

Mt. Kisco, Developer Close in on 99-Year Lease for Mixed-Use Project

By Martin Wilbur

Mount Kisco officials are on the verge of signing a 99-year lease with a developer to build a mixed-use development on two downtown municipal parking lots, a project they hope will invigorate the downtown.

Mayor Gina Picinich said last week that the village expects to soon come to terms with developers Gotham Organization, Inc. of Manhattan and Charter Realty & Development of Greenwich, Conn. that would see the construction of 229 apartments and about 40,000 square feet of retail space on the South Moger and North Moger parking lots.

There would also be more than 900 parking spaces in structures built on a portion of each lot, many of which will replace the spaces lost in the current lots, and a community room in the North Moger building that would be used by the Mount Kisco Arts Council.

While Picinich didn't provide an exact timeframe for the contract's signing, she said she was looking forward to finalizing the deal.

"We need to finish up this contract agreement and I do believe we're just about there," Picinich said. "I think everything



An artist's rendering of the mixed-used development proposed by Gotham Organization, Inc. and Charter Realty & Development in Mount Kisco. Village officials expect to sign the contract for the 99-year lease agreement shortly.

has been negotiated out as much and as far as we can."

Last year, the developer received preliminary approval for a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program from the

Westchester County Industrial Development Agency for the \$130 million project.

During a presentation at last Thursday's Village Board meeting, Picinich said that the PILOT would pay \$35 million to the village,

Bedford School District and Westchester County over the first 30 years of the contract. The entities would receive money on a proportional basis that coincides with how property taxes are divvied up.

During each of the first 10 years, those three entities would divide \$200,000, followed by an escalator that increases the PILOT revenue to a combined \$3,065,000 in its final year.

For the remainder of the lease, Gotham and Charter would pay full property taxes on the two sites, Picinich said.

The village would also receive an upfront \$8 million land lease payment that would be rolled over to help pay for the construction of the two parking structures. She said the village would need to find another \$4 million in grants or other sources to fully fund the parking.

Other revenue for Mount Kisco would be a \$100,000 parking maintenance fee adjusted annually based on the Consumer Price Index. The village is estimated to receive \$4 million by the end of the 30-year PILOT. The village would also retain the parking revenue.

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New Castle Democrats Tab McCall to Lead Ticket in Town Election

By Martin Wilbur

The New Castle Democratic Committee last Tuesday named Chappaqua Board of Education Vice President Holly McCall to lead its ticket as the party's candidate for supervisor.

McCall, who completes her three-year term on the school board on June 30, will be part of a full slate of Town Board candidates – Councilwoman Lori Morton and Michael Weinberg, who has been active with the town and county Democratic committees. Jennifer Bounds will be competing for the Town Board seat carrying a two-year term, which was necessitated by last December's resignation of former councilman Jason Lichtenthal.

The four candidates were among 12 hopefuls interviewed for the four seats up for election and were unanimously endorsed by the

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Holly McCall, currently the vice president of the Chappaqua Board of Education, is running for New Castle supervisor later this year. She will be joined by running mates Councilwoman Lori Morton, Michael Weinberg and Jennifer Bounds.

Mt. Pleasant Board of Ed Hopes for Return of Younger Students

By Martin Wilbur

The Mount Pleasant Board of Education approved release of \$384,000 from unassigned fund balance to pay for the potential full-time return of students at Hawthorne and Columbus elementary schools.

After surveys of students' parents at both schools were recently conducted and tabulated, the board unanimously passed the resolution at its Feb. 10 meeting that could allow in-person classes to resume next month provided the district can ensure the required number of certified teachers to staff the buildings.

The district's initial focus will be to reopen the K-2 Hawthorne Elementary School followed by Columbus, which houses grades 3-5, said Board President Colleen Scaglione Neglia.

"At this time, we don't have enough

applicants for teachers to complete a full return to both Hawthorne and Columbus," Neglia said. "At this time Hawthorne requires four teachers. We will proceed in trying to open up Hawthorne, and then the board will consider how we can proceed with Columbus with the administration and the teachers."

Following the vote, she said the district had interviewed five applicants to fill those positions.

Neglia said the money is needed to hire teachers and teacher aides as well as buy personal protection equipment.

At the last meeting, board members listened to parents for about an hour-and-a-half, with many pleading for a full return to school. Those who advocated for a return to in-person learning reported lackluster remote lessons in some case and that their children were falling

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The South Moger garage, with four levels, would be located underneath and alongside the building and contain 363 spaces – 120 for the yet-to-be-determined anchor retail tenant, 179 spaces for the 119 apartments and visitors and 64 metered spaces.

The five-level North Moger structure would have 564 parking spaces, including 336 for commuters, 152 for the residents and visitors in the 110-unit residential units, 69 metered spots and seven for retail.

Mount Kisco must convince New York State to clear title for a portion of the North Moger property in order to build something other than parking at the site. A portion of the building would sit in an area where any use other than parking is prohibited.

Picinich said she has “every confidence” that the village will be successful in getting that clause lifted.

“If we enter into this contract and for

any reason we cannot clear that title, there is no negative impact to the village,” she said. “What I mean by that is that there’s no penalty.”

Other village responsibilities are improvements to the Main Street and North Moger Avenue intersection estimated at \$200,000 and \$2 million for a pedestrian connection from the Metro-North station over Route 133 to the commuter parking at the North Moger site.

The developers have agreed to supply 15 units of workforce housing eligible to those earning up to 90 percent of adjusted median income.

Trustee Peter Grunthal was bullish on the project, saying it would represent a major revitalization for the downtown. He said communities’ success have always revolved around trade and creating new and exciting opportunities.

“I have no doubt that a couple of years

from now we will have broad economic activity, we’ll have people who want to live in Mount Kisco, people who will want to occupy these apartments and to use the commercial space,” Grunthal said.

However, Trustee Karen Schleimer recited a laundry list of potential pitfalls that she said the village is looking past.

Schleimer said she is uneasy that people would gravitate to Mount Kisco to live in studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments. Since the onset of the pandemic many people want more space and Schleimer said she isn’t convinced that people will return to hour-long five-day-a-week commutes into Manhattan.

She also said there was inadequate green space, commuters would not want to walk from the North Moger lot to the train station and that the 30-year PILOT would provide far less revenue to the village than property taxes.

“The mayor and I do not see eye to eye on this project for a lot of reasons,” Schleimer said. “I’m not comfortable that my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, so I can’t say we’re on the verge of going ahead and signing this. I still think we have questions that need to be answered.”

Grunthal said while the world has changed because of COVID-19, it is still a temporary change and that a developer such as Gotham would not be entering the lease to fail.

The original proposal unveiled in November 2019 had 217 units, which included three-bedroom apartments but those have since been eliminated. There is the reduction of about 10,000 square feet of retail space. There are also 35 parking spaces that have been added.

Once a lease is signed, the developers can move on to the Planning Board for site plan review.

New Castle Democrats Tab McCall to Lead Ticket in Town Election

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committee. The fifth seat, currently occupied by Deputy Supervisor Jeremy Saland, is not up for election until 2023.

“We were focused on finding the best-qualified candidates to lead New Castle forward on all of the issues facing the town,” said Democratic Committee Co-chair Jane Silverman. “Some of the qualities included integrity, fiduciary responsibilities, openness to hearing all points of view on the issues facing our town, temperament and project management skills. We wanted a team with complementary skills and experiences.”

They will be taking on the independent Unite New Castle ticket led by Councilwoman Lisa Katz, who is running for supervisor and is one of four registered Democrats opposing the party’s ticket. The rest of the opposing slate consists of Andrea Sanseverino Galan, Tara McAdam Kassal and Jennifer Louis-Jeune. Louis-Jeune will oppose Bounds for the two-year term.

In her six years as a New Castle resident, McCall has been active with the school district and other organizations. She served as both chair and vice chair of the Roaring Brook Elementary School PTA and currently co-chairs the Bell Middle School PTA’s craft fair.

She said she had the time and the flexibility to make the run for supervisor. She also believes her experience serving the Chappaqua School District gives her a unique perspective, along with having developed relationships which can benefit the entire town.

“I really enjoy serving,” said McCall, who formerly worked in financial services project management. “When I saw that (Supervisor) Ivy (Pool) wasn’t going to run, I thought maybe that’s another way I can help out, especially leveraging experience from the school board.”

While she expects the debate over the proposed Form Based Code to remain a key campaign issue, McCall said that there are other important issues facing

New Castle. The environment and sustainability issues should be explored, including potential municipal solar opportunities and concerns of the West End with the proposed overlay district.

Passing a Form Based Code is consistent with the 2017 Comprehensive Plan update and critical to revitalizing downtown Chappaqua, but she doesn’t support it in its current form.

“I do have confidence that the community is determined to work together with the Town Board’s leadership to find a place that is right for the Chappaqua hamlet and New Castle overall,” McCall said.

Weinberg, who has been politically active locally and in the county for years, said the opportunity presented itself for him to run. Weinberg has worked as a special adviser on state Sen. Peter Hackham’s staff the past two years along with overseeing his own finance and consulting business. He is also a town Democratic district leader.

“I’ve been involved in politics for

so long it really matters to me and it seems like a good time to step up,” said Weinberg, an active member of the Chappaqua-Millwood Chamber of Commerce. “I understand the issues as well as anyone. I’ve certainly spoken in front of and listened to Town Board meetings long enough.”

In November, Morton won a seat for the remaining year on Pool’s former council seat term. At the time she said she was likely to run for a full term.

A 19-year town resident, Morton is a vice president of research at Regeneron. She has been active with the school district and various organizations and served as a founding member of the district’s PTA STEM Committee, leading the organization from 2016 to 2019. She was also a founding contributor to the Chappaqua Children’s Book Festival.

Morton was active with Chappaqua Friends of Hillary, and continues to serve as a board member of Up2Us. She was a town Democratic district leader for more

than three years until beginning her service on the Town Board.

Bounds, who leads U.S. operations for a European manufacturer, has served on the New Castle Council on Race and Equity’s Business and Commerce Committee.

She hopes to attract diverse businesses and residents to town as part of revitalization efforts and to make New Castle a more walkable community.

Part of an interracial marriage with two biracial children in high school, Bounds was also motivated to run because of racial incidents in the school district and town last year.

“I want to make it a better, safer place for children of color who come through after them, so they don’t have some of the same experiences here,” said Bounds. “At the same time, I realize how much better it is here than anywhere else.”

Town Justice Noah Sorkin was also endorsed by the committee as he seeks re-election.

Mt. Pleasant Board of Ed Hopes for Return of Younger Students

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behind, regressing academically and socially over the past year.

“I have a second-grader and every morning that she’s not here she cries and I have to pry her off the floor, and there are tantrums and behavior that she has never had, ever, in her entire life,” said Thornwood resident Anna Manessi. “She has anxiety, she has depression and this is told by her doctor to me and this is what’s happening with our children.”

Hawthorne resident Mike Nugent said that to him the choice was clear, particularly after the results of the survey were released. Nearly 80 percent of Hawthorne Elementary School parents wanted their children to return to school; the tally at Columbus was nearly a 50-50 split.

“You said you have an impossible choice. Could it be any more possible?” Nugent said.

“You sent out a survey to survey the parents, they answered it. You are elected by the parents of this community to represent them. I don’t know what the debate is. This is not your own personal decision.”

However, nearly an equal number of parents opposed the move because of health concerns as well as the likelihood that their children will face an upheaval in March for the second straight year. Students who return to school will not be able to keep the teachers they have had in the hybrid classes.

Opponents of a reopening called for district officials to concentrate their attention and resources on having a full reopening in September.

“To all of you, I understand your angst. I understand why you would want your children back at school,” said Karen Murphy Connelly of Thornwood, a first-grade teacher in another

district. “But I feel you should also know that school doesn’t look the same anymore. There is no carpet time. We have face shields in front of the children, we have face masks on. We have to remain in the front of the classroom. That’s not the way you teach first grade and any elementary teacher can speak to that.”

Leslie O’Malley, who has two children at Columbus Elementary School, said changing teachers at this point in the year would be counterproductive.

“It would be like starting over again for school, and I also, like other parents mentioned, using the reserve fund to me is not the same thing as a surplus, like we have extra money that we want to get used before the end of the year,” O’Malley said.

A contingent of parents in districts throughout Westchester and Putnam have been increasingly outspoken about finding a

way to at least return the youngest children to the classrooms in recent weeks.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kurtis Kotes said the administration will focus on first reopening Hawthorne Elementary School but needs to make sure that the teachers being interviewed are qualified to serve.

He also cautioned that while the district is planning for a full reopening in September, if the Department of Health is still requiring distancing, the only option is to return to remote learning.

“We will not be able to sustain adding this number of staff without significantly cutting from somewhere else, and if the resources are down because that money is gone, we would not be able to pay for the additional staff,” Kotes said.

Latimer Urges Public to Follow Safety Guidelines, Get Vaccinated

By Anna Young

As the coronavirus infection rate continues to drop in Westchester, County Executive George Latimer encouraged residents to remain vigilant, follow safety measures and get vaccinated.

During a press briefing last Friday, Latimer urged eligible people in groups 1A and 1B to get vaccinated, emphasizing that there is currently no other way to end the pandemic. He described the vaccine as the medical community's ticket back to normalcy and chastised those making excuses not to get inoculated.

"I'm frustrated that there's still an unwillingness of people to do what we know is the logical thing to do and we go out of our way to find excuses for not doing it," Latimer said. "The path out of the pandemic leads through vaccinations and making yourself less vulnerable to getting the disease in the first place."

But until everyone is immunized, he said it's imperative the numbers don't spike again like they did during the holiday season. Latimer added that officials are encouraged by the reduction in infections, fatalities and hospitalizations over the last month.

However, he asserted that the county has been in this position before only to see the trajectory change.

"Our behavior is critical here," Latimer said. "The numbers are getting better but not better enough for us to drop our guard."

Coronavirus cases increased by 377 in Westchester County on Monday, bringing the total number of positive cases to 104,777 since the start of the pandemic. There are now 6,332 active cases, a continual drop after cases tracked just above 7,000 late last week following a mini three-day surge.

Data shows a decline of 562 in active cases since last week.

"We had a slight uptick in Wednesday's numbers and Thursday's numbers over what they were the prior day, but still the numbers have been dropping," Latimer said. "The numbers are getting better, but the numbers are still embedded with fatalities and hospitalizations."

The daily positivity rate is 4.77 percent, with 7,903 tests administered Saturday. Overall, more than two million COVID-19 tests have been dispensed in Westchester since March.

Ten more deaths were reported on Monday, bringing the COVID-19-related death toll to 2,064. There were 43 virus deaths recorded in the last week, with 388 since Jan. 1.

"In terms of the numbers and trends, the number of fatalities per week have been dropping (and) we're almost at the point where we are half of the population of fatalities than we had two weeks ago," Latimer said. "Obviously, nothing will suffice until we hit zero."

While the weekly fatality rate has decreased, Latimer stressed that 25 percent of virus-related deaths have occurred since Thanksgiving. He attributed the rapid influx in deaths to public gatherings and folks defying state guidelines.

"You cannot deny that we've had a rapid increase in the number of fatalities since Thanksgiving Day at a time when we had

almost no public activities, but private behavior pursued whatever direction it pursued," Latimer said. "And maybe the people at the party didn't die of COVID but they got COVID and they passed it onto someone else who had an underlying illness who suffered."

There are currently 403 virus patients in Westchester hospitals, another decrease since hospitalizations neared 600 earlier this month.

The Westchester County government has directly administered 60,731 vaccines to eligible residents since the County Center became a distribution site on Jan. 13. The county health department and Westchester Community College sites have inoculated

9,707 individuals.

"At some point in time, we will have vaccinated as many people as we have had people that officially were tracked as having COVID," Latimer said on Monday. "The numbers don't correlate except they are an indicator of how much they are rising in the vaccination challenge."

Latimer added that while the county continues to inoculate more than 1,000 people a day, there still isn't enough supply to meet the demand of every eligible Westchester County resident.

Putnam County's total caseload reached 8,135, with 19 additional positive cases recorded on Monday. The daily positivity rate is 2.19 percent, with 868 tests administered

on Saturday. Active cases have reached 510.

There have been 86 coronavirus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic. Two virus deaths were reported last week, with 18 fatalities in 2021.

Statewide there were 6,146 new positive cases on Monday, with the daily positivity rate clocking in at 4.33 percent.

There were 89 additional COVID-19-related fatalities, bringing the death toll to 37,941.

Statewide hospitalizations stand at 5,804, a decrease of 40 over the previous day. Across New York there have been 1,584,931 positive coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

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Noted Attorney, Author Lawrence Otis Graham Dies at 59

By Martin Wilbur

Chappaqua resident Lawrence Otis Graham, a highly respected attorney, best-selling author, local political commentator, activist and one-time congressional candidate, died suddenly last Friday. He was 59.

County Executive George Latimer announced Graham's death on Sunday on his Facebook page. No cause of death was given.

"I met him when he and his wife Pam – a talented and successful executive in her own right – lived in White Plains and I was going door-to-door running for re-election as a county legislator," Latimer said. "I walked

away from that front door meeting knowing I had just met an impressive man...and he was that and more over the 25+ years of our friendship.

"He left an indelible mark while he was with us. And we mourn his departure this day."

For many years, Graham worked for the White Plains law firm Cuddy & Feder, specializing in real estate law, land use and governmental affairs. He was a New York Times best-selling author, who wrote 14 books as well as having served as a contributing editor at U.S. News & World Report.

He offered regular political commentary

on News 12, including offering his insight each Election Night.

Graham was also once a political candidate. In 2000, he ran against former Rep. Sue Kelly but was defeated.

Graham wrote a magazine article, which developed into a book, about his clandestine effort to work undercover as a busboy at an all-white a Greenwich, Conn. country club.

Born on Dec. 25, 1961, Graham was the son of Richard C. Graham and Betty J. Graham. He grew up in White Plains and was a graduate of White Plains High School, Princeton University and Harvard Law School.

He married Pamela A. Thomas on Feb. 15, 1992, and worked for many years until the time of his death as an attorney at the White Plains law firm Cuddy & Feder.

The law firm posted a tribute to him on Sunday on its website, noting his work in the community and serving on the boards of numerous schools and organizations. He also served on the Westchester County Police Board.

"Larry's enthusiastic and energetic community efforts were rooted in his belief that one must give back and make a difference in the lives of people," the Cuddy & Feder statement read in part. "His talents were highly sought after as a board member at several universities and philanthropic organizations, as a police board commissioner and a commentator on Channel 12. Larry's intelligence, vision and sensitivity resonated particularly in his dedication to telling the



An undated photo of Lawrence Otis Graham who died last Friday at 59 years old.

Westchester County Parks Taking Picnic Reservations

The Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation is now taking reservations for outdoor picnicking in county parks for the upcoming months.

All groups will be required to follow current COVID-19 guidelines including, but not limited to, capacity, social distancing and mask wearing.

Picnicking, including outdoor pavilions, is allowed at Blue Mountain Reservation, Peekskill; Croton Gorge, Cortlandt; Croton Point Park, Croton-on-Hudson; George's

Island Park, Montrose; Kensico Dam Plaza, Valhalla; V.E. Macy Park, Irvington; Ridge Road Park, Hartsdale; Saxon Woods Park, White Plains; Sprain Ridge Park, Yonkers; Tibbetts Brook Park, Yonkers; Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, Cross River; and Willson's Woods Park, Mount Vernon.

To make a reservation, call 914-231-4575, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Reservation holders will be contacted if there are any changes to COVID-19 protocols.

story of uniquely human experiences and the search for equity for all people."

A public viewing will be held this Friday, Feb. 26 from 12 to 5 p.m. at Lee's Funeral Home, located at 160 Fisher Ave. in White Plains.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be sent In Memory of Lawrence Otis Graham to the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), Contribution Receipt Center, P.O. Box 98097, Washington, D.C. 20090 or by visiting go.si.edu/honor-memory.

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Mt. Kisco Special Ed School Pushed to Brink Over Tuition Flap

By Martin Wilbur

A state Education Department (SED) determination has placed a Mount Kisco school that serves students with learning and social and emotional disabilities in financial peril because the school must pay districts that sent pupils to its classes.

The Karafin School, which is privately owned and operated and located on Radio Circle for students in grades 9-12, has been forced to reconcile payments with the New York City Department of Education and districts throughout the lower Hudson Valley dating back to the 2013-14 school year.

Last spring the school, which had not seen its state-set tuition rate increase over the past seven years, was flagged by SED "due to underspending and costs disallowed by SED per tuition methodology," according to a department spokesperson.

Dr. Bart Donow, the Karafin School's owner and director, said that according to the state's calculations the school took in more money than it spent and was also providing higher salaries for some of its teachers and employees than their certification allowed. He said the school needs to retain qualified staff in a prohibitively expensive environment.

"Our salaries are ridiculously low because our tuition prohibits us from getting any more," Donow said. "The only source of income that comes in besides a federal grant, which I have to spend on material for the kids, is the tuition rate."

The state set the per-pupil tuition rate at \$3,047.04 a month for 2019-20 and it decreased to \$3,028 for the current school year, he said.

As a result of the SED findings from the previous years, the Karafin School is responsible for repaying \$257,000 to the New York City Department of Education and a similar amount to numerous districts in Westchester, Putnam, Orange, Dutchess and Ulster counties as well as some in Connecticut.

Donow said the lower Hudson Valley districts are unlikely to ask for the money back because many had sent or one or two students, so it wouldn't be financially feasible for them to reopen their books from several years ago. Also, if the Karafin School went bankrupt, districts would spend far more money anywhere else to provide the mandated services.

However, with New York City accounting for roughly half of the school's enrollment and due just over a quarter of a million dollars, Donow needed to agree on a \$7,000-a-month payment plan out of the \$104,000-a-month tuition from the city.

Typically, the Karafin School has had close to 75 students a year. However, whether it's the pandemic or other factors, current enrollment is about 58 students.

Donow said he hopes the school will be able to survive. He launched a gofundme drive, which has had just over \$26,000 in contributions.

"The cost of nothing went down during



MARTIN WILBUR PHOTO

The Karafin School on Radio Circle must repay the New York City Department of Education more than \$250,000 because the state says it paid staff members more than it was supposed to under current tuition methodology.

that time period," Donow said of the seven years where rates have been essentially frozen. "We paid the teachers more. We gave them raises without having really the money at hand to do it under the assumption it would be there."

"Our rent went up in cost. Everything goes up. So when they finally had their reconciliation for all of those years, they said 'Well, you spent money you didn't have' – that we agree on – 'but you spent money inappropriately because these people you paid didn't deserve that.'"

Donow, who has been operating the Karafin School for about 40 years, is hiring an attorney to challenge SED's conclusions.

He said one of his teachers, who studied at Oxford and went to Columbia University to get her teaching degree and has 34 years' experience, is now making about \$64,000 a year.

Dating back to 1980, the state never quarreled when the Karafin School would provide raises to their teachers and staff, Donow said. But last spring, shortly after the onset of the pandemic, they were notified. He said the fiscal crunch may have something to do with it.

"I definitely think that it's part of that, and it's about a masochistic kind of thing where the public education sector does not want places like us to exist because we are private," Donow said.

The SED spokesperson said that the department is advocating for a state redesign of tuition rates for providers of special education programs and services. That is established by SED and approved by the Division of the Budget. SED establishes annual tuition rates for more than 1,000 approved special education programs at approved private schools, public schools, special act school districts and BOCES.

A set escalator based on growth General Support for Public Schools costs would provide some cost certainty.

Meanwhile, Donow hopes the Karafin School, which opened in 1958, can weather this storm.

"Nobody knows that we're here until they need us," he said.

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State Senate Passes Package of Bills to Protect Nursing Home Residents

Members of the state Senate moved forward Monday with an 11-bill package that is designed to better support and protect nursing home residents.

Legislation approved by the Senate and supported by Sen. Peter Harchkham (D-Lewisboro), is a continuation of efforts made to safeguard residents of New York since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic last year.

The legislation passed today will establish a direct patient care spending ratio for nursing homes, provide greater transparency regarding violations at facilities and require state health officials to conduct more thorough inspections.

"This new legislation, aimed at improving the quality of long-term care, includes developing regulations that will allow compassionate care-giving visitors at facilities in the state," said Harchkham, who co-sponsored the visitation bill and several others in the package.

"It is essential that we consider the emotional well-being of nursing home residents and their loved ones while assuring the safety of everyone concerned and yet providing opportunities for in-person visits."

The action comes after intensifying criticism of Gov. Andrew Cuomo for his actions from both Republicans and some Democrats for his handling of the COVID-19 crisis relating to nursing home deaths.

A Jan. 28 report from state Attorney General Letitia James found that the Cuomo administration underreported nursing home

deaths from the coronavirus by about 50 percent.

Earlier this month, 14 Democratic state senators joined Republicans by calling for the end of the governor's emergency powers that went into effect nearly a year ago.

The legislation passed by the Senate includes:

- **Patient Care Ratio Reporting.** This bill directs the Commissioner of Health to establish a "Direct Patient Care Ratio" that would require all nursing homes to spend at least 70 percent of a facility's revenue on direct patient care.
- **Publication of Nursing Home Ratings.** Requires that the most recent Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) rating of every nursing home be prominently displayed on the home page of the Department of Health's website and at each nursing home facility's website and displayed at the facility for view by the general public.
- **Reimagining Long-Term Care Task Force.** Enacts the Reimagining Long-Term Care Task Force that would study the state of both home-based and facility-based long-term care services in throughout New York, and to make recommendations on potential models of improvement to long-term care services for older New Yorkers.
- **Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Reform Act.** This proposal would expand the current program to be more accessible and available to seniors



State Sen. Peter Harchkham supported the 11 bills that looks to protect nursing home residents and increase accountability and transparency at the facilities.

and their families while promoting the volunteer advocate program, and improve interactions between the Department of Health and the ombudsman program regarding complaints.

- **Allowing Compassionate Care-Giving Visitors.** Creates a standardized program to allow personal care and compassionate care visitors at nursing homes.
- **Infection Inspection Audit.** The Department of Health would establish and

implement an infection control inspection audit and checklist for residential care facilities.

- **Quality Assurance Committees.** Requires adult care facilities to include quality assurance committees in their quality assurance plans.
- **Requirements for Transfer, Discharge and Voluntary Discharge.** Creates requirements for the transfer, discharge and voluntary discharge of residents from residential healthcare facilities
- **Standards for Ownership of Nursing Homes.** Requires more review of ownership of nursing homes through the certificate of need process, including consideration of past violations at other facilities by owners, and requires more notice to the public during the Certificate of Need process.
- **Department of Health Death Records.** Requires the Department of Health to record COVID-19 deaths of nursing home residents who died in hospitals to be recorded as a "nursing home" death, and require the department to update and share data it receives with hospitals and nursing homes on communicable diseases.
- **Transparency of Violations.** Forces residential health care facilities to disclose in writing to potential residents and their family members the website where a list of violations and other actions taken against the facility can be found.

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Bedford Schools Short-Circuits Solar Farm Proposal at West Patent

By Martin Wilbur

The Bedford Board of Education has pulled the plug on the proposed 30-acre solar farm it had been considering behind West Patent Elementary as well as a carport there and at Mount Kisco Elementary School.

On Monday morning, the board issued a statement that it had discontinued entertaining the proposal from Brightcore Energy LLC of Armonk to install the array that would have paid the district \$13 million to lease the land for 25 years.

“The district worked diligently to learn more about what this project would entail,” the board statement read. “After careful consideration, the district had determined not to proceed with this proposed project and will not advance its review or consideration of the project any further.”

It did not provide a reason for its decision. An e-mail sent to Board President Collette Dow did not produce a response on Monday.

Since Brightcore made a presentation to the board in December, there had been increasing opposition to the proposal from the community, particularly residents who live near the school and for many parents with children attending West Patent.

There had also been growing concern about Brightcore’s claims that the approvals would be coming only from the

state Education Department (SED) and other state agencies with no local oversight permitted from the Town of Bedford.

Brightcore had approached the district about using the land at the school for a ground-mounted solar array. The array, along with carports built over the West Patent and Mount Kisco Elementary School parking lots with solar panels on top, would have generated roughly 8.6 million kilowatt hours of energy, enough to power about 1,000 homes.

The proposal was generated as part of Con Edison’s goal along with other utilities around the state to encourage clean energy projects to meet New York’s plan of being power 100 percent by renewables by 2040.

Had the array materialized, the company would have also installed monitors inside the schools to indicate how much power is being generated by the panels.

Despite the board’s decision, its statement said that district officials will seek other opportunities to promote green energy and sustainability.

“We look forward to focusing our efforts on the district’s other ongoing sustainability and energy efficiency initiatives, such as the proposed Energy Performance Contract and development of a district-wide strategic sustainability plan,” the board stated. “Those plans will be shared with the community as they develop.”

Treasures Thrift Shop to Re-open in Armonk on March 6

Treasures Thrift Shop at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Armonk is hosting a grand re-opening. Starting Mar. 6, shop hours will be Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for both shopping and donations.

Shuttered since last year due to COVID-19, Treasures has been refurbished and its inventory refreshed. Hand sanitizers and air purifiers have been installed. Maximum capacity has been set at eight persons. Masks and social distancing are required. There is plenty of parking.

Shoppers will have plenty of wonderful items to choose from – clothing, small furniture, dishware, art, books, bric-a-brac and more. Winterwear will be offered at very low prices. Cash and credit card payments are accepted (but no personal checks).

Also, donors can do some good while spring cleaning. Treasures gratefully accepts donations of a wide range of items in new or nearly new condition. A complete list is posted on the Treasures website, www.treasuresthiftshop.org.

As a service to the community, Treasures Thrift Shop is happy to

dispose of textile items (clothing, shoes, linens, towels, handbags) not of resale quality.

Half of Treasures’ net proceeds support local nonprofits such as the Emergency Shelter Partnership, Hope’s Door, Hudson Valley Honor Flight and the Mount Kisco Interfaith Food Pantry, among other organizations.

Come visit on Saturdays, starting Mar. 6 and help make a difference. You can find us in the basement of the parish hall at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, located at 50 Bedford Rd. in Armonk.

Interested in volunteering? There are lots of opportunities available and would love to hear from you.

Treasures is an all-volunteer-run thrift shop founded more than 50 years ago that has become an institution in downtown Armonk. It is dedicated to connecting donors and shoppers, offering low-cost, high quality items to the community and providing an alternative to landfills.

For more information, visit www.treasuresthiftshop.org or contact Trina Fontaine at info@treasuresthiftshop.org.



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Obituaries

Scott Frey

It is with profound sadness that we share the news of the passing of Scott Young Frey on Jan. 26 at age 36. After fighting a courageous battle with a virulent and little-known strain of cancer, Scott passed away in his home in San Francisco surrounded by his family.

Scotty grew up in Pleasantville, where he was well-known and much loved. He was a talented athlete, playing basketball, baseball and football since third grade with the Dad's Club and culminating his career as a member of the Pleasantville varsity basketball team. He had an unparalleled sense of humor, generous spirit and boundless sense of compassion.

After graduating from Pleasantville High School, Scott earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors from Charleston Southern in 2007. Scotty moved to San Francisco in 2010 to join his brother Evan. Together they spent the past decade charming scores of Californians at the Wreck Room, which they transformed into San Francisco's unofficial New York Mets, New York Jets and Oregon University Duck bar. In the past year, Evan acted as Scott's caretaker, steadfastly supporting him throughout his illness, for which his family is deeply grateful.

Scotty is survived by his brother, Evan; father Edward; mother Megan; grandmother Edith; stepfather Kit; stepmother Joann; sisters Christine and



Scott Frey

Nicole; his aunt, Linda; cousins Jennifer and Katie; niece Hallie; and nephews Ethan and Rico.

In lieu of flowers, those wishing to express sympathy may consider making a donation in Scotty's name to the Bartender Emergency Relief Program, through the USBG National Charity Foundation at <https://usbgfoundation.networkforgood.com>.

Annette Mustich

Annette Mustich died peacefully at her Pleasantville home on Feb. 20 in the presence of her family. She was 91.

She is survived by her beloved husband, Jimmy, with whom she shared 70 years of marriage, and their two children, Cathy Guy and Jim Mustich Jr.

Born in the Bronx on June 20, 1929, to Catherine and Frank DiStasio, Annette attended Evander Childs High School and worked as a young woman at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in Manhattan. On Sept. 30, 1950, she married Jimmy, her high school sweetheart. The couple moved to Pleasantville in 1957 and, in homes on Marble Avenue and Mountain Road, lived there ever since.

Annette was a devoted mother and a source of love and strength not only to her own children but to nearly every young person who came into her orbit. She was a treasured friend to many. A superb cook, she commanded the kitchen not only at home but during lunch hours at Jim and Dom's Bar and Grill on Marble Avenue, the family business during the 1960s, an establishment which brought many new friends into her warm embrace.

After raising her children, Annette returned to school to complete an associate's degree in recreation leadership at Westchester Community College in support of her mid-life career in recreation. As director of the Pleasantville summer day camp and then as a leader of senior citizens programs in Briarcliff Manor, Annette shared the resourcefulness of her mind and the generosity of her spirit with children and adults across the generations, forming countless bonds of friendship and support. Her family was always first in her affection, and she lavished love and radiance on Cathy, Jim Jr. and their families.



Annette Mustich

In addition to her husband and children, she is survived by grandsons David Guy and Nick Guy and great-grandsons Rocky and Reza Guy; by daughter-in-law Margot Greenbaum Mustich and granddaughters Emma Mustich Coburn and Iris Mustich, son-in-law Michael Coburn and great-grandson Charlie Coburn. She was predeceased by a brother, Anthony DiStasio.

Annette was a voracious reader and adored the ocean, and she passed her passion for books and the beach on to her children and grandchildren. She would want everyone who knew her to celebrate her life with the joy and fortitude she brought to it, and to get on with their own lives in the same spirit.

A memorial service will be held sometime in the future. The family asks that any donations made in her name be directed to Hospice of Westchester, whose caregivers blessed her last days with their good graces (<https://hospiceofwestchester.org/donate-today/>).

Robert Spatta

Robert J. Spatta of Croton-on-Hudson and formally of Yonkers passed away on Feb. 14. He was 76.

Bobby was born Sept. 2, 1944, in Yonkers to John and Clara Spatta. He served honorably in the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. On Nov. 13, 1971, he married Virginia (Ginny) Cerrato.

He worked for the Westchester County Department of Environmental Facilities for more than 35 years. He was a life active member of the Croton Fire Department,

member of the Ossining Volunteer Fire Department and honorary member of the Mohegan Fire District. Bobby was a member of the Lakers Social and Athletic Club of Yonkers. He enjoyed family vacations and spending Sunday dinners with all of his children and grandchildren.

Bobby is survived by his wife, Ginny; children Kristie (Doug) Oles, Dan (Rina), and John (Cynthia); grandchildren Lanie, Vinny, Dan, Dominic, Antonio, Sebastian, Salvatore, Sergio and Stella; and sisters Virginia Pecora and Karen Karam. He was predeceased by his parents and his brother, Warren.

Michael Harrington

Michael John Harrington of Yorktown Heights passed away on Feb. 15. He was 74.

Michael was born in the Bronx on Nov. 21, 1946, to Dennis and Anne Harrington. Mike served honorably in the United States Army during the Vietnam War. On Oct. 19, 1968, he married Anne McGee. Mike and Anne met in first grade at Our Lady of Angels grammar school in the Bronx and shared 68 years together.

Mike was a dedicated, hardworking Local 3 electrician who had a hand in laying the

electrical infrastructure in New York City for over 38 years. He was a family man who liked to travel, watch sunsets and ride roller coasters. He kept his grandchildren supplied with zip lines and hoverboards (because he wanted a turn).

Mike is survived by his wife, Anne, and daughters Jeanne (Chris Schiermbock), Denise (Matthew Higham) and Laura (Sal Alleva) and son Michael Jr. He adored his 10 grandchildren (Grace and Christopher Schiermbock, Kiera, Colin and Connor Higham and Joseph, Johnny, Samantha and Caitlin and Piper Harrington).



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Valhalla Senior Project Rezoning Hearing Likely in Two Weeks

By Martin Wilbur

A public hearing to consider a rezoning that would help pave the way for a 170-unit senior living project in Valhalla will be continued on Mar. 9, the next major step for the application.

Brightview Senior Living has proposed the continuing care facility on Grasslands Road across the street from the entrance to Westchester Community College. It would include a mix of independent living, assisted living and memory care units.

Earlier this month, the Mount Pleasant Planning Board issued a negative declaration under the state Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) that permitted the application to advance for the rezoning before the Town Board.

Town Attorney Darius Chafizadeh said unless there are additional issues or questions, the Town Board could close the hearing and adopt the Service Enriched Senior Housing Floating Zone for the nearly 10 acres on Mar. 9. This week the board is expected to schedule the continuation of that hearing. The property is currently in a residential zone.

"We're anxious to proceed. We hope that your board will ask staff to prepare that resolution," said David Steinmetz, an attorney representing Brightview. "Darius and (town planning consultant) Pat (Cleary) worked very hard on the negative declaration

and we appreciate their efforts."

Despite previous concerns about traffic congestion on Grasslands Road, the Planning Board issued its negative declaration on Feb. 4, satisfied with its traffic consultant that the project would not cause any significant adverse environmental impact.

It was reasoned that traffic generated by the facility would add to the congestion on Grasslands Road or at the intersection with Bradhurst Avenue. Most of the residents would not be leaving or arriving during peak

hours or even leaving the site.

The town's consultants also concluded that wetlands would not be an issue.

Councilwoman Laurie Smalley said that the application first appeared before the town about six years ago and she is pleased it has been vetted to the point where it can move forward.

"With all the work that's gone into it by Brightview, certainly I've had all my questions answered," Smalley said. "So I would be in favor of advancing this."

Steinmetz said Brightview also plans to advance its application before the town's Industrial Development Agency. Once the applicant has its rezoning request approved, the proposal would need to return to the Planning Board for site plan review.

"We do believe your board is in a position now to formally adopt the zoning, for formally map the zoning and then Brightview would go back to your Planning Board and we would complete the site-specific site plan review before the Planning Board," Steinmetz said.

Kotes to Leave Mount Pleasant at End of School Year

The Mount Pleasant School District is now looking for its next superintendent.

The Board of Education earlier this month retained the education consulting firm Hazard Young Attea & Associates to help with its search after Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kurtis Kotes informed the community that he will be leaving Mount Pleasant at the end of the school year.

Last month, Kotes was named superintendent of the Goshen Central School District in Orange County. He will reunite with the district, having served as previously as principal of Goshen High School from 2011 to 2015 and then as assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, personnel and technology for three years before arriving in Mount Pleasant.

Kotes arrived in Mount Pleasant in July 2018. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher in the Arlington Central School District in Dutchess County, and went on to become assistant principal at Cornwall High School, coordinating its Guidance Department. He then moved to the Goshen Central School District to begin his service there.

Kotes has a bachelor's degree in political science and history from the University of Albany. He has a master's in secondary education – social studies from Mount St. Mary College and a doctorate in executive leadership from St. John Fisher College.

He will begin in Goshen on July 1.

--Martin Wilbur



Dr. Kurtis Kotes

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Editorial

School Districts Have Been Smart By Going Slow on Return to School

It's unlikely there's a single parent, teacher or school administrator that doesn't want children back in school for live, in-person instruction five full days a week.

The question has always been, as this school year has progressed from the late summer low infection rates to the frightening spikes of November to January, how safely can it be done?

In recent weeks an increasing swell of frustration among parents in many districts throughout Westchester and Putnam has surfaced after seeing their children languish alone in front of a computer at home for days on end. It's understandable. Even for those children who aren't falling behind academically –

and plenty are – the lack of socialization and interaction with peers is likely to hurt many of this generation's elementary school-age children.

But we're not just talking about the safety of the students. Children and teenagers, while certainly not completely unscathed during this pandemic, have had vastly better outcomes if they should test positive for COVID-19.

It's also the teachers and staff members who have a greater chance of comorbidities simply by virtue of being older than the children. Unfortunately, it's unclear whether the level of risk for educators who regularly interact with students increases by being in a full school building. But that's the point. As much as

the medical community has learned during the past year, there is so much that is still unknown.

And it's also about every family that has immunocompromised relatives or a multigenerational arrangement that could have a grandparent living under the same roof.

Many districts that don't have the space have been prudently cautious about pushing for too much attendance too quickly.

While schools have a responsibility to educate, in a pandemic they also have a responsibility to keep their students and their families, staff and community safe.

Letters to the Editor

Cuomo Should Resign for Concealing Info on Nursing Home Fatalities

After months of folks showering praise on New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo for his handling of COVID-19, it has become increasingly clear that Cuomo didn't actually handle it all that well after all.

Early on, New York's COVID numbers were through the roof as Cuomo was very slow to react. Later, he made the terrible decision to send COVID patients back into nursing homes, which led to many deaths. It is also worth noting that there has been some reporting linking nursing home companies

to political donations to Cuomo in the past, bringing up the potential that this decision was motivated by political considerations.

Now, it has come out that he intentionally hid these numbers at a time when he was portraying himself as the great hero of COVID and foil for Trump's incompetent response. Making matters even worse, Assemblyman Ron Kim, a critic of Cuomo's handling of the situation, has shared that Gov. Cuomo called him and threatened "to destroy him" if he didn't stop his critiques.

Cuomo has shown himself to be little more than a thug whose popularity is based largely on name recognition (due to his famous father) and a highly successful public relations campaign to portray him as highly effective when nothing could be further from the truth. Andrew Cuomo should resign immediately or be impeached.

Ron Widelec
Rye Brook

Challenge Local Municipalities to Pursue a Tree-Planting Program

As a member of the Town of Cortlandt Conservation Advisory Council, I would like to propose a challenge to all the municipalities of Westchester County and their CACs: I propose the 1,000-tree challenge. The goal would be for each municipality to plant 1,000 trees within a

time frame. I'm aiming for that goal within a three-year time limit. I can't think of an easier way that local governments can help combat global climate change.

The man-made climate disaster can also be ameliorated by a man-made solution. This is a cheap and easily affordable plan

to help out at the national and global level. Nature has taken billions of years to develop a system of absorbing CO2 emissions (which is what trees do and then convert it to oxygen), and when trees shed their leaves, the decomposing leaves thus release held up carbon to warm the climate during the winter months.

This challenge can also be done with a public-private partnership since we all have to have some responsibility for the well-being of our planet. I would encourage readers to contact their local officials to advocate in pursuing this challenge. If you find that you're going nowhere fast, take the time to plant some of your own trees on your property (native species please). Everyone has a part to play, and even with a small act can help turn the tide of climate change.

Emil Moussa
Cortlandt Manor

Something isn't Adding Up With the MTA's Cost for Two Key Projects

The MTA's Feb. 23 public hearing notice for potential Federal Transit Administration funding of its 2021 Program of Projects left unanswered questions? Here is the link to the document <https://new.mta.info/document/28146>.

On page 118 there is a Metro-North request for \$31 million in funding for Positive Train Control. In December, MTA Chairman Pat Foye and Metro-North President Catherine Rinaldi said the project was completed. Then why is there additional work to be paid for and completed? There is no companion project being requested by the Long Island Rail Road for additional Positive Train Control funding.

On page 104, the Park Avenue Viaduct replacement is listed at \$385.64 million; it cost \$120 million under a previous Federal Transit Administration grant. Work on the viaduct took place between 1995 and 1998 to replace the existing deck. What was the

anticipated useful life? Did Metro-North adequately fund and follow the maintenance plan for this asset so it would reach its useful life? Does this new project duplicate previous work?

Metro-North riders, taxpayers and elected officials deserve answers to these questions.

Larry Penner
Great Neck

The writer is a retired transportation advocate, historian and writer who previously worked for the Federal Transit Administration Region 2 New York office. This included the development, review, approval and oversight for billions of dollars in capital projects and programs for the MTA, Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North, New York City Transit, MTA buses along with 30 other transit agencies in New York and New Jersey.

Correction

In last week's article in the Northern Westchester Examiner about Eric DiBartolo being charged with grand larceny, it incorrectly stated that the former Yorktown highway superintendent is a current fire chief. DiBartolo had previously held the position. The Examiner regrets the error.

Guest Column

Shivering Through the Longest Winter of Our Discontent

By Michael Gold

There is no joy in Pleasantville. The mighty sun has struck out. Over and over again.

I've borrowed from the poem, "Casey At the Bat," with apologies to the author Ernest Thayer.

At the end of the poem, Thayer writes, "Somewhere in this favored land, the sun is shining bright, the band is playing somewhere and somewhere hearts are bright...But there is no joy in Mudville – mighty Casey has struck out."

Ordinarily, one might look to Texas, that eternally optimistic of American places, for some sunshine. That would be wrong now. Texas suffered a weather disaster of epic proportions, with relentless cold, ice and snow. A place with the unlikely name Gun Barrel City received the unwanted gift of more than nine inches of snow.

Having been tested by too-numerous storm-caused power outages ourselves here in Westchester, we can offer our compassion and empathy to the millions in Texas chattering in bone-chilling cold with no electricity. I'm glad President Biden is offering federal disaster assistance.

Last week 73 percent of the continental United States had snow cover, according to

the National Weather Service. My daughter asked me the other day what a new Ice Age might look like. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to picture one. I could start just by looking at my front window.

You'd have to travel to Mexico for a dose of pure, unadulterated sunshine right now.

The sun here is proving to be an elusive ghost, disappearing behind snowstorms, freezing rain or just plain grey skies, pitching itself outward only for a few rare moments here and there, like a thief unsure of when to make a move on his intended victim.

As the microscopic apocalypse of COVID-19 has entrenched itself in the land, each day we wake up to a rough repeat of the day before, enclosed in a box of grey. We put ourselves through the same routine, with precious little variation. We're in an endless, repeating loop.

I never thought I could come to despise a forecast of snow, but each flake I see on my phone etches a streak of grey in my brain. The polar vortex is attacking again! Run for the hills!

The wonders of water turning itself into frozen white pellets that fall from the sky, bringing the very foundation of life directly to us, begins to pall when it refuses to stop dropping on our front yards, driveways and

doorsteps.

Perhaps the sun, like all of us, longs for a vacation. I can see the giant orange, yellow orb stretching out on a lounge chair, savoring a fruity drink, spiced with rum, next to a blue pool the size of California, a cheap detective novel by his side on the deck, savoring his own heat and contemplating the restorative powers of relaxation in a warm, languid place where nothing much happens as the palm trees bow to a gentle Caribbean wind.

Despite repeated demands from his constituents to get back on the job, the sun refuses all requests for relief. The view is too good, and the continual parade of rum drinks makes a compelling case for him to continue to do nothing.

From my house, I can see cars pushing along the parkway. People trudge back and forth through the damp streets. A young woman walks her little dog and stares at a cellphone. The regularity of this routine begins to numb the senses.

The cold bites into us, even inside the confines of our home. We sit with blankets heaped on our laps and watch the bare trees loiter with mindless purpose, sleeping straight up.

I keep reminding myself that this all must end soon. Our part of the planet

will continue to turn toward the sun, lengthening the days and warming the air.

The federal government is pushing hard to get millions more vaccines into our arms as soon as possible, which will help free us from staring at our computers and pacing up and down our living rooms for much of the day.

Pitchers and catchers reported for spring training Feb. 17. Soon, young men with defiantly superior athletic skills will run wind sprints on vast fields of grass. A bat will connect with a ball speeding toward the plate and send it soaring toward a perfectly blue sky.

The trees will wake up and sprout rich, green leaves. Flowers will bud with riots of yellow, red, purple and blue. Scarlet ripples will weave themselves into the clouds of a new sky. Children will find their bicycles and take a ride out on to the quiet streets under the watchful eyes of their proud and nervous parents.

To quote another famous poet, here comes the sun. And not a moment too soon.

Pleasantville resident Michael Gold has had op-ed articles published on the New York Daily News, the Albany Times Union and other newspapers.

Overlay Zones Are a Necessary Revitalization Tool, Not a Rubber Stamp

By Sergio Esposito

So, what exactly is an overlay zone, how does it work and where does it fit in to the existing approval process.

There has been plenty of misinformation as well as speculation as to how such a tool is leveraged. My hope is to explain what an overlay zone is, how it fits into an already established approval process and why it is necessary.

An overlay zone is a regulatory tool that creates a special zoning district, placed over an existing base zone or zones, which identifies special provisions in addition to those in the underlying base zone. It is a tool that is being used and has been heavily utilized as a "gamechanger" in many municipalities across Westchester.

Before an overlay district can be implemented it must go through the rezoning process much like the rezoning process a developer would have to go through. One main difference here is that there would be no developer on hand and to rezone an area to usher in (well-needed) economic revitalization. It is, in no way, a "rubber stamp" as some would characterize it and it does not guarantee that a certain parcel would be utilized

under the overlay zoning.

The overlay district rezoning process would undergo public hearings much like a typical request for a rezone. Citizens would have their opportunity at a televised public hearing to voice their concerns or support for the rezone.

So where does it fit into the approval process? The overlay district is only one part of a multifaceted process. Typically, but not always, a general guideline for an application approval process would follow these steps:

- There would be a staff level meeting, possibly between planning and engineering. This is where the project is disseminated and its viability discussed with the applicant. It is also the point where the applicant, in writing, would request that the project be considered under the overall zone. This request would be rigorously reviewed to determine if the property is appropriate to be considered under that overlay. If there is no request or if the request is denied, then the project is considered according to the base or original zone.
- The applicant would submit an application.

- The application would then be introduced to the Planning Board.
- Next, the Planning Board would review the application, make suggestions and indicate possible changes.
- An agency would declare itself Lead Agent.
- Next, requests for comments will be solicited by any and all relevant agencies. Comments would be welcome from inside the Planning Department as well as outside and a discussion would ensue.
- Thorough review of the application would continue.
- At this point, there would be an indeterminate number of steps. Depending on what the application calls for, there would be traffic studies, an environmental study could ensue, the application would be considered against the tree ordinance, there would be an architectural review and the list goes on.
- After all the necessary studies are done, it is all further and thoroughly discussed and reviewed. The application is referred for a public hearing, once again to allow for public comment from citizens voicing their

concerns or support.

- Finally, the Planning Board makes its final determination as is usually the case.

This is just a basic rundown of the requisite steps necessary for a project to get approved. The overlay district portion is only one step in the grand scheme of things and is in no way a rubber stamp.

Lastly, overlay districting in Yorktown is necessary and vital to our economic health. It will provide the flexibility and enthusiasm we need in a post-pandemic environment. The business community will greatly benefit from all revitalization attempts.

Times have changed, everything has changed, and we must evolve with the times. We must rethink and reinvigorate our Main Streets. Economic revitalization will also help to fill empty offices and storefronts. This will protect the business tax base from landlords seeking tax reductions through the tax certiorari process.

Sergio Esposito is president of the Yorktown Chamber of Commerce.

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Lakeland High School Junior Motivated to Fight for People's Rights

By Rick Pezzullo

Lakeland High School junior Yazmine Sibiski is determined to make a difference.

"One of my goals is to be able to create an accepting environment and allow people to feel more confident with their ideas and who they are," she said. "I have been fortunate enough to see the unfairness in the world, which shouldn't be there."

The honors student stressed it was difficult adjusting after moving in 2010 to Jefferson Valley since she comes from a biracial household. Her mother, a teacher in the Ossining School District and the 2019 Ms. Westchester County, is Puerto Rican and her father is Polish and German.

"Growing up I never really felt I belonged anywhere," she said. "I felt like such an outcast. It has always been hard for me to fit in. I can't begin to imagine other people that have felt the way that I have. It's an unpleasant feeling. I want to be the voice for those people."

A member of her school's debate team, Sibiski, 16, founded the Breaking News Club, an online forum for Lakeland students to voice their concerns and opinions on any subject. The club, which she said has been supported by her principal, was slated to meet for the first time this week.

Sibiski explained she decided to launch the club following the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol building in Washington.

"I was talking about it with a lot of my friends and we didn't know how to talk about it. I was infuriated with that," she said of



the insurrection. "They (students) should feel comfortable to be able to express how they feel. I feel it's necessary to have a safe environment and have them listen to their own peers."

In addition, Sibiski is creating a community-wide club called "A New World," which welcomes activists of all ages. A website with information on that club is <https://takeactionmakechangeaz.weebly.com>.

"One of my top goals is to spread



Lakeland junior Yazmine Sibiski recently launched a new club at her school, the Breaking News Club, an online forum for students to express their views on any subject. She also created a human rights-themed logo for the club.

awareness, create more activists and create a safe environment for everyone," she said. "It infuriates me with how many places don't have handicapped-accessible areas, how people are mistreated because their race or ethnicity or because of who they love. How there are children working in unimaginable conditions instead of attending school. Many families are not given the same opportunities or even health care advances because of the color of their skin. All these people deserve their rights, and they deserve someone to fight for those rights."

Like many students, Sibiski has been

affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, not having any in-person classroom learning since last March. Extracurricular activities such as basketball and softball have also been discontinued.

"I was always with my friends from like 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Now I'm home 24/7," she said. "It's been a lot of work and a lot more stressful. You can't create a relationship with teachers."

But Sibiski hasn't let COVID-19 derail her career path. An aspiring lawyer who has always dreamt of attending the University of Pennsylvania, Sibiski has been accepted at a pre-college program at Georgetown University this summer and is hopeful of completing an internship with a judge that was canceled last year.

"I have my whole life planned out," she said.

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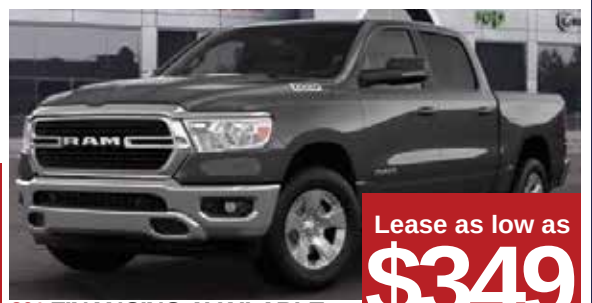
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Assisted Living Facility Celebrates WWII Vet's 102nd Birthday

By Lindsay Emery

After 75 years of marriage, Yorktown residents George and Gloria Personick always remember to hold each other's hands and kiss one another at night just before bed.

"If you're arguing or anything, always kiss at night before you go to bed," Gloria said. "That should be the Bible really. You should kiss each other before going to bed. And let him hold your hand."

Sharing their inseparable bond, the longtime couple embraced each other closely as George, a World War II veteran, celebrated his 102nd birthday last Friday at the Yorktown Assisted Living Residence in Cortlandt Manor.

George has been a resident there since 2017. Gloria moved in shortly after.

While the pair have celebrated countless birthdays together, their story dates to when they were children playing in the backyard in The Bronx. Gloria recalled being invited over to George's house by his sister when she was 12, remembering the admiration she had for him shadow boxing and jumping rope with his brothers and father.

But when George was drafted to serve in the Army, George's sister encouraged Gloria to write him letters, even though they really didn't know each other. George served as a combat medic in World War II, where he performed surgery in the field and worked in hospitals in China, Burma



and India.

"She said, 'Just write him a letter so when he comes home, he'll have something to come home to,'" Gloria explained. "So, I did foolishly. I got trapped."

What started as cordial messages soon transitioned into love letters. When George arrived back in New York, Gloria met him in Times Square. Twenty-seven days later they were married.

Following his military tour, George went on to serve his community as a physical therapist in the VA, and then eventually as a nurse in Peekskill Hospital until he



A photo of George and Gloria Personick, left, on their wedding day 75 years ago, and the couple pictured last week. They and the staff at Yorktown Assisted Living Residence celebrated George Personick's 102nd birthday last Friday.

retired in his 70s. He and Gloria have two daughters, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, all of whom joined them on ZOOM last week to celebrate his momentous milestone.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the facility arranged for a ZOOM gathering of

close friends and family before enjoying George's favorite dinner.

"I'm excited because I'm going to see a lot of people," George said.

Along with family and friends, the facility's staff and Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater all joined in the celebration.



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The Living Room Couch: Where Did it Come From?

For more than 17 years I've been writing as The Home Guru, initially as a way to promote my real estate business. (Yes, I was and still am a realtor/)

But over time, the column developed a life of its own and this article represents the 629th in the series. That's some long run for anything to hold on, but in the case of subjects related to the home, the inspiration for ideas is endless.

One of my much-appreciated fans once asked me, "Where do you get all your ideas for your columns?" That was simple to answer. I simply conveyed the many questions I had about how a home is designed, built and lived in and reported my observations and research.

Just today, my wife asked me if I had ever written about the living room couch or sofa and where it came from? Darned if I knew, so I did my research.

Certainly, Adam and Eve didn't have a couch, nor the cavemen in their shelters, but evidence points to the sofa being used by the Greeks in the seventh century. The Greek word for couch, in fact, is "kline," which means to lean or recline. There, four ornately carved legs supported the ancient couch that was typically used by more than one person at a time. From there, the couch moved to Rome where the couch became a status symbol of the rich.

By the Middle Ages, couches had become

scarce. They were typically only found in the French court. We also get the word couch from the French word "coucher," meaning to lie down.

The popularity of the couch took off in the 18th century, and people started to refer to it as a sofa, which comes from an ancient Arabic word for cushion. Sofas were strewn about living rooms, where people lazed about in a most informal way.

The sofa made its way to America after Thomas Chippendale, the famous London 18th century furniture maker, published a book on furniture. Now everyone was getting a couch, not just the wealthy. Meanwhile, back

in Europe, the chaise lounge was becoming popular.

In my childhood, lived in the 1940s and '50s, sofas usually came in a suite of living room furniture with one or two side chairs and a coffee table. The first couch I remember in my childhood was overstuffed but very firm. Its fabric was itchy and indestructible.

In the 1960s, the couch took on a whole new look with straight lines and bold designs as furniture makers used their creativity to design couches that reflected self-expression and the times.

When I moved to New York, my first sofa was, believe it or not, a straight-lined Danish Modern with foam rubber pillows. When out-of-town guests would visit me, I would place



the long bottom cushion on the floor to be used as a bed.

After just a year, I moved into a large apartment in an historic building where the ceiling height in my living room was more than 16 feet. To match that scale, I bought a large camelback Chippendale sofa at W. & J. Sloane, which some of you older folk like me may remember as an exquisite furniture store. As I remember, that sofa was more than 90 inches long.

But when problems developed between my roommate and me and we decided to go our separate ways, I moved into a much smaller four-floor walk-up. As it happens, the sofa was so long that it couldn't make the corners of the stairwell and it broke my heart but I had to send it back to W. & J. Sloane. Even though I had used it for more than half a year, Sloane took it back because my landlady, a decorator, had a connection there.

My next sofa was actually a more modest Chippendale settee that sat only two. It is memorable because I invited a girlfriend from

work to accompany me when I picked it out. As it turned out, I ended up marrying that woman, and today, many years later, we still enjoy sitting on it.

Since we now live in a modern home, however, I also bought a comfortable Lawson sofa that sits three very comfortably.

It's perhaps odd, but modern lifestyles dictate that we never really sit in the living room on that sofa, especially now that we have no guests due to the pandemic. It may be very comfortable but today it's just for looks. It will be great when it can beckon to guests once again.

While both a writer and publicist, Bill Primavera is also a realtor associated 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.

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Stock Research Associate Writes Book to Interest Children in the Market

By Martin Wilbur

For some, the stock market represents a secretive world of undecipherable terms, a place only for high rollers or something akin to a trip to the casino.

But White Plains native and equity research associate Nicolette DiMaggio is hoping to change some of that fear and hesitancy. And she's looking to start off with the investors of tomorrow.

DiMaggio has released her first book titled "Stock Explore," a children's book with the goal of reaching kids as young as seven years old to help them understand the basics of the stock market and investing.

"The whole focus of 'Stock Explore' is specifically on stocks and understanding what a stock is and what an investment means and the qualities of a stock," DiMaggio said. "So that's my first book, focusing in on stocks. That's a huge universe in the investment industry."

The story centers on Elle, a seven-year-old girl who is learning about her first stock. She acquires five superpowers, based on Porter's five forces for analyzing businesses, with the help of an owl. Each superpower teaches Elle principles of financial literacy.

With only a few states mandating any type of financial literacy into their schools' curriculum, DiMaggio said many children are missing out on being introduced to and learning about the subject during their formative years. Childhood is the right time to have them take on the subject matter rather than waiting until after they've

graduated college and have their first job, she said.

"The biggest thing for me when I started writing my book is going back to the basics of how kids think," said DiMaggio, a White Plains High School graduate who now lives in Stamford and works for Willis Towers Watson. "You're curious, you want to explore new things and that's really what stock research or investment research is, constantly looking into new stocks and figuring out if we can invest in something and whether you should invest in something."

The idea for the book arose a few years ago while DiMaggio was sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic in the Lincoln Tunnel. Crawling along, she wrote much of the story into her iPhone, then saved it, but didn't do anything with it for a couple of years.

After the pandemic struck and DiMaggio was working from home, she explored the feasibility of having it published.

She hired an editor and an illustrator, consulted her mother, a kindergarten teacher, to make it appropriate for children, then gave it to her grandmother and her friends to read, before pitching it to publishing companies. Some thought it was interesting but would likely have limited appeal.



Nicolette DiMaggio has written a children's book that is designed to help children and their parents learn more about the stock market and investing.

So DiMaggio decided to self-publish. It was ready by October.

She suggests that to gauge a child's potential interest, first see how curious they are and if they are open to exploring what the markets are about. If you have their attention, then have them look into the types of companies and products that might interest them or that they use. If they remain engaged, a parent can help them understand the characteristics and qualities of the company and what might make it successful.

If a parent is an investor, after a while they can perhaps make small purchases in

a custodial account.

For DiMaggio, it was her maternal grandfather who piqued her interest in the investment world. A retired accountant, he always enjoyed following and investing in the market and was an avid reader of The Wall Street Journal.

Since she spent a lot of time with him, getting driven to or picked at school when she was young, DiMaggio found herself naturally gravitating to his interests, including the market.

Her first stock purchases were, at 18 years old, Apple and IBM. DiMaggio was soon on her way to Siena College where she was a finance major, one of the few women in that course of study.

A common misconception about the stock market, she said, is that you have to be good at math. If you can master fourth-grade math and are strong at division, then you those are the requisite math skills, DiMaggio said.

Today, with the internet, people can go online and research the common terms used in the industry and look up brokerage firms that have little or no fees. At some point, DiMaggio said, the stock market affects everyone.

"Just being open to being curious and asking questions," she said. "In my book, Elle is constantly asking questions, and someone is helping her answer them."

"Stock Explore" can be purchased at Barnes & Noble, through Amazon and on DiMaggio's website, www.stock-explore.com.

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Educator’s Book Inspires Teachers to Unlock Students’ Unlimited Potential

By Sophia Spiegel

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for most educators and students, but it is stories like Dr. Brandon Beck’s that could inspire others.

Two months ago, Beck’s personal development book: “Unlocking Unlimited Potential: Understanding the Infinite Power Within to Guide Any Student Toward Success,” was released, presenting a revolutionary way of educating. His goal is to help teachers unleash the infinite power within every student.

Inspired by his parents, both educators for more than 30 years, and his experience playing and coaching soccer, Beck is an adjunct professor at Manhattanville College, an elementary school teacher in the Ossining School District, a dual language teacher and a boys’ soccer coach. While working toward a doctorate in educational leadership at Manhattanville, he wrote a dissertation titled “The Influence of Professional Development on Teachers of English Language Learners.”

After researching, writing and defending his dissertation, Beck wanted to develop the work into a book that was reader-friendly and inspired and motivated.

Like many others, Beck’s world was turned upside down when the pandemic hit last year. Education became a luxury, where those with technology and internet

access at home could learn virtually, while others were left wondering when and where their next class would take place. He was frustrated by the challenges and uncertainties of remote learning and decided to channel his energy into writing and influencing on social media.

Longing for face-to-face connections after months of social distancing, social media offered Beck an outlet to fill the void.

“I was able to connect with so many different people in so many different ways, and I was empowered by them because I was able to learn that I wasn’t alone,” he said.

Once he finished the book, Beck reached out to publishers and landed a contract with Codebreaker Inc., an organization dedicated to sparking students’ curiosity.

On Dec. 22, the book was released in Barnes & Noble and through Amazon, where after only a few days it was given hot new release status.

“Those of us who develop programs know that the teacher’s role is critical to the success and well-being of students,” said Dr. Matia Finn-Stevenson, Yale University’s director of School for the 21st Century. “He inspires readers, telling his own and others’ stories, gently weaving in research and showing that all of us have unlimited potential.”

According to Beck, the process for



Ossining School District teacher Dr. Brandon Beck’s new book hopes to help teachers inspire their students.

educators is a journey. The goal is “no matter who is sitting in front of us, to be able to unlock what is inside of them, unlock that unlimited potential and help them sift through those self-limiting beliefs to become their truest and ultimate self.”

Beck’s book breaks down the journey into three parts: building the foundation, using challenges as opportunities for growth and believing in you. It includes personal anecdotes and stories from other educators and professional athletes. Beck uses these stories to demonstrate that his

method of educating has come from well-supported and documented research. He notes that even people who don’t work in schools or are educators, such as parents, are finding inspiration from it.

Beck says his primary purpose as an educator and teacher is simple.

“Inspire adults and children to have faith in themselves and believe in their inner genius,” he said.

Through social media, Beck has found even more ways to share his message. He created a live show, “Unlocking Unlimited Potential Stories,” where he speaks with educators around the globe who he believes are helping their students in that regard. The show can be seen on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and is also available on Apple Podcast and other streaming platforms.

The success of Beck’s book while he expands his social media presence has led him to become a motivational speaker at events and conferences. In April, he will speak at the Codebreaker Power Summit, a live virtual conference where education leaders are invited to motivate and inspire.

For more information about Beck and his book, visit www.BrandonBeckEdu.com or check him out on Twitter @BrandonBeckEDU, Instagram @brandonbeckedu, Facebook @BrandonBeck and on YouTube: Brandon Beck.

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Public Access Talk Show Host Adept at Going Beyond the Game

By Martin Wilbur

John Vorperian has spent the last 20 years interviewing some rather high-profile athletes, writers and people in the entertainment industry. Robert Vaughn, Ralph Branca and Thomas (Hollywood) Henderson, to name just a few.

What makes Vorperian's several thousand interviews since 2002 fascinating is that the vast majority of them were conducted from the studios of White Plains Community Media, the city's public access channel.

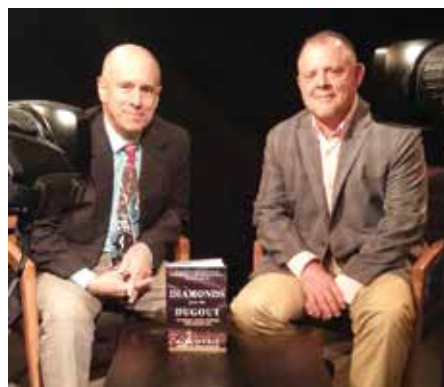
The White Plains resident is the host of "Beyond the Game," which initially started out as a New York-themed baseball talk show but over the years has branched out to include guests from the three other major team sports, journalists and authors as well as musicians and actors.

What has kept a steady stream of notable people coming on his show? One source for Vorperian's contacts has been his connection with the Society of American Baseball Researchers and its football counterpart, both of which he has done work for.

But it's also his ability to have conversations with his guests and raising little-known facts or topics that seem to form a connection.

"I'll go into areas where most sports reporters won't, probably because they've got somebody in their ear saying keep it on this," Vorperian said.

One day, former Oakland Raider Pete Banaszak was the guest, a Super Bowl-winning running back who played in the



John Vorperian, left, host of the popular White Plains Community Media talk show "Beyond the Game," with baseball scribe Mark Newman.

1960s and '70s. Vorperian spent a chunk of the show asking him questions about his high school track career.

That's part of the inspiration for the show's title, delving into areas that are a bit off-beat making for anything but a cookie-cutter interview.

"He was a state shotput champion in Wisconsin where he went to high school," Vorperian said of Banaszak. "After the interview, he said, 'That was great, no sports reporter has really brought that part of my life up. I really got a kick out of talking about it.'"

It also doesn't hurt that each one of Vorperian's interview not only air on Altice Channel 76 or Fios Channel 45 but are placed on the channel's website.

"A lot of this is cold-calling and the fact that I can direct people, whether they be agents or PR guys or gals to a website and they can see the episodes and they can find out," he said.

By his own description, Vorperian is no stranger to public access television. The first incarnation of his show, which was called "On the Record," started in the 1980s, where he concentrated simply on baseball, and where possible, New York baseball.

After that ran its course, Vorperian, whose real job is as an attorney for the Westchester County Law Department, returned in 2002 with his idea to rekindle the sports interview show.

He approached the executive director of White Plains Community Media at the time, Fred Strauss, who told him he had to put together material for five shows before he would think about putting him on the air.

His first guest was Henry Stein, the author who had written a novel called "Hoopla" that was set in the aftermath of the 1919 Black Sox World Series-fixing scandal.

"These (early) episodes, I was very wooden," Vorperian said. "It's learning about how to be in front of the television (camera) and how to perform for viewers, and as the host, you let the guest shine."

Many of his guests, particularly in the early going, not only had a New York connection but one to Westchester. Stein was a Hastings-on-Hudson resident, and over the years, Vorperian had Branca, a former Brooklyn Dodger, boxing writer and commentator Bert Sugar and the late Valhalla resident Sal Yvars,

who came on "Beyond the Game" to talk about how the 1951 New York Giants stole signs in the latter stages of that season to erase a 13.5-game deficit against the Dodgers.

Vorperian doesn't exactly recall how the show included entertainment. He recalled in separate episodes having Anson Williams and Marian Ross of "Happy Days." The conversation with Williams centered around his uncle, Dr. Henry Heimlich, and Ross talked in depth about her early career in films.

After 20 years, Vorperian has no plans to stop interviewing or filming episodes, which he does on his personal time, a labor of love.

To view back episodes of "Beyond the Game," visit www.wpcommunitymedia.org.

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Westchester's Underground Railroad Roots, But Some Shrouded in Mystery

By Sherrie Dulworth

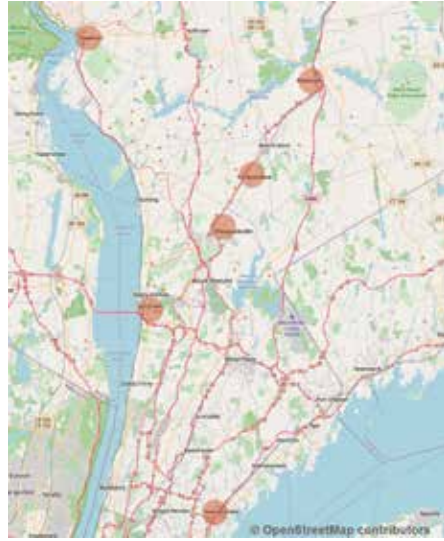
The Underground Railroad represents both literal and figurative historic movement. The literal movement encompassed a clandestine network of people and places helping slaves escape to freedom. Figuratively, it was part of a larger social justice movement for collective human rights.

Fugitives fled by foot, hidden in wagons or buggies, in boats or were later transported on trains. Some passed through local towns headed toward their ultimate destination of Canada.

Where are Westchester's roots in this important piece of American history, and who were the courageous people involved?

Records are sparse. If the escapees were found, it could lead to capture. Successful escape required discretion, with activity coordinated among a trusted circle of family and friends. In "Fleeing for Freedom: Stories of the Underground Railroad," authors George and Willene Hendrick wrote "Hundreds of little-known people were involved in the efforts. For their own safety, most did not publicize their work freeing slaves."

If caught, the escaped slaves risked being returned to bondage where they would likely be punished for their attempts at freedom. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 raised the stakes for those aiding slaves on the run. Penalties were as high as six months imprisonment and fines of \$1,000 – more than \$30,000 in today's dollars. In addition, mob violence against abolitionists was an



A map of some of the key stops along the Underground Railroad in Westchester.

ongoing risk.

A code language served to protect those involved. Places of refuge were called stations, those who ran the safehouses were station masters and conductors were the people who led others to freedom.

Over a century later, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would write, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Those who played a part in the Underground Railroad lived through their actions.

Here are several of Westchester County's notable people and places with important roles in that historic freedom movement.

New Rochelle

One of the most active documented stops on the Underground Railroad was the New Rochelle home of Joseph Carpenter and his wife, Margaret Cornell Carpenter. Born in Scarsdale, the Quaker couple were staunch abolitionists who moved to a farm in New Rochelle in 1793. It is believed that fugitive slaves were transported by boat to Long Island Sound or over land from New York City, and then to the New Rochelle safe house. Nearby Carpenter's Pond was named for the family.

Pleasantville

Joseph Pierce and his wife, Hannah Sutton Pierce, were Pleasantville farmers and members of the Quaker community in Chappaqua. The Pierces were related to the Carpenters through the marriage of their son, Moses, to the Carpenters' daughter, Esther.

According to a letter later written by Moses and Esther's son, the couple sheltered runaway slaves in their home, which was a stop between the Carpenter's New Rochelle residence and the John Jay Homestead in Bedford about 15 miles north.

Even after the end of the Civil War, providing aid could be dangerous.

"After the Civil War when slaves were freed, there was still a lot of hostility," said Dorothee von Huene Greenberg, professor emerita of English at Pace University.

Greenberg cites an instance when



SHERRIE DULWORTH PHOTO

The John Jay Homestead in Katonah as it appears today, one of the documented stops on the Underground Railroad.

resentful neighbors drove an African American family from their home in nearby Tarrytown. The family sought shelter with the Pierces, which enraged some Pleasantville residents, who threatened to burn down the couple's home.

In 2012, the Village of Pleasantville and Town of Mount Pleasant honored the Pierces' courageous work with a memorial plaque installed outside the Mount Pleasant Public Library.

Chappaqua

The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, were the first religious organization to officially denounce slavery in the 1750s. The Quakers had a significant presence throughout Westchester, including

continued on next page

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Westchester's Underground Railroad Roots, But Some Shrouded in Mystery



THE CHAPPAQUA FRIEND'S MEETINGHOUSE PHOTO
Chappaqua Friends Meetinghouse

continued from previous page

in Harrison, Purchase, Scarsdale, New Rochelle and Chappaqua.

Although the Chappaqua Friends Meetinghouse sanctuary is not a known Underground Railroad station, some of its members, including Moses and Esther Pierce, played prominent roles in supporting abolition. The building, the oldest documented structure in New Castle, is on the National Register of Historic Places and on the African American Heritage Trail of Westchester County.

The Pierces are buried in the Chappaqua Friends Cemetery located behind the Meetinghouse.

Bedford

Founding Father John Jay was an early supporter of abolition, and his son William carried on those efforts, publicly and privately. The first judge of Westchester, William Jay inherited the Jay homestead, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1981. The homestead is reported to have been a safe haven used after the Pierce home in Pleasantville. The next stop was the more northerly Pawling home of David Irish, who was also related by marriage to the Pierces.



Quilted artwork, with a quote from Quaker founder George Fox.



SHERRIE DULWORTH PHOTOS

The Harriet Tubman statue that is on display in Peekskill through Sunday.

The homestead has several digital exhibits featured for Black History month, including a virtual lecture this Wednesday, Feb. 24, at 7 p.m. entitled Slavery and the Jay Family: a 7-Generation Story.

Tarrytown

The Tarrytown African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church congregation evolved from a group that was established in 1837 in New Rochelle and later in White Plains. In 1860, four of the Tarrytown members, Amanda and Henry Foster, Hiram Jimerson and the Rev. Jacob Thomas, formed a local congregation and founded the Foster Memorial AME Zion Church.

The nearby Dutch Reformed and

Methodist congregations helped fund construction of the red brick building. For five years before its completion in 1865, the congregation met in the Fosters' Tarrytown confectionary store and other businesses, while members of the church aided escaping slaves by providing food and shelter.

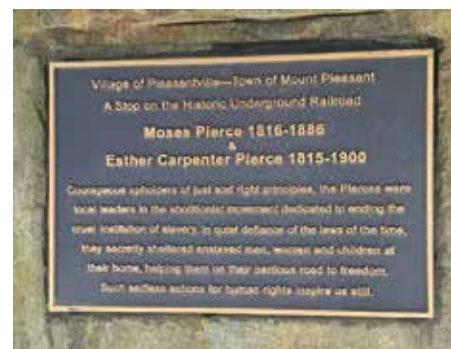
The Foster Memorial AME Zion Church is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places and the African American Heritage Trail of Westchester County.

Peekskill

Along the banks of the Hudson River, Peekskill hosted several Underground Railroad stations. From the river, runaways



The Park Street AME Zion Church was one of several Underground Railroad stations in Peekskill to help shuttle slaves to freedom.



The memorial plaque honoring Moses and Esther Pierce at the Mount Pleasant Public Library in Pleasantville. The Pierces are remembered for hiding runaway slaves in their home as part of the Underground Railroad.

could follow MacGregory Brook for access to nearby stations.

Hawley Green and his wife, Harriet, sheltered freedom-seekers in their Peekskill home, which reportedly had a secret stairway and hidden room. Green, a barber and free Black man, later sold the house to William Sands, a Quaker abolitionist. The house is a short distance from another asylum, the renowned Park Street AME Zion Church.

Park Street AME Zion's parishioners included abolitionist leaders Harriett Tubman, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. This Wednesday at 7 p.m. the church will host an online event, Celebration of the Life & Legacy of Harriett Tubman - Peekskill Freedom Movement.

In celebration of Black History Month, a 2,400-pound bronze sculpture is on special exhibit in Peekskill through Feb. 28. Entitled Harriet Tubman: The Journey to Freedom, the artwork depicts the abolitionist leading an enslaved young girl to freedom. Created by the sculptor, Wesley Wofford, the statue is located on the corner of Central Avenue and Division Street and is sponsored by Peekskill's Business Improvement District.

Was Your House Used as Part of the Underground Railroad?

Most of the activity of the Underground Railroad was covert, and the role of particular people and places remains a mystery and open to speculation. Without documentation, it is difficult to assess whether or not a private home was an Underground Railroad station.

Barbara Davis, co-director of the Westchester County Historical Society, said "Westchester is blessed with many 18th century houses." According to Davis and co-director, Susanne Pandich, as part of researching whether a home may have been used in the Underground Railroad, people can follow these steps or ask the following questions:

- Look at original deeds. When was the

house constructed?

- Who were the past owners, particularly those before and in the early years following emancipation? What was their religious or known political affiliations?
- Physical structures and evidence. According to Davis, information needs to be taken in context. A hidden door, room or tunnel may – or may not – be significant but should be viewed in light of the overall picture.

To learn more, the public is welcome to attend a virtual event, "How to Research Your Westchester House," hosted by the Westchester Historical Society on May 6 at 3 p.m.

Stepinac Senior Advances in National Merit Finalist Bid

By Rick Pezzullo

Nicholas DeSanctis, an Ossining resident and a senior at Stepinac High School, has advanced to the distinguished finalist standing in the 2021 National Merit Scholarship Program Competition, an academic achievement enjoyed by a select group of high school students nationwide.

DeSanctis, one of 1,500,000 high school students to enter the competition this year, is among 15,000 entrants to earn a finalist ranking. He is hoping to be one of 7,600 National Merit Scholarship Award winners when that list is revealed this spring.

"On behalf of the entire Stepinac family, we congratulate Nick on his latest top academic honor," said Frank Portanova, Stepinac's vice principal of academics and curriculum and a 1993 alumnus. "It reflects not only his distinguished performance but high potential as well for future academic accomplishment. We wish him continued success."

The National Merit Scholarship is DeSanctis' latest prestigious academic achievement. He scored "A" grades in two college-level online Harvard Pre-College Program summer courses he completed in Calculus 3 and Physics 2, earning eight Harvard credits.

He also won the coveted Rennselaer Medal with the opportunity for a \$120,000 scholarship and started his senior year by being accepted into the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth Program. He



Nicholas DeSanctis

already earned an "A" in Linear Algebra and is now taking a Differential Equations course.

In addition, DeSanctis has been a member of Stepinac's Honors Academy, the unique-in-the-region, three-year personalized learning program with focused studies in engineering, health sciences, finance and economics and law – leading to potential careers in those disciplines.

DeSanctis plans to pursue his interests in computer science and biomedicine at college.

Five Byram Hills Students Named National Merit Finalists

Byram Hills High School announced last week that five seniors have been named finalists in the 2021 Competition for National Merit Scholarship awards.

The students are Jordyn Bernard, Luke Briody, Talia Dinstein, Jared Ilan and Kathryn Petlyuk.

More than 1.5 million juniors took the PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Test in October 2019, and more than 15,000 were named finalists.

"This year, five of our students earned the prestigious distinction of becoming Finalists in the 2021 National Merit Scholarship program," said Kristina Wilson, chair of the Byram Hills Guidance Department. "Finalists were chosen not only for their PSAT scores but also for their SAT scores and general academic performance. Congratulations to our finalists for earning this honor."

Beginning in March and continuing to



The five Byram Hills High School seniors that were named finalists for the National Merit Scholarship awards. Pictured clockwise, from top left, are Jordyn Bernard, Luke Briody, Talia Dinstein, Kathryn Petlyuk and Jared Ilan.

mid-June, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, notifies about 7,600 finalists that they have been selected to receive a Merit Scholarship award.

NMSC is a nonprofit organization established in 1955 to honor the nation's scholastic champions and to encourage the pursuit of academic excellence.

A Spiritual View

By Father Mardiros Chevian

The world has been in a panic, as humanity is threatened with the fear of illness and death due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As believers, we need to grasp the truth – with God life does not die. Life dies only when our faith no longer fills and energizes our spiritual center. Our entire life is a journey through all sorts of "pandemics." How do we respond to the countless viruses that we encounter in our everyday life? If we are wise and strong in our faith, we will turn our lives into an everlasting journey.

The coronavirus, an unseen enemy, cannot and should not shatter our lives. We do need to apply the rules set forth of physical and social distancing and wearing masks, of course, but what we do with the solitude that it offers is in our hands. How do we use that time and those opportunities for retreat and reflection? This can be a time for spiritual transformation, a time to grow in God, a time to value the precious gift of life out of which emerges respect for all humanity and for creation.

This could also be just the right time to seek out and return to a house of worship – temple, church, mosque, place of fellowship. Know that God is waiting for us to return to His House. The lockdowns have been an opportunity to experience our time in "the desert," a not-so-often

found chance to strengthen ourselves spiritually. This is a time to differentiate between material and spiritual values. This could be your time, our time, to start a new journey with a new promise and a new vision to live a God-pleasing life and to bring light to all people with the gifts that have been given to us.

Your house of worship will continue to be the House of God and a holy space where we can become one in the spirit of divine love. As you enter into His House, you will experience transformation. You will witness the miracles, large and small, in one another's lives. It will be the miracle that will lead us to change to become loving and caring for all, but above all, to be guardians of peace.

Enter through the doors of your house of worship and be prepared for a miracle. By all means, cover your mouth with a mask, but do not cover your heart. Open your heart so that God may embrace you, and in turn, we each other.

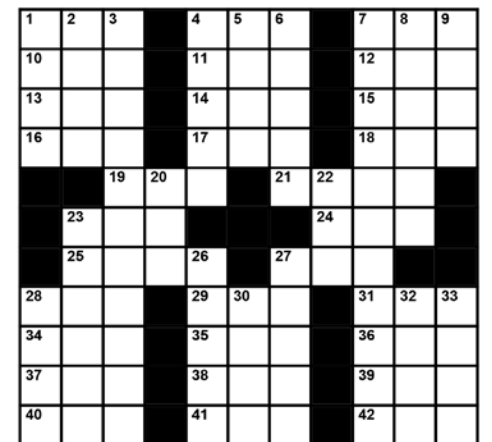
Father Mardiros Chevian is the dean at St. Nersess Armenian Seminary in Armonk and is part of the Armonk Faith Alliance. Congregation B'Nai Yisrael. The alliance also comprises Hillside Church, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, St. Patrick's RC Church and Congregation B'Nai Yisrael.



Crossword

Across

1. Took a seat
4. One of the B's in B & B
7. Mouse hunter
10. Exclamation of disbelief
11. Adam's partner in the Bible
12. Metal from a mine
13. "___ you sure?"
14. Come together
15. Vase
16. Damage the surface
17. Insect that makes a hill
18. Worldwide web
19. "Dude"
21. Takes steps
23. Animal that gives us milk
24. Wall hangings
25. Final word in grace
27. Pig's home
28. ___ as directed
29. Mail Boxes ___
31. Commit a bad deed
34. Fruit center
35. Time period
36. Surface for Gretzky
37. Area-code preceder
38. Lion's refuge
39. Lady deer
40. Finland neighbor, for short
41. Thus far
42. Finish up



Down

1. Pretense
2. Heavenly glow
3. Chef's device
4. Started
5. Steady
6. Airline with a triangular logo
7. Rural areas
8. Take to jail
9. Covering for campers
20. Sublime amazement
22. Leopard or lynx, e.g.
23. Slots business
26. Hard up
27. Barely enough
28. Second word of a fairy tale
30. Rings tell its age
32. Screen symbol
33. ___ to know basis

Answers on page 22

Buy Myles Mellor's easy, super easy, medium crosswords, family puzzle books, word searches and cryptograms at www.ilovecrosswords.com

Freckle's Juice, an Alternative for Those Wanting a Healthy Lifestyle

By Sydney Stoller

Acai bowls, smoothies and juice cleanses have grown in popularity in recent years, and this frenzy over good-tasting, healthy food does not seem to be abating anytime soon.

The smoothie craze may have peaked several years ago, but Freckle's Juice today is hitting its stride.

Owner Felicia Forbes chose the company's name based on a nickname that she was given in high school because, quite simply, she has Freckle's.

Forbes was 25 and working a desk job when she went for her annual physical and was told she had high cholesterol. She knew a change in her diet was needed.

"My co-workers were eating things like fried chicken and French fries, so I was eating that every day," Forbes recalled. "Even if I wanted to eat healthy, there was not a local juice bar or a salad bar where I could get something nutritious and filling quickly."

To combat the incessant takeout that her co-workers ordered, Forbes began bringing food from home, including fresh fruit smoothies. She followed that regimen for several weeks, and her colleagues noticed that she was not only losing weight but appeared to have more energy.

Soon they wanted what she had, so her co-workers gave Forbes money for the ingredients. Each morning she brought in more and more smoothies for people in the office. Friends outside of work heard about Forbes' smoothie success, and they wanted in too.

When a friend asked her to help make juices for a juice cleanse he was doing, then posted the results on social media, Freckle's became a business.

Working in her kitchen with just her cousin helping her, Forbes began creating and distributing smoothies via delivery and in pop-up shops. Customers loved the juices and smoothies because of their unique and fun flavors that Forbes said stems from her Jamaican heritage.

"A lot of the ingredients [that we use in the store] are the things that I was raised on like mango, ginger, mint and pineapple," she explained.

The flavors inspired Forbes to coin Freckle's' motto: Where juice meets culture.

The menu at Freckle's is expansive. It features smoothies with names like Love Sponge, referring to the popular reggae song by Buju Banton, that contains mango, pineapple, ginger and

orange juice.

There are various juice combinations like Feel the Beet (beet, cucumber, carrot and apple) and wellness shots like the Turmeric Shot (turmeric, ginger, black pepper, lime and honey) that have listed health benefits.

Not only does Forbes introduce her customers to new flavors and ingredients, but she explains the way that each one will affect their bodies. The Brain Food smoothie that is in the category coined "Super Drinks" contains spinach and pineapple as well as maca. Maca is an example of a superfood that customers may be unfamiliar with, but the Freckle's menu explains that it has "long been believed to improve fertility, sharpen mental focus and memory, enhance



Felicia Forbes, founder and owner of Freckle's Juice. Her company's Westchester location is at the White Plains City Center.

endurance, and more."

In 2015, Freckle's' first store was on Dyre Avenue in Yonkers. A few years later a second location opened at the White Plains City Center. Freckle's not only provides healthy drinks along with a recent addition of certain food items, but teaches customers about the importance of healthy eating.

Forbes said that nutrition education can have a big influence on someone's life.

"It's so important for us to know about health and wellness. I never tell anyone to give up a certain type of food, but I instead emphasize the importance of balance in their diets," Forbes explained.

"If we can teach people about balance, we are helping them to live longer and healthier lives," she added.

Despite the company's success, Forbes said she faced many challenges as a young woman of color. Her idea for a juice bar was dismissed as a hobby rather than a legitimate business. Customers still ask her who the owner of the shop is, assuming that she is an employee rather than the owner.

Five years into her business venture, Forbes said she is finally getting some respect, but there's still a way to go.

"Black women are just not taken seriously in the entrepreneurial space," she explains concisely.

Freckle's Juice, located at 5 City Place in White Plains, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday until 7:30 p.m. For more information, call 914-949-8111 or visit www.frecklesjuice.com.

Business Spotlight

ArtsWestchester Accepting Proposals for Social Justice Artist Grants

ArtsWestchester CEO Janet Langsam announced last week the launch of a major new competitive artist grant program, Voices for Change, in which three artists will each be awarded grants of \$10,000 to propose and create new works.

Voices for Change is the inaugural program in a series of new initiatives that the organization is undertaking as part of its rededication to the social justice ideals of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

"ArtsWestchester has a long history of supporting historically under-represented communities," said ArtsWestchester board member and Social Justice Committee member Dr. LaRuth Gray. "We want to ensure that our programming continues to respond to the people we serve, especially our immigrant, racial, ethnic and communities of African descent. We want to listen more closely to – and honor the expressions of – diverse voices in our community. Voices for Change is one way to focus on concerns of equity."

Mid-Hudson Valley artists working in all disciplines are invited to submit proposals for visionary work that encourages deep thinking about complex issues such as social justice, civic equity and the public good. A unique aspect of the program is that proposals are asked to include a collaboration with a service or cultural community-based organization.

Three artists each will receive a grant of \$10,000 to implement and present their vision. Proposals may address a broad range of issues, including but not limited to



The ArtsWestchester gallery in White Plains. The organization is accepting submissions for a new competitive grant program that will furnish three artists with \$10,000 each for the top works related to social justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

incarceration, homelessness or racial equity. The deadline for application is Apr. 5. Application details are posted at <https://artswestchester.org/grants/voices-for-change>.

"ArtsWestchester's exhibition and performance programs are deeply rooted in the belief that art has the power to illuminate complex issues, encourage civic discourse and open the community to new ways of thinking," said board member and Voices for Change Committee member Betty Himmel. "In past programs, ArtsWestchester has explored themes such as the new immigrant experience, gender

identity, voting rights, the expanded definition of family, the age of data and the economic crisis of 2008."

The debut of the Voices for Change artworks will come on the heels of ArtsWestchester's fall exhibition Who Writes History? a National Endowment for the Arts supported project that seeks to bring marginalized stories to the fore through contemporary art. ArtsWestchester plans to announce additional social justice initiatives throughout the coming months.

These initiatives represent, in part, expanded funding opportunities for artists and organizations and public programs that will be rolled out during 2021. The Voices for Change grant initiative is made possible through contributions from board members and the Kathwari Foundation.

This grant, which supports new work comes, at a critical time because many independent artists are unemployed as a result of the pandemic. The Voices for Change grant acknowledges that art can serve as a catalyst for change."

Last summer, ArtsWestchester began working with a well-known consultant in the field of racial equity and inclusion, Donna Walker-Kuhne, who had previously worked with ArtsWestchester to develop its diversity policy in 2005.

As an organization, ArtsWestchester is well on its way toward reframing its mission, re-dedicating itself to the social justice principals of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in all of its programs. It is launching seven new initiatives in the coming year.

Exercise is Medicine: Why Staying Fit Can Prevent Disease

What would you be willing to do to obtain a treatment that could help prevent Type 2 diabetes, dementia, pulmonary disease, hypertension, heart failure, cystic fibrosis, hyperlipidemia, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, asthma, depression, anxiety, obesity, Parkinson's and many other ailments?

What if this treatment could also make you happier, less stressed, increase your sleep quality and help you live longer? Would you invest in research for this treatment? Would you ask your doctor to prescribe it for you?

Well, they have been – for centuries. Hippocrates himself wrote two books outlining the case for using this “treatment” to maintain one's health. Countless studies in years since have also demonstrated evidence that this treatment is ridiculously good for you, with its effects improving almost all aspects of your life.

Fortunately, this treatment is easily accessible to everyone. Would you be willing to try it? If so, we will see you soon because this treatment is not a vitamin or medication. It's exercise.

We understand that life can easily get in the way of a consistent exercise routine. However, it must be stressed just how critical frequent physical activity is for one's overall health and longevity. According to the World Health



By Sarah Sowards

Organization, lifestyle (exercise, diet, substance use, stress levels) is linked to as much as 70 percent of disease burden. The Aging Research Group reported 55 percent of disease in people 60 years old and up were preventable through certain lifestyle changes, in particular increasing one's physical activity.

One in 10 premature deaths in the world are related to lack of exercise, a statistic that is almost identical to deaths related to

smoking. Considering we have the ability to make time to exercise, thereby preventing and reducing a large percentage of disease burden, why are we not exercising more? Why are we not prioritizing it and making the time? An overwhelming amount of research clearly indicates physical activity is essential to our health. We know how great it is for us.

A longitudinal study done at The Aerobic Center found that fitness improvements, specifically those in cardiorespiratory fitness, showed a greater effect on the longevity of those with diabetes, even when compared to pharmacological interventions.

A meta-analysis examining the relevant literature established when compared to actual medications concluded that exercise was just as effective in preventing heart disease and diabetes and treating heart failure. Exercise was also more effective than drugs for helping rehabilitate stroke survivors. JAMA Internal Medicine even declared, “There is no medication treatment that can influence as many organ systems in a positive manner as can physical activity.”

Your doctor can lecture you at every visit. I can communicate every research finding out there. Your spouse can remind you; your children and friends can encourage you, but ultimately, you are responsible for

your own health.

So, no more excuses. Let's take our medicine. Let's take care of ourselves. Let's lift some weights, get the cardio in, take a class, go for a swim. Whatever it is, let's do it. Exercise is medicine. I'll be taking mine, and I sincerely hope you take yours too. We'll see you out there!

Get started today. Contact Club Fit's Jefferson Valley location at 914-250-2750 or at jvadvisor@clubfit.com or the Briarcliff Manor location at 914-250-2134 or bravisor@clubfit.com.

Sarah Sowards is a club experience assistant at Club Fit.

Crossword Answers

1	S	A	T	4	B	E	D	7	C	A	T
10	H	U	H	11	E	V	E	12	O	R	E
13	A	R	E	14	G	E	L	15	U	R	N
16	M	A	R	17	A	N	T	18	N	E	T
19	M	A	N	21	A	C	T	S			
23	C	O	W	24	A	R	T				
25	A	M	E	26	N	S	T	Y			
28	U	S	E	29	E	T	C	31	S	I	N
34	P	I	T	35	E	R	A	36	I	C	E
37	O	N	E	38	D	E	N	39	D	O	E
40	N	O	R	41	Y	E	T	42	E	N	D

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When the Future is Forecast at the Lowest Levels



By Nick Antonaccio

Biodiversity is a well-turned term describing the prevalence of varied ecosystems and the interrelationships of nature's plant and animal species.

When humankind is introduced into the equation, things can go awry. The delicate

balance between nature and humankind has increasingly affected the sustainability and even survival of a number of plant and animal species.

Ecosystems have been, and continue to be, disrupted by humankind's insatiable need to house and feed its growing populace. This has placed a great deal of stress on the natural order.

Over the last 200 years, since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, humankind has altered the planet. Pollution, habitat destruction and climate change have endangered countless species. Needless to say, controversy follows humankind's deeds. Is a given amount of destructive activity necessary to foster our growth? Should humankind unilaterally intervene in the balance of nature?

My interest in the escalating debate over these issues grew when my sister forwarded me a link to an NPR story concerning the symbiotic relationship between humankind and nature – which has a direct effect on wine.

'Old World and old-school winemakers have always farmed to live in symbiotic harmony with insects, wildlife and flowers.'

No, it did not concern the impact on winemaking of extreme drought or intermittent seasons of excessive rain or drought brought on by climate change, or the damaging effects of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Those are well-documented and have garnered concern across the globe.

No, this story spoke of a single insect that influences the fermentation process in grapes, and therefore, the taste profile of the wine produced from these grapes. What is at stake is the continuing existence of this insect, and others, as humankind intervenes in vineyard agriculture with chemical pesticides.

A microbiologist in Italy, Duccio Cavalieri, has been studying the vespa crabro, a wasp indigenous to the Chianti region of Italy. What did Cavalieri discover about this biological marvel?

After 15 years of observation and – what else – DNA sequencing, he discerned that this insect, which inhabits the local vineyards, has several beneficial traits. The wasp ingests the indigenous yeast that forms on grape skins during the growing season. It then deposits the yeast inside the grape using its unique stinger that, unlike other insects, enables it to pierce the grape skin. Once deposited, the yeast kick starts the fermentation process before the grapes are even harvested. This influences the ultimate flavor profile of the produced wine.

Old World and old-school winemakers have always farmed to live in symbiotic harmony with insects, wildlife and flowers. This practice preserves the inherent characteristics of their wines. Other winemakers introduce supplemental yeast, some genetically modified in a laboratory, to foster a particular type of fermentation, which influences the resulting wine.

This wasp phenomenon presents a strong case for natural yeasts, but also brings to the forefront the potential damage that humankind can wield in the vineyard.

I believe Cavalieri's work is important in understanding the complexity of wine and how grapes from similar regions, even adjacent vineyards, can taste so different.

But is all of this just the proverbial tempest in a teapot? Relatively speaking, this is a

small population of wasps, of a variety that isn't found in many wine regions. The laws of biodiversity preclude the wasps' impact over a broad geographic area. As such, they have a small impact on wine – but what an impact. And if humankind does not exercise prudence in the vineyards, a vital ally of terroir-focused wine may be lost.

Is there a real danger of losing the vespa crabro at this time? It's impossible to tell. How many beneficial insects have already been wiped out through humankind's intervention in the delicate balance with the natural order of ecosystems? Our wines may have already been exposed to changes created by these practices.

The next time you're in a vineyard, or your backyard, take notice of the beneficial insects and raise a glass of wine to their prosperity.

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.

You Heard It Through the Grapevine

Mars Commands Attention in Space and on Earth

A few months ago, we talked about the endless pleasure of seeing Mars, bright and red like a planet full of rusted fence posts from more than a hundred million miles away. The clouds have been heavy this winter, and it's been difficult to find the time to see the fourth rock from the sun.

Since then, three space probes have joined the list of spacecrafts exploring there. On Feb. 9, the Hope probe entered orbit and became the first probe from the United Arab Emirates to reach Mars. It was followed the next day by China's Tianwen-1. Just last week NASA's Perseverance rover landed and joined its cousin, Curiosity, which has been exploring there since 2012.

Other than the moon and Earth, Mars is probably the most explored object in our solar system. NASA's Mariner 4 probe flew past it in 1964. Over 30 spacecraft have made it to Mars in one form or another. Ten are still operating there.

Traveling in space is hard, and it's always exciting when scientists and engineers manage to get a robot to another world. Perseverance is particularly exciting because it's not alone. It's bringing along

the small Ingenuity helicopter, which will fly through Mars's thin atmosphere and help scout places to explore.

Imagine that for a minute: people have built a rover from scratch, strapped it to the top of a missile and sent it off to a blank spot in space so that it could meet up with another planet that wasn't anywhere nearby when it launched – and that rover is bringing its own helicopter with it.

If it all works, it'll be another step along the way to sending an actual manned mission there. When things here seem bleak, we can grab onto amazing things like this.

As it turns out, while all of this is going on, it's another spectacular time to try to look between the clouds for the red planet. During the last week of

February, Mars crosses over the imaginary line between the constellation Aries (the ram) and into Taurus (the bull). In your mind's eye, try to see those rovers driving and digging in the parched dust on the surface, looking for water and possible signs of life.

At the start of Mars's namesake month, it appears near the tiny dipper-shaped Pleiades, one of the closest star clusters. The cluster, named for the seven mythological sisters who were daughters of Atlas and Pleione, is about 450 light years from us. It's made up of about 1,000 stars, but it's tough to see more than six in Westchester's skies.

Even so, as those stars travel through



By Scott Levine

an unrelated cloud of dust, which scatters and reflects their light, it's a gorgeous sight with the unaided eye. Through binoculars, it's simply spectacular. On the nights of Mar. 4 and 5, Mars will cross just below the cluster from our point of view. Its rusty color will be a wonderful contrast against the sisters' blue.

It's cold but it's a great time to let your mind wander and explore Mars, like the rovers working there. I hope you can find a few minutes to look up this month.

Scott Levine (astroscott@yahoo.com) is an astronomy writer and speaker from Croton-on-Hudson. He is also a member of the Westchester Amateur Astronomers, dedicated to astronomy outreach in our area. For information about the club, including membership, newsletters, upcoming meetings and lectures at Pace University and star parties at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, visit westchesterastronomers.org. Events are free and open to the public. Please note: All in-person club activities are suspended until further notice due to COVID-19.

Clear Skies



Last Quarter
March 5



New Moon
March 13



First Quarter
March 21



Full Moon
March 28

The upcoming phases of the moon.

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But due to COVID-19, most local news publications are losing money, fast. Advertising has plummeted during the crisis and readers aren't subscribing fast enough to fill the void. This has led to thousands of local reporters being laid off. Just as our society faces numerous, urgent challenges.

Millions of people are in danger of losing access to the authoritative local

information they need to stay informed. That's why the Local Media Association and the Local Media Consortium are working with local news providers to build a strong future for local journalism. And that's why our long-time partner Google is purchasing ads like this in local publications across the country, as well as providing a Relief Fund to help struggling local news outlets. But those actions alone aren't enough.

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