Beating Back a Barn Fire

When the first fire truck arrived at 4:20 P.M. on Sunday, February 17, the milking parlor at Cream Hill Farm was, as firefighters say, fully involved. Soon six more trucks, tankers, and pumpers roared up, and at final count there were 27 Cornwall firefighters and another 50 or so from Goshen, Kent, and Falls Village, all of them working to save the old barn attached to the burning building.

"Flames were blazing out the doors and windows," said Fire Chief Earle Tyler, "but luckily the wind was from the north, so we could push the fire back, away from the barn. The timing of the fire was on our side, too. We'd have had far fewer guys on a weekday, and we'd have been slower to respond if it had been midnight."

It was lucky, too, that the 94 cows, none of which were injured, were outside the milking parlor when the fire started—apparently from an oil-fired hot water heater. Jim Kennedy, the farm operator, "was able to move them up to another barn," said Charlie Gold. News of the blaze spread fast to fellow dairymen. Peter Jacquier of Canaan's Laurel Brook Farm already had his trailer ready to transport 30 head when Kennedy called for help; smaller barns could push the fire back, away from the barns. With the frequent unavailability of the farming community is always amazing; Laurel Brook even came back to Lakeville at midnight with five and a half tons of feed for the cows."

Fire Chief Tyler was proud, too. "Our own department and mutual aid did a really great job. It was a good save." —Ella Clark

CCS Cinderella Team

Against daunting odds, the CCS boys basketball team, uniformed in long yellow socks from the soccer team, their own shorts, and team shirts from last year, turned in not only a winning season this year, but an undefeated one. Squad members were: Daniel Simons, Aaron Packard, Byron Clohessy, Cooper Oznofficz, Ryan Watts, Sam Packard, Dog Council, David Kennedy, Josh Martin, and Kyle Robinson. Some of the obstacles they faced were a gym too small with a floor too slippery for home games, the lack (initially) of a certified coach, the closing of the outdoor basketball courts in Cornwall Village, and the frequent unavailability of their own court for practice. Also, Cornwall had not won the Region One crown in—old timers say—49 years.

So how did they pull off this impressive improbability? First, of course, was their own athleticism and desire. But second, they selected their parents wisely. One father, Robert Clohessy, took courses to become a parlor when the fire started—apparently from an oil-fired hot water heater. Jim Kennedy, the farm operator, "was able to move them up to another barn," said Charlie Gold. News of the blaze spread fast to fellow dairymen. Peter Jacquier of Canaan's Laurel Brook Farm already had his trailer ready to transport 30 head when Kennedy called for help; smaller barns could push the fire back, away from the barns. With the frequent unavailability of the farming community is always amazing; Laurel Brook even came back to Lakeville at midnight with five and a half tons of feed for the cows."

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Legislative Pressures—OUCH!

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway is concerned—and wishes everyone in town would get concerned—about what might or might not happen in the current session of the state legislature. Because of the recession, state revenues are down. Costs of ongoing programs are up. Push has clearly come to shove.

"Cornwall will do well to hold the status quo," Gordon said recently. "And, of course, if we don't keep our state aid, property taxes here will have to go up."

As usual, many of the disagreements pit the smaller towns against the urban and heavily populated areas of the state. One proposal would replace local auto taxes with a standard state assessment; as a result, Cornwall car owners would pay higher taxes to the state, with the net proceeds that eventually fill back to the town reduced. Also, the state budget recently submitted by the governor trims Cornwall's projected education aid by some $12,000. Our road assistance, too, is threatened by proposals to decrease aid to towns and pour the money into I-95.

From his seat on the board of directors of the Council of Small Towns, Gordon sees other dangers and possibilities. For instance, the town's freedom in labor matters is now restricted by binding arbitration regulations. These might be changed to the town's advantage. So might provisions of a recent law changing the ten-year interval between assessments to 12 years, with a new "statistical balancing" added every fourth year. Although the balancing is supposed to be computerized at low cost, Gordon has his doubts.

"Keep informed," Gordon urges. "Read the newspapers. Express your opinions. We're lucky to have Andrew [Roraback] and Roberta [Willis] working on these problems from both sides of the aisle in Hartford."

Good News for CCT

The new millennium has started well for the Cornwall Conservation Trust. The Bradley family has generously given a three-acre wooded parcel on Popples Swamp's hillside overlooking the pristine Housatonic River corridor. Also, Hendor Chubb has given the CCT a conservation easement on 101 acres in Cornwall Hollow. This diverse property includes woods and slopes down to considerable frontage on the Hullenbeck River, a feeder to Great Swamp, a particularly rich ecosystem. Thus this one area will not join the one-half of U.S. wetlands lost to development in the past century. Essential to biodiversity, these waterways teem with activity that breeds and feeds many species of wildlife.

Three grants sweeten the story. First, the Land Trust Alliance (LTA) has granted the CCT $5,000 for land stewardship. This is funded in part by the New England matching grants administered by the LTA Northwest Program with the support of private donors. Second, for the purpose of natural resource inventorying, the CCT has been given a matched grant of $1,000 by the Berkshire Taconic Foundation. Third, a $1,000 supplemental grant has been received from the Torrington Area Foundation for wildlife inventories and boundary marking on easement lands that the CCT maintains.

The CCT is convinced that in the long term, land preservation saves the town money while generating true economic health.

Land Transfers

Anne A. Hubbard to Daniel D. and Ellen O'Toole Hubbard, 13.5 acres and house at 235 Dibble Hill Road for $1,005,000.

Marion E. Vogel to Bruce B. and Deborah A. Bennett, 75 acres off Cornwall Hill Road for $195,000.

Roger H. Samuels to Edward J. Kelleher, Jr., house and 16.24 acres at 120 Great Hill Road for $463,000.

Steven M. Rosen and Penelope Fleming to Andrew Arato and Jean Cohen, house and 3.45 acres at 135 Popples Swamp Road for $275,000.

William S. Calhoun to South Everest LLC, 9.75 acres on Everest Hill Road for $222,200.

Coltsfoot Farm LTD Partnership to CVA Valley LLC, Lot 12 of 7.5 acres for $77,142.87; Lot 14 of 23.9 acres for $139,442.20; and Lot 17 of 10.9 acres for $86,784.72 on Everest and Valley Roads.

Coltsfoot Farm LTD. Partnership to CVA Everest LLC, Lot 13 of 13.2 acres for $109,863.56; Lot 15 of 21.9 acres for $125,765.65; Lot 17 of 15.56 acres for $150,000 on Everest and Valley Roads.

Jessica K. Fowler to CVA Everest LLC, 4.8 acres on Valley Road for $135,000.

Michael A. Hanke and Ann W. Marshall to Marc Sgaraglino and Maria Ginsburg, house and 6.1 acres at 105 Cream Hill Road for $185,000.

Estate of Olga H. Schilling to John Peter Nestler and Jennifer Van Asch Van Wyck, house and land at 105 Todd Hill Road for $190,000.

Susan M. Gallo Lober to Jane Barnet and Paul R. Gottsegen, house and land at 11 Bolton Hill Road for $450,000.

Those Gone Geese

Ralph and Thalia Scoville's geese are usually found lollygagging around the corner of Scoville Road and Town Street, guarding their territory, greeting their guests with snake-necked hisses, getting in the way of the UPS truck. But recently someone has been committing what Earl Brecher calls "wholesale murder" among the gaggle. "Thing was, Virginia had come in from running one day early in December and..."
Letters to the Chronicle

PAST TRAGEDY; FUTURE HOPE

I am always surprised when disparate parts of my life converge—living in Cornwall, growing up in South Africa, traveling frequently via plane (or worrying about family when they do!), supporting AIDS research, and knowing Cornwall resident Don Bachman.

Don was a close friend of all the crew members lost on AA Flight 587 that crashed on November 12. He has taken the pain and loss he felt and committed himself to “an expedition of kindness and hope.” Actually, it is a 75-mile trek through the Cederberg Wilderness Area in South Africa. He is aiming to raise $10,000 to support both AIDS research in the US and provide direct help for people suffering from AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since September 11, many of us have felt frustrated by our inability to do anything concrete to mitigate the enormity of the grief that has befallen so many Americans. In the face of this personal grief, Don, dedicating his trek to the memory of his fellow flight attendants. I may not be with Don physically as he walks in the land I grew up in, but my thoughts, prayers, and financial support will be. I ask you to join me in supporting Don’s wonderful, uplifting journey. Please send your generous checks to: African AIDS Trek, ATT: Don Bachman Trekker #1211 (please note on your check too), 135 S. LaSalle Dept. 7007, Chicago, IL 60674.

—Lynn Waterston

WEST CORNWALL RACEWAY

We just returned from Germany and were going through the pleasant task of reading back issues of the Chronicle when I saw “Speeding on 128” in the December issue.

When we are home, I am an early riser and often will be around the Post Office at 6:30 A.M. or so. The speed of cars coming in both directions is unbelievable. I even tried to estimate the speed when coming down the hill into town in my own car, and I’ll bet a good many of those people in a hurry to get to work are hitting close to 40, if not more.

We hear of more coyote attacks recently. The artificial breeding man tells you these things. Hedgerows lost a little black calf last spring; it was crippled, and the cows couldn’t get there to defend it. They’ve raised hell with sheep too, and one man had a heifer stuck in the mud that coyotes killed. Ought to be a bounty on them.

“Ever since we lost that gander, we’ve trained the geese to go into the barn at dusk and we haven’t lost any. Not that the geese are worth anything. But they are good watch dogs.”

“They’re members of the family,” says Thalia.

—Ella Clark

Technology Planning at CCS

It’s no longer just blinking lights and space invader games. The use of computers in school is now a state-mandated curriculum. Cornwall Consolidated School is well aware of this issue and is currently working on a school technology plan that will meet with state approval. A new Technology Committee, comprised of community members, school staff, and local governmental officials is overseeing the plan.

Currently the school has at least one computer in each classroom; some have two or three. Almost every room has a drop for a computer connection, but some of these do not tie into the same system as the classroom computers. The office computer system, for example, has a completely different server, which makes it hard for teachers and office staff to share information. The school has just updated its Internet connection, but still has problems maintaining this link to the world. The computer lab, large enough for a whole class, is located in the library. This lab is being used by several teachers for the first time this year to incorporate technology training into the standard academic curricula as requested by the state.

“Our hope is to keep Cornwall going forward,” school librarian and committee member Ginny Snowden said. “All the other schools in the region have been praised for their technology plans. We are the last one to do all this.” Other regional schools have not only classroom-based computer labs, but also laptop or mobile computer labs. Some of the schools are distributing laptops to teachers and students. At this time CCS is not capable of doing this, financially or technologically.

Over the past few years, the school has received some state grant money for hardware and software, but this money has a catch to it. It is running out. If the school does not...
development of new technology, Cornwalls is an assessment of the school's current computer technology and a projection for the school's technology growth over the next five years.

The committee stresses that improvements made at CCS will be used not only by the pupils but also by the community and staff. This commitment to bringing technology to all Cornwall is part of the mission statement of the new technology plan.

---Bob Kanelh

Town Eyes State Grants

One exception to the gradual increase of big-city power in Hartford is the Small Town Economic Assistance Program, written into state law last June. Under STEAP, towns under 30,000 can apply for grants up to $500,000 for a long list of community and quality-of-life projects.

Cornwall is now in the process of applying for three projects. The largest grant, $250,000, would begin the process of converting the former Neoweld Company sites in Cornwall Bridge from contaminated, tax-delinquent eyesores to taxpaying properties that take advantage of their excellent locations. Another grant, $100,000, would cover the purchase of 8.8 acres adjacent to Foote Fields and the creation of a much-needed park.

The committee stresses that the improvements made at CCS will be used not only by the pupils but also by the whole community.

---Bob Kanelh

Events & Announcements

Art in Cornwall: Beginning March 2, the Cornwall Library will feature The Last Picture Show, an open exhibition of works by Cornwall artists of all ages. This will be the last art show at the current Library Building, and any Cornwall resident who has a work of art that he or she would like to see on the walls of the Library is invited to bring it, ready to hang, to the Library on Saturday, March 2, between 1 and 3 P.M.

At the National Iron Bank, Hilary Johnson of Washington, CT, will be exhibiting her animal portraits during the month of March.

Postponement: The movie, Big Broadcast of 1938, previously announced for a March 20 showing at the Library, has been postponed until April.

Seasonal Pictures Needed: Association of Businesses in Cornwall (ABC) is putting together a new business directory this spring and wants color photos illustrating the four seasons in Cornwall to use on the cover. People who have pictures may leave them at Cornwall Electric by March 15 (unusual photos will be returned). Gift certificates worth $50 at local businesses will be awarded for each accepted photo. Call Tom McKenzie, 672-6884, if you have questions.

Poetry Slam: Don't forget! March 9 at the Cornwall Library at 4 P.M. Everyone welcome; good eats, too.

Child Center Auction: Save the date—Sunday, April 28—for the 2002 Cornwall Child Center auction, which will be back at Mawhawk this year. Persons interested in helping or with something special to donate should call Emilie Pryor (672-4226) or Jean Vitalis (672-6880).

Bake Sale: From 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. on Saturday, March 9, the Cornwall Wolf Scouts will hold a sale at Baird's to help sponsor a child through the Christian Children's Fund.

A Fly-Tying Workshop, sponsored by Park and Rec. for kids fifth grade through high school, will be held at the Town Hall from 1:30 to 2:30 P.M. on March 3, 10, and 17. Led by Rob Nicholas of Houseatonic Anglers. Space is limited, so call 672-6058 to register.

A Celtic Band Concert, sponsored by Park and Rec., will take place on March 9 at the Town Hall. A potluck supper at 6:30 P.M. will precede the 7:30 P.M. concert.

Easter Party: Park and Rec. will sponsor its annual Easter party on Saturday, March 30, from 10 to 11 A.M. at CCS. Robo the Clown will be followed by an Easter egg hunt. Open to children pre-K through fourth grade.

Comdance Film Festival: Contestants still have three long weeks to submit a VHS film that might win a prize. Films should be under ten minutes long and contain no vulgarity. Other than that, you're free to let your creativity run wild—dramas, joke commercials, music videos, whatever. A jury panel will pick the three best films in two categories, fiction and non-fiction. Submissions are due by March 22 and can be left in the Cornwall Library in Donna Murphy's name or mailed to her at 55 Everest Hill Road, West Cornwall, CT 06796.

The festival itself, sponsored by Park and Rec., will be April 7 in the Town Hall. Questions? Call 672-6896 or 672-2407.

Rummage Sale Flash: The dates for the great 2002 sale have been set—July 13, 14, and 15. So please start assembling your rummage!

Coaches Needed: Park and Rec. is in need of baseball and softball coaches for the upcoming season. All you need is interest, enthusiasm, and energy. For more information call Bethany Thompson at 672-6058.