

THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

Tribunus



Plebis

RELIABLE. REGULAR. RELEVANT.

Volume XI, Number 9

December 2020

Compactor Grant to Bring Big Savings

By Times Reporters

One-thousand dollars per month. According to a fiscal analysis by the Select Board, that's how much money the Town saves due to the purchase of its cardboard compactor. The device, acquired by the Town with help from a \$6,000 grant, has been on-site at the transfer station since the spring.

With Covid-19 forcing more and more residents to stay indoors and do their shopping online, the amount of cardboard coming to the transfer station has exploded. The Town pays by volume to have its paper recyclables hauled away and Select Board member George Riley told The Times he was surprised to learn how much money the compactor had saved the Town.

"I was expecting huge increases in costs," he said, "so it was pretty shocking to me that when we compared costs last year to this, we were saving an enormous amount.

"The bottom line," Riley added, "as far as the average taxpayer is concerned: your dump sticker fees aren't going to go up again anytime soon. And that's largely due to the cardboard compactor."



Knox Trail, Guided Tour, October 2014
Enthusiastic hikers met at Upper Spectacle Pond before setting out on the first tour of the Sandisfield section of the trail. At far right is guide and researcher Tom Ragusa. An April, 2021 tour is tentatively planned. The Times will provide details in the March issue. Photo: Cindy Ragusa

Knox Trail Emerges From the Woods

FIRST STEP TO NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

By Ron Bernard

Thanks to some thirty years of determination by one individual, the Knox Trail, arguably Sandisfield's most important historical legacy, is poised for nomination and listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Through three decades, Tom Ragusa of Otis has painstakingly trekked back and forth through the overgrown forests and swamps, over downed trees, through thick buckbrush, mapping and documenting the roughly eight miles the trail crosses through Sandisfield and Otis. Tom, who retired from a career with the Massachusetts DCR in 2017, deserves much of the credit for the potential designation. He helped establish the Otis Historical Commission in about 2007 which this year sponsored state historical/architectural consultant Bonnie Parsons to research

and prepare a cultural asset "Inventory," an initial history of the trail as it pertains to Sandisfield and Otis. This report fulfills a bedrock requirement of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and starts the process.

A listing (or even a precursor nomination) of the trail as a national historic asset could generate considerable interest in heritage tourism which is popular and growing. The Sandisfield section may offer extra appeal because it is the only section still in an unaltered state. The trail passes near the Spectacle ponds and the site of Henry Spring's Continental Tavern at Otis State Forest and could be developed as a year-round historical/nature/educational venue.

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Cultural Council Grants Deadline Extended

INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS HAVE UNTIL DECEMBER 14

Due to delays in setting the annual state budget in Boston, the Massachusetts Cultural Council will be unable to determine and announce Local Cultural Council grants and allocations until January 2021 and possibly not until February.


Because of this delay, the FY21 grant application deadline for all Local Cultural Councils, including Sandisfield, has been extended to December 14, 2020.

Please note that if your project was postponed due to Covid-19 in FY20, you may apply again for additional funding in FY21.


For program guidelines, council priorities and to apply for a grant, please visit www.mass-culture.org/sandisfield.

The purpose of the Sandisfield Cultural Council is to fund and promote activities that enrich our community. Individuals, nonprofits, public schools, libraries, municipal agencies, and religious organizations may apply for funding of cultural programming that benefits the public. Applicants and programs must reside or be located in Massachusetts.

Our Council has the following priorities when considering applications:

- The venue should reach a large group in our community
- School children and activities related to learning are a high priority
- Local presenters dealing with the arts, humanities, and science are encouraged to apply. 

Thanks from the Front Lines

The Sandisfield Emergency Services would like to extend its thanks and appreciation to the residents who attended the Special Town Meeting, November 12, and supported our organization with their votes. 

Election Results, 2020

EARLY VOTING USED BY MANY VOTERS

By Bill Price

Assisted by a small army of poll workers during the nearly two-weeks of Early Voting and again on Election Day, November 3, Town Clerk Dolores Harasyko managed one of the Town's largest voter turnouts for a Presidential or any other election in her 22-year tenure as Town Clerk.

OUT OF 640 REGISTERED VOTERS, 523 CAST BALLOTS. That's nearly 82 percent of voters casting ballots, very possibly the highest percentage in Town history.

More than 200 voters showed up in person on Election Day, the first Tuesday in November.

Dolores' poll workers had already been busy overseeing the early-voting system. This year about 60 percent of voters, more than 300, voted early or cast absentee ballots. During the 2016 Presidential election four years ago, when the system was first instituted, only 75 Town voters used it.

On Election Day itself at Old Town Hall, the poll workers were kept busy from before they opened the doors at 7:00 a.m., until the polls closed at 8:00 p.m., with only a short break for lunch. All the early and absentee votes had to be entered one by one into the ballot box on Election Day, with those votes recorded the same way as an in-person voter. So poll workers were checking in, confirming, and registering the absentee and early-voting ballots at the same time as they were checking in and guiding voters who appeared in person on Election Day.

A further complication this year was that anyone visiting Old Town Hall to vote had to maintain social distancing and wear a face mask.

After 8, the counting began. Dolores reported that it wasn't over until close to midnight.


THE COUNT IN SANDISFIELD

Biden-Harris won the Town vote, 306 versus 200 for Trump-Pence. Biden's 65.3% victory was almost the same percent by which Biden won statewide, 65.7% to Trump's 32.5%. For comparison, in the 2016 Presidential election Clinton received 254 Town votes and Trump 190, out of 488 voters with 603 registered.

Of the other races, incumbent U.S. Senator Ed Markey beat Kevin O'Connor in Sandisfield by 306 to 186. Markey also won statewide.

All the other Berkshire candidates ran unopposed. Congressman Richard Neal, State Senator Adam Hines, State Representative Smitty Pignatelli, Register of Probate Anthony Patella, and State Councilor Mary Hurley all won reelection.

BALLOT QUESTION 1, to expand access to car repair data, passed in Town, 328-152. It passed at the same margin statewide and is expected to take effect for the 2022 auto model year.

BALLOT QUESTION 2 failed, 289-184, as it failed statewide. This question would have instituted ranked-choice voting in Massachusetts and was resisted because it seemed that the proposed system would have been too complicated. 




SANTA IS COMING TO SANDISFIELD

Santa is coming back, Covid or no Covid.

Come visit Santa and his elves on **Saturday, December 5**. In keeping with our town's tradition, the Firehouse on Rte. 57 will host a Holiday Drive-Through on that Saturday, from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

We'll be suited up appropriately to the season. We'll be masked and ask that you do the same. Please remain in your cars.

So pack up the children and bring them over. We hope to see you then. In the meantime, stay warm, stay safe, and Happy Holidays to all.

Keep in mind that we are now a Committee of Three, and could use a lot more members. We want to grow our Recreation Committee, and could use your help. 

– Chrissy O'Brien

– Roger Kohler

– Lynn Rubenstein

A Little Privacy, Please!

WHY VOTERS CAST PAPER BALLOTS AT TOWN MEETINGS

By Simon Winchester, Town Moderator

In a Town Meeting, votes are taken either by a poll – attendees raise their hands for or against a motion – or by ballot. A ballot is by definition a secret process. With a ballot, all participants are

handed a perforated slip of paper printed with the words Yes and No. The voter separates the paper and places his or her vote – signifying assent to, or dissent from the motion – in a box, which is then opened by the Town Clerk who counts the number of Yes and No papers.

A ballot is usually requested by someone in the audience, and the motion to have this type of vote requires a simple majority to pass. If it does, then paper slips are circulated, as described above.

In exceptional circumstances the Moderator can order a ballot on his own authority, without reference to the wishes of the audience. This occurs infrequently, usually when discussion on personnel matters are deemed to be unusually sensitive. 🗳️

Special Town Meeting Moves on Public Safety Law BUT SELECT BOARD EXPECTS SUCCESSION PLAN

By Sandisfield Times Reporters

Voters at a special town meeting on November 12 passed procedural items about permitting for municipal signs and serving liquor on Sundays, and also approved a petition to the Legislature to ask that it waive a state law forcing public safety officials to retire at age 65.

In a 59-5 vote by secret paper ballot (See report above, “A Little Privacy, Please!”), residents approved the wording of the petition that said that as long as the employee is mentally and physically able to do their jobs, they can continue to work in public safety. During discussion of the proposal, Select Board Chairman Brian O’Rourke said that the Town would require public safety workers older than 65 to pass an annual physical exam as a condition of their continued employment.

The timing of the vote was critical since the mandatory retirement law was due to affect most of the Town’s public safety officials. Sandisfield’s fire chief, Ralph Morrison, recently turned 66, and has been at the helm of the Fire and Rescue squad since 1981. His brother—police chief and assistant fire chief, Mike Morrison—will turn 65 next year, while several other volunteer firefighters are also nearing mandatory retirement age. Emergency medical technicians are exempt from the law.

Since he is already past the age of 65, liability concerns would change Ralph Morrison’s role to that of a “fire chief administrator,” and prevent him from actually fighting fires. Morrison receives an annual stipend of about \$10,000, in addition to standby and active hourly pay.

HEATED DISCUSSION

The proposal generated fierce debate during the comment period as some residents characterized the Select Board’s approach as “kicking the can down the road” and not addressing the more fundamental problem of how to recruit a new generation of public safety personnel. “Which is actually exactly correct,” Select Board member George Riley told the Berkshire Eagle. “We obviously need to get younger people in. If we didn’t get this passed, we would basically lose most of our Fire Department.”

At the meeting, O’Rourke said the Select Board had asked the Town’s attorney to draft this warrant article in order to “buy us time to develop a succession plan.”

The Select Board would like to see such a plan sooner rather than later. According to the recently released minutes of an October 1 executive session of the Select Board, in O’Rourke’s opinion the Town should pursue a waiver while at the same time “start looking for a replacement for the fire chief and not wait until he turns 70.”

Several members of the Fire and Rescue Squad were present at the meeting, held at the Department of Public Works garage, and spoke of their struggles to recruit and retain new members. Anyone interested in volunteering should call Chief Morrison at 258-4742. “There is always a job opportunity for everyone,” Morrison told the Times in an email. 🗳️



THERE HAVE BEEN MOMENTS

Stunners.
Whole days gone,
No sunrise or sundown.
People dying painfully
Without music.
Days of stumbling clocks
And no meridian.

All around the world
Only the leftover pillared cities
Of the Adriatic stand.

What have we done?

Val Coleman
West New Boston



THE SANDISFIELD TIMES: YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

We welcome news from your neighborhood, your family and friends (births, deaths, graduations, honors/awards).

The Times also publishes classified ads (free for 30 words or less, depending on space).

We also welcome your letters to the editor on topics of concern to Sandisfield readers. Maximum 300 words.

Contact us at editor@sandisfieldtimes.org.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS TO RESUME IN JAN/FEB

Our popular series of tips for supporting and helping your students at home, written by Maxene Kupperman-Guinals, was crowded out of this month’s issue. It will return in the January/February issue with Part II of “Working with Young Mathematicians.” It will continue monthly with “Working with Young Writers,” ... “Young Readers,” ... “Young Artists,” “Making the Most of Your Computer,” and more.

Judgement Day

AG ASSESSES OPEN MEETING LAW COMPLAINTS

By Seth Kershner

The Massachusetts Attorney General's office recently determined the merits of three separate Open Meeting Law complaints filed earlier this year by Sandisfield resident, Alex Bowman.

In its determination letter, dated November 20, the Assistant Attorney General for the Division of Open Government found that the Select Board violated the Open Meeting Law by posting January 27 and April 21 meeting notices which contained insufficient detail; failing to respond within 10 business days to a request for open and executive session minutes; and creating and approving insufficiently detailed open session and work session meeting minutes for the January 27 meeting.

However, the Attorney General's office sided with the Select Board on other complaints. For example, Bowman had alleged that an item listed in the Select Board's March 25 meeting agenda, "Budget reductions," was lacking the kind of detail required by law. But the Attorney General's office found that the Board was in fact not obligated to list every department that could be affected by budget reductions on the agenda "as the Chair anticipated discussing almost all departments and was not required to anticipate the course of the discussion."

ACCOUNTABILITY OR HARASSMENT?

In an email to the Times, Bowman said that he was simply trying to get more accountability and


transparency from elected leaders. "Anyone in town should be able to participate in the local issues our taxes fund," Bowman wrote. "Failure by the Select Board to abide by the Open Meeting Law prevents that from happening."

Reached by phone on the day before Thanksgiving, Select Board Member George Riley expressed frustration with what he called a campaign of "harassment" by Bowman.

According to Riley, small towns in Massachusetts are hampered by "one of the most restrictive open meeting laws in the country." He added that while all three of the Select Board members support the Open Meeting Law in principle, the law is written in such a way that it becomes all too easy to be "tripped up" by some technical violation. "If the law were to be followed to the letter, it would render town government inoperable."

Riley also said that what Sandisfield's Select Board is doing with its minutes and notices is little different from what nearby towns are doing. "The only difference between them and us is that we have Alex Bowman. They don't."

In its conclusion, the Attorney General's Office ordered the Select Board's "immediate and future compliance with the Open Meeting Law" and warned that similar violations in the future could be "considered evidence of intent to violate the Open Meeting Law," possibly resulting in fines of \$1,000 per violation.

When asked what the Select Board would need to do to avoid future problems, Riley added: "Obviously the Select Board is going to be much more careful about dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' with our minutes. At the same time, we understand that what we're being subjected to is harassment." 



Town Needs Transparency

A REQUEST FOR FULLER AGENDAS, MINUTES

By Alex Bowman

For a small town to succeed, it needs participation from its people. It needs volunteers who are committed and passionate about the place they live and the desire to see it progress. Sandisfield does not lack an active or passionate community, but the people of this town cannot have impact without transparency from those who hold leadership positions.

It should be easy to understand and follow what issues have been discussed at Select Board meetings, and to know the specific topics that will be discussed at the next meeting. But it is not. We cannot have effective participants without increased transparency. Most of us cannot attend every meeting, so it's the duty of the Select Board to be specific and detailed in meeting notices. That way we can all prioritize attending the meetings with the topics that are most important to us.

I have tried to stay involved, sitting through hours and hours of Select Board meetings. When I cannot attend, I follow the meeting notices and minutes so I can stay up to date on issues I care about. However, notices are too general. Vague topics like "Town manager updates" leave one to question what will be discussed. And rather than using the same "Discuss FY2022 Budget" agenda item for a dozen notices in a row, we deserve to know if the library or the transfer station is on the docket.

The minutes also often lack sufficient detail. Many towns around us regularly post documents before meetings. Sandisfield does not. Other towns provide a commentary to go with the annual town budget to provide some color to the decision-making process. Sandisfield does not. I say it's time our town steps up.

When I brought up these transparency issues to the Select Board, they were dismissive. I looked into the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law (OML), which requires that any town meeting

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provide both a notice with specific intended topics, and a detailed record of the actual discussion so that a person unable to attend the meeting can easily understand what transpired. There is no active enforcement of the OML, so unless someone complains, there is no accountability or repercussions for not providing detailed notices or minutes.

When I made formal OML complaints to the town, The Times belittled the matter by referring to it as nothing more than “a storm in a teacup.” Some on Facebook accused me of costing the town money, which was false because it was the Select Board that opted for lawyers (a move not required by law). The town refused to comply, so I appealed my complaints to the Attorney General, and her office sided with me in finding violations of the law.

Good management requires transparency and accountability. We entrust our elected officials with spending our collective money, so they should ensure that everyone can easily know what will be discussed in each Select Board meeting. People need to know when to show up, so we don't end up with “kings on thrones” making decisions in front of an empty room. It's the minimum our elected officials can do. And as townspeople, we cannot be shy about holding them accountable when they fail. ❖

Select Board Report

The Select Board dealt with several administrative issues in the period prior to the annual budget work. Cemetery plot policies, senior transportation, a business license for Sunny Rose Farm, and the preparation for a Special Town Meeting were among the topics we dealt with. The big news was that Cold Spring Road has finally been paved. A three-year long negotiation process with Kinder Morgan Corporation involved the assistance of Rep. Pignatelli and the Mass. Attorney General. A final section will be paved by the Town next year.

Several of the Route 57 culverts were incorrectly installed. We are working on this issue with the contractor, Belmont-based Tasco Construction.

The Berkshire County “Permit Eyes” online system is live for Town building, plumbing, and electrical permits as well as inspections. Online payment is now finally available, and staff training has been completed.

We received yet another Open Meeting Law Complaint from Mr. Bowman, sent to the Office of the Attorney General and reviewed by our Town Counsel, about posting of the minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting on October 1 with the Fire Chief and Town Counsel, regarding the Massachusetts Law mandatory retirement issue which was partially resolved at the Special Town Meeting on October 12, after which, per State law, the minutes were approved and posted.

We held a Work Session with the Finance Committee to review the upcoming budget process and the impact of quarterly forecasting on this, and we decided to call an All Boards Meeting on November 16, which was well attended, to review this process with department heads and answer any questions. ❖

Mark Newman
Brian O'Rourke
George Riley

Editor's Note: At its November 23 meeting, the Select Board voted to suspend its practice of submitting monthly columns reporting its activities. This may be the last official Board report The Times will be able to publish. Have these reports been useful to you? Do you agree with the Select Board's decision? Tell us by letter to editor@sandisfieldtimes.org or by mail to Editor, The Sandisfield Times PO Box 584, Sandisfield, MA 01255. Name and address requested for possible publication.

OUT ON A LIMB: OP-ED

Subjects should be enthralling 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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Knox Trail Emerges From the Woods con't from p. 1

YOU KNOW THE KNOX TRAIL, DON'T YOU?

The most important historical memory pertaining to Sandisfield is not one of our notable figures or even one of our ancient buildings.

Rather it is the old military highway made legendary by Col. Henry Knox and his teamsters during the harsh winter of 1775-6. Already an ancient road through the Berkshire Mountains, the trail became famous when Knox's motley band took control of British cannons captured earlier at Fort Ticonderoga and, using oxen, dragged the tons of armaments over hundreds of miles to reach General Washington on the Dorchester heights where he was confronted by the British army and naval fleet. Astonished to see a battery of cannons trained on his warships in Boston harbor, the commanding admiral and the army abandoned the city to the rebels, an event that affected the course of the war and American history.



New York and Massachusetts celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Knox episode by installing 56 monuments between Fort Ticonderoga and Dorchester. This one on Rt. 23 at the intersection of West Shore Road in East Otis was the first (1927). It is also reportedly the closest to the original trail.

Photo: Cindy Ragusa

This episode of brilliant military strategy and execution, heroism, and unbelievable endurance by men and livestock was made possible by the existence of the crude and precarious trail, not much more than a 17th century footpath

in places, that ran between the New York and Massachusetts colonies, crossing both Sandisfield and Otis. This is what became known as the Knox Trail.

GETTING TRACTION WITH DOCUMENTATION

Sonia Morrison, co-chair of the Otis Historical Commission, told *The Times*: "The commission, along with our entire community, is proud to have supported our member and friend Tom Ragusa's enormous efforts to memorialize our beloved Knox Trail not only for us and neighboring communities, but for our country."

Ms. Parsons said that the Knox Trail is a strong candidate for the Register under several criteria. She added, "This may be a unique situation. I am unaware of another trail of this nature elsewhere in the nation that has listing."

The Inventory project, completed last month, took most of 2020 to finish. Ms. Parson's report consists of about 20 pages of text, maps, and detailed supporting documentation required by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). A copy will be available at Town Clerk's offices in Sandisfield and Otis.

The Otis Historical Commission, with the enthusiastic support of the Sandisfield Historical Commission, will jointly submit the Inventory to the MHC. Once the report has been vetted and accepted at the state level, an even more thorough research study will need to be commissioned. That document will be the basis for a potential nomination and ultimate approval by National Parks Service, steward of the Register. The process is intense with many criteria and steps. It is also protracted, usually taking several years.

One can envision Sandisfield a few years from now as a place that draws hundreds of rock climbers, hikers, and American history buffs. A critical mass of natural attractions – the existing BNRC Clam River Trail, cliff climbing at Hanging Mountain, and eventually a restored, interpretive Knox Trail – could be in our future. Remember, from such beginnings did the Berkshires evolve into a vibrant arts and culture destination and an economic engine.

A tour of the Sandisfield section is tentatively scheduled for mid-April 2021. The *Times* will report details in March. 



Statement of Significance

*Bonnie Parsons,
Inventory Project Consultant*

The General Henry Knox Trail in the towns of Sandisfield and Otis is a potential historic district as a relatively intact section of the Trail representing its entirety from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston. It is historically significant as a Section of a 17th century way created by native Americans in their trade that took place between settlements in the Hudson River valley and the Connecticut River valley. It was subsequently known as the Great Road in use during the period prior to and during settlement of western Massachusetts for travelers from Springfield to Albany, as a pathway used during the French and Indian Wars for troop and materiel movement, and then as a local way and postal road in the growing settlements of Otis and Sandisfield in the 18th century. It played an important role during the Revolutionary War as the route by which Colonel Henry Knox moved tons of munitions from Forts Ticonderoga and Fort Crown Point in New York to Dorchester at the orders of General George Washington during the winter of 1775-1776. It subsequently served during the Revolutionary War for military movements such as the marching to Boston of captured British General Burgoyne and his troops. By the end of the first decade of the 19th century it was no longer a through road but served as an important way in the development of the commerce and industry in the two separate townships of Sandisfield and Otis.

The Trail has archaeological significance for the remaining artifacts of the roadway such as retaining walls constructed by General Amherst in 1758 and the 65-Mile Marker of ca. 1764 carved on a boulder, Henry Spring's Continental Tavern foundations, and foundations of two mills from 18th and 19th centuries. Several encampment sites dating from before and during the Revolutionary War and 1764 survey marker points all contribute to the history of this pathway and road.

In the Aftermath

THE TIMES ACKNOWLEDGES ERROR, AND REPLIES

By Simon Winchester

I had the honor to help start *The Sandisfield Times* ten years ago, and pledged at the outset that as well as trying to be interesting in telling stories about our extraordinary home town, we would also try to foster a real sense of togetherness – in a village without a center, divided by its unique topography, with precious little history of cordial mutuality.

The happenings of last month have made me wonder, however, whether my hopes were ill-founded, were more than a little naive, and may have now been dashed.

The event that set all this wonder in motion was a short and innocuous pre-election report in our last issue, in which one of our reporters wrote about the mechanics of voting. He noted that more people than ever before had mailed in ballots or voted early, and he quoted one town official as lamenting in jocular fashion that so few people were left to vote in person that she and her poll workers might have “to play Scrabble all day.”

A perfectly delightful thought – had it been true. But it turned out the official had never said any such thing and objected heartily, particularly to the implication that the poll workers might be able to take it easy during a very contentious and laborious election.

The reporter promptly acknowledged that *he had made up the quote* in a misguided attempt at humor. It was an idiotic thing to do, lamentable and unprofessional.

But the damage was done, and soon thereafter, in what in my view was a somewhat disproportionate reaction, a tsunami of venom gathered itself up and broke against all of us who are involved in this, the newspaper that had perpetrated the error.

Most of the vitriol came by way of Connect Sandisfield, our successful and well-regarded local electronic bulletin board. Usually the site offers its few hundred subscribers pictures of bears and deer, bobcats, missing dogs, new dishes on offer at a local cafe, and requests for cleaning services or announcement of giveaways.

But on this occasion there was a lengthy expression of denunciation from the official's partner:

the “Sad” Times, as he called it, was good only for lining the floor of a parrot's cage. A few angry residents then piled on, several without having read the offending article, demanding resignations and public groveling, and accused us of

bullying. I would not have been surprised to see calls for our volunteer staff to be pilloried, put on drowning stools or in the stocks or else burned at the stake.

And then one of our selectmen added his thought in a separate email, throwing the toys out of his stroller in apoplectic rage. What we had written (and moreover what I had written, in another context, which had annoyed him equally) was shameful and required an immediate and fulsome apology. Moreover, his letter ended with a thunderous flourish worthy of the Athenian court: *Any and all requests made to me by the paper will be ignored, calls and emails will not be returned. Print that, along with why if you dare.*

Strong words indeed.

In response to the original complaint, we assure readers that we will invent no more quotes, even in jest, and attempt, to the best of our abilities as we always have, to get things right.

But prudence suggests we begin lowering the temperature. Not just because we are entering the season of good will to all, but because it has to be remembered by all that the whole point of the press – even in a tiny town like ours, where we all know one another and encounter one another on a near daily basis – is to hold a mirror up to our community and so show ourselves who we are; and to keep in check those who wield power over us.

Like all in the press, we know we have a hallowed obligation to help keep our government here honest, fair, competent, and effective. We do not necessarily seek the friendship or the approval of those who rule, those who set and collect our taxes and then spend the money we grant to them. We have no wish to make them love us. It is simply our job to question them, to challenge, to criticize and, when it is due, to praise.

And so far as this government is concerned, at this stage in its existence, there are indeed questions

– about our roads, about the police, about the fire department, about landfill issues, about unexplained absences, forgotten caches of money – all of which we at the paper will continue to ask on your behalf, even if by doing so we seem to some an infernal nuisance.

Tribunus plebis, it says on our masthead: *the tribune of the people*. In our small way we try to stand up for our townfolk, and though we do so imperfectly our intended goal is unwavering: we are *your* paper, standing for all, no matter your politics or your preferences. And further – as our next president reminds us – we are all in this together, all bent on helping this wonderful town become an even better community, and in time one that is a little less divided, we hope, than we are today.

The complaint about the invented quote can be accessed at The Times' website: Sandisfield-times.org, see December 2020. 📄

Selling Sandisfield A COVID REAL ESTATE BOOM?

By Bill Price

The Times reported in September that a real estate boom is taking place “all over town.” And it's not just Sandisfield. Most regions of the Berkshires are included, as well as neighboring Columbia County in New York and Litchfield County in Connecticut. The dramatic upswings in property sales and prices seem to be fueled mostly by social disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, in combination with low interest rates.

Details in the article, “Real Estate is ‘Crazy Hot?’”, can be accessed online at The Times' website, sandisfieldtimes.org, visit Library for the issue of September 2020. Copies are available at the Sandisfield Library in West New Boston.

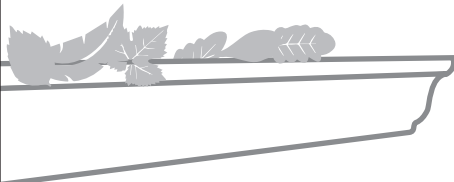
The boom extends beyond single family home sales. The Town may see a few subdivisions developed in Town. Local real estate broker Chapin Fish of the Brockman Agency reports that developers are ready to subdivide large parcels for home lots. One proposed ten-acre parcel, currently under consideration by the Planning Board, is located on the west side of Town Hill Road nearly a mile north of the intersection with Rt. 57.

Other proof of the boom are September and October listings of real estate sales in Sandisfield, as reported to the Berkshire Edge, and Berkshire Trade & Commerce. Previous



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Cold Spring Road Paved. Finally!



For two days in November, Palmer Paving of Springfield coordinated paving of four miles of Cold Spring Road in north Sandisfield. Dozens of big trucks from many area contractors continuously fed hot asphalt into an impressive paving machine in a leap-frog-style caravan.

On November 3, the Massachusetts Attorney General's office announced a settlement for environmental damage to state land and road destruction with energy giant Kinder Morgan and its pipeline subsidiary, Tennessee Gas, in the amount of \$800,000.

Approximately \$500,000 was allocated to repaving Cold Spring Road which had been improperly remediated in 2018, a year after pipeline construction finished. Residents had warned that the original work with chip sealing was insufficient and completed too late in the season.

The balance of the settlement will go to the Massachusetts Natural Resource Damages Trust.

Protracted negotiations with the company began in 2018 and involved AG Maura Healey, Representative Pignatelli, and the Town of Sandisfield represented by Selectman Brian O'Rourke who won praise for his efforts. The agreement was widely reported by regional media.

Report/Photos: Ron Bernard



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Selling Sandisfield: A Real Estate Boom?***con't from p. 7***

months, for the past several years, included one, possibly two sales in Sandisfield, or none.

Sandisfield Sales, September:

- 3 Sandler Lane: Cosmo Colyer-Pfeil of Sandisfield to Sandler Lane LLC, \$295,000, 09/01/2020
- 311 Tamarack Trail, Otis Wood Lands: Jacqueline Rabin of Sandisfield to Daniel Michaelson and Tamara Maletic, \$355,000, 09/09/2020
- 304 Shadow Lane, Otis Wood Lands: Ian and Kimberly Lennard of Sandisfield to Paul Posnak, \$294,000, 09/11/2020
- 73 Sandisfield Road: John Campetti Estate and Christopher J. Campetti to Kevin and Jennifer Crealesse, \$200,000 on 09/11/2020
- Town Hill Road: Paul Bobryk Estate to Franklin Woods, Investors, \$275,000, 09/18/2020
- 5 Smith Rd: Adrian D. Bradley and Kathleen M. Eutsler of Sandisfield to Matthew B. Glushien, \$390,000 on 09/25/2020
- 311 Woodlands Way, Otis Wood Lands: 53 Woodland Way RT and Richard P. Ratner of Sandisfield to Jason A. and Deborah F. Levine, \$246,000 on 09/29/2020

Sandisfield Sales, October

- 21 Sandisfield Rd: Edward S. Swiech and Timothy D. Brooks of Sandisfield to Gwendolyn Lyeth-Burton, \$325,000 on 10/16/2020
- 136 Sandy Brook Turnpike: Maryann K. Linn of Sandisfield to Elizabeth B. Orenstein and Benjamin R. Naylor, \$130,000 on 10/14/2020
- 108 Town Hill Rd: Matthew and Marina Virginia of Sandisfield to Antonia Troiano and Kathy Scharf, \$285,000 on 10/16/2020
- 307 Woodlands Way, Otis Wood Lands: US Bank NA Tr of Sandisfield to Kevin C. Charlton, \$130,000 on 10/13/2020
- 233 Sandisfield Rd: La Casa In Collina LLC of Sandisfield to Craig and Linda Storms, \$430,000 on 10/19/2020
- 25 Sandisfield Rd: Yvonne M. Brooks of Sandisfield to Lucy E. Morris and Mark J. Feddes, \$120,000 on 10/22/2020
- 124 New Hartford Rd: Adam and Anthony Cipperly of Sandisfield to Dorothea Buxbaum, \$335,000 on 10/23/2020
- 17 So. Sandisfield Rd: Gary W. Lemon and Dawn Odell-Lemon of Sandisfield to Derek S. Blethen, \$290,000 on 10/23/2020
- 82 Hammertown Rd: Gill Katherine K Est and James T. Smithgall of Sandisfield to Walton W. Ford, \$850,000 on 10/27/2020. 🏡



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COVID NEWS

“Wear the Damn Mask”

By Bill Price

Take some advice from Fox News correspondent Chris Wallace: “Wear the damn mask.”

Because the Covid-19 pandemic has surged again, Governor Baker has reinstated safety regulations to protect residents and visitors. Follow the state guidelines.

As of November 20, the State Department of Public Health reported that there have only been 8 confirmed cases in Sandisfield since the pandemic began in March, all having recovered or moved elsewhere. During the middle two weeks in November, 78 Sandisfield residents were tested for the virus, with none positive. The rest of Massachusetts was not as lucky: confirmed cases rose by 2,288, deaths statewide rose by 34 to 10,238.

At increasing risk are patients in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. The Hillcrest Commons Nursing Home in Pittsfield reported that about 35 percent of the 228 residents have tested positive, along with 28 staff members. According to reports, most are recovering. As at the beginning of the pandemic, the New Boston Nursing Home reports no new cases. The local facility was one of the first to take extreme precautions and their efforts seem to have succeeded.

MYSTERY REQUIREMENTS ON A TELEPHONE POLE

Posted in a glassine envelope and tacked to a telephone pole on Cold Spring Road not far from Spectacle Pond were a set of clear rules that don't exactly match those issued by the governor's office but are very close.

As of November 6, the rules stated, “All persons over the age of 5 MUST wear a face covering whenever in public, indoors or outdoors.” That “Face

coverings are required when in a vehicle with non-household members.”

And that “Failure to comply with this order may result in a civil fine of up to \$300 per violation.”

The sign said that further information was available from a website: mass.gov/maskrules. A search by this reporter at that site found many versions of rules and regulations since May, but nothing stated as flatly as the rules on the telephone pole. While the sign is very likely an official posting of regulations, the issuing authority might have been included. Residents more often comply with regulations, it seems, if they know who or what is issuing them.



Because of the sign's proximity to Spectacle Pond, it might have been posted by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

It is unclear as to who or what would issue the civil fine and/or collect the “up to \$300 per violation.”

Sandisfield's Police Department and our Board of Health knew nothing of how the sign came to be posted.

But the advice – and the rules – still hold. Most of us obey red lights and stop signs at intersections. Red lights and stop signs are government regulations for the common good. Wearing a mask is just another one and has the advantage of being temporary (we hope). As Chris Wallace said, “Wear the damn mask.”



ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

On the bright side.

Not so many school shootings.
Less time commuting.

Teachers can't get close to students
Saving kids from the abhorrent.

On the bright side,
On this 2020 ride.

Social cliques have dissolved.
Social climbing has devolved.

Less physical attachment,
Less workplace harassment.

Less doggies in a shelter,
More puppies front and center.

On the bright side,
On this 2020 ride.

Lots of time to think and muse,
Lots of time to read the news.

Much less rushing,
Much less fussing.

On the bright side,
On this 2020 ride.

Karen Garfield
New Hartford Road



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Notes of Thanks

Each year during our Annual Appeal we receive notes of appreciation from readers. These arrived in November this year.

I really miss Sandisfield and enjoy reading the Sandisfield Times!

Mark Pisani, Aspen, Colorado



Thank you so very much for your consistently excellent work. We love the Times.

Jeffrey Gonyeau & Jack Dennerlein
Dorchester, Mass. and N. Beech Plain Road



I love the news and information you share through the Sandisfield Times. I am from this little town! Donation enclosed, hope it helps.

Susan Koloski, Winsted, Conn.



Thank you for another year of interesting and factual news from the Sandisfield Times. Love the poems, obituaries of lives well lived, and the animal photos. Happy holidays to the staff and people of Sandisfield!

Bob & Jo Ann Austin, Hinsdale, Mass.



Thank you for the Sandisfield Times. I need the connection to Sandisfield. I have fond memories of growing up vacationing and visiting my family there.

Lorraine Slepki, Wethersfield, Conn.



Thank you for the good work you are all doing!

Rev. Allison Stokes, Rochester, New York



Thanks for your efforts. Always a good read – articles on the past and the present – and sometimes the future! My father, Maurice “Tuffy”

Campetti always looked forward to reading the Times.

Candace & George Craig, Torrington, Conn.



Please use the enclosed donation in support of your fine publication

Robert Johnson, North Haven, Conn.



Dear folks at the Sandisfield Times: Happy Holidays!

Tracey Homan, Lower West St.



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Were Gremlins to Blame?

A newly installed utilities pole at South Beech Plain Road near Cold Spring Road suddenly caught fire on the afternoon of November 13 when an electrical line or connection came into contact with it. Certain poles are being replaced with taller, sturdier new ones around town as part of the "make-ready" work for the coming high speed broadband (estimated to arrive in early 2022). The fire, which charred several sections of the pole, apparently extinguished on its own so no real harm done. It could have been worse but the incident gives new meaning to getting blazing fast internet service here.

Photo: Sandisfield Times reporter



The Librarian's Corner

By Terry Spohnholz

Library hours:

Monday and Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. until 12:30;
Wednesday, 2:00-5:00 p.m.,
Thursday, 5:00-7:00 p.m., and
Saturday, 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.

The Library will be closed for Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24, as well as Saturday, December 26. It will be closed again on December 31, and January 2.

Due to Covid-19 protocols the Monthly Arts and Crafts for Kids continue to be cancelled until further notice.

The Library Board of Trustees will meet on November 30 to discuss the continued opening of the Library during the pandemic. Due to recent increases in Covid-19 nationwide, the influx of travelers from out of state, and the fact there currently is no building custodian who can deep-clean the Library, the Board is considering returning to curbside pick-up only. If we do return to curbside only, the Library hours will remain the same. The results of the meeting will be too late for this issue of The Times, so it's probably best to call ahead: 258-4966. 📞

NEW ARRIVALS AT THE LIBRARY

- *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam
- *Shadow of the Dragon* by Marc Cameron (writing as Tom Clancy)
- *Piece of My Heart* by Mary Higgins Clark
- *The Law of Innocence* by Michael Connelly
- *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig
- *Love Your Life* by Sophie Kinsella
- *Monogamy* by Sue Miller
- *Deadly Cross* by James Patterson
- *All That Glitters* by Danielle Steel
- *Anxious People* by Fredrik Bachman
- *Fortune and Glory* by Janet Evanovich
- *The Wonder Boy of Whistle Stop* by Fannie Flagg
- *Wintering* by Katherine May
- *The Book Collectors* by Delphone Minoui
- *One Vote Away: How a Single Supreme Court Seat can Change History* by Ted Cruz
- *It Was All a Lie: How the Republican Party Became Donald Trump* by Stuart Stevens
- *Kindred* by Rebecca Sykes

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Bringing Data to the School Budget Debate

By Carl Nicholas Nett

The noted author W. Edwards Deming famously stated: “In God we trust. All others must bring data.”

Here I bring you data on the finances of the Farmington River Regional School District (FRRSD), a topic of frequent lively discussion in Sandisfield. This data is taken directly from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education statewide database for “FY2015-2019 Per Pupil Expenditures (All Funds),” which can be accessed via the web link cited in the table below.

The power of this data set is threefold: 1) the focus on per pupil expenditures enables meaningful direct comparisons with other school districts, while also obviating any need to distinguish between Otis and Sandisfield pupils, 2) the breakdown by in-district and out-of-district pupils allows focus on the very reason Farmington River Elementary School exists – to educate the pupils that actually attend it – by highlighting **in-district** per pupil expenditures, and 3) the statewide averages provide powerful “benchmark data” to evaluate FRRSD finances, which has heretofore been missing from the debate on school finances.

Comparing FRRSD **in-district** per pupil expenditures to the statewide averages across the 10 financial subcategories listed in the table reveals that FRRSD runs: a) 2-3 times higher than statewide averages in 6 subcategories, b) 1-2 times higher in 3 subcategories, and c) lower than the statewide averages in only one subcategory. On a percentage basis FRRSD is most above the statewide averages in the “Administration” subcategory, at 2.8 times the statewide average, and below the statewide averages only in the “Teachers” subcategory, at 90% of the statewide average. Examining the next level of detail contained in the state database, one finds that the “Instructional Leadership” subcategory contains the line item “School Leadership” at \$141,685, which is more than half of the total annual expenditures in this subcategory. What a layperson would likely view as “administrative overhead” also contributes significantly to the “Instructional Leadership” subcategory running at more 2.1 times the statewide average. Of course, “administrative overhead” running so high also


contributes to the “Insurance, Retirement Programs and Other” subcategory running at more than 2.4 times the state average.

Note also that the **in-district** per pupil expenditures at FRRSD run more than 1.7 times the state average at \$28,487. A simple web search reveals that this amount is also more than 1.7 times the current in-state tuition & fees (\$16,349) for a college student to attend the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Fortunately, the FRRSD **out-of-district** per pupil expenditures are only \$9,834 – just 35 percent of the in-district per pupil expenditures! – owing to the cost effectiveness of the schools the out-of-district pupils attend. This pulls the FRRSD total per pupil expenditures (combined in-district and out-of-district) down to \$18,304 through the weighted averaging process. But even at \$18,304, the FRRSD **total** per pupil expenditures are still 11 percent higher than the current UMass-Amherst in-state tuition and fees. And they’re also still nearly double the out-of-district per pupil expenditures.

This means that if all the current Sandisfield in-district pupils were able to be placed out-of-district, at the current out-of-district per pupil cost to Sandisfield, Sandisfield’s school budget would be reduced to about half its current value. Given that the school budget is one of the largest items in the budget, and far more than half of its total budget, cutting this budget in half would be a financial godsend to Sandisfield.

There is a lot more to say, but I’ll stop here for now. I’ve purposely stuck here to the cold, hard, indisputable facts, and refrained entirely from stating the conclusions I’ve personally drawn from this analysis. I’ll leave it to each of you to draw your own conclusions, and to debate them with me and your neighbors in the pages of The Times or at Town Meetings.

But please remember: “In God we trust. All others must bring data.” Only through a focus on data can we evolve our “lively” discussions on FRRSD finances from emotion to fact. Thank you for your time and attention. 

FY2019 Farmington River Regional School District	\$/Pupil	MA Avg	% Avg
Administration	\$1,504	\$537	280%
Instructional Leadership	\$2,316	\$1,096	211%
Teachers	\$5,766	\$6,419	90%
Other Teaching Services	\$3,563	\$1,400	254%
Professional Development	\$273	\$162	168%
Instructional Materials, Equipment & Technology	\$1,073	\$481	223%
Guidance, Counseling & Testing	\$606	\$536	113%
Pupil Services	\$4,058	\$1,728	235%
Operations & Maintenance	\$2,259	\$1,298	174%
Insurance, Retirement Programs & Other	\$7,069	\$2,924	242%
In-District Expenditures (118 pupils)	\$28,487	\$16,581	172%
Total Expenditures (259 Pupils)	\$18,304	\$17,149	107%
Out-of-District Expenditures (141 pupils)	\$9,834	NA	NA

Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/finance/statistics/per-pupil-exp.html>

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

Volunteers Keep the Town Working

IF 2020 WASN'T YOUR YEAR, TRY 2021

By Bill Price

Sandisfield, along with other small towns of Berkshire County, depends on volunteers to get much of its work done. Since before the Revolution, town residents have stepped up to perform sometimes exciting, sometimes mundane chores that keep the place humming.

We used to repair the roads in front of our own homes, clear our own downed trees, prepare our neighbor's bodies for burial, dredge overgrown culverts, along with the paperwork chores that have always demanded attention.

These days the heavy lifting and shoveling are usually left to Town employees, with occasional help of neighbors like Chuck Nelson and Richie Hamilton who happen to own and operate their own excavators. It's usually best to leave the heavy stuff to the professionals, but a lot of Sandisfielders are adept with chain saws and backhoes and are willing to use them for the common good.

And there is still a lot of volunteer work that needs doing.

The Finance Committee has to study department budgets, the Rec Committee organizes holiday events, the Broadband Committee is bringing the internet to our doors, the Council on Aging and the School Committee do their work. The Board of Health checks our septic systems. We have a Cemetery Committee, a Conservation Commission, and a Planning Committee. And plenty more.

Take a look at the long list of committees on sandisfieldma.gov. Pick one. Volunteer. Pitch in. Usually it might be a meeting per month, or less. Sometimes volunteers need training, sometimes not. Sometimes the decisions get dicey, sometimes they're just boring. But they're all necessary and worth doing.

Early in the year, Barbara Cormier asked the Selectmen if they would consider adding non-residents to committees and boards. She understood that elected boards and committees have to be registered voters of the town, but the Town could use more volunteers and maybe non-residents would like to help. She was informed that they could and are already doing exactly that. Ad Hoc or subcommittees are appointed by the Selectmen and can be a mix of registered voters and non-registered voters.

Following are some of the residents who have volunteered for duty or resigned this year. The list

is compiled from Select Board minutes. Covid-wise, 2020 has not been the easiest of years to step up and take part. Maybe 2021 will be your year to pitch in.

In February, Kim Spring resigned after several years as Animal Control Officer and Inspector of Animals. The Board decided subsequently to use Town Police for this service, thus eliminating the need and expense for the position. So far the system is working, but the police don't really want to be chasing loose dogs and cattle encroaching on neighbors.

In April, Billie Anderson Pachulski resigned from the Recreation Committee.

In June, Clare English was reappointed to the Conservation Commission, which she has served for many years.

In July, Theresa Spohnholz resigned from Recreation Committee.

In August, Barbara Cormier, Linda Riiska, and Shirley Spring were reappointed to the Council on Aging.

In September, Jennifer Hibbins, already a member of the School Committee, asked to be reappointed to the Cultural Council.

In October, John Burrows submitted a letter of resignation as Emergency Management Director. The Selectmen thanked him for all his years of service. John recommended Eric Pachulski as his replacement, saying that he would remain on the job to train Eric for a smooth transition. Eric was appointed by a unanimous vote. John thanked the Selectmen, the Police and Fire Departments, and the Town Clerk for all their assistance through the years. He gave a special thank you to Dolores Harasyko for all of her help and her contributions to the work of the EMD.

Also in October, Rosanne Hoekstra was reappointed to the Cultural Council.

In November, Barbara Kershner volunteered for the Cultural Council and Lynn Rubenstein joined the Recreation Committee.

Also in November, Fire Chief Ralph Morrison was appointed Emergency Response Coordinator for the Southern Berkshire Emergency Planning Commission.

And Paul Gaudette and Barbara Cormier were reappointed to the Zoning Board.

Remember, Sandisfield can use your help. Let 2021 be your year. 🍷



High Wind in November

A sudden and freakish high wind swirled through sections of Sandisfield November 2, bringing trees and limbs down across roads and highways, including Rt. 57. Local traffic on Dodd Road was stopped for several hours by a huge white pine that completely blocked the road. Road crews were busy clearing other sites and residents reported that Eversource was slow to respond. Eventually Chuck Nelson of C.W.Nelson Landscape Design & Nursery, located not far from the downed tree, emerged with a heavy duty excavator and, working safely and carefully (pictured here), cleared the road for his neighbors.

Photo: Brigitte Ruthman

Police/Fire/EMS Logs

NOTE: North Main Street is Rt. 8 north of New Boston Bridge; South Main Street is south of the bridge.



POLICE

October 2020 Incidents

- October 1 . . . Disabled motor vehicle, North Main Street
- October 1 Illegal dumping, North Main Street
- October 3 Fireworks complaint, Town Hill Road
- October 4 Erratic motor vehicle operation, North Main Street
- October 4 Lifting assistance, Tolland
- October 6 Burglar alarm, Otis Wood Lands
- October 7 . . . Motor vehicle accident, South Main Street
- October 7 Tree on wires, South Main Street
- October 7 Tree on wires, Roosterville Road
- October 7 Tree down, West Street
- October 8 Tree down, West Hubbard Road
- October 8 Tree down, Hammertown Road
- October 9 Burglar alarm, Hammertown Road
- October 9 Structure fire, Otis
- October 9 911 hang up, West Street
- October 9 911 hang up, Sears Road
- October 11 911 hang up, Lower West Street
- October 13 Medical call, Tolland
- October 14 Burglar alarm, Otis Wood Lands
- October 14 . . . Unwanted party, North Beech Plain Road
- October 14 Disabled motor vehicle, North Beech Plain Road
- October 14 Suspicious person, Smith Road
- October 15 911 misdial, Otis Wood Lands
- October 15 . . . Disabled motor vehicle, Sandisfield Road
- October 15 . . . Suspicious motor vehicle, Sandisfield Road
- October 16 911 hang up, Sandisfield Road
- October 17 Keep peace, Sears Road
- October 18 Traffic complaint, Sears Road
- October 20 . . . Assist citizens, South Beech Plain Road
- October 21 . . . Abandoned motor vehicle, Town Hill Road
- October 22 . . . Assist citizen, South Sandisfield Road
- October 22 . . . Assist motorist, New Hartford Road
- October 24 Medical call, Sandisfield Road
- October 24 Legal paper service, Sandisfield Road
- October 24 Traffic complaint, Sears Road
- October 29 Medical call, Slater Lane
- October 31 Tree on wire, Fox Road



EMS

October 2020 Incidents

- October 4 Mutual aid to Tolland, lift assist, no transport
- October 13 Medical call to Tolland, no crew, Otis Ambulance dispatched
- October 24 Medical call, no transport
- October 29 Medical call, lifting assistance, no transport



FIRE

October 2020 Incidents

- October 7 Motor vehicle accident, Fire Engine @#1 and Car responded, Otis Ambulance responded. No transport
- October 7 Multiple trees and wires down, Rt. 8, Town Hill Road, West Street
- October 9 . . . Structural fire, mutual aid to Otis with Engine #1, Tankers 1 and 2

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

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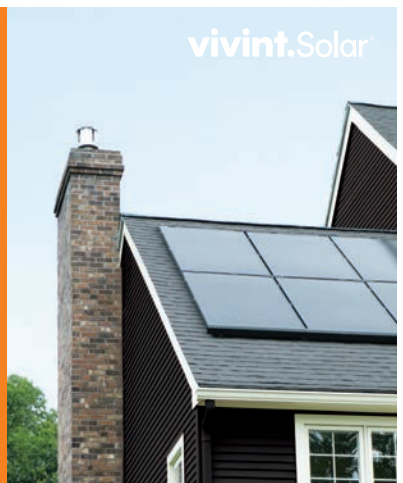
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Comings and Goings



SEAN CARR
1969-2020

Sean Carr, who lived in Sandisfield all his life, died at his Sandisfield Road home in New Boston on October 24, 2020, at the age of 51.

Born September 19, 1969 in Winsted, Sean was described by his family as having a brilliant mind and an acerbic wit. His family said that Sean, extremely well read, was “willing to share his thoughts on any topic with anyone at any time.” One of his sisters added, “Whether he knew anything about the subject or not.”

“Those of us who knew Sean from infancy through full adulthood,” said the family, “can attest to the fact that from his unexpected visits to neighbors as an exploring 3-year-old to his reclusive nature as an adult, Sean marched to the beat of a different drummer. His sometimes gruff exterior hid a very kind and sensitive soul.”

A former neighbor, Dawn Margraf, wrote in a tribute on Connect Sandisfield that “Sean was like a brother to me. Growing up, he was at our house all the time. A lot of my memories from growing up include Sean, Shannon, and Brian. Sean wasn’t just the boy down the road, he was a member of our family. Sean, you were an amazing person. You had such a big heart. You will be so deeply missed. RIP.”

A friend who knew Sean for many years, Amanda Spadaccini, recalled that when she was a young teenager, “my childhood and lifelong companion (a very cool Irish setter) was killed by a car. I very vividly remember Sean coming to the house and immediately giving me a huge bear hug. He was always very nice to me even though I was an awkward, quirky, and pretty nerdy kid. He would take his time explaining things to me and was patient and genuinely interested in my life. Every time I saw him as an adult that never changed, and he was a huge part of my growing up to value books and self-education. He meant a lot to me.”

Sean worked in manufacturing most of his life, first with the family business, Carr Metal Products which was located in the big red barn near Carr Field on Sandisfield Road in West New Boston. After the business closed, Sean worked with other companies where he was highly respected for his skills in his trade.

Sean also operated his own landscape and lawn business. He was a talented mason.

In his free time he loved to read and to tend to his various farm animals which were kept in corrals behind the big red barn.

Sean is survived by his siblings: Jamie Carr of Otis; Mary Cohutt of Westfield; Norman Carr of Phoenix, Arizona; Michael Carr of Sandisfield; Theresa Carr of Heber City, Utah; Kathleen Dyer of Otis; Shannon Bates of East Longmeadow; and Brian Carr of Portland, Oregon. In addition, Sean is survived by numerous nieces, nephews, in-laws, and cousins.

He was predeceased by his parents, James A. and Eloise C. Carr, who operated Carr Metal Products in Sandisfield, his brothers James M. and Patrick S. Carr, and his sister Peggy L. Field.

During his life, said his sister Jamie, Sean “was adamant that he did not want a traditional burial so we did our best to comply with his wishes. He is on his way to the Body Farm at the University of Tennessee where his remains will be used for research, and he will be forever helping other people add to their knowledge/continue their education.”

In his memory, donations can be made in his name to your favorite charity. If you would like to leave a message of condolence or share pictures with the family, please visit the website of the officiating funeral home at www.kellyfuneralhome.net. Because of Covid restrictions, services for Sean have not been held, but the family “would like for his friends, coworkers, and family who are distant to be able to celebrate his life. Covid-allowing, we will schedule an event in the spring.”

His family added, “Sean held a very special place in all of our hearts and will be missed. Good bye, Sean.”

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Dan Civitello, 2019

DANTE "DAN" CIVITELLO 1925-2020

Dan Civitello, 95, of Middlebury, Conn., died November 1 in Waterbury, the same town where he was born, August 17, 1925. His parents were Domenick and Luisa (DiLella) Civitello

Dante was well-known in Sandisfield in the 1950s as the popular "cowboy" foreman and out-of-this-world trick rider at the Lost Wilderness Dude Ranch on Rt. 57 north of New Boston. Dante and Rex, his beloved horse, are still fondly remembered here.

Although actually in Tolland, the ranch was widely advertised as being in Sandisfield and both Dante and the ranch were featured in a Sandisfield Times two-part report in October and November last year. Both articles can be accessed through The Times's website at SandisfieldTimes.org, visit Library-Archives.

Dante, who served in the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II, is remembered by his family and all who knew him as a "Renaissance man" who excelled at every endeavor.

A fan of western movies as a boy, after the war he taught himself to trick ride and train horses. A member of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association, Dante travelled the country as a top-level rodeo performer, including shows at Madison Square Garden and the Roy Rogers Rodeo. He was honored in a ceremony at the Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles.

He had a keen eye for horseflesh, and loved his draft horse, Sampson, who was recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the largest horse of that breed in the world at the time.

Dante learned harness and leather-making and founded a tack and riding store, Dan's Frontier Store and Harness Shop in Waterbury. The shop relocated to Woodbury, Conn., in 1965 and was considered by horse enthusiasts in the tristate area as a 'must' destination. He was nationally-known as a master leatherworker and harness maker.



This iconic photo of Dan Civitello jumping through a lariat over Rex at the Lost Wilderness bucking chutes was carried by newspapers across the country. The Gene Autry Museum in Los Angeles selected it for permanent display.

A life-long musician, Dante played guitar, banjo, harmonica, drums, and a special instrument, the washtub guitar. He was a member of the Bristol Old-Time Fiddlers and hosted many country music jams at Dan's Frontier Store. His contributions to music in Woodbury were officially recognized in a ceremony at Woodbury's North Green where his legacy is memorialized. Dante also enjoyed photography and film making, with one full-length film to his credit.

While working as head wrangler and main entertainer at the Lost Wilderness, Dante met the love

of his life, JoAnna Costello, a New York City girl who was vacationing at the ranch. Parents of six children, they remained devoted to one another until her death in 2017.



Donna Civitello writes: "My father's last ride, to the graveside in a horse-drawn wagon belonging to the Kriz family, ninth generation blacksmiths. For decades the Krizes have shod all of the Budweiser horse teams. Dad was great friends with Joe and Johnny Kriz who were also taken to their graves in that wagon. Their sons carry on the tradition."

He is survived by daughters Donna Jean Civitello, Bette Ann Kitik, Lisa Marie DeAngelis, JoAnna Lynn Abraham and sons, Daniel John Civitello and James Anthony Civitello. He is also survived by his daughter-in-law, Jill Semple Civitello, and his sons-in-law, Robert Forrest Carter, Norman James DeAngelis and Eric Walter Kitik; his grandchildren, Drew Alexander Kitik, Lila Elizabeth Kitik, Melanie Grace Kitik, James Anthony Civitello Jr., Robert Paul Civitello, Nicholas John Civitello, Megan Lynn Civitello, Rachel Leigh Abraham, Christopher Michael DeAngelis, Joseph Anthony DeAngelis, Grace Marie DeAngelis, and a beloved nephew, Charles Linder who was considered part of his immediate family. He was predeceased by his sisters, Marie Antoinette Civitello, Aurora Beatrice Civitello, his brother, Eduardo Romeo Civitello, and his granddaughter, Angelina Marie DeAngelis.

To leave an online condolence, visit munsonloveterefuneralhome.com. Please consider charitable contributions in Dante's name to the Wounded Warrior Project, 4899 Belfort Road, Suite 300 Jacksonville, FL 32256.



Visitors in the Woods

By Bill Price

We don't often see the wild animals and other critters that share Sandisfield with the rest of us, but sometimes we can get their pictures.

Carl Nicholas Nett has set up two automatic cameras on busy trails behind his home on Town Hill Road. He often posts the results on the Connect Sandisfield Facebook page.

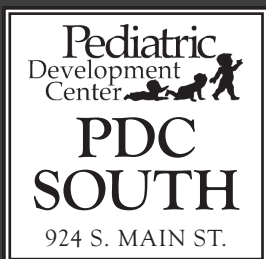
The handsome bobcat, hunting in broad daylight in October, and the rutting whitetail bucks battling it out in November were caught about a hundred yards behind his home. His equipment was a Wildgame Innovations Terra Extreme Trail Camera equipped with 21 high-intensity LED lights with a less than 3/4-second trigger. The camera can give Carl up to 14 photos of a moving creature and a video.

Further back in the woods, the night-prowling raccoon was captured in October with Carl's second camera, a Spypoint Cellular Trail Camera.

Who knows what goes on back there? Carl does. 📷



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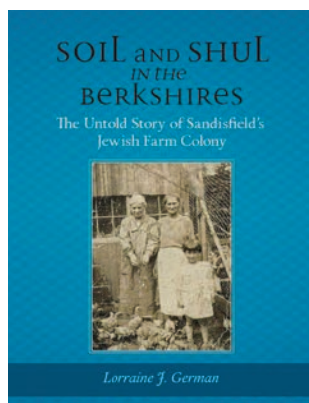
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BOOK ON SANDISFIELD'S JEWISH COLONY REVIEWED IN *HISTORICAL JOURNAL OF MASSACHUSETTS*

By Bill Price

Lorraine German's *Soil and Shul: The Untold Story of Sandisfield's Jewish Farm Colony*,



received a full review in the only scholarly journal devoted exclusively to the history of Massachusetts, an accolade for the book and our town. The seriousness of the review acknowledged the depth

of Lorraine's research and her skill at assembling the material.

Written and published by Lorraine in 2018, the book relates how Jewish families immigrated to Sandisfield as part of an early 1900s plan to resettle Eastern European Jews from the ghettos of New York City to farms in the Berkshires. The

review notes that "detailed narratives of the major families of the community chronicle the origins, challenges, and successes of this remarkable Western Massachusetts community." The book includes dozens of historical family photos.

Descendants of those families still live in or have second homes in Town, including the Pinskys, Sandler, Kaplans, Dryanskys, Lipsitzes, Kleiners, Linders and others. Lorraine's husband, Steve German, is a descendant of one of those families and they live part time in their family home near the Sandisfield Arts Center.

The review will be published in the *Journal* in the Winter 2021 issue. Copies of the book, *Soil and Shul*, are available by writing to Lorraine at ligerman13@aol.com or her website, www.madriverrantiques.com. \$25 per copy, plus \$3 postage. 📷

NOW HEAR THIS!

Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro. Please send notices for Now Hear This! to editor@sandisfieldtimes.org.

DECEMBER EVENTS

Please note: Be sure to check to see if the events are still scheduled as listed due to the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic

Sandisfield Select Board Meetings are by telephone conference. Please visit sandisfieldma.gov or call 258-4711 for call-in information.

Chair Yoga on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. sponsored by the Council on Aging. Free. For information, contact Nina Carr (258-3314).

COA Business Meeting on Wednesday, December 2 at 10:00 a.m., at the Council on Aging, basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57.

Santa's Holiday Drive-Through. Santa and his elves will be at Firehouse #2 on Rt. 57 on Saturday, December 5, from 11:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. In keeping with our town's tradition, the Recreation Committee is again sponsoring Santa's visit. Santa and elves will be suited up and masked and the Committee asks that you please be masked yourselves and remain in your vehicles.

New Boston Church Service on Sunday, December 13 at 10:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church, Route 57. Please wear a mask and socially distance.

Foot Clinic on Friday, December 18 at 10:00 a.m. at the Council on Aging, basement level at the Sandisfield Town Hall Annex on Route 57. Please make an appointment by calling Linda (258-4816).

EVENTS/OUTDOOR FUN IN OTHER TOWNS

Festival of Trees: Legends of the Berkshires to January 10, 2021. Businesses and organizations in Pittsfield and surrounding towns will join together with the Berkshire Museum to present a safe, accessible, and socially-distant Festival of Trees for all to enjoy, free of charge. Bright, colorful, one-of-a-kind displays in windows, storefronts, lobbies, and exterior spaces focusing on exploring tales from the place we call home. Visit berkshireremuseum.org for more information.

Winter Lights at Naumkeag on Tuesdays through Sunday nights from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. until January 2. A magical outdoor experience with sparkling and shimmering, artfully designed, holiday lights. Advanced, timed tickets are required. Naumkeag is located at 5 Prospect Hill Road in Stockbridge. Visit thetrustees.org for full details and tickets.

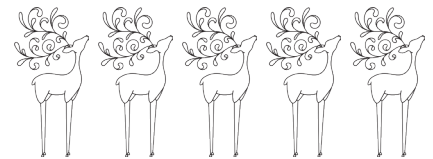
Holiday Farmer's Market on Saturday, December 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Camp Eisner on 53 Brookside Road in Great Barrington. Featuring locally grown and produced foods and gifts, including fruits and vegetables, cheeses, meats, breads, yarn, and more. Please wear a mask and socially distance.

Story Walk on Friday, December 4 through Sunday, December 6 around the outside of the Stockbridge Library featuring the book "Red Sled" by Lita Judge.

ONLINE EVENTS

Jonathan Edwards and the Stockbridge Mohican Indians Online on Wednesday, December 2 at 7:00 p.m. Dr. Roy M. Paul will talk about his book telling the history of the Mohican people and their desire to know more about the "Great, Good Spirit." For more information, visit www.bidwellhousemuseum.org.

A Virtual Main Street Stockbridge at Christmas Celebration from Friday, December 4 to Sunday, December 6, video available online until December 31 featuring videos of concerts, a reading from Dickens, and more. For information and link, visit www.stockbridgechamber.org.



**Look for our combined
January-February
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and the New Boston Inn. The Times is also available in West Otis at the laundromat, the Farmington River Diner and Fratelli's; in East Otis at Katies, Papa's, and the Knox Trail Inn. Also at the Monterey library (outside box) and in Colebrook at the post office and the general store. Distribution is currently limited due to pandemic restrictions but former and/or new locations will be restored or added to distribution service as soon as restrictions are eased. Back copies are available for purchase.

The Times can be mailed to your home by paid subscription (not available for Sandisfield postal addresses) (see form below left) or you can read it (free) online as a PDF document at www.sandisfieldtimes.org.

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