White Plains Police Lead Investigation of Missing Person Case

By Anna Young

A missing person case that was first reported over 30 years ago has been reopened after law enforcement officials discovered human remains in a vehicle submerged in Muscoot Reservoir this week.

The White Plains Police Department, which will lead the investigation, said the car matches the description of a vehicle relevant to the case which was first reported in late 1989. The vehicle, which was removed from the water near Somers by New York State Police and Department of Environmental Protection Police, is being treated as evidence, officials said.

The apparent human remains found in the car, and confirmation that the remains are of the missing party in question, are pending forensic examination. Officials will release the name of the individual once the next of kin is notified, police said.

White Plains officials said they will continue to work with DEP Police and the Medical Examiner’s Office to determine the cause of death and identification.

Greenburgh Students Honored at MLK Legacy Awards

By Rick Pezzullo

Two students at Woodlands Middle High School were honored by the African American Men of Westchester (AAMW) at the organization’s MLK Legacy Awards on Jan. 18.

Senior Kenedi Catoe and Junior Harshita Shet were among seven students recognized by the AAMW, along with four additional students who earned scholarship awards.

Eric Eller, president of the organization, noted that the students were honored because they “represent the spirit of Dr. King by being beacons of light in their communities for their service and leadership.”

The Woodlands students were honored at the virtual awards event, which was the organization’s 20th. In addition to honorees and presenters, the event was attended virtually by County Executive George Latimer, State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and other business and government representatives.

Catoe was honored with the Vision Award for her work on young people’s community engagement. She is president of the Woodlands National Honor Society and has worked extensively with the Westchester Youth Bureau’s Youth Empowerment Council for Change, the NAACP White Plains Youth Division, and other organizations.

Shet received the Social Action Award, as the founder of Feminine Dignity, a nonprofit that provides feminine hygiene products to women in shelters, refugee camps, correctional facilities and other institutions. She also produced the documentary “Whatever Happened to Black Wall Street,” which was nominated for an Emmy Award, and has competed in the Scripps National Spelling Bee for four consecutive years.

“We are extremely proud of Kenedi and Harshita for the incredible work they have done to be recognized for the MLK Legacy Award,” said Greenburgh Superintendent of Schools Dr. Tahira Dupree Chase. “They are exceptional students and citizens who demonstrate great leadership qualities.”

First Stop in District

Congressman Mondaire Jones (D-NY) volunteered at Feeding Westchester in Elmsford Monday, marking his first in-district event since taking office January 1.
Applications Being Accepted for Launch1000 Free Online Entrepreneurship Program

The Westchester County Office of Economic Development is accepting applications for the Launch1000 program.

Launch1000 is a free online, self-paced entrepreneurial training program designed to jumpstart 1,000 new businesses by helping County residents put their new business ideas to the test.

Launch1000 will help individuals evaluate their idea, test it with potential customers, and see if it seems likely to succeed.

As individuals progress through the program, additional resources such as mentorship, valuable introductions, and even grants, will become available.

One Yonkers entrepreneur tells us, “It really is a helpful program. I’m learning true networking and how to really make my business work better. I’m in Phase 2 and the encouragement is amazing as well.”

The program requires access to a tablet or laptop, and stable WiFi. If you do not have access to these, the County can help. Please note your needs on the application. All county residents are eligible to apply.

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The application and the FAQ are available in Spanish. La solicitud y las preguntas frecuentes necesarias están disponibles en español.

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County Health Officials, School Districts to Decide on High-Risk Sports

By Anna Young

As two more cases of the United Kingdom variant of COVID-19 were confirmed in Westchester County, the Department of Health in conjunction with local school districts are determining if high-risk athletics can resume next month.

Last Friday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo made known that Westchester had its third case of what’s deemed a more contagious strain of the virus. To date, there are 25 confirmed cases of the variant in New York State.

Health officials warn the new variant is up to 70 percent more transmissible than earlier versions of the virus, but there is currently no evidence showing the new variant causes more severe illness or increased risk of death. The U.K. variant may become the dominant strain circulating domestically by March. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) asserts that an increase in cases will put more strain on health care resources, lead to more hospitalizations and potentially more deaths. Officials are also wary of other strains from South Africa and Brazil.

Despite Cuomo referring to these new strains as “frightening,” he announced high-risk high school sports can resume Feb. 1. He initially postponed them when COVID-19 rates began to surge late last year.

Sports, including basketball, football, ice hockey, competitive cheerleading, volleyball, wrestling and boy’s lacrosse, can only proceed if county health departments believe they can be played in compliance with safety protocols.

Westchester County Executive George Latimer said local health officials are working with school superintendents and other county executives in the Hudson Valley to reach a decision that would ensure testing, protective gear and other protective resources are provided if approved.

“It’s quite a decision but we’re happy to have the responsibility in these areas,” Latimer said during his Monday briefing. “We have tasked the schools with coming back to us with a plan.”

If athletics resume, he anticipates testing will increase significantly and sanitation protocols will need to be heightened. Latimer added that he expects a joint statement will be released later this week.

“Westchester can’t act unilaterally,” Latimer said. “We want to make sure that if we open this up that we do it in a safe fashion.”

COVID-19 Update

As active cases of COVID-19 slowly decline in Westchester and Putnam counties, both areas continue to see the fatality rate rise and daily testing remain in the thousands.

Coronavirus cases in Westchester increased by 804 on Monday, bringing the total number of positive cases to 90,029 since the start of the pandemic. There are now 11,405 active cases, a decrease of 163 over last week.

“We were getting roughly the same amount of positives two weeks ago as we are now,” Latimer said. “I now think we’re starting to see the end of the spike that we got during the holiday season.”

The county’s daily positivity rate is 6.5 percent, with 12,366 tests administered on Saturday. Overall, more than 1.71 million COVID tests have been taken in Westchester since March.

The county reported five more deaths, bringing the COVID-19-related death toll to 1,851. In the last week, 54 people have died from the virus in Westchester, with 176 fatalities since the start of the new year.

“The number of those we lost have been growing in a more significant fashion compared to going through long periods of time where we had no fatalities during the summer,” Latimer said. “Both the fatality number and hospitalizations are still significant, and we continue to look at the outbreaks as one that is very serious because now we’re dealing with the U.K. variant.”

As of Monday, there are 550 virus patients in Westchester hospitals, a decrease of 17 since last Thursday. Latimer said hospitalizations, while sizable, are still less than half of what the peak number of hospitalizations was during the height of the pandemic last spring.

As of Monday, the county government has directly administered 16,165 vaccines to eligible residents, Latimer said, with 12,838 individuals inoculated since the County Center became a distribution site on Jan. 13. The county health department has immunized 3,327 people, he said.

Putnam County’s total caseload has reached 7,004, with 77 additional positive cases recorded on Monday. The county’s daily positivity rate is 6.57 percent, with 1,172 tests administered Saturday.

Putnam currently has 1,160 active cases, a decrease of 125 over last week.

There have been 76 coronavirus-related deaths in Putnam since the start of the pandemic. There were two virus-related deaths last week and nine since the start of 2021.

Statewide there were 12,903 new positive cases on Monday. The daily positivity rate is 5.47 percent.

The state recorded 167 additional COVID-19-related fatalities, bringing the death toll to 34,242 since last March.

Statewide hospitalizations stand at 8,730, an increase of 117 over the previous day.

Across New York there have been 1,388,990 positive coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.

Yorktown, Mt. Pleasant Request Hosting COVID-19 Vaccine Sites

By Rick Pezzullo

Yorktown and Mount Pleasant officials have asked Westchester County and the state to host a vaccine distribution center within their towns to make it more convenient for residents.

Yorktown Supervisor Matt Slater and Town Clerk Diana Quast have proposed that the Albert Capellini Community and Cultural Center gym and the Jefferson Village Senior community room to be potential sites.

Mount Pleasant Supervisor Carl Fulgenzi said last week he has proposed that the town’s community center on Lozza Drive in Valhalla is an “ideal location.” Fulgenzi said that the community center, which hosts the town’s senior programs, is spacious, easily accessible for older residents and the disabled, has ample parking and allows drivers to drop off visitors just outside the front doors.

“We happen to have an ideal facility and central location,” he said. “So we felt it would be very helpful for Westchester County given our central location, instead of people having to go to White Plains or further south, they would be able to come to Mount Pleasant.”

In a letter to state and county elected officials, Slater and Quast maintained that Yorktown has several senior living facilities, nursing homes, veterans’ halls, pharmacists, firehouses, ambulance corps and town buildings that can also be utilized to handle residents eligible to receive the vaccine.

“We are prepared to facilitate any number of locations within our community to fulfill the needs and get as many people vaccinated as possible,” Slater and Quast stated in a Jan. 15 letter. “Having locations from Yorktown to White Plains to Yorktown would provide perfect regional locations in lower, mid and upper Westchester County. Additionally, establishing a vaccine distribution center within centrally located Yorktown will eliminate the need for many seniors and elderly to find ways to travel in order to be vaccinated.”

They noted both locations have been used as polling places for elections and were easily accessible for seniors with no stairs and plentiful parking. The Jefferson Village building, they added, was close to major roadways and could function as a multicounty center for Putnam and Dutchess as well.

“We get calls from senior citizens in our office. Many are not tech savvy, so to ask a 92-year-old woman to go on the web and schedule her appointment that way, and then hop in a cab or get someone to drive her down to the County Center is not really feasible.”
Croton-on-Hudson Ups Face Mask Law Penalty to $1,000

By Anna Young

Those found violating Croton-on-Hudson’s face mask law will face a fine of up to $1,000, but officials say the likelihood of fines being imposed is minimal.

After the Village Board approved an emergency face mask mandate in November, the state Department of Health advised that the local law must mirror the same stipulations set forth by the state. Officials unanimously approved two new changes to the legislation last Tuesday.

Prior to the change, violators were subject to a $100 penalty for the first infringement, and a fine of up to $250 for any subsequent offense within a one-year period. Now wrongdoers will be subject to a maximum fine of $1,000 for each infraction.

The Croton-on-Hudson Police Department is responsible for enforcing the law.

Officials, who stressed they don’t agree with raising the fine and only changed the law to comply with a state recommendation, said any penalties will be at the discretion of the court. Village Manager Janine King had said previously it’s unlikely village justices will impose a fine exceeding $250.

“Our preference was to set the maximum lower, but the state was adamant that we set the maximum higher.”

Another amendment to the law will now require individuals playing sports, participating in fitness classes or recreational activities to wear a mask or face covering. Police officers, firefighters, ambulance personnel and other first responders engaged in public safety situations must also be masked.

Both were previously exempt from the law.

The board approved the village’s emergency mask measure on Nov. 16 as COVID-19 cases were significantly rising in Westchester County. At that time, there were only 24 active coronavirus cases within the village, but that number neared triple digits during the holiday season.

The law is only in effect if the village declares a public health emergency, and King made the declaration on Dec. 14. Legislation ceases when the public health emergency expires.

The law requires face masks and coverings be worn on public, private and commercial properties when unable to maintain a six-foot distance from another person who is not a member of the same household.

Residential property is exempt from the law.

Other exemptions to the law are children under the age of two, anyone who is unable to medically tolerate a face covering and drivers traveling alone or exclusively with members of their household in a car.

Mask Up

The Rotary Club of Cortlandt Manor recently stopped by Cortlandt Town Hall to donate masks as a part of Rotary’s Million Mask Challenge to stop the spread of COVID-19. Supervisor Linda Puglisi, fourth from left, and Purchasing Director Peter McMillan, fourth from right, thanked everyone for their generosity and the important work in the community. Also pictured, from left, are Mary Worrall, Anna Hawley, Gladys Pillcurima, Rita Sharples, Larry Sharples and Sue Radzilowicz. Masks will be distributed at the town’s purchasing building Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Call 914-736-1046 upon arrival and the masks will be brought to your vehicle.

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Mt. Kisco, Homeland Towers to Agree on Cell Tower Review Extension

By Martin Wilbur

The Mount Kisco Village Board agreed to an extension of the application period for the controversial Homeland Towers cell tower proposal for a portion of a 25-acre parcel on South Bedford Road.

Mutual consent is needed to extend the time the village has to consider the application. Under federal telecommunications law, there is a 150-day “shot clock” for a municipality to make a determination on a cell tower application from the time of the complete submission, said Village Attorney Whitney Singleton.

By approving to extend the deadline by about a month, the village would now have until Apr. 14 to complete its review of the matter as long as the applicant agrees to the change.

Singleton said the complicated nature of the application, and a separate but related proposal for a solar farm by Sunrise Solar Solutions on the same parcel at 180 S. Bedford Rd., along with problems coordinating the review with the two entities, has necessitated additional time.

“Both the Planning Board and the Zoning Board are duly processing the application,” Singleton told the Village Board last week. “We have talked about the possibility of special meetings. We’re moving as best we can and we have regular (staff) meetings every Friday to go over this application. So I can say the Planning Board and the Zoning Board are not sitting on their hands.”

The Planning Board decided last September to hold a joint environmental review of the two applications because of the potential cumulative impacts of both projects. It is not yet clear whether the board will issue a negative or positive declaration under the state Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

During ongoing public hearings, neighboring residents and environmentally-minded residents in both Mount Kisco and Bedford have urged the planners to choose another site on the property under the lease it signed with landlord Skull Island Partners.

In 2009, the federal government passed legislation to institute a time cap for such projects. It is not yet clear whether the potential cumulative impacts of both projects could go beyond mid-April.

Singleton said that at this time Apr. 14 is what Homeland Towers has agreed to. If more time is needed, there could be additional extensions requested.

The working relationship between the village and Homeland Towers has been strained during recent meetings. Most notably, there have been sharp disagreements between the two sides over whether there is any chance that Homeland Towers can move the location of the proposed 145-foot monopole to another spot on the property to lessen impacts on the surrounding area.

Homeland Towers has argued it cannot choose another site on the property under the lease it signed with landlord Skull Island Partners.

In 2009, the federal government passed legislation to institute a time limit for a determination on cell towers because municipalities were believed to be elongating the approval process as a strategy to try and discourage them from being sited within their borders.

Send a Valentine to a Hero

The message is a simple one, “Thank you so much for what you do, we always need you.”

This is just one of the many sweet messages from the heart of a child to a soldier or veteran in a project called OPERATION VALENTINE.

Cassidy-Flynn Funeral Home, Inc. in Mount Kisco is one of nearly 1,000 exclusive Veterans & Family Memorial Care funeral home providers across America who are sponsoring the 12th annual OPERATION VALENTINE initiative. The project is simple and meaningful, said John G. Flynn, CEO and president at Cassidy-Flynn.

“Students and individuals throughout the community write messages to the troops and veterans on Valentine cards, cut-out hearts or whatever they like, and we make sure that they are delivered to our brave men and women serving overseas,” Flynn said.

Cards cannot include glitter, food or candy, but there are still many ways to personalize a handmade card. Write a message on them and say “Thank You,” tell them about yourself and wish them a Happy Valentine’s Day.

Valentine cards may be dropped off now through Feb. 5 between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. at Cassidy-Flynn Funeral Home, Inc., located at 288 E. Main St. in Mount Kisco.

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Concerns Over West Patent Solar Farm Proposal Raised to Board of Ed

By Martin Wilbur

Homeowners living near West Patent Elementary School along with other members of the community recently expressed concern regarding the Bedford School District’s consideration of a solar farm on vacant space behind the school.

Several speakers at the Board of Education’s Jan. 13 meeting appealed to district officials to consider the potential drawbacks of installing solar panels on 30 unused acres of the school’s property, including disturbance to the land, neighbors and daily operation of the school.

“It very much seems like a massive industrial project in the middle of a very residential area,” said nearby resident Tom White. “Taking out 30 acres of beautiful forest that this area is known for… it’s hard to get comfortable with despite the school district receiving some revenue for it.”

Last month, the board listened to a presentation by representatives from the Armonk-based Brightcore Energy, LLC where they proposed paying the district $13 million over 25 years for use of the forest that this area is known for…it’s hard to get comfortable with despite the school district receiving some revenue for it.”

Caroline MacGill, a Bedford Hills resident and a mother of four children, said renewable energy sources need to be developed but allowing for acres of solar panels behind a school and into forested land is wrong.

“I’m surprised we’re even considering chopping down trees in order to build larger-scale solar projects, and I wonder if the board has investigated competitive quotes from rooftop and parking lot solar opportunities rather than putting the 30 acres into a new project,” MacGill said.

Board Vice President Edward Reder said the reason why only West Patent and Mount Kisco elementary schools are being considered for the program is because those are the only buildings that are in Con Edison territory, which is aggressively pushing forward with renewable projects. The district’s remaining three elementary schools and the Fox Lane campus are in NYSERG areas.

Another neighboring resident, Gerardo Mendez, said he disagreed with the concept of using the land simply for financial gain.

“At least from my perspective I really think using our natural resources, sort of squandering our natural resources for basically financial gain in a kind of a very direct way kind of puts us in a Third World mentality, where we’re basically monetizing natural resources,” Mendez said. “There is an irreversibility to this project. Once we do this, these trees are gone, there’s not going to be kind of a restoration project.”

Meanwhile, Bedford Town Historian John Stockbridge said given the town’s agrarian history and its commitment to open space, district officials should give the proposal careful consideration before making any decision to move forward.

The area has nearby horse-riding lanes and walking trails that are used by the public.

Board member Jessica Cambareri said she was torn between the preserving the woods while also doing what’s best fiscally for the district.

But Reder said the area that is being considered for the solar farm is far from pristine.

“I’ve walked that property back there. There are riding lanes back there. I wouldn’t term it as very safe land. There are trees that have fallen, no one’s maintaining it. There are riding lanes, there are rocks, there are rock walls,” he said. “So I understand there’s a greenspace, and there’s protected space or its preserved space, but I wouldn’t necessarily say it’s greenspace that’s navigable or walkable.”

The board will address the issue again after Brightcore Energy representatives return. There are various approvals at the state level that the company would need to obtain before the Board of Education can make a decision.
Rosemarie Wheeler

Rosemarie Wheeler (Shubert), 88, of Peekskill passed away on Jan. 17 due to complications from COVID-19.

She worked hard all her life to raise her two children, Robert (Barbara) Wheeler of Peekskill and Janet Orman of Valrico, Fla. She was a wonderful mother and friend. Although she had limited means, she always got great pleasure out of giving to others. She spent many years working in Standard Brands and Texas Instruments, among other places. She enjoyed her Bingo nights at St. Columbanus and Wednesday night Bingo at River Pointe. She also enjoyed many friendships with the residents of River Pointe.

In addition to her children, she is survived by a grandson (Kevin), a niece (Linda Davis) and three nephews, Robert Shubert, Thomas Shubert and Kenneth Jackson. She is also survived by many cousins and friends.

Interment was at St. Patrick’s Cemetery in Verplanck, where a private service was held. Arrangements were handled by O’Marra & Carpentieri Funeral Home in Verplanck.

Former Yorktown Highway Superintendent Faces Grand Larceny Charges

In an article titled “Former Yorktown Highway Superintendent Faces Grand Larceny Charges,” Rick Pezzullo discusses a former highway superintendent’s charges and the subsequent legal proceedings.

Jesse Winn

Jesse James Winn of Tarrytown, and formerly of Cortlandt Manor, passed away on Jan. 8 at Westchester Medical Center after a lengthy illness. He was 69 years old.

Jesse was born on Apr. 29, 1951, at St. John’s Hospital in Yonkers to Inez Hayes and Allen Winn. At an early age he moved to Ossining and was raised and cared for by his foster mother, Mrs. Suhler Nelson-Smith. He spent the majority of his life in Ossining and Peekskill where he had extended family and friends and touched many lives.

Jesse was a gentle and kind soul who enjoyed visiting and spending holidays with his families. In addition, he loved animals, including the cats and dog Mojo, who were the family pets at his residence in Tarrytown. Jesse was a very talented artist who loved drawing with colored pencils and also liked to do puzzles.

By Rick Pezzullo

Peepeekskill Man Indicted for Fatal Stabbing at China Pier

In an article titled “Peepeekskill Man Indicted for Fatal Stabbing at China Pier,” Rick Pezzullo reports a悲剧 of a man who violently stabbed two 18-year-old males and killing one during a fight at China Pier on Louisa Street in November was indicted last Thursday on manslaughter and assault charges.

Matthew Torres, who was 17 at the time of the Nov. 28 melee, is being detained pending a trial before state Supreme Court Justice Howard R. Hecht, according to Westchester District Attorney Mimi Rocah.

“During the course of a violent fight, the defendant intentionally stabbed two young men, killing one and seriously injuring the other. These charges are the first step in holding him accountable,” Rocah said. “My condolences go out to the victims’ families, who lost their son and family member due to this senseless violence.”

An investigation by the Peekskill Police Department and district attorney revealed a dispute on the pier led to the deadly fight. During the course of the brawl, Torres allegedly stabbed Joaquin Salazar multiple times and Alexis Leon once in the torso area. Torres then fled the scene.

Salazar, a prominent soccer player, succumbed to his injuries at Westchester Medical Center after friends dropped him off at New York Presbyterian-Hudson Valley Hospital Center to receive emergency medical attention.

“This is no doubt a difficult and sad day for Peekskill,” Mayor Andre Rainey said.
Cunzio, Gashi Will Run for Re-election on Board of Legislators

By Martin Wilbur

County legislators Margaret Cunzio (C-Mount Pleasant) and Vedat Gashi (D-Yorktown) will be running for re-election later this year, joining a growing list of elected officials and candidates who are finalizing their plans for this year’s election cycle.

Cunzio, who represents the towns of North Castle, Mount Pleasant and part of Greenburgh in District 3, will be seeking her fourth term on the Board of Legislators, while Gashi is going for a second term after replacing longtime legislator Michael Kaplowitz for the District 4 seat. District 4 includes Yorktown, New Castle and part of Somers.

Despite being the board’s only non-Democrat, Cunzio has sought to remain non-partisan as the minority caucus has dwindled to just herself during her time on the board. She said her colleagues, facing multiple of a pandemic and fiscal pressures, haven’t been distracted by politics and have remained professional and collegial.

“The Board of Legislators never took a hiatus. We’ve continued to work and I think everyone is extremely busy and I think we have the same goal in mind, which is really to help the county,” Cunzio said. “This is not a year where people have been talking about politics. They’re trying to get things going and moving in the right direction.”

Cunzio, a 22-year Thornwood resident, said she hopes to continue to work on projects to help volunteer emergency responders and safety issues such as the improvement of the intersection of Commerce Street and Elwood Avenue in Hawthorne.

Late last year, Cunzio helped forge an agreement with Westchester County Health Care Corporation, the owner of Westchester Medical Center, to provide ambulance services for five facilities on the county’s Grasslands property, alleviating the burden on the Valhalla Volunteer Ambulance Corps. After Medicaid reimbursement, the contract has no net cost to Westchester taxpayers.

She said she’s also proud of having supported five balanced budgets that once again reduced the county’s tax levy for 2021.

The legislator said she hopes to help bring more affordable senior housing to the area and work to get eligible local residents, particularly veterans and retirees, to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

“I am incredibly proud of what we have accomplished since then,” said Cunzio who has represented the district since 2016. “We have truly made government work for the people of Westchester County. More work remains as we recover from the effects of the pandemic in the months and years to come. I look forward to always providing a voice to the residents of our community.”

Gashi, who will officially kick off his candidacy for re-election on Feb. 18, said his first year in office changed dramatically about first year in office changed dramatically about two months into 2020 with the onset of the pandemic. He said despite the immense challenges, he felt “incredibly proud and privileged to serve during this time.”

“It feels like things were thrown into disarray, but maybe they always are and different than what you expected exactly and the benefit of being a public official right now is that this is a time when you really do need the government,” Gashi said. “This is a time when the stuff you’re doing has real meaning for everyone.”

Key measures that were approved during the past year were temporary property tax relief that allowed certain homeowners to delay their payments because of COVID-19, increasing the county’s share of child care contributions and eliminating the need for a referendum when capital projects of more than $10 million need to be bonded, he said.

Gashi said she has enjoyed public service and helping constituents.

“There is something like this, you realize the stuff you’re working on today, right now, is necessary and important and has the possibility of improving someone else’s life,” Gashi said.

“That’s what you do it for.”

Neither legislator was aware yet of an opponent for November. The petition period for candidates begins late next month and extends into early April.

Last week, District 2 legislator Kitley Covill (D-Katonah) confirmed she wasn’t running for re-election and will leave after serving for four years. All seats on the Board of Legislators are two-year terms.

County lawmakers Margaret Cunzio and Vedat Gashi, representing districts 3 and 4 on the Board of Legislators, respectively, will each be running for another term later this year.
Letters to the Editor

Yorktown Town Board’s Treatment of Public Was Disgraceful

The courtesy of the floor portion of the Jan. 19 Yorktown Town Board meeting disturbed and disgusted me. Not because of any of the community members who spoke out against the Design District Overlay Zone legislation and the Underhill property development, but because of the childish and demeaning way in which members of the Town Board responded to them.

Members of this, or any community have every right to criticize the positions of our elected officials. That’s something taught in a grade school civics class, an essential cornerstone of our American democracy.

You don’t get elected to public office and become immediately infallible and immune to questioning. The Town Board chair and supervisor are elected officials with a duty to serve the community. That means actively listening to the concerns of every community member, especially when they bring those concerns to a public forum such as a Town Board meeting.

That is the essence of a democratic government. To watch board members immediately turn around and demean and disrespect those community members, while many of them were still on the Zoom call, sickens me to my core. This kind of bullying has no place in our government. Board members should hold themselves to at least a standard of decency and respect.

I can understand their outrage at insinuations of wrongdoing; anyone would share that sentiment. However, outrage doesn’t dispel the feeling that something untoward is happening. When such allegations like this are leveled against elected officials, the burden of proof is on them. There’s a reason Presidents put their business interests in blind trusts, and judges recuse themselves from cases on occasion: not because they would do anything wrong, but to reassure the public that their actions are unbiased by personal interest.

A Town Board meeting is intended to be an open and honest discourse between elected representatives and the people they represent. It is the responsibility of those representatives to prove to their constituents that they are acting in the best interests of the community.

Instead, on Jan. 19, the Town Board spent almost 20 minutes complaining about the lack of respect they were shown. That time might have been better used asking themselves why members of the community would assume they’re involved in unsavory deals. Could it possibly be that their plans and actions surrounding the Underhill development and Design District Overlay Zone legislation have not been anywhere near as transparent as they could have been? Did they ever stop to think that allegations of backroom deals might crop up because residents feel they have been deliberately kept in the dark while decisions that could irreparably alter their communities are being made without their input?

Yorktown, we deserve better and we must demand better. We as a community should not be content with elected officials who demand our respect while failing to communicate with us. We are not sheeps to be herded along while politicians decide our fates. We must remind our elected officials that their jobs are to serve the public trust and not belittle their constituents, live on camera.

Michael Hicks
Yorktown

Cuomo Must Be Ousted for His Handling of Vaccines, State’s Finances

With a new president taking office last week and finally turning the page on a horrific year, we New Yorkers are stuck with perhaps the worst governor in the country. Everything done well is because of him and everything done wrong is someone else’s fault. Just blame Trump! We have a vaccine so let’s royally screw up its distribution?

We have a vaccine so let’s royally screw up its distribution? From Day One, the federal government left distribution up to the states. What a mistake.

How can one man in Albany screw up distribution?

1. Dictate everything. Bring no one from the other side of the aisle to even try to appear bipartisan, just dictate from your little bunker in Albany and go on your brother’s TV program and be lauded for what a great job he thinks you’re doing.

2. Waste precious time because in your warped mind Trump cannot get any credit at all for the vaccine, so pompously announce that New York will not accept any vaccines approved by Washington until it undergoes vetting to ensure that it’s safe and effective. What a crock. Has anyone found out what Cuomo’s minions did with this so-called state testing? How are the results of King Cuomo’s independent testing ever been made public? Or was it even done? Don’t hold your breath; grandstanding never comes with any follow-up disclosure.

3. Cuomo’s single greatest fear is having an immigrant or person of color coming out of a facility after getting the vaccine and claiming a white person got in and vaccinated 15 minutes sooner or that they didn’t have to wait as long because of some imagined privilege.

His insanity carries over to closing thousands of New York City restaurants and other businesses for little or no reason at all. I was in Florida and saw how the press tortured a governor simply because he kept his state open, and everyone is getting vaccinated “in due course,” not because of their nationality or skin color or political affiliation. Florida didn’t run up its home deaths) and accountability, from the guy who demands accountability from everyone else, he ducks and hides from his own culpability.

So what can we do? Find someone willing to run in opposition and support him or her. If I cannot find someone, I’ll just run myself. No joke! He cannot be re-elected based on his record and this doomsday duo of incompetence – Cuomo and De Blasio – who have ruined this state. Don’t believe me? Just travel to Florida, North Dakota or any southern state.

Frank A. Catalina
Shrub Oak

Galef Should Concentrate on More Important Issues Than Renaming Park

With respect to Assemblywoman Sandy Galef’s objection to the name of park property originally intended by the Trump Organization to be a golf course (“Galef Calls for Removal of Trump Name From State Park,” Jan. 19-25) described by her as “just an insignificant issue,” how can the results of King Cuomo’s independent testing ever been made public? Or was it even done? Don’t hold your breath; grandstanding never comes with any follow-up disclosure.

3. Cuomo’s single greatest fear is having an immigrant or person of color coming out of a facility after getting the vaccine and claiming a white person got in and

Cuomo’s bankrupted our great state and demands Washington bail us out. Without transparency (let’s start with the nursing home deaths) and accountability, from the guy who demands accountability from everyone else, he ducks and hides from his own culpability.

So what can we do? Find someone willing to run in opposition and support him or her. If I cannot find someone, I’ll just run myself. No joke! He cannot be re-elected based on his record and this doomsday duo of incompetence – Cuomo and De Blasio – who have ruined this state. Don’t believe me? Just travel to Florida, North Dakota or any southern state.

Paul Jaffe
Chappaqua
**Mt. Kisco Facility Serving Disabled Proposes Site Upgrades**

By Martin Wilbur

A Mount Kisco multigenerational daycare center that provides programs to intellectually and developmentally disabled adults has plans to upgrade its building, make site improvements and expand its parking lot.

Representatives for Arc Westchester’s Ann Manzi Center have proposed to construct a new entrance vestibule and covered drop-off area, build an outdoor patio, develop an on-site trail and walking system and update the lighting and landscaping on its 4.1-acre property at 699 E. Main St.

Arc Westchester must obtain site plan approval and a steep slopes permit from the Planning Board as well as approval from the village’s Architectural Review Board.

Ian Mueller, the applicant’s architect, said the planned work is needed because a few years ago Arc Westchester wanted to find a way to improve the organization’s programs to support its senior population and to provide services to people who age out of the programs. In particular, the outdoor patio and walking trails will allow participants to have more time outdoors in good weather.

“This has become important during the COVID-19 pandemic where spending time outdoors has truly become a critical need for them to service the individuals and their program,” Mueller said.

Additional parking containing room for another 40 cars would be provided by expanding the current lot to the west, said the project’s landscape architect Dawn McKenzie. She said not only does Arc Westchester need more parking but the zoning requires it. There are days when the current lot is inadequate.

“As many as 75 individuals and 30 staff members can be on site at one time,” she said. “If you go there during the day, you’ll find there are cars pulled in here and parked along the driveway to the site,” McKenzie said.

Four mature oak trees located along the existing driveway that are showing signs of decline will be removed, she said.

McKenzie explained that to supplement the evergreens and deciduous plantings, the applicant plans to add more evergreen trees and shrubs in the southern portion of the lot closest to the residences that will serve as screening for the neighbors.

The new site lighting in the parking lot will be not be allowed to remain on throughout the night, she said.

During the Jan. 12 public hearing, several residents along neighboring Farway Drive expressed concern that the efforts by Arc Westchester to mitigate impacts may not be enough without intruding on their privacy and affecting their quality of life.

A few residents questioned why the additional parking couldn’t be moved toward the front where there appears to be more space, which would lessen the impact on neighbors.

“I'm not an architect, but it would give us some privacy and maintain what we’ve been used to,” Mullen said. “It’s really been impactful on our homes, our neighborhood, our privacy and it’s a very dramatic change. Not that change can’t be good but it just seems it can be put in an area that doesn’t affect our lives and our property values.”

Another resident, Randi Sperber, also remarked about the amount of space available toward the front of the property.

“We were just wondering why the parking lot had to be built up to our backyards when there’s all that space in the front and on the sides without houses,” she said.

John Bainlardi was one of the boards members who suggested to the applicant’s representatives that in addition to the plantings there could be a solid fence that could help shield the parking lot more effectively for the neighbors.

The public hearing is scheduled to resume during this week’s Planning Board meeting, scheduled for Tuesday evening at 7:30 p.m.
State Files Lawsuit Against NRC Over Indian Point Snub

By Rick Pezzullo

New York Attorney General Letitia James filed a lawsuit last week against the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for denying a petition from the state to hold a public hearing on the decommissioning of the Indian Point nuclear power plants.

The legal action also challenges the NRC’s decision to allow Holtec International, which is overseeing the decommissioning of the Buchanan facility after it closes in April, to use more than $630 million of the plant’s dedicated decommissioning trust funds for spent fuel management costs. James maintains the costs are the legal and financial responsibility of the federal government.

“For the health and safety of New Yorkers, it’s imperative that Indian Point be safely, rapidly and thoroughly dismantled,” James said. “The NRC is attempting to bypass critical transparency and accountability steps, and also is seeking to make New Yorkers pay for the job. The NRC’s unwillingness to hear New York’s valid concerns is a slap in the face to all New Yorkers. I am committed to fighting back against the NRC’s misguided and illegal actions and ensuring that Indian Point is decommissioned in a responsible way.”

In 2017, Entergy, the owners of Indian Point, announced, to the surprise of local municipalities, that it was closing the two remaining operating units at the site. Unit 2 powered down last April, and Unit 3 is scheduled to cease operations in three months.

On Jan. 23, 2020, the NRC announced that it was considering approval of an application by Entergy to transfer the Indian Point license, and the facility’s decommissioning trust funds, to Holtec for decommissioning.

Holtec obtained the NRC’s approval to use the trust money, not only to conduct the required radiological decommissioning, but also to fund spent fuel management. Of the roughly $2.1 billion of aggregated trust funds intended to decommission the facility, Holtec intends to spend more than $630 million for spent fuel management alone, raising concerns among some regarding the sufficiency of the remaining funds to conduct a safe and comprehensive decommissioning.

Last Feb. 12, James filed a petition for the state to intervene in the license transfer, arguing that it violates the NRC’s rules for approving a nuclear facility license transfer. James also requested that the NRC hold a public hearing on whether the proposed Holtec licensees have demonstrated financial qualification, whether they have shown adequate decommissioning financial assurance and whether its decommissioning plans will actually ensure adequate funding for decommissioning and the other activities for which Holtec sought to use the decommissioning trusts, particularly spent fuel management.

On Mar. 24, 2020, and again last Oct. 7, the state opposed Holtec’s request for an exemption from the NRC’s regulations that prohibit the use of trust funds for non-decommissioning activities.

“The NRC has once again failed to prioritize the real and substantive concerns of Lower Hudson Valley residents by denying the public hearing requests by the Town of Cortlandt, Village of Buchanan, Hendrick Hudson School District and New York Attorney General’s Office that were submitted almost a year ago,” said U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer. “Allowing Indian Point to change hands without a proper public hearing is a slap in the face to all who live and work in the communities surrounding Indian Point, and I urge the NRC to immediately reverse this decision.”

“Westchester residents deserve to have their voices heard on whether or not Holtec is right for our community,” added Westchester County Executive George Latimer. “Indian Point is in our backyard and the decommissioning process is one that will impact our region for generations. We need answers on Holtec’s plans for protecting local jobs and restoring the site environment while also seeing adequate proof of sufficient financial responsibility. I applaud and support the attorney general’s suit and look forward to results that will benefit Westchester residents now and for years to come.”

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Energy efficiency, reducing heating and electric costs and limiting one’s carbon footprint have become increasingly critical for a growing number of Westchester residents.

For homeowners in the town and village of Ossining and the Village of Briarcliff Manor, that mission is about to get a major boost this week.

The three municipalities are set to collaborate with Sustainable Westchester to launch the EnergySmart HOMES program, an effort to promote residential fossil-fuel free heating and cooling solutions. They were among more than a dozen communities throughout the county to apply for acceptance into the program that will include reduced-cost home energy-efficiency assessments.

Residents in the three communities can log onto a virtual kickoff this Thursday evening at 7 p.m. to get more information on the program by visiting the Sustainable Westchester website, www.sustainablewestchester.org.

“Residents in the three communities can log onto a virtual kickoff this Thursday evening at 7 p.m. to get more information on the program by visiting the Sustainable Westchester website, www.sustainablewestchester.org. "A lot of people don’t realize that our homes certainly generate a huge amount of greenhouse gases," said Lauren Brois, director of the EnergySmart HOMES program for Sustainable Westchester.

Partnering with the Briarcliff Sustainability Committee and Green Ossining, the program will help connect residents to sign up for an assessment to learn how energy use can be reduced while making their homes more comfortable year-round and saving money on utility bills, Brois said.

If a homeowner decides to move forward in making improvements to their home energy systems, whether that’s installing geothermal, air pumps, energy-efficiency products or simply replacing a house’s insulation, they can be put in contact with a contractor participating in the program to have a reduced price for the work, she said.

Funding for the program is through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA).

Village of Ossining Mayor Rika Levin said being selected for the program is crucial for her community because about 70 percent of the homes in the village were built in the 1970s or earlier, suggesting that there is a significant opportunity for energy-efficiency savings. There are about 26,000 residents in the village.

“I think it’s great for the residents,” Levin said. “We have a lot of older homes. They were built at a time when we were not thinking about carbon footprints. So the work (Sustainable Westchester) is doing with the municipalities, I think will be great for the residents.”

Pradma Sridhar, a member of the Briarcliff Sustainability Committee, said the committee was started to learn that the combined zip codes of Ossining and Briarcliff have some of the highest greenhouse gas emissions in the entire county.

“So we figured it’s really important for residents to understand all the options that we have to reduce their household emissions of greenhouse gases,” Sridhar said.

As a prelude to this Thursday’s online kick off, Ossining and Briarcliff officials joined Brois and others from Sustainable Westchester at last Saturday’s Ossining Farmers’ Market to announce the launch of EnergySmart Homes. Residents of those communities can learn about reduced-cost energy assessments and improvements to their homes.

Osning and Briarcliff Manor officials stand with representatives of Sustainable Westchester, including Lauren Brois, at podium, at the Ossining Farmers Market last Saturday to announce the launch of EnergySmart Homes. Residents of those communities can learn about reduced-cost energy assessments and improvements to their homes.

Reducing carbon emissions is an international effort, said Dorian Burden, a member of Green Ossining. However, it must start at the local level.

“Climate change is a global issue but it needs to be addressed community by community and household by household,” Burden said.

For any community member that misses this Thursday’s online kick off, there will be a second opportunity on Feb. 23 at 6 p.m. Visit www.sustainablewestchester.org for more details.

While homeowners outside Ossining and Briarcliff Manor won’t be eligible for the low-cost benefits of the program, anyone in the county can contact Sustainable Westchester to get more information on making their home more energy efficient, Brois said.
Assemblywoman Amy Paulin (D-Scarsdale) announced Monday the passage of legislation that repeals the section of the New York State Penal Law establishing the crime of loitering for the purposes of prostitution, commonly known as the “Walking While Trans” law.

The bill now awaits Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s signature.

The current law was enacted in 1976 and permits police to arrest persons based on an assumption that they are occupying a public space with the purpose of engaging in prostitution, even if the assumption is not evidence-based.

The statute allows arbitrary observations such as one’s dress or appearance as grounds for arrest. Police reports cite “waving at a car,” “standing somewhere other than a bus stop or taxi stand” as reasons to make an arrest under the law.

The law disproportionately affects trans women, particularly trans women of color. In a 2016 class-action lawsuit brought by the Legal Aid Society challenging the law, five of the eight named plaintiffs were transgender women of color arrested for simply standing outside, speaking to one another or walking home from the subway or grocery store.

“A woman can be improperly arrested and detained simply because an officer takes issue with her clothing or appearance,” the Legal Aid Society wrote in its lawsuit.

The suit lists examples of women who have been targeted: “women assumed to be loitering for prostitution because they were wearing a ‘short dress,’ ‘a skirt and high heels,’ ‘tight black pants’ or ‘a black dress.’”

In 2019, 57 people were arrested under the statute, of which 53 percent were in Queens and 23 percent in Brooklyn, according to data from the New York Department of Criminal Justice Service (DCJS).

Of the 152 people arrested under the statute in 2018, 80 percent were women, 49 percent were African-American and 42 percent were Latino, according to the DCJS data. More than half of the arrests in New York City occurred in Queens.

In 2013 and 2014, the advocacy group Red Umbrella Project found that in one Brooklyn court 94 percent of the defendants charged under the law were African-American.

In 2020, there were only six arrests made under the current statute – further underlining the archaic nature of the law and need for its repeal.

Compounding the problem of discriminatory and arbitrary arrest, transgender people frequently experience physical, sexual and verbal abuse at the hands of police. Sixty-one percent of transgender New Yorkers recently surveyed were subjected to police misconduct, including incidences of sexual assault, while a similar number of respondents reported that their experiences of police harassment discouraged them from seeking the assistance of law enforcement altogether.

“The harassment prompted by the current law has been borne heavily by victims of human trafficking and abused and exploited women and does not reflect the reality that these victims deserve our help and support to escape their harmful environments, rather than submit them to further harm and degradation,” Paulin said. “The legislature’s passage of this bill will thankfully repeal our draconian and deeply harmful current law” State Sen. Brad Hoylman (D-Manhattan) sponsored the bill in the Senate.
Local Cantor, Colleagues From Coast to Coast Join for Virtual Benefit

By Martin Wilbur

After the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to consume the world last March, Elizabeth Sternlieb was looking for a way that she could use her talents to help people in need. Sternlieb, the cantor at Temple Beth El of Northern Westchester in Chappaqua, came up with the answer after watching food lines grow and grow and people around November we were seeing these to those in need,” Sternlieb said. “Then whatever we can think of to offer assistance and pajama drives and different drives and try to do whatever we can with food drives regardless of faith.

“Those of us who have a synagogue job, some of us have taken pay cuts just because of circumstances in synagogues,” Sternlieb said. “But people who are hand to mouth, everything dried up quickly. So that group of people, the musicians, it was important to me to include them and also they get paid for the work.”

The concert will feature mainly original works with Jewish themes written by many of the participants, Sternlieb said. Much of the music will be in English, although there will be some prayers that will be interspersed, she said. Sternlieb will be introducing each performer.

“It’s done in a sensitive enough way that inspiring,” Sternlieb said. “I think anyone of any faith would find it appealing.”

Included in the program is a tribute to Meir Finkelstein, the cantor at Congregation Beth Yechezkel in Houston. Over the years, he has been is one of the most prolific composers of Jewish liturgical music in addition to writing scores for television and documentaries. Finkelstein was one of the youngest people to become a cantor at 14 years old, Sternlieb said.

The finale will be a choral production with each performer having recorded his or her part separately, and then mixed by a sound engineer to make it appear as though they are singing as one group.

Another first is how there will be representation from each of the five branches of Judaism, which is not a small feat. Sternlieb said it is against tradition in the Orthodox Jewish community for men to sing with women. But one of the performers, the acclaimed Cantor Netanel Hershtik of Hampton Synagogue, an Orthodox congregation in Westhampton, N.Y.

However, since Hershtik is “commandment minded,” he agreed to participate, Sternlieb explained.

“It is the most important thing, always, to save a life, so I believe he heeded this as an opportunity to fulfill that commandment, and so he was very excited about being part of this,” she said.

Registration to view the concert or for more information, visit the Temple Beth El website, www.bethelnw.org/concert.

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Assemblyman Supports Effort for WiFi in State-Run Group Homes

By Martin Wilbur

Assemblyman Tom Abinanti (D-Pleasantville) joined a group of legislators in Albany on Monday to call on the state Office of People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to provide internet access for residents of state-run group homes.

Abinanti, chairman of the Assembly Committee on Disabilities, was joined by several lawmakers from around the state, including Sen. James Skoufis (D-Woodbury). Skoufis was contacted by a constituent who had been unable to communicate with his adult daughter for nearly 10 months because of COVID-19 restrictions. The woman’s family recently pulled the daughter out of the home.

Skoufis then learned that it wasn’t an isolated issue or a problem with the individual facility, but rather a state-wide policy.

As a result, since the onset of the pandemic and tight guidelines being imposed regarding group homes visitor, many families have been cut off from their loved ones who are among the most vulnerable population.

“In a COVID world, internet access is the lifeblood for people with disabilities to be part of the rest of the world,” Abinanti said. “The Internet gives not just access to information but contact with loved ones and vital remote services that cannot now be provided in person safely.”

Skoufis said with many of doctors’ visits having gone virtual, thousands of residents have been unable to receive the health care they need.

If OPWDD fails to rectify the matter, he and some of his colleagues will introduce legislation requiring all state group homes provide free WiFi to developmentally disabled residents.

“The past 10 months these residents have been as isolated as ever,” Skoufis said. “They have not been able to see their parents, their families at all. They need Facetime, they need internet, they need WiFi to get the health care that they need, telemedicine that they need. They can’t leave the home. They need it for educational purposes to engage with their teachers and go to school, so it is unthinkable that OPWDD has not provided internet to the thousands that they’re supposed to service and care for.”

Doug Hovey, president and CEO of Independent Living, Inc. in Orange County, said there are about 38,000 group home residents in state-operated facilities that have been cut off from the outside world since last March.

He said while it’s laudable that Gov. Andrew Cuomo has made providing affordable WiFi access to low-income New Yorkers a priority, but it’s time to start using the same standard for group home residents. Hovey mentioned that most private group homes, such as the ones operated by his organization, provide internet access.

“Communication is a right, not a privilege,” Hovey said.

Skoufis said he contacted OPWDD to find out its rationale for failing to provide the service across the board. While that question wasn’t answered, he was told that providing internet for all group home residents in state facilities would cost about $900,000.

He called the expense is “a speck in the $190 billion state budget that we have here in New York.”

“For some reason this was kept a secret and it’s a shameful secret,” Skoufis said. Sen. John Mannion (D-Geddes), chairman of the Senate Disabilities Committee, said in a world where more and more services are online, it is an injustice for group home residents to not have that access.

“The pandemic has shown that Internet access is as vital to modern life as electricity, yet WiFi is considered a luxury by New York State if you have a disability and live in a group facility,” Mannion said. “This has to change.”
Mahopac HS Senior Leads Cancer Fight in Nationwide Competition

By Sydney Stoller

While most Americans are trying their best to defeat the coronavirus, Mahopac High School senior Max Semegran is focusing his efforts on another deadly disease: Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

This year, Semegran will become Mahopac’s first participant in the nationwide Students of the Year competition hosted by the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society (LLS).

But raising money for the largest nonprofit that fights blood cancer is a personal battle for Semegran. His older brother Ben was diagnosed with the disease in 2019.

“It was such a shock to me to see my older brother, someone who I see as such a strong person, ravaged by Hodgkin’s lymphoma,” Semegran said. “Throughout this experience I realized the importance of informing people about blood cancers and the impact that they have, while also raising money and awareness to improve the treatments for this disease.”

To honor his brother, Semegran named his Students of the Year campaign Team Ben. Ben is recently cancer free after conquering the disease on two separate occasions, although the effects of his illness still haunt his family to this day.

Knowing firsthand the horrible way that cancer affects loved ones, Semegran said he is determined to do whatever he can to support LLS.

In turn, the nonprofit allocates any funds raised toward finding cures, research, and supporting families who need help affording treatment.

To become a competitor, high school students are nominated by friends, family, or in Semegran’s case, a teacher. Students then participate in a fundraising contest for LLS, which started on Jan. 21 and extends through Mar. 11.

The contestant who can offer the largest donation on behalf of their team is named Student of the Year.

To further achieve his goal of eliminating blood cancer, Semegran and his fellow contestants must also come up with unique ways to mobilize the town and raise money.

During the scavenger hunt, participants will answer clues and solve riddles to win a prize. Community members can buy a ticket to participate and the prize money will consist of a portion of the money made from ticket sales. The rest will be donated to LLS, he said.

Semegran has also approached local businesses interested in buying ads in the program distributed at the Students of the Year banquet. The banquet is attended by thousands of people, which means invaluable exposure with the bonus of supporting a good cause.

In addition to buying an ad, the virtual end-of-contest banquet will feature an auction where businesses can donate items that attendees can bid on. These can range from restaurant vouchers to luxury items, Semegran said.

Along with the medical benefits the Students of the Year contest brings, it also aims to help entrants develop interpersonal skills, like public speaking, networking, and financial planning. Although Semegran has exhibited these attributes in many aspects of his life, he’s eager to build on this foundation and learn as the contest continues.

Devin O’Toole, the LLS representative for Connecticut and the Hudson Valley, said Semegran exemplifies the ideal high school student to get involved in this campaign.

“He is extremely driven, gives his all in everything he commits to and has outstanding leadership skills,” O’Toole said. “He is finishing out his high school career as the first student to ever represent the Mahopac community and we could not be more honored to have him involved in this campaign.”

While Semegran is proud to be a leader in the fight against cancer at his school, he hopes that the fight will continue once he graduates. However, his optimism remains high after the Mahopac Students Against Cancer Club was formed at the high school last fall.

“My goal is to make the high school aware and educate people on the disease,” Semegran said. “This is a disease that we don’t talk about enough.”

“Many of the people on Team Ben are from the club because I knew that all of the members would be interested in the fight against cancer,” Semegran said. “I am hoping that in the future they can continue doing this program and it would become a part of their club and it would be a yearly thing.”

To donate to Team Ben, visit https://events.lls.org/ctwhv/CTWHYSOY21/mxandmah.
It’s been 18 years since I first started writing The Home Guru column and about all the chores that go along with improving and maintaining a home. During that time, I haven’t gotten any younger. The frequency and complexity of my do-it-yourself projects around the house have diminished significantly with age – my age.

In fact, especially during COVID-19, even though I live in a relatively chore-free condo, I’ve spent days, weeks and even months just staring at my four walls, embarrassed to admit that there are three overhead lights that need to be replaced, but I’m only capable of reminding myself that the chore needs to be done.

With 10-foot ceilings, the task just seems too daunting. But then, all I have to do is call condo management to get the job completed.

Here’s a little scary history. Years ago, a neighbor of mine was making a repair on his roof when he lost his footing, fell off and hit his head, knocking himself unconscious. Incredibly enough, when he regained consciousness, he suddenly no longer wanted to be married to his wife. It just came out of the blue following his near-death experience.

That experience offered a good excuse to me – and my wife – that I should never do anything around the house that is either dangerous or for which I am unqualified.

But we guys are a stubborn lot, we are. And women are right up there with us when it comes to the satisfaction we derive from doing ourselves what we might hand over to others for a price. There are other factors involved, both practical and psychological.

For one, not all of us are moneybags. When I first moved to the suburbs as a young husband and father, I could barely scrape together the money needed for the mortgage, utilities and taxes each month, much less even considering whether I could afford a service to have my lawn cut or my shrubbery pruned.

On the other hand, with a young family and a stressful job, I was grateful for the therapeutic element that came with building my own bookshelves, applying my own wallpaper and doing my own foundation plantings. I would step back and say, “Wow, that’s some heck of a job; no one could possibly do it better.”

And you know what? Except for some really skilled artisans I have found along the way, like a carpenter who is an artist with wood and a painter who can do faux work that should be in a museum, my handiwork from years past stood up very well indeed.

In my former antique home, I would marvel when stepping into my bedroom, and almost compulsively, I would look at the perfectly matched pattern on the papered walls and marvel at how each corner is miraculously matched to the other. When I was in my dining room, I couldn’t stop myself from observing the stenciling along the top of the walls, the swag and leaf pattern on which I labored for weeks on end when my back and neck were supple enough to endure the physical effort required.

But the years do take their toll. As soon as the snow of winter melted each spring, I would start my first home ritual of redressing my driveway and parking area by leveling the mounds of crushed bluestone created by the snowplows.

Of course, I would soon hear a window open, my wife admonishing me to stop immediately, warning that the chore is as taxing as shoveling snow and that I was too old to do it anymore. I would respond that it was good, healthy exercise for me. We went back and forth. She would win, but only because I always try to be a good husband and don’t want to worry her.

Today, it’s a different time of life and I must face the reality that it’s time to be a different kind of homeowner with a different kind of to-do list, mainly one of who to call to get the various jobs done that need to be done.

According to a Consumer Products Safety Commission report, nearly 250,000 people have to visit emergency rooms each year simply because they fall off a ladder. This is the most dangerous chore around the house.

In descending order, the next most dangerous home improvement chores are lawnmower accidents; power tool accidents; chemical-related accidents (pool chemicals, paints, lubricants, solvents and other household or workshop cleaning agents, so read those labels carefully!); chainsaw accidents (I was always afraid to even own one); and finally, electric shock. (Always assume a wire is “hot,” unless you know for sure that the power has been turned off.)

It’s wonderful to do it yourself, but be careful which chores you choose.

Bill Primavera is 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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A Glance at Some Recent Releases Worth Watching

It has been a difficult year for the movie industry, but as we look toward 2021, many studios are putting an increasing amount of quality content onto the multitude of streaming services available. Here are a few recent releases that you may want to check out.

**Wonder Woman 1984**

The newest installment to the DC cinematic universe looks to build off the success of its critically-acclaimed predecessor. The story revolves around Diana Prince as she lives her life without her lost love, Steve Trevor. She meets Barbara Minerva, an insecure, but brilliant geologist at the museum where she works and they develop an unlikely friendship amidst the discovery of a mysterious stone.

Pedro Pascal portrays Maxwell Lord, a power-hungry businessman who looks to escape an aspiring lawyer and long for the booming jazz culture from decades ago. Despite poor reviews and as someone who read the memoir, I found “Hillbilly Elegy” to be an emotionally fulfilling film that is certainly worthy of a watch.

**Hillbilly Elegy**

Based on The New York Times best-selling memoir and directed by Ron Howard, “Hillbilly Elegy” centers around the life of J.D. Vance, an aspiring lawyer who looks to escape the impoverished and troubled past be endured growing up in rural Ohio.

J.D.’s mother, portrayed by Amy Adams, feels a moral obligation to help her unfit to be a parent to two children. His grandmother, played by Glenn Close, steps in multiple times to try and lead J.D. down a more fortuitous path in life.

As J.D. grows older, despite his success, he feels a moral obligation to his family and tries to juggle graduating from school and taking care of his family, who desperately need his support. Although the cliche escape poverty storyline may be overdone in Hollywood, this film does a great job of encapsulating real emotional conflict along with societal barriers that are ever-present in today’s America. The acting, as you would expect, is top notch from two of Hollywood’s leading actresses, and Gabriel Lasso puts in a solid performance as Vance.

Despite poor reviews and as someone who read the memoir, I found “Hillbilly Elegy” to be an emotionally fulfilling film that is certainly worthy of a watch.

**Sylvie’s Love**

Set in the late 1950s and early ’60s, “Sylvie’s Love” is an old-fashioned love story revolving around Sylvie Parker, played by Tessa Thompson, and Robert Halloway, played by Nnamdi Asomugha.

Robert is a talented jazz musician who works at the record store owned by Sylvie and her family. They have a natural connection and chemistry that makes the situation difficult for Sylvie as she is already engaged to a man serving in the military during the Korean War.

Thompson puts in an excellent performance that we’ve come to expect from the budding star and Asomugha is surprisingly exceptional as well, considering he was best known for being an All-Pro cornerback for the Oakland Raiders. Although the acting is excellent, there are certain unexplained plot holes that may leave you confused and unsatisfied.

“Sylvie’s Love” is a solid date night film that will pull at your romantic heartstrings and long for the booming jazz culture from decades ago.

**Elegy**

Set in the 1980s, Pedro Pascal portrays J.D. Vance as he lives his life without meeting the woman he loves, Steve Trevor. He meets Barbara Minerva, an insecure, but brilliant geologist at the museum where she works and they develop an unlikely friendship amidst the discovery of a mysterious stone.

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**continued on page 20**
Community Engagement Sought for Chappaqua Library Strategic Plan

The Chappaqua Central School District (CSD) Public Library is excited to announce an upcoming public engagement opportunity, the 2021 Strategic Plan. The 2021 Strategic Plan will outline a systematic process for moving toward an agreed-upon, community-wide vision. The plan involves the development and prioritization of strategic goals and measurable strategies.

The mission of the Chappaqua CSD Public Library is to be a welcoming community center for human interaction, intellectual stimulation and cultural enrichment for people of all ages; to provide, through resources, events and programs, a place where the experience of the past can meet the needs of the present and future; to provide access to its own materials and to sources beyond its collections for people on-site and in other locations; and to work with institutions, organizations and individuals within the community in the pursuit of these goals.

To prepare, the committee will gather information from library staff and the community relating to library services and materials, identify our strengths and weaknesses, determine any external threats, identify long-term trends in the library field and determine the future goals for the library.

Anyone interested in participating, may e-mail a letter of interest and a resume to afarber@wlsmail.org.

A Glance at Some Recent Releases

continued from page 19

Let Them All Talk

This comedy/drama, directed by Steven Soderbergh, centers around Alice Hughes (Meryl Streep), a famous author working on a new manuscript. She is being honored with an award in England, but cannot fly due to health reasons. Her agent, Karen, suggests that she take a ship instead in order to receive her award, while also trying to find information on her next work.

Alice invites two old college friends whom she’s lost touch with as well as her nephew, Tyler. During the trip, old wounds resurface and new love emerges, which results in many awkward social encounters.

The acting, led by Streep and Lucas Hedges, is outstanding as one would expect. The plot, however, becomes a little difficult to follow as you try to understand pieces of the characters’ past. At the end of the film, you might find yourself wondering what you’re supposed to take away. I was expecting a little more substance from a film with this type of star power, but I was still interested enough to enjoy it.

If you like Streep, you’ll enjoy “Let Them All Talk,” but it may you leave you unsatisfied if you’re expecting an Oscar contender.

Rating: 7/10
Where to Watch: HBO Max

Soul

The newest Disney/Pixar film follows middle school teacher Joe Gardner, an aspiring jazz musician who falls in an open manhole right before he’s about to get his big break.

Joe’s soul and body are separated and he tries desperately to return to Earth to fulfill his life’s passion. Through his journey with an unborn soul, known as 22, Joe learns lessons about himself and his purpose in life while developing an unlikely friendship in the process.

“Soul” is funny, heartwarming and has meaningful lessons that transcend all ages. It does have similarities to a previous Disney film, “Inside Out” in terms of character style, so it does lack originality in that regard, but “Soul” is an excellent addition to the Disney library and has likeable characters and plenty of wit to keep all ages interested.

Rating: 8.75/10
Where to Watch: Disney+

Crossword

Across
1. Current
5. Memorial Day solo
9. People waiting to get into a
10. Once more
12. Dropped sharply
13. Place for target practice
15. “___ She Lovely” Stevie
Wonder song
16. Menace
21. Word indicating a location
22. Regions
23. Exist
25. Surprised
27. Leave off
30. It’s hunted at Easter
31. Became fainter
33. Symbol of authority
35. Hot-tempered
36. Motivate, in a way
37. Road division
38. Real estate document

Down
1. Escape
2. Meat eaten with onions
3. “___ Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest”
4. Formed a union
5. Material for roofs and roads
6. Opposed to
7. Cookware items
8. Token

11. Safety item for a tightrope walker
12. Material to be input
17. Washington D.C. time
18. Sculpture and painting, e.g.
19. Peppermint drink
20. Hearing organ
23. Plead
24. Gradually move sideways
26. Projection
27. Taking a personal day, perhaps
28. Daily delivery
29. “What’s the ___?!”
32. Salad supply
33. Stage of bloom
34. “We ___ family”

Answers on page 22

A Spiritual View

By Cantor Lilah Sugarman

“It is the Tree of life to all who hold fast to it and all of its supporters are happy.”

Proverbs 3:17.

This week the Jewish community celebrates Tu B’shevat, the new year of the trees. For this holiday, we honor nature, trees and the fruit they give us.

Also, this last week, in the Torah, the Hebrew bible we have the last of the 10 plagues, and in this part of the story, it says, God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. I read this as God hardened Pharaoh’s heart since the intention was already there for his heart to be hardened.

I think we often let so many things get in our way of connecting with others. Ultimately, our own selves, our own hardening of our hearts get in our way of connecting most true to ourselves and, ultimately, others. I invite us to work on opening our hearts for inner exploration and further connection with others. I lift up the words of Amanda Gorman, our first youth poet laureate:

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know,
to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another

My blessings for this week are that we, like trees rooted in the earth, are grounded in tradition, in those who have come before us. May we be grounded in an inner connection to ourselves and, like the tree’s branches, reach toward the skies, reaching out toward others and a future of hope and unity.

Lilah Sugarman is the rabbi at Congregation B’Nai Yisrael in Armonk and is part of the Armonk Faith Alliance. The alliance also comprises Hillside Church, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, St. Patrick’s RC Church and St. Nersess Armenian Seminary.
Camp Study: Adherence to CDC Guidance Proved Successful

The American Camp Association (ACA) celebrated a study released last August from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that identifies how four overnight summer camps in Maine were able to operate safely and successfully without the spread of COVID-19 last year. Integral to these camps’ success was employing a multilayered nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPI) strategy, reflecting adherence to measures outlined in ACA’s educational resource, a Field Guide for Camps on Implementation of CDC Guidance. Each of the NPIs provided a limited layer of protection, but when implemented collectively in a consistent and diligent manner by a camp’s entire community – campers, staff members and camp parents/guardians – they created a culture of compliance that can prevent and mitigate transmission of disease.

“This study of more than 1,000 camp attendees shows promising data that overnight camps can operate safely in the era of COVID-19,” said lead study author Dr. Laura Blaisdell. “With this foundational information we look forward to ACA convening wider studies investigating the experience of more diverse camp experiences this year.”

President and CEO of the American Camp Association Tom Rosenberg said that while safety was the foundation for a successful summer last year, the camp experience teaches children social-emotional skills for 21st-century learning and leadership. “These skills are paramount to persevering in a time of pandemic and beyond,” Rosenberg said.

Blaisdell highlighted the four participant camps did not restrict attendance from any part of the country or globally. The study’s findings demonstrated that a multilayered public health prevention and mitigation strategy in an overnight camp setting can identify and control COVID-19 transmission, regardless of the prevalence of the virus in campers and staff arriving from various communities.

Rosenberg emphasized the importance of the report. “(Last) summer, more than 3,000 day and overnight camps ran, serving kids and families in need of fun and engaging time outdoors with friends,” he said.

Rosenberg said ACA’s upcoming four research studies focused on camp practices and programs that continued to provide safe and engaging camp experiences last summer by following the organization’s Field Guide for Camps on Implementation of CDC Guidance.

The research supports educators and after-school programs adhering to ACA’s Field Guide’s suggested practices, Rosenberg said. Applying multiple layers of NPIs and leaning into a culture of compliance, even without testing and bubbling, can help any school or organization that brings children together while mitigating spread of the virus, he said.

Rosenberg said the report is positive news for the upcoming summer. “The primary goal of this research is to identify effective practices so that more camps will offer in-person day and overnight programming for summer 2021, ensuring children receive the life-changing camp experiences they need and deserve,” Rosenberg said.
Teatown Kicks Off 17th Annual EagleFest This Saturday

Teatown’s Hudson River EagleFest, the annual festival celebrating the bald eagle’s winter migration to the Hudson Valley, will kick off for the 17th time this Saturday, Jan. 30 with a week of exciting virtual programs and limited in-person activities for children, families and birding enthusiasts.

From Jan. 30 through Sunday, Feb. 7, Teatown will host a series of virtual programs featuring Connecticut falconer and wildlife rehabilitator Christine Peyreigne of Christine’s Critters; Anne Swaim, executive director of Saw Mill River Audubon; programs by Zeiss Sports Optics; and Teatown’s own animal ambassadors.

New this year will be the highly-anticipated presentation on the healing nature of bird watching by Holly Merker, a cancer survivor who credits “ornitherapy” as a tool in her recovery.

To make the programming accessible to all, Teatown is charging a minimal registration fee of $5 for members and $7 for non-members per program.

Teatown also plans to host limited in-person family fun activities including the “Golden Feather” treasure hunt, with Teatown swag bags as prizes. Adding some “virtual reality” to the virtual world will be a new map of viewing sites and virtual visits to select viewing locations developed in collaboration with virtual reality company A&R360.

“Last year’s EagleFest had the highest attendance ever so we know that there is great enthusiasm for the bald eagle and wildlife conservation programming that Teatown provides to families throughout the Hudson Valley and beyond,” said Kevin Carter, Teatown’s executive director. “While COVID is preventing the in-person festival at Croton Point Park this year, we have extended EagleFest to include an entire week of really exciting hybrid programming we hope will inspire families and bird enthusiasts until we can return to Croton Point Park next year.”

Bird photographers may be interested in entering a bird-of-prey photography contest, with the top prize sponsored by Zeiss Sports Optics. The contest is in memory of nature photographer and longtime Teatown supporter Ed Mertz, who died last year. Entry into the contest is free.

Teatown is also collaborating this year with Pleasantville-based brewing company Soul Brewing. A percentage of the sales of Blonde and Marzen beers at Soul Brewing’s Pleasantville location during EagleFest will go to support Teatown.

Teatown is selling “Eagle Bundles” gift sets on its e-store. It includes a special eaglet bundle with unique learning activities for children created by Teatown educators.

For more information, including details about the bird-of-prey photography contest, and a complete schedule of programs, visit www.teatown.org.

EagleFest returns for the 17th time starting Saturday for a weeklong celebration of the bald eagle’s annual migration to the Hudson Valley. This year it will be a mainly virtual event.

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Crossword Answers

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<th>FLOW</th>
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| OMIT | EGG | FADED | BADGE |
| FIERY | URGE | LANE | DEED |
It is hard to imagine the Super Bowl without hot wings, zesty delivery pizza or homemade buffalo chicken dip, despite the anticipated heartburn that might follow.

On top of all your favorite rich and spicy foods is the anxiety you may get from the game itself, especially as this year is shaping up to be more unpredictable – and therefore more stressful – than ever.

“This unprecedented year is generating anxiety and stress for all those involved in the planning leading up to the big game, from event coordinators to the players, advertisers and fans,” said Kenny White, a sports analyst and legendary oddsmaker known as the “Wizard of Odds.” “But die-hard football fans and casual viewers alike could use some of this uncertainty to actually enjoy the whole Big Game experience even more than in previous years.”

De-Stress With a Little Fun

To stress less, look for ways to have a bit of extra fun. For example, TUMS, the brand that celebrated “TUMSworthy” moments during the game last year, will be launching a new bingo experience on Feb. 1. To participate, download your game board at @TUMSOfficial and follow it during the game. Delivery pizza arrives with the wrong toppings? Out of chicken wings? Puddle on the field? Scorching dip? Examples such as these could represent a #TUMSworthy moment on your bingo board.

“While the Big Game will once again be full of uncertainties, creative propositions such as the #TUMSBingoSweepstakes can make the whole experience more fun for fans and non-fans alike,” White said.

Beat Symptoms

Generally characterized by a burning sensation in the chest, other signs of heartburn include acid indigestion, sour stomach and upset stomach associated with these symptoms. But you can take action to reduce this discomfort, whether ordering from your favorite restaurant or testing out that new buffalo chicken dip recipe that you have been eager to try.

Because eating too fast can contribute to heartburn, one of the most effective ways to alleviate symptoms is to take time to savor all those tasty snacks. Also, consider mixing up your spread with a few items you know are not heartburn triggers.

You might also want to make spectating more active. When you lie flat, your esophagus and stomach are on an even plane, making it easy for stomach acids to flow into your esophagus, which can cause heartburn. Sitting at a 45-degree angle could compress your stomach and make things worse. So, try to get up and move around between plays.

You can also turn to America’s top heartburn brand TUMS and have some TUMS Chewy Bites on hand. With a main ingredient of calcium carbonate, delivering fast-acting multi-symptom relief, and neutralizing acid on contact to treat the signs of heartburn, TUMS goes to work in seconds to deliver heartburn relief.

To learn more, and for more heartburn relief tips, visit tums.com.

This Super Bowl Sunday, relax and have fun. With a smart game plan, there is no need to be sidelined by heartburn.

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Three Area Students Named National Finalists for Science Competition

Three students, two from Westchester and one from Putnam County, are among the 40 national finalists for the 80th Regeneron Science Talent Search for 2021, the nation’s oldest and most prestigious science and mathematics competition for high school seniors.

The local finalists are Jared Ilan of Byram Hills High School, Michael Pavlovich of Ossining High School and Rebecca Monge of Carmel High School.

They were selected from 1,760 highly qualified entrants based on their projects’ scientific rigor and potential to become a world-changing scientist and leader. Earlier this month, the Society for Science and Regeneron named the top 300 student scholars.

The finalists are each awarded at least $25,000, and the top 10 awards range from $40,000 to $250,000. The top 10 Regeneron Science Talent Search 2021 winners will be announced during a live-streamed virtual awards ceremony on Mar. 17.

More than $3 million in awards will be distributed throughout the Regeneron Science Talent Search, which includes awards to finalists as well as $2,000 provided to each of the top 300 scholars and their schools.

They will also have an opportunity to interact with leading scientists and display their projects to the public during a virtual event on Mar. 14. Usually held in person in Washington, D.C., the 2021 competition will take place virtually in order to keep the finalists and their families safe during the ongoing pandemic.

“It’s an honor to welcome the Regeneron Science Talent Search 2021 finalists to the community of alumni who share a drive and passion for science,” said Dr. George D. Yancopoulos, co-founder, president and chief scientific officer of Regeneron and among the top winners of the 1976 Science Talent Search.

“Year’s finalists represent many of our nation’s most promising young scientists who, even during a global pandemic, are using their ingenuity, resourcefulness and STEM skills to work toward a better future. I can only hope that their STS experience further inspires them to take on and help solve the biggest challenges facing mankind – from climate change to disease and future pandemics.”

The finalists’ projects cover behavioral and social sciences, biochemistry, bioengineering, cellular and molecular biology, chemistry, computational biology and bioinformatics, computer science, earth and planetary sciences, engineering, environmental science, genomics, materials science, mathematics, medicine and health, physics, plant sciences and space science.

For a complete list of this year’s finalists and their projects, visit https://www.societyforscience.org/regeneron-STS/2021-finalists.

By Scott Levine

Light Pollution is Worse Than Just Preventing Us From Seeing the Stars

About 12 years ago, not long after we moved up from Brooklyn, I carried my daughter into the night and looked up. I was amazed. With no trouble at all I could see the delicate arch of six stars that form Orion’s shield! I could see the Milky Way!

In the years since, I’ve watched as more and more lights have sprung up in my neighborhood and around Westchester. They’re on driveways and doorsteps. They light up empty street corners, deserted sports fields and low-hanging tree branches. One neighbor sometimes sees fit to point his SUV at his house and turn on his headlights at midnight. The light bounces everywhere, and trespasses into other houses.

As the sky cleared last week, I realized I can’t see Orion’s shield anymore. It’s slowly disappeared into the night, pushed back and retreated, like a frightened bear hiding in the woods. Have you noticed, too? Most people around the world say they can’t see the Milky Way at all. We’ve dirtied the skies with light and let that piece of humanity slip away.

At its simplest, light pollution is the unnecessary, wasteful use of light, brightening nighttime skies. To many people, this sounds like a joke, but it is a serious problem, far beyond “dark skies are cool.”

Light pollution affects the well-being and life cycles of plants and animals. It causes illness, injury and problems with migratory and reproductive patterns. It disrupts astronomical research. The loss of dark skies is believed to contribute to stress, burn-out, loneliness and disconnection from other people.

Studies have shown links between light pollution and sleep problems in humans, which, in turn, are linked to breast and other types of cancer. Light pollution contributes to global climate change by using more energy to run these lights.

Safety isn’t the answer either. Statistics suggest an increase in crime in over-lit areas because we’re giving steady and consistent light to the criminals, free of charge. Who hasn’t been blinded by overly bright streetlights while driving?

Most important to some: it wastes money. We’re spending more and more to power these lights so we can, ever so slightly, light the undersides of passing airplanes.

But all is not lost. People and communities are committing themselves to the cause. A dark sky tourism industry is growing with the help of organizations like the International Dark Sky Association. Here are five easy things any of us can do:

1. Simplest and most effective, turn off unnecessary outdoor lights. We don’t need to light up everything around us.

2. Shield the outdoor lights you do need and direct their light downward at the specific area you need to light, rather than upward toward the sky.

3. Use amber lights and put them on motion sensors and timers so they’re only on when necessary.

4. Use blinds and curtains to reduce the light leaving your house and shut the lights when you leave rooms.

5. Talk to your friends and neighbors about the problem. I’ve been in touch with local officials and hope to speak with them again soon.

We need dark skies. They’re part of who we are, where we’ve been and where we’re going. Thanks for your help.

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, who are 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 concerns over COVID-19.
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Adding Water to Wine? The Art (?) of Dilution

By Nick Antonaccio

In previous columns, I explored the intertwined history of wine and water. Throughout ancient times it was a common practice to dilute wine with copious amounts of water in order to reduce the level of alcohol and to diffuse the off-putting aroma and taste of the inferior quality of wines produced in those times.

In modern times, water has taken on a contradictory persona. On the one hand, it is loathed as a dilutive agent that spoils the essence of a wine. On the other hand, it is added during the winemaking process by a number of winemakers to produce an acceptable product low in alcohol.

I received several responses on my reporting of this phenomenon. The ones that intrigued me the most were the self-confessions of readers who have practiced the art of dilution.

Readers admitted to adding club soda or ice cubes to their favorite quaffing wines. They also offered additional insights into the use of water that I had not mentioned due to lack of space in my column.

I felt a column focusing on these consumer practices was warranted. If you have additional experiences you would like to share, send them to my e-mail address.

1. For first-generation children of Western European immigrants, wine was an integral part of most weeknight dinners and every Sunday marathon feast. How many of you were offered wine diluted by water or soda at an early age?

This was a generations-old practice brought to the United States, considered a simple way to share the experience of a traditional “old country” meal with the entire family. In addition, it gradually introduced children to a mealtime beverage considering a healthy component of the Mediterranean diet.

2. Remember the first time you raided mom and dad’s wine or liquor cabinet? They would never notice a few ounces missing from a bottle of wine or vodka/gin/scotch. Remember the first time you were caught and then devised the foolproof method of adding an equal amount of water to replace the alcohol you had consumed?

Diluted wine or alcohol tasted the same to a teenager. Remember when your parents tossed the diluted bottles in the trash after they next tasted the contents of the bottles? Remember you could never again find any bottles of alcohol anywhere in the house, or the key to the new locking device they may have placed on the wine and liquor cabinets?

3. Who would have thought that adding a bit of water to liquor would be de rigueur as an adult? The first time I ordered a single malt scotch and was offered a splash of water with it, I cringed. I was finally able to afford a rather expensive, and envied, whiskey. Why would I want it diluted?

A wise bartender informed me that adding water to scotch is rooted in science. His insights: High levels of alcohol overpower aromas, and therefore our olfactory senses. Adding water accelerates the evaporation of alcohol molecules and releases the aroma molecules attached to them. As I sniffed and tasted the diluted single malt, I felt less of a burning sensation (fewer alcoholic molecules) and more of the aromas (more aromatic molecules waiting up from the glass). I’ve ordered my single malts with a side (not a splash) of water ever since, which allows me to add water incrementally to match my particular palate.

Having received these inputs from readers, I now confess to the following:

1. As a youth, I was served wine at home mixed with water before graduating to wine mixed with 7UP lemon-lime soda.

2. As a young adult, of legal age, I ordered — “top-shelf” scotch with club soda because it (and therefore, I) was cool to do so.

3. In the eighties, my go-to summer drink was Sangria — watered down with club soda.

But I never stooped to diluting the vodka in the bottle I drank from in my parents’ liquor cabinet.

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.

Battling Prostate Cancer With a Pinch of Humor

Born in Warsaw, Poland, Andrzej Krakowski is an award-winning film producer, director, screenwriter, cartoonist and professor of film and digital media.

Despite his busy schedule, the 74-year-old diligently keeps up with his health, including going for a prostate cancer screening every year.

And while his past tests were normal — meaning he had no indication of a high prostate-specific antigen (PSA) level or enlarged prostate gland — Krakowski still made a point to go to his most recent screening, even though it was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That decision to tend to his routine care may have saved his life.

During the screening, which is a standard digital rectal exam, internist Dr. Michael Wein noted that his prostate “feels different.” Wein advised a consultation with a urologist, who, after ordering an MRI, a CAT scan and biopsy, officially diagnosed Krakowski with prostate cancer.

He was referred for treatment to Dr. Ashwatha Narayana, chair of radiation medicine at the Cancer Institute at Northern Westchester Hospital.

Narayana explained that because the cancer was detected early, the treatment options were better and would result in fewer side effects and complications.

“From the moment I met Dr. Narayana, I knew he’d be my doctor,” Krakowski recalled. “He walked me and my wife, Majka, through each treatment option logically and clearly. He made drawings for us, took his time and was humane and warm. He alleviated my fear.”

Together, they decided on a treatment plan consisting of hormonal therapy followed by radiation treatment. Krakowski would also receive SpaceOAR Hydrogel, which protects the healthy rectal tissue directly behind the prostate from radiation.

Throughout nine weeks of cancer treatment, Krakowski never lost his sense of humor. Each time he sat in the waiting room before getting radiation, he drew cartoons about his experience to lift his own spirits and the spirits of others.

“Because of COVID-19, everyone in the waiting room was in masks, sitting silently in different corners,” Krakowski said. “But as he drew, people took interest and he invited them over to take a look.

“One elderly woman whose face had looked so sad took a peek and laughed,” he recalled. Another patient would always excitedly announce, ‘Rembrandt is here today!’

Krakowski self-published a book of his cartoons titled “Prostate Cancer with a Pinch of Humor (Sketches from the Treatment)” and gave out copies to others undergoing treatment.

“For the patients, even one ounce of humor is priceless,” he said.

On the last day of his radiation, his wife brought in cakes.

“We had a little party outside,” Krakowski said. “Today I feel great. But the first day I didn’t have to go for radiation, I felt kind of lost. I missed my pals.”

The special bond he developed with his fellow patients, Narayana and his entire care team helped him feel at home at Northern Westchester Hospital.

“T oday I feel great. But the first day I didn’t have to go for radiation, I felt kind of lost. I missed my pals.”

“Had Andrzej waited longer to get screened, there’s a good chance the cancer would have gone into his bones,” Narayana said. “Then, our approach would have been limited to trying to slow down the process. In other words, a delay in screening and treatment would have made a huge difference in the outcome.”

Krakowski knows that, too, which is why he urges others not to wait to get the care they need.

“Medicine has progressed so far; where there’s science, there’s hope,” he said. “So go to medical checkups. Have your screenings. Don’t put anything off. Think of where you want to be one year from now. The choice is yours to make sure you get there.”

To learn more about cancer care at Northern Westchester Hospital, visit nwh.northwell.edu/cancer-institute.
As is he were playing at the YMCA, Carmel junior Michael Youngman lofts one toward the pins as part of his 3-set 536 series, including a 188 high game, in the Rams’ 7-0 sweep of rival Mahopac last Tuesday at Spins Bowl in Carmel where Carmel senior Spencer Dicembrino, as usual, was all business and paced the Rams with a match-high 581 3-game series and a match-high game of 203 (193.6 average). Mahopac seventh-grader Austin Arzaga equaled that high game (203) and fired a 567 3-game series in a solid varsity debut. The Mahopac girls answered in kind with an impressive 7-0 sweep of Carmel behind Gabby Marino’s match-high 213 game (boys or girls), part of an impressive 525 3-game series... see Bowling Notebook
Carmel Boys, Mahopac Girls Sweep Alleys

Carmel’s Ryan Terwilliger eyes up his pins in Rams’ 7-0 win over Mahopac last Tuesday.

Mahopac’s Alyssa Arzaga spun a 470 3-game series, including a high of 160 in Indians’ 7-0 win over Carmel last Tuesday.

Mahopac’s Krista Dietz fired a 461 3-game series, including a 177 in Indians’ 7-0 win over Carmel last Tuesday.

Carmel Boys, Mahopac Girls Sweep Alleys

Carmel’s Spencer Dicembrino was wrecking pins in his 581 3-game series, including a match-high 203 in 7-0 win over Mahopac.

Mahopac’s Gabby Marino staged a 523 3-game series including a match-high 213 in Indians’ 7-0 win over Carmel last Tuesday.
Mahopac senior Jamison Castrataro stole the show at Odyssey Gymnastics last Wednesday in the host Indians’ rout of Suffern and Ossining during Section 1’s opening day on the gymnastics circuit, and the only event she didn’t dominate (balance beam), her sister, Lexi, a seventh-grader, did.

Jamison won vault (9.3), uneven bars (9.0) while placing second on beam (9.2) in her first varsity competition while taking third in vault (8.3), 6th on bars (7.15) and fifth on floor (8.75).

"It was a nice start to the season and a great team effort," Mahopac Coach Vinny Collins said of the Indians 163.6 team score, far ahead of Suffern (149.7) and Ossining (86.15). "Jamison picked up where she finished last season and it was a solid effort all the way around. We had great efforts from Lexi and Kaitlyn (Palange), a couple of our rookies, in their first high school competition. All of our veterans - Lia, Rachel, Kaylie Ann and Jade -- were solid throughout the entire competition and two more of our rookies - Cecylia, Jadyn - had competitive efforts as well."

Mahopac will continue to gear up for the three-headed monster that is Lakeland/Panas/Put Valley, the reigning sectional champion, on Feb. 10 at Dynamic Gymnastics.

Mahopac senior Jamison Castrataro tore it up on opening day to win the all-around. Mahopac freshman Jadyn Suni competes in uneven bars last Wednesday in Indians’ win over Suffern and Ossining.

Mahopac senior Rachel Romero competed on beam in Indians’ win over Suffern and Ossining Wednesday.

### Gymnastics Notebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vault</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uneven Bars</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beam</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor Exercise</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Mahopac High School Gymnastics Results

- **1. Jamison Castrataro** (M) 9.30
- **2. Ava Greenhut** (S) 9.05
- **3. Lia Graap** (M) 8.95
- **4. Nina Mori** (O) 8.70
- **5. Ava Greenhut** (S) 8.10
- **6. Lexi Castrataro** (M) 8.00
- **7. Alyssa Miller** (S) 8.00
- **8. Alexa Ditore** (S) 7.90
- **9. Kaitlyn Palange** (M) 7.80
- **10. Cecylia Haberling** (M) 7.60
- **11. Kaitlyn Palange** (M) 7.50
- **12. Alyssa Miller** (S) 7.40
- **13. Ava Greenhut** (S) 7.30
- **14. Nina Mori** (O) 7.20
- **15. Kaitlyn Palange** (M) 7.10
- **16. Lexi Castrataro** (M) 7.00
- **17. Ava Greenhut** (S) 6.90
- **18. Nina Mori** (O) 6.80

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By Ray Gallagher
Examiner Sports
Editor@Directrays

Might Carmel Reinstate Legendary Grid Coach Cayea?

High-Risk Sports Green-Lit by Cuomo, Student Athletes Await Local Decisions

All any professional ever wants to do is give an honest day’s work and, in the end, go out on their own, dignified terms. Twenty-five years tenured, after feeling slighted by the Carmel School District in the winter of 2020, rumor has it legendary football Coach Todd Cayea could (emphasis on could) soon be reinstated as the lead dog on the Rams’ sideline.

As usual, personnel decisions like this come with a two-sided gag order, so NO-BODY would confirm or deny the rumors until an official announcement, but where there’s smoke one can only assume there’s fire, or the egg will never come off my face. Living in town, I hear things I simply can’t ignore.

Forget the malarkey that went down in January of 2020, just two months after Cayea, can’t ignore.

One tight-knit, fun-loving district was suddenly and inexplicably down in the dumps, having been held indoors. As usual, personnel decisions like this can’t ignore.

When the torch to local health officials in the Section 1 counties of Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess and Rockland can’t get on board with high-ranking health department officials in the Section 1 counties of Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess and Rockland can’t get on the same page with school superintendents regarding the installation of NYSPHSAA sanctioned high-risk sports beginning Feb. 1. I mean, yeah, I CAN envision something going wrong, because so much has since COVID-19’s afflicting last March, but seriously, it’s time to push on, time to burst the bubble and #LetThemPlay.

I cannot imagine a scenario whereby high-ranking health department officials in the Section 1 counties of Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess and Rockland can’t get on the same page with school superintendents regarding the installation of NYSPHSAA-sanctioned high-risk sports beginning Feb. 1. I mean, yeah, I CAN envision something going wrong, because so much has since COVID-19’s afflicting last March, but seriously, it’s time to push on, time to burst the bubble and #LetThemPlay.

“Fingers crossed it isn’t a smoke screen,” said Barrett. “I’m optimistic that it will happen. I think we are ready for any protocols that are put in place and I think athletes are understanding and accepting of any protocols. I hope winter sports can go. My teams have been doing winter workouts safely, so I think they are ready to go.”

Since the day he took over last summer, Mahopac A.D. Stephen Luciani, the former Pelham High A.D., has been hamstrung by COVID-19 limitations, so he’s admittedly stoked for the return of all sports.

“Hopefully a good sign,” Luciana said. “I can’t wait.”

Tell your wives, tell your moms and dads...we’ll see you in June when all is said and done because it’s go-time, boys and girls. #Continue2Advocate because there are still many hoops to jump through.

Several other Section 1 A.D.s have expressed similar optimism, but understandings we haven’t cleared the final hurdle.

Even Mahopac’s Superintendent Mary-Margaret Zehr’s position could (emphasis on could) soon be reinstated as the lead dog on the Rams’ sideline.

However, local athletic directors backed Cuomo’s decision and hoped NYSPHSAA and their superiors would get on board.

Rumor has it former Carmel grid Coach Todd Cayea could be bringing the band back together in early Feb. for a spring tour.

Under serious pressure from a handful of NYS politicians, outspoken coaches, unanswered emails and phone calls from students, athletes, NYS. Gov. Andrew Cuomo finally relented last Friday and gave the go-ahead (passed the buck, actually) for high-risk sport to begin practicing on Feb. 1, thus opening the door for winter sports. “Phase 2” fall sports and spring sports.

Mahopac football Dominic DeMatteo has been on the front lines of this fight, advocating on behalf of student athletes across the state. Complacency is something he warned against and many in the know agree.

“It’s a major first step,” DeMatteo said. “I was speechless when I first heard it, but today I’m ready for ‘Phase 2’ (all sports) to begin. That said, there’s still much work to be done.”

Local athletic directors backed Cuomo’s decision and hoped NYSPHSAA and their superiors would get on board.

“I hope winter sports can go. My teams have been doing winter workouts safely, so I think they are ready to go.”

Since the day he took over last summer, Mahopac A.D. Stephen Luciani, the former Pelham High A.D., has been hamstrung by COVID-19 limitations, so he’s admittedly stoked for the return of all sports.

“This is what I’ve been waiting for,” Luciana said. “I can’t wait.”

Tell your wives, tell your moms and dads...we’ll see you in June when all is said and done because it’s go-time, boys and girls. #Continue2Advocate because there are still many hoops to jump through.

The most difficult part of running winter track outside during the pandemic is the uncertainty of knowing whether the weather will cooperate and allow practices to go forth, and whether we will be able to have the meets that we have scheduled,” White Plains Coach Fred Singleton said. “By far, the easier part is watching the athletes practice each day, knowing that they are pleased to be around their teammates and friends, doing what they love to do - run.”

White Plains junior Mia Priore won the 1500 meter walk in 8:06.08, which would have been a school record if the race had been held indoors.

White Plains captain Jade Palmer-Johnson won the long jump at 5-7 in recent meet against New Rochelle.
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