Draft Report on White Plains Police Reform Released

By Rick Pezzullo

The White Plains Police Reform Committee has released its draft report for public comment following a six-month review.

The 22-member committee, which included White Plains Police Chief Joseph Castelli and was chaired by NAACP White Plains/Greenburgh Branch Chairperson Janice Griffith, was formed in September 2020 after Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an Executive Order to all municipalities served by police.

The group of local leaders and residents was given the task of reviewing the needs of the White Plains community, evaluating the Police Department’s current policies and practices, and developing policy recommendations for the city’s Common Council to consider.

“It has been a great experience working with such a diverse group of community members,” Griffith said. “The dedication and commitment that was put into this work is commendable. I look forward to sharing with the community the results of our combined efforts.”

“I would like to thank the committee and its chair, Janice Griffith, for volunteering their time over the past six months on this important initiative,” said White Plains Mayor Tom Roach. “This committee of engaged community stakeholders has worked hard to come up with their recommendations.”

The report, which the public can comment on until Saturday, March 6 through email at: policereform@whiteplainsny.gov, contains more than 40 recommendations on such topics as training and equipment, community engagement, transparency and accountability, qualifications, recruitment and retention, and policies and procedures.

“The mandate for this committee was to look at ways to put sustainable mechanisms in place to build trust and reduce further harms to our communities,” Griffith stated in a letter in the report. “It is the goal of this committee to have the mayor, Common Council, and Police Department understand the need for them to be adopted and implemented, as well as the need for ongoing follow-up.”

One of the suggestions of the committee is to implement a Civilian Complaint Review Board which would be tasked with reviewing the internal investigative findings related to personnel complaints. Making improvements to the current personnel complaint process was also recommended.

In the area of transparency, the committee recommended data be published on the Police Department’s website relating to types of arrests, whether the arrest is police or civilian initiated, car stops and whether those stops result in summonses or warnings, and break down the data demographically.

In addition, the committee advocated for the creation of a statewide database/registry that tracks police misconduct and disciplinary records.

White Plains Launches COVID-19 Project to Help Seniors

By Rick Pezzullo

The City of White Plains has launched a COVID-19 Angels Volunteer Project to assist senior citizens with navigating the technology needed to obtain an appointment for getting the COVID-19 vaccination.

The City of White Plains Youth Bureau and Recreation & Parks Department will be managing the project and are asking for volunteers to assist them in making calls and securing vaccination appointments online for our senior citizens.

“Office has received many, many calls from seniors who have been unable to secure a vaccination appointment,” said Mayor Tom Roach. “The White Plains COVID Angels Project is designed to be a source of assistance to seniors who have limitations accessing vaccinations and to alleviate some of the stress that has become associated with navigating the vaccine process.”

A volunteer organization has been identified to assist with implementation of the project:

SEWA International (Westchester). SEWA International is active in 20 countries and has worked closely with other local disaster relief organizations throughout New York and USA. SEWA serves humanity irrespective of race, color, religion, gender or nationality. They specialize in disaster relief and rehabilitation. SEWA’s development programs focus on family services; child, tribal and refugee welfare; women empowerment; health; and education. In addition to their extensive work in the US, they have also undertaken development projects in Colombia, Guyana, India, Kenya, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Volunteers with various skill sets are welcome. Volunteers to team leaders and work on data collection as well as booking appointments online and making calls.

Acquiring appointments online can be done 24 hours a day which lends itself to flexibility for all who want to help. People can volunteer whatever time they may be available.

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Lawn Signs Help Spread St. Patrick’s Day Cheer in WP

By Rick Pezzullo

While the coronavirus pandemic has caused the cancellation of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade in White Plains for the second straight year, the spirit of the Irish is alive and well.

As a way of celebrating Irish heritage and honoring St. Patrick, a Parade Committee decided to sell lawn signs, and residents have been more than supportive.

In less than two weeks, Beth Okeefe Cleary, a member of the Committee, said more than 230 signs, which cost $25 apiece, have been sold.

“People are buying more than expected,” Cleary said. “The overwhelming response to the lawn sign initiative has shown the true Irish spirit of the people of White Plains. We were hoping that the signs would spread good cheer and good health, and we believe they are doing just that.”

The signs are visible not only through the neighborhoods of White Plains, but elsewhere, as Cleary said a lifelong resident of White Plains, who recently moved to Philadelphia, purchased one to display on her lawn, as did a resident of Connecticut.

Cleary noted committee members will also be encouraging local businesses to display signs in their storefronts.

“The Committee just wanted to highlight the Irish Americans in our community and everything they have done,” she said. “For two years, we didn’t want it to go unnoticed.”

All the proceeds from the sale of the signs, which cost the Committee about $10 each to make, will be designated to the cost of future parades. The parade, which are traditionally sponsored by the city, still run up a tab of thousands of dollars as the bands, marching groups, buggies and special guests that march down Mamaroneck Avenue receive a stipend to participate, and other expenses incur.

“We are looking forward to making the 2022 Parade bigger and better than ever!” said Cleary, who noted this year’s event would have been the 23rd annual parade. Lawn signs can be purchased on the parade website at www.whiteplainsstpatrickssday.com.
WP GOP Committee Seeks Candidates, Campaign Workers

The White Plains Republican City Committee is actively seeking candidates and campaign workers for the November election. The following positions for elected office will be on the ballot: County Executive; County Clerk; County Legislator for Districts 5 and 8; City of White Plains Mayor; and three seats on the Common Council of the City of White Plains.

“We strive to be the party of inclusion. We embrace the participation of all individuals who share our core beliefs of self-determination, limited government intrusion in our lives, lower taxes, and the creation of economic and social advancement for every member of our community,” Republican Chairman Brian Maloney stated.

“All are welcome to join us this election cycle as a candidate for office or as a member of our campaign organization. It does not matter who you are, what you look like, your level of education, your age, your current party affiliation, background, or your level of involvement in public life. The White Plains Republican Party is your party of opportunity and an alternative voice, and we welcome your participation,” he added.

The petition process begins on March 2 and ends on March 25.

Anyone interested in running for public office in November or volunteering is asked to send an email to: gopwhiteplains@gmail.com.

WP Launches COVID-19 Project to Help Seniors

continued from page 1

have to give. The planning process is well underway to give White Plains seniors assistance obtaining the protection they need to combat this aggressive virus.

For further information, contact 914-422-1378, or email at wpangels@whiteplainsny.gov.

Meanwhile, 750 Greenburgh senior citizens were vaccinated Saturday at the Theodore Young Community Center by Rite Aid.

First vaccinations began at 8:30 a.m. and the last seniors got their vaccinations at 8:30 p.m.

“A big thank you to our Greenburgh Covid Angels, the numerous volunteers, town staff of the Theodore Young Community Center, Union Baptist Church, Christ Temple and Rite Aid for organizing a very successful vaccination of 750 seniors at the Theodore Young Community Center,” said Greenburgh Supervisor Paul Feiner.

Metro-North Railroad Rolls Out WhatsApp Chat Feature

MTA Metro-North Railroad President Catherine Rinaldi has announced that Metro-North customers can now communicate with the railroad in real time using the popular messaging platform WhatsApp.

“It is important that our customers are able to communicate in real time and it’s what we’ve become accustomed to as a tech savvy society,” said Rinaldi. “We will continue to work on new ways to deliver excellent customer service as part of our Way Ahead Plan.”

Metro-North’s customer service representatives will receive messages from Metro-North customers via WhatsApp between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily and be able to reply in real time. Metro-North receives about 50,000 messages per year from social media channels. The announcement follows a similar one from Metro-North’s sister agency, MTA New York City Transit, which began using WhatsApp for customer communications last year.

Metro-North advises that WhatsApp is not for reporting emergencies. Customers who have an emergency or feel threatened should call 911. The best way to receive real-time service alerts, is to sign up for emails or text messages at mymtaalerts.com, or customers can also follow @MetroNorth on Twitter.

The WhatsApp messaging is being advertised now on Metro-North’s electronic signage and a link is available in the Metro-North section of the MTA’s “contact us” web page. Metro-North will also add a link to WhatsApp from the Metro-North TrainTime App.

The new messaging feature complements real-time information and train updates on arrival and departure boards throughout the system, including potential delays and track changes. In November, the railroad unveiled major new features to the Metro-North TrainTime app, including one that lets customers track in real-time the amount of space available on each car of an approaching train, designed to help customers keep appropriate social distance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Riders can also track the location of trains before and after arriving at their origin station.

Customers can chat with Metro-North by visiting Metro-North’s WhatsApp chat page.
State Looks to Open Additional Vaccination Sites for Seniors

By Anna Young

Seniors could soon have an easier time accessing COVID-19 vaccine appointments with facilities opening statewide specifically for those 65 and up.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that officials will partner with local health departments to open vaccination sites for seniors across the state. Certain facilities will also provide transportation assistance to New Yorkers and special support for paperwork regarding their vaccination.

Cuomo said the state will begin receiving an increased supply of the Moderna vaccine from the federal government starting this week to support this effort.

“We know that our senior New Yorkers are more at-risk with COVID, and it’s critical that we provide them with access to the vaccine right in their own communities, as well as the assistance they need to schedule and get to and from their appointments,” Cuomo said. “By working together with our local health departments to establish these sites, we will help ensure the process of receiving a vaccine is as simple as possible for our 65+ population and get closer to reaching our goal of social equity and fairness through vaccine distribution.”

It wasn’t immediately known if Westchester or Putnam counties will be home to any of these additional state-run facilities, but vaccine allocation will be increased at area pharmacies servicing the senior population, with pop-up clinics planned for distribution.

Westchester County currently has three vaccination facilities – one that is state-run and two that the county oversees. The County Center in White Plains opened on Jan. 13 as the area’s first state-run mass vaccination site, with the Department of Health clinic and Westchester County College also serving the eligible population.

Westchester County has directly administered 74,757 vaccines to eligible New Yorkers at the County Center. The clinic and WCC sites have inoculated 15,906 individuals.

Another mass distribution site will open this week in Yonkers, but it will only cater to Yonkers residents.

“There have been more vaccines available through the federal government than was true a month ago and we hope that number is going to continue to grow,” Westchester County Executive George Latimer said. “The signs are hopeful and it’s moving in the right direction, but we’re nowhere near out of this thing yet and we want to be measured and careful.”

Latimer called the roughly six-week diminution in COVID-19 data encouraging but is still cautious to label the activity a trend with a high number of infections still being recorded daily.

While the active cases, fatalities and hospitalizations are much lower compared to what they were during the holiday season, Latimer said that the county isn’t yet in the clear. He reminded folks that the area has seen cases decline significantly only for infections to ramp up.

“The number of fatalities, the number of hospitalizations and the number of total active cases have continued in the downward direction, good news, but it is a slow and steady reduction,” Latimer said. “It is not a dramatic reduction and we’re not at the point yet where we can any way assume that we are out of this.”

Cases of COVID-19 increased by 370 on Monday, bringing the total number of positives to 107,857 since the start of the pandemic. There are now 6,041 active cases, a roughly 500 decrease over last week.

The total test positivity rate is 4.39 percent, with 8,429 tests administered Saturday. Overall, more than two million COVID-19 tests have been dispensed in Westchester in nearly a year.

Four more deaths were reported on Monday, bringing the COVID-19-related death toll to 2,101. There were 47 virus deaths last week, with 425 since Jan. 1.

As of last Friday, there were 340 virus patients in Westchester hospitals, a significant decline compared to the start of February when hospitalizations neared 600.

“We are not in any jeopardy of our system being overtaxed with the downward slope in infection, all of which is good. We’re still at a stable point,” Latimer said.

Putnam County’s total caseload reached 8,369, with 20 additional positive cases recorded on Monday. The daily positivity rate is 3.78 percent, with 768 tests administered on Saturday. Active cases stood at 458.

There have been 86 coronavirus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic, state data shows, with 18 fatalities in 2021.

Statewide there were 6,235 new positive cases on Monday, with the daily positivity rate clocking in at 3.58 percent.

Eighty additional COVID-19-related fatalities have brought the death toll to 38,557.

Statewide hospitalizations stand at 5,307. Across New York there have been 1,636,680 positive coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic.
Pugh Heads Democratic Slate of Incumbents in Croton-on-Hudson

By Anna Young

Mayor Brian Pugh will seek a third term representing the Village of Croton-on-Hudson this November, as two incumbents look to continue their tenure on the Board of Trustees.

Pugh last week received the support of the Croton Democratic Committee and the Working Families Party, along with Trustees Sherry Horowitz and John Habib. Pugh, who was first elected in 2017, is a lifelong village resident who served on the Board of Trustees prior to his stint as mayor.

With the Nov. 2 election, Pugh said it’s imperative that officials continue to work together to overcome the current health crisis and move the village forward.

“Facing the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge few could have imagined, but working with our community, the Board of Trustees has helped see the village government through the challenge, conserving our village’s financial resources while ensuring that essential services are delivered,” Pugh said.

“Now we must work together to build back better by making the capital investments in equipment that our first responders need, completing infrastructure projects like Croton Point Avenue, expanding our tax base and creating new housing opportunities that are accessible at all income levels.”

Horowitz will vie for a third two-year term after being first elected to the board in 2017. The longtime resident is a small business owner in Croton, the founder of Childrenspace, a preschool education center that has provided care to youngsters for over 40 years.

If re-elected, Horowitz said she has a vision that combines the warmth and friendliness of a small town with the promise of a progressive and engaged community. She hopes to continue her pursuit in reducing the village’s carbon footprint, developing workforce and mixed-income housing, and finding opportunities to create a village that residents are proud to live in.

“At this time, when we are being encouraged to reimagine our institutions, I am excited about the unique opportunities we’ve been given to continue creating the village we want to see,” she said. “I am proud to continue pursuing a progressive agenda for the village I love and represent.”

Habib, who was elected to the board two years ago, owns a law firm in Westchester County and has managed other active firms across the nation and overseas throughout his 30-year career as an attorney. He is hoping to serve a second term, saying that it’s been an honor to have had the chance to assist in the development of his hometown.

“I’m particularly proud to contribute my previous experience managing chambers of commerce toward helping our local business community re launch the Croton Business Council,” Habib said. “I look forward to working collaboratively with the board and Croton’s businesses and residents to revitalize the local economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

It is unknown at this time if the Croton Republican Party will nominate challengers for the Nov. 2 election.

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**Harckham, Mayer Call for State to Increase Child Care Funding**

By Martin Wilbur

State senators Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro) and Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) vowed last week to fight for hundreds of millions of additional dollars to help fund child care centers, many of which have struggled through the pandemic.

 Joined by parents and advocates outside the Mount Kisco Child Center last Friday, the two legislators called on their colleagues and Gov. Andrew Cuomo to support a series of actions that would open up slots for additional children and pay the facilities a greater sum.

The most significant proposal would be a $485 million funding increase in the 2021-22 state budget. The proposed executive spending plan maintains child care funding at its existing level, which the senators described as inadequate. By boosting funding, it would create more openings for children, limit co-pays and revise eligibility requirements, allowing more parents to receive subsidies.

Harckham said without affordable and accessible child care for working families, the economy will not fully recover once the state fully emerges from the wrath of the pandemic.

“Child care is not only good for people that are working, it is an investment to keep our kids productive and contributing to the economy when they are absent because of illness or holidays,” Mayer said.

“The COVID crisis has forced us to go back to our donors two and three times for scholarship assistance,” Milbert said. “Working families should not have to rely on the generosity of their neighbors to make their child care affordable. That is the job of government.”

Harckham urged the governor and his legislative colleagues to follow through on the generosity of their neighbors to make child care affordable.

“Child care is in crisis and help has to come right away,” Halas said.

The additional money would allow for cost-of-living raises for staff, raise the fee level from 69 percent back to 75 percent of market rate where it had previously been set and pay providers for a portion of the days when children are absent because of illness or holidays.

State Sen. Peter Harckham, accompanied by state Sen. Shelley Mayer and child care advocates and parents, urge the state to sharply increase child care funding in the upcoming budget.

“Child care is in crisis and help has to come right away,” Halas said.

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“Child care is not only good for people that are working, it is an investment to keep our kids productive and contributing to the economy when they are absent because of illness or holidays,” Mayer said.

“Maybe this is the year where we’d be able to provide appropriate funding and it will become close to a reality,” said Mount Kisco Child Care Center Executive Director Dawn Mayerski.

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Westchester Sports Hall of Famer Charged With Possessing Child Porn

By Anna Young

Westchester Sports Hall of Fame inductee Richard Leaf could spend up to 30 years in prison after he was arrested last week for possessing videos and images containing child pornography.

Leaf, a 72-year-old Somers resident, who is also known as “The Voice of the Westchester County Center,” was charged in federal court in White Plains last Wednesday with one count of receiving child pornography, which carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison and a maximum sentence of 20 years, and one count of possessing child pornography.

That latter charge carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, according to the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.

“Richard Leaf is alleged to have engaged in deeply disturbing sexual communications with minors, and in being in possession of child pornography,” U.S. Attorney Audrey Strauss said. “Child pornography inflicts immeasurable damage upon innocent victims, and this Office and our FBI partners will continue to exhaustively detect, identify, and charge any individuals engaged in this sinister conduct.”

Between March 2019 and April 2020, Leaf posed as a teenager named Alex Bronson to communicate via Skype with a minor, who Leaf believed was 15 years old, officials said. During these conversations, the minor sent Leaf a video of himself masturbating in the shower and a fully nude photo of himself in the bedroom.

In addition, law enforcement officers uncovered almost a dozen images and videos containing child pornography on Leaf’s home computer.

Officials said that Leaf also created fictitious accounts on Chat Avenue, an online chatroom website, and Skype to communicate with minors. The username of some of Leaf’s fictitious accounts include alex bronson; 15; alex15; 15brandon; 914; 14; austinf19; williams.23; dan77771; 7; and Austin A.

“As our society continues to become more reliant on technology, more of our children are exposed to the most despicable predators — those searching out (the) young to sexually exploit them,” FBI Assistant Director William F. Sweeney Jr. said. “As we allege in this case, Mr. Leaf used Skype to chat with his victims, I'd like to stress to parents that although these contacts may occur in a virtual world, they harm your children in the real world.”

He added that predators inflict lasting damage to their victims, and both parents and guardians need to be aware of the dangers their children face.

Leaf had been the announcer for the Section 1 boys and girls basketball tournaments for nearly 40 years. He was also the announcer for Iona College men’s and women’s basketball, Scarsdale and Mamaroneck basketball and numerous tournaments.

In addition, he officiated youth soccer dating back to 1981 and had previously served as president of the Westchester-Putnam Approved Soccer Officials Association.

Strauss praised the efforts of the FBI and its Westchester County Safe Streets Task Force. She added that the investigation is ongoing.

The case is being handled by the office’s White Plains Division. Assistant United States Attorney Jennifer Ong is overseeing the prosecution.

If anyone has information to report or interacted or sent underaged photos or videos of a sexual nature to any of the above accounts, please contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation at 1-800-CALL-FBI.
State Senate Seeks to Put Clamps on Utilities With Proposed Bills

By Martin Wilbur

The state Senate passed a collection of legislation last week aimed at holding utilities and telecommunications companies accountable for failed storm-related response and restoration efforts.

Legislation introduced by Sen. Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) would eliminate the $100,000 cap on fines for each violation related to poor response on the part of the utilities and would mandate that telecommunications firms file an emergency response plan that must be approved by the Public Service Commission (PSC).

Two additional key provisions in Mayer’s bill removes the ability for utilities to argue that they “reasonably” complied with the law and to restructure the processes by which the PSC determines a penalty, including by instituting a list of factors that cause a utility violation. The list of factors includes the extent of storm preparation for which there was advance warning, including whether the company made sufficient use of mutual aid resources, whether a violation was recurring and the scope of damages caused by a violation.

Mayer is hopeful that by hitting utilities in the pocketbook, the shareholders will hold the companies and their leadership accountable.

“My bill really puts teeth into what they can do because getting rid of the cap and forcing them to have a hearing and look at all these factors, they’re going to have to impose fines, and stiff fines, and there’ll be consequences,” said Mayer, whose legislation was largely inspired by bitter complaints from constituents. “The shareholders, I think, when you remove the cap, will lean on the executives to do better.”

The bill was approved 43-20 strictly along party lines. Mayer said she was confident that the Assembly would pass the legislation as well.

However, her measure, to some extent, is competing against a proposal from Gov. Andrew Cuomo which threatens state takeover of utilities that fail to perform.

One of the challenges that Mayer faced was placing restrictions on telecommunications companies because they are largely regulated by the federal government. However, the state can require an emergency response plan be filed and approved by the PSC, similar to what is required of the power companies.

“I think my bill is a big step forward,” she said. “It took a lot of work to find a path.”

Last week, the Senate also approved a package of 10 bills in a wide-ranging piece of legislation. The bills concentrate on adding safety and regulation to protect consumers.

“Protecting the rights of utility customers is essential as the increasing number of severe storms continues to cause outages across the state,” said Sen. Peter Harckham (D-Lewisboro), who supports the bill.

“These bills will provide greater oversight and accountability, while also making utility companies financially liable to customers when laggard storm responses cause spoiled food and medicines.”

Key provisions include:

- Utility Moratorium. Extends the moratorium on utility shut-offs until Dec. 31 or when the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted or expires.
- Protecting Customers. Lobbying Costs. Protects utility customers from unknowingly paying for lobbying activity.
- Electricity Plan for Essential Medical Needs. Identifies the specific medical equipment that qualifies for essential electricity and additional utility outreach during outages.
- Utility Reimbursement. Provides consumers with a bill discount when a contracted service provider fails to provide service.
- Utility Consumer Advocacy in the Public Service Commission. Requires at least one PSC commissioner to have experience in advocating in the interests of utility consumers.
- Emergency Response Plan Requirement. Establishes the criteria for the Long Island Power Authority and its service provider’s emergency response plans, and subjects them to review, approval and enforcement by the PSC.
- Stronger Utility Storm Response. Removes restrictions on the PSC’s ability to penalize utility company violations and enhances oversight of utilities to ensure improved storm planning and response.
- Professional Engineer Approval Requirement. Requires a professional engineer to review and approve a gas infrastructure project to prevent public utility accidents from occurring in New York.
- Public Statements of Compensation. Requires large utility companies to publicly report the annual pay of their top employees.
- Reimbursement for Lost Food or Medicine. Provides a customer reimbursement for lost food or medicines due to an extended power outage.

State Sen. Shelley Mayer saw her bill approved last week in the Senate that seeks to hold utilities and telecommunications companies accountable for storm-related failures. Lawmakers also passed a wide-ranging package of bills aimed at improving service and response.

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Obituaries

Pow Wow Organizer Gil ‘Crying Hawk’ Tarbox Dies at 73

Gil “Crying Hawk” Tarbox, a driving force behind the popular Daniel Nimham Pow Wow in Putnam County which celebrated the Wappinger tribe that lived in the area, passed away recently. He was 73.

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said that Tarbox, a Kent resident, “put Putnam County on the map” with the annual Pow Wow and helped residents learn about the county’s history.

“We will all miss Gil. There is no replacing his enthusiasm, his spirit and his vast knowledge of the Native Americans who called our county home,” Odell said.

“The Pow Wow he helped create has grown into one of the biggest local events of the summer. It not only draws people from all over the country, it brings the past alive and gives the next generation a greater understanding of history.”

A member of the Nimham Mountain Singers, Tarbox helped establish the Intertribal Pow Wow that is held one weekend every August at the Putnam County Veterans Memorial Park. With singing, dancing, drumming and storytelling, the Pow Wow helps educate young people about the 8,000 Wappinger Indians who lived in this area and their last chief, Daniel Osborne’s “On the Wings of Love.”

George Vargulick

George Vargulick, a retired elementary school teacher, died peacefully on Feb. 17 at home with his family by his side. He was 93.

Vargulick was born Dec. 25, 1927, in Fort Pierce, Fla. In the Army in 1945, he served overseas in the Pacific theater as a surgical technician. Later, he graduated from Iona College with a teaching degree and went on to have a fulfilling career as a teacher at Van Cortlandt Elementary School, where he taught for 29 years. He was also assistant scout master for Boy Scout Troop 45. For many years he was an active member of the Saints Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church in Peekskill, as well as the Van Cortlandville Historical Society and the Peekskill Volunteer Ambulance Corps.

Danielle M. Coletta

Danielle Marie Coletta, a sixth-grade English teacher at Mildred E. Strang Middle School in Yorktown, died unexpectedly on Feb. 22 with her family holding her hands. She was 48.

Coletta was born Jan. 11, 1973. She attended George Washington Elementary School in Mohegan Lake, Copper Beech Middle School and Walter Panas High School in Cortlandt. She graduated from Pace University in Pleasantville with a bachelor’s degree in education and Western Connecticut University where she received a master’s degree in education.

She will be remembered for her devotion to the teaching profession. Her career began at Columbus Elementary School in Hawthorne, Charles and their children Janna, Kaelie and Madison Di Vico, Lianne and husband Edward Navedo and Jaclyn, her husband, Dustin and children Cameron and Carter Lucas; and by many loving cousins and friends.

Coletta is survived by her parents, Susann and Joseph Coletta; her brother, John, his wife, Jill and their children Aidan, Ethan and Jack Coletta; her three sisters, Kristin, her husband, Charles and their children Janna, Kaelie and Madison Di Vico, Lianne and husband Edward Navedo and Jaclyn, her husband, Dustin and children Cameron and Carter Lucas; and by many loving cousins and friends.
No. Castle Ready to Bond for Accelerated Road Repaving Program

By Martin Wilbur

North Castle officials are planning to accelerate the final 24 miles of paving of town roads by drawing on most of a $10 million bond authorization that was approved last spring.

Town Administrator Kevin Hay last week recommended to the Town Board that it borrow $9 million to repave the remaining roads that have not been done since the town began the accelerated program about seven or eight years ago.

The paving would cost an estimated $7.5 million to $8 million with the likelihood of some drainage improvements and crack sealing needed in certain locations that would account for the balance of the expenditure, Hay said.

After consulting with Highway Foreman Jamie Norris, Hay explained that the work would take two or three years depending on the contractor and would also include drainage work where necessary. The paving should help to maintain the roadways’ infrastructure during the time frame, he said.

“We feel at this point, with our financial numbers and our revenue numbers looking pretty good, COVID not significantly affecting as we were concerned of when we first authorized this, we recommend moving forward with the program,” Hay responded that the town could dedicate a portion of any surplus each year toward the paving line. However, with North Castle having done drainage work where needed while completing the paving, there should be less maintenance and fewer problems.

“The roads are lasting longer because we did drainage and we’re already paying attention to the crack sealing and maintenance,” Schiliro said. “We should get more years out of some roads.”

Board members were agreeable to moving forward with the program.

“I think it’s a great project, I think it’s a great idea,” said Councilman Barry Reiter. “I’ve always said that (with) quality of life, roads are key.”

Councilwoman Barbara DiGiacinto said when discussing various municipal issues with the Association of Towns recently, the issue of low borrowing rates was repeatedly raised by local officials from around the state.

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Councilwoman Barbara DiGiacinto said when discussing various municipal issues with the Association of Towns recently, the issue of low borrowing rates was repeatedly raised by local officials from around the state. The general advice was to go ahead with projects if feasible.

“It was make a list of your capital improvements you’ve been putting off and do it because the bond rates are so favorable,” DiGiacinto said. “So, obviously, I support this idea and we’ve already acted on it.”

Prior to the town’s aggressive repaving, its Pavement Condition Index averaged in the low to mid 60s. Today it’s above 80, which is considered excellent for the Northeast, Schiliro said.
Letters to the Editor

Lakeland Has Worked Hard to Return to In-Person Learning Next Month

As district superintendent, I believe the best place for students to learn is in our classrooms. It is important for their academic success as well as their social and emotional growth. I wholeheartedly share the goal of wanting to bring our students back to school as much as possible, but we must do it safely.

I am writing with some hopeful news as we work toward increasing in-person learning to the greatest extent possible while keeping our schools safe for students and staff by employing best practices to mitigate the coronavirus.

I will present the Board of Education with a series of considerations for increasing in-person learning for all of our students. These considerations, developed with our district physician, call for giving students the choice to attend school in-person four days a week, with Wednesdays continuing as our flex day. Students would still have the choice to learn fully remote at home as well.

For the four-day-a-week, in-person option to be possible, the district seeks to meet two metrics. Using the seven-day rolling average for Westchester County, the coronavirus positivity rate must remain below 5 percent, and the district is targeting 70 percent or more of its faculty and staff to be fully vaccinated. Our goal to begin the four-day-a-week, in-person option is Apr. 6.

When our district physician, Dr. Louis Corsaro, certifies that the metrics have been met, all students could attend school four days a week. The district will reconfigure classrooms to provide three feet of space between desks and each desk will have a three-sided plastic barrier, a protocol permitted by the New York State Department of Health. In addition, every pre-K-12 classroom will have an air purifier.

Next week, the district will begin its on-site COVID-19 testing program, which is voluntary for students and staff and will help keep our schools safe as more students attend.

The logistics of bringing students in more frequently are complex and present challenges that will require flexibility from our families, students, faculty and staff.

Letter Writer Made it Difficult to Determine if MTA Projects Are Needed

In response to Larry Penner’s letter to the editor last week (“Something isn’t Adding Up With the MTA’s Cost for Two Key Projects”), the author knows transit. Not everyone else does. It would be nice if the author kept this in mind when he writes his opinion pieces.

The author discusses a proposed MTA project to work on the Park Avenue viaduct. He mentions work done on the viaduct from 1985 to 1989. The author asks, “What was the anticipated useful life? Did Metro-North adequately fund and follow the maintenance plan for this asset so it would reach its useful life? Does this new project duplicate previous work?”

It would be nice if the author provided even a rudimentary set of details. I am not a civil engineer or a transit expert, but common sense has me asking several questions. What is the normal useful life for a project such as this? Pre-COVID this viaduct was extremely busy with Metro-North traffic every day. What effect does 22 years of having trains rumble over the viaduct about 20 hours a day have on the viaduct and its structural integrity? What type of maintenance is required? What type of maintenance is helpful but not required? Did the MTA provide any of this maintenance?

When and if the author chooses to provide details is when I can conclude how necessary this project is.

Nat Weiner
Bronx, N.Y.

Proposed Accessory Apartment Bill is Overreach From Albany at its Worst

Re: Senate Bill S4547, Regulation of Accessory Dwelling Units.

In my opinion, this proposed piece of legislation is just another example of big government’s reprehensible overreach to further micromanage even more aspects of our lives. Each individual locality in our state has its own unique characteristics, which are currently and properly addressed by our local elected representatives. We do not need or desire interference by politicians, who do not represent North Castle residents, who attempt to impose their own political agendas on our town.

Uncontested Elections Are a Danger to Our Democracy

I have lived in Yorktown for over 30 years and have witnessed and been part of many local elections. Too often I have observed uncontested elections. It is the responsibility of party officials and their district leaders to insure there are prospective candidates for all offices. The people should decide who our officeholders are, not a handful of party leaders and backroom influencers.

This requires commitment by party officials and leadership. A concerted and pre-planned effort should be made to identify qualified candidates – capable of both visionary and strategic thinking who have proven operational experience. As election season approaches, grooming, preparing, testing and encouraging candidates should be a sustained focus.

Uncontested elections are a danger to our town and society. They project the appearance of impropriety, discourage voting, result in disengaged constituents due to lack of choice and too often, poor governance results.

I urge the leaders and committee members of our major parties to seek qualified candidates for this coming election and all future elections. You are responsible for and obligated to seek candidates for all open positions to ensure that a fair, open, honest and democratic election be held for town supervisor, town justice and highway superintendent.

Bob Giordano
Yorktown Heights

If COVID-19 conditions change and the district is no longer meeting the metrics, there may be a need to return to the hybrid model.

I am looking forward to presenting this positive development in our planning with the Board of Education and the community.

There is nothing I would like more than for a complete return to normalcy and for our schools to fully reopen to in-person learning. As we continue to contend with the pandemic, this path forward represents our best option under the current conditions. I am hopeful that we will see students four days a week at our schools after spring recess. In the meantime, I ask for the community’s patience and support in continuing to stay safe as we fight the virus together.

Be well and stay safe.

Brendan Lyons, Ed. D
Superintendent, Lakeland Central School District

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Guest Column

For Schools Struggling to Offer In-Person Classes, the Answer Lies Outdoors

By Michael Peppard

“Can we please have class outside today?”

Remember that timeless question? Students gazed out the window, longing for fresh air and bodily movement.

But kids knew the answer before they even asked. No, we have to use the board. We need too many materials. Looks like rain.

But once the ground thaws this year, we should respond with an emphatic Yes. School should be outside, five days a week, for as many classes as we can, for as long as we can. Instead of worrying about how to get kids back in school, let’s bring school outside to the kids.

Do it for public health. Do it for the economy. But most of all, do it for them.

The public health rationale for outdoor school is obvious. Evidence shows a vast difference in rate of transmission for the coronavirus when comparing indoor and outdoor environments. One Japanese study estimated the risk of transmission to be 18 times higher indoors. A large database of cases from China found a similar ratio.

And our county and local health officials have confirmed that transmission is happening primarily in private indoor gatherings. Add in the increased vaccination rates for teachers this month, and we can have five days per week of school starting in April.

The economic effects of the pandemic have already been overwhelming. Previously flourishing industries that rely on social gathering have been reduced to ripples of debt. Crucial to any substantial economic recovery is the return of a full, predictable school week. We parents cannot plan our work around a partial school schedule, especially if we have multiple kids on different schedules. Let’s also not forget that many teachers are themselves parents of school-age children and can’t do their jobs well under current conditions.

The toll on mental health for parents and children is impossible to quantify. Thrust into a crisis, parents rose to the challenge of being full-time teachers, alongside our regular roles as employees or employers. We set up workspaces for our kids and ourselves in closets, garages, even bathrooms. We taught long division or Civil War history amid conference calls and emergency loan applications and infinite interruptions from children being children. But we could not convert our sprint into a marathon. Parents have reached a logistical and emotional breaking point.

Kids need a predictable return to school even more than parents do. Many have become sullen and detached, barely getting out of bed. Tweens and teens need their friend groups for healthy psychological development. Younger children need socialization and play with peers to learn basic life skills. Some of the youngest ones literally can’t remember their lives before they wore masks.

Kids’ emergency room visits related to mental health are up 25 to 30 percent compared to before the pandemic.

Teachers and administrators know all this, which is why they are working so hard to reopen more days per week. But the simplest solution for reopening school seems not to be getting enough consideration: don’t focus just on the school building, but the property around the building.

Instead of spending on Plexiglass dividers and cleaning supplies, communities could be buying tents for rain and shade. Instead of figuring out how to space desks six feet apart, schools could be buying clipboards and small whiteboards in bulk. Teachers who rely on technology to teach lessons can harness the power of the devices that students often carry with them; and for schools that have gone to one-to-one technology, this plan becomes even easier.

Better yet, drop the tech altogether and start the kids’ necessary detox. Picture circles of students with whiteboards, clipboards, books and tactile learning aids. The morning could be dedicated to languages, math and social studies. Afternoon could be more active, with math and science experiments, music or drama. Programs such as Out Teach and Timbernook have hundreds of ideas at the ready.

What about weather? Outdoor school in April will require pavilion tents and flexibility, but no more flexibility than we’ve already been managing. May, June, September and October are the best months of the year for weather. And the tents are a bargain compared to the collective cost of sitters, lost wages and economic depression. What parent would not donate the equivalent of one day’s payment to a sitter instead toward a pavilion tent fund that would allow 50 more days of in-person school? Towns and villages can re-use their school tents for summer day camps, too.

To be sure, there would be challenges of logistics and pedagogy. But consider those it would eliminate: sanitizing every classroom every day, kids moving through hallways while maintaining social distance, glitchy internet, endless screen time. A few essential indoor spaces could be retained, such as science labs and special education clusters.

Even if only partially possible, the outdoors should be a foundation of any reopening plan. Working together, our communities can do this. Our kids need us to.

“So can we pretty please have class outside today?” The timeless question has never been more timely. This time, the kids are right.

Michael Peppard is a professor at Fordham University, a former high school teacher and a candidate running unopposed for village trustee in Pleasantville later this month.

Looking Forward to This Year’s Campaign and Engaging With Voters

With the November presidential election still in our rearview mirrors, it is difficult to believe that the 2021 campaign process is already well underway.

Local political parties have met, interviewed and selected their candidates. Petitioning, the process whereby candidates must collect signatures to be on the ballot, begins Mar. 2 and ends Mar. 22. Hence, it is already time that voters become engaged, learning about the candidates and issues.

“Petitioning is the heart of the campaign process,” said Robert Shatzkin (for a second term as town clerk); Debbie Carter (a Town Board member running for Receiver of Taxes); and Kimberly Ragazzo (seeking a second term as town judge). In addition to being the endorsed candidates for the Democratic Party, we are also honored to have the endorsement of the Working Families Party.

My background can be summarized as follows: Although born and raised in Croton-on-Hudson, I have lived my entire adult life in Westchester. I have practiced as a cardiologist, first at Hudson Valley Hospital, where I was honored to serve as president of the medical staff and as chairman of the Medical Board. Becoming more involved in administration, I established both the inpatient medical service (Hospitalist Group) as well as the outpatient Westchester Medical Practice.

In 2014, I was recruited to Phelps Memorial Hospital, where I served as vice president of physician services and as chief of the Cardiology Division. I established an outpatient office-based medical group with 15 locations, from Dobbs Ferry to Croton-on-Hudson. With over 100 physicians and providers, and hundreds more professional staff, I was able to hone my management skills and style. Throughout all these endeavors, I have continued to practice cardiology, now in the multispecialty office I established in Croton-on-Hudson, adjacent to ShopRite.

I have always been an active participant in our Cortlandt community. As president of my local homeowners group, I was instrumental in preserving a large parcel for open space. Subsequently, I served on the town’s Zoning Board of Appeals. In 2007, I was elected to my current position of councilman. Recently, Supervisor Linda Puglisi appointed me to serve as her deputy supervisor, enabling me to prepare for the role of town supervisor.

On a personal note, I met my wife, Terry, the summer before college. We have two wonderful adult children who were raised here in Cortlandt and attended Hendrick Hudson schools.

We cherish this community, feeling blessed to live our lives here, and to have the ability to pay forward these blessings. You will be hearing from my Cortlandt colleagues in the coming weeks, and I look forward to engaging with many of you during this campaign.

Dr. Richard H. Becker is deputy supervisor in the Town of Cortlandt and a candidate for town supervisor.

SMALL NEWS IS BIG NEWS
Developer, ArtsWestchester Partner on White Plains Sculpture

One of Westchester’s most prominent business addresses, 50 Main St. in White Plains, will soon be home to a monumental sculpture to be installed under the arches of the 15-story office tower owned and managed by Ginsburg Development Companies.

Titled “Fragments of Something Bigger,” the sculpture will measure 17.7 feet in height and be made of polished stainless steel, which was selected for its ability to reflect light. The sculpture, which is currently being fabricated, will be set on a pedestal and surrounded by seating, also made from polished stainless steel. Installation is scheduled for this spring.

The sculpture is the work of Bulgarian sculptor Georgi Minchev, who was selected for its ability to reflect light. The sculpture, which is currently being fabricated, will be set on a pedestal and surrounded by seating, also made from polished stainless steel. Installation is scheduled for this spring.

The sculpture is the work of Bulgarian sculptor Georgi Minchev, who was selected through a competitive, international, open call process managed by ArtsWestchester. Artists were invited to submit proposals for the site.

Ginsburg Development and ArtsWestchester received submissions from 36 highly qualified sculptors. Three artists were designated as finalists and awarded an honorarium. Each finalist produced a scaled model of their proposal. In addition to Minchev, the other two finalists were David Provan of Cold Spring and Piero Manrique of Mamaroneck.

We are delighted to partner with ArtsWestchester in bringing exciting public artwork to our development in downtown White Plains,” said Ginsburg Development Principal Martin Ginsburg. “This remarkable sculpture is yet another example of our ongoing commitment to showcasing world-class artwork at our commercial and residential developments.”

Last year, Ginsburg Development and ArtsWestchester unveiled the work of nine artists from the greater Westchester area as part of the company’s investment in its art collection for 50 Main St. The unveiling was part of a grand opening of the first phase of Ginsburg’s reinvention of its office building, which includes a new mezzanine amenity level.

A key feature of the new common space is a contemporary art collection curated by ArtsWestchester that features numerous Hudson Valley artists.

“ArtsWestchester applauds Martin Ginsburg for his appreciation of the important role that public art plays in creating vibrant environments that energize and inspire the places where we live and work,” said ArtsWestchester CEO Janet Langsam. “Our vision for White Plains is an exciting urban center where significant works of contemporary art punctuate the landscape and the built environment.”

Located at the gateway to downtown White Plains, 50 Main St. is a key component of Ginsburg Development’s transformation of the former Westchester Financial Center into City Square, a new mixed-use center.

In addition to the modernization of 50 Main St., the project includes the transformation of the 1 Martine Ave. office building into 188 luxury rental apartments, new restaurant and retail space along Main Street and the creation of City Square Park, a private open space on the roof deck of the parking garage that connects all buildings and features fountains, waterfalls, walking paths, a putting green and outdoor dining on beautifully landscaped one-acre space. The focus on artwork will be carried throughout the entire project.

Ginsburg Development is nearing completion of the newly-renovated and redesigned lobby, which will feature the same level of high-end finishes and artwork as the amenity mezzanine.

City Square Park has been completed and the luxury apartments at 1 Martine will be opening this spring.

An artist’s rendering of the sculpture to be installed at 50 Main St.

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New Bike Jumping Trails to Open This Spring at Graham Hills Park

By Martin Wilbur

Local mountain biking enthusiasts will have three new trails to choose from this spring at Graham Hills Park in Mount Pleasant to test their riding and jumping skills.

Westchester County, which owns the park, announced last Wednesday that materials are being shipped to construct the trails near the lot on Route 117 across the street from Pace University. County officials worked with a committee of local riders and biking advocates to develop a course after an unauthorized set of jumps was discovered last spring in a forested area about a five-minute walk through the woods from the Saw Mill Parkway intersection with Marble Avenue.

“The mountain bike community at Graham Hills is passionate about their sport,” said County Executive George Latimer. “When we learned they were interested in developing the skills area, we were happy to work with them to develop their ideas and move the project forward.”

The county Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation identified the location for the new trails next to the existing trail and parking lot entrance. Personnel from county parks worked with Jim Dellavalle Designs and the Graham Hills Skills Park Committee to design the trails using proper techniques.

Bob Dillon, a local biker and coach of the Pleasantville mountain bike team that competes in the National Interscholastic Cycling Association, said the collaboration between the county and the committee generated buy-in from the bikers. “I haven’t heard any reservations from the cycling community that participated in the build of the other area,” Dillon said. “I’ve heard nothing but good things. Everyone just feels very positive that this is going to be as good or better and it’s in a safer location.”

The illicitly-constructed course discovered last year was built in an environmentally sensitive area of the park and presented a danger to riders. In a report to the county last summer, Dellavalle stated that the trails crisscrossed and riders traveled at fast speeds. Lack of signage, which didn’t inform riders of the difficulty of the course, and encroachment into a wetland preservation area that is prone to runoff, posed additional problems, he said.

It is expected that the unauthorized trails will be dismantled.

Dillon said because the new trails will be professionally designed it should have greater longevity and require less maintenance. Since the previous trail was used by many youngsters, Dillon also mentioned that crossing the Saw Mill Parkway posed a danger. The Route 117 parking lot will make the trails much more accessible, he said.

“We are so grateful to the county for giving a green light to this project, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Graham Hills Skill Park Committee member Jaymeson Leo said. “Moving forward it will be a valuable addition to the park and community.”

The project is funded primarily by donations of materials and work completed by volunteers, said Peter Tartaglia, the first deputy commissioner at Westchester County Parks. Consultant costs is between $5,000 and $8,000, he said.

County Legislator Margaret Cunzio said since last spring there had numerous meetings and calls among county officials and the community to ensure the project a reality. “There was give and take on every side but I’m very, very happy that we were able to come to an agreement, and not only come to an agreement, but clearly things are progressing and moving forward and we want to make sure we get this done,” Cunzio said.

Volunteers from the Westchester Parks Foundation have placed much of the construction material at the new location. The material was donated by Thalle Industries, R. Pugni and Sons, Ad Tec and Mandy Santucci.

Construction will resume when the snow melts and the ground is firmer. The new trails are on track to open sometime this spring.
Indian Point will shut down by April 2021, and federal law allows for up to 60 years for it to be dismantled and removed.

But we don’t have to wait that long.

There’s a smarter plan for Indian Point currently under review. It calls for major work to be completed in just 12-15 years.

The plan will provide hundreds of local jobs. It means opportunity for redevelopment of the land decades sooner. And it results in predictable tax revenue for local schools and governments.

Indian Point will close soon after operating for nearly 60 years. We don’t have to wait another 60 years for it to be dismantled.

Learn about the smarter plan at indianpointdecommissioning.com

The illustration above is an artist’s depiction of the Indian Point property after the completion of major decommissioning work.
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WHITE PLAINS
CONTINUUM57
WESTCHESTER MAGAZINE
Officials Send Message on Importance of Vaccination at Pop-Up Site

By Martin Wilbur

Getting the public vaccinated against COVID-19 has been a struggle for public officials and the millions of Americans who want to protect themselves against a virus that has killed more than 500,000 people in the United States.

Last Saturday, Northern Westchester Hospital and the Village of Mount Kisco made it a lot easier for 200 local residents to receive their first dose.

The two entities, along with Neighbors Link and Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s office, partnered to operate a pop-up vaccination site at the Fox Senior Center. The precious first doses were reserved for the community’s underserved and hard to reach populations who are currently eligible to receive the vaccine, including many seniors who don’t have the ability to travel far, have limited resources or are from the village’s sizeable immigrant population.

“Here in Mount Kisco, unlike a lot of surrounding communities, we have a good amount of subsidized housing, so these are truly folks that are traditionally underserved,” said the village’s Mayor Gina Picinich. “So it’s essential that we get to these folks. They couldn’t get to the County Center. They don’t have a computer to make an appointment. So this is tremendous.”

Picinich said she had learned of a pop-up vaccination site in Port Chester a few weeks earlier and called the governor’s office to inquire about holding a similar event in Mount Kisco. At about the same time, she was told that Carola Bracco, the executive director of Neighbors Link, the organization that does outreach with the region’s immigrant community, was looking to do the same.

Aside from administering the first dose to 200 local residents, Bracco said the event was important to convince people that the vaccine is safe. She urged anyone whose turn comes up and has the opportunity to receive the vaccine should get it.

“The vaccine is safe, it doesn’t give you COVID, it doesn’t have a chip in it and that it is safe for people to get,” Bracco said. “We think it’s the best way to protect people from getting extremely sick from COVID.”

To help drive that message home, New York’s Secretary of State, Rossana Rosado, a White Plains resident, received her first dose last Saturday at the pop-up site. Her message was similar: If you have the chance to get the vaccine don’t hesitate.

After waiting the mandatory 15 to 20 minutes following the vaccine and with no ill effects, she explained why it was important for her to take it publicly.

“I’m a private person and a chicken but I’ve come out of my comfort zone because I think it’s important to set the example for folks,” Rosado said.

“I think getting the vaccine in a very public way is a way to walk the walk and say I would never ask you to do something I’m not doing,” she added.

A member of the state’s Vaccine Equity Task Force, Rosado said there are many factors why many people are afraid of taking the shot. However, reaching the minimum 70 percent vaccination that public health officials say is necessary for herd immunity is critical in order to put the pandemic behind us.

Bracco mentioned that as many as 40 percent of health care workers are also hesitant to sign up, so it will take plenty of work to convince enough of the population to get the vaccine.

Saturday’s vaccination event was the latest effort by Northern Westchester Hospital and Northwell Health to reach underserved members of the public throughout the New York metropolitan area, said Derek Anderson, the hospital’s executive director. Northwell operated 20 different mission-based locations throughout Long Island, New York City and Westchester last Saturday.

Northern Westchester has been servicing a community vaccination POD the past two months, and when there’s an extra dose, looks to equitably distribute to those in the eligible categories, he said.

“We’ve been able to get firefighters, homeless shelters participants, which really has been fantastic,” he said.

Picinich said the faster the village can vaccinate its residents, particularly the seniors, the faster Mount Kisco can reopen the senior center, which has been closed for nearly a year.

“Getting seniors vaccinated means that we get closer to opening this center and this is essential for mental health, physical well-being,” Picinich said. “It goes beyond the disease.”

Those who received their shot on Saturday will return on Mar 20 for their second dose.

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine and who is eligible, visit https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/covid-19-vaccine-tracker.

Seniors wait their turn last Saturday to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at the Fox Senior Center.
P’ville Looking to Expand In-Class Instruction This Spring

By Lindsay Emery

The Pleasantville School District is planning to expand in-person learning for grades K-6 after spring break two weeks after parents of primary grade-level students appealed to district officials that more time was needed in the classroom. Superintendent Mary Fox-Alter emphasized that a reduced regional infection rate and desk shields will be imperative for the return of students to school.

“With the use of desk shields, we can certainly expand in-person instruction for grades K through six with a minimal adjustment below six feet,” Fox-Alter said.

A timeline for the return of students in grades 7-12 will be more difficult to predict because of their increasingly individualized schedules and older buildings with smaller spaces.

The District Reopening Committee will be considering the introduction of desk shields and other barriers when six feet of social distancing cannot be maintained. Problems such as specific desk shields with Velcro for sled desks are being examined for the high school. Students carrying their own desk shield from class to class is also being weighed, along with other issues that must be resolved before the return to in-person learning.

School officials are also planning three town halls this month to inform the community about the increase of in-person learning. The tentative dates for the forums are Mar. 11 for Bedford Road School and Mar. 16 for Pleasantville Middle School. The date for Pleasantville High School’s town hall had yet to be determined last week but will be held before Mar. 26.

A recent survey that attracted 847 responses from community members, saw 668 parents intending to send their students to school for in-person instruction five days a week. Another 101 responded that they were uncertain about sending their children to school while 78 said they would not return their students at all. Most of the survey respondents are parents of students who attend the K-4 Bedford Road School. Parents will continue to have the option to continue full remote learning.

Superintendent Search

Last week, the Board of Education approved a contract with Dr. Michael Kuchar and Dr. Frank Auriemma from the search firm Strategic Educational Advantage to help conduct the district’s superintendent search.

Kuchar explained the community will help develop a profile of a candidate that will ensure the best fit by creating a district survey for people to complete.

Focus groups comprised of parents, community members and school district groups will be asked the key question about the characteristics they would like to see in the next administrator to lead the district in order to create a candidate profile, he said. The profile will drive the consultants’ screening process, as well as direct the board with their interview questions.

Kuchar and Auriemma aim to have the survey available by this week. Fox-Alter announced in January that she will be retiring at the end of the calendar year.

The board also approved the retirement of beloved members of the school community, including Director of Athletics John Bauerlein. Bauerlein served the district in that capacity for 12 years.

“You know, when things gel, they go well, so I’m really happy and thank you guys for all the excitement and the moments that this community has provided for me,” he said. “It’s been a wonderful run.”

In addition to his duties as athletic director, Bauerlein also assumed the role of COVID-19 coordinator for the district, which included monitoring in-person learning attendance and contact tracing. The board and Fox-Alter wished him the best and emphasized the impact that Bauerlein has left on Pleasantville.

“So, John, it’s bittersweet but we congratulate you on your retirement and thank you for your service to our kids, to your coaches, to your parents and just for constantly cheering on our Panthers,” Fox-Alter said.

A Brighter Day

Marla Beth Enowitz, artist and founder of Marla Beth Designs, recently donated 90 of her XO, Marla Beth love-themed canvases to staff and patients at Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital for Valentine’s Day. The hospital’s Child Life and Creative Arts Therapy program helps children and their families understand and adjust to illness and hospitalization. Enowitz’s designs, described as whimsical and sophisticated, are featured in some of the most beautiful homes and businesses throughout the region. A curated selection of mini-works from the limited series is available at www.marlabethdesigns.com.

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Making the Home Suitable for Quarantine

More than 15 years ago, I wrote a Home Guru article about the trend futurist Faith Popcorn (obviously a pseudonym) who coined the expression cocooning, or the trend of people preferring to stay more at home.

At the time, as a public relations practitioner, I was engaged in a project with her, but personally was very much doubting her projections, at least for myself. What, me? Stay at home? Never.

But today most of us, including me, are now doing exactly that, and it’s not by choice; it’s by demand.

As a former frequent restaurant-goer, it is the dining out that I have missed most. But just the simpler pleasures of being able to entertain a big family. He heights into an enlarged colonial designed for enjoyment for the family. A walk-out lower level that would suggest more options to stay on our own block, as well as in our own homes. They are planned around the topography so that each can have their own space, enjoying their favorite recent film, “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,” on my large screen TV as I lounge in my pajamas in my living room, intermittently watching TCM on my large screen TV and, with any leftover brain space, enjoying my favorite recent film, “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,” on my iPad, while periodically checking for e-mails and voicemails on my iPhone. Case closed.

With a punch-out addition in back that is 30 feet deep, they were able to combine their first level’s original living room, dining mom and kitchen into one open space for entertainment with an equally large kitchen/dining room in the new addition, ample enough to seat 25.

On the lower level is a party room that includes two large screen TVs, one at each end of the room “specifically designed for Super Bowl Sunday,” they say, “where everyone in the large space can see the game.” There’s also a pool table, an octagonal gaming table, a darts table, two generous seating areas and a full-service bar. Why leave home to have fun? It makes good sense in a COVID-19 world.

In answer to any argument that quarantine and spending less outside the home will stall the nation’s economy, just consider all the new technology, accessories and furnishings we are utilizing to turn our homes into work and family entertainment hubs.

While writing this column on my new iMac laptop, I’m lounging in my pajamas in a comfortable easy chair in my living room, intermittently watching TCM on my large screen TV and, with any leftover brain space, enjoying my favorite recent film, “Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,” on my iPad, while periodically checking for e-mails and voicemails on my iPhone. Case closed.

Bill Primavera, while a writer and public relations practitioner, is also a realtor associated with William Raveis Real Estate. To engage the talents and services of The Home Guru to market your home for sale, call 914-522-2076.
Chorale Provides Creative Outlet, Instruction for Children Singers

By Lindsay Emery

The Putnam Chorale is forming the county’s first youth chorus for children eight to 12 years old, beginning hour-long online instruction this Wednesday afternoon.

Musical Director Jessica Zamek is excited about the prospect of guiding children of that age now and once the pandemic ends.

“For middle schoolers and high schoolers, they have their musicals, they have select choirs, but for this age group, eight to 12, we wanted to offer something that isn’t offered a lot for that age group — really consistent musical instruction and quality pieces and an opportunity to be with those students who are also interested in that,” Zamek said.

The first practice will focus on meeting one another and finding out how much musical aptitude students have, such as whether they can match pitch. It is not an audition, Zamek said, but rather a gauge as to what needs to be taught. It is hoped that they attract children from throughout Putnam and northern Westchester.

During the first month of rehearsals, the students will practice vocalizing, warming up and beginning the process of learning how to have healthy vocal techniques. Zamek plans to introduce the children to a broad variety of pieces and a wide breadth of lyrics. She also wants to teach the students a piece in a foreign language as soon as they commence practices.

In addition to the weekly chorus gatherings, two voice lessons with Zamek are included in each semester’s package. Zamek has been teaching voice lessons for about 20 years and completed her undergraduate degree in vocal performance and graduate degree in opera performance. She currently provides private voice lessons to children at Rye Country Day School and is familiar with online teaching.

“I definitely want to see my students in person, but there’s a lot to be done and it’s certainly better than the alternative, which is no music,” Zamek said.

Although the first month of the Putnam Youth Chorus will be through Zoom, Zamek and Putnam Chorale President Nick Simonelli hope that students can meet in person by next month by following all Centers for Disease Control precautions including singing outside with masks and maintaining social distance. Simonelli believes that professionals should task themselves with teaching youngsters with every discipline, every work, every craft, needs to train the next generation in whatever it is you’re doing,” he said. “I love choral singing and it’s my objective to help promote kids singing in choruses and move from there so eventually the kids will even sing in the Putnam Chorale with the adults.”

The arts have been among the field that have been severely impacted during the pandemic with artists losing their livelihood. But they have also been deprived of their creativity, Zamek said. She and Simonelli stressed that encouraging the youngsters’ creativity is more important now than ever.

Socialization, even if it is in an online setting, is also crucial for children so that they can develop empathy, form friendships and even release endorphins.

“I think being involved in a creative community, it really is transformative, and I think that’s one of the things that Nick was also very interested in, is that the adults and the children will be interacting together, even if it’s nonmusical at first,” Zamek said. “So, I think that pairing is definitely going to be transformative.”

What are Zamek and Simonelli looking forward to during the inception of the Putnam Youth Chorus?

“I just want to see the smiles on the kids’ faces when they get to sing something for the first time,” Simonelli said.

Even though the Putnam Youth Chorus is a tuition-based group, there are scholarships available for those who qualify.

The weekly rehearsals will begin this Wednesday from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. To register and learn more about the program, visit https://www.putnamchorale.org/youth/.
Program Builds Social Skills, Stresses Physical Activity for Children

By Sophia Spiegel

The COVID-19 pandemic has been overwhelming for many children, perhaps even more so for those challenged socially.

Frances Hernandez’s 13-year-old son struggles with self-esteem and anxiety. However, after enrolling in Build 4 Life’s new Social Skills Program, she has seen tremendous growth in his physical and mental well-being.

“This program has made him believe in himself and showed him he can do things he didn’t think he could do, or want to do, because he was uncomfortable,” Hernandez said.

Build 4 Life’s innovative program is Westchester’s first children’s social skills classes that combines physical activity, social interaction and peer counseling to combat problems children are facing, some of which have intensified during the past year.

Two classes are currently being offered: Introduction to the Building Blocks of Socialization, for ages 4-7, and Building Blocks to Utilize Effective Communication for children 8 to 13 years old. The program also includes one-on-one sessions, centered around each child’s interests, for students who could benefit from individualized attention.

Alex-Jamal Burton, CEO and founder of Build 4 Life, a health and wellness company dedicated to helping children and adults reach their full potential, has observed a change in many children’s behavior since the onset of the pandemic.

Burton and Gebhard have found that one-fit-for-all,” Gebhard said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been overwhelming for many children, perhaps even more so for those challenged socially.

As many as one in five children are grappling with learning disabilities and other conditions that can make it difficult for them to participate in school activities.

The Build 4 Life social skills curriculum will support children even after the pandemic comes to an end.

“I think the pandemic is highlighting a lot of shortcomings, but these problems and issues will still be there, and there needs to be a foundation laid for prospering even when we come out of the pandemic,” Burton said.

Continued on next page
WMCHHealth Launches Task Force for Equitable Vaccine Distribution

The Westchester Medical Center Health Network (WMCHHealth) has established the Health Equity Task Force (HETF) to help ensure all residents of the Hudson Valley have access to information, education and resources to ensure robust vaccination as the state ramps up COVID-19 vaccine distribution efforts.

Westchester Medical Center is serving as the coordinator for the Hudson Valley Region Hub of New York State’s Regional Vaccine Network.

HETF’s goal is to ensure health equity is a priority woven into every facet of COVID-19 vaccination effort (e.g., education, communication, dissemination, challenges, prevention efforts) and that short-term and long-term vaccination program development and implementation reflects an array of diverse community perspectives.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to attain his or her full health potential and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially-determined circumstances.

“HETF is comprised of community stakeholders and clinical champions representing communities throughout the Hudson Valley. It is an extension of WMCHHealth’s mission to be of service to everyone in our region, and underscores our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as a healthcare provider and as an employer,” said Michael D. Israel, president and CEO of WMCHHealth.

“We are well-prepared to build on our strong, existing foundation of community engagement.”

Ensuring Health Equity in Vaccine Distribution

WMCHHealth’s HETF is comprised of 75 clinical experts and community stakeholders, including leaders of organizations serving diverse populations, faith-based institutions and social service agencies, along with representatives from the New York State.

Task force members meet weekly to identify vaccine access and distribution barriers and develop solutions to remove them, particularly impediments that affect underserved communities. HETF is sharing identified issues, along with solution recommendations, with New York State to refine vaccine distribution strategies.

HETF’s specific focus areas are available for review at COVIDInfo. WMCHealth.org/Vaccination.

“COVID-19 has ravaged our most vulnerable communities, communities that were already suffering from health disparities and other social inequities,” said Mecca Mitchell, senior vice president, engagement for WMCHealth, who is leading HETF.

“Now, these same communities face unique vaccination challenges that must be addressed in a way that is respectful, culturally intelligent, and trustworthy to ensure greater participation in the drive for vaccination.”

Diverse Membership for Diverse Communities

“Neighbors Link is proud to be a part of the Health Equity Task Force,” said Carla Bracco, executive director of Neighbors Link. “We have come to see the stark disparities in education, employment and health care as a result of COVID-19 and it is critical for vaccine distribution to be equitable, safe and fair; particularly for the communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic.”

“Our next generation depends on us to pave the way for health and restoration,” said Rev. Erwin L. Trollinger Jr. of the Calvary Baptist Church of White Plains.

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Boutique Offers Eclectic Mix of Garments, Accessories

By Kristen McNerney

It could take months or years for someone to fully realize what career path will bring their life the most fulfillment, and that sentiment applies to Cold Spring boutique owner Judiann Romanello.

Last year, Romanello opened DamnAged Vintage, a carefully curated vintage clothing shop, after nearly a decade working for high-profile fashion designers and trying to figure out her place in the world. But while fashion was simply an interest growing up, her path to becoming an educator opened the door to a world that would eventually become her passion.

While close to completing her dual master’s program in elementary and special education at Manhattanville College, Romanello instead took an editorial education at Manhattanville in elementary and special education and joined a high-profile visual merchandising firm. The experience opened the door to as many as three cities a week setting up jewelry counters and accessory walls. “The level of detail was exquisite.”

However, she found the work to be creatively stifling, asserting that her hunger was in fashion. After a year at Cartier, she expressed interest in opening a vintage clothing store of her own and took a freelance position with the company while running a private business selling clothes out of her New York City apartment.

While Cartier would fly her to Texas, Romanello would shop at discount designer centers and pack as many outfits in a bag as possible before her flight home. Back in New York City, people would book appointments to browse the rack of clothes she had set up in her confined living space.

“I would give my customers macaroons and champagne and it would be a lot of fun,” Romanello said. “I think I had three different people trying on clothes in my apartment at one time.”

Struggling to make ends meet, Romanello took a side job as a bartender, but on her last day of training, she was fired. Struck with defeat, she opted to leave New York City to live with her mother in Garrison to save money and focus her energy on opening her own shop.

Eventually, Romanello set her eyes on Cold Spring.

“I knew of Cold Spring as a kid,” she said. “There were antiques, it was cute, it was quaint and it was in the middle of a mountain.”

Romanello opened DamnAged Vintage last June. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused distress for many merchants, the lockdown benefited her business.

“I wouldn’t have been able to take my time setting up had the opening not been delayed,” she said.

Much of her business is conducted online through the website, which launched during the shutdown. The boutique is open Thursday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Monday for in-person shopping and provides customers with a nostalgic experience.

Romanello said every article of clothing in the store is hand-picked, with a collection of apparel designed to appeal to all body types.

As the business grows, she hopes to cater to men’s fashion. Romanello added that each piece of clothing is given the proper restorative care, with a special cleansing ritual conducted for clothes that belonged to those who have passed on. She said the ceremony is meant to restore their positive energy and give everything in the store a light and airy feel.

Along with clothes, DamnAged Vintage also offers candles, incense kits and accessories.

“I’m a quirky person and we sell damn good vintage,” Romanello said. “To me, that’s thrilling.”

DamnAged Vintage is located at 109 Main St. in Cold Spring. It’s open Monday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The boutique is closed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

For more information, call 845-809-5600, visit www.damnagedvintage.com or e-mail judiann@damnagedvintage.com.
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The Evolving State of Winemaking — From Vineyard to Virtual Winery

By Nick Antonaccio

Still swallowing in the pandemic, I’ve resorted to repring several columns. Herewith, one of my personal favorites.

Wine is, in its most elemental form, an agricultural product. To make a decent wine you must be a decent farmer. This axiom has been generally true since the beginning of winemaking, nearly 6,000 years ago. Of course, as with many products, there are exceptions, which is the focus of this week’s column.

In the last 30 years, the winemaking industry has been turned upside down, through modern technology and techniques plus modern entrepreneurs. These influences have infiltrated every level of wine production.

Many wine consumers believe that the process for making wine is similar for all wines. The supposition is that grapes are gently handpicked at the epoite of ripeness, carefully sorted for rotting grapes, leaves and insects and then lovingly crushed, fermented, aged and bottled, all under the watchful eye of a master winemaker.

Although this process does occur in many wineries, it is a far cry from the vast quantity of wines sold in the United States. For the most part, winemaking is big business. Over 80 percent of wines produced and sold in the United States come from about 2 percent of the number of producers.

This is the current state of winemaking in the United States. There are several modern-day business models being practiced, some subtly different from each other, others radically different from centuries-old winemaking.

1. Full-spectrum wineries. This is the traditional model still flourishing around the world — but in diminishing numbers. Entrepreneurs invest in farmland, then plant and tend grapevines and harvest the crop each year. They also invest capital in an all-encompassing winery operation, replete with pressing equipment, fermenting containers, storage and aging barrels or tanks and a bottling line. This operation typically requires a significant capital investment.

But what if you have the passion but not the cash? There are several means by which to pursue your ambition.

2. Buy the grapes but control the wine production. There are many farmers who find immense satisfaction in purchasing high-quality farmland and planting and growing their own grapevines. And there are no shortages of entrepreneurs who would rather stain their hands with grape juice than sully them with vineyard soil.

By outsourcing grape production, these winemakers are able to focus on producing the final product rather than the raw material. And the capital commitment, along with the annual operating costs, can be far less than for a full spectrum winemaker.

3. The alchemists. These entrepreneurs are interested in producing their own individual expression of a wine, without the burdensome cost and time commitment of growing grapes or producing fermented grape juice. They will outsource grape production and then contract with a cooperative wine-processing facility to crush and ferment their purchased grapes. No sullied or stained hands, and a minimal capital investment. Their primary investment is in barrels and warehouse space. They blend purchased grape juice in their own barrels and then store and age the wine, as they deem appropriate to achieve a desired end product. An outsourced mobile bottling and labeling line completes the cycle.

4. The hobbyists — or the cash-strapped. These entrepreneurs have created what I’ve dubbed the virtual winery. Every phase of the winemaking process is outsourced, typically to a vertically integrated processing plant. A virtual winery “owner” contracts with these firms to purchase certain grapes, process them and place the virtual winery’s label on the bottle. No capital costs, a negotiated annual operating cost, clean hands and the ultimate gratification: your own wine to market. It is estimated there are over 1,500 virtual wineries in the United States alone.

The idyllic image many of us have as we sip a glass of wine is a small winery with rows of owned vineyards surrounding a red-barn winery building, guarded by a frolicking dog and ebullient owner. The truth in many instances is a carefully created marketing campaign of sensual images and illusory labels.

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

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You Heard It Through the Grapevine

In the last 30 years, the winemaking industry has been turned upside down, through modern technology and techniques plus modern entrepreneurs. These influences have infringed every level of wine production.

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More than a decade ago, New York introduced an updated power of attorney form with two parts to replace the three- to four-page standard form that was used for many years.

The first section listed the chosen agents and the specific tasks (banking, real estate, taxes) to be handled. Part 2 was a statutory gift rider that controlled gifting and asset transfers for estate and long-term care planning. This longer form was supposed to reduce the risk of fraud and provide greater structure and clarity to all the people and financial institutions working with the power of attorney.

In a surprise to no one, the updated two-part power of attorney was overly complex and tricky to properly execute. Another development was more disturbing. The new form wasn’t honored by many financial institutions.

So what happened? Some financial institutions insisted on having their clients utilize the company’s form and did not accept the New York Statutory Power of Attorney form.

The problem was – and remains – that powers of attorney tend to be prepared for people with health issues. A power of attorney form’s creation is tied to the principal’s competency. For example, an unrevoked, executed Power of Attorney From 2015 remains valid, and if the principal (the person creating the power of attorney) has lost competency, they may be unable to make a new one.

Banks compelling a disabled or incompetent client to make a new power of attorney with their company-specific form is a huge problem. Without an accepted power of attorney in place, basic banking functions may not take place and a guardianship proceeding may be necessary to obtain a court appointment.

Starting July 13, the new Power of Attorney law will try to re-introduce some common sense to the preparation, execution and acceptance of this very important form. The major development is the requirement of a time-sensitive, written document from any party refusing to honor the power of attorney with reasons listed for the refusal. Added to this is a damages provision for legal actions to compel acceptance of a power of attorney. The expectation is that banks will not routinely reject powers of attorney because it will be costly to do so.

Also, under the new law existing powers of attorney would still be in effect, but new ones will have simpler execution rules. For principals who are unable to sign the form, they can more easily direct another person to sign on their behalf. This is a very helpful development for individuals who cannot physically sign the form due to illness or other circumstance. Furthermore, the document itself will be simpler. The two-part form will be replaced by a single, unified form.

Annual gifting amounts will be raised from the current $500 limit to $5,000. Financial matters related to health care will be covered more completely with the new form. A recordkeeping requirement for agents is also built into the law.

We will see how the new power of attorney form works in practice. Hopefully, simpler equals better. Alan D. Feller, Esq. is managing partner of Sloan & Feller Attorneys at Law, located at 625 Route 6 in Mahopac. He can be reached at alan@feller.com.

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THERE’S A WORD FOR IT
A vocabulary-building quiz     By Edward Goralski

Late in the Season. A snowy month of February is behind us. March is here, which means that we are most certainly in late winter. To mark where we are in the season, all the words in the quiz this week contain late in them. Do keep in mind that spring arrives later this month.

1. boilerplate (n.)
A) a sales call  B) a crisis point  C) ready-to-print copy

2. dilate (v.)
A) to make smaller  B) make larger  C) change color

3. plateau (n.)
A) a relatively stable level  B) a stated policy  C) empty talk

4. belated (adj.)
A) tardy  B) under an obligation  C) capable

5. emulate (v.)
A) to parody  B) disperse something  C) strive to excel

6. latent (adj.)
A) advantageous  B) hidden  C) most recent

7. palate (n.)
A) the sense of taste  B) an official residence  C) champion of a cause

8. adulate (v.)
A) to remove by erosion  B) make impure  C) praise excessively
My Pandemic Palate Continues to Expand

By Morris Gut

Since its founding by the Livanos family in 1994, City Limits Diner in White Plains has become a bustling mainstay along Central Avenue. We completed our COVID-19 vaccinations last week at the County Center, so we decided to celebrate over a mid-morning meal across the street.

After major redesign and renovation in 2012, the popularity of this restaurant only grew, and we had not visited in a while. At about 10:30 a.m. the place was calm. Tables were well-spaced throughout the multilevel dining rooms in keeping with COVID protocols. We were seated at a comfortable booth.

Scanning the menu was appetizing. Just about everything sounded good, including breakfast, which is served all day. It was hard to decide, but I went for a cod fish sandwich served on a roll with a special house aioli (ask for extra aioli), lettuce and tomato. My companion wanted huevos rancheros. Both were satisfying. We shared the large serving of French fries that came with my order. It turned out to be a fine spot to reflect on our vaccine experience.

The Livanos family has brought us so many fine dining experiences through the years, including the upscale Moderne Barn in Armonk. We will be doing more tastings in coming months.

City Limits is located at 200 Central Ave. in White Plains. Open seven days. Info: 914-686-9000 or visit www.citylimitsdiner.com.

New Place for Falafel

Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food is the focus of Falafel Place, a new restaurant and takeout counter that just opened on Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains. The company, founded by Chef Ori Apple, has another unit on Yonkers’ Central Park Avenue, and a group of restaurants in Manhattan that serve under the name Hummus Place.

Falafel and hummus in its various forms are prepared fresh daily along with pita sandwiches, classic shakshuka and a variety of meze. The menu states it is vegan, kosher and gluten-free. There aren’t many outlets for these popular traditional staples in Westchester, so I hope it goes over well.

Falafel Place is located at 204 Mamaroneck Ave. in White Plains. Open seven days. Info: Visit www.falafelplaceny.com.

Brazilian Steakhouse to Open

There has been a lot of work going the past two years at the old landmark Bank of New York building on Main and Church streets in White Plains. Fogo de Chao, a major Brazilian Steakhouse chain with 40 restaurants across the U.S., Middle East, Brazil and Mexico, has been renovating this sprawling space for its flashy version of churrascaria BBQ.

If its restaurant on West 53rd Street in Manhattan is any indication, it will be a sparkling spot for drinks, giant Market Table salad bar and waves of fire-roasted meats served on skewers, churrasco style. If you’ve never experienced this type of dining concept, get ready and make sure you are hungry. It is similar to Texas de Brazil at Ridge Hill in Yonkers. The announced opening date is Mar. 23.

Along with the traditional meat offerings there is a fresh daily seafood selection and a variety of fresh-made salads. There’s also a sprawling bar and lounge where it’s Happy Hour all day, seven days a week. The bar menu appears to be reasonably priced. There’s also a butcher shop on the premises for take-home.

Fogo de Chao will be located at 235 Main St. in White Plains. Info: Visit www.fogodechao.com.

New Menu, Music Coming to Tauk

Restaurateur Anna Mallozzi took over Tauk Kitchen + Bar last year, the Montauk-seafood themed restaurant in Armonk, and we are told there are big changes on the way, including a new name. Her son, Jonathan Irizarry, is a chef at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. He plans to re-imagine the menu.

In the meantime, Mallozzi is jazzing up the bill-of-fare with a live keyboard on upcoming Saturday evenings Mar. 13 and 20. It could become a regular event.

The restaurant, at Armonk Square, is near DeCicco’s Market. You can still enjoy specialties such as bang bang shrimp, lobster cobb, fish and chips, Maine lobster roll, chicken francesca and Fossil Farms’ Imperial rib-eye steak. We’ll keep you posted.

Tauk Kitchen + Bar is located at 402 Main St. in Armonk. Check ahead for hours of operation. Occasional live music. Free parking. Info: 914-730-1144. (A new website is in the works.)

“Searching for Italy” is Delicious

Peekskill-born actor Stanley Tucci stars in an appetizing new series on CNN entitled “Searching for Italy,” a delicious romp through the scenic and delicious Italian culinary countryside. Beautifully filmed and depicted, Tucci visits various cities and towns throughout the boot zeroing in on the incredible food scene in each region.

In one episode he visits Rome and learns how to prepare the proper “vera” carbonara sauce. In another he watches how artichokes are prepared the traditional way in the old Jewish Quarter. My palate is longing for more episodes.

Tucci, who attended John Jay High School and SUNY Purchase, has long been a food and wine aficionado, having once owned a restaurant called Finch Tavern in Croton Falls. He also hosted a series called “Vine Talk” on PBS. His latest cookbook, “The Tucci Table: Cooking with Family and Friends,” which he co-authored with his current wife Felicity Blunt, is available on Kindle.


Everyone is Irish on St. Paddy’s Day!

The leprechauns are coming! St. Patrick’s Day, Wednesday, Mar. 17, will be celebrated with all its local color. Throughout the region, towns and villages are hanging shamrocks on storefronts and homes giving the Hudson Valley its sparkling moment in the Emerald Isle.

If you want to partake in the traditional foods, spirits and reveling sprinkled with a good dose of blarney, I will be offering dining venue suggestions in my next column. Be sure to check ahead for special hours. Larger groups are advised to make reservations in advance. Takeout and delivery are also good options. Erin go Bragh!

Remember to follow COVID-19 protocols and stay safe!

Morris Gut is a restaurant consultant and former restaurant trade magazine editor. He has been tracking and writing about the food and dining scene in greater Westchester for over 30 years. He may be reached at 914-235-6591 or gutreactions@optonline.net.

The cod fish sandwich and huevos rancheros at City Limits Diner.
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