Fox-Alter to Retire as Pleasantville Schools Chief at End of 2021

By Martin Wilbur

Pleasantville Superintendent of Schools and veteran educator Mary Fox-Alter, who rose from teacher to lead the district for just over a decade, announced last Wednesday she will retire from her post in December.

In a message delivered to the community, Fox-Alter said the time was right to move onto her next challenge but called her decision “bittersweet.” “She has been district superintendent since 2010 and has served in Pleasantville for the past 31 years in an education career that has spanned four decades.

“Without a doubt, the last decade has been the most rewarding and fulfilling period of my career,” Fox-Alter said in her statement. “It has been a complete privilege and pleasure to work with the caring and talented educators in our district whose singular focus has been our students. I love what I do and the people I work with each and every day. I know how unique and special that is — I have been blessed.”

Fox-Alter was certified as a social studies teacher and taught computer classes, was a computer science chair and technology coordinator. She also served as deputy superintendent and was elevated to the helm after the departure of former superintendent Dr. Donald Antonecchia.

The joy of working in Pleasantville has gone beyond educating children and district success, she said.

“The ability to know people on a personal level and to get to know families and to be involved with them for the ups and downs in life and to work together with the village or the police department or other stakeholders...”

continued on page 2

Proposed Senior Project Expected to Receive Negative Declaration

By Martin Wilbur

The Mount Pleasant Planning Board is expected to issue a negative declaration next month for a 170-unit residential project for seniors near a congested area in Valhalla.

Brightview Senior Living is proposing to build a “service enriched” project that will help the conditions, Fox-Alter said in a statement. “It has been a complete privilege and pleasure to work with the caring and talented educators in our district whose singular focus has been our students. I love what I do and the people I work with each and every day. I know how unique and special that is — I have been blessed.”

Brightview was certified as a social studies teacher and taught computer classes, was a computer science chair and technology coordinator. She also served as deputy superintendent and was elevated to the helm after the departure of former superintendent Dr. Donald Antonecchia.

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continued on page 2

Latimer Announces Re-election Bid for Second Term

By Martin Wilbur

County Executive George Latimer officially announced Monday morning that he is running for a second term this fall.

Latimer said there are still plenty of issues for him to tackle over the next four years.

“We still face more challenges ahead,” Latimer said in a nearly two-minute video that was released on his campaign Facebook page. “The pandemic is not over; our families and small businesses are still struggling and social inequities that existed before the pandemic have gotten worse. But we’ll fix these problems the same way. We’ll deal with them openly and honestly and look at the facts, not politics. We’ll work on solutions.”

He touted his accomplishments that included restoration of the historic Miller House in North White Plains and Memorial Field in Mount Vernon, construction of the new family courthouse in New Rochelle, repairs to the Sprain Ridge Pool in Yonkers and cutting county property taxes for the last two years.

Latimer, 67, also said that his administration has communicated key information to the public on a regular basis since the start of the pandemic nearly a year ago.

The announcement had been expected since after the holidays. Last summer, Latimer said he would likely announce his re-election plans after work on the 2021 budget was completed in December. A large deficit was expected but with federal funding from the CARES Act, a voluntary retirement program and sales tax revenues that were not as dire as originally projected, there was a small cut in the tax levy for this year.

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Fox-Alter to Retire as Pleasantville Schools Chief at End of 2021

continued from page 1
was more than just a job to Fox-Alter. She cared about the children and families and made personal connections while often spotted at the district’s sporting events and community activities. Fox-Alter was as much a part of the community as if she lived in Pleasantville, Nessel said.

“I have witnessed her deal with many situations varying from educational opportunities to building emergencies and community tragedies and she always handles them with grace, strength and compassion,” Nessel said. “You can see in her face just how much she cares about us and our well-being.”

Board President Larry Boes and former president and current board member Shane McGaffey agreed that Fox-Alter’s largest contribution to the district was the development of the two five-year strategic plans, which includes goals for curriculum and instruction, infrastructure and community involvement.

Boes said Fox-Alter’s passion, character and integrity was evident in everything she did, from executing the strategic plans to arriving and surrounding herself with strong people.

“You don’t last 31 years in one place and get the promotions the way that she got without having that kind of passion,” he said.

The board is expected to issue a Request for Proposal for a search firm in hopes of having a permanent successor in place before Fox-Alter departs, Persons said. If the right person isn’t identified, there is always the possibility of an interim, she said.

Fox-Alter said she is confident she will be leaving the district in a strong academic and fiscal position. She lauded working with various school boards over the years that have always focused on a strong commitment to student success and the community.

“It’s a great board and I love the fact that they’re in a right place to pick up the torch and pick the next superintendent,” Fox-Alter said.

Fox-Alter listed academic and instructional improvement initiatives, advocacy for students and public schools and enhancing the school’s infrastructure among her accomplishments.

Fox-Alter did not mention what her future may hold but said she isn’t ready to stop working. One possibility, she said, was to continue her advocacy work on behalf of public education.

Meanwhile, she looks forward to spending more time with her family.

“Every day, I’d wake up with a skip in my heart. I just enjoyed it,” Fox-Alter said.

Proposed Valhalla Senior Project Expected to Receive Negative Declaration

continued from page 1
said David Cooper, an attorney representing the applicant.

Proposed improvements would include installation of a traffic signal on Grasslands Road at the entrance and exit to the facility, which would be aligned with the access point to Westchester Community College, and widening of Grasslands Road to provide left turn lanes into both sites, said project engineer Diego Villareale of John Meyer Consulting.

There would also be adjustments to the timing of the traffic signal at Grasslands Road and Bradhurst Avenue and improved signage in the area.

Villareale said Brightview has recognized since it formally submitted its application two years ago that Grasslands Road is a challenging thoroughfare, particularly during peak hours near the intersection with Bradhurst Avenue. However, it’s the community college’s traffic volumes, not the proposed development, that has triggered the need for the traffic light and turn lanes, he said.

“Again, it has its challenges during very specific hours and it will continue to do so, but we continue to work with the board and staff to make a number of improvements along this corridor and we feel we’ve done that with the widening and the traffic signal installation and now the signal timing modifications that we proposed,” Villareale said.

When the project was first pitched before the Planning Board, members were skeptical about the traffic on Grasslands Road but were satisfied with the studies conducted. The biggest pushback last week was concern expressed by board member Joan Lederman that the facility would put a burden on emergency services, especially the volunteer ambulance corps.

Lederman said that at another assisted living facility in town, 100 residents generate an average of 25 ambulance calls a month.

“This is the biggest problem with these facilities,” she said. “I don’t know how we fix that. I think staffing of these facilities should have better medical staff more capable of triaging the people who live there and not calling EMS services for ridiculous things.”

But Steve Marker, development director for Brightview, said there will be medical staff on hand around the clock trained in CPR and first aid.

“We do limit the calls coming from our community in that way,” Marker said. “We do feel our policies help mitigate some of the burden on the town services.”

In addition to a zoning change, Brightview would need site plan, steep slopes and wetlands approvals from the town.

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135 Deerfield Lane
15 Foxwood Drive
15 Leroy Street
15 Rockledge Road
661 Washington Ave.
43 Wilton Road
10 Randy Lane
64 Sky Top Drive
101 Chaote Lane

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Post-Holiday COVID Spike Continues to Plague Area, State

By Anna Young

Westchester County Executive George Latimer said the COVID-19 infection rate is continually growing, attributing the latest spike in cases to residents flouting safety protocols to host indoor New Year’s celebrations.

In the last week, coronavirus cases in Westchester County have jumped by nearly 5,000, signaling a post-New Year’s Eve surge that closely resembles the pattern reported just after Christmas. Active cases also rose by more than 1,500 over the last week, with numbers far exceeding 10,000.

During the peak of the pandemic last spring, active cases had reached 12,000.

“That number is jumping dramatically. These numbers are not going down and there’s a reason why,” Latimer said Monday during a press briefing. “You weren’t in Times Square or in Renaissance Square in White Plains to watch the ball drop, but people were together in private settings and these numbers reflect that continued growth of the infection.”

Coronavirus cases increased by 789 on Sunday, bringing the total number of positive cases to 77,731 since the start of the pandemic. There are now 10,894 active cases, a number that is nearly identical to the active caseload reported during the height of the pandemic on Apr. 10, Latimer said.

The daily positivity rate stood at 6.55 percent, which is based on 12,051 tests taken last Friday. COVID tests were administered at high rates in Westchester throughout the week, with daily testing reaching a record high of 13,201 on Jan. 7.

On that day, just one week after New Year’s Eve, 1,019 coronavirus cases were reported in the county.

Overall, there have been over 1.5 million COVID-19 tests administered in Westchester since March.

The county reported nine more deaths on Sunday, increasing the number of COVID-19-related fatalities to 1,730 since March. Since Jan. 1, 66 people have died from the virus.

“The numbers are not good,” Latimer said. “Wishing them to be better does not make them so.”

As of Jan. 9, there were 504 virus patients in Westchester hospitals, about a 50-person increase over the last week, Latimer said. While Latimer is disheartened by the hospitalization rate, he said the only positive takeaway is that the county’s bed count is much higher than those currently admitted.

Putnam County’s total caseload has reached 5,750, with 105 additional positive cases recorded on Sunday. Putnam has seen numbers boom over the last four days with cases exceeding 100 for three of those days.

There were 116 cases reported on Thursday, 115 Friday and 94 added on Saturday, with a four-day case total of 430. The county’s daily positivity rate was 9.23 percent, with 1,138 tests administered Friday.

Putnam currently has 1,234 active cases. There have been 68 coronavirus-related deaths in Putnam since the pandemic began. No new deaths were reported on Sunday. However, Putnam did report one new death on Jan. 8, its first in nearly two weeks. The last fatality the county recorded was on Dec. 29.

Statewide there were 15,355 new positive cases on Sunday. The daily positivity rate is 6.22 percent.

The state recorded 151 additional COVID-19 related fatalities, bringing the death toll to 31,672 since March.

Total hospitalizations are at 8,484, a decrease of 43 over the previous day. Across New York there have been 1,126,442 positive coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

New Cases of UK COVID Strain

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced on Saturday that three additional cases of the United Kingdom strain of the COVID-19 virus have been identified in New York, bringing the total to four. The first case was detected in a Saratoga County man on Jan. 4. Two of the new cases are connected to the Saratoga Springs exposure, while the third has been traced back to an individual living in Massapequa, Nassau County.

Cuomo urged that the U.K. strain is real and frightening. According to health officials, the variant is 70 percent more transmissible, although it does not make you sicker.

“There’s no mystery as to how it got here – it got on a plane and flew here from Europe, just like the original strain did,” Cuomo said. “Yet, the federal government continues to refuse to learn from the spring and mandate testing for all international travelers. Their failure to act means the rest of us need to be that much more vigilant in our work to stop the spread, as well as do all we can to accelerate the distribution of the vaccine.”

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W’chester Officials Appeal to Public to Get Vaccine When Available

By Martin Wilbur

Westchester County health officials urged residents to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they have the opportunity in order to protect themselves, their families and people they come in contact with.

During a Facebook Live forum last Thursday evening, Health Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler and Dr. Dial Hewlett Jr., medical director of the division of disease control for Westchester’s Department of Health, said the risks to one’s health and society are far greater by avoiding vaccination then by getting inoculated despite reservations by a sizeable portion of the population.

“The most important tool we have right now to get back to life as we knew it before COVID is a vaccine, and we’re lucky that we have multiple vaccines done by multiple companies in record time,” Amler said. “Right now, we have to help the public understand what vaccines can do for them, who should be vaccinated, what the limitations of vaccines (are), and we just have to work this out.”

Pfizer and Moderna were the first two pharmaceutical firms that developed vaccines with more on the way. Westchester pharmaceutical firms that developed vaccines with more on the way.

County Executive George Latimer last summer with Health Commissioner Dr. Sherlita Amler, right. Amler and Dr. Dial Hewlett Jr., medical director of the county’s division of disease control, addressed issues related to the vaccine last week.

COVID-19 Vaccine Appointment Info

On Monday, New York State activated its website that helps the public determine eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine and identified various locations at https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/.

Health care workers, which comprised the first group of recipients, along with education workers, first responders, public transit workers, public safety workers and people 75 years old and up are now eligible to make an appointment.

Also on Monday, the state COVID-19 Vaccination Hotline opened for scheduling vaccination appointments for eligible New Yorkers at 1-833-NYS-VAX (1-833-697-4829). Prior to receiving the vaccination, the New York State COVID-19 vaccine form must be completed online at https://forms.ny.gov/s3/vaccine. After registering, you will receive a submission ID.

For more information about eligibility, phased distribution and more, visit https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/what-you-need-know.
Cuomo Vows to Help State Recover From COVID, Economic Pain

By Martin Wilbur

Gov. Andrew Cuomo pledged Monday to prepare New York to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic through short-term health and economic measures while also strategizing to make long-term change by investing in the state’s future.

In his annual State of the State address, Cuomo laid out his administration’s priorities and actions to fight the pandemic and rebuild the state’s economy.

He urged all New Yorkers to guard against COVID-19 fatigue and stop the spread of the virus to avoid overrunning the state’s hospital system. Cuomo warned that if any of the 10 regions’ hospitals become overwhelmed, his administration will be forced to shut down the economy in that region.

On Monday, the first day of sign-up for the second group of eligible vaccine recipients, he announced the distribution system is being expanded to include more sites for the currently eligible four million New Yorkers to be inoculated. The list of eligible workers and the form to register is available at https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/Public/ prescreen.

Meanwhile, Cuomo mentioned an ambitious reinvestment plan. He hopes to provide $4 billion in budget gap, he said.

Cuomo was adamant that the vaccines be prepared.

While appointments for vaccines will likely stretch several weeks into the future, Cuomo said it is better to have people waiting for the vaccine rather than having the product and too few people signed up.

As the pandemic ends.

COVID-19 while rebuilding New York once the pandemic ends.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo delivered his State of the State address Monday that promised combating COVID-19 while rebuilding New York once the pandemic ends.

improve roads, rail and airports; use empty office and commercial space to increase affordable housing and having New York become a green energy hub, bringing thousands of jobs to the state.

Expanding access to affordable broadband and invest in worker retraining is also essential.

While many people may expect returning to a pre-pandemic world, Cuomo said there are changes already underway that have changed the world and New York needs to be prepared.

“This is a moment that is made for New Yorkers,” Cuomo said. “This will be a moment to re-energize, reinvent and re-create.”

Meanwhile, Cuomo mentioned an ambitious reinvestment plan. He hopes to
Police, Committee Stress Importance of Outreach to Public in Mt. Pleasant

By Martin Wilbur

Strengthening trust and communication between the community and Mount Pleasant’s officers was a key focus of last week’s Mount Pleasant Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative.

The fourth session held by the 14-member committee last Wednesday night centered on how outreach to the public can be bolstered.

Chief Paul Oliva said that interacting with students in the local schools along with having a presence at various town events, such as Mount Pleasant Town Day, assist in building good relationships, although they can always be improved.

“I don’t know that we really have a rift in the community, per se, that we have to heal at this point but I don’t think we have strained relationships with any particular group,” Oliva said.

Programs such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), addressing classes and youth groups and having a school resource officer help build relationships among the student population so they feel comfortable speaking to officers and know that they can turn to them for help, he said. Arrests in the event of wrongdoing are a last resort, Oliva said.

Committee member and town resident Kelsey Padgett appealed to the chief and Lt. Sean Forde, who is also part of the group, to continue reaching out to teenagers.

“I think it’s a good idea to engage with high schoolers because right now we’re living in a world in which the relationship is pretty broken and more so for that generation than generations before, the relationship of police to community,” Padgett said.

Forde said being an adjunct professor of criminal justice at Westchester Community College has been an education for him, seeing the perspective of the younger generation.

“It’s an extraordinary exchange,” Forde said. “It’s absolutely fantastic.”

While there have not been many documented hate crimes in Mount Pleasant, the town has not been immune from episodes. Hussein Elzoghby, a committee member representing the Upper Westchester Muslim Society, said there had been harassment of local Muslim residents.

Oliva urged him and other to report incidents. Elzoghby also offered that many of the society’s members speak various foreign languages and can help the department with interpreters should that need arise.

The most common language barrier is for Spanish-speaking people, Oliva said, although there is occasionally a need for someone who can converse in other languages. He stressed that the department does not target the immigrant community in search of undocumented individuals and hand them over to federal authorities.

“We want immigrant communities to trust us and come forward,” Oliva said.

The chief said he continues to reach out to the different constituent groups in Mount Pleasant, including the clergy and the business community, and encouraged residents to reach out to his office if they have questions or problems.

Oliva also said he stresses to his officers that how they interact with the public will help determine residents’ opinion of the police.

“If you have a contact with (an) individual police officer and it doesn’t go well that leaves a bad taste for a person,” Oliva said. “I tell (the officers) that they really are the best part of community engagement and outreach.”

He reiterated from last month how the department continues to work with personnel at the two residential homes for youths in town, The Cottage School and Hawthorne Cedar Knolls. The staff takes the lead on handling incidents since they are specially trained to help that population, but the police are there as a support presence, said Margarita Carson, the director of security at the JCCA campus.

“Our experience has just been that generally the police are very respectful, very caring, very understanding of our youth, their needs,” Carson said.

Oliva said that he and all department members are held to a high standard.

“You lead by example,” he said. “We follow the rules and I think we have to set the example for that. I think it’s just being open and knowing that we expect a lot from our officers but we don’t expect them to be perfect. If you make a mistake, you’ve got to own it and that’s how you learn.”

Padgett mentioned that she didn’t believe that a citizens’ advisory board was necessary for Mount Pleasant, but would like for the public and the department to periodically continue dialogue after this series of meetings has produced the mandated report to the state. She called for formalized meetings semiannually or quarterly, she said.

“I would hate for it to never happen again,” Padgett said.

The next Mount Pleasant Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative is this Wednesday, Jan. 13 from 6 to 8 p.m.
P’ville Ponders Small Group Meetings to Discuss Police Reform

By Abby Luby

Pleasantville officials are planning to schedule informal meetings to discuss police reform issues since the live-streamed format may limit some residents who are reticent about airing concerns and grievance to the wider public.

At the Pleasantville Village Board’s Dec. 28 work session, the board discussed the public’s hesitancy and decided to reach out to certain individuals and groups who have expressed a deeper interest and desire to be involved in the police reform process.

“We could put together three or four working groups and perhaps a pair of trustees could sit in on one or two,” said Trustee David Vinjamuri at last month’s work session. “It would be a manageable number, like 10 to 12 people. It could also be cross-functional and include students, teachers, youth officers and a school board member.”

Trustee Nicole Asquith supported the idea of meeting with particular groups who could more comfortably voice their opinions in a more informal environment.

“This would allow them to dig into the material a little bit more and develop ideas or suggestions in a substantial way,” she said.

Asquith also suggested the meetings not be recorded. Vinjamuri said he would mention that board members are meeting with certain groups in his monthly update.

“What’s Happening in Pleasantville,” that he has started to post on the village’s Facebook page.

At the start of the webinars in the fall, the village established a dedicated e-mail address for people to submit their concerns. The pandemic has forced the meetings to be aired via Zoom, and Scherer pointed out that before COVID-19, community comments would be handled differently.

“Absent COVID, if folks had an issue, they didn’t feel comfortable discussing in a public arena and one that was being recorded, we would meet to discuss in living rooms or over coffee,” Scherer said. “That way we were able to dig into it, respect each person as we converse face to face. The webinar format is a much more stilted means of getting at that.”

Scherer said he has reached out to various organizations, including faith-based groups, the Interfaith Council, the Cottage School, Pace University and the Pleasantville Chamber of Commerce. He echoed Asquith and Vinjamuri sentiments.

“We need to reach out to folks who are interested in a deeper engagement,” Scherer said. “I think the notion of faith-based groups, diversity and inclusion groups and minority communities are three groups we should reach out to right now.”

The fourth public Pleasantville police reform meeting will be live-streamed this Thursday, Jan. 14 and will focus on police training and the complaint review process. The next forum is on Jan. 28 and will examine community policing, general outreach/communications and outreach to specific communities.

Public participation was robust for the first two forums but diminished considerably at the most recent forum. The format of the webinars has generally included detailed reports by the Pleasantville Police Department, Village Board comments and questions and comments from the public.

According to Scherer, Asquith and Vinjamuri, if items discussed in the smaller groups were pertinent, they would be mentioned in the report to the state.

Scherer proposed the board and Pleasantville Police Chief Erik Gruetzner generate a draft of recommendations based on community feedback and data gathered from the forums.

“We would reflect that (draft) back to the community as actionable recommendations that we have come up with, items that seem actionable now and we can send to the state as our immediate plan,” Scherer said. “We would also present items that we’ve heard from the community that we are looking to do a deeper dive for significant change going forward.”

He compared meeting with certain groups as a future feedback mechanism to “laying down railroad tracks we can use going forward.”

“David and I are interested in more transparency on things like the complaint process and how that works,” said Asquith. “We are interested in knowing where people are coming from and if there are people who want to be heard but who are uncomfortable about coming forward, we want to make this process as inclusive as possible.”

The Jan. 14 and Jan. 28 forums will be held at 7:30 p.m. via Zoom with links posted on the village website. For more information on the process and to see videos of prior meetings, visit https://www.pleasantville-ny.gov/police-reform-reinvention-collaborative. Written comments can be submitted to policereform@pleasantville-ny.gov.
Editorial

Pleasantville Police Reform Meetings Must All Be Accessible to the Public

For the past few months, municipalities across New York and throughout the area have earnestly engaged in forums to discuss how policing can be improved. There have been some very constructive discussions locally relating to appropriate use of force, communication and interaction with the public and de-escalation training and practices, among many other issues.

What has been learned is that Westchester and Putnam counties have some very fine police departments. In many instances the conversation centers not on what is wrong but how policing can be even better.

Even if there aren’t major problems with a department, the mere exercise of police representatives speaking with community members that they might not otherwise have ever met helps break down barriers. These forums were mandated by Gov. Andrew Cuomo following the racial justice protests that erupted after George Floyd’s killing last May and adds to everyone’s workload, but conversations about problems or how to improve police work is critically important. That is why it is intensely disappointing and misguided for Pleasantville officials to be strongly considering the addition of informal get-togethers to the process. These meetings would apparently be offline and wouldn’t be live-streamed or recorded to allow for public viewing or participation. The Village Board must put the kibosh to such a notion.

One of the reasons given for having informal meetings is that there are people who don’t feel comfortable airing concerns or grievances with everyone watching. That’s understandable, but it’s not how democracy works.

First, this process is mandated by law, so in order for it to work, or what she served one term. I have worked with and had the opportunity to observe many of our town supervisors over the past three decades, most all of whom had no experience running an organization of hundreds of employees or with budgets of tens of millions of dollars. It takes time to learn the ropes of such a large organization, time we cannot afford to waste.

It’s time to put this to the voters of Pleasantville. I encourage all Pleasantville residents to contact their elected officials and ask for a public referendum to be placed on the ballot this coming election cycle to consider changing the town supervisor’s term of office from two to four years.

Bob Giordano
Yorktown

Letters to the Editor

Yorktown Supervisor’s Term Should Be Increased to Four Years

Over the past several decades some area municipalities have changed the length of term for a number of elected offices. In our own town of Yorktown, the terms of office for highway superintendent and town clerk were changed from two to four years. To me, that was common sense for the Yorktown supervisor’s position.

Now more than ever it is important to have our supervisor focus on addressing the serious issues facing the town without the distraction of campaigning and running for office every two years.

First, it takes time to learn the job and two years is a very short window to do so. Some elected officials hit the ground running and win several terms; others take a bit longer and are not re-elected to second terms. Over the past two decades we have had six supervisors elected, and three of them served one term. I have worked with and had the opportunity to observe many of our town supervisors over the past three decades, most all of whom had no experience running an organization of hundreds of employees or with budgets of tens of millions of dollars. It takes time to learn the ropes of such a big organization, time we cannot afford to waste.

It’s time to put this to the voters of Yorktown. I encourage all Yorktown residents to contact their elected officials and ask for a public referendum to be placed on the ballot this coming election cycle to consider changing the town supervisor’s term of office from two to four years.

Bob Giordano
Yorktown

Apology is in Order After Baseless Claims Made Against Yorktown Officials

There she goes again. Last week Susan Siegel kicked off the new year with a new volley of accusations and conspiracy theories against our town government (“The Truth About Yorktown Town Taxes in 2021.”) Does she ever have anything positive to say? No, she has proven to be an obstructionist and conspiracy theorist.

Her latest assault is especially shameful because it accuses our town government of using a spreadsheet that she claims is inaccurate. What she doesn’t want you to know, or what she doesn’t want to admit, is that she used the same spreadsheet when she was a Town Board member not long ago. Not exactly breaking news when all the facts are presented now is it?

Ms. Siegel owes this community, Supervisor Slater and Comptroller Caporale and the entire Town Board a public apology for her hypocritical criticism, but knowing her I wouldn’t hold my breath.

Brian Silik
Yorktown Heights

Local Officials Also Need to Take Stand Against President’s Lawlessness

In my 50 years of participating in demonstrations and peaceful dissent, I’ve been teargassed and sprayed with mace by “peace” officers. In 2016, I demonstrated peacefully against the new President; I was teargassed for simply gathering on the steps.

I have never seen the violence and lawlessness I’m seeing encouraged by Trump. How could these thugs be treated with kid gloves? We know what would have happened if the complex of the demonstrators were darker.

I believe that all politics is local, thus I call upon Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater and councilmembers to condemn the behaviors of this mob inspired by and encouraged by President Trump. Calls to recognize systemic racism are heightened by seeing justice being unequal.

Yorktown’s Coalition on Community Safety and Engagement has been meeting regularly, and we have heard that our police do a fine job. I wonder if the coalition meetings will be held in a vacuum, ignoring what happened in D.C. I challenge our local elected officials to take a stand against these bigoted, dangerous and violent terrorists supported by the Republican President and his local supporters.

Melvyn R. Tanzman
Mohegan Lake
Guest Columns

America at its Best But We Still Have an Awfully Long Way to Go

By Adam Stone

Attention progressives: America, in many critical ways, is a better place than it has ever been.

In the 1600s, indigenous people were trampled.
In the 1700s, we seceded our nation with slavery.
In the 1800s, we endured a great Civil War, a reckoning over our Original Sin.
At the start of the 1900s, women didn’t attend college.
In the 1910s, women didn’t possess the right to vote.
In the 1920s, anti-Semitic legislation was enacted to limit immigration from Eastern Europe.
In the 1930s, no Black player had yet been allowed to play Major League Baseball.
In the 1940s, under FDR, we created internment camps to imprison Japanese-Americans.
In the 1950s, Blacks were ordered to the back of the bus.
In the 1960s, segregated water fountains belittled our highest values.

In the 1970s, a woman had not yet served on the Supreme Court.
In the 1980s, police brutality went widely ignored, with little public resistance or consciousness.
In the 1990s, gays were prohibited from serving openly in the military.
In the early 2000s, the War on Terror heightened anti-Muslim sentiment as sexual harassment ran rampant, unchecked by a subsequent #MeToo movement.
In the early 2010s, gay people remained barred from marrying those they loved.
At the start of 2020, we hadn’t yet elected a woman to be vice president.
At the start of 2021, after violent insurrectionists egged on by our commander-in-chief desecrated our Capitol, our (admittedly dreadful) political system rose to at least one moment, certifying Joe Biden’s election victory, condemning in bipartisan (but woefully insufficient) fashion a rogue, wayward, figuratively frothing-at-the-mouth president.

The political nightmare we’re enduring, while certainly featuring unique and terrifying characteristics, remains in many important ways an extension of our tortured but incrementally improving past, not a departure from our history. And, it should be noted, we’ll be severely tested in the days, weeks, months and years ahead: the tests will be painful, navigating the historically choppy waters. Optimists can hope we eventually emerge stronger, as we have in the past when we lived through bitterly divided eras.

These fringe elements have always been here. Certainly, over the past four years, the dangerous wackos have been elevated and tolerated in a way they weren’t previously. But, also, it’s not just the Capitol-storming freaks and their ilk who constitute the split electorate. It’s also the good people of the country who, for example, resist cultural change. Change that seems inevitable and obvious in retrospect but change that was met with fierce resistance by generally good people since our founding.

Most of the more than 74 million Americans who voted for Trump are nothing like the rioters who engaged in treason on Wednesday. But some of the 74 million-plus do share political sensibilities with Americans of an earlier time who held beliefs that are widely rejected in 2021.

Some political descendants of those Americans of an earlier age harbor unfortunate ideas of the day. The good news: the overwhelming majority of Americans hold cherished ideals – near unanimous ideals – that would have been considered enlightened in an earlier era but are mainstream today. Ideals politically like-minded decentards refute. But this, perhaps counterintuitively, is what slow progress looks like.

It should also be stressed that today’s progressive outlook will eventually appear outdated and lacking. If you want the ultimate proof of this general point, look to Lincoln. The Great Emancipator himself didn’t believe in racial equality even as he fought ferociously to unshackle slaves.

Keep the faith and keep on fighting. As the famous Martin Luther King Jr. quote goes, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. There’s enormous work to do, as there’s always been.

Adam Stone is publisher of Examiner Media.

If You Don’t Condemn the Insurrection, You Condone It

By Brian McGowan

On Jan. 6, just 14 days before our nation’s duty and fairly elected President and Vice President will be sworn into office with a vow to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, we witnessed a horrific assault on that constitution by a mob incited to violence by a man who swore that same oath less than four years previous – Donald J. Trump.

The scenes that screamed across media were more than shocking. They bordered on the surreal, a movie set gone insane, with a director more fit to rage and misrule than to preside at the helm of the greatest democracy the world has yet seen.

Shocking that others once considered as presidential in caliber – Rudy Giuliani, Ted Cruz and others – lent their encouragement to a mob who did more than desecrate the sacred halls of Congress. They desecrated the American dream, the spirit of our Founding Fathers and our flag that many chose to wave or wrap themselves in as they stormed the chambers where our elected government worked to carry out their constitutional obligations, and fulfill the oath each and every one of them had made when they entered public service, if not before.

This insurrection has festered for too long, fueled by fanatics once considered on the fringe, and thus not really anything we needed to concern ourselves over. There will always be lunatics, right? But were they ever led before by anyone as lunatic as the current occupier of the White House? The litany of his character deficits is too long to repeat, or ignore. Shame on the elected opportunists who have supported him and his baseless lies, afraid to put principle ahead of voting blocs they have made themselves captive to. Shame!

I am an independent voter, from a family with a strong progressive Democratic ethic, but with many Republicans as well. I have friends, associates and relatives in both major political parties, and have voted for candidates on both sides of the aisle when their positions seemed reasonable and likely to move our nation forward. I have voted in every election since I became eligible, and it was easy over many of those decades to make choices other than what my “political genes” might have dictated.

Sadly, that has been made more difficult in our recent past, as the party of Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower has fallen into the clutches of something far removed from what it once stood for. Would Nelson Rockefeller, Republican governor of New York, presidential candidate and vice president under Gerald Ford, have survived in today’s Republican Party? I think not.

And so we must condemn all those culpable for the violent attack on our democracy last Wednesday, beginning with the President who has committed acts against this country very short of, if not bordering on, treason. We must condemn every supporter who has continued to lend their voices and encouragement to his delusions. We must condemn the reckless, lawless and criminal behavior of the mob of tens of thousands of this President’s core supporters, who thought they could halt the working of our democracy.

We must condemn hatred, racism and any action that denies to our citizens, and those who would seek to be citizens, the rights of Americans to believe in our democracy, and know that it stands for something more than the twisted, warped beliefs of those who profess to revere it, but by their actions would bring it down.

If we do not condemn these things, then we condone them. Silence is not condemnation. Silence is collusion.

God bless America, and God preserve our democracy, both from our enemies abroad, and those within.

Brian McGowan is a longtime Pleasantville resident.

Visit TheExaminerNews.com and click on Puzzles at the top of the homepage to play today’s crossword!
Vacant Pleasantville Building Destroyed By Fire

By Anna Young

A vacant building in Pleasantville that is expected to become the site of a residential community went up in flames last week. The Pleasantville Volunteer Fire Department responded to a structure fire on Jan. 5 about 5:04 a.m. in the area of Vanderbilt Avenue and Depew Street, which had most recently been home to the former Deluca Auto Body site. Fire officials arrived at the scene to find heavy smoke emitting from the vacant structure.

Due to the severity of the fire, the village received help from the Chappaqua, Thornwood, Valhalla, Briarcliff Manor, Hawthorne and Pocantico Hills fire departments, and Pleasantville Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Officials said members performed search, hose line operations, master stream operations, ventilation, and overhaul. Units were able to successfully clear the scene around 11 a.m.

Fire officials were still investigating the cause of the fire.

The property, which housed the vacant building, will where Lighthouse Living’s 71-unit, three-story residential building. The project was approved by the Pleasantville Planning Commission in March.

The vacant structure located was scheduled to be demolished last Wednesday.

The project will include 10 studio apartments, 51 one-bedroom units and 10 two-bedroom units. Developers have previously said they’re looking to appeal to millennials and empty-nesters.

Robert Crawley

Robert “Bob” J. Crawley, 85, of Ossining passed away on Jan. 7. He was 85.

Crawley was born on Dec. 14, 1935, to Edward and Amelia Crawley. He was a graduate of Ossining High School.

Bob was a local businessman, owner of Crawley’s Grocery, Campwoods Deli and Roosevelt Deli. He was a lifetime member of the Ossining Fire Department where he served for 58 years with Holla Hose. There, he was ex-captain and served on numerous committees. In addition, he had been president of the Ossining Rotary Club, Exalted Ruler of the Elks #1486 and a member of the St. Augustine Golden Eagles.

Crawley is survived by his daughters, Debbie (Mike) Cafarelli, Kathy (George) Lawrence and Kelly (Chris) Lovell; seven grandchildren, Amie (Richard) Berry, Nicholas (Jenn) Cafarelli, Zachary Cafarelli, Rachel (Alex) Bateman, Ryan and Brendan Lawrence and Christopher Lovell; two great-granddaughters, Audrey and Evelyn Berry; and many nieces and nephews. He is also survived by two sisters, Doris Smith and Judy Crawley.

He was predeceased by his sister, Jean Lippert, and his brother, Leroy Crawley.

In light of the current situation, we have put measures in place to continue to serve our beloved community.

LIVE STREAMING OF ALL SERVICES
• Viewings with religious services available
• Offering families the opportunity to mourn their loved ones and pay their respects

LARGE CHAPEL ALLOWS FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING
• Pre-Planning Services Offered
• Most Affordable Funerals in the Area
• All Life Insurance Policies Accepted for Funeral Payments

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January 12 - January 18, 2021

By Martin Wilbur

Local elected officials universally condemned the rioting at the Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump, with freshman Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-Suffern) calling within hours for the president’s impeachment or removal through the 25th Amendment.

Reaction from across the area was swift in the hours following the deadly Jan. 6 mayhem in Washington, D.C. that delayed Congress’s affirmation of President-elect Joe Biden’s and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris’s electoral college victory until after 3 a.m. the following morning. Five people, including a member of the Capitol police force, died during the lawlessness.

Jones was among a growing legion of congressman across the nation that supported impeachment or urging Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Trump, describing the president’s actions as inciting “an armed insurrection against our nation’s legislative branch.”

The House officially introduced an article of impeachment on Monday.

“Consequences must be swift,” Jones said. “I have joined my colleague, Congresswoman Cori Bush in calling for the expulsion of the president for abuse of power and high crimes and misdemeanors. I have signed onto articles of impeachment against President Trump for abuse of power ‘I have joined a letter calling on Vice President Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment to remove Trump from office. I urge my colleagues to join me. The fate of our republic is on the line.”

Westchester County Executive George Latimer said in a statement last Wednesday that the barriers that protect the country’s democracy have broken down in recent years.

“‘In the history of this nation, no matter how much conflict we have had – and there is conflict built in every day in the halls of government – we never go from disagreements as fellow Americans to inciting violence or expecting that a mob can control a legislative body in order to impose its will outside of its legislative structures,’” Latimer said.

“Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said the nation has lots of work to do to make sure the country remains a shining example of democracy.

“The world is watching. Americans have the right to protest, but not to break the law while doing so,” Odell said. “For the future of our children, I would hope we could put our country first, despite any differences.”

State Sen. Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) said he was “disgusted and angered” by the attack on the Capitol and commented that the nation’s “stands in the shadow of shame.”

“The attempt to overthrow our presidential election deserves a full investigation, and anyone complicit in this anarchic free-for-all should be held accountable,” Harckham said. “It is entirely beyond belief that a lawless mob was able to force its way into the Capitol building without being apprehended.”

Several local officials also joined the large chorus who reacted last week. One of those, Peekskill Mayor Andre Rainey, said the rioting was a result of a lack of leadership which has emboldened thousands of citizens to disrespect fundamental American values.

Joseph Kaidanow, chairman of the Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center in White Plains, said the organization tries to remain apolitical, but the events of last Wednesday “drew us over the line.”

Kaidanow said there was no other way to describe Trump’s role other than incitement, and the reality of government sanctioned violence and authoritarianism has advanced before the nation’s eyes.

“The reality of Mr. Trump’s power places more, not less, responsibility on him as the leader of our nation,” Kaidanow said. “The issues we confront as a nation are clearly complex and run deep. They were not created over these last four years, nor will they be remedied over the next four. However, leadership matters. Words matter. Body language matters. The incendiary messages, both overt and implied, that have been utilized for political purposes, to galvanize and divide the country, have had a corrosive effect which culminated in yesterday’s tragedy.”

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Pleasantville STRONG Names Village Resident to Lead Coalition

By Abby Luby

Laura Moore was recently named the new coordinator of Pleasantville STRONG, a coalition dealing with youth substance abuse in the community.

Moore replaces Nicole Malgarinos, the five-year-old organization’s first coordinator. She is a longtime Pleasantville resident with two children currently attending Pleasantville High School.

Moore, whose neighbor, John Mueller was one of Pleasantville STRONG’s founding members, said his involvement inspired her to apply for the coordinator’s position.

“I remember John taking this on in true John fashion and how motivated he was,” Moore recalled. “He worked so hard to rally the community and I was in awe.”

Moore said she has seen firsthand the importance of connecting to teens concerning different types of substance abuse. She pointed to the impactful classes taught by Mary Ann Flately, a licensed mental health counselor and the Pleasantville School District’s student assistance counselor, addressing addiction to vaping, marijuana or alcohol.

“Mary Ann was a big draw for me,” said Moore, who holds a doctorate in education, health and behavior and a master’s in science, health and behavior, both from Columbia University. “I’ll be looking to learn a lot from her, what she’s learned and what the needs are.”

Malgarinos, who served on the Pleasantville STRONG Steering Committee to select a new coordinator, said she encouraged the hiring of a local resident. She called Moore a “perfect fit and a huge benefit.” The committee was impressed with Moore’s 20-plus years’ experience in nonprofit settings.

“She will be of great assistance when we move in that direction,” said Malgarinos, who works for Westchester County’s Mental Health Services and will help Moor transition into the position. “We have an on-boarding process that’s mostly administrative, but then I will be introducing Laura to those connected with the Westchester Coalition, Student Assistance Services and other coalitions who work for drug-free communities.”

Five years ago, the coalition received an annual $125,000 Drug-Free Communities federal grant, which has recently been renewed for Pleasantville STRONG for another five years. The grant stipulates that community groups collaborate to fight substance abuse.

“Laura comes to the table with much knowledge and she knows the community,” said Shane McGaffey, chairman of the Pleasantville STRONG Steering Committee and Pleasantville Board of Education member. “One of the goals (for Pleasantville STRONG) is to become a sustainable, nonprofit organization and Laura has the experience to do that. She is the right person to continue our work and to move us to the next level.”

Moore said teens face tougher decisions today than those from previous generations, and she stressed the importance of school programs such as Flatley’s classes. “The programs in high school are wonderful and it would be good to push those programs into the seventh and eighth grades,” Moore said. “The younger the child we can talk to about these issues, along with families and the community, the more comfortable it will be talking later on when they are teens.”

Because the coordinator position is part-time, Moore will continue as director of education and research at The Harbor Lights Foundation, an organization that provides education and psychosocial support for children, teens and families living with grief. Before working at Harbor Lights, Moore was the director of the Children, Teens & Families Program at Gilda’s Club Westchester in White Plains, which provides intervention, including coping and anxiety reduction.

Moore said she hopes to cast a wide net when it comes to messaging about youth substance abuse.

“Kids don’t live at school. They are at home, at sports groups, clubs or church. The message has to go to all different places,” she said. “We need to ask how we can best work with our great community and neighboring communities as well. It’s exciting to think about the next five years and what will come next.”

Laura Moore, the new coordinator for Pleasantville STRONG, which fights substance abuse among youngsters.

A GOOD READ WHILE YOU’RE STAYING SAFE INSIDE

Four days after being temporarily assigned to the detective division of a sleepy suburban police department, a young officer is thrust into the task of investigating a double homicide. The investigation takes the upstart officer through unfamiliar and dangerous encounters, including suspicion that his agency is incapable of an investigation of this magnitude.

Inspired by a case Louis A. Dorio worked during his twenty years in a “bedroom community” police department, Murder Finds the Suburbs is thrilling true-crime drama that shows evil—as well as service and justice—are everywhere, not just big cities.

Louis A. Dorio retired as Chief of Police after a 20-year decorated career with a suburban NY Police Department.

“Amazing Crime Story! What a great book! I found myself so involved with the story that I couldn’t stop reading. Without giving away any of the story away I can say there were times where I was holding my breath waiting to see how the situation turned out. I recommend this book 100%. Great, fast read. Perfect for a cozy weekend.” ★★★★★

“Couldn’t Put It Down. Finished the book in two days. I couldn’t put it down and have received the same feedback from everyone I have passed the book along to. Louis Dorio does an amazing job of making the reader feel like they are right there with him on the case. I highly recommend Murder Finds the Suburbs.” ★★★★★

“Captivating-This was a fantastic read! A truly captivating story that kept me on the edge of my seat. I couldn’t put it down!” ★★★★★

Available at Amazon in paperback or Kindle
Visit the author’s webpage at https://outskirtspress.com/murderfindsthesuburbs
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When it comes time to sell a house, there are many issues to be addressed to make it attractive to prospective buyers, from curb appeal to functionality of all systems. Realtors are eager to provide advice to guide sellers through the process of “getting ready.”

Probably the most sensitive issue to address is unpleasant odor in the house. My sense is that it isn’t what it used to be, and as a realtor, I find that sometimes that can be a good thing, such as occasions when an old house is riddled with mold or when a home is overpowered with the aroma of spicy cooking.

Every home has a particular smell. Sometimes it’s good, sometimes not. When it’s good, we might want to savor it, but when it’s bad, both we and a prospective buyer want to escape it.

I can still recall that sweet smell of the home I grew up in. Maybe it was a combination of my mother’s cooking, largely tomato- and olive oil-based, with her perfume (My Sin), which today I largely tomato- and olive oil-based, with a combination of my mother’s cooking, the home I grew up in. Maybe it was a good thing.

The next time I was keenly aware of objectionable house smells was in the apartment of a very senior woman who had invited me, as a part-time antiquities dealer at the time, to buy some of her things. When I entered her apartment, located in an old former hotel in Brooklyn Heights, I was hit with a smell that was very unpleasant, yet difficult to describe.

The windows were shrouded in heavy curtains and shades, and the furniture was all deeply tufted. When she showed me her things, some quite beautiful, I would ask her how much she wanted for them. She would often give me a low price, which she must have pulled from her value of things in the 1920s. It would have been unconscionable of me to not give her more.

Whenever I would offer her two and three times the amount she requested, which was still a bargain for me, she would say, “Oh,” with delight. She was lovely and I was getting tremendous deals, but I couldn’t wait to leave the terrible smell of her living environment.

I’m embarrassed to admit that I thought the smell was coming from what I had heard was called “old people smell,” but that was a wrong assumption. “There is no such thing as an ‘old people smell,’” I was told by the owner of an air quality restoration service. “It’s the circumstances of the old person’s environment. “There may be closed windows and no air flow; it could be their personal habits, how often they bathe and clean their clothes, and the odors just don’t have an opportunity to dissipate with circulation.”

Smoking, pets and mold are the three most common causes of house odor, he said.

“Usually no one does anything about the first two – smoking and pets – because people are not aware of those odors when they live with them,” he continued. “They are very aware of mold, however, either because of the smell or allergic reaction, and that is something they want to do something about.”

Toxic mold produces a chemical called mycotoxins, which can cause serious and even fatal illnesses.

While the smell of lingering smoke and pets may be offensive to those not used to it, they aren’t harmful and might be corrected by household remedies. However, toxic mold, which is reputed to have hastened the death of television personality Ed McMahon, should be handled by a professional remediation service. There is just too much at stake, especially in the remediation process, to approach on one’s own.

If a house is being readied for sale and the owner is advised to eliminate the smell of smoking or pets, the best cure is good ventilation. The process can be expedited with good old-fashioned baking soda. Baking soda can be sprinkled on furniture and carpeting that has absorbed smoking or pet odors. After sitting for several hours, it is vacuumed.

The worst thing to do about household odors is to try to mask them with candles, incense or other odor-combating products. The layered smells can be worse than the offending odor.

Bill Primavera is a residential and commercial realtor® associated with William Ravies Real Estate in Yorktown Heights, as well as a publicist and journalist writing regularly as The Home Guru. For questions about home maintenance or to buy or sell a home, he can be called directly at 914-522-2076.

When it comes time to sell a house, there are many issues to be addressed to make it attractive to prospective buyers, from curb appeal to functionality of all systems. Realtors are eager to provide advice to guide sellers through the process of “getting ready.”
Members of the New Castle Town Board indicated the likelihood of revisions to the proposed Form Based Code for downtown Chappaqua during discussions last week regarding the code’s potential impact on traffic and parking.

The board, which has listened to significant criticism during public hearings on the proposed rezoning at the recent public hearings, reassured the public that all comments and questions will be reviewed and addressed in writing by the town’s consultants.

“There really want to be able to get our consultants going and to start to do these initial analyses and really sort of write the answers to the questions that have come through this public process,” said Supervisor Ivy Pool.

Last Tuesday’s discussion came before this Wednesday’s scheduled joint Town Board-Chappaqua Board of Education work session and the scheduled continuation of the public hearing on Jan. 19. The Board of Education hired its own consultant in the fall after it disputed the town’s consultants who estimated less than 100 school-age children would be generated by nearly 1,000 units under the full build-out scenario.

The town is required to include the full buildout under the state Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA). Town officials are considering rezoning up to 72 acres in the hamlet in hopes of encouraging developers to invest in downtown Chappaqua by introducing mixed uses in certain areas. The hope is by adding apartments and having residents live downtown, there will be increased activity and vitality.

There are issues that will need to be resolved by the board and its consultants before officials feels comfortable moving forward. Pool mentioned that any substantial downtown development would require improvement to the triangle intersection at the base of the Route 129 bridge.

Improvements such as a T-intersection or a roundabout at that location have previously received a frosty reception from the state Department of Transportation (DOT) during previous administrations.

“In my mind, we need to understand whether New York State DOT is going to support that,” Pool said. “They haven’t in the past. Do we believe they will going forward, and how will this work from a potential standpoint of the costs associated with that?”

Councilwoman Lisa Katz said she was very concerned about parking and traffic. She said that with previous studies showing a traffic service Level F downtown at certain times, there would need to be improvements to accommodate the likelihood of increased volume.

Another key issue facing officials is parking. Pool said getting a clear picture of how much additional parking may be needed, where it can be built and how much it would cost is a critical component of the proposed Form Based Code.

There has been discussion about the possibility of a parking structure in the town-owned land at the train station, but any use of municipal property is subject to a permissive referendum.

The town and its consultants need to guard against losing parking if there is development downtown, Deputy Supervisor Jeremy Saland said. But if there were to be a parking garage, which should be explored, it would need to be done so it’s not constructed in an offensive manner, he said.

“If we need town land to do it, then does that mean it just stops, does that mean it just doesn’t happen if we can’t get the land in play to make the development work?” Saland asked.

The town’s director of planning, Sabrina Charney Hull, said there have been many examples of when parking issues scuttle development plans.

New Castle officials and their consultants have plenty to consider in the weeks ahead.

“I’ve not made up my mind how I feel about the Form Based Code other than I am not going to adopt it in its current iteration, I can guarantee that,” Katz said. “But we’re still in the process of figuring out, evaluating what’s best for the town.”
An 18-year-old Connecticut man was arrested early Monday by Mount Pleasant police on a weapons charge following a struggle with two officers when they spotted a gun in his waistband.

Mahk Walker, of Hartford, was charged with second-degree criminal possession of a weapon in Thornwood about 2:30 a.m.

While on patrol, Officer Samantha O’Conner pulled over a vehicle occupied by three males after she observed it being operated erratically in Thornwood. She followed the car into a residential neighborhood where there have been numerous incidents of stolen property from vehicles and reports of stolen cars.

Once stopped, O’Conner engaged the driver in conversation and had reasonable suspicion to detain the men for further investigation.

After Officer Nicholas Mann arrived at the scene to provide assistance, the two officers asked Walker, the backseat passenger, to get out of the car. Police said he was uncooperative after exiting the vehicle, continuing to keep his hands near his waist.

Mann observed what later turned out to be a Smith & Wesson .40-caliber semiautomatic pistol, which was fully loaded with 16 rounds of ammunition, police said. Upon observing the gun, both officers brought Walker to the ground and a struggle ensued.

The suspect was handcuffed and brought to Mount Pleasant police headquarters.

Mt. Pleasant Police Arrest Connecticut Man on Weapons Charge

By Martin Wilbur

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New Shop to Provide Residents With Taste of Britain in Mt. Kisco

By Sydney Stoller

Stuck at home during the coronavirus pandemic, local Anglophiles and British expats have been unable to take a trip across the pond.

They may instead be satisfying their need for English culture by watching “The Crown,” “The Great British Baking Show” or “Bridgerton,” all trending shows on Netflix based in the U.K., and by drinking breakfast tea.

Fortunately, there will soon be a way for local residents to get a taste of Britain close to home.

A new retail shop called The Hamlet will be opening in Mount Kisco in late February at 23 S. Moger Ave. The Hamlet will mainly sell British food, books, gifts and vinyl records. The food items, mostly nonperishable snacks and dry goods, will be imported from England, which means that customers have the opportunity to try authentic delicacies like Cadbury chocolates and Monster Munch potato chips.

Monster Munch chips are a favorite of co-owner Drew Hodgson, who moved to the United States from England in 1993. Hodgson eventually moved to Manchester before relocating to America and settling in Mount Kisco with his wife, Leigh, and their daughters.

Opening the store alongside partners Karen and Mike Ransom has been a longtime dream for the Hodgsons. And their passion for The Hamlet and its merchandise is palpable.

“It’s exciting to see a new business opening a new store with enthusiastic proprietors is a breath of fresh air. It’s encouraging and energizing to see people invest in our community, especially during this challenging time,” Hodgson said. “I want people to walk in and feel like they walked into a little piece of England,” Hodgson said. “I’m thinking about what I would want as an expat, as someone who is missing home.”

In a climate where many local businesses are struggling to survive, opening a new store with enthusiastic proprietors is a breath of fresh air.

“It’s exciting to see a new business open, especially one so unique,” said Jen Gerken, owner of Porch, a shop on Main Street, which sells home accessories.

The Hamlet will be selling merchandise that will make visitors feel as though they’ve stepped into a shop in the U.K. It is scheduled to open next month.

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Putnam Land Trust Accepts 31 Forested Acres in Southeast

The Putnam County Land Trust (PCLT) announced last week it has accepted the donation of 31 acres on Joe’s Hill Road in the Town of Southeast.

The property is 90 percent woodlands and consists of mature maple-beech and oak-hickory trees, many of which are two to three feet in diameter (estimated to be 100 to 150 years old). Plant communities are red maple swamp, oak-hickory forest and maple-beech forest. There are also rock outcroppings which make the preserve fascinating to walk and explore.

Joe’s Hill, 847 feet in elevation, is .5 miles to the south. This property’s land slopes westward to the reservoir from a peak elevation of 670 feet near the road along the eastern boundary to a low point of 430 feet at the wetlands and reservoir at the western boundary. This wetland along the western boundary is part of New York State Department of Environmental Conservation wetland BR-31. A wetland just east of the property feeds a stream that runs across the property. These woodlands and wetlands provide a high-quality breeding, nesting, foraging and stopover habitat for birds, reptiles, amphibians, beneficial insects and a variety of other wildlife. Birds observed on a June 18, 2018, visit include the wood thrush, red-eyed vireo and veery, all of which are interior-forest dwelling migratory birds that require large, unfragmented blocks of woods such as these in which to breed. Spotted turtle, bobcat and river otter may breed here or use this habitat.

This property helps to protect the quality of the water entering the East Branch Reservoir and provide much-needed wildlife habitat. Over the past 50 years, three billion birds have disappeared due to loss of habitat and use of pesticides. By conserving this property, PCLT is helping to provide undisturbed habitat for them.

The property requires work to make it accessible for visitors, and there are plans to have it open for walks by early 2022.

ArtsWestchester Seeks Art Created During Pandemic for Exhibit

ArtsWestchester has issued a call for submissions of artistic and creative projects made during the COVID-19 pandemic for a new curated exhibition that will open in the spring.

Janet Langsam, ArtsWestchester’s CEO, said at a time of great loss and physical distancing, many have turned to creative outlets to help cope and express anguish when feeling helpless.

“Painting, photography, sewing, crafting, singing, writing and other everyday creative activities are helping us to reclaim a connection to our friends, families and self,” Langsam said. “We invite you to share your creativity with us – your homemade puppet theater, your ‘COVID cookbook,’ your family Zoom concert – and tell your pandemic story. We are open to all of your creative ideas.”

The exhibit is expected to open in late April, with a parallel virtual presentation. However, depending on health guidelines and policies in place at the time, the exhibition may be solely virtual. The exhibit’s title and opening date will be announced in February.

ArtsWestchester will consider submissions in the following categories: crafts, visual arts, performing arts, cultural/traditional practices, writing and fashion, among others.

Artists must be Westchester County or Hudson Valley residents. Adults may submit up to three works in any category; minors are limited to one submission. The submission deadline is Mar. 3 at 11:59 p.m. Selected artists will be notified of submission status no later than Mar. 15.

ArtsWestchester will offer two 7 p.m. workshops on Jan. 19 and 26 to help artists and members of the public prepare submissions. Those who would like to view a recording of the sessions, e-mail Logan Hanley, gallery manager, at lhanley@artswestchester.org.

Exploring the Changes in the Wine World During the Past Quarter Century

The world is changing — rapidly. The wine world is changing — also rapidly.

As we leave 2020 behind and venture into the uncertainty of 2021, let’s focus on the last quarter century — a mere speck of sand in the continuum of humankind’s presence on this amazing planet.

Over the span of the last 25 years, the global community has witnessed, and been directly affected by, greater advancements in science, medicine, technology, world health, world peace and human longevity than in the cumulative history of mankind.

In 1995, we were primarily tethered to wired phones, receiving much of our information from the Postal Service and broadcast and print media. The internet was just beginning to surface as a consumer tool for information research and shopping.

What a phenomenal journey it’s been since then: smartphones have largely replaced traditional soft technology sources, not to mention still and video cameras and film, maps, board games, music and music storage on hard media, shopping carts, even face-to-face conversations.

Adults live longer than in 1995 due to advances such as laser surgery, stents, statins, genetic sequencing and MRIs. The level of worldwide poverty is the lowest in history and much of the world’s population lives in relative peace.

In 2021, we can also enjoy life to the fullest (notwithstanding the obvious effects of the pandemic), including indulging in our favorite wines. Allow and indulge me, in the shadow of these momentous changes in our lives, to ruminate on the transformation of the wine world over the last 25 years.

Let’s focus on the change in the proliferation and influence of wine producing regions.

New major players. A number of today’s major wine-producing countries were not even on the international radar screen 25 years ago. Nowhere has the surge in wine over this period been the greatest than in the United States; all 50 states now produce quality wines. The result of this surge? We have become the largest wine consumers in the world, and 75 percent of what we consume is produced domestically. American cult wines garner similar respect as a number of esteemed French wines.

Resurgence of Old World producers. After languishing in the world markets for decades, winemakers have revitalized their wineries with bold, exciting new representations of wines — and at very affordable prices. In addition to numerous producers in France and Italy, those in Griechenland, Portugal, Austria and Switzerland have embraced New World technology, producing quality wines that were subpar 25 years ago.

Eastern Europe has an Old World wine heritage dating back to the early Romans. Virtually non-existent outside of their homelands 25 years ago, high quality/price ratio wines from Croatia, Romania, Czech Republic and Hungary are entering the United States market.

Surge of New World producers. Gallo’s Barefoot brand has risen from domestic sales of 40,000 cases in 1995 to an industry-leading 18 million today. And don’t forget the other New World behemoth, Yellowtail, which is still dominant in the United States market with over 11 million cases sold today. Add to the mix New Zealand, Chile, Argentina and Canada.

New horizons. This is where it is truly amazing. Today, wine is produced in far-flung regions never thought to be commercially possible, let alone successful, in 1990. Primarily sold in-country, these wines haven’t hit our shores yet, but they have received acclaim for their high quality. Down the road, look for wines from the Black Sea countries (Russia and Georgia), North Africa (Morocco, even Ethiopia), Israel, Brazil and India. The newest giant emerging in the market is the United Kingdom, producing acclaimed sparkling wines.

Where is the world market for wine headed? There are a number of wild cards. Experts anticipate significant changes in the wine world in the future, influenced by global warming and the rise of the Chinese market, amongst others.

One thing is certain: Just as consumers and wine lovers everywhere have benefited from historic changes in the last 25 years, so too will we benefit from the ever-evolving world of science and wine production. Enjoy the ride.

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.

You Heard It Through the Grapevine

By Richard Levy

Crabtree’s Kittle House: A Dining Masterpiece in Chappaqua

As a travel writer I’ve been lucky enough to devour incredible meals in some of the world’s finest restaurants, from Paris to Saigon, Berlin to Los Angeles and Madrid to Florence.

Now that COVID-19 has sadly “clipped my wings,” the world’s Michelin-starred restaurants of my travels are now just a delicious memory.

But recently I’ve discovered an incredible, world-class, Michelin-worthy restaurant just 30 minutes away from home in Hastings-on-Hudson. A magical, very special restaurant that’s blown me away in every possible way.

That charming, Old World, romantic restaurant is Crabtree’s Kittle House nestled in the woods in Chappaqua. Over 200 years ago this was a family farm, then a Prohibition era roadhouse, a private girl’s school, country playhouse where Henry Fonda and Tallulah Bankhead starred and a bed and breakfast during Hollywood’s Golden Era.

The white, classically gorgeous building was constructed in 1879 and has 14 antique-decorated guest rooms upstairs, a beautifully decorated restaurant downstairs, with picturesque patio for outdoor dining and another patio for one-of-a-kind country weddings.

The delightfully charming owner of Crabtree’s Kittle House is John Crabtree. Just as Leonard Bernstein was acclaimed by music critics as the renowned maestro of the New York Philharmonic, Crabtree is acclaimed by food critics as the renowned maestro of his establishment.

Like a great conductor, he orchestrates every facet of his outstanding restaurant. His attentive staff is Old World, serving every dish so artfully. They make you feel very special, explaining how each dish was prepared and how the ingredients were locally and sustainably sourced.

Upon being seated they’ll bring you a basket of homemade sourdough bread, served warm with a crunchy crust and gossamer dough. Each course is presented to you as delicious works of art. My favorite dishes included their Highland Farms venison osso bucco, pan roasted Hudson Valley pork belly, winter truffle and wild mushroom Gnocci and slow-braised grass-fed short ribs. Their seafood selections are beyond outstanding. Order a side of their seductive parmesan truffle fries with chipotle aioli.

Their incredibly delicious, artistic desserts are more impressive than ones created by Vienna’s masterful pastry chefs. Order their Valrhona Chocolate “Gift” with Crème Anglaise.

Crabtree glows when he talks about his world-class wine collection that critics have called one of the most impressive of any restaurant in the country. Wine Spectator Magazine gave it one of their highest ratings.

The tables inside the lovely main dining room are safely distanced. Dining on their expansive patio is a warm and cozy experience, thanks to the towering heaters.

You can also pick up most items on their menu curbside with family meals for four to six people. On weekends they have the most delicious four-course brunch in Westchester.

Until I take off again on my next travel adventure, I’m so thankful that I discovered Crabtree’s Kittle House, which has been so rewarding a dining experience as I’ve had in all my travels. This unique restaurant unequivocally deserves to be awarded two stars by the discriminating folks at Guide Michelin.

So take my advice, make plans today to treat yourself and your significant other to a delightfully decadent one-of-a-kind memorable meal. Of course, it’s a bit pricey but with all you’ve had to put up with this year and unable to celebrate all the special holidays with your loved ones, it’s absolutely worth the splurge. More importantly, you’re worth it.

Crabtree’s Kittle House is located at 11 Kittle Rd. in Chappaqua. For more information, call 914-666-8044 or visit www.crabtreeskittlehouse.com.

Hastings-on-Hudson resident Richard Levy is a former advertising “Mad Man” creative director and now a travel writer. He’s also an inventor of innovative new products and is writing and illustrating a new children’s book. You can contact him at RichardLevyTravelWriter@gmail.com.
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Woodpeckers of Westchester: A Portentous Pileated

By Brian Kluepfel

We have considered the pileated woodpecker a bird of good fortune since we saw one just outside our apartment on moving day four years ago.

Such a massive, beautiful creature, we were compelled to watch it, even as the rain drizzled down our necks and dampened our hair on a dank March morning. I even asked the landlord not to remove the tree where the woodpecker was situated. The tree is still there, but probably not due to my request.

As big and bodacious as the pileated woodpecker is (if you haven’t seen one, they’re crow-sized, with a bright red crest), they’re not easy to spot, especially in the spring and summer. They tend to be high up in the canopy of thick woods, and eastern deciduous forests are dense with foliage until late autumn. While we often hear one on our walks through Mariandale, only once have we seen one there. We did see another, out in the open by the Ossining Metro-North station, a few years ago.

On New Year’s Eve I met a good friend at Pruyn Sanctuary for a coffee and a quick hike. (It was another drizzly day.) As we strolled through the lowland swamp, we heard the unmistakable tapping of a woodpecker, and through the treetops for a moment, my friend spied the pileated woodpecker. Perhaps as the woodpecker raps its head repeatedly against the trunk to get a reward of insects, collective humanity bashing our head against the wall of intolerance and misunderstanding will result in something positive. Or maybe we’ll have to fly to another tree.

There are 22 woodpecker species native to North America (for die-hards who insist the ivory-billed is still around, 23). You can see several at our Saw Mill River Audubon sanctuaries in Westchester. Among them are the red-bellied woodpecker (we just saw one at Cedar Lane Park), the hairy woodpecker, the downy woodpecker, the northern flicker (often visible on the ground, with gilt-edged wings), the yellow-bellied sapucker, and naturally, the pileated woodpecker. In recent years, Muscoot Farm in Somers had been home to a nest of stunning red-headed woodpeckers.

Brian Kluepfel is the editor of the Saw Mill River Audubon newsletter and a correspondent for Lonely Planet and Fodor’s travel guides, as well as Birdwatching and Westchester magazines. You can find him at birdmanwalking.com and @briankluepfel on social media.

For The Birds

The hard-to-spot pileated woodpecker, one of more than 20 woodpecker species native to North America and the American Birding Association’s 2020 Bird of the Year.
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For a variety of reasons, lacrosse is more like family than most sports, so make no mistake: Laxers are there for each other, especially when the chips are down.

There is genetic royalty at just about every legitimate high school lacrosse program across the country. Families with two or more children often form the lineage that shapes the pedigree and stock of a particular program: the Fuscos of Yorktown High, the Lindseys of Walter Panas, the Prunty of Lakeland. Heck, Yorktown has a ton of families worthy of royal mention (the Marrs, the Nelsons, the D’Andraias, the Kavovits, the Carcaterras, the Dooleys, the McDuffs, the Harringtons, the McCalls, the Vercruysses, et al.), but given the three All-American men -- Frank, the dad in 1980, and sons Frank Jr. (2012) and Austin (2013) -- and one All-American daughter, Rilea -- the Fuscos are about as given at Yorktown as the Bocklets of John Jay Cross River, who are dealing with a major setback to one of their three All-American sons.

The Bocklet family means as much to the lore of Section 1 lacrosse as any family in history, including four siblings who all played Division I lacrosse. Mike Bocklet (Fairfield ’07), Matt Bocklet (Johns Hopkins ’08), Chris Bocklet (Virginia ’11) and sister Casey Bocklet ’07), Matt Bocklet (Johns Hopkins ’08), Chris Bocklet (Virginia ’11) and sister Casey Bocklet Virginia ’15) starred at John Jay prior to their NCAA and professional careers.

But, now-31-year-old Chris Bocklet, the former three-time UVA All-American and high school All-American, remains in critical condition after a longboarding accident ended in calamitous fashion and placed Chris in a coma. Mike Bocklet rushed in to support the Bocklet family. Former three-time UVA All-American Mike Bocklet (Virginia ’11) and sister Casey Bocklet (Virginia ’15) starred at John Jay prior to their NCAA and professional careers.

Many of us in Section 1 see Chris’ dad, Barry, running up and down the sidelines as one of the top football and lacrosse referees in the area (not to mention a true gentleman), so it’s time to rally around Barry’s pride and joy and donate whatever you can to help Chris get back on his feet.

In light of the COVID-19-driven postponements of high-risk sports last fall, #Time2Advocate has taken on a life of its own after Mahopac High football Coach Dominick DeMatteo took to social media recently in an effort to revive and initiate a statewide push for varsity football in the spring of 2021. Several local politicians have jumped aboard the mission in an effort to get NYS Gov. Andrew Cuomo to give the green light for “high-risk” sports like football, basketball, ice hockey, wrestling and cheerleading.

It was less than a decade when we couldn’t classify cheer as an actual sport, but now it’s a high risk activity. Enough already! Depression and anxiety due to missing school and athletic experiences because of COVID. That’s about 132,000 high school kids.

This is why it’s #Time2Advocate on behalf of all student-athletes: Professionally and respectfully, call your local politicians and ask them to espouse on behalf of NYS student athletes to #LetThemPlay before another 11th-hour cancellation ends all hope.

Coach Thibbs’ NY Knicks are, evidently, going to go through their fair share of ups and downs in 2021, as evidenced from their 5-5 start and Friday’s 101-89 setback to OKC, but even without No.1 draft pick Cole Toppin (calf strain) in the lineup, I’m far more entertained by this unit through 10 games than I have been much of the last decade, or two.

The puck drops on the 2021 NY Rangers season this week and Blueshirt fans are hoping to see the rebuilding of a potential empire should Rangers GM Jeff Gorton and team president John Davidson hit on all these recent draft picks, including No.1 pick Alexis Lafreniere. Procuring a top four seed in the newly-revised eight-team East Division is anything but a sure thing given the top-heavy contenders within the division, including the Boston Bruins, NY Islanders, Philly Flyers and Washington Caps. That said, I’ll settle on qualifying in 2021 with an eye on Lord Stanley’s Cup in 2022.

When the nation was going to hell in a handbag last Wednesday, NY Mets owner Steve Cohen put an end to my personal gloom last Wednesday, NY Mets owner Steve Cohen put an end to my personal gloom when he, Sandy Alderson and Jared Porter aggressively traded for All-Star Francisco Lindor and Yuli Gurriel. It got me thinking -- just #35DaystoTillPitchersandCatchers Metsmerized. Thanks, Uncle Stevey, for putting the smile back on my face.
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