

# THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

*Tribunus*



*Plebis*

RELIABLE. REGULAR. RELEVANT.

*Volume X, Number 3*

*June 2019*



*"This hummingbird," writes Otis photographer Cindy Ragusa, "comes to the door almost every morning to see me."*

## 2019 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING All Warrants Pass Except the Real Big One

*By Tom Christopher*

The issues were divisive at times, but the tone remained courteous and positive throughout Sandisfield's Annual Town Meeting on May 18.

Convened again at Firehouse #2 on Route 57, the meeting began promptly at 10:02 a.m., when town moderator Simon Winchester asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence to show respect for the Mahican people, the region's first human inhabitants.

*Cont'd p. 5*

## Town Chooses Charter for Broadband

### WILL THE THIRD TIME BE THE CHARM?

*By Ron Bernard*

A breakthrough in the drawn-out struggle to attract a high-speed broadband provider to the town was announced at the May 6 meeting of the Select Board.

In a 3-0 vote the Board accepted the recommendation of the Sandisfield Broadband Committee to immediately initiate a licensing process for Charter Communications through applicable state agencies. A "Status as of May 16, 2019" by the broadband committee is available on the town's website.

The committee's recommendation letter, dated May 6, was read aloud by Selectman Brian O'Rourke. Committee members were not present to explain the recommendation or answer questions.

In its letter, the committee also advised the Board to eliminate Crocker Communications from further consideration for design, construction, and management of any future fiber optic network in town. The letter acknowledged that Crocker has been unable to deliver on its repeated assurances that USDA grant money would offset a considerable portion of the installation cost. The committee confirmed that "the town would need to contribute a significant amount towards the network design and construction," which effectively killed the deal.

Crocker, a family-owned western Massachusetts telecommunications company, had no track record of building fiber optic networks, yet was chosen in April 2018 by the committee and the Board following the collapse of lengthy discussions with Frontier Communications, which in turn had fallen through when a four-town consortium failed to materialize.

### Charter Finds a Path ...

After years of residents' frustration over lack of decent internet service it appears that the process may now gain traction.

Charter responded to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute's (MBI) Flexible Grant Program to build a network in New Marlborough. This opened a physical "pathway" and incentive for the company to connect neighboring Sandisfield.

Based in Stamford, Conn., Charter is a major player in telecommunications. Under the brand name Spectrum, it supplies internet, telephone, and television services to some 26 million customers in 42 states.

*Cont'd p. 7*



## VISIT YOUR NEW TOWN GARAGE OPEN HOUSE

Meet your highway crew and  
DPW Superintendent Brad Curry

See your new trucks!!!


**Saturday, June 8**

**10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**

**On Silverbook Road  
just behind Old Town Hall**

## Transfer Station Hours Expand

As of July 1, Transfer Station hours will increase to Wednesday, noon to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday/Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Also as of July 1, the town will take ownership of the Transfer Station and attendant Tony Melloni will become a town employee. Master Garbologist, which has operated the dump for several years, will continue with a new contract for pickup and hauling, but without labor. Tony will work 19 hours per week. Tony said he was glad the town has taken it over, and he's "very happy." 



## York Lake Open

By Nina Carr

Believe it or not "summer" is actually on its way!

And the good news this summer is that York Lake and its surrounding picnic area will be spic and span, with working restrooms, and access to potable water.

Deanna Todd of our local DCR outpost at Beartown State Forest told me that the park will be fully open for Memorial Day weekend and will be

## The Winning Write-In Candidate

By Bill Price

Write-in candidates seldom win elections, but it happened here this year.

A last-minute write-in candidate for a two-year seat on the Planning Board won with 62 votes, the result of a mailing that arrived in registered voters' mailboxes three days before the Annual Town Meeting and five days before the May 20 election.

The candidate was **John Field**, owner of the John Field Tree Service located on Rood Hill Road. Following is John Field's note to voters:

My name is John W. Field and I am reaching out regarding the upcoming May elections. I would like you to consider me as a write-in candidate for the Planning Board. As a life-long resident of Sandisfield, it is my hope to use my experience as a business owner and operator to serve the board with a focus on the betterment of our community. I am familiar with the town, its land, and residents, and believe I have the knowledge and relationships to serve all. Please remember to write me in on Monday, May 20th.


Thank you for your time and consideration.

John W. Field, Jr.

manned through the summer by three seasonal employees. When I spoke to her on May 20, she said that their crew was working on the waterfront area.

She also said that there may be opportunities for volunteers to help out at the lake later in the season.

She did advise that visitors to the park should use the entrance off of Rt.183 until the dirt road from Rt.57 is repaired. We understand that we are on the list for those repairs.

So break out the sunscreen, sand toys, and hotdogs and enjoy this beautiful park. 

## The Vote Getters TOWN ELECTION, 2019

With all but one of the nominated candidates for elected offices standing for reelection – and none facing opposition – the outcome of the election on Monday, May 20, was clear from the moment the polls opened at 10 a.m. There were, however, write-in votes, and one successful write-in vote for a two-year term on the Planning Board.

Only 98 voters turned out, of 585 registered in Sandisfield, a bit over 16 percent. Last year, with five candidates for two select board seats, 256 voters cast ballots.

### VOTING RESULTS

**Moderator: Simon Winchester, 72.**  
(one year)

Write-in votes: Barbara Cormier, 2.  
Jean Atwater-Williams, 1.

**Selectman: George Riley, 79.**  
(three years)

Write-ins: Alex Bowman, 2.  
A.J. Riiska, 2., Ralph Morrison, 1.

**Board of Assessors: Bethany Perry, 78.**  
(three years)

Write-ins: Elaine O'Brien, 1.

**School Committee: Jennifer Hibbins, 88.**  
(three years)

**Board of Health (three years): Kim Spring, 94.**

**Planning Board: No nominated candidates.**  
(two years)

**Write-ins: John Field, 62.**  
Alex Bowman, 4., Bethany Perry, 1.

**Planning Board: Paul Gaudette, 82.**  
(five years)

Write-ins: John Field, 2.

**Library Trustee (five years): Clare English, 90.** 

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## Forging a Path Ahead

The town has made it through a rough winter, and while the weather has at last improved Sandisfield faces a tsunami of challenges that rival any it's seen in several generations.

The long-term outlook for hill towns in southern Berkshire County, including Sandisfield, is concerning. There's a long list: crumbling infrastructure, roads difficult and expensive to maintain, little or no economic growth, a mostly flat population, housing valuations stagnant, local business closings,

a decreasing sense of volunteerism, Broadband still "on the horizon," if that close, district-wide per pupil costs rising.

All of this puts pressure on the tax base, which means yearly increases are probably inevitable unless "something happens." What that "something" could be is unknown.

There are positives, however.

The town seems well run with an outward-looking, bold Select Board. Our selectmen are willing to tackle unpleasant and thorny issues and to make decisions and carry them out. They keep on task. They have

to prioritize and stay focused like never before. While it's easy to criticize, they seem to be working in synch.

Another good sign is the Green Community award of \$128,000 and the quick efforts on the part of a few residents who made that happen (see page 8). We need more citizens with energy and experience to step up when similar opportunities arise. The selectmen need to continue forging relationships with Pignatelli and Hinds, the Berkshire Regional Planning Council, The Berkshire Eagle, and any other entity with influence and, well, yes, pull. We have no time to lose.

*Bill Price, co-editor  
West New Boston*

## Police Chief, Son Hurt in Rt. 8 Crash

*By Bill Price*

Police Chief Mike Morrison and his son, Alec, were hurt in a collision on Route 8 about three miles north of New Boston on a rainy evening, May 14.

Chief Morrison was driving an A&M Auto tow truck, heading south, with his 16-year-old son in the passenger seat, hauling another truck at the request of the Massachusetts State Police. Suddenly an oncoming northbound 26-foot Ryder rental truck veered across the road into their lane, said a Berkshire District Attorney's Office spokesman, and struck them head-on.

Mike's brother, Fire Chief Ralph Morrison, driving just behind the tow truck, saw the accident as it occurred.

The injured Morrisons and the driver of the Ryder truck, Francis Costanzo, 40, were taken by ambulance to Baystate Medical Center in Springfield. Alec's injuries included a broken right femur. Chief Morrison received cuts and bruises to his face and a fractured cervical vertebrae.

The driver of the rental truck, who was apparently not badly injured, was later charged, a state police spokesman said, with negligent operation of a motor vehicle and marked lane violations.

Route 8 north of New Boston is a highway with many curves as it follows the bends of the Farmington River, but the accident occurred about 6:50 p.m., on a short straight stretch of road.

Ralph said his brother tried to swerve to the right to avoid the oncoming truck. He said, "It simply turned into the oncoming lane."

He added, "I've seen accidents before, but never one that involved my family." He stopped his pickup and jumped out.

"My heart was racing," he said later. "The first thing I did was run up to the cab of the tow truck, yelling 'Mike. Alec.'" He said his heart instantly slowed down "when they both answered. As long as they were alive ..."

He added, "The front bumper of the Ryder truck was nearly against the windshield of the tow truck. It was that close."

Both doors of the tow truck were jammed. Ralph said, "I kept trying and tugging. Finally Mike said, 'Stop trying to open the door. Call for help.'"

Ralph took his brother's advice. "I started with the Sandisfield fire station,



*Only the steel frame of the tow truck kept the rental truck from smashing into the windshield.*

*Photo: Rico Sanchez*

because I know them. Then 911."

He described the wait as excruciating. "It seemed like it took forever for anybody to get there, but I knew they were all on the way and it really wasn't that long. It seemed like a long time to me."

He checked on the driver of the Ryder truck who was basically uninjured, although also pinned in the cab of his truck.

Ralph said Sandisfield firefighters used the Jaws of Life to pry open the doors of both trucks and extricate the drivers and Alec.

Ralph explained how lucky his brother and nephew were in the accident. "A state trooper told me later that if they hadn't been driving the older tow truck they would have been killed. Our old truck was made of steel. The new ones are plastic."

Local emergency responders included Sandisfield, Otis, Tolland, Monterey, Southern Berkshire, Colebrook, and Winsted. Also soon on hand were members of the District Attorney's office and state police. According to the Berkshire Eagle, the state Department of Environmental Protection was present because of the adjacent Farmington River and the possibility of "a fuel spill from one or both of the vehicles."

A Life Star helicopter was summoned, landing in an open space near Roosterville Road below New Boston, but rainy weather soon closed in and the helicopter had to return to base. The abandoned ground crew rode to Baystate in the Winsted ambulance with Alec.

Mike and Alec were released from the hospital May 20 and are recovering at home. Police Chief Morrison asked the Times to send thanks to all those who responded and to those who have helped the family. 🙏

# Town Votes “No” on School Budget

## NOW WHAT HAPPENS?

By *Brigitte Ruthman*

The rising cost of just about everything, including teachers' contractual benefits, shifting enrollments, and a dispute over the cost-sharing formula between the towns of Sandisfield and Otis pushed the proposed school budget up a whopping 8.4 percent over last year.

The total for this fiscal year was to be up more than \$120,000 over last year's budget. The town's contribution to its regional education expenses was to be \$1,566,670.

This was too much for residents at the Annual Town Meeting who shot Article 16 down by a vote of 30-21.

The budget will now go back to school officials for a quick retooling and another town vote which will have to happen before July 1, the beginning of the 2020 fiscal year. If the school committee and the district can't resolve the issue, the state may have to make the final decision.

Even as he argued in favor of passing the warrant, Eric Jesner, business manager for the Farmington Regional School District, acknowledged that the increase was a “significant” hit for a town already faced with costly road repairs in the wake of its worst-ever mud season.

Sandisfield school committee member Nicholas DellaGiustina, who argued in favor of the warrant, said fixed costs make up all but a small percentage of the budget proposal. Last year's school budget increase was just 2.5 percent.

But costs continue to rise. Teachers, one per grade who tend to have small classes of no more than 15 students, saw their salaries increase by three percent. Salaries represent \$660,000 of the total.

Combining grades has been proposed as a possible cost-saving measure, but has been rejected by the district and many parents.

Health care costs, according to school committee member John Skrip, are soaring.

In addition, this year, with five more K-12 grade students coming from Sandisfield and nine fewer from Otis, per pupil cost is \$20,236. The town sends 97 students to the school district, 15 more than two years ago.

A major sticking point for the school budget issue was a dispute over the cost-sharing formula which allocates how much Sandisfield and Otis pay proportionally. The amount is based on incomes and property values that favor Otis and make a difference this year of \$22,800. If the original formula for apportioning costs that had been agreed upon by Sandisfield and Otis when the school district was founded in 1992 were used, Sandisfield's contribution would be lower. Instead the formula used is one imposed later by the state.

With the older “alternate” formula more favorable to Sandisfield than the “statutory” formula, the Board of Selectmen unanimously opposed the budget proposal this year, as did two of the four members of the Finance Committee. That was enough for many voters.

“The school committee has the option of using the alternative method by vote,” Jesner said. But if the town fails to approve the budget at a special town meeting, Jesner and DellaGiustina agreed, the state would step in and require the statutory formula.

And, if the town opts for the old formula, Otis will vote it down because it won't favor them, said DellaGiustina, who voted to keep the statutory formula.


Without additional state funding, Jesner said the budget is as low as it can get.

The vote followed a plea from former Select Board and school committee member Skrip who agreed that costs have already been shaved to a minimum. “Please pass this budget,” he said in his remarks to the audience.

But other items in the operating budget drew questions.

The FRRSD lunch program, at \$146,000, is higher than in other schools and helps pay for lunches some families can't afford. Could it be lower?

The \$474,000 cost to transport students to and from school is also higher, in part because of the distances that must be travelled to pick up students and because the Commonwealth has not made good on a pledge to support transportation with more public funding. And, Jesner said, typically only one bus service bids on the job.

At the end of the discussion, the moderator called for a vote. Article 16 failed by nine votes. The school budget now returns to the school committee for some fast work at its next meeting, June 3. 

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by Lorraine J. German

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2019, "in favor" or "opposed."

Credit: Photos: Heather Bellow, The Berkshire Eagle



At the head table, left to right, Moderator Simon Winchester, Town Attorney Brian Maser, Selectmen George Riley, Brian O'Rourke, and Mark Newman.

## All Warrants Pass Except the Real Big One

Cont'd from p. 1

Winchester then noted the gratitude of the town for the recovery of Police Chief Mike Morrison and his son, Alec, following a recent motor vehicle accident on Rt. 8.

In a directive to the voters, he asked members of the audience to address their remarks to the moderator rather than to each other. Though not universally observed, this device did seem to banish personal rancor from what was often a lively debate over the various articles of the warrant.

Attendance at the Town Meeting was sparse this year, with just 51 voters attending – a sharp drop from last year's turnout of 76 voters and a small fraction of the town's registered voters of nearly 600.

In the interest of efficiency and continuing a system first employed last year, the town warrants had been grouped together in just 27 separate articles. Another innovation was that the articles were moved for consideration out of the order in which they were included on the warrant or schedule, with those that promised to provoke the most debate considered first.

One of the major debates was over Article 16, which asked whether the town should pay \$1,566,670 as its contribution to regional education expenses. This represented an increase of \$121,567, approximately 8.4 percent, over last year's contribution. After considerable debate, and testimony from Eric Jesner, business manager of the Farmington River Regional School

District, this motion was defeated by a vote of 30 to 21. The issue will have to be resolved by special town meetings in Sandisfield and Otis by July 1 or the total budget for the school district will be at risk. (See "Town Votes 'No' on School Budget," page 4.)

Next to be considered was the question of whether to allocate \$10,000 for town employee incentive pay. This was prompted by the town's contract with the local chapter of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the union representing two members of the Highway Department. The Select Board had renegotiated a clause of the contract with the two workers, creating a series of what selectman Brian O'Rourke described as "stair step" annual bonuses reflecting the employee's level of performance, with a top reward of \$1,000 given for a worker demonstrating "outstanding performance."

Selectman O'Rourke explained that because the town has a practice of extending the equivalent of union benefits to all full-time town employees, this bonus would also be made to all town employees working more than 20 hours per week.

Some members of the public called for detailed job descriptions to be created for all town employees to provide a basis for measuring performance. Selectman George Riley said that he would ensure that every town employee eligible for those raises would have a formal job description.

Despite some questioning from voters about whether it was appropriate to offer incentive pay for doing one's job well, the motion passed.

Also moved for consideration out of its order on the warrant was Article 10 which called for an


appropriation of \$57,384 for the employment of a public safety officer for fiscal year 2020. Fire Chief Ralph Morrison gave an emotional appeal in favor of this motion, pointing out that inadequate staffing of the town's ambulance service might force Sandisfield to employ an outside contractor to fill the gap at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars annually.

The cost of this new position, the chief explained, would be largely offset by reductions in the police and fire department budgets and by annual appropriations from the Berkshire Rehabilitation & Skilled Care Center in New Boston and the neighboring town of Tolland.

With no ambulance service of its own, Tolland relies on Sandisfield for those services and is considering making an annual contribution of \$30,000 toward the position of public safety officer. "Tolland is very favorably disposed to this idea," Selectman Riley said at the meeting, "they just haven't had time to put the question before voters."

Article 10 passed overwhelmingly.

The remaining articles on the warrant were passed unanimously and for the most part with little debate, including the final article, #27, which called for a change to the town bylaws establishing penalties for false fire and police alarms.

At 1:00 p.m., sharp, a motion to adjourn was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously. The final gavel marked the end of the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. 

## IN REBUTTAL

# Distorted Versions of Town Affairs

By George Riley, Selectman

I was deeply disappointed by the profoundly misleading articles appearing in the May edition of the Times concerning Alex Bowman's dispute with the town over the garage on New Hartford Road.

Mr. Winchester, who wrote the main article, never spoke to anyone on the Select Board about this issue, preferring instead to get his "facts" from Mr. Bowman. When I discovered this prior to publication and called to inform him of another side to the story, he told me he was not going to revise his article.

The inaccuracies and distortions in that article combine to create a false impression of what actually happened.

It states, for example, that Mr. Bowman "recused himself from all discussions" of the Zoning Board of Appeals, which even the most casual glance at the ZBA minutes of Feb. 2 will contradict.

And it was not the Planning Board which informed the Garfields that they must apply

for a special permit, but the Select Board, which posted a public hearing notice and informed the abutters. The Select Board had decided that, despite the fact that the Garfields had been issued a valid building permit, in an abundance of caution a public hearing would settle the core issue, which according to the bylaws is whether this new building was "substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood."

The article states, "the hearing never happened – in part at least because by then the Garfields' new garage had already been built." That statement is completely false. What actually happened is that, on learning of the public hearing for a special permit, Mr. Bowman harangued the town clerk with his insistence that the Garfields should not apply for a special permit from the Select Board, but instead for a variance from the ZBA, of which we note Mr. Bowman is a vocal member. It was at that point that the decision was made to consult town counsel for a legal opinion.

In six pages of legal reasoning and citing of precedents, this opinion states, in essence, that: 1) Mr. Bowman's complaint was not timely; 2) Mr. Bowman also lacked standing to bring a complaint; 3) the building inspector's permit was proper, and therefore no special permit is required; and 4) even if a special permit were needed, only the Select Board, not the ZBA, can issue one. Not one word of this legal opinion was mentioned in the Times article.

Mr. Bowman was subsequently dismissed from the ZBA, not, as Mr. Winchester claims, for "publicly challenging...the mentality that "this is just the way things have always been done in Sandisfield," but, as stated in the Board's

decision, which was provided to Mr. Winchester, because "Mr. Bowman's insistence that this matter required a variance to be determined by the Zoning Board of Appeals of which he is a member, raises questions whether this complaint was frivolous, or motivated by some personal animus."

The Times' May editorial cites this inaccurate version of events, and notes that "accepting things because 'that's the way it's always been' is becoming less and less acceptable."

Precisely.

"The way it's always been?" This town was run for many years by a small group (with notable exceptions) which used power personally and inappropriately. By acting as an agent for others to pursue a personal grudge against the Garfields and using his position as "an officer of the town" (his words) to attempt to use the Select Board to execute this feud (under the guise of "enforcing the bylaws"), Mr. Bowman has been behaving exactly in accordance with "the way it's always been." This Select Board refuses to be used in this way.

In its decision to dismiss Mr. Bowman from the ZBA, the Board noted that we all need "a willingness at times to put aside our own personal opinions or desires for the sake of the greater good." This, I believe, is the way forward from how "it's always been." ❖

[Note: Simon Winchester stands by the substance of his report.]



Artwork by Michelle Arnot

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(as seen on  
syfy Channel)

## Town Chooses Charter for Broadband

Cont'd from p. 1

Selectman O'Rourke expressed the hope that the town will have home service "within two years." Moreover, he explained that under Charter's proposal, financial risk to the town is minimal as no local money will be required until the network is completely built and functioning.

The Charter deal has certain attractive aspects including no home connection charge, no customer contracts, and no minimum town "take rate." This means that although every residence passed by the network's line will be connected, occupants are free to accept service or not. Charter is willing to connect 571 homes out of a possible 584, or 98% service coverage of the town.

### And the Construction Money Comes From ...

The MBI will grant Sandisfield's \$1.2 million "Last Mile Broadband" allocation plus an additional \$550,000 to Charter for them to build the network. Upon completion of the work, the town will be responsible for an additional payment to Charter of \$826,700, bringing the total state and local investment in infrastructure to about \$2.6 million.

The town's obligation for that additional payment will be met via a possible 10-year, three-percent interest loan from the state, with an annual payment of \$98,000 to be deducted from the state's traditional budgeted aid through the Department of Local Services to Sandisfield known as the "Cherry Sheet."

Selectman George Riley later told the Times that other payment options include a loan of either 10, 15, or 20 years at interest rates of 3.25, 3.5, or 4.3 percent, respectively. "If we choose the 15-year loan (which is the duration of Charter's license), the annual payment will be \$62,455," he explained.

The network will be largely or possibly totally paid for with public funds, including Sandisfield tax dollars (the deduction from the Cherry Sheet

aid). It is conceivable that Charter will incur few if any significant construction costs, yet this valuable asset will become their sole property. The question of local control (ownership) has been a controversial topic here for years since planning began.



### MBI Will Keep Watch ...

Because Charter is considered foremost to be a cable television company, the town must enter into a cable franchise agreement under an 11-step process guided by the MBI. The MBI will also oversee the agreement for 15 years, after which the town will be responsible to re-negotiate an agreement.

Pricing has yet to be established but Spectrum offers on its website a wide array of product offerings including in "bundles" of internet, telephone, and television at various levels. On the lower end, basic internet only ("up to" 100 Mbps) would run about \$50 per month while a grouping of telecom products might cost \$85-\$100.

### What About OWL ...


The Sandisfield portion of Otis Wood Lands (OWL), a private community, is not included in Charter's proposal. OWL contains some 250 mostly seasonally occupied homes, about equally divided between Sandisfield and Otis.

A thorny unresolved question concerns how to supply service to these homes. Charter's cables are strung on telephone poles. Because the Wood Lands' rules prohibit poles, utilities must be buried which companies like Charter have so far refused to do. Separate discussions on a strategy that includes the town of Otis, which has its own broadband network, and the OWL property owners' association are expected.

## If Charter Does Come to Town ...

The lack of financial risk for the town and the company's uncomplicated customer policies are welcome.

Lurking in the background, however, is the concern of possible poor customer service and aggressive pricing, according to mostly angry online reviews and news reports about Spectrum's performance and legal woes. Online forums are an unscientific representation certainly, and indeed most telecommunication companies receive poor ratings, but at least being familiar with the comments may help one to know what may happen here.

And one more thing. Selectman Riley said, "Although I am voting for the proposal, I have a misgiving. There is a forced arbitration clause in here. There is no way that I will accept that." Heads nodded in agreement. 



### I Must Die

I must die  
Or so I'm told  
By gravity  
Or missing words  
That arc away  
When I'm about to speak.  
Whole paragraphs  
That once were glamorous and long  
Now are glamorous and gone.

I must die  
Because it's time  
And the clock is a river  
And the river is strong  
And I cannot breast it  
Or belong  
Beyond this little  
Tiny song of mine.


Val Coleman  
West New Boston




**C. W. NELSON**  
19 Dodd Road, Sandisfield, MA 01255  
(413) 258-3375  
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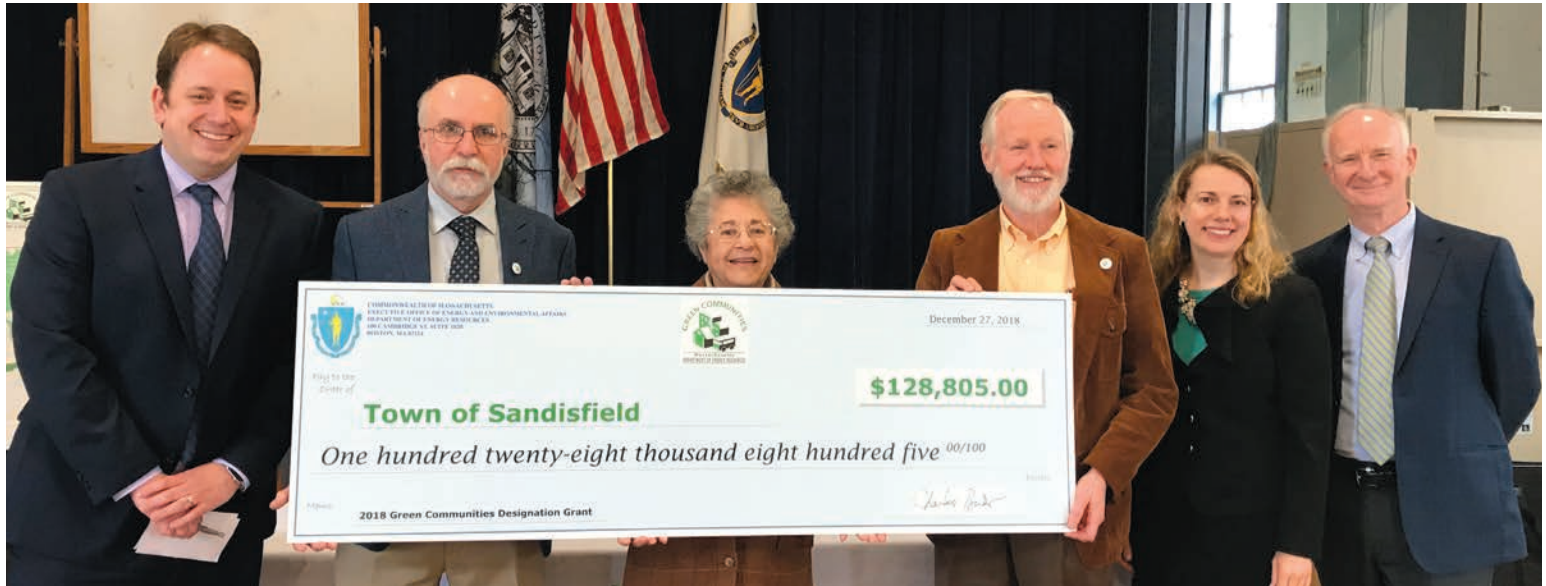
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State officials presented this “big check” to Sandisfield representatives (center, left to right, Larry Dwyer, Nina Carr, and George Riley) in a ceremony in Westhampton.

# A Big Check Indeed!

## TEAM WORK, PROMPTNESS PAY OFF WITH GREEN COMMUNITY AWARD

By Ron Bernard

Late last year Sandisfield learned it was one of 30 Massachusetts towns eligible for a significant cash grant from the State Department of Energy Resources (DOER) as a “Green Community.” The program began in 2010 and now includes 240 towns that have committed to reducing energy consumption and emissions and to promote renewable energy.

On May 2, DOER announced that only seven more towns, including five from western Massachusetts, were selected to receive awards in this round. Sandisfield was awarded \$128,805.

A clearly pleased George Riley revealed the good news at the May 6 Select Board meeting. He said, “We are proud that Sandisfield was also noted for being the town that completed its application in the shortest amount of time. It’s a new record.”

Under the Green Communities Act, cities and towns must meet certain criteria to be designated a Green Community, including for example reducing municipal energy consumption by 20 percent over five years. Applications must state how the town proposes to spend the money to attain specific goals.

Achievements like this do not happen by luck. It takes careful attention, hard work and close coordination. The criteria are strict. Also, in the case of this round, there was a very short deadline of only about five weeks for the completed application.

The town won the award thanks to the diligence of the project committee – Nina Carr, Larry Dwyer, George Riley, and others – with vital support from the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission.

Nina Carr told the Times, “This result shows what can be done with the right approach. We feel this is just a beginning because if the town meets the goals, we can apply for Green Community grants every year.”

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# Select Board Report

The big news last month was the proposal from Charter Communications/Spectrum to provide broadband service to Sandisfield, following its recent agreement with New Marlborough. Although the “devil is in the details,” this offer was judged more advantageous to the town than the current deal with Crocker, given Crocker’s inability to secure sufficient funding to date.

As a result, the Board voted to accept this offer. Selectman Riley expressed reservations about Charter’s reputation for poor customer service and objected to a clause in the New Marlborough license requiring forced arbitration of any disputes, but voted in favor of pursuing this offer.

Including loan interest, this proposal would cost the town about \$1 million. That is a lot for a network which would be owned entirely by Charter, but the town cannot afford to continue without high-speed internet service. New residents, especially young professionals, and businesses will not locate here otherwise. It will still be about two years until we are connected, but the ball seems to be finally rolling. See the [www.sandisfieldma.gov](http://www.sandisfieldma.gov) for more details and the front page article in this issue of The Times.

In related news, the town has hired Pauline Bakunis as website administrator. She will be responsible for posting agendas and minutes of meetings for all boards and for keeping announcements and the calendar current.

We received a “check” for our Green Communities designation for \$128,805. At present, we are the only town in this area designated a Green Community. We also hold the state record for accomplishing this project from start to finish so quickly.

The Board reviewed the two valuable MVP meetings which took place to determine our town’s vulnerability to climate change, and thanked all who contributed. Follow-up is now needed – there are “Hazard Mitigation Planning Grants” to help with this process.

The Board announced that Town Administrator Fred Ventresco’s contract would not be renewed on May 6. We noted that this was a business decision that had nothing to do with Fred’s performance, but was the result of the Board’s wish to re-assess that position. We also thanked Fred for agreeing to remain until the end of the fiscal year.

At a work session with DPW Superintendent Brad Curry, the Board reviewed current and future projects including installation of drainage at the library, culverts on Silverbrook and Gremler Roads, much patching and grading, and chip sealing plans for West Hubbard, River, and Town Hill Roads.

**We discussed the Open House at the new DPW garage, on Saturday, June 8, from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Come and meet your highway crew and see your new trucks!**

Starting July 1, the transfer station will be open from noon to 5:00 p.m. on Wednesdays and 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

And the Board’s summer schedule will be:

- June 3, 10, 17 and Tuesday, June 25.
- July 1, 15 and 29.
- August 12 and 26.

Finally, thanks to all of you who participated in this year’s Town Meeting. Our town’s exercise in democracy went well, with good discussions and valuable comments all around. 🍷

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George Riley*

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# An Ode to the Barn

By Brigitte Ruthman



The barn at Joshua's Farm Photos: Bill Price

## Part 1

There is a certain sweetness to places where cow's milk is collected, a sweetness that wraps around and clings to people who work in those places. The worn sweatshirts and barn coats and furry hats are tinged by the mingling of hay and cows

and the steam that rises from warm milk on cold days, but mostly from the cows.

It is a place as welcoming as a grandmother's kitchen.

Milk cows are predictable and love sameness and to have their necks rubbed and to know you are there by whirling their heads around to see you and smell familiar scents.

I intended to build a simple barn, on a cement slab that could "float" over frosts, sturdy enough to support a tractor, but not metal or sterile or big. It needed to blend into the hillside, not own it.

I wanted the nooks and crannies and the feel of the old uneven Vermont barns I have known and worked in, whitewashed timbers overhead still bearing 18th century bark.

I hired people along the way, not really sure of where I was headed.

I added structural hewn beams to the framing after a friend told me where to find a pile of them for sale. A financier who had intended to reassemble a dismantled barn from Canton on his property in Colebrook changed his mind, Joe said. I went with Joe to see the pile of old wood stored in a vast, plain, cold metal barn.

"How much," I asked. In the pause that followed I did a quick calculation on a home equity credit line if the price came up over \$2,000.

"How about \$200," he said. I handed him the cash.

We loaded the timbers, some 16 feet long, in the back of Joe's Dodge Dakota truck and my Chevy pickup. They ranged in size from 6X6 joists to 10X10 support timbers. Chestnut mostly, hewn with a shaping axe, mortise and tenon. Some were

in need of repair where wood-boring beetles had made them weak, and some needed cutting. I'd use an acid to get rid of the powder post beetles. Many hands and many winters had cast a darkened hue across the old timbers I didn't wash away.

We'd need to make three trips, using both Joe's rig and mine. We'd drive with me following Joe, in case of trouble. On the first trip, the timbers swayed as they stretched toward the road.

"Joe," I asked, "do you think we need a flag or something on the back?"

"Nah, it's not far, we'll be okay," he assured.

We weren't a mile down the road when I picked out the nose of a state police cruiser rounding a corner in Colebrook Center. The trooper switched on his lights in pursuit of Joe. I pulled up behind the cruiser. Joe was shaking.

"Nice sticks," the trooper said, in appreciation of New England charm. I told him the story of the barn and the cows they would house. After he made sure we weren't going far and were crossing the state line, we tied makeshift flags to the end of the sticks.

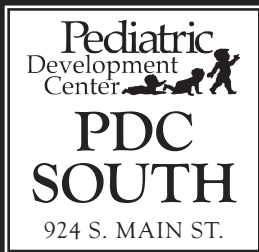
## Part 2

The barn grew. The center portion had room for hay above it, 200 bales if they were packed just right. Another portion was reserved for round bales.

The ground floor was left airy and open as a free stall area for cows, attached to the milk room which had the advantage of the insulated hillside

I installed the beams in the center and west wing, fastening them to 2X10 rafters. Old chestnut

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flooring was laid above. Joe and his crew came over for one day to notch a new frame in the milking wing. Conspicuously absent was the "drop," a gutter that usually runs the length of a barn's cement floor behind the cows to catch the manure. With memories of twisted ankles, broken manure cleaners, and milk buckets tipping into the gutter, I picked up a snow shovel to use instead. My herd is small, and the door is close enough.

And it was, and usually stays open during morning milkings, even in the coldest weather when snow swirls around. Pressing up against a cow's belly is always warmth enough.

There are no separation bars between the cows in the milking barn, which would have taken up space. Nails serve as hooks for baling twine and a dusty cap, teat cleaning clothes, a hammer, and halters.

The four stanchions came from the Hewins' family barn in Sheffield. Tim's uncle had returned from World War II when he bought the best stanchions he could find in a local farm store and stashed them away but never used them. Tim fished them out and, working with friends one Saturday night, fastened them to the barn floor. Three years later the Hewins' barn burned to the ground.

But the stanchions survive. Each one has a hardwood liner and an innovative swivel for cows to move their heads around.

I refinished them, creating a new durable color with a combination of grey Rust-Oleum paint and an artist's tube of azure blue on the metal parts, then sanded and stained the wood.

A sliding door to the hay storage area was salvaged from South Kent School.

The barn came together well enough, with some shifting of the cement foundation pads that kept doors from closing evenly. On the harshest of days the barn groaned as it should have, sturdy as it has been around dozens of calves born out of the weather and with two floors hugging the hillside. Swallows made their nests as they would have in the cross beams of an older barn's threshing room door or the joists of the ground level bay. The door stays open for them.

New mortise and tenon joints were made to fit the barn's new dimensions, a task that begged the question of who might have made the ones we cut away. Heavy tongue and groove boards were laid against its sides.

Finally, the barn looks as though it might have been here for as long as cows have grazed this land.

I wonder as my barn wraps around me like a needed cloak on winter days how long it will survive and how many more milkers in a world that no longer favors them might know the raspy tongue of a patient cow. ♡

# The View at Center Cemetery

At the May 13 Select Board meeting, Barbara Cormier commented on the condition of the Center Cemetery. "It looks disgusting as you drive in. Big piles of stone and dirt look like they've just been dumped there. Imagine driving in there on Memorial Day and seeing that." The selectmen said they would follow up. She added, "As you're driving out the other side of the cemetery there are more dirt piles that have been there so long weeds and grass are growing over them." ♡



## Rosemary's Baby

Born the first week in May at Joshua's Farm to a Brown Swiss named Rosemary, this new young calf is named Bullet (in honor of Bob "Bullet" Sherwood of Salisbury, Conn.).

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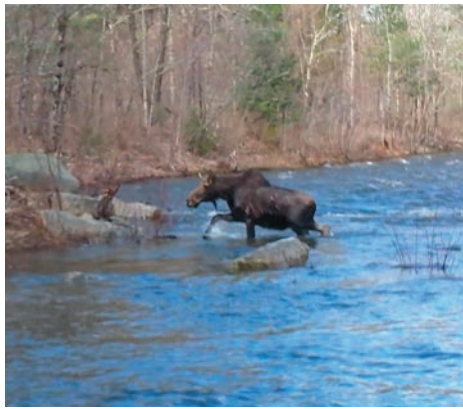


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## Moose Crossing

*I was fly-fishing on the Farmington on April 15, near the Rt. 8 bridge south of Tucker's, when I looked upstream and saw this moose enter the river from the east, heading west into Sandisfield. His small set of antlers were possibly just growing for the season.*

*Matthew Virginia  
Town Hill Road*

# My Road to Sandisfield

## HOW I CAME TO BE HERE

By Rita Kasky



Rita Kasky, of Hartsville, 2000

I'm nervous\* and excited\*\*.

It's a Thursday in October, 1992, and the last night I'll sleep in my New York City apartment. The next day, with all of my worldly possessions and my two cats, I will journey to a new life in rural Massachusetts where I'll start a new job in Stockbridge and rent a house in the village of Southfield.

\*Nervous because I was raised in apartments in the Bronx and Connecticut and as an adult I had moved to Manhattan apartment to start my career. Always apartments. Never a house.

\*\*Excited because I was moving on to new challenges and a calmer life in the country.

But what did I know about the country?

The first night in the rented house I heard noises and figured it was the upstairs neighbor until I realized I didn't have an upstairs neighbor anymore. The noises were coming from outside. It

was a bit scary. I made sure the doors and windows were locked and proceeded to have a restless night.

When I was still in one piece in the morning, I thought – so far so good. The women from across the road came over to welcome me and when I told them about the night noises they looked at me and then burst out laughing. "It's the deer, my dear! Or maybe a bear or a fox or a raccoon. Not to worry." Hmm.

After a year in Southfield I felt the need for a little more space. I rented a lovely Cape in Hartsville where I enjoyed 12 happy years. My landlord, who lived just up the road about half a mile, taught me a lot about how to live in a house. Things I never thought I'd need to know. As an apartment dweller I used to call the super if something went awry.

Then came the bad news that the house was on the market! I loved this sweet house, not just because it felt so right for me but because I learned I could actually manage to live in a house without any catastrophes. But as much as I loved it, I couldn't afford to buy it.

I decided to look for another rental. And that's when my life changed, again!

Finding a rental at or even just a little more than I was paying was not going to happen. One night at dinner my friends Linda and Jerry suggested I consider buying land and building a modular house.

After all, doesn't paying a mortgage instead of rent make sense and then I'll never have to move again? Are you kidding me???

Well, these very dear friends promised they'd take me through it all as they had lots of experience building houses and, besides, Linda was a realtor.

Linda got a line on a piece of property on Silverbrook Road in Sandisfield.

When we drove out to see it I realized that it was very near that sharp turn on Route 57 at what was once the Sandisfield town center, a turn I took carefully whenever I drove to or from the Hartford airport and each time I thought, "I won't have to do that curve again for a while."

The property was perfect. Trees. Some land but not too much. I could garden, eventually.

First I needed to talk to the bank, and if they thought I was a good bet I could become a property owner.

And then I could talk to the modular people at Segalla's and pick out a house!

It was 2004, and, lo and behold, all of that came together nice and neat!

I'll tell you all about building a modular next month. 🏠



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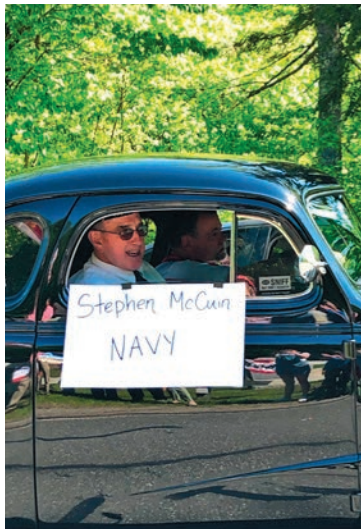
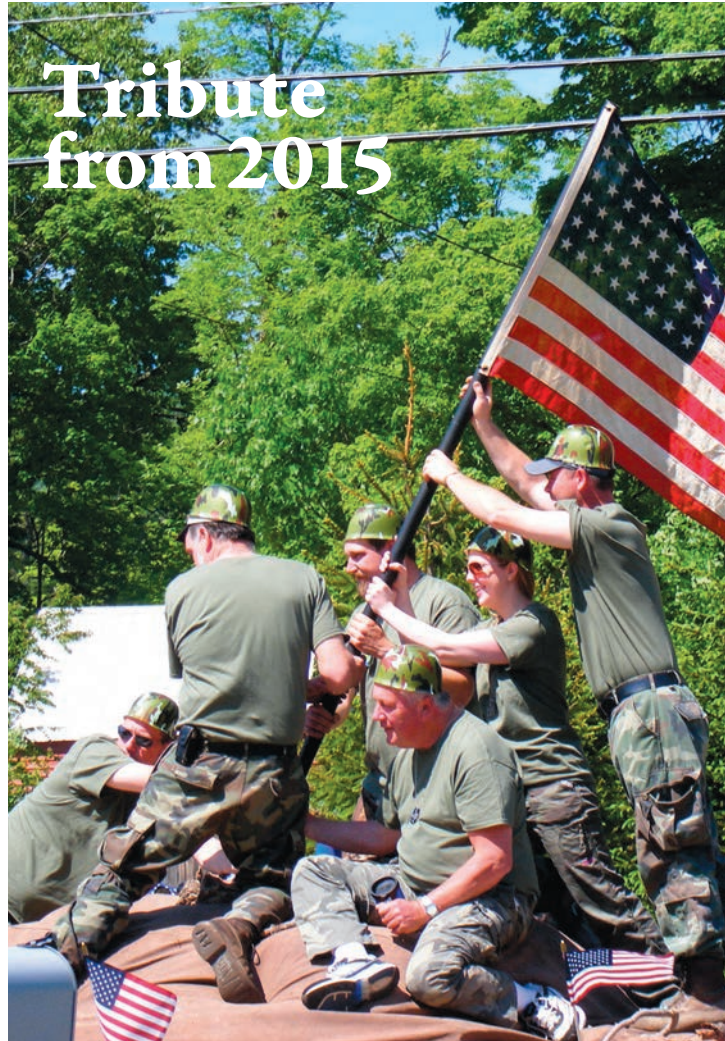
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# MEMORIAL DAY PARADE 2019



We honor all our veterans this year with a photographic memory from Sandisfield's 2015 parade, a float designed by Charlie Pease and friends as a tribute to the Iwo Jima flag raising. Surrounding the photo are images from this year's event, snapped by **Barbara Cormier** as the parade passed by the West New Boston Cemetery.



## Thank you.

The chief of the Sandisfield Fire Department, Ralph Morrison, and commander of American Legion Post #456, Maria Domato, co-sponsors of our town's Memorial Day parade, express their appreciation to everyone who contributed to this year's event and to all who turned out to watch as the parade passed by.





## Lapham's at the Library

By Simon Winchester

By now a very large box has arrived at the Sandisfield Free Public Library. Our librarian, Theresa, who already has a pretty hard job fitting new books



into her jewel-box of a building, was warned. But ever since she saw what was inside, she was pleased – as I hope you will be too, and that many who seldom venture inside our library will now be tempted to do so and have a look.

It all started two months ago when I was asked to emcee at an annual gala in New York City designed to raise money for a uniquely interesting publication, now twelve years old, called *Lapham's Quarterly*. One of the perks of the job that night was the permission to donate a complete 46-issue set of the *Quarterly* to each of two “deserving institutions.” I decided that one of them should be the admirable and rapidly-expanding Northwestern Connecticut Community College down in Winsted; and the other our gem of a little library up here.

Our library can hardly be said to be expanding, rapidly or otherwise – though perhaps it should be. Theresa Spohnholz, who has been running it – and running the town Treasury besides – since she came here from Alaska half a dozen years ago is doing her best to whip up enthusiasm among residents for what is a quite remarkable resource.

She has comfy chairs; she has coffee and cookies; she has a nice and respectably fast public computer; and she has several thousand books to lend out, for free, to anyone who cares to read. She looks enviously at the space downstairs, which is designated by the town as a Community Center, and into which she'd love to expand; but for now she does her level best with what she has, tiny and cramped though it may be.


*Lapham's Quarterly* is a journal that looks like a large and glossy paperback book, and each issue is entirely devoted to history of a single topic. The current issue is on Trade, and in the past twelve years there have been editions about War (the inaugural issue, the fall

of 2007), Money, Flesh, Magic, Time, Home, Night, Luck, The Sea. By far the most popular issue was that devoted to Eros, its cover a photograph of the open lips of red silk purse – need I say more?

This journal survives, healthily, a dozen years since its founding by Lewis Lapham, the 84-year old former editor of Harper's – and now at last it can be found, in its entirety, down at the Sandisfield Free Public Library – if the redoubtable Theresa manages to find a shelf for it.

I commend *Lapham's Quarterly* to you – you will not be disappointed.

I commend a visit to our library to find and read it. And I commend to you the visiting and using of libraries in general – for how much more pleasant it is to find and savor a physical book than it is to tap a screen and be bathed in a blizzard of electrons.

Plus, here in the Sandisfield Library the coffee is pretty good. And, just like the books, entirely free. 

## Come Tour the “Chocolate Factory” A MUSICAL ADAPTATION

By Barbara Penn

Roald Dahl's beloved classic, “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” will be brought to life by the Sandisfield Players in June.



The Players will present evening performances at 7:00 p.m., Friday, June 14, and Saturday, June 15, and a matinee at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 16, at the Sandisfield Arts Center.

The production is one of the most ambitious projects undertaken by co-director Ben Luxon and the Players. If anybody can pull it off, this director and these players who have given us such memorable productions as “Shakespeare Unchained,” “Under Milkwood,” and “Our Town” can do it.

“Charlie,” the group's first musical, includes seasoned Sandisfield actors Jean Atwater-Williams, Mary Anne Grammer, Ben

Luxon, and Susie Crofut, plus a host of child actors and adults from Sandisfield and neighboring communities. And they can all sing.

The sets, designed by artist Susie Crofut and built by Luxon and crew, are worth the price of admission. The candy factory is a magical feat of fantasy.

Look for the Oompa Loompas!

Luxon is joined as director by Jesse Howard, drama teacher at the Berkshire School, who collaborated with him last year on directing “Shakespeare Unchained.” Howard did a version of “Charlie” years ago, but according to Luxon, “He has always wanted to stage it with both adults and children.” With all of Howard's family in the production, it's a dream come true. Howard himself stars as Willy Wonka and his son is Charlie.

Some of the songs like “Pure Imagination” will be familiar to anyone who saw the Gene Wilder movie version, “Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory,” but a surprise will be original music created by Jesse Howard.


As with all Dahl's writings, there is a dark, sinister side to the story, but this side is so deftly woven into the playful, clever prose,

music, and imaginative tale that both children and adults will thoroughly enjoy it. Be assured that there is indeed a happy ending, all to the benefit of sweet, loving Charlie.

On Father's Day weekend, give yourself and your family a sweet evening or afternoon out. Don't miss the opportunity for the excitement of a live, lively, and top-notch production of “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.”



Two singers from “Charlie”:  
Jean Atwater-Williams as  
“Mrs. Gloop” and Reid Sinclair  
singing, “The Candy Man”  
Photos: Peter Levine

The production is supported in part by a grant from the Sandisfield Cultural Council. Tickets at [www.sandisfield-artscenter.org](http://www.sandisfield-artscenter.org). 

# Something for Everyone in June

By Hilde Weisert

The Arts Center 2019 season gets into high gear in June, with something for everyone.

*Looking for entertainment for the whole family?* Come to the free family movie on Saturday, June 7, at 7:00 p.m. And on Father's Day weekend, bring the children to watch the cast of children and grown-ups in the first musical from the Sandisfield Players, the magical "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," Friday, June 14, and Saturday, June 15, at 7:00 p.m. and matinee Sunday at 3:00 p.m.

*Need a break from electronic devices, or want to deepen your*

*appreciation for the woodlands around us?* Local author Hannah Fries, on June 8 at 10:30 a.m., will read and share slides from her beautiful book, *Forest Bathing Retreat: Find Wholeness in the Company of Trees*.


*Are you a fan of Brazilian music who'd like a bit of Antonio Carlos Jobim?* Join us in the downstairs gallery-café transformed into an intimate jazz club and listen to international singer Vita Kay, a big hit at our last Family Frolics event. June 8 at 8:00 p.m.

*A documentary film buff or concerned about the environment?* Come to the screening of "Grit," a new film by Academy Award-winning director Cynthia Wade on June 22 at 8:00 p.m. The documentary captures a little-known environmental disaster in Indonesia caused by natural gas drilling. After the film, the

director will be present for a conversation with the audience.

*Seeking the pleasure that masterly, evocative art provides?* Join us on Saturday, June 1, between 2:00-4:00 p.m. at the opening reception for artist Olwen Dowling's "The Past Is Present" show of oils, watercolors, and monoprints of scenes from the west of Ireland as well as North Chester here in the Berkshires, or stop by any time during the month before a performance.

*Ready to hear some beautiful classical music without that long drive to Tanglewood?* Don't miss the outstanding central Massachusetts Blackstone Valley String Quartet wrapping up the month with Dvorak on June 28 at 4:00 p.m.

For more details, see the Monthly Calendar on page 19. 

# A Puzzle a Day

By Michelle Arnot


*Hell not a crime.* This was the greeting that I received upon arriving at the 42nd Annual Crossword Puzzle Tournament (ACPT) in Stamford, Connecticut, at the end of March. It wasn't a rebuke, but rather an anagram of Michelle Arnot. Such is the type of wordplay you encounter with the acrossionado crowd.

Six years ago, Will Shortz – puzzle editor of The New York Times – invited me to be a judge at the ACPT, which he founded. The Stamford Marriott was happy to host it during the low season. This year 750 contestants filled two ballrooms to capacity.

All Saturday the digital clock counted down while contestants solved six puzzles (with a lunch break) and judges waited in a windowless room. The drill works like this: Each puzzle is allotted 15 to 30 minutes. As contestants complete the puzzles, they beckon runners who jot down the time remaining and hustle the puzzles to the judges. We initial and color any wrong letters with a special highlighter. The puzzles then go to the computer room for tabulation. On Sunday the top three acrossionados solve the final puzzle on white boards, with the winner taking the \$5,000 pot. Top finishers in other categories receive smaller awards. A good time is had by all!



A quick scan of the contestants revealed only one from our area, a Great Barrington solver.

On July 13, local acrossionadaos will have the chance for a dress rehearsal at the Sandisfield Arts Center, which will host a mini crossword tournament with mini prizes. Sharpen your pencils and your wits, and meet me for some healthy wordplay. The first ten people who mention The Sandisfield Times when they register get in free. 



Artwork by Michelle Arnot



# Sandisfield Arts Center

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# JUNE



IN THE GALLERY

**JUNE 1 – 30: OLWEN DOWLING  
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RECEPTION SAT, JUNE 1, 2 - 4 PM**



**FRI, JUNE 7, 5:30 PM  
FREE Family Movie  
"Little Mermaid"**



**SAT, JUNE 8, 10:30 AM \$10  
HANNAH FRIES:  
Her new book,  
*Forest Bathing Retreat:  
Find Wholeness in the  
Company of Trees***



**SAT, JUNE 8, 8 PM \$15  
VITA KAY: Jazz & Bossa Nova**



**FRI, JUNE 14, 7 PM \$20  
SAT, JUNE 15, 7 PM \$20  
SUN, JUNE 16, 3 PM \$20**

(CHILDREN 12 AND UNDER: \$5)

**CHARLIE and the CHOCOLATE  
FACTORY - THE MUSICAL**



**SAT, JUNE 22, 7 PM \$10  
CYNTHIA WADE: Film, GRIT**



**SAT, JUNE 29, 4 PM \$15  
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STRING QUARTET**

# Council on Aging



By Nina Carr

The Sandisfield COA continues to be very active even though sadly our numbers have diminished.

The Chair Yoga classes have been well attended, and we all really enjoy our instructor Wendy Larson. We laugh almost as much as we exercise. They are held every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. at Old Town Hall.

Also by the time you read this, a group will have returned from a trip to the new MGM Casino in Springfield. Hopefully richer than when they left.

Ann Wald has been our representative at meetings in Otis that focus on affordable and elderly housing issues. She would like input from Sandisfield residents, especially seniors on this issue. Please call her at 258-4415 if you have questions or suggestions.

Coming up very quickly in June will be our Health and Wellness Fair on June 8 at the American Legion Pavilion on Rt. 8 from 10 a.m.-2:00 p.m. This has been quite an ambitious project and we are hoping for a good turnout. There will be valuable information for all ages, and it is free! We will have representatives from Fairview Hospital, CHP, Hospice, Age Friendly Berkshires, and many more.

Of course we will continue our usual schedule through June, business meetings on the first and third Wednesdays, pizza and cards on the third Wednesday, and blood pressure clinic on the fourth Wednesday of the month. We are also planning a foot clinic in July.

Come by on Wednesdays at noon and give us a try!

# Fire/EMS Logs



## April 2019 Incidents, 911 Calls

April 1 . . . . . Medical call, Tolland, standby, call cancelled

April 2 . . . . . Medical call, Beech Plain Road North, Otis ambulance covers this area, transported to Fairview

April 3 . . . . . Medical call, transported to Fairview

April 3 . . . . . Medical call, Otis ambulance responded, mutual aid

April 14 . . . . . Medical call, lifting assistance

April 15 . . . . . Medical call, Tolland, Otis ambulance responded, mutual aid, transported to Baystate Hospital

April 16 . . . . . Medical call, transported to Berkshire Medical Center

## EMS, CONT'D

April 16 Medical call, transported to Fairview

April 17 . . . . . Medical call, transported to Berkshire Medical Center

April 22 . . . . . Medical call, no transport

April 23 . . . . . Medical call, Otis ambulance responded, mutual aid




## April 2019 Incidents, 911 Calls

April 24 . . . . . Mutual aid to Otis for brush fire.



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# Coming and Going



Fallyn Irma Pease

Jennifer and Charles Pease of South Main Street, Sandisfield, announce the birth of their daughter, Fallyn. Born April 1 at Baystate Medical Center in Springfield, Fallyn is a granddaughter of Charles and Laureen Pease of Sandisfield and Mary and Jim Florek of Westfield, Mass. Her middle name is in honor of her late great-grandmother, Irma Pease, also of Sandisfield.

*Photo: Elijah Holland*



ROBERT L. GACEK

1946 – 2019

Robert Louis Gacek, 73, of Sandisfield passed away on May 1, 2019 in Great Barrington. Prior to moving to Sandisfield full-time in 2015 he had been a 30-year resident of Waterbury, Conn. The Gaceks purchased a cottage on Cold Spring Road in 2006 and rehabilitated it. (See Sandisfield Times, "A Tale of Two Cottages," December 2014).

Born January 20, 1946 at New Britain, Conn., Robert was the son of the late Louis and Anna Petrowicz Gacek. He graduated from E.C. Goodwin Regional Vocational Technical School in New Britain. He later went to Naugatuck Valley Community College in Waterbury where he earned his Associates Degree in Hotel and Food Service Management. He was a member of Alpha Beta Gamma International Business Honor Society and Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society.

Robert was a proud member of the U.S. Army having served in Vietnam. He received The Bronze Star Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, two Over Seas Bars, Sharpshooter Badge Rifle M14 and the Sharpshooter Badge M16 Rifle before being honorably discharged.

In Connecticut, Robert worked both sides of retail and wholesale lumber and millwork sales. He was involved planning and implementation of merchandising programs with many hours of hands-on display work. He was employed by Chapman Lumber Co., in Thomaston, Guardian Building Products, Waterbury, Cleary Millwork, Rocky Hill, Lloyds Home Centers, North Haven, and worked at various Grossman locations.

A member of the American Legion Post #456, Sandisfield, the Sandisfield Council on Aging, and the Sandisfield Historical Society, Robert was also a member of the Brooklyn Valley VFW Post # 7790 in Waterbury.

He enjoyed cooking and could turn a simple meal into a delicious and appetizing delight.

Robert is survived by his wife of 35 years, Mary Ann DeRuiter Gacek. The couple was married August 27, 1983 in Pompton Plains, NJ. He is also survived by his daughter, Elizabeth Hoffman and her husband, Bruce, of Amston, Conn., his stepson, Nicholas Shabrack and his wife, Amanda of Apex, NC, his brother, Ronald Gacek and wife, Dorothy of Fort Mill, SC, and three grandchildren, Jordan DeSimone and Zoe and Mason Shabrack all of Apex, and his brother-in-law, Donald DeRuiter and wife, Joyce of Pompton Plains, NJ.

Services were held on May 18. Donations in his honor may be made to Am Vets Post #77, Otis, American Legion Post #456, Sandisfield, or to Soldier On, care of Finnerty & Stevens Funeral Home, 426 Main St., Great Barrington, MA 01230. Please direct remembrances to [www.finnertyandstevens.com](http://www.finnertyandstevens.com)

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## Letters to the Editors

### “OUTRAGEOUS” TOWN MEDICAL INSURANCE

At the recent Town Meeting, one resident, seeing what the town pays for employee medical insurance, asked, “Don’t you find that outrageous?”

I didn’t respond at that moment, but he was absolutely right. The town pays \$14,000 annually for each family plan – and that’s only for its 70 percent share. But the town has no choice – it’s the law.

The actual cost ranges from \$20,000 to over \$35,000. You’d have to be making well over six figures to afford to pay \$35,000 a year for medical insurance! And with these astronomical costs, you’d expect total coverage – but you’d be wrong: here comes a host of deductibles, co-pays, limits and exclusions.

And it gets worse year by year. Medical bills are the number one reason that Americans file for bankruptcy. This profit-driven system is clearly out of control and threatens to bankrupt our local and national economy.

But what can you do? Only one thing – make sure that your Congress people and the next presidential candidates pledge to fight for Medicare for all, so our country can join every other civilized nation in making health care a right. We can’t afford this outrage any longer.

*George Riley (As a private citizen)  
Cronk Road*

### BACK TO DODD ROAD

Not to keep going over and over our much needed road repairs and maintenance in town, I just want to say I have been shocked, saddened, and disappointed in some of the answers we have received from town officials.

We all know that for years roads in our town have been neglected and maintenance limited. Being an EMT for 30 years here, I have been on almost every road in town therefore know my road isn’t the only road in town that needs attention.

The remark that Dodd Road problems were due to our business was uncalled for and very disappointing. Hopefully by working and listening to one another solutions will be found. We should all remember the quote by Abraham Lincoln, “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”

*Zoe Nelson  
Dodd Road*

### FINDING THE BYLAWS

It was enlightening to read of a Zoning Board member being sacked by the Selectmen for his “judgement on zoning matters” pertaining to the enforcement of the Zoning Board Rules and Regulations.

But I can’t help but wonder how a town resident is supposed to comply with these Zoning Rules and Regulations if they are buried on the town’s website without a clear path to where they reside. The easiest way to find them is how I did: Google “Sandisfield Zoning Bylaws.”

These rules and regulations date from 1964 and include amendments to May 2009. A bylaw regarding photovoltaic systems, passed in 2018, is posted separately. The bylaws are poorly paginated and poorly typed. It seems no one has looked them over for some time. Other towns in the area have zoning regulations posted independently on their websites.

Our mostly 40-year old rules should be reviewed and updated with regard to the 21st century and the nature of the town and what it has become today, as well as what it wants to be in the future. After this has been done, they should be posted so they can be easily found by the public.

*Jerry Herman  
Sandisfield Road*

### REVISITING THE SILVERBROOK CAFE

Simon Winchester last month reported too many incorrect assumptions for me not to correct. We live in town and want the townspeople to have facts, not assumptions.

I owned and ran the property in 2010 and considered selling due to my health issues – period. There were NO (and I quote) “vast structural, hygiene, or lack of passing trade” of any kind, and this is a fact.

I contacted an attorney and signed and gave the property back to TD Bank due to my health issues – period!

My Dad and I originally purchased the property in 2008 and invested over \$240,000 into renovations. For Simon to write “many scores of thousands of dollars need to be spent to make it a fully-functional business” should have been looked into before (again) assuming.... The restaurant space can be operational as soon as permits are applied for and approved.

My family and I made our money back within the first year of opening. Never did I struggle for business, as The Silverbrook Cafe was so busy and profitable I stayed open 7 days a week as requested by my patrons.

When we purchased the property back in 2018 there was nothing (quote) “bizarrely” about it. After the film by Karen Allen was shot, I shut the building down. My Dad purchased it from TD Bank so I could advertise it for sale and get the town’s Best Little Honky-Tonk West of the Clam River watering hole back open.

Looks like fate has brought Melissa and Seth to open the Silverbrook Tavern soon.

*Connie D’Andrea  
Silverbrook Road*

*Simon Winchester replies:*

*I very much regret that you found fault with the piece I wrote, but I stand by the reporting. My inclusion of the downward spiraling value – or asking price – of the property illustrates, I think you will agree, the challenges that you experienced as a previous owner, as well as those which will confront Melissa and Seth as they assume responsibility.*

*Our town is too small allow personal enmities to grow and fester, and I hope you will feel able to put this matter aside once your letter has been published and has set the record straight, as you see it. I have the greatest respect and admiration for you as a businesswoman, and am only sorry that, for a variety of reasons, the Silverbrook was not to be a long-term success for you. Let us all hope that Melissa and Seth have better luck.*



# HOME IMPROVEMENTS

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# NOW HEAR THIS!

*Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro*

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

## JUNE EVENTS

**Playgroup** on Mondays from 9:30-11:00 a.m. at the Sandisfield Library Community Room (library basement). No pre-registration is necessary. The playgroup features a story time. Program led by Nina Carr. Free.

**Wednesday Weekly Gatherings** from 11:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. at the Council on Aging, basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57.

**Tai Chi, Standing and Chair** on Mondays at 11:00 a.m. at the Old Town Hall on Silverbrook Road. Sponsored by The Council on Aging. Free.

**Opening Reception: "Olwen Dowling" The Past is Present** Oils, Watercolors, Monoprints on Saturday, June 1, from 2:00-4:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. Olwen works in oils and watercolors in her depictions of the west of Ireland, as well as North Chester where she lives in the Berkshires. The gallery is open during performances. Private showings available by appointment with the artist. The exhibition in the Gallery will be on display through June 30.

**YOGA with Ann Gadwah** will be offered in June at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesdays (June 5, 12, 19) and Tuesday (June 25) at the Old Town Hall on Silverbrook Road. Contact the Recreation Committee or library for more information. \$5.

**Free Family Movie Night: "The Little Mermaid,"** on Friday, June 7, at 5:30 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. This month's selection for the whole family will be posted on www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. Free.

**Sandisfield DPW Open House** at the new garage, Saturday, June 8 from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Come meet the highway crew, see your new garage, and your new trucks.

**Health and Wellness Fair** on Saturday, June 8 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the American Legion Pavilion on Route 8, near Firehouse #1. Many exhibitors, free health exams. Sponsored by The Council on Aging. Free admission.

**Forest Bathing with Hannah Fries** on Saturday, June 8, at 10:30 a.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center on 5 Hammertown Road. Join Hannah for a slide show, reading, and discussion about her new book, Forest Bathing Retreat: Find Wholeness in the Company of Trees. For more information visit www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. \$10.

**Jazz & Bossa Nova with Vita Kay** on Saturday, June 8, at 8:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. Raised in Kazakhstan studying classical piano and singing Soviet pop and patriotic hymns, Vita later sang in choirs in Russia and the

UK. While in London, she was introduced to jazz, bossa nova, and traditional Indian call and response devotional singing. For tickets and more information visit www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. \$15.

**New Boston Church Service** on Sunday, June 9, at 10:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church, Route 57. All are welcome!

**Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** with the Sandisfield Players on Friday, June 14 and Saturday, June 15 at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday, June 16 at 3:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. For tickets and more information, visit www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. Adults \$20, children (12 and under) \$5.

**Grit, a film by Cynthia Wade with Q&A** on Saturday, June 22, at 7:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. This cinematic documentary captures a hardly known yet massive environmental disaster: an unstoppable mudflow in Indonesia believed to be caused by natural gas drilling. After the film, there will be a Q&A session with director Cynthia Wade. For more information, visit www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. \$10.

**Blood Pressure Clinic** with Porchlight Visiting Nurse Association on Wednesday, June 26 at 11:30 a.m. at the Council on Aging, basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57.

**Blackstone Valley String Quartet** on Saturday, June 29, at 4:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center at 5 Hammertown Road. The performance will feature Dvorak's "American String Quartet". For tickets and more information visit www.sandisfieldartscenter.org. \$15.

### OTHER EVENTS IN NEARBY TOWNS

**Massachusetts Audubon Family Fun Day** on Saturday, June 1 from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. at Pleasant Valley in Pittsfield. There will be nature exploration activities, live animal presentations, music, and nature arts and crafts. Free.

**Steepletop Hike** sponsored by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council on Monday, June 3 from 10:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in New Marlborough. The hike will be 4.5 miles and feature a search for spring happenings such as wildflowers and migrant birds. Please wear sturdy footwear, bring water and a snack or lunch. For additional information, contact Mariah (mauman@bnrc.org or 413-499-0596).

**Bits & Pieces** on Saturday, June 8, from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. at the Monterey Community Center. Don't throw out those broken dishes as artist and educator Marilyn Orner Cromwell helps you turn them into new works of art in her mosaic workshop.

For more information and to register, visit www.ccmonterey.org.

**Yogurt Making Demonstration** with Wendy Jensen on Sunday, June 9, from 1:00-2:30 p.m. at the Monterey Community Center. For more information and to register, visit www.ccmonterey.org.

**Saving the Season Workshop** on Saturday, June 22, from 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. at the Monterey Community Center. Author and food-writer Kevin West guides you in this workshop on canning and preserving the fruits of your harvest. For more information and to register, visit www.ccmonterey.org.

**Sup'N Swing** on Saturday, June 22 at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall Park in Otis. The "Monday Project Band" will entertain during this Otis Annual Community Celebration. Food trucks.



## HEALTH and WELLNESS FAIR

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*Jill Reiter*



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Copies are also available in Otis at Berkshire Bank, Katie's Market, Papa's Fuel, Otis Library, Otis Rec Center, Farmington River Diner, Otis Poultry Farm, Otis Woodlands (May-September), Knox Trail Inn, and the Laundromat. Locations in Monterey include the Library (temporarily located at the firehouse) and the Roadside Café. Also available at the Southfield Store in New Marlborough, and at the general store and post office in Colebrook. Back issues are available for purchase.

The Times can be mailed to your home by paid subscription (see form below left) or you can read it (free) online as a PDF document at [www.sandisfieldtimes.org](http://www.sandisfieldtimes.org).

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## **Editorial Staff**

*Editors: Bill Price and Seth Kershner*

*email: [editor@sandisfieldtimes.org](mailto:editor@sandisfieldtimes.org) or cell 413.429.7179*

*Advertising/Subscriptions: Ron Bernard*

*Graphic Design: Tina Sotis*

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