Fire in the Pink House

Good luck and some brilliant work by several dozen volunteer firefighters saved West Cornwall’s historic Pink House on the first Monday of the new year. For one thing, the temperatures, which had been in the single digits for several days, had risen above freezing, making water in the nearby brook and the Housatonic River easier to extract. And the air was calm—no “Santa Ana” wind to jump the flames to nearby trees and structures.

Patience Lindholm, on her way to work a little earlier than usual, spotted smoke and flames coming off the building’s roof and called LCD (Litchfield County Dispatch) on her fire department radio. About the same time, next-door neighbor Tom Bechtle had heard what he described as an “eerie moment… Something drew me to a window. It was dead quiet, but I noticed Phil Wolfe [Pink House resident] come out the front door and look up toward the roof. There were flames and a lot of smoke.”

The first fire truck arrived in about ten minutes, and it took another three or four to get the hoses out. More trucks from Cornwall’s two firehouses were arriving and, eventually, equipment from such far-away places as Goshen, Falls Village, and Lakeville. From Millerton came air tank supplied, making water in the nearby brook and the Housatonic River easier to extract. And the air temperatures, which had been in the single digits for several days, had risen above freezing, making water in the nearby brook and the Housatonic River easier to extract. And the air was calm—no “Santa Ana” wind to jump the flames to nearby trees and structures.

During the blaze, the Cornwall ambulance and another from Kent stood by but were needed to take only two firemen to Sharon Hospital as a precaution. EMS personnel used the main room of the nearby Wandering Moose Café as a rehab center to monitor firefighters. And behind the counter at the Moose, Russ and Sharon Sawicki and several volunteers, the same Tom Bechtle and Don Bachman, were serving breakfast and later lunch to the many hungry firefighters as they finished securing West Cornwall’s landmark, seriously smudged but still pink.

—John Miller

Overmagnetized?

All life is continuously bombarded with unperceived low-level power charges from the earth and the sun. To this natural electromagnetic field (EMF) we have added EMFs from microwave ovens, televisions, computers, cell towers and phones, power lines or transformers. We presume that we are safe, but no public health research in the United States is exploring potential ill effects on living organisms. Biological research, mostly conducted in Europe and Asia, suggests that EMFs cause damage to animal and human cells, including DNA. This was the cautionary message of the panel of experts who spoke in Cornwall to advocate “Responsible Tower Siting” on January 12.

Former New York Times science writer Blake Levitt as the other speakers emphasized that, rather than trying to banish cell phones and towers, they aimed to raise awareness of risks to health and habitat and advocate reduced exposure. The evidence of detrimental EMF effects they cited was impressive. For example, breeding, nesting, and migration of bird populations are affected.
Doing Business in Cornwall

A recent tour of Cornwall’s two commercial centers offers a mixed picture for those hoping for more economic development. In West Cornwall, several empty stores are a reminder of its unfulfilled potential. The January purchase of the Bechtle-Bachman house by an area realtor, however, promises to bring in some foot traffic.

In Cornwall Bridge, on the other hand, businesses have been largely holding their own. At last June’s Town Plan forum, several people mentioned the historic area under the 1930s bridge as a good place for non-retail businesses with a modest number of employees. In fact, one such business, In Pursuit of Tea, has been operating there for nearly two years, under the radar of most Cornwall citizens.

Cornwall friends Sebastian Beckwith and Alexander Scott, along with partner Frank Kwei, established the company in Brooklyn and moved with its four or five employees to Cornwall Bridge in February 2006. Personal connections rather than Cornwall’s economic desirability were the critical factor in locating here. As an import, packaging, and re-sale business that sells tea over the Internet and provides tea service to such four-star restaurants as New York City’s Daniel and Chanteleine, it can function equally well in nearly any location. In Pursuit of Tea does not do retail business, but its products are sold locally at Baird’s and at Cornwall Bridge Pottery. Visited in the second-floor dormer overlooking the river, Sebastian Beckwith exulted in being able to run a global tea business while gazing upon the Housatonic’s rushing waters.

Beth and Rick Cochran’s Berkshire Country Store has not had so smooth a ride (despite a visit from Governor Jodi Rell to celebrate them as the state’s first retail outlet for biodiesel fuel). A petition to change the zoning of the five-acre property from Residential to General Business generated an outpouring of conflicted response from the public at a two-part hearing in August and September. In late December, Beth and several of the younger Cochran family members stepped out of state, and the family offered the business and property for sale. In January, Rick requested that the Planning and Zoning Commission consider reclassifying two acres of their property (as opposed to the entire five) as a rural business zone.

Rick Cochran plans to keep the store open during the P&Z review process and while seeking new owners. He does not ascribe the store’s difficulties to any inherent problem with location and hopes that the town may come to a consensus that will allow “whoever winds up owning our store a little more freedom to offer different services.”

—Paul De Angelis

Winter Needs

With only part of winter gone and severe cold still ahead, I decided to explore what support systems are in place for Cornwall residents. Some of the most pervasive needs are addressed by Jill Gibbons, Cornwall’s Director of Social Services. On a recent visit, her bright office felt welcoming, and the doors to the well-stocked shelves of the Cornwall Cupboard Food Pantry were wide open. “I am so grateful for the generosity of the people in this community,” Jill stated, more than once. The typical post-holiday slump, suffered by so many food banks, is not an issue in Cornwall. There are current needs, however. Grocery gift certificates will provide for fresh vegetables, fruit, milk, or other perishable items. Gasoline cards (locally available at CITGO) help people get to the food pantry or to the supermarket. High-protein canned goods and pasta sauce are short on supply, as are pet foods. Donations of cash, i.e., checks made out to the Cornwall Food and Fuel Bank, are of course the most versatile form of support. The Cornwall Food Pantry is open whenever the Town Offices are open. Residents are welcome to take noted by a recent accreditation report.

A first meeting of the Central Planning Committee was to be held January 24. Cornwall members of the six-town committee are Phil Hart, Wynne Kavanagh, Anne Kosciusko, Katherine Tatge, and Jim Terrall. Your opinions are needed. —Phil Hart

Good-Bye to a Friend

Mildred H. Preston

Congratulations
Stephanie Ann Johnson and Shaun Douglas Rodger

Land Transfers
Hart Cherry Hill Farm, Inc., to Priscilla Hart Mauro, 2.108 acres and buildings thereon on Cherry Hill Road for $10,000.

Arthur W. Strasle to Weantinoge Heritage Land Trust, Inc., a Conservation Restriction on 23.319 acres and a Conservation Restriction with retained agricultural rights on 3.033 acres at 195 Great Hill Road.

Lauren B. and Woodie J. Cyr, Jr., to Thomas Clifford, 1.143 acres on Mansonville Road for $25,000.

Ira B. Shaprio and Jacqueline Dedell to Warren Land Trust, Inc., a Conservation Restriction on 64.1614 acres on Warren Hill Road, in the Towns of Warren and Cornwall.

Robert L. and Gerald T. Wilson to Sunset View, LLC, 1.5 acres on Furnace Brook Road for $50,000.

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HVRHS Looks Ahead

In early fall 2007 the Region One Board of Education formally approved a Long-Range Planning Committee. Its goal is to develop a five-to-ten-year framework to guide decision-making on all aspects of educational life at the high school. Among particular concerns are budgeting, curriculum and staffing issues as they relate to enrollment, and deficiencies

(continued from page 1)
New” page of the cornwallct.org website at least 48 hours in advance.

In just the past month the natural resources committee has begun to benefit from a new 200-page natural resources inventory report put together by the state- and federal-funded King’s Mark Environmental Resource Centers. This report put together by the state- and federal-funded King’s Mark Environmental Resource Centers. The report includes a plethora of maps and charts that make fascinating reading. (A copy can be consulted at the Town Hall. There the larger group usually discusses the issues of the day.)

Town Plan Update

The formulation of Cornwall’s new Town Plan is beginning to pick up speed as four subcommittees—one for each of the four main areas of the town—have been formed. The subcommittees are tasked with developing a plan that will guide the town’s development into the future. The plan will be presented to the public at a series of meetings starting in the fall.

The process goes like this: on the fourth Tuesday of each month, the Planning and Zoning Commission convenes a special Town Plan workshop meeting at 7:30 p.m. in the Town Hall. There the larger group usually discusses the issues of the day.)

INDEPENDENT GAL

My Village herd of Milking Devons has surprisingly grown. One of my girls, who we didn’t believe to be pregnant, produced a heifer calf on January 9. On her second day, after receiving her name (Coltsfoot Cottage’s Cally Gal), she decided to display her independence by leaving the herd and spending four days on her own in the woods out back. On her third night away we had a Nor’wester. When Cally still hadn’t returned by breakfast on the fourth day, I thought for sure that she had succumbed to the elements or some ravenous critter. Later, as I was having my lunch, I noticed Mike (the bull) looking curiously across the backyard. Lo and behold, here came the Gal, all of six days old, trotting through ten inches of new snow, obviously in search of her mother’s teats. Before I could get halfway down the driveway she had found them and was latched on like there was no tomorrow. These American Milking Devons are indeed magnificent and hearty beasts. —Dan Gracey

TOWN OF STOICS?

The Chronicle issues of December 2000 and 2004 speak volumes on the sterling character of the disappointed, larboard-leaning voters of Cornwall. Stiff upper lip, and all that.

In the December 2000 edition John Miller took on, for him, the arduous task of reporting the gruesome congressional and presidential election outcomes of that year. He was able to get through the trauma only by devoting three quarters of his article to descriptions of the Election Day soups served at the November 4 community luncheon held at the UCC Parish House. In the few references to the election results in the remaining quarter of his piece, he managed to keep emotion in check by commending OK Republican Andrew Romer’s runoff victory for the State Senate and stressing Cornwall’s backing of worthy Al Gore (though in a losing cause), along with VP candidate Joe Lieberman, maverick Ralph Nader, and Green candidate Audrey Walsh. The names of newly crowned President and Vice President Dick Cheney were allowed to slip by with hardly a mention. The four-time three-letter man in college, John has stoically survived his share of pain in his life, but a Republican administration in Washington was more trauma than he could face in print over his name.

Then, in 2004, the Chronicle reported the Bush reelection in passing but saved its praises for the Cornwall voters who came out in unprecedented numbers that year for a 91 percent showing at the polls. Reporter Hanna Grossman dwelt also on the preponderance of right-thinking, clean-living, good Democrats residing in Cornwall and the relative paucity of misguided Republicans. (Not in those words, of course. After all, she was reporting from a conservativeizing.) Dick Cheney didn’t survive her cut and was not mentioned. Probably a shortage of space.

Perhaps 11 months off is a bit early to devote precious Chronicle space to a presidential vote, but with an anticipated Democratic sweep of congress and the presidency forecast, it is not too soon to begin to savor a complete political turnaround. Following that day, will we have a single joyous December edition, two-thirds devoted to election news? Or will it be a special extra, extra, supplemental to a more traditional dignified edition with Cornwall happenings only? To quote Lewis Carroll (sort of), “Oh frabjous day, kalloc kallay, they’ll chortle in their joy.” —Scoville Soulé, Rep.

CORNWALL’S IRAQI FAMILY

Did anyone hear Chris George on NPR last week? He’s the incredibly sensible head of IRIS, the refugee organization in New Haven to which the U.S. Government has directed two Iraqi families for settlement. The first of those families is being co-sponsored by the UCC Cornwall—which means we give money towards their expenses and give whatever physical and emotional support we can muster long distance. Those first arrivals, Zahury and her three daughters and twin grandsons, had fled to Jordan after her husband and son-in-law were killed. Their English is still minimal, although IRIS has an amazing network of services including daily English lessons. The one possible exception—she had been a teacher in Baghdad, has not yet been hired because of the language gap, and the family will have no government subsidy after January. If anyone would like to help please send a check to the UCC with the notation “for the Iraqi family.” The entire amount will go to the support of that family. —Nita Colgate
Connecticut’s “Important” Primary

On February 5, Connecticut’s Democrats and Republicans have the first opportunity in recent history to exert a palpable influence on the candidates their parties nominate for president. The Democrats’ choices will be allotted proportional shares of most (48) delegates to the August national convention in Denver; 13 other “superdelegates” will go unpledged, no matter what the results. The Republicans’ contest is a winner-take-all affair (27 of the state’s 30 delegates go to the victor, with 3 unpledged “supers”). See the “Letters” section for one independent-minded voter’s reaction to the Chronicle’s recent coverage of presidential elections.

—Paul De Angelis

Events & Announcements

The Housy Foreign Travel Club will host a fundraising dinner featuring 1950s-style food at the Wandering Moose on Monday and Tuesday, February 25 and 26, with seatings at 5:30 and 7 p.m. Cost is $15 for adults and $8 for children 12 and under. Make reservations early by contacting the Moose at 672-0178 or travelclub@thewanderingmoosecafe.com. Proceeds will benefit members in their trip to Italy and Greece this summer.

The Cornwall Assessor’s Office will be accepting applications for the Homeowner’s Tax Relief Program until May 15. Applicants are required by law to submit proof of their 2007 income (income tax return, if filed) and 2007 Social Security form 1099. Income limits for this year (Social Security and all other income) are: married, $36,500; single, $29,800. Homeowners on Social Security disability must show proof of their permanent disability status and meet income limits. Elderly homeowners must have turned 65 by December 31, 2007, to qualify. The Assessor’s Office at the Town Hall is open Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to noon and Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 1 to 4 p.m. Questions? Call 672-2703.

Be Our Valentine

Valentines make our hearts turn lightly to love (or something like that). It’s also a time to remember the Chronicle, a labor of love for its writers and editors from the time of its first issue. Since then, costs to produce the paper have multiplied by three. We do need to hear from you and your checkbook. Out-of-towners should send $15 to keep their issues coming. Many thanks!

Motherhouse Activities

- Family Contra Dance with Bill Fischer calling and the Homegrown Band playing, Saturday, February 2, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Town Hall. Suggested donation: $5/adult, $3/child. For more information call 672-6328 or 672-6101.
- Old Style Life Skills Workshop, Bee-ginning with Bees, Saturday, February 9, from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the UCC Parish House. Buzz over the tools of beekeeping with Mark Moorman of Sprainbrook Apiary. Make beeswax candles and share a potluck lunch. $35/family. Pre-register with Debra Tyler at 672-0229 or Debra@Motherhouse.us. Space is limited!
- Mother-Son Day, Saturday, February 23, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Debra’s home in Cornwall. Enjoy gingerbread boys, jokes and riddles, paper airplanes, gentle jumping games, and a lunch of cheese fondue. $35/mother-son pair. Call 672-0229 for information.
- Family Contra Dance with Paul Rosenberg calling, Saturday, March 1, from 7 to 9:30 p.m. at the Town Hall. See above for details.

The Civilian Conservation Corps in Cornwall in the 1930s will be the subject of a talk and slideshow by Marty Podskoch on Saturday, February 16, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Library. Admission is free.

A Town Meeting with President Jefferson and presidential candidate James Madison will be held on Sunday, February 24, at 3 p.m. at CCS. Sponsored by the Cornwall Fund for Excellence. (See insert.)

Art in Cornwall: The Cornwall Free Library will continue to exhibit Ray Olsen’s show of etchings and pastels entitled New England Landscapes Plus, while natural fiber baskets by Carol Hart will remain in the case through February. The iO Gallery’s show of rotating artists, Wall 2 Wall, also continues through February.

Songs of Peace and Protest, a Cornwall Iraq Moratorium Network’s Third-Friday event, will take place on February 15 at 7 p.m. at UCC. Musicians and vocal artists from New York City and Great Barrington will join local performers in this free concert. For information call 672-6089.

Five Dogs out of the fourteen abandoned in Cornwall in October still need homes. They have been living at the Harwinton pound until space becomes available at the Little Guild of St. Francis. Potential adopters should call Rick Stone at 672-6230.

Hot Chocolate Hour, an after-school, read-aloud program for third- to fifth-graders, will run every Wednesday from February 6 to March 12. Reading will be from the classic fantasy The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles. Registration forms are available at CCS. The school bus will drop off participants at the Cornwall Library. For further information call 672-6874.

Park & Rec Activities

- Every Friday in February from 6 to 8 p.m. is game night at CCS. Bring a game to share with others. Pizza, beverages, and snacks will be provided. Children must be accompanied by an adult.
- Every Saturday in February from 7 to 8 p.m.: free family ice skating at Hotchkiss. All skaters must wear hats.

THE CHRONICLE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

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