CCS Under the Microscope

Cornwall hit the headlines last month when The Hartford Courant published an analysis of the health of local educational systems and listed our town third on a state-wide list of "schools grappling with change." The story came at a time when Cornwall is examining educational needs as Region One seeks a new superintendent.

According to Ben Barnes of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM), which wrote the report the Courant was analyzing, Cornwall's place on the list of schools in trouble, ahead of Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport, is due to statistics rather than facts. The Cornwall Consolidated School experienced a 10 percent drop in Massey Test scores over the past four years, a number which would be earthshaking if it described Hartford's thousands of kids. But 10 percent among 200 CCS students could reflect a dozen kids having a bad day, Barnes suggested.

Barnes also said that disciplined, small increases in Cornwall's education budget also worked against the town because this meant to the statisticians that Cornwall was not putting money into its schools at the same rate as other towns.

"Cornwall is clearly not a place where education is on the ropes," Barnes concluded in a recent interview.

Region One as a whole, however, did not fare at all well in the CCM report, and this broader trend may be more significant for Cornwall in the long run. The class of 1996 dropout rate was 13 percent and the number of graduates going on to any kind of higher education was right at the bottom of the state rankings, at 57 percent.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway said in a statement prepared for the December 18 Board of Education meeting that the new Region One superintendent will have to address the big gap between inputs, chiefly a per-student cost of more than $10,750 (at the top of the state rankings) and outputs like the dropout and higher education statistics, both in the cellar.

Ridgway said the CCM report, however misleading statistically, hints at a future that Cornwall needs to prepare for. Changes in the population mix at CCS indicate that the school is changing. The number of students receiving special education is growing as enrollment goes up. Federal Chapter I funds, which support remedial education for CCS children, have increased 42 percent over last year.

More students evidently mean more needs, Ridgway said. So we are "grappling with change" after all, even if the changes are not exactly the ones identified by The Hartford Courant.

—Lisa Lansing Simont

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**JANUARY 1998**

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One Man's Meat

The six-foot-six pony-tailed hunter in Carhart coveralls was a little punchy; he'd been in the woods on Cream Hill since dawn and had already brought in a 150-pound doe. Now it was dark at the deer check station, except for the floodlight on the corner of T-Bow's convenience store (on Route 7 in Falls Village) shining down on the scale. Laurie Fortin, the four-foot-ten technician from the Department of Environmental Protection, helped the hunter lift his second kill, a fawn, out of his van and into the light. Curls of steam rose from the bloody gutted abdomen. Laurie slung the fawn gently back into his wheel-drive truck with sand is kept waiting for real fire or medical emergencies, a four-wheel plow is always on the way. And private contractors are on call for the deepest snows. Gordon Ridgway urges all of us to be patient. We should also remember that the town uses less sand and salt than the state, so slower speeds are advised on local roads. Watch for school buses and fuel-delivery trucks in the narrow space between those banks of snow. Remember that sooner or later a snow plow is always on the way. And for real fire or medical emergencies, a four-wheel-drive truck with sand is kept waiting and ready.

—Bob Potter

911 Number, Please!

At the selectmen's request, Fred Bate, Sr., and Ralph Scoville have completed their survey of all 98 roads and lanes in Cornwall for proper posting of 911 numbers. By law, assigned numbers must be at least three inches high and clearly visible from the road. Fred and Ralph found 953 buildings in compliance, with 238 numbers either missing, incorrect, or otherwise faulty (numbers posted 20 feet up in a tree, etc.). The town now plans to send everyone not in compliance a form to be filled out and returned when 911 numbers are correctly displayed. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway wants to publicly thank Fred and Ralph for their careful work on this project, and to urge everyone to comply with the law as soon as possible. The town is authorized to impose fines of from $10 to $100 on persistent slackers.

In an emergency, help can arrive faster when your number is visible. If you are unsure of your number, call the Selectmen's Office (672-4439), or call the Assessor's Office (672-2703) in case of new construction.—Bob Potter

Welcome

Alexis Christine Parent to Jennifer Parmelee
and Peter Earl Parent

Asa Lane to Merida Prud'homm and Barry Lane

Good-Bye to a Friend

William Van Alstyne

Congratulations

Matthew Alexis Borque to Kelly Jean Gallo

Land Transfers

Coltsfoot Farm Ltd. Partnership to Trevor H. and Lee Ganshaw, 11.5 acres at Everest Hill and Valley Roads for $66,000.

Mr. Madwon to Roger Jackson, Parcel S on Route 7 for $75,000.

Gerard W. and Patricia M. Smith to Donald and Margaret Teismann, house and land on College Street for $475,000.

Bank of Boston to Bruce Witik, Lot 3, 16 acres on Great Hollow Road for $8,000.

Unsung Cornwall Champions

Six big, beautiful tan Belgian horses help out during the haying season in West Cornwall.
Letters to the Chronicle

Drivers Needed

Fish volunteer drivers have been doing a fine job taking neighbors to medical appointments and on errands but too could use a few more drivers. If you could do this occasionally please give me a call at 672-6261. Your services will be greatly appreciated.

--Marie Prentice

Early Answering Machines

Bob Potter's recent article on old Cornwall party lines brought two memories to mind. The first was the built-in answering service a party line might provide. In our case, when we were out, we asked my grandmother (ring 1) to answer our phone (ring 2), and take messages. Sometimes, she even answered a caller's questions on the spot.

The second service was the baby-sitter help line the operator might provide. When I was old enough to take care of my younger siblings, but still uncomfortable about being left in charge, my mother would say, "Don't worry; just pick up the phone and ask for me." In the meantime, she had asked the operator to connect the call to the phone of the people whom she and Dad were visiting.

It's comforting to know that technology still can't match the human touch.

--Charlie Gold

Such a Deal!

On November 15, despite inclement weather, about two dozen folks turned out to Cornwall Hall to hear singer/songwriter David Ronies. He entertained with warmth and humor, singing songs of railroads, bicycles, and lost love. The music elicited dancing kids and singing-along elders.

This event was sponsored by Cornwall Park and Rec., and this grateful listener hopes that it marks just the beginning of such musical events. At the bargain price of five dollars for adults and free admission for kids, it was cheaper than a night at the movies and much closer to home. It also offered the opportunity to meet the singer, greet neighbors, sip cider and munch oatmeal cookies. Such a deal!

I hope that any such future events bring out many more Cornwallians. It's a good chance to support the efforts of Park and Rec. and have some good community-oriented fun.

--Cynthia Kirk

Drivers Needed

Cornwall will be greatly appreciated for the services of the people whom she and Dad were visiting. It's comforting to know that technology still can't match the human touch.

--Charlie Gold

Dump Mess—Whose Lapse?

Cornwall will soon be faced with bills totaling over $7,000 for a transfer station permit which either lapsed or never existed in the first place. This is the story:

In the late 1980s, town dumps (or "landfills") were closed out, to be converted to "transfer stations." Cornwall complied with the regulations, paid for the necessary engineering studies, then constructed the new system and in 1991 applied for a transfer station permit. The years passed...and suddenly in late November 1997 the town was billed $850 for outstanding Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) operating fees dating from 1991. Apparently the town's original 1991 application had never been received?/acknowledged?/approved? by the state. Moreover, the town received, through the state Attorney General's Office, a non-appealable court order to submit a proper transfer station application within 90 days. A Manchester engineering firm has been engaged to do the necessary field studies, blueprints, area map, maintenance specifications, and specialized paperwork, all at a cost of $4,800.

Whose lapse was it? The town engineer has a record indicating that a DEP consent order was issued in 1993, but no trace of such an order can be found in the Cornwall files. The DEP suggests that the town might have confused receipt of a "construction permit" with receipt of an "operating permit" six years ago.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway regrets that the state cannot now come out and inspect our transfer station, certify that it is in compliance, and get on with the trash of public business. But such retroactive approval is not state policy. However, the $7,000-plus cost does have a lucky offset: Cornwall's "tipping (disposal of trash) fees" to the Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority have been reduced 20 percent. Within a year, this should almost recover the unexpected cost of the lapsed permit.

--Bob Potter

Those RR Crossing Gates

It looks very much as though West Cornwall will get automatically operated railroad crossing gates, judging by the lack of opposition expressed at the legally mandated hearing recently held by the Department of Transportation at the Town Hall.

Only 12 people attended the hearing, and three of them were reporters. One attendee questioned the legality of the railroad itself, but others appeared to be in favor of the installation of the gates on West Cornwall’s single-line rail crossing.

The cost estimate for the installation and associated work is $455,000, to be funded by the federal government. Preliminary plans will be completed in six or seven months.

--Stephen Senser

Selectmen Resolve

At a December meeting, Cornwall's Board of Selectmen spoke out as individuals when asked for priorities to be addressed during their two-year terms of office. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway initiated the discussion (continued on page 4)
Events & Announcements

Assessment Review: Forms to request a hearing by the Board of Assessment Appeals are available from the Town Clerk or the Assessor. Hearings will be scheduled for March 3, 4, 6, and 7. Property owners who cannot appear in person may designate an agent to represent them by completing a notarized authorization form. All forms are due in the Town Office by February 20. Please call Phyllis Wojan at 672-6141 for further information.

Rehabilitation in Connecticut Prisons: During January and early February, three programs on aspects of treatment/correction in Connecticut prisons will be held at the United Church of Christ, all on Sundays at 11:30 a.m. On January 11, Cornwall resident Ellen Doubleday, Assistant Principal at the Cheshire Correctional Institution, will talk on Providing Education in a Prison Setting. On January 18, the Reverend Gordon Bates, former Executive Director of the Connecticut Prison Association, will speak on Guardians, Victims, and Offenders: Mission Possibilities. On February 1, John Perry, Sharon resident and a trainer with the Alternatives to Violence Project, will describe the work of AVP and show a documentary video. Call the church office, 672-6840, or Peg Keskinen, 672-6486, for more information.

The Cornwall Democratic Party will hold a caucus on January 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Town Hall for the election of members of the Democratic Town Committee. All Cornwall registered Democratic voters are eligible to vote and are urged to attend.

The Bridge Kids’ Press, the publishing center at Cornwall Consolidated School, is now in its second year. It is a place where children can transform their writing and stories into printed and bound books. Volunteers are needed to work with the young authors to edit, proofread, type, and bind their books. Typing and binding can be done at home. If you are interested in helping with any of these tasks, call CCS at 672-6617 and leave a message for Joyce Samson.

Calling All E-Mailers: John Miller and Doc Simont are about to compile an e-mail address book for Cornwall. Anyone interested in being included please send your e-mail address to jlm186@ctf.nal.net soon.

Children’s Library Programs: The winter story hour series for preschoolers will begin on Friday, January 9 at 10 a.m., and will include stories, poems, and songs about animals and where they live. Snacks will be provided.

Student of the Year: Elyse Piker, a CCS eighth-grader, is this year’s recipient of a Region One Superintendent’s Award as Cornwall’s “outstanding student of the year.” “Elyse is a natural leader having the unique ability to work with everyone,” said Principal William Oros. “Her presence is strongly felt at CCS.”

Poetry Slam #3: Cornwall’s third annual Poetry Slam is coming up on January 10, at 4 p.m. at the Library. Declaim, emote, sing, dance, or juggle your latest creations in poetry or prose. Sponsored by the Friends of the Cornwall Library, who welcome all ages and all types of performance (we might have someone standing on her head this year!). Original works only, no more than three minutes. Call Phyllis Naults (672-6608) to get on the list of participants.

The Cornwall Library is richer by $3,800, thanks to a benefit showing of Adam Van Doren’s film, James Thurber’s Life and Hard Times, on November 28. The premiere of Adam’s documentary was sponsored by Friends of the Cornwall Library.

Celebrating Hildreth: At the Cornwall Library from January 12 to February 14 there will be an exhibit of tributes to Hildreth Daniel celebrating 25 years of art shows at the Library.

Update on the Middle East: On Sunday, January 4, at 11:30 a.m. at the United Church of Christ, Scott Cady will share observations and show slides of his recent trip to the West Bank. While there, he met with people of all faiths and persuasions. Coffee will be served in the Day Room preceding the program. Everyone welcome.

Ski Wee Registration for children in T to third grades will take place Thursday, January 8, from 2 to 4 p.m. at CCS. Sponsored by Park and Rec., the program will begin Thursday, January 15. Appeal is made for volunteers to assist. Please call Sharon Sawicki, 672-2975, to volunteer or for more information.

CORNWALL CHRONICLE
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