River Rumors

Rumors were flying...all over West Cornwall. The biggest rumor was that HVA (Housatonic Valley Association), flush with a generous share of General Electric PCB damage dollars, was coming in to undercut Cornwall’s bid to buy a three-acre parcel on the river next to the Hughes Memorial Library.

But when reasonable people got together at a special meeting on April 16, it turned out that the rumors were nothing but rumors, and false ones at that.

The next time you’re in West Cornwall, go to the Hughes Memorial Library at 35 Lower River Road. Just to its left is the three-acre plot that runs south along the river and is owned by Connecticut Light & Power (CL&P).

Four years ago Cornwall got in touch with CL&P to discuss buying the land. The plan was to use a $200,000 STEAP grant to renovate the interior of the Library (kitchenette and bathroom) and to put a septic system under the lawn. But then came the rumor about HVA. People in West Cornwall got upset, and soon there was a petition with over 20 signatures. That’s when First Selectman Gordon Ridgway stepped in and called an informational meeting.

It now turns out that CL&P is not going to sell the property. Rather, it may approve applications for easements that will allow Cornwall and HVA to make their improvements. The HVA proposal would stabilize the existing parking area at the southern end of the property, install a composting toilet, halt the erosion of the riverbank, and build an accessible platform for handicapped fishermen. The Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department would also have improved, safe access to the river.

All this, of course, will take a long time. An hour after it began, the meeting came to an end with all parties seemingly satisfied for now. The rumors had faded away.

—John Miller

West Cornwall Means Business

Headlines say the economy is on the skids, but in West Cornwall the slope may be upward. Three new businesses have come with the spring. What years and years ago was a small Roman Catholic chapel has now become a real estate office. What years ago was a furniture store now houses a barbeque joint. And what only recently was a wine cellar/seller has been remodeled as a fine-art photo gallery.

Perhaps the most conspicuous business announces itself with a sign—Bain Real Estate—in front of the small white building next to the Wandering Moose Café. Bain is certainly no stranger to Cornwall: It’s the company that regularly sends out those interesting maps showing recent sales and prices—seven different maps for different sections of town to a total of 1,105 addresses. With headquarters in Kent, Bain now has two satellite offices, in Sharon and West Cornwall. Realtor Priscilla Miller, in charge here, without using the cliché “location” even once, points out that the nearby café, Shaker furniture showroom, and of course the covered bridge itself should bring in considerable walk-in traffic. Although real estate has softened somewhat in recent months, it is still an active market, and in fact an improving one for the many first-time buyers Priscilla Miller sees.

Just up the street and across the tracks, in the space below The Wish House gift shop, the Northern Exposure Photographic Gallery, a collaborative effort of several regional photographers, opened its doors on March 22. Cornwall’s Lazlo Gyorsok is among those featured in the initial exhibit, Visions, and Martha Loutfi’s images will be on display in a summer show. Current open hours are noon to 3:30 P.M., Thursday through Sunday, with one of the exhibitors usually present on weekends. In addition to framed photographs in well-lit wall displays, bins of other photos, as well as post and note cards, are available. Curator Karin Smith looks forward to clothesline shows on The Wish House lawn and workshops on photography (continued on page 2)
(continued from page 1)

as a fine art. Further information is available at www.northernexposurephotography.com.

At the other end of Railroad Plaza, just past the old red station, is Smokin’ Barbeque, opened by Vicki Halliday and Dan Evans on March 28. It’s a full bar, a limited menu, and a ton of atmosphere: pinball machines that really light up, green-checked oilcloth on the tables, menus on chalkboards, and candles in cans. Ribs, brisket, pulled pork, smoked turkey, and more temptations are offered at reasonable prices, with side dishes such as coleslaw and potato salad. Open only Friday and Saturday at this writing, the restaurant will increase days and hours as the season progresses. When asked for a quote to end this story with a snap, Dan Evans just smiled and pointed at the odd word on his T-shirt: edywijafangas. Pronounced fast and with the right slurr, this comes out something like “eat it wi’ yo’ fingers.” Nuf said.

—Bob Potter

A Brief History of Foolishness

Contrary to the story in the April Chronicle, an Olde Dudleytown theme park will not be constructed in Kent. The piece was an April Fools spoof. You all got that, right? We ask because April Fools humor can be a risky business.

The Chronicle’s efforts are perhaps not up to the classics in the field, such as the BBC’s “Big Ben Goes Digital,” or Sports Illustrated’s famous “Sidd Finch,” but our small history illustrates the problem of the genre, viz., can a story be plausible and absurd at the same time?

Our first April Fools story was in 1994, at the height of the confusion about what to do with Rumsey Hall. It described a proposal by the American Kennel Club to turn it into a canine museum, an idea that seemed barely credible to the writer (me) but was taken seriously by some readers despite its description of “wax replicas of famous movie dogs” and a quote from Gordon Ridgway that the AKC was “barking up the wrong tree.”

John Miller’s 2005 account of an upcoming visit by Prince Charles and Camilla surely left more readers laughing than credulous, but there was a faint ring of truth in Camilla’s “Cornwall” connection, and Ed McDonald wrote to say he was disappointed to learn that it was a spoof: “Feeling certain I would be invited to the Scotts’ garden party I sent my blue serge suit and old Etonian tie to the dry cleaners.”

Hendon Chubb’s “The Truffle of Lucky Pierre” in 2006 was a masterpiece of understatement, so subtle that it was greeted by baffled silence. A guy grows a fancy mushroom in town? What’s the joke? You had to grow up in Provence to get this one.

In April 2007, Lisa Lansing Simont also tilted toward the plausible in her story about a proposal to close the covered bridge to traffic, which would be rerouted to a new bridge. The piece had a couple of speed bumps that should have warned readers (such as physically moving The Wandering Moose), but the idea provoked outrage among some readers and led two Chronicle directors to chide the managing editor for burying such an important story in the back of the paper.

Oddly enough, that same issue had a serious story by Gordon Ridgway about a brook in the center of West Cornwall that had morphed into a 100-foot-long mini glacier. Many readers thought that this was the April Fools story. Go figure.

I guess we’ll keep trying until we get it as right as George Plimpton, who wrote “Sidd Finch,” about a rookie ballplayer who learned “the art of the pitch” at a Tibetan monastery and showed up at the Mets camp in Florida with a 168-mph fastball. The subtitle of the article was: “He’s a pitcher, part yogi and part recluse. Impressively liberated from our opulent lifestyle, Sidd’s deciding about yoga—and his future in baseball.” The first letter of each word spells “Happy April Fools Day.” —Ed Ferman

The Budget and Your Wallet

The combined general town government and education budgets total $6,314,412, an increase of $278,254, or 4.61 percent, over last year. How did the Board of Selectmen and Board of Education (BOE) keep the budget in check?

The selectmen balanced average salary increases of 3.5 percent, lower interest income, lower town clerk fees, higher CRRA tipping fees, and higher costs for roads and insurance, against a windfall surplus in the 2007-08 budget of $278,254, mostly derived from land classification adjustments and sales. Also helping on the plus side are FEMA reimbursements for last year’s flooding and an increase in state grant funding in several areas. Says First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, “We knew going in, this was not the year to do anything fancy.”

BOE Chairman Barbara Gold credits CCS Principal Kathleen Fitzgibbons as being “very aware of budget concerns and the town’s fiscal conservatism.” Dr. Fitz uses state RAP grants to enhance the school’s academic programs. In addition, next year the middle school will need only one homeroom each for grades six through eight, which will eliminate one teacher position.

How does all this affect your wallet? The Board of Finance sets the mill rate after the budget is voted upon at the annual town budget meeting to be held Friday, May 16, at 7:30 p.m. at CCS. The new mill rate is projected to be 12.05, up 1.26 percent from last year. This number is applied to your real estate and personal property assessments to give you your new tax. You can do the math. —Cheryl Evans

Editor’s Note: Numbers in this article are current as of the May Chronicle deadline.

Transistor Transit

On April 3 a long, white container was trucked into the Recycling Center (AKA dump) and took up residence between the two scrap-metal bins. This is the long-awaited electronics depository. Within, residents may divest themselves of all manner of electronic appliances: TVs, computers, and monitors, to name a few. Smaller items are accepted free of charge, but a nominal fee applies to larger ones. Items may be dropped off any day the facility is open except Sunday.

CRTC Recyclers, who collect the appliances, promise to destroy computer hard drives, and the container will be locked during off hours as a security measure, but caution dictates that one format the drives if they contain sensitive information.

Any items in perfect working order should be so marked and called to the attention of Fred or Steve, who will make a modest effort to find a good home for them. (Charges still apply.)

Lastly, do not lament parting with those beloved electronic servants. In no time their guts will be winging their way to the Orient only to return, like the swallows to Capistrano, recycled inside that HD TV you will have to shell out 500 bucks for next year. —Matt Collins

Welcome

Jacob Hans to Amy and Matthew Triax
Alexandra Currier to Kathy and Phil West

Good-Bye to Friends

Ruth Phillips Foote
Madeline S. Lape
William B. Winters

Land Transfers

Sharon K. and John C. Nobert to William Dinneen, property at 34 South Road for $650,000.
Joseph and Barbara Ellis to Cornwall Conservation Trust, a conservation easement on .452 acres on Lake Road.
Joseph and Barbara Ellis to Betty Spence, 3,001 acres on Lake Road for $120,000.

The Sweetest Year

A sugar summary shows that this was indeed a super-sumptuous year for Cornwall’s maple syrup producers. Apparently the combination of sun, rain, and temperature encouraged the maples to yield up bumper bucketsful of sap. The sap, boiled down at a 40-to-1 ratio, yielded around 550 gallons of syrup. That can sweeten a lot of pancakes!

Those coping with taps, collecting containers, boiling rigs, wood hauling and splitting, and tending the sugaring process include Buddy Hurlburt with the most taps and a yield of 288 gallons, Gordon Ridgway, Amanda Perkins, Bob Whitford, Hunt Williams, Gregory Oracz, and Phil Hart. All agreed that this year was “the best ever.”

Also, a common comment was that the pile of wood, the supply of...
containers, and the energy for constant oversight of the boiling ran out before the sap itself quit running; taps were pulled before the season ceased. All who treasure the taste of maple sweetness have a bountiful supply to anticipate.

—Ginny Potter

Correction

The March Chronicle informed our readers that Connecticut Light & Power offered most homeowners an extensive energy audit for $3.00 co-pay. Move that dot two places to the right: it’s $300.00.

Forward Thinking

Plans may be coming together to bring help to Cornwall’s list of need-to-do’s. In the effort to enlist citizen recommendations for the revision of the Town Plan, the Planning and Zoning Commission held a meeting on March 25 at which people concerned with Cornwall Bridge issues were invited to list problems and possible solutions. The well-attended meeting focused on difficulties with heightened traffic and a challenged economy, but did not lead directly to a consensus of solutions. The residents and businesses in West Cornwall have often voiced similar concerns and have not found solutions.

P&Z Chair Annie Kosciusko cautions that there is only so much the Town Plan can do, and she fears that people are expecting more than the commission can deliver. She wishes for “actual humans wanting to be there, running businesses in the empty, waiting buildings.”

Serendipitously, First Selectman Gordon Ridgway announced the receipt of a state STEAP (Small Town Economic Advancement Program) grant in the amount of $150,000 for “business façade improvement and traffic calming programs.” Individual businesses would apply to the town for support for a project and would provide 10 percent of the funding themselves. For example, exteriors could be enhanced by new doors or signs; kiosks could list businesses. The town could hire a planner to coordinate the sprucing up. The STEAP money will become available when required paperwork is accepted by state committees and supervisors. The combination of innovative ideas with some money to help pay for them should increase the energy and economy of both villages.

—Ginny Potter

Open Space Future

By a Planning and Zoning Commission vote at its April 8 meeting, subdivision regulations will include: “Where three or more lots are planned, the Commission shall require either the reservation of up to 15 percent of the land for open space or accept a fee in lieu of open space.” To meet this requirement, members strongly urge applicants to submit a Preliminary Subdivision Plan, during which details can be mutually worked out for the best use for the owner and for the preservation of appropriate land.

—Ginny Potter

Solar Panels on the Way

On April 2, Bob Wall of the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund (CCEF) and Bob Wassung, a CCEF engineer, addressed a full room at CCS on the subject of solar panels. The seventh and eighth grades attended, as did their science teacher, Kathy West, and Lynn Meehan, who has been rehired this spring to be the energy educator. With a slide show and a talk, the men from CCEF discussed the placing of photovoltaic panels on the roof of a municipal building in Cornwall.

Dr. Fitz gave an impassioned plug for the school as the perfect site. Since the panels would become such an immediate part of the school as the perfect site. Since the panels would become such an immediate part of the students’ lives, and since the workings of the panels will be accessible on a computer website, it was easy to see the reason for her plea. However, the engineer will look at other buildings and check for strong, unshaded roofs set at a suitable angle.

In a drive that started last summer and is ongoing, the Cornwall Energy Task Force earned two panels by signing up enough people to switch over to renewable energy. The town nearly has a third panel, and the engineer will check roofs for this possible addition. The slides clearly showed how photons from the sun turn into volts when they go through a photovoltaic cell, or solar panel, and then get routed to batteries for storage or to the grid.

It will be about a month before the selected roof is announced, and then a couple of more months before the installation is complete.

—Anne and John Zinsser

An open letter to State Senator Andrew W. Roraback:

HANGING OUT IN CORNWALL
Dear Senator Roraback:
Yesterday’s Waterbury Republican-American informed the public of a proposed law that would “enshrine the freedom to dry laundry outdoors in state law…. The bill would prohibit towns and cities, condominium boards or homeowner associations from banning outdoor clotheslines.”

I urge you to support this legislation. Yes, I’ve heard of such places but thank goodness not in my town. At least not yet are the Proper People in charge. Imagine, they can go out into their gated backyards and sunbathe wearing nothing but a sneer—but they can’t hang up what they just took off? You know what I think? I think they think people who hang out their own laundry also share a single family towel in the bathroom and dump car ashtrays onto parking lots. Wal-Mart parking lots.

Not so. Behind every line of clothes a poem lies, like whatever makes a certain neighbor here dry her dainties inside a pillow case. Observe, Senator. Observe! Clotheslines turn men into jockeys or boxers. All clotheslines lead to clothesline art: A flowing stream of form and color shape-shifting in a frisky breeze outwaxes a Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns.

Clotheslines are shaking the sunshine out and savoring the smell. Clotheslines are carols on a windy day. Clotheslines are Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg. Clotheslines are abayas. Clotheslines are bikinis. Clotheslines are where we draw the line, hold the line, and if necessary, Senator, lay it on the line.

Your constituent,
Robert R. Potter

Events & Announcements

Auction Reminder: “Around the World” fundraiser for the Cornwall Child Center will take place on Saturday, May 3, from 5:30 to 9 P.M. at the Torrington Country Club. Buy tickets at the door or call Sandy Dolinsky at 672-0129. Go to www.cornwallct.org to read the catalog or join in the bidding.

Art in Cornwall: At the Cornwall Free Library, an exhibit of Sybil Perry’s new pastel landscapes, Into the Woods, begins May 2. A reception for the artist will be held on Sunday, May 4, from 2 to 5 P.M. Betty Busby’s sculptural pottery continues to be shown in the case.

Northern Exposure Photographic Gallery will exhibit Visions through May 18 and start a new group show, Town & Country, on Saturday, May 24, with a reception from 3 to 6 P.M.

A Referendum will be held in the Town Hall on Tuesday, May 6, from noon to 8 P.M. for the purpose of voting on the Region One school budget. Absentee ballots are available in the Town Clerk’s Office.

Arts Fund Scholarships are available for the pursuit of summer study in the arts. Interested students in Region One schools should contact Linda Peppe at (860) 824-5774 as soon as possible. Applications must be postmarked by May 2, 2008.
Medicine to African Children: The Mekele Blind School in Ethiopia needs to replenish the meds brought over last summer by a group from the Northwest Corner. Non-chewable vitamins, ibuprofen, and Tylenol in sealed bottles can be donated through CCS or dropped off at the Library until May 10. Generic brands or expired-dated pills will be gratefully accepted.

Motherhouse Activities:
May 10: Weed Walk
Discover the wonder of edible and healing plants (AKA weeds) with herbalist Alicia North. Start at Local Farm and end there with a potluck lunch. 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. $35/family.
May 11: Make a clay “Peace Bowl” to hold your wishes, dreams, and prayers on Mothers’ Day, 1 to 3 P.M. at the Local Farm barn. Bowls will be fired in an open pit on Saturday, May 17, $35/family.
May 23: Family Round Sing, 7:30 P.M. at the Local Farm barn.
Contact Debra@Motherhouse.us or 672-0229 to register or for further information.

Marriage Makes a Word of Difference: This new film portraying the personal struggles and political challenges facing Connecticut same-sex couples will be shown on Saturday, May 10, from 4 to 6 P.M. in the Town Hall. A reception will follow. RSVP to Nancy Dart at 672-0041 or ndart@aol.com.

Earth Day Extended: The Cornwall Energy Task Force invites you to attend local Earth Day events and to bring back ideas for recycling, conserving, and responding to future energy demands. Please write or draw each idea on a letter-sized sheet of paper and submit it to the Town Hall by May 22 for a Memorial Day exhibit.

Red Cross Blood Drive will be held at the UCC Parish House on Tuesday, May 6, from 1:30 to 6:15 P.M. Donors should be at least 17 years old, weigh 110 pounds, and be in good health. Walk-ins are welcome, but scheduling a time can avoid waiting. For further information call Jerry or Pat Blayke at 672-6516.

May Distractions
In Cornwall, the month of May offers much to distract us. The gardens are freshening up, lettuce and peas are in the ground, annuals are coming, please send in a donation. The Chronicle reading as well as for sending along a check to guarantee this continued pleasure.

Ninth Annual Spring Bird Walk: Meet our resident naturalist Art Ginter at the intersection of Rattlesnake and Cream Hill Roads on Saturday, May 10, at 7:15 A.M.
Bring binoculars and waterproof boots for the two-hour hike through the Hedgerows Farm property. No rain date.
For details and reservations contact Carla Bigelow (672-0283).

The Cornwall Iraq Moratorium Network will host guest speaker Michael Hoffman, a co-founder of Iraq Veterans Against the War, at the Town Hall on Friday, May 16, at 7 P.M. and is open to all. For information call 672-0183.

A West Cornwall Focus Meeting on Tuesday, May 27, at 7:30 P.M. at the Town Hall, has been called by the Planning and Zoning Commission to elicit recommendations for the Town Plan, exclusively for that village. West Cornwall residents and business owners are encouraged to attend. Issues to be discussed will include the outlook for businesses, the concerns of those in residences, traffic flow, and parking. Everyone is welcome to be part of the discussion. Those unable to attend and having specific comments or suggestions are invited to send them to Karen Nelson at cwanldus@optonline.net, or at the Town Office (672-4957).

Library Book Sale on Memorial Day weekend: Saturday, May 24, 9 to 10 A.M.; early bird sale, $10; 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.; regular sale; Monday, May 26, 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. (closed during parade). Gently used books wanted—please drop off at the Library.

The Unexpected Guest, an Agatha Christie radio play, will be presented by the Town Hall Players with a cast of Cornwallians on the Town Hall stage Memorial Day weekend. Performance dates: Friday and Saturday, May 23 and 24, at 8 P.M.; Sunday, May 25, matinee at 1:30 P.M. Tickets: $10 adults, $8 seniors, $5 children. For further information call Bobbie Tyson, 672-6762.

Bob Parker, Writer and Illustrator, will talk about his new book, Piano Starts Here—The Young Art Tatum, on Saturday, May 10, at 3 P.M. at the Library.

Out-of-Town Subscribers: If the date next to your name on the mailing label is circled in red, it means your subscription has expired. To keep the Chronicle coming, please send in a donation.

Memorial Day: On Monday, May 26, at 9 A.M., Charles Gold will lead a service at the North Cornwall Cemetery. Bring flowers to decorate the graves. At 10 A.M., the Seamen’s Service will take place at the covered bridge. The parade and ceremony begin at the Town Green at 11 A.M.

After the parade and ceremony, enjoy food and games on the United Church of Christ grounds at the carnival sponsored by UCC and the Cornwall Child Center. Consume hamburgers and hot dogs grilled on the spot, fresh salads, beverages, and ice cream; and join in games for children of all ages. Proceeds support CCC scholarships and a variety of UCC mission concerns.


A Forum on Kent, sponsored by the Cornwall Association, will be held on Saturday, May 31, at 4 P.M. at the Town Hall. Kent’s first selectman and other town representatives will tell what makes their town tick. Refreshments will be served.

HVRHS Community Forum: The Housatonic Valley Regional High School Long Range Planning Committee has established a series of public forums to present information and solicit citizen responses. The Cornwall meeting is planned for Friday, May 30, at 7 P.M. at CCS. All Cornwall citizens are urged to attend and to complete an online survey located at www.hvrhs.org and www.region1schools.org. Print copies will be available at the May 30 meeting.

Calling Cornwall Artists: The Third Annual Cornwall Open Studio will take place on Saturday, June 21, from 1 to 5 P.M. Those interested in participating should contact Dave Colbert at ourmaridog@yahoo.com or 672-0064.

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