

THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

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Meeting Lisa

GETTING TO KNOW THE NEW TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

Town Administrator Lisa Blackmer, who began serving as Sandisfield's first town administrator in December, is finding her way through Town Hall, working with the Select Board and town committees, and learning the local ropes from town staff.

A Times reporter sat down with Lisa in her "office" in the Town Hall Annex to help us become more acquainted. She shares space now with Town Clerk Dolores Harasyko and the town's Highway Department, but she will move soon to a more private area as much of her work requires confidentiality.

In the Berkshire Eagle on February 12, Lisa told reporter John Sakata, "The first six months will be a learning curve, learning what the boundaries are, what I need to expedite, and what I can take my time on."

Times: What draws you to public service?

Lisa: I suppose you could say that I am a bit idealistic, maybe due to my family. My mom volunteered in the school, my dad coached little league, we sponsored a Cambodian Refugee family. My parents set an example of helping others. I like to think that I can make a difference, especially in a small town like this, which is rewarding.

Why Sandisfield?

First thing, the town hired me. But actually my family's association with the town goes back quite a few years. We rented cabins at Spectacle Pond. I also have old friends here and have visited frequently. Sandisfield is a unique, interesting place; in some respects

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Ghostly figures, frozen in the ice, living on the cliffs of Sandisfield. Who are they?

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Serious Problems with Municipal Buildings

TOWN COMMITTEE RECEIVES CONSULTANT'S REPORT

By Ron Bernard

A major milestone in the Town's short and long-term facilities planning was reached last month when Bryarly Consulting submitted detailed plans to the Strategic Planning Committee for repairs to Sandisfield's aging municipal buildings.

Bryarly, a Springfield-based engineering firm, was asked to study two major areas: (1) long-term

space requirements based on the committee's 2013 department and boards survey responses and (2) repairs necessary right now to bring existing structures into building code compliance and associated cost estimates. The picture presented by Bryarly to the committee at meetings in January with revi-

Cont'd p.3

MEETING LISA

Cont'd from p.1

stopped in time and removed from the faster pace of life. This aspect has a certain charm.

You've been on the job only a short time. Do you have you a sense of how Sandisfield compares to other Berkshire towns of similar size and demographics?



I assume you mean from a municipal standpoint. In my experience it seems that other towns in South County have better resources and taxability. This is not a knock on our town because there are valid and historical reasons, probably well known to residents.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the town?

It all boils down to the budget, which is certainly lean. But this is reality because the tax base is so constricted. The town has rising costs without new sources of funding.

An administrator can help by using knowledge, time, and connections to seek out grants and other

income streams and advocating for PILOT funds and more unrestricted state aid. I sit on the Massachusetts Municipal Association board where I'll be advocating for more state Chapter 90 road money. And because Sandisfield has so much state-owned land, I'm sure we qualify for more money in lieu of taxes from the state. Also, I see a need for long-term planning which should lead to grants.

From what I have seen so far, there is strong community spirit and an above average tradition of volunteerism.

What is your vision for improving town government?

I don't pretend to have a grand vision. But I will bring much practical experience and suggestions to bear on everyday problems. I am hopeful that over time the people will notice better and more efficient operations.

What are your strengths? What do you bring personally to the position of Administrator?

I've been an elected member of the North Adams City Council for six years, and I understand the challenges facing the individual towns throughout Berkshire County.

I am sold on the value of networking and have, as they say, a big Rolodex of contacts for a sounding board. I ask a lot of questions. But I've also learned how to listen. I appreciate different points of view and the importance of bringing people together to resolve issues. I am not afraid to change my position if new information comes to light and that is in the best interests of all concerned.

What do you expect from the Town and from residents as you make this transition?

I only hope that folks understand that progress does not happen overnight and to have some patience. The list of things needing attention is large and growing. At the moment my allowed time is relatively limited so priorities have to be clear. I'm sure the Selectmen will support me.

What are your plans to become more familiar with our institutions and neighborhoods? How can people help?

My available hours are limited as I said, but I intend to visit all the departments and to meet the committees and boards and residents as soon as possible. I also look forward to learning my way around this big town although the weather lately has been an impediment.

What is your schedule and how can residents reach you?

My schedule is not set in stone, but generally I will be in office on Mondays from about 2:30 to 9 pm, and Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9 am to 3 pm. I can be reached at 258-4711 and by email: sandisfieldtownadm@verizon.net

May we ask about your family life?

Sure. I live in North Adams with my husband, Bill. His career has been in public safety for 35 years, including the last 28 years in the Massachusetts State Police. We have two adult children, Bill and Jennifer, and a granddaughter, Lena. In what I call "spare time," I enjoy all the Berkshires have to offer. I cook for friends and family, work in my garden, and hang out with my two cats, Mugsy and Charlie. 🐾

Town Election in May SANDISFIELD ELECTION CALENDAR

If you are interested in running for one of the twelve positions up for election in May, you need to contact Town Clerk Dolores Harasyko or Assistant Town Clerk Teresa DellaGiustina and take out nomination papers. You need to be a registered voter. When collecting signatures on

your nomination papers make sure the person signing is a registered voter of Sandisfield and that they use their street address. PO boxes and route numbers are unacceptable as addresses. If the signature is illegible, the signer can print their name next to the signature.

DEADLINES AND IMPORTANT DATES

March 27	Last day to obtain nomination papers
March 31	Last day to submit nomination papers
April 15	Last day to object or withdraw nomination papers
April 28	Last day to register to vote for the Annual Town Meeting and the Annual Town Election. Register at Town Hall Annex, 2:00-4:00 p.m., and 7:00-8:00 p.m.
May 17	Annual Town Meeting. Old Town Hall, 10:00 a.m.
May 19	Annual Town Election. Old Town Hall, 10 a.m.-8:00 p.m.

OFFICES UP FOR ELECTION

Office	Term	Currently held by
Moderator	1 year	John Skrip
Town Clerk	3 years	Dolores Harasyko
Selectman	3 years	Jeffrey Gray
Treasurer	3 years	Teresa DellaGiustina
Auditor	1 year	Ralph Morrison
Board of Assessors	3 years	Teresa DellaGiustina
School Committee	3 years	Nick DellaGiustina
Board of Health	3 years	Victor Hryckvich
Planning Board	5 year	Gary Bottum, Sr.
Library Trustee	5 years	Clare M. English
Constable	3 years	Nazario Sanchez
Constable	3 years	Joseph Zeller

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

April is the cruelest month, said a poet. Let's hope he's wrong, that it's not still coming. We've had enough.

Better to anticipate sunshine, melting snow, rising sap, emerging green, even the coming mud. Finally, wildflowers. Eventually, summer gardens.

Meanwhile, we have issues to resolve. We need a store that sells bread and gas. How can we help that happen?

Some town buildings are falling down. Others are inefficient or simply don't work. Fix them? Build from scratch? Either/or?

The town is strapped for cash, with few resources to collect more. We almost have to fistfight the state for operating funds. What to do? Wring hands? Wash hands?

Get involved, is what.

Others have in the past. Residents, stepping up. Twenty years ago, the late Bob Green helped raise funds for Firehouse #2. Resident George Sokolsky, longer ago than that, was a founder of the Sandisfield Taxpayers Association which helped the town over an earlier rough patch.

Who can help now?

You. Me. Us. Get involved. Full-timers. Part-timers. Attend Select Board meetings. Be interested. Provide support. An election is coming up. Talk to people. Attend meetings as our committees try to find out what the town needs and come to decisions.

It's hard work.

But Sandisfield, our town, needs the help of everyone who loves this place.

Bill Price
West New Boston



*New Boston Inn buried again.
Photo: Jean Atwater-Williams*

SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS

Cont'd from p.1

sions in February is eye-opening but not surprising.

Sandisfield is facing a challenge on a scale not seen since the late-1940s when the consolidated "New School" was constructed on Sandisfield Road to replace the obsolete neighborhood schoolhouses that had become so rundown and unsafe there was no alternative.

Then, as now, the Town had to deal with a crisis resulting from years – actually decades – of patchwork repairs, deferred maintenance, and lack of planning. Then, as now, the situation was even more daunting owing to generally bad economic conditions and a stagnant tax base.

The rehabilitation required to bring just three buildings – Town Hall Annex, Old Town Hall, and the Library – into code compliance has a likely price tag of over \$1 million. According to Bryarly, all the rehabilitation work relates only

to remediation of safety hazards and establishment of basic working environments.

Committee chair Kathy Jacobs said, "That means that none of the repairs are cosmetic improvements. They'll simply bring us up-to-date. And none of the repairs bring new capability to the Town of any sort."

In other words, even after repairs are done, the buildings will not only not meet current needs, but they would still be obsolete. Concerning space requirements, the old and current town halls have a combined area of approximately 14,000 sq. ft., while an estimated 24,000 sq. ft. will be needed within a few years to fulfill basic municipal activities and responsibilities.

The small audiences at the committee's public meetings heard a litany of serious issues in the buildings, including presence of asbestos, obsolete fire alarm systems, inadequate emergency, interior, and exterior lighting, rampant mold, dampness and water problems, failed windows, heating and hot water problems, inadequate bathrooms, faulty roofs, and at one site even a crumbling foundation. Septic systems are also problematic and are at risk of failure.

Protect Your Animals Rabies Clinic

The Sandisfield Board of Health is sponsoring a Rabies Clinic for vaccinations of dogs, cats, and ferrets. An outbreak of rabies in November involved wild animals and domestic livestock.

The vaccination event will be on Saturday, March 29, at Old Town Hall at 3 Silverbrook Road, from 10 a.m. until noon. Vaccinations are \$15 each. Vaccine will be given by Dr. Claire Blanchard from Bilmar Small Animal Clinic of Great Barrington.

For information, call the Board of Health at 258-4053 or Kim Spring, Animal Health Warden, at 258-4450.

Unfortunately, the reality is even more sobering. According to the engineers, the highway department's facilities (which were considered separately from the above estimates) are so decrepit that repairs might not be feasible. Regardless of whatever decisions are made to upgrade the other three buildings, the separate, major, and immediate problem of the condition of the garage must be addressed and will involve substantial additional cost.

The Strategic Planning Committee has been working all winter on this situation. At this point the scope of the problem is clear and the list of specific remedies and likely costs have been identified. This month the committee will review for the Selectmen the specifics in the Bryarly report together with various scenarios, implications, alternatives, and timing.

Ready or not, the public is about to be informed and will be asked to participate in decisions that will profoundly affect the quality of life here and maybe even our viability as a town. ♡



TOWN BUSINESS

Submitted by Town Clerk Dolores Harasyko

Edited by Bill Price

Agendas for upcoming Selectmen's Meetings and detailed meeting minutes are available at the Town website: www.sandisfield.info. Go to Meetings, then to Board of Selectmen. Town Selectmen are Patrick Barrett, Jeff Gray, and Rosario Messina.

Selectmen's Meeting, December 16, 2013. Among other business, snow plow bids were opened, plowing procedures, conservation easements, and a complaint at the transfer station discussed,

Highway Department

Three bids for snow plowing were received, as follows:

- P & R Construction at \$55.00 per hour
- A & M Auto at \$60.00 per hour
- C. W. Nelson at \$60.00 per hour

(At the December 23 Selectmen's Meeting, the contract was awarded to P&R Construction.)

Road Superintendent Steve Harasyko provided weekly highway reports. Selectman Patrick Barrett appreciated the highway department work during past snow storms and getting out before the school buses. The bridge by the Library has been repaired again and extra arrow signs and reflective strips added and a light installed.

An anonymous complaint was received about highway department employees plowing their own driveways during snow storms. (This was re-

ported in Town Business in the Jan/Feb issue of the Times.) The decision was that the department should continue the long established and reasonable practice currently in place.

Conservation Easements

Town Administrator Lisa Blackmer provided updates on conservation easements. She asked for more time to further research tax implications placed on the town by granting more easements. She found that some towns will no longer allow easements as it has become too costly to those towns' tax base. Mr. Narain Schroeder from Berkshire Natural Resources Council was present to represent Dominic Konstam requesting the easement and asking the town to vote December 30, 2013. Lisa pointed out that their Chapter 61 runs out on Dec. 31, and it is unreasonable to ask the town to make such an important decision without enough time to thoroughly research the impact on the town. The issue was held to the December 30 Selectmen's Meeting agenda for an update from Lisa.

Gas Pipeline Expansion

Letters of concern regarding the expansion of the gas pipeline were received from Mary Anne Grammer and Barbara Penn. Patrick has contacted state representatives who were unaware of the expansion proposal and will continue to work with Smitty Pignatelli's office and keep the public aware of the process. Lisa suggested getting the entire Berkshire delegation involved as this pipeline extends north through Berkshire County. Lisa will follow up.

Transfer Station

Mary Turek in, saying that a tense situation is building at the dump with people trying to use the dump without stickers. Patrick responded that the attendant has been instructed to not get into confrontations with any unruly persons, but that he is to contact the Board of Selectmen. Administrative Assistant Dolores Harasyko stated that a new sign

has been placed at the dump: "No dumping without current sticker per order of the Board of Selectmen."

Other Business

Ron Bernard, Chair of the Historical Commission, in to discuss a proposal for a Sister City/Twin Town designation with the town of Ombersley in Worcestershire, England. The town has a connection to the Sandys family from which Sandisfield derives its name. Cost to the town would be minimal, approximately \$150. Motion by Selectman Jeff Gray, second by Patrick to allow Ron to pursue the project.

The Selectmen, accepting letters of resignation from Nick DellaGiustina from the Planning Board and Susan Bubenas from the Conservation Commission, thanked them for their work for the Town.

Minutes for Dec 30, 2013, and for Jan 6, 21, 27 and Feb 3, 10, and 18, had not been posted at press time.

Selectmen's Meeting, January 13, 2014. Among other regular business, discussions included issues of Town internet access, general budgets, drainage at the library, funding for town administrator's office, and business license fees.

Highway Department

Snow, heavy rain, freezing rain, and ice jams have kept the department very busy. A contractor was hired to unblock the ice jam on Route 57 to avoid flooding the major thoroughway in town. On January 9, anticipating heavy rains, Steve contacted town commissions to appraise them of potential flooding problem. Selectman Rosario Messina observed the process and commended Steve for the job. The new truck should be in by the end of the week.

Town Internet Access

Treasurer Teresa DellaGiustina requests support from the Selectmen to proceed with upgrading internet access. She experienced two consecutive weeks with no internet access and she had to drive around town to find a signal in order to complete the payroll. Jean Atwater-Williams is working on estimates to convert to fiber optics, which she will review with the Selectmen and request a reserve fund transfer.

General Budget

Reviewing the General Government budgets, Dolores discussed the final expense report from the Treasurer for the end of fiscal year 2013. Most budgets ran out of funding, and the Treasurer had to obtain permission to move leftover money to cover budgets. Dolores explained that this is due to cutting and level funding for so

Cont'd p.5



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TOWN BUSINESS

Cont'd from p.4

many years. The cost of operating has increased due to rising heating fuel costs, increases in utility bills, postage. She would like to increase the budgets for operating expenses. The Selectmen agreed.

Library Drainage

Drainage problems at the Library back door were reviewed. Quotes will be obtained for gutters to divert the roof runoff, and Steve will create a rise with cold patch to keep the water from the parking lot from reaching the back door. Kathy Jacobs stated that the Strategic Planning Committee is aware of the problem and that this on their list of repairs.

Funding for Town Administrator Office

Discussed funding for the Town Administrator office. Currently housed in the Selectmen's/Town Clerk office, Lisa has requested a more private area to work because the office is busy with a lot of traffic and she often deals with confidential items.

Business License Fees

The town has not increased business license fees since 1980. Lisa is surveying surrounding towns for guidance. The fees can be changed by a vote of the Selectmen and does not have to be on the annual town warrant as it is not a bylaw change.

Other Business

Terry Ignace asked about plowing regarding the school bus runs. Steve is adjusting the routes to assure the plowing gets done before the bus run starts. Terry is requesting police presence on Sandy Brook Turnpike on weekends from 7 a.m. until the afternoon as there is a lot of speeding traffic as the road is used for access to the ski areas this time of year. 🇺🇸

Letter from the Selectmen

By Patrick Barrett

It is important for town residents to have updates from our board so that the community knows the issues/concerns of its executive committee. I will make a concerted effort to resume my regular column for the Times.

Lisa Blackmer has made many contributions during her short time as Sandisfield's first town manager. Lisa is working on numerous issues such as putting the finishing touches on the senior tax work-off program, contacting public officials regarding the Tennessee Gas pipeline project, and answering questions we would normally be required to ask town counsel. Her knowledge of municipal affairs will help put Sandisfield in a better position moving forward.

Our thanks to the Highway Department for its hard work due to the numerous storms that have hit town. They have logged a tremendous amount of overtime in order to keep our roads safe. We would also like to recognize David McCuin for the video interview for the Berkshire Eagle's website. David gave by far the best interview out of the many Berkshire County highway department workers who were taped. We thank David for representing our community in such a positive way.

It is budget time again. Before one knows it the Annual Town Meeting will be upon us as well as elections for various town offices. A reminder that town meetings are posted on the Sandisfield Town website. We hope citizens will come out and respectfully voice their concerns.

This has been a sad year with the passing of so many wonderful citizens. Particularly, losing Pete Murray, Tuffy Campetti, and Bill O'Brien, Sr., in such a short span of time was a shock to this town. These three men were civic minded and involved residents whose contributions were innumerable. Sandisfield is a better place for having them as citizens, and they will be truly missed!

Lastly, the Select Board would like to clarify comments regarding 240 acres of land placed in conservation restriction as reported in last month's Times article, "Banker Likely Buyer of Green Property." It was reported that "the Board proved powerless in law, and were compelled to agree to his demand." Our Board in fact could have voted down this request, thus denying the conservation restriction on the 240-acre parcel. We chose not to do this, however, due to the fact that the piece in question was already in a Chapter program. The owners were already paying a reduced tax rate on the property, due to the fact that the land was so hilly/rocky that any future building would not be desirable. Due to these circumstances, we chose to honor this request.



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Get Ready for the Parade

YOU CAN MARCH IN IT!

Our town's Memorial Day Parade, jointly sponsored this year by the Sandisfield Fire Department and the American Legion, will kick off at 10 a.m., Sunday, May 25, at Old Town Hall.

Town residents are invited to march in the parade or drive a vehicle in order to pay tribute to American veterans. Or, if you'd rather, join your neighbors at one of the town ceremonies or watch along the route.

If you'd like to take part, join the line-up at the Old Town Hall on Silverbrook Road by 9:30. The parade will march behind our country's colors down Route 57 (Sandisfield Road), stopping

for ceremonies at the West New Boston Cemetery and the Berkshire Skilled Care & Rehabilitation facility. Continuing south on Route 8, the parade will come to an end at the American Legion Pavilion where a third ceremony honoring veterans will be held, followed by refreshments for all.

If you'd like to march or drive a vehicle in the parade, call Fire Chief Ralph Morrison at 258-4742 to let him know. Ralph and the Commander of American Legion Post #456, Maria D'Amato, are co-chairs of the 2014 parade. c

A Reporter Knows the Way to Sandisfield

By Bill Price

After what seems like long neglect, the Berkshire Eagle is paying more attention to Sandisfield. In early February, reporter John Sakata wrote two feature articles about our town with photos included with each story.

On February 12, Sakata outlined the "daunting tasks" facing new town administrator, Lisa Blackmer, pointing out that our town "has a negligible amount of commercial tax revenue. There are pressing infrastructure repair needs with no tax base to build off," creating significant challenges for anyone governing the town.

In her new role, Blackmer was quoted as saying she believes "she has the most important skill down. 'I know what I don't know and I know where to go to find the information.'" She looks to town staff to provide her with information and guidance.

Only a week earlier, on February 6, the hard winter's work of our highway maintenance crew was outlined, with Road Superintendent Steve Harasyko interviewed, along with drivers David McCuin and Tim O'Neil.

Steve was quoted as saying the winter road maintenance budget was \$165,000, with about three-fourths of it spent already. Sakata wrote: "The winter has been busy, and the crew has worked '24 or 26 days straight' without a break."

The Times welcomes John to the hilltown beat. We're happy to see him whenever he gets to our corner of Berkshire County. ♡

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Snowshoers on the trail: Mario Castro, Mary Anne Grammer, Anina Carr, Laura Rogers-Castro, and Michael Leavitt (of BNRC). Photo: Doug Bruce

PETE SEEGER

The jam of a banjo
Weeps to a close
And a generation of bravery
Can sleep.

*Val Coleman
Town Hill Road*

Trail Planning Through the Clam River Reserve

By Mary Anne Grammer

With all this snow there's only one thing to do – SNOWSHOE!

On February 12, six of us did just that, guided by two representatives from the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. We hiked the snow-covered 1.4 mile portion of the Clam River Reserve Trail that begins behind Town Hall Annex.

This was the first stage of a trail improvement process that will take about three years. When completed, the Clam River Reserve will contain about five miles of hiking trails.

The weather was perfect for a snowshoe trek through the woods, bright blue sky, sun shining, with the polar vortex backed off for the day. Doug Bruce and Michael Leavitt of the BNRC showed residents where trail improvements would take place and how existing wood road trails would be utilized when possible.

The loop-trail will begin at the south end of the Reserve and guide recreational users through the woods; highlights included views of the currently gushing Clam River, placement of vernal pools (an amphibian habitat), and scenic vistas. Doug and Mike pointed out how the natural beauty of the Reserve would be maintained as well as protected from erosion and overuse; all costs would be funded by the BNRC with no cost to Sandisfield.

Once the snow recedes, Mike will visit the Reserve over several weeks to select the best route for the trail. He said, "I'll be glad to have company and when we break-ground we'll be happy to have your physical help – trails don't build themselves."

At the conclusion of the hike, residents were grateful for the attention BNRC will provide the Reserve. Although there were a few sore muscles and tumbles, everyone enjoyed their personal guided hike through one of the town's most beautiful wooded habitats.

For further information about the Clam River Reserve visit, BNRC's website for interactive maps and a calendar of future events: www.bnrc.net.

OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Kim and Chandru Paspoletti continue to work their way through town committees in planning for the spring construction of Joyce's, their gas station/convenience store on Rt. 8. "We have an address," said Kim. "53 South Main Street." They are scheduled at a joint Planning Board/Board of Health meeting on March 3.

At the end of February, Diego Ongaro wrapped up filming his first feature-length film, "Bob and the Trees." Using professional and non-professional actors and a mostly local cast and crew, the film tells the story of Bob Tarasuk, a 50-year-old logger trying to keep his business afloat during the recession. The film is an expansion of a shorter version screened at SARC a couple years ago. Examining one of America's most dangerous and little understood industries, the film also explores what our instant gratification culture does to small businesses like Bob's.

Diego will edit the film in his native France this spring. www.diegoongaro.com.

At press, we learned of the death of **Carmela Misley**, a long-time resident. An obituary will be included in the next issue of The Times.

Sandisfield Historical Commission


GOOD RESPONSE TO OLD-HOUSE NAME PLAQUES

Handsome signs are appearing on old houses all over Sandisfield thanks to a special program sponsored by the Historical Commission and announced in the Times last November.

Among Berkshire County towns, Sandisfield boasts an above average number of antique and historic properties, many more than 200 years old. Generally, a house or building is considered "antique" when it reaches about 75 years. The program is available, however, to all home owners, regardless of the age of their building.



Signs can also be used to mark a former historic point or a landmark. The intent is to create awareness and pride in town heritage. Standardized traditional-style plaques like these help to promote this ideal and connect the town.

The Commission estimates that at least 75 antique and/or historic properties may eventually participate in the program. So far, 31 owners of houses and historic sites have obtained this high-quality, 12-by-10 inch durable PVC plaque. Signs are available under a special arrangement for Sandisfield with Ghi Sign Service of nearby Canaan, Conn. The cost is \$47.86 including sales tax. Contact me (413 269-0012/ronbernard@aol.com) or any commission member for information or to order a sign. 

No Health Insurance? Low income?

VOLUNTEER CLINIC OFFERS FREE MEDICAL CARE

By Bill Price

Sandisfield adult residents without health insurance and who meet income guidelines have access to a health clinic in Great Barrington. That's good news for a lot of us.

If you live in Sandisfield, are between the ages of 19 and 64, have income of less than about \$35,000 for a single person or \$70,000 for a family of four, and have no access to public programs, you can receive free medical care with the local branch of Volunteers in Medicine.

One Sandisfield resident, who asked to remain anonymous, lost a crown a year ago. Her current insurance plan didn't cover dental, and she simply didn't have enough money to get the crown replaced." She said that because it was a free clinic she was sure she wouldn't get the care she was used to with her regular dentist.

"I couldn't have been more wrong. Not only did I get an experienced and talented dentist," she said, "but an assistant who went to any length she could to make me comfortable. They also took a full set of X-rays and gave my teeth and gums a thorough exam. Cost? 0. No strings attached."

Unfortunately overwhelmed by its own success and faced with an impossibly long waiting list, the VIM dental clinic has currently closed its list for new applications for dental services only.



Volunteer Ken Mayer of East Otis.

All other services are available, and the dental department is still available for VIM medical patients. Located on Rt. 7 south of Great Barrington (next to Barrington Bagel Company, across from Guido's and the Big Y Shopping Plaza), VIM offers not only medical services, but mental health, optometry, nutritional counseling, and acupuncture to adult residents of the Berkshire area.

Open since 2004, the group has treated thousands of patients and is a user-friendly portal to the health care system.


VIM provides a well-equipped, fully staffed facility with private examination/treatment rooms. The volunteer physicians and nurse practitioners, about a third of whom are retired, often address more than one of a patient's medical concerns during a visit. A patient may have medical counseling, an optometry appointment, and a dental exam all in one day and under the same roof. VIM also offers, when needed, an extended network of specialists who see patients in their private offices or other facilities.

Typical patients are people who work in restaurants, landscaping, housekeeping, farming, beauty salons, the creative arts, carpentry, construction, light industry. Some work part-time and others are small business owners. All are economically stretched and many work multiple jobs. "Basically," a representative said, "our friends and neighbors."

The VIM professionals are supported by volunteer laypersons and a small paid office staff.

Ken Mayer of East Otis is one such volunteer. About seven years ago he read in a Berkshire Eagle column that the clinic needed Spanish interpreters. "I grew up in South America," Ken said, "and am fluent in Spanish, so I drove over there."

Ken began his duties manning the reception desk two afternoons a week. "Right away, I was able to make Spanish-speaking patients comfortable," he said.

Now he goes over one morning or afternoon a week. "I interpret when needed in other situations, and particularly for the nutrition clinic. I make reminder calls, help coordinate the optometry clinic, and fill in as needed wherever they need help that I can provide." 

VIM phone is 413-528-4014, or visit www.vim-berkshires.org.



BRIDGE WATCHED



LIGHTS GONE, LESS NOISE, TRAFFIC MOVING

By Sandy Parisky

Motorists crossing the Farmington River at New Boston move across the Route 8 and 57 bridge as though the long delays during the bridge replacement project had never happened. Since my home and my neighbors in the Old Stone House are adjacent to the bridge, we are attuned to all the changes that have occurred over the last two-plus years of construction.

Since work stopped last November and the bridge opened to two-way traffic, it's less noisy. Traffic signals and heavy equipment are gone, and motorists seem to speed by at their normal rate, although definitely not the 20 mph rate posted. Once traffic lights were removed, the road rage that often occurred in the middle of the night ended.

My neighbor, Peter Levine, remarked the other night that he noticed somewhat less noise from truckers applying their J-brakes. Perhaps the drivers don't need the J-brakes as often because the angle of the new bridge alignment – shifted to the north – helps to slightly reduce the “S-curve.”

Having finished 99% of the \$4 million bridge project last November, J. H. Maxymillian, contractor for Mass DOT, will return to wrap up landscape work and lay a final blacktop surface over bridge approach lanes this spring.

Editor's note: This report writes finis to Sandy's popular monthly reports that the Times published under the title "Bridge Watch." Not to worry. Work on the replacement for the Clark Road Bridge in Roosterville is due to begin any day now. We'll be watching.

PTA Gets a Note from the Teacher

IT SAYS “THANK YOU”


As we reach the mid-point of the school year, we sincerely thank the Farmington River Elementary School PTA for everything they do for our students. Our PTA takes such care in providing for the needs of all of our students. They are true partners in working to make our school a wonderful place for children to grow and learn, within and beyond the classroom.

Under the leadership of Sherry DeCelle, PTA President during 2013, our PTA provided over \$10,000 worth of technology, books, field trips, and other goods and experiences for all students. Our PTA has been the primary source of books for our school library for the past three years, through their outstanding Book Fair. Tara Beardsley, Chair of the Cash Calendar project, has collected over \$3,700 in prize donations for this year's cash calendar from our generous community partners. This is an incredible accomplishment and the proceeds again benefit all FRES students. Tara is the Diva of Donations! All fund-raising is for the benefit of our students.

Because service is the hallmark of our PTA, its leaders and members are actively involved in every initiative that the school needs – to name a few: serving as room parents, chaperones, and ski program helpers, to providing technology upgrades, arts and cultural experiences, subsidizing/supervising the ski program (kudos to Mark DeCelle and

Craig Drenga), and organizing and implementing “Screen Free Week” (thank you Shanon Albee and Anastasia Stanmayer). PTA members serve on various working committees with teachers and administrators, as well as attending and contributing to the School Committee meetings. This partnership will continue to flourish as we look for new initiatives and challenges.

Thank you to the Farmington River PTA for your financial support, your service to our children, and to your willingness to work on moving our school district forward. Without your support, we could not afford to provide many of the items and experiences that make a good school great. In these times of financial stress and limitations to families, schools, and communities, our PTA MAKES THE DIFFERENCE!

-  Jo Ann Austin, Superintendent
- Mary Turo, Principal
- Laurie Flower, Co-President, Farmington River Teachers' Association
- Chris Keller, Co-President, Farmington River Teachers' Association



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Just Another Old-Fashioned Winter

But 2014 will not soon fade from memory

Unusual and sustained cold waves in January and February, thanks to something called the “polar vortex,” assured ideal conditions for winter sports in the Berkshires. The best in years, actually. Happy skiers, ice-fishing never better, and snowmobilers with no reason to complain. The snow, already piled high from January and layered on by successive storms in February, created a winter wonderland, as well as an economic opportunity for snow-plowers. ❄️

Photos: Jean Atwater-Williams, Flora Parisky, Brigitte Ruthman



The "Spirits" of Colebrook

Text and Photos by Larry Dwyer

Ghostly figures, frozen in the ice, living on the cliffs south of Sandisfield. Who are they? Legend has it they are the Spirits of Colebrook River Village – an uprooted community forced to leave their ancestral grounds to make way for a mighty dam. Now they wait peacefully on the Cliffs of Sandisfield before they pass into the netherworld, visible only in the bleakest of winters when ice forms over them as they watch over their former community. (The name of the disappeared town was Colebrook River.) ❧





Our Readers Respond

THE TIMES GETS THE MESSAGES

By Bill Price

The Times received several letters in response to our report last month on the purchase of the former Green property. All of the letters scolded us – some severely – for our characterization of the purchaser of the property, Dominic Konstam, or for errors in the report.

I've summarized five of the letters here, due to length and some duplication of complaints. I appreciate the care and thoughtfulness of the writers and have tried to capture the gist of their remarks. All of the letters are available in full at our website: www.sandisfieldtimes.org. Two additional letters are printed in full on page 13.

Because more than one writer suggested that the report might have been published as an op-ed, we've included the responses under our op-ed heading "Out on a Limb." That seems to be where we are, out on a limb.

John Yaeger of Sage Road, wrote, "It is not surprising that even the reporting in a small-town newspaper may reflect small-town attitudes, though presumably without heavy-handed mischaracterizations of individual 'ambitious' or 'little-known' residents."

Mr. Yaeger included a list of what he saw as the reporter's negative views on residents, suggesting that the list could be "a possible agenda for a series of clearly labeled opinion pieces on these issues. Being editorials, they would not require attribution to any real or imagined sources and could present the subjective view of the editorial staff."

The Times agrees with Mr. Yaeger on the fact that this is a small town and a small-town newspaper. We don't accept his contention that the paper represents small-town attitudes.

From neighboring Monterey, **Roger Tryon**, who has lived on Lowland Farm his entire life, wrote that he has known the purchaser of the Green property possibly ten years and is "happy

to have him as a friend ... Dominic is engaged in many agricultural endeavors, a busy professional life and, of course, family responsibilities. Is it really fair to criticize his involvement in the community in such a harsh and public way?"

In Sandisfield, **Robert Liberman** of Roberts Road was "dismayed by the recent article because of certain misstatements of fact as well as the inaccurate statements about Mr. Konstam's character." Mr. Liberman pointed out that Mr. Konstam "spends considerably more time there than in New York City," though his work "does require extensive travel. He does not and with the Green purchase would not own anything like 3,000 acres and is not an absentee landowner." He added that most of Mr. Konstam's houses "are occupied by family."

He wrote that Mr. Konstam "is very dedicated to the rural nature of Sandisfield and enjoys raising goats and making cheese, growing grapes and experimental winemaking, farming chickens, and selling organic eggs."

Mr. Liberman added that he "has been a grateful subscriber to the Times, but cannot understand the character of the article."

Mr. Liberman was not the only writer to point out that our estimate of Mr. Konstam's acreage was excessive. A representative of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council estimated Mr. Konstam's property more in the neighborhood of "1,500 acres, give or take."

Antonia and George Grumbach of Sage Road wrote they were "saddened and actually appalled by the mean-spirited mischaracterization of the Konstam family." Among other things, they felt that "Mr. Konstam is chastised for not 'socializing' with local residents. To us and, I think, to most folks in Sandisfield, both full-time residents and second-home owners, who cherish our privacy and are friendly with all of those with whom we come in contact, this accusation does not sit easily.

"And that is the most troubling aspect of this article. Rather than drawing the Town together, which we thought was the original purpose of The Sandisfield Times, this article, full of innuendo about Mr. Konstam as a non-local, attempts to divide full-time residents and second-home owners. That is both extremely unfortunate and distasteful to those of us who love Sandisfield. We hope this article is an aberration, and we think the Konstam family deserves an apology."

Road Hill Road resident **Patrick Barrett** wrote that the article "saddened and disappointed" him. He felt that the Times should not have singled out one resident for placing property in a state-sponsored Chapter program, which "are

legal and many of our residents have chosen to take advantage of the tax breaks afforded by Massachusetts law."

Mr. Barrett wrote that calling into question Mr. Konstam's integrity "based upon what 'most who have encountered him report' was reckless and irresponsible reporting." Mr. Barrett defended the right of residents to "enjoy the beauty and serenity of Sandisfield without becoming involved in community affairs."

He added, "As for riding high-powered all-terrain vehicles on town roads, we live in a rural community and many of our residents do this in a responsible fashion. If a person is driving in a reckless fashion and irritating other residents, we have a police department that can handle these types of complaints."

Mr. Barrett wrote that the conservation programs "serve an important purpose: protecting the landscape and environment of many communities throughout Massachusetts. Sandisfield is in fact facing serious financial strain due to the fact that our budgets are heavily dependent upon property taxes, and yet so much land in town is either state owned or in conservation programs. A professional article analyzing this issue would not only be informative, but also would go a long way towards finding common ground for a proactive community solution."

Speaking to Mr. Barrett's last point, the Times would encourage a serious look at the town's participation in conservation programs and the toll in property tax income. An impact analysis with a forecast seems critical now, and a study should be commissioned by the town. The Times volunteer reporters cannot really lead this charge. Perhaps a financial analyst in Sandisfield could take on the job or a consultant who knows what they're talking about. It seems fundamental to know what we're facing in the future.

Editor's Response

The Times asked Simon Winchester to report on the sale of the Green property and who was buying it. Simon did that, and we were informed by his efforts. Simon is not only our founding editor, but among our best reporters. We appreciate his efforts which, in this case, became a lightning rod.

There is little to be gained by a point-by-point discussion between the letter writers and the Times. We agree with some of their points, disagree with others. But we agree with enough of them to say, ouch, maybe we did step over a boundary. In retrospect, we could and should have reported facts without the tone, and readers would have provided their own assessment.



TWO MORE LETTERS

Two of the letters responding to the tone and accuracy of our report on the purchase of the Green property are here in full, with editor's reply.

Classy Publication, But ...

As an editor of the Sandisfield Newsletter off and on for 20 years, I was thrilled when The Sandisfield Times appeared to fill the void left by the Newsletter's demise. Simon Winchester has my undying gratitude for assembling a competent and caring staff for this vital publication. The Times is a classier publication than the little newsletter ever was. I thoroughly enjoy it.

But the Times seems to have a recurring problem that I feel compelled, as a former editor, to point out. The rules of responsible journalism preclude unsubstantiated comment, and especially undocumented comments on events in progress. Articles in the Times have appeared which should not be an article at all, because the reporter did not reference sources or document statements made, giving what must be personal opinion as fact. That might be acceptable in a letter to the editor or an op-ed, making clear that statements are solely the opinion of the writer.

Our community needs the glue the Times can provide, and I hope this publication, which benefits us all, will return to more regular journalistic rules rather than turning into a tabloid.

Roberta Myers
Cold Spring Road

Editor's reply: Regarding Roberta's first paragraph, I'm glad to return the compliment. As a subscriber to the Sandisfield Newsletter for its two decades, I was informed about the town and was grateful for it.

Regarding her second paragraph, I don't agree that the Times verges on "tabloidism." Three or four articles over as many years does not seem to me to be taking us too far down that dark road. But we understand Roberta's concern and take her cautions to heart. As we do the concerns of all our letter writers.

Correcting Assertions, From the BNRC

I am writing to correct a pair of assertions included in Simon Winchester's article.

In describing a Conservation Restriction (CR) donated to the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) by Dominic and Sarah Konstam, Mr. Winchester states that the CR will deny Sandisfield "some thousands of dollars in annual tax revenues." In fact, under the CR, the land remains on the tax rolls and given that it has been classified for tax purposes as Chapter 61 forestry land, taxed at 5% of its value, it seems unlikely that tax revenue generated from these acres will change much, if at all.

Mr. Winchester goes on to say that, "in the end the Board proved powerless in law." In truth, nothing compelled the board to approve the CR. Over three meetings, the selectmen engaged in detailed discussions about what type of land is appropriate for conservation vs. development, potential future road maintenance costs to the town if houses were built on Back Road, and potential impacts on tax collections. After careful consideration the Selectmen exercised their legal authority and voted to approve the CR as being in the public interest

As for the Konstams' potential purchase of the Green property, I know very little except that by my calculation Mr. Winchester may be exaggerating the scope of the Konstams' possible future land holdings by about 1,500 acres, give or take.

Narain Schroeder
Director of Land Conservation
Berkshire Natural Resources Council

Editor's Response: Our estimate of acreage in the report was in error. We also understand now that land already protected by Chapter 61 does not move off the tax rolls when placed under permanent Conservation Restriction (CR). The land continues to be taxed at roughly the same 5% of value, give or take.

One difference is that land in Chapter 61 can be taken out of the program, but land placed in a CR cannot. A strong incentive for land owners to keep Chapter 61 land in the program is the fact that if they or a future owner decides to take it out, deferred taxes for the last 10 years must be paid to the town, a significant penalty. With the additional layer of a CR, the land can never be taken out of the program.

While it is true that nothing compelled the select board to approve the CR, minutes for the December 2 board meeting report that the BNRC representative was asked "what happens if it does not get approved. Mr. Schroeder replied that they will come back again," adding that the state had

already pre-approved it. That seems like an incentive to move on.

We learn from Mr. Schroeder's letter that 20 acres have been held out for development, apparently facing the now unmaintained and washed-out Back Road. If the property is developed for housing, Back Road will need to be reopened. Cost to the town? Unknown.

Of course, the town (and taxpayers) can't have it both ways. (1) Maintain land with the potential of future development and property tax income, but if development happens pay to improve access roads. (2) Put the land into preservation but lose taxes that help pay for roads we already have. Whatever happens, the town is going to have to tax someone to pay for something. ♡

Out on a Limb: an op-ed

Subjects should be interesting to most of us and have a strong link to Sandisfield, written by and for Town residents. Address either PO Box 584, Sandisfield, or email editor@sandisfieldtimes.org

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Flood in Our "Sister City"


By Ron Bernard

The Sandisfield Historical Commission recently proposed a "sister city" relationship with the town of Ombersley, England, which lies in the British West Midlands about 100 miles west of London. Our shared association is the fact that Sandisfield's name was derived in 1762 from the (Lord) Sandys family of Ombersley. We expect that a formal association or friendship pact could eventually include cooperation on projects such as cultural or student exchanges.

Most of us here are aware of the terrible, unprecedented flood besetting large areas of the UK, including the county where Ombersley is. We wrote our contacts there to express concern and extend Sandisfield's best wishes. Project coordinator, Councillor Peter Tomlinson, responded, describing incessant heavy rains with winds reaching 100 mph that have caused massive power outages and destruction, even of vital railways.

Mr. Tomlinson wrote in part, "Many thanks for your concern. Indeed England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been experiencing the worst rainfall since records began.

"We first had the problem of the Somerset (river) levels which we know are prone to flooding but never have they flooded so deep and for so long. The next disaster befell the railway line linking Devon with Cornwall along the coast at Dawlish. It was built in Victorian times with the line running next to the seawall, which after over 100 years in existence was breached in the storms and the railway line destroyed. There is now no rail link into the County of Cornwall. In fact, no rail link to Plymouth, once the home of half the Royal Navy."

Let us keep our new friends – and all the affected people there – in our thoughts and wish them courage through this ordeal. 



FARMINGTON RIVER
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
BULLETIN

By Tara Beardsley

Preschool Registration and Screening

NEW STUDENTS ONLY

Wednesday, March 12, 2014 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.


The Farmington River Regional School District will be accepting registrations and scheduling screenings for 3 and 4 year old children for our public preschool program for the 2014-2015 school year. Children who are residents of Sandisfield or Otis who will be three years old before September 1, 2014 may be eligible for this program. Residents of neighboring communities are also invited to apply.

For the upcoming school year, our tuition-based program will offer families the following options:

5 half days a week 8:30-11:30 for all 3 and 4 year olds minimum of 3 days required – Monday, Wednesday, Friday

5 full days a week 8:30-2:30 for 4 year olds only (must turn 4 by September 1, 2014) minimum of 3 days required – Monday, Wednesday, Friday

The screening will be conducted in the areas of speech and language, fine and gross motor development, and learning skills. Screening is required for all new enrolling children. Children currently enrolled in our program do not need to be screened.

Interested families should call Lynette Gagnon at the school (269-4466) to schedule an appointment for screening and pick up a registration packet. 

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Scholarships Available To Sandisfield Students “Lost” Sandisfield Manuscript Available Soon

APPLICATION DEADLINE APRIL 30

By Laura Rogers-Castro

College is expensive and every little bit extra counts! The Sandisfield Scholarship Fund is available to award eligible high school seniors from Sandisfield with funds to assist with the costs of higher education.

Typically, awards are given to students following successful completion of their first semester. To qualify, students need to be a resident of Sandisfield and to have lived here at least one year. This year’s application deadline is April 30.

Last year, Ev Kuzmech was awarded a \$500 scholarship. Ev has successfully completed her first semester at the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth and continues to demonstrate strong academic skill.

The money for her particular award was donated by the former Sandisfield 250th Anniversary Committee, using money from surplus

donations made to the 2012 history book project. The committee had suggested that the recipient not only demonstrate good citizenship qualities, but have an interest in history. While the interest in history is not a scholarship requirement, it was felt that Ev qualified on that account. Her family has been involved in historical reenactments for years, including the Revolutionary War reenactment camp during the 250th celebrations.

The Sandisfield Scholarship Fund Committee welcomes requests for applications. Please contact Laura Rogers-Castro at 258-4688 or laurarogers-castro107@msn.com for an application packet.

The Committee greatly appreciates past supporters and welcomes new ones! If you would like to contribute to the fund, checks can be written to the “Sandisfield Scholarship Fund” and mailed to the Committee at PO Box 672.

History told by a Partisan

A handful of Sandisfield and Otis residents, led by Ron Bernard, are preparing a “lost” manuscript of local history for access by researchers and anyone interested in the past of the two towns.

Written in the 1940s by Berkshire historian and one-time Sandisfield resident Elizur Yale Smith, the manuscript was never published – and has possibly never been accessed since its deposit in the Otis Library by a friend of Smith’s.

Sponsored by the Sandisfield and Otis Historical Commissions and the Otis Library, the project may be ready for unveiling in a month or so. Look for a story about “the story” in next month’s Times.

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Broadband Update

By Jean Atwater-Williams

MassBroadband123, the MBI's fiber optic "middle mile" network connecting municipal institutions in western Massachusetts – town halls, public health and safety facilities, schools, and libraries – is now complete and operational. Sandisfield's Library and Town Hall Annex are expected to be connected within weeks. The question on everyone's minds remains: "When will my home or business be connected?"

To serve people currently without broadband will cost about \$100 million. Governor Patrick's bill of about \$50 million was passed by the House last November and is awaiting action by the Senate Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets.

Assuming the bond bill passes, as is likely, where does the other \$50 million come from? For that, WiredWest expects to apply for federal funds supporting deployment of rural broadband.

It is also exploring the idea of raising funds by issuing a bond, which it has the legal authority to do, and asking member towns to guarantee it. Towns would not have to put up money, but rather pledge their borrowing authority. Interest payments on the bond would only be required in the unlikely event that WiredWest is unable perform. This financial guarantee by the towns will make the bonds salable. This strategy is expected to have no impact on local tax rates. ♡

Questions? Contact Jean Atwater-Williams, at waterwilliams@gmail.com or Tel: 413 258-8000

Some Sandisfield Statistics

Land Area in Sq. Mi.	52.3
2012 Centerline Road Miles (MassDOT & Local only)	90.54
2010 Census Population	915
2010 Census Housing Units	671
ACS 2007-2011 Median Household Income	60,104
ACS 2007-2011 % Below Poverty Level (calculated)	4.5%
FY2013 Avg. Single Family Tax Bill	2,950

Source:
Massachusetts Department of Revenue

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Comings and Goings A Tribute

My Friend, Bill O'Brien

By Ruth Dec-Friedman

In the late '80s, we moved to a small Manhattan apartment. My husband, knowing I desperately needed a garden, promised that someday we would have a country place. Our decision to finally get one was accelerated when my father-in-law was diagnosed with dementia, which helped us understand the fragility of life.

Within months we found the house in Sandisfield. Now, I was brought up in a rural area and my husband was used to camping, but neither experience prepared us for Sandisfield. Nature was relentless. There was always something wrong with our lovely old cranky house. We took the advice from the sellers who left us a scribbled note taped to the wall: "Call Bill O'Brien if you need help. He is a true friend."

There were many Friday nights when we entered the house that we found something wrong. Whether it was the old tree falling near the house, the Weber rolling off the deck, the well giving problems, or the corroded pipes crumbling, Bill and his grandson Bobby were always there.

Once, we ran out of water. The house came with an old, water-guzzling washing machine. Living in New York City, I never had my own machine so I became a washing fool. Bill came over and we had a good laugh about respecting the limits of the well.

Somewhere along the way I noticed a significant shift in my husband. As his father was slipping away both mentally and physically, Bill became a replacement for my husband's father. Every Friday night when we came up, problem or not, we called Bill. Hearing Bill's voice, I could see my husband's shoulders relax. Bill made ev-

erything all right.

Over time our relationship deepened. We started to do projects, often around nature. I made my own dandelion wine but Bill insisted on finding me a barrel. He wanted the winter cold to force the wine into brandy. He showed me the edible herbs and foods found in the forest.

We had trouble with our water supply so Bill and I dowsed the property looking for a spring. Eventually he told us to take water from his source so every two weeks after we filled our jugs, we spent hours talking about the history of the area. Always our visits ended with a spot of "tea," a euphemism for good scotch.

My most important venture with Bill, however, was to make sour grass soup, a treat he had every year with a certain Polish lady lived in the area. Bill knew I was of Polish descent so he figured I could make it. We searched for the grass for ten years without success. It took me three years of Internet research and calls to many Polish restaurants to find it. I was able to come up with a recipe that paralleled the dish, not made from sour grass, but from French sorrel. The first time I made it, I bought out all the sorrel in Guido's in little packages sold as herbs. Not wanting to repeat this extremely expensive method, I started to grow fresh sorrel in my garden every year for Bill's soup.

I did this because Bill had become one of my best friends.

There are those who have said Sandisfield is a fragmented community. Perhaps it is a natural human phenomenon to separate ourselves into groups. This is nobody's fault. Geography defines sociology. We simply don't have a town



At the 1998 wedding of Ruth Dec and Richard Friedman of Sandisfield. From left, the late Einar Aas of Ski Butternut, Bill O'Brien, Sr., and Bill's grandson, Bobby O'Brien. Gedney Farm, New Marlborough.

center where all the groups can crossover and meet. To the credit of Sandisfield, its residents have had to work harder to bring about community.

Bill O'Brien, however, was an exceptional emissary. The "town center" was in his heart. He loved everybody, especially if you joined him for a spot of "tea." The last promise he made me was to go on a road trip to the hills to find the real "sour grass." Somewhere along the way, he couldn't do it anymore, and we knew we were losing him and finally we did.

So I want to thank you, Bill O'Brien, for everything you have done for us, welcoming us as strangers to be part of this wonderful community. And I didn't get a chance to tell you last November when you couldn't leave the house that I think I found the name of the real sour grass. It is called *szczaw*, which is Polish for sorrel and looks like the leaf you described. It only grows in the spring, like you said it would. I think I found it, Bill.

Goodbye, my old friend. May Godspeed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMTs Great, and Thanks

I don't know how many of you have had to call for help from our local EMTs. I certainly don't wish it for anyone, but it sure is reassuring to know what a professional and caring group we have here in town.

On Jan. 6th my husband Bill fell on the ice while bringing in firewood, and broke his ankle rather badly. It was impossible to move him by myself. I called 911, and the EMTs were here quickly. Karlene, Rico, and Sandy – you were great! Thanks also to Rod, Gary, and neighbor Kevin who pitched in to help.

Please remember these fine folks and their hard work at Town Meeting time. Also, I strongly urge any younger folks who have an interest in becoming an EMT to contact the Fire Department and find out when the next training session begins.

Anina Carr
Sears Road

Nice Words from a Donor

I love getting the newspaper and congratulate all of you on the great writing and on the warmth of your community news reporting.

Irene Conley
Woodbury, Conn.



By Laurie Foulke-Green, Librarian

Our next genealogy assistance classes will be held on March 26 and April 30. Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. Or call for genealogy requests at 258-4966, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, or visit sandisfieldlibrary@yahoo.com. I'll be happy to assist you in finding your Ancestors!

NEW BOOKS

- I Am Malala/Malala Yousafzai
- Carthage/Joyce Carol Oates
- The Forever Girl/Alexander McCall Smith
- Death of a Policeman/M.C. Beaton
- Murder in the Afternoon/Frances Brody
- Nantucket Sawbuck/Steven Axelrod
- Do or Die /Suzanne Brockmann
- The Case/Janet Evanovich
- The Killer /Jonathan Kellerman
- Private LA /James Patterson
- Ripper/Isabel Allende

NEW - CD'S/ AUDIO BOOKS

- The Winter People/Jennifer McMahon
- The Wily O'Reilly/Patrick Taylor
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Rescued Pig Getting Fat

Readers of last month's rescue story will be glad to know that Lucky Cookie Dough the pig is alive and well, and always hungry, at Joshua's Farm on Dodd Road. The heirloom cross, black with a white band, has fully recovered from his adventures in the woods and being attacked by a coyote. His owner, Brigitte Ruthman, will give him at no charge to anyone who promises not to eat him. Contact her at bruthman@msn.com.

NOW HEAR THIS!

Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro.

Please send notices for Now Hear This! to calendar@sandisfieldtimes.org.

MARCH EVENTS

Baseball Clinics for Ages 8-11 on Sundays, March 9, 16, 23, and 30 from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Farmington River Regional Elementary School. Pitching and batting with tennis balls at these drop-in clinics. Free! For more information contact Steve at 269-4632 or sgraves8@yahoo.com.

Corned Beef & Cabbage Dinner sponsored by the New Boston Congregational Church on Saturday, March 15, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Fire Station No. 2, Route 57, in Sandisfield. Dinner includes corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, bread, beverage, and assorted desserts. \$10.00 for adults; \$5.00 children under 12. Take-outs available.

Tree-Pruning Workshop sponsored by Sandisfield Arts Center will be held Saturday, March 19, at 10 a.m., at Riiska Brook Farms, 101 New Hartford Road. Spring is THE time to prune fruit trees. Take the mystery out of the messy tangle of branches and learn how to cut back those untended trees in the yard. Bill Riiska and his grandson Andy will share their years of pruning knowledge for healthy fruit trees. Come join us! \$5.00.

Rabies Vaccination Clinic for dogs, cats, and ferrets will be held Saturday, March 29, at Old Town Hall from 10 a.m. until noon. Vaccinations are \$15, and will be given by Dr. Claire Blanchard of the Bilmar Small Animal Clinic. Sponsored by the Sandisfield Board of Health. For information, call the BOH at 258-4053 or Kim Spring, Animal Health Warden, at 258-4450

Save the Date: Dinner & Celebrity Auction on Saturday, April 12, 2014, at 7:00 p.m. to benefit the Sandisfield Arts Center.

MARCH EVENTS IN SURROUNDING TOWNS

Affordable Care Act Information Session hosted by Representative Smitty Pignatelli and Health-care for All on Friday, March 7 from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Lenox Town Hall. This event will focus on the changes in Massachusetts health insurance due to the Affordable Care Act. Kate Bicego, Consumer Assistance Program Manager

for Health Care for All, will be on hand to answer questions regarding how this act impacts the health insurance marketplace in Massachusetts and how people can find assistance paying for health insurance.

Basin Pond Hike in Becket sponsored by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council on Wednesday, March 12 from 10:00 a.m. to noon. This 2.5-mile trail features beautiful hardwood forests and a great overlook. Directions: From the center of Lee, take Route 20 and Becket Road. Turn left on Becket Road and drive north .3 miles to the trailhead on the left. Carpooling is essential! For more information, email mleavitt@bnrc.net.

ZUMBA on Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. with Michelle Theilig at the Tyringham Town Hall. (\$8 per class). Join a friendly group of people and have fun during your workout!

Yoga on Mondays and Wednesdays, 6:00 to 7:15 p.m. at Ashintully Barn in Tyringham on Tyringham Road. \$10 each session but you must pre-register. For more information, call Tracy at 413 243-3582.

Hot Chocolate Saturdays at Bartholomew's Cobble on winter Saturdays, 9:00 am. to 4:30 p.m. Snow shoes and free hot chocolate available at the Cobblers Visitor Center, 105 Weatogue Road, Sheffield, 413 229-8600.

Call for Artists: Otis Arts Festival. The Otis Arts Festival is scheduled for Saturday, July 26, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. If you would like a vendor application, please visit www.townofotisma.com/culturalcouncil.

ONGOING EVENTS

Selectmen, every Monday at 7:00 p.m., Town Hall Annex.

Farmington River Regional School District, first Monday of the month, 7 p.m., Farmington River Regional School, Rt. 8, JoAnn Austin, Superintendent. Public Welcome.

Planning Board, second Monday of the month, 6 p.m., Old Town Hall.

Board of Assessors, second Tuesday of the month, 5 p.m., Town Hall Annex.

Conservation Commission, third Tuesday of the month, 7 p.m., Town Hall Annex.

Board of Health, first Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m., Old Town Hall.

Boy Scouts, contact Western Mass Council of Boy Scouts for a local troop at 413 418-4002.

Council on Aging, every Wednesday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m., Senior Center, Town Hall Annex. Pot luck lunch at noon, bingo at 1 p.m. Free blood pressure screening every fourth Wednesday.

Finance Committee, second Wednesday of the month, 7 p.m., Sandisfield Library. Public welcome.

PTO, second Thursday of the month, 3:15 p.m., Farmington River Regional School. Child Care provided.

Sandisfield Public Library Hours: Monday and Tuesday, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; Wednesday, 6:30-8:30 p.m.; Thursday, 2-5 p.m., Saturday, 9 a.m.-12 noon. Call ahead at 258-4966.

Historical Commission: Third Wednesday, 7-8:30 p.m., Sandisfield Library. Next meeting, March 19.

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Donations of all sizes are needed to ensure the continuation of this newspaper. Please send checks to: *The Sandisfield Times*, P.O. Box 584, Sandisfield, MA 01255 or donate online at our website: www.sandisfieldtimes.org.

Copies of *The Sandisfield Times* are available in Sandisfield at A&M Auto, the Arts Center (in season), the Dump, Post Office, the New Boston Inn, the Silverbrook Café & Country Store, Villa Mia, MJ Tuckers, When Pigs Fly Farm and Town Hall. Copies are also available in Otis at Katie's Market, Papa's Fuel, Otis Library, the Farmington River Diner and Terranova's Café. Other locations include the Monterey General Store and the Southfield Store in New Marlborough. Back issues are available for purchase.

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