A Burning Matter

A long-running controversy over the burning of brush at Hedgerows Farm on Cream Hill Road in West Cornwall has raised questions as to whether the property will remain in its current ownership. Dan Cain, owner of Hedgerows, says that unless the ban on brush-burning imposed by Fire Marshal Stan MacMillan is relaxed, he sees no viable way to operate the kind of farm he wants. Cain put it this way: “If I can’t farm here, I should pass on the responsibility to someone who can get along with the fire marshal.”

Gordon Ridgway, Cornwall’s first selectman, confirms that the fire marshal will issue no further burning permits to Cain for use at Hedgerows, a decision Ridgway fully supports. He notes that Cain and his employees have a long record of burning brush at Hedgerows without any permits or in violation of the terms of permits issued by the town. At a time when the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection—staffed by volunteers, must turn out. He notes that Cain and his employees put it this way: “If I can’t farm here, I should pass on the responsibility to someone who can get along with the fire marshal.”

The first selectman notes that Cornwall issues hundreds of burning permits each year. Each places conditions on what may be burned (in terms of log diameter or the size of brush piles). Permits also prohibit burning on any day when the fire marshal says that conditions are not appropriate. “We get almost no complaints about burning,” Ridgway explained, “except for the many violations that involve Mr. Cain’s farm.” He also noted that every time there is an uncontrolled fire, or one violating the permit, the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department, staffed by volunteers, turn out.

Cain responds that he has had no problems burning brush on his other farms in Goshen or in New York State or Virginia. He admits, though, that he was arrested by the state police last year for burning brush at Hedgerows in violation of his permit and had to appear in court and pay a fine. He blames his problems primarily on MacMillan’s overly strict enforcement of the rules.

“Stan MacMillan has been Cornwall’s fire marshal for over 15 years,” Ridgway notes, “and he has always done a very good job for the town.” A former chief of the Sharon Fire Department, MacMillan also serves as fire marshal for over 15 years,” Ridgway notes, “and he has always done a very good job for the town.” A former chief of the Sharon Fire Department, MacMillan also serves as fire marshal for Sharon, Kent, and Falls Village.

When asked whether this conflict was likely to be resolved, both Cain and Ridgway responded that Cain’s lawyer and the town attorney were talking. As the Chronicle goes to press, however, the Hedgerows burning ban remains in force. —David A. Grossman

Congrats to Grads

commencement n. 1. the act or process of beginning

Congratulations to the 46 students who call Cornwall home and who will begin a new chapter in their lives as they graduate from their respective schools.

On June 12 at 7 P.M., 20 students will be joining the ranks of alumni of Cornwall Consolidated School. Housatonic Valley Regional High School will welcome Forest Classey, Myles Clohessy, Brandon Coe, John Hare, Brian Hurlburt, Allison Lacco, Sebastien Lasseur, Lizzie Morehouse, kale Prentice, Wilson Terrall, R. J. Thompson, and Ethan Tuthill. Andrea Bramley will be attending Oakwood Friends School. Daniel Hedden, Bronwen Kalmes, and Elizabeth Ridgway will all continue their education at Kent. Kyle Hurlburt will study at Oliver Wolcott, and Cloitle Laigle will go to the Berkshire School. Dyllan Munson plans to attend Marblewood. Laurel Woodruff is undecided. Graduating from Washington Montessori is Sarah Hubbard, who will continue her education at Millbrook.

Housatonic Valley Regional High School will graduate 19 Cornwall students on June 18 at 6:30 P.M. Continuing their education are Sarah Brown (St. John’s University), Jonathan Coe (Syracuse University), and...
For Love of Prius

Ah, Prius owners—some wax lyrical: “I dance with the car, rather than drive it,” says Katie Freygang, our Energy Guru. “Dance with the landscape, over the hill, let gravity pull the car down. And I have warm in places to cool in others. But sun is sun.”

Some who are particularly fond of the Prius seem to be the only ones that are. Susan Gold, who defines the Prius as a “low-end” model, says “not fun to drive, since I feel it is underpowered.” He is also concerned about the disposal of batteries and the footprint they leave behind. Katie concurs. “Yes, there are apparently bad things about the batteries, including the working conditions in China where they are now made.”

Susan delights in watching an episode of Smog Patrol (a television series), in which a self-righteous, egg-head “Pious” owner tickets SUVs in parking lots for “Failure to Care about the Environment.” As Pious numbers increase, black clouds of Smog hover over cities with high concentrations of Piouses, and a Smog Alert is imposed.

Cornwall does not have the Smog problem yet—at least when it comes to Priuses; we don’t score a heck of a lot higher with our ten hybrids than Salisbury, for example, with its twenty-two.

One factor militating against broader use of the Prius seems to be its height. Our happiest owners are between 5’5” and 5’11”. For those six feet and over, like Anthony, “Leg room is very tight.”

Some who are particularly fond of the car and its air filter, Susan has discovered, are light of weight and under six feet. They are mice.

—Ella Clark

The Market Will Open

Good news! There will be a 2008 Cornwall Farmers’ Market on The Wish House lawn. Motherhouse’s Old Style Life Skills workshop Cooking by the Hearth provided the perfect atmosphere for the planning process. As Wyatt Whitman bent to his aromatics tasks over the hearth on Fox Road, a group of committed planners began to germinate this year’s program. But one of the essential contributors, Mother Nature herself, was not available for consultation. See insert for information such as the exact opening date and produce possibilities. Interested in the numbers? There were five “high-end” sales here in the past year or so, and they averaged 17 percent above the value assigned by the assessor. In the “lower-end” market, there were also five sales averaging 5 percent over Barbara’s estimate. Finally, the four “mid-market” sales just managed to beat her values by an average of 0.5 percent. Not great, perhaps, but not a crisis, either.

—David Grossman

What Housing Crisis?

Is Cornwall’s housing market facing the crisis trumpeted in the national press? Even The Lakeville Journal in its May 15 issue headlined “Real Estate Doldrums Are Hitting [the Northwest] Corner.” But that’s not really the case here, according to Barbara Bigos, our town’s assessor. What she has seen in the past year is a local housing market that ranges from quite warm in places to cool in others. But she sees no crisis, either in Cornwall or the other towns for whom she is the assessor, Salisbury and Norfolk.

Barbara notes that “high-end” houses in Cornwall, a category that she defines as ranging upward from $800,000 to multimillion bucks, are doing well, whether measured in the number of sales or the prices these estates sell for. Most high-end houses are bought by weekenders, and a fair number of them by people who count in euros or pounds rather than dollars.

“Low-end” houses, which she defines as selling from $250,000 to $500,000, are doing reasonably well, too, but with more modest gains. For the most part, these units are being sold and bought by year-round residents. It’s in the middle ground—houses selling from $500,000 up to about $800,000—that Barbara sees problems. She speculates that these “middle-market” houses may be a bit too pricey for year-round residents but not fancy enough for weekenders.

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—David Grossman

Good-Bye to Friends

Nancy Nauts Dobbs
Steven Charles Rudes

Congratulations
Yuriyan Giraldo and Paul Biondino III
Eileen Rogers and Michael Redmond

Land Transfers
Frances Brandon-Farrow to Joseph Saluti, four parcels on Town Street and Yeling Hill Road, including property at 13 Yeling Hill Road, for $2,681,000.
Carll a. and Jane Pallokat, and Lora P. and Carl R. Grantmeyer to Anna M. Timell, 2/3 interest in property at 278 Cornwall Hollow Road for $200,000.
Nancy M. and John E. Renzi to Anna M. Timell, 1/3 interest in property at 278 Cornwall Hollow Road for $100,000.
Estate of John DeWitt Norton to Donald Garren, property at Dark Entry Forest for $30,000.
Letters to the Chronicle

TROUBLE IN WEST CORNWALL
Contrary to the May Chronicle article “River Rumors,” there are concrete proposals for significant alterations in the river landscape of West Cornwall. While CL&P may not have any immediate plans to transfer ownership of the grassy parcel south of the Hughes Library on Lower River Road, the HVA plans to construct a facility at the bend of the river that includes a concrete and steel ADA-compliant fishing platform in the river, a rip-rap and geogrid boat ramp, a public toilet, and an ADA-compliant parking area.

Residents of West Cornwall are troubled about the implications of this proposal. There are concerns about aesthetic and scenic impact, increases in traffic, maintenance, ecological impact on the river bank, whether this is a suitable use of PCB cleanup money, and whether this is an appropriate location for such a fishing and boating facility.

HVA has not consulted with the residents of West Cornwall about their proposal, nor have they adequately addressed its implications. The people of West Cornwall are reacting to a detailed plan that could have a considerable impact on our village.

—Mark Wilson

IMPROVING RIVER ACCESS
At a special Board of Selectmen meeting on April 26 to discuss ideas for “The Bend” on the Housatonic River in West Cornwall, HVA presented a proposal. It was designed in response to requests for improved river access for Cornwall’s Rescue Squad, for the disabled to share in the river’s fishing, for an environmentally sound toilet for river users, and for solutions to the erosion problem.

Updated maps of our proposal are on file at Town Hall and HVA. Our plan is not final: it continues to be reviewed by the Housatonic River Commission. If the community does not support these uses at an open meeting we will withdraw the proposal.

If accepted, the proposal that is being made by HVA, together with the Housatonic Fly Fishermen Association, would be funded by the Natural Resource Damages Fund—part of the PCB cleanup agreement between EPA and GE to enhance aquatic and recreation resources. This fund is separate from the on-going PCB cleanup plan and funding outlined in the agreement.

—Einar Lindholm, Board Member, HVA

CATHERINE USCINSKO OF THE CCS ART DEPARTMENT received a $2,800 award for a painting called “Peacock.” Judy Fisher of Goshen won third prize for “Light Up My Toes.” Jacobson won second prize for “I Am Lost” to John Westberg of Milford for “I Am Lost” —Hector Prud’homme

Art Show Winners
Last month’s Art at the Dump was a grand success. It made over $800 to buy supplies for the CCS Art Department. First prize went to John Westberg of Milford for “I Am Lost.” Judy Fisher of Goshen won second prize for “Light Up My Toes.” Jacobson won third prize for his “Peacock.” —Richard Griggs

Of Birds and Birders
A small, devoted group of Cornwall birdwatchers keeps tabs on avian activities here. The Cornwall Birding Group (CBG) includes Art Gingert, Carla Bigelow, Jean Bouteiller, Joe Ellis, Celia Senzer, and many others. They share unusual sightings such as the eagles that come in winter to hunt for fish in the Housatonic.

This spring the birding hot spot in town was near the junction of Rattlesnake and Cogswell Roads in North Cornwall. There, on the Cornwall Conservation Trust’s Rattlesnake Preserve wetlands, there is a marshy pond created by beavers. It attracts an amazing variety of bird life and is also a nesting ground for many species.

Among others, our expert birders have identified great blue herons (five on one occasion); American bitterns; Canada geese; many ducks, including wood ducks, green-winged teal, mallard, black ducks, and hooded and common mergansers; turkey vultures; northern harriers; osprey; a sandhill crane; and red-tailed hawks. As well, the marsh has lots of songbirds, including Magnolia and Palm warblers, redwings and other blackbirds, as well as a now-rare brown thrasher.

A year ago, bitterns were first seen and heard. They are hard to spot in the grass. This species is classified as endangered in Connecticut.

Star of this year’s migration was a subadult sandhill crane with a brown head (instead of an adult’s red one). It lingered a day or two with the herons, then flew north. Cranes usually live much farther west and are described as “casual or accidental” here. Thus, a “first” for Cornwall.

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—Mark Wilson

SHOWDOWN ON SCOVILLE ROAD
Nearly 50 years ago my dad, Elmer Griggs, lived in retirement on Scoville Road. A good friend, Chad Docker, lived a quarter of a mile up the road, across from the house owned by Scoville Soulé.

On a cold, raw winter night about 2 A.M., Chad told Dad that he observed a flashlight flick in the house occupied in the summer by Annie Scoville. Dad told Chad he would check it out. He got up, dressed, put on an overcoat and scarf and overshoes, and walked down the road to Annie’s house. Dad noticed the door was ajar and he called out, “I know you’re in there and if you come out this minute I will never tell who you are.” The person came down and Dad recognized him.

A considerable quantity of “loot” had been stacked outside, which presumably the person had intended to load into the vehicle parked around back. Dad admonished the person that if he ever heard of his burglarizing any other place, as a lawyer, he would do his utmost to send the perpetrator to the penitentiary. When we asked Dad to give us a hint as to who he had confronted, he would not even reveal the gender of the offender. Mom assured me he never told her.

I have known anyone with more decency, character or courage than Elmer Griggs.

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Town Budget Adopted
Without a question or dissenting vote, a town meeting held on Friday, May 15, and attended by about 20 residents adopted Cornwall’s $6,314,206 budget for fiscal year 2008-09. Shortly afterward, the Board of Finance set the tax rate at 12.05 mills, up from 11.9 in 2007-08.

—The June Editors

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Events & Announcements

Art in Cornwall: Starting Tuesday, June 3, the Cornwall Free Library, as part of its Food, Glorious Food extravaganza, will exhibit artwork inspired by food from over 40 local artists. See insert for details.

At the IO Gallery, a new exhibit celebrating the female form in art entitled Girls, Girls, Girls showcases the talents of a group of women artists including locals Erica Prud’homme, Danielle Maier, and Anique Taylor. An artists’ reception will be held on Saturday, June 14, from 5 to 7 p.m. The show runs through July 20.

Through June, Northern Exposure Gallery continues to show Town and Country, a group show of photographs, which includes work by Lazlo Gyorsok and Martha Loutfi.

Trail Maintenance: Blue-Blazed Mohawk Trail maintenance from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 7. Tools will be supplied for both heavy and light work. Bring lunch and work gloves. Rain or shine (but not in heavy rain). Meet at hiker parking lot on Route 4, east side of Cornwall Bridge. To pre-register, please contact Henry Edmonds at (203) 426-6459 or HEdmonds@aol.com, or Kim Herkimer at 672-6678 or aghiii@snet.net.

Household Hazardous Waste Collection in Falls Village on Saturday, June 7. Check under your sink and in your garage for cleaners, oil-based paint, turpentine, pesticides, herbicides, household cleaners, and hobby supplies. Propane tanks from barbecue grills are also accepted. No charge for drop-off, but pre-registration is required. Call the Cornwall Town Hall at 672-4929 by June 5.

Open Studio: The Third Annual Cornwall Artists Open Studio will be held on Saturday, June 21, from 1 to 5 p.m. For a list of the 20 or so participating artists, directions to their studios, and a map, go to www.cornwallct.org and click on “Cornwall Artists.”

June Is Green

Really green, the trees cloaked in tints and tones of green that centuries of painters have tried to capture. No wonder people get married in June. If you’re not involved in a wedding, you might take a moment to send some green to the Chronicle. A check will do, and please use the coupon below. Thank you.

A Cornwall Historical Society Photo Exhibit will open at The Wandering Moose on Saturday, June 7, from 5 to 7 p.m., with complimentary hors d’oeuvres. The show will consist of old photos of West Cornwall, a number of which have not been shown before. That weekend the Moose will also offer a special menu featuring items based on recipes from the nineteenth century, when the covered bridge was built.

Motherhouse Events:
- June 14: Old Style Life Skills Series workshop. Eggs-perience Chickens. Learn about keeping chickens, from raising chicks to collecting eggs. See a variety of portable chicken houses. Prepare a live broiler to cook at home. 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Local Farm barn in Cornwall. Bring a dish to share for a pot-luck lunch. $35/family.
- June 28: Mother/Daughter River Retreat, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. A relaxing day of quiet activities for mothers and daughters to share on and near the Housatonic River. $35/mother-daughter pair. Contact Debra@Motherhouse.us or 672-0229 to pre-register or for more info.

Renter’s Relief Program: The Assessor’s Office is accepting applications for the Elderly and Disabled Renter’s Rebate Program through September 15, 2008. Applicants must be 65 as of December 31, 2007, or disabled and receiving Social Security disability support. Income limits for 2007 are: married $36,500; single $29,800. Income, rent, and utility statements for 2007 must be submitted with the application. For more information or to receive an application, visit the Assessor’s Office Tuesday through Thursday from 1 to 4 p.m. or call 672-2703.

Tax Relief Programs: There are two Cornwall tax relief programs: (1) If you face difficulty in paying your tax bill, you may apply for a $200 reduction if the tax exceeds 10 percent of your income; (2) If your property tax bill exceeds 8 percent of your income, you may enter into a tax-free condition with the town, which then takes a lien on the tax-abated property. That lien is eventually settled when the property is transferred. Requests must be filed with the Selectmen’s Office by June 15. For more details contact the Selectmen’s Office at 672-4959.

Solstice Peace Vigil: Join others on the Cornwall Bridge Green on Friday, June 20, at 6 p.m. to protest the Iraq War and sing the praises of peace at an event sponsored by the Cornwall Iraq Moratorium Network. Bring songs, musical instruments, your family and friends, and your own colorful peace posters (or pick up one of ours). For information call 672-0183.

Dog Licenses: Connecticut state law requires that all dogs six months of age or older be licensed annually on or before June 30 in the Town Clerk’s Office. Licenses will become available on June 1. A current rabies vaccination certificate must be submitted or be on file. Neutered or spayed dogs cost $8, and male or female dogs cost $19. For a neutered or spayed dog being licensed for the first time, a certificate from a licensed veterinarian must be presented. Penalties apply for late registration. If you choose to register by mail, enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for return of tag and license.

Rose Algrant Show: If you are an artist 21 or over, living in Cornwall, and want to exhibit at this year’s show scheduled for July 25, 26, and 27, call Phyllis Nauts at 672-6608 by June 15.

Meditation Group: The Cornwall Friends (Quaker) Worship Group invites all interested persons to join us. There are no requirements beyond an interest in shared silent meditation and/or worship. The group meets for about 45 minutes on the first and third Wednesdays of every month in the parlor at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church. All are welcome, whether you attend regularly or sporadically. For more information call Peg/Ken Keskinen at 672-6486.

THE CHRONICLE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

We hope you enjoy this on-line edition of the Cornwall Chronicle. Remember that all our revenues come from readers like you, and we need your help to continue producing this electronic edition along with the print edition. If your contribution is $10 or more, we’d be glad to mail the print edition to any out-of-town address. Please mail your tax deductible gifts to: Cornwall Chronicle Inc. 143 Cream Hill Rd., West Cornwall, CT 06796. Comments, letters and news may be e-mailed to the publishers at: elfhill@aol.com