

THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

Tribunus



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November 2023



West Lake, early October.

Photo by Tom Eismeier, Stump Road.

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OUR ANNUAL APPEAL ISSUE

OUR CHIEFS UNDER FIRE

FOLLOWING FIRE TRUCK CRASH, TENSIONS INCREASE

By Bill Price



Sandisfield's Select Board is at a stand-off with Fire Chief Ralph Morrison and his brother, Police Chief Michael Morrison.

Heated exchanges between the chiefs and the Select Board at the Select Board meeting Tuesday, October 24, resulted in the chiefs walking out of the meeting. After the meeting was adjourned, a shouting match ensued between them and Selectman John Field in the Town Hall parking lot.

A witness statement to the shouting match was submitted to the Select Board but has not been made public.

The agenda item that started the fracas was a review of investigation documents and updates following the crash of the Town's water tanker on September 26, allegedly caused by a failure of the brake system, and later revelations that the tanker had not been given a safety inspection since its purchase as a used vehicle in 2019. The wrecked truck could not be inspected by the state police as is customary because it was towed to an off-site location by A&M Auto and evidence was compromised.

A&M Auto, owned by Fire Chief Morrison, lost its designation at the Town's safety inspection and repair shop when the Select Board learned that A&M had few if any records of inspections of the wrecked truck or other Town vehicles for a number of years.

The good news was that neither the Police Chief, who was driving the truck in his capacity as Assistant Fire Chief, nor anyone else was injured in the crash.

The crash and follow-up events were detailed in five articles in The Berkshire Eagle, as well as a lead editorial on October 19. The editorial, which summarized these events, is reprinted on the facing page, with permission from The Eagle.




Photos courtesy of The Berkshire Eagle.

Fire Chief Morrison declined to comment for this issue of The Times, despite several requests. Police Chief Morrison is out of town and will return November 10.

Select Board Chairman, Steve Seddon, told The Times, "We haven't come to any conclusions. We have worked out a timeline of the crash and are reviewing the safety inspection history. We will hold an executive session to discuss the matter as a board, but so far we've kept all of our discussions in open meetings."

The agenda for the October 30 Select Board meeting originally included an item of further discussion with the chiefs, but on recommendation of Town attorney KP Law those discussions will be held in executive sessions, and in an updated agenda the item was removed.

The Fire Chief and Police Chief have each served Sandisfield for more than forty years. 

A risky lesson in small-town official scrutiny

EDITORIAL, THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE,
OCTOBER 19, 2023

As concerned as we were to hear about a fire truck crash in Sandisfield and the multiple lapses in oversight that preceded it, this situation actually could have been much worse.

Assistant Fire Chief Michael Morrison could have been seriously hurt or worse when the tanker he was driving lost its brakes on the way to a call and sheared a utility pole as it rolled down an embankment. And lives could have been on the line at the location of the fire emergency in Otis while he took the wrong route through Tyringham, where the truck crashed, due to faulty verbal directions from another firefighter.

We are glad that Mr. Morrison avoided injury and that this fiasco did not turn into a tragedy. Much as some might prefer not to dwell on it, it's imperative to assess what led to such a fiasco in the first place to prevent another like it in the future.

It seems more things went wrong than right before and after the crash. The Sandisfield Fire Department's 1988 Mack 600 RDS tanker truck had recently failed an emissions inspection and was overdue for a brakes inspection (the truck bore a rejected inspection sticker at the time of the crash). Inspections for the town's entire emergency fleet have been handled by A& M Auto Repair — a shop owned by Fire Chief Ralph Morrison, who is Michael's brother. The directions that led Michael Morrison down the circuitous route to the crash site were not received from dispatch, which goes against protocol. After the crash, Ralph Morrison moved the mangled truck from the yard at R.W.'s Inc. in Lee to his private property in Sandisfield, which prevented the vehicle from being inspected by State Police and therefore

blocked the town from getting key details on the cause and conditions of the crash.

To the credit of the Sandisfield Select Board's recent ruling, the town will now rely on a third party to inspect municipal emergency vehicles rather than an auto shop owned by the town's fire chief. Better late than never. The Select Board is also wise to look into the rest of the town's emergency fleet, in case there are other lapsed inspections that might otherwise become apparent too late.

It must be noted that the Select Board and the public might not even know these concerning details about the circumstances of this crash were it not for the quick reporting of Eagle reporter Jane Kaufman. In a follow-up story days after the crash, her digging into the Carfax report for the crashed truck appeared to demonstrate more attention to the tanker truck's inspection status than previously shown by the fire chief himself.

Some in Sandisfield, including Fire Chief Ralph Morrison who said he had "nothing to say to The Berkshire Eagle" in the wake of the crash, have chafed at that scrutiny. We understand the unique difficulties that small towns face in staffing and maintaining critical municipal departments; we advocate for those concerns and solutions to them on this page all the time. Stretched-thin squads, many composed of volunteers, face unique difficulties with keeping the rosters full as well as oversight and maintenance. But those can't be excuses for sloppiness with the machinery of public safety. It's not an insult to the past service of the Morrison brothers to point out that alarming incidents like these underscore the need for the utmost care from and scrutiny of local officials with crucial public service responsibilities.

That goes especially in a town where the fire chief's brother is the police chief, who is also the assistant fire chief. That arrangement, combined with previously unquestioned practices like delegating town vehicle inspections to the fire chief's auto repair shop, ought to invite even more scrutinizing for possible lapses in oversight and conflicts of interest that jeopardize safety and efficacy in small towns already struggling to provide modernized emergency services.

Even the perception of those conflicts can be detrimental to sound local governance and public trust; in this case, it went beyond perception and led to a tanker truck rollover that not only dangerously derailed an emergency response but could have seriously injured or killed the town's police chief and assistant fire chief. It's worth remembering that these guidelines and regulations that small-town leaders might be tempted to shirk are there not only to serve the public but to protect first responders, including the Morrises. In this case, not only was Michael Morrison in danger but so was anyone else who might have been on the road with him, not to mention the hundred-plus customers who lost power for the night when he took out a utility pole.

We hope the lessons are many here for not just the police and fire chief but all Sandisfield officials so that incidents like this one that could have turned out far worse become less likely.

Reprinted with permission from The Berkshire Eagle.



Update on the Town Charter Proposal

By Larry Dwyer

I attended the Select Board meeting on October 10 to follow-up the progress on the Town Charter.

The Charter Committee presented the latest Town Charter draft to the Select Board. A new draft was posted on the town website on September 27, but more changes have been made since then.

When I asked to comment, I was subjected to an intense barrage of vitriol. The reason for this is because I dare challenge the necessity of a town charter. Most of the hostility came from Joh Sylbert and Steve Seddon. Forget about micro-aggressions, with me it was in your face, but I was a union shop steward for many years, so I'm used to taking a few lumps.

So far, the Charter Committee has held only one public hearing on August 11 to which only nine people attended. The Charter Committee has asked for input for the Town Charter draft, and I am one of only two people who has ever attended their regular meetings. I asked if there would be another public hearing and the answer was that there would be more, but no additional public hearings have yet been scheduled.

When I finally did get to speak at the Select Board meeting, I made a statement that a charter is a foundation document, and the Collins Center recommended not putting much detail in the charter since a charter is hard to change. The

Collins Center approach is to capture how Sandisfield is currently operating, and the town charter should reflect this. Of course, the Town Manager said I was misinterpreting what the Collins Center said. But how difficult is it to understand, "Don't put too much detail in the charter."

It's not likely the Charter Committee will accept any of my recommendations for changes, but whether they accept my recommendations or not, I still have the Sandisfield Times to express my views without any discord.

Despite the hostility, I still plan to attend the Charter Committee meetings. Mostly I want to ask the Collins Center to expand on why the charter is considered a foundation document and again to explain why we shouldn't put in too much detail.

As a side note: Jon Sylbert was a member of the Charter Committee for the Town of Monterey, but at the Monterey Select Board meeting on August 31, 2022, they allowed the Charter Committee member appointments to expire. Due to lack of interest in drawing up a Charter draft, the Monterey Charter Committee never held a single meeting.

The residents of Sandisfield need to understand more about the town charter. It is a privilege that we can discuss this openly in our democracy and we should exercise our right to know what is going on. I encourage Sandisfield community members to participate in the town meetings and ask questions. 🍷

Out on a Limb: Op-Ed:

Subjects should be of interest 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. Opinions in Out on a Limb articles are those of the authors and do not represent The Sandisfield Times.



Letters to the Editor

A CHARTER RESPONSE

As a member of the Charter Committee, one of the tasks I was assigned was to research requirements for all appointed town boards and committees in Massachusetts. The board and committee membership requirements listed in the charter were sourced directly from the official MA.GOV website.

Following is an excerpt from that website regarding Historical Commissions – the board that Larry Dwyer wrote about in his October "Out on a Limb" piece regarding the Charter Proposal.

The commission shall consist of not less than three nor more than seven members. In cities the members shall be appointed by the mayor, subject to the provisions of the city charter, except that in cities having a city manager form of government, said appointments shall be by the city manager, subject to the provisions of the charter; and in towns they shall be appointed by the selectmen, excepting towns having a town manager form of government, in which towns appointments shall be made by the town manager, subject to the approval of the selectmen.

In summary, for Mr. Dwyer to suggest that the membership requirements listed in the charter are arbitrary and could and should be changed on a whim is incorrect. While membership could change (after all, isn't everything subject to change?), Mr. Dwyer's proposal that "if interest were to increase in the history of the town, it may be good to add more members" would be, as per MA.GOV, against best practices.

The committee welcomes public attendance and participation at our well-publicized meetings, so to suggest there haven't been multiple opportunities for folks to weigh in is incorrect. The committee is still having meetings, so should anyone wish to observe and comment while we deliberate, we encourage you to do so. As I've written before, this document crafted by the people for the people is critically important to our town's future, so take a few moments to make sure you have an understanding based on facts, not on misinformation and hearsay. 🍷

Melissa Bye
New Hartford Rd.



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Charter Proposal: RESPONSE TO LAST MONTH'S OPINION PIECE

By the Town Charter Committee

In response to the Larry Dwyer's "Out on a Limb" opinion piece in the October *Times*, it is important to set the record straight regarding the creation of the draft Town Charter and address some misconceptions.

The draft Town Charter was meticulously crafted under the guidance of the Collins Center, a well-respected authority in municipal governance. Every aspect of the draft Town Charter has undergone careful scrutiny to ensure it aligns with their recommendations, reflecting a commitment to responsible governance and expert counsel. There is not a single element of this Charter that the Collins Center has not approved.

The assertion that there has only been one public meeting regarding the creation of the draft Town Charter is not accurate. In fact, each of our 16 meetings was conducted in a public setting, highlighting the commitment to transparency and community engagement. One of these meetings was a joint meeting with the Select Board, in which the Board gave its opinion and approval. Furthermore, there are plans for at least one more public hearing to ensure that the community's voice is heard and valued throughout this process.

Regarding the ability of a Select Board member to serve as temporary or Interim Town Manager, this is now allowed, based on feedback from the current Select Board, but without compensation. This limit was also approved by the current Select Board.

Finally, regarding the number of members allowed on the Historical Commission, it is not true that "the Historical Commission currently has no limit on the number of members." Please read the bylaws, which state that the Historical Commission is limited to five (5) members, and note that Massachusetts General Law sets the range between 3 and 7 members. We have copied MGL, which gives the town the flexibility to change the number of members within the limits of the Law. The Town will not have to revise the Charter to do so. 🗳️

Road Maintenance: RESPONSE TO "OUT ON A LIMB"

By the Sandisfield Select Board

The Select Board would like to make clarifications and corrections to George Riley's "Out on a Limb" opinion piece in the October *Times*, "Maintenance Deferred is Not Maintenance."

Mr. Riley's lengthy comparison of gravel road maintenance between Sandisfield and Monterey is misleading.

Apples to oranges.

Sandisfield has 82 miles of roads that our DPW is responsible for maintaining; Monterey has 52 miles. Sandisfield has 52 miles of gravel roads, exactly the same as Monterey's total miles; Monterey has only 25 miles of gravel roads.

Sandisfield's current DPW budget is \$916,000; Monterey's is \$1,123,000. That amounts to \$200,000 or over 20 percent more.

Maintaining twice the road miles requires twice the budget, so Sandisfield's budget, compared to Monterey, would need to be in excess of \$2,000,000 for our DPW to perform at the same level as Monterey.

As for DPW fleet vehicles, Monterey owns a tandem dump truck (\$250,000 plus the cost of a plow apparatus), two M2 dump trucks (larger and more expensive trucks than our F550s at over \$200,000), and three F550s, so at least five trucks can be on the road plowing with one to spare. (The tandem dump truck is especially important to consider in a comparison, because it can haul considerably more gravel and hold considerably more salt, allowing it to make longer plow runs before returning to the shed.) Sandisfield has two Western Star dump trucks, a Freightliner, and two F550s. So even if we had the same road miles as Monterey, instead of twice as many, we would still not have a comparable fleet.

When he was a member of the Select Board, Mr. Riley never proposed such a budget for the DPW so that our crew could do as good a job as Monterey.

Mr. Riley also tells us we should "teach our road crew how to properly maintain our gravel roads" and claims that training the DPW crew on the use of our new grader "has been ignored."

Dave McCuin took a "Motor Grader Operation Safety" training in 2012, a "Gravel Roads When the Dust Settles" training and a "Grader Operating Training" in 2019, and an extensive "Grader Operator" training in April and June of 2023. Tony Suarez also took this same training, as did

Ralph Leavenworth (among others) before his resignation. As for "active management," Brad Curry has been following our grader operator for a month now in order to evaluate performance.

We do need better grading, and we have advertised for just such a specialized position. We also bid and contracted for a Heavy Equipment Rental outfit (Sandisfield has not done this in years) so that we can use outside contractors to perform more complex road reconstruction and culvert work above our regular maintenance.

We are not "content with the present situation," as Mr. Riley suggests, and we are well aware of the challenges of maintaining more road miles than any other Berkshire town on the same budget.

Finally, Mr. Riley wrote: "Meanwhile Sandisfield can't even use gravel to fill potholes and washouts." We have spent a tremendous amount on gravel for washouts this year and years past. There have also been countless culverts replaced/ repaired with the ditches feeding and leaving them.

Water that comes in the volumes it now seems to come in, and more frequently, are devastating to dirt roads. When these intense storms dump this kind of water, it not only washes out the road creating crevices, it also sends all the material off the embankments, losing the ability to simply grade the material back into a crown.

Currently the DPW is documenting all of the materials used and which roads they are used on to create priority lists for which roads that need to be completely rebuilt rather than simply regraded. 🗳️

Take the Yanner Park Survey



The Yanner Park Committee needs input from you. Please scan the QR code with your SmartPhone camera or visit <https://forms.gle/rTJR9JLLHF7kSkZG6> to complete a brief survey about Yanner Park.

The survey will close on November 15.

Thank you from the Yanner Park Committee.

Three DPW Jobs Available

Adapted by Times Reporters from Town Website

The Department of Public Works is looking for three good people.

The positions are full-time, 40 hours a week, and include benefits. Each requires the ability to lift 50 lbs., and have construction/mechanical knowledge. Each requires a CDL Class A or B License, Hydraulic Class 2A or 2B License, and 4G Mowing License. Duties include physical labor, driving trucks, operating heavy machinery, and plowing snow.

Equipment Operator/Laborer. A CDL Class A or B License, Hydraulic Class 2A or 2B License, and 4G Mowing License are required within 90 days of hire date. Town will pay for license acquisition with a two-year commitment. Hourly wages are \$23.86 to \$31.41 depending on licenses.

The **Grader Operator/Laborer** position is an elevated pay rate for a well-qualified candidate with a minimum of five years' experience and having completed training for the grader and is proficient in repairing as well as maintaining the Town's dirt roads. Hourly wage is \$32.90 with licenses.

DPW Working Foreman will be expected to assist in the coordination of daily work with the DPW superintendent as well as coordinate all daily work when superintendent is absent. Responsible for overseeing daily operations at the worksite to ensure completion of projects in a safe and efficient manner. Hourly wage is \$34.93 with licenses.

Apply with resume and three references to Sandisfield Highway Superintendent Brad Curry at Highways@sandisfieldma.gov. For complete job descriptions, visit www.sandisfieldma.gov/home/pages/employment.

DPW WAGES TO INCREASE

By The Select Board

Late last year, the Select Board negotiated with the Department of Public Works union members to approve a new pay matrix that would encourage DPW employees to attain specific licenses in order to provide them more competitive pay for their efforts in attaining those licenses.

The previous model the DPW was using had resulted in wage stagnation and left the Town with little means of attracting new talent.

In the new matrix accepted by both parties, the Town offered to pay for all the different training programs, and in return the employee would commit to one year of service for every \$1,000 spent by the Town in training. This would create a mutual commitment between both parties.

Since then, one of the DPW employees, our most recent employee Antonio Soares, jumped four spots on the matrix to prove himself a more versatile member of the team and earned himself a significant raise.

Since the negotiations, the country as a whole has experienced extreme inflation. This, coupled with a shortage of qualified workers and the private sector paying a premium to attain licensed workers, has left Sandisfield and other towns competing to fill these positions. Sandisfield DPW then suffered the loss of two employees which left us with only three DPW employees, including the superintendent.

The Select board decided action was necessary to reevaluate the pay matrix.

We increased almost every position by \$2-3 per hour. We also created two new tiers to include the position of working foreman and skilled grader operator. The new tiers does not add additional employees, rather creates elevated tiers for our team to aspire to.

The **working foreman** position – for a qualified individual – would be at an elevated pay rate. This would also create a redundancy at a management level which would leave someone in charge with a clear understanding of directives when the superintendent needs time off. It would also be an employee who could provide guidance to less experienced employees on site.

The **experienced grader operator** position would allow us to pay the right candidate a premium to maintain and rebuild our dirt roads.



NEW UNION RATES

CLASSIFICATION Requirements	Year 1 FY 2023	Year 2 FY 2024	Year 3 FY 2025
PART TIME LABORER 1 Driver's License, no benefits	\$20.60	\$23.86	\$24.58
FULL TIME LABORER 2 Driver's License, benefits	\$19.57	\$22.76	\$23.44
LABORER 3 Driver's License & one of 2A4G	\$20.60	\$23.86	\$24.58
LABORER 4 Driver's License & 2A & 4G	\$21.63	\$24.95	\$25.70
LABORER 5 Class B CDL	\$22.66	\$26.04	\$26.82
LABORER 6 Class B CDL and one of 2A4G	\$23.95	\$27.41	\$28.23
LABORER 7 Class B CDL & 2A & 4G	\$24.72	\$28.22	\$29.07
LABORER 8 Class A CDL	\$25.75	\$29.32	\$30.20
LABORER 9 Class A CDL and one of 2A4G	\$26.01	\$30.59	\$31.51
LABORER 10 Class A CDL & 2A & 4G	\$26.78	\$31.41	\$32.35
GRADER OPERATOR/ LABORER Class A CDL & 2A & 4G		\$32.90	\$33.89
WORKING FOREMAN Class A CDL & 2A & 4G		\$34.93	\$35.98

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Sandisfield Arts Center

Two More Great Shows in November

By Jess Cofrin

The Sandisfield Arts Center has two fantastic and FREE events coming up in November.

November 4, Saturday, from 4:00-6:00 p.m., is the opening of *CONNECTED*, an art exhibit celebrating artists with ties to South Berkshire County. It feels vital, particularly at this current time, to acknowledge our profound interconnectedness as humans – with one another and with the natural world. The exhibit will showcase works from twelve artists, including Sandisfield locals Jaye Alison Moscariello, Linda Mironti, Setsuko Winchester, Jess Cofrin, Josie Miner, June Wink, Susie Crofut, and Peter Baiamonte, as well as regional artists Jacob Fossum, Daisy Noyes, and Abbe Stahl. This exhibition also features our 2023 Daniel Manacher Young Artist’s fellowship winner, Falcon Laina. Come enjoy light refreshments and meet the artists.

November 25, Saturday, at 4:00 p.m., Simon Winchester will be in conversation with Ron Bernard about Simon’s 2023 book, *Knowing What We Know*. Simon’s talks always draw a crowd and promise lively discussions, so arrive early to secure your seat.

These events will conclude another vibrant season at the Arts Center, and we have so much

to be grateful for with audience numbers rising to near pre-pandemic levels.

A LOOK BACK

Live music played a significant role in our summer’s line up and made it clear that the Arts Center makes for a fabulous concert venue. We opened with an enchanting Evening of Song, featuring a cabaret of music and dance. Seasoned performer Zoë Lewis and the talented young pianist Joshua Luxon-Robinson both delivered exceptional shows. Most recently, folk duo Ari and Mia put on what many said was the best concert they had seen in a long time!

Other highlights from the season included a screening for “A Stage of Twilight” starring Karen Allen. In September, we marked the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima with the poignant film, “Vow from Hiroshima.” Of the various workshops, one of our most popular was the “Introduction to Handmade Rugs” with John Balayan.

The gallery also had a full season of amazing artists on the walls and out in the fields as we hosted the 2nd Biennial Outdoor Sculpture Show. Pulitzer Prize winning photographer, Andre Lambertson, gave a very moving artists’ talk during his October exhibition.

Finally, our Annual Gala Dinner featured the culinary talents of long-time chef Adam Manacher and helped us raise money so we can offer another season of exceptional programming in 2024. To stay up to date on all our events, please follow us on Facebook and Instagram!

Please note that “An Evening with Carol Burnett,” originally scheduled for November, has been postponed until 2024.



Thanksgiving Flower Arrangement Class

The Sandisfield COA will host a Thanksgiving Flower Arrangement class on November 15, Wednesday, at 1:00 p.m.

The class will be held at the COA room at Town Hall. The cost is \$10 and all materials will be provided.

FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS

As reported by the RecCommittee on page 12, **Lynn Rubenstein** resigned from the Sandisfield Recreation Committee as of the end of October. This was noted in a brief announcement in last month’s Times, along with the news that **Laurie Sedden** who has worked very closely with Lynn over the past couple years would succeed her as Committee Chair. Lynn’s leadership since 2020 refreshed the RecCommittee and helped create a half-dozen Town-wide events that will continue to evolve and entertain us all. The Times will watch to see what Lynn turns to next. As for herself, Lynn said, she looks forward to “hearing about all the fun things Laurie and the rest of the committee will offer to the town.”



sandisfield ARTS CENTER

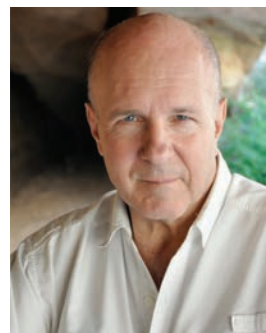
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NOVEMBER 4 THROUGH DECEMBER 3
GALLERY EXHIBIT: “CONNECTED”



A curated exhibit showcasing 11 artists with ties to our area. The exhibition asks what connections we can make to foster a community in our corner of the world. Included are Peter Biamonte, Jess Cofrin, Susie Crofut, Jacob Fossum, Falcon Liana (2023 Daniel Manacher Prize Winner), Josie Miner, Linda Mironti, Jaye Alison Moscariello, Daisy Noyes, Abbe Stahl, Setsuko Winchester, June Wink. **Opening reception 4-6 pm. FREE.**

SAT., NOVEMBER 25, 4 PM
SIMON READS



Join us for a reading by **Simon Winchester** and a discussion, led by Ron Bernard, of his 2023 book **Knowing What We Know: The Transmission of Knowledge from Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic.**

“A delightful compendium of the kind of facts you immediately want to share with anyone you encounter ... Simon Winchester has firmly earned his place in history ... as a promulgator of knowledge of every variety ...”

— **New York Times**

This event is FREE to attend.

FOR DETAILS VISIT SANDISFIELDARTSCENTER.ORG

Church Website Announced

The New Boston Congregational Church is pleased to announce the launch of our website at www.newbostoncongregationalchurch.org.

The website will be used to communicate the church's message, events and activities, fund raising, and community outreach. The website conveys the spirit and intention of the congregation as told by Pastor Eric A. Kriebel.

Thanks to Bobby Flower of Prospect Marketing in Stockbridge for his generous support with the website design, programming, and publication and to Marianna Saporito, interim webmaster for technical and translational support. Also appreciated is the financial support from the Newsome family.

A donations tab is coming soon in advance of the congregation's 2024 150th anniversary celebration and fund drive. NBCC is a non-profit entity. Donations in any amount are greatly appreciated.

Town Money Tucked Away

CAN IT BE USED TO EASE THE TAX LEVY?

By Tom Christopher

There has been considerable to-do at Town Hall recently about a \$150,332 gap that has opened up between the current tax levy and the amount allocated for expenditures in the Sandisfield 2024 town budget.

This discrepancy was revealed in a recent Select Board meeting to be the result of a faulty budgeting process: the town government included in its calculation of available funds income that was anticipated but which did not subsequently materialize.

Fortunately, this revelation coincided with the discovery by Roger Brown, chair of the Board of Assessors, that the Overlay Account, a fund maintained by the Board to cover any abatement

in taxes, contained in the neighborhood of \$453,000, an amount Roger Brown deemed excessive. This money had accrued because approximately \$37,000 is added to the Overlay Account annually and the actual withdrawals have been substantially less. In the past five years, for example, withdrawals have averaged just \$19,000 annually.

Chairman Brown was exploring the return of the excess funds to the town for other uses when he was informed of the budget discrepancy. Chairman Brown suggested that the lacking money might be withdrawn from the Overlay Account.

This transfer of funds from the Overlay Account to an Overlay Surplus Account has to be approved by the Sandisfield electorate. The Select Board has issued a warrant for a special town meeting to take place on November 8, in which, among other business, voters will have the chance to approve or veto this fiscal band aid.

Whatever decision is reached, one hopes that the town government will return to approved budgetary practice and that such maneuvers will not become necessary in the future.

A Gift for Rosemary

Rosemary Allan, a World War II veteran, is Sandisfield's oldest resident. As she was approaching her 99th birthday in late October (her birthday is really on November 8), her friend Rose Nelson of Sunny Rose Farm saddled her horse Emmy and rode from Dodd Road through the heart of Sandisfield to Tannery Road in New Boston where Rosemary and her partner Rich Mercure live above the Farmington River. Rosemary grew up in nearby towns riding horses every day. Rose wanted to give Rosemary a special treat for her coming birthday, and brought Emmy over to deliver greetings in person. Can you say "in person" about a horse? Emmy thinks so.

We regret to inform you that Rosemary Allan died as The Times was going to press this month.

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High Praise on Training Day

Seventeen veteran and junior firefighters, mostly from Sandisfield, met on a beautiful October Sunday at Firehouse #2 to refresh and teach potentially life-saving emergency response techniques.

Organized annually by the Sandisfield Fire Department, the all-day training was

supervised by former long-time Pittsfield Fire Chief, Robert Czerwinski. Toward the end of the session, Chief Czerwinski said, "In my fifty years as a fire fighter, I can't recall a bunch of young people as motivated to learn as these fellows." He added, "This is a very good sign for the future here."



News of Northwest Sandisfield

THE PILBIN PROPERTY

By Bill Price

Out on West Hubbard Road, a drama is unfolding.

In June 2019, Jennifer Pilbin proposed the purchase of property along Town Hill Road in order to build what was to be Sandisfield's first cannabis-growing facility. Neighbors on both sides of Town Hill Road resisted, and Ms. Pilbin sought another location.

She subsequently purchased land on West Hubbard Road, purportedly away from neighbors who might object to a cannabis farm. Not so. Neighbors on West Hubbard resisted the idea even more than those further south along Town Hill.

In any event, no cannabis farm got beyond the planning stage and Ms. Pilbin moved into a house trailer hauled to the site. Things went pretty badly from there.

The property deteriorated until a series of inspections by the Board of Health and a succession of Select Boards started a process that is still "in process." And the bank that holds a mortgage on the property came knocking.

Minutes from the Select Board meeting of October 2 tell where the "process" stands now:

Jennifer Pilbin's property on West Hubbard Rd was scheduled to be auctioned on September 27, 2023. However, she filed for bankruptcy a few days prior and the auction was canceled. Jennifer now has to come up with a payment plan with the bank. Should she fail to make her payments, the bank will schedule another auction. The Board of Health has conducted an inspection of the trailer and property and deemed it uninhabitable. The Fire and Police Chief have both visited the property as well to notify Jennifer that she is not to illegally burn, as there were reports of her doing so.

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★ UPCOMING EVENTS ★

Knox Trail Trivia Night-Thursdays 7pm
(except Thurs Nov 2nd)

Nov 4th Melissa Brinton Band 8pm

★ NOVEMBER 11th ★
1/2 PRICE FOR VETERANS
1/2 PRICE FOR HEROES ALL DAY!
Proof of service required-Alcohol not included

Nov 11th Brother Sal Blues Band 8pm

Nov 18th Fan Addicts Band 8pm

Nov 19th The Hilltown Blues Jam 2pm

Nov 25th The Side-Tracked Band 8pm

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By Terry Spohnholz

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Wednesday evening 5:00–7:00 p.m.

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Closed Thursday, Friday and Sunday

Phone: 258-4966

Email: sandisfieldlibrary@gmail.com

Our new website: sandisfieldlibrary.org

CELEBRATING THE SEASON

A Thanksgiving Harvest of Songs & Stories



Saturday, November 18 at 1:00 p.m., Davis Bates will present a fun, participatory program for all ages at the Library. Davis is a Parents' Choice Award-winning singer and storyteller. Funded in part by a grant from the Sandisfield Cultural Council.

NEW BOOK ARRIVALS

ADULT FICTION AND NON-FICTION

- *The Secret* by Lee Child
- *Blood Lines* by Nelson DeMille
- *Dirty Thirty* by Janet Evanovich
- *The Exchange* by John Grisham
- *Starling House* by Alix E. Harrow
- *Roman Stories* by Jhumpa Lahiri
- *Second Act* by Danielle Steel
- *From a Far and Lovely Country* by Alexander McCall Smith
- *Judgment Prey* by John Sanford
- *Let Us Descend* by Jesmyn Ward
- *Twelve Dogs of Christmas* by Susan Wiggs
- *Masters of Death* by Olivie Blake
- *Wellness* by Nathan Hill
- *Hidden Roots of White Supremacy* by Robert Jones
- *Ngrth Woods* by Daniel Mason
- *Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros

OLDER CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULT SECTION

- *No Brainer* by Jeff Kinney

NEW BOOKS IN THE CHILDREN'S SECTION

- *The Big Cheese* by John Jory

BOOK CLUB

Sandisfield Woman's Book Club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the 4th Thursday of each month (except as noted below due to the holidays). The club reads a variety of books suggested by members and is always looking for new members. Selections for the next few months are:

- November – *Haven* by Ruth Gruber (November 15)
- December - *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri (December 2)

PINOCHLE ANYONE?

The Library hosts a pinochle group at the library that meets at least once a month, sometimes twice. Knowledge of pinochle is not required – we learn as we go. We will be meeting **Wednesday November 8 and November 29 at 6:30** at the Library.

CHILDREN'S SECTION

The Children's section is replete with books, games, toys, Brio trains, and lots of arts and crafts supplies. We also offer notary service, public computer and printer availability, free wifi and access to e-books from the Massachusetts libraries with your Sandisfield library card. If you have a particular author or book in mind, and the Sandisfield Library does not have it, we can borrow it from other libraries.

NOTARY SERVICES

Available when the library is open or by appointment. Please call 907-244-6466 for an appointment.

GENTLY USED BOOKS FOR SALE

Curl up this season with some old favorites or discover a new author. \$1 a book (hard cover) or six for \$5. Fiction, non-fiction and biography. 📖



November Poem

NOVEMBER NIGHT

By Adelaide Crapsey

Listen.

With faint dry sound,

Like steps of passing ghosts,

The leaves, frost-crisped, break from the trees

And fall.

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SANDISFIELD Historical Society

SPECIAL GUEST: NOVEMBER 11, VETERANS DAY

By Ann Wald, President

We had a great day at Riiska Brook Orchard on the first of October for our apple-dessert baking contest. We thank everyone who took the time and effort to bake a pie or an apple dessert. Baking a pie is a skill everyone should know, men too, and teach your children, too.



For apple pie, the first-place winner was Laurie Seddon. Second and third were Anita Carr and Mary Bredenfoerder.

In the apple dessert category, Claudette Litchfield was first, and Melissa Bye and Sharon Hryckvick second and third.

We give a big thank you to our judges: Mary Gonzalez, Jonathan Sylbert, and Simon Winchester.

And an especially big thank you to Riiska Brook Orchard for prizes and allowing us to hold our contest at their wonderful place. Thanks as well to the Farmington River General Store and Spice 320 in Colebrook for additional prizes.

Our next meeting will be held on November 11, Veterans Day, at 3:00 p.m.

Our special guest speaker will be Tom Beasley, District Director of Veterans Services in Southern Berkshire Department. He will speak on his and his families service in the military as well as the benefits available to all veterans.

Please join us at the meeting house on Rt. 183 at the corner of South Sandisfield Road. Since our new bathroom is not installed yet, we will supply a handsome port-a-pottie on site.

If anyone is interested in joining us for the **Christmas Fair on December 2**, either as volunteers or vendors, call me at 258-4415.



At the Tractor Pull

All tractors and anyone who likes tractors showed up October 9 at the American Legion Pavilion for a free show and an open-air flea market. It was a great day.

Photo: Ron Bernard

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recreation COMMITTEE



Oktoberfest a Sweet Success

By Laurie Seddon, Chair

Photos: Mary Bredenfoerder/Ron Bernard

Oktoberfest was a popular event again this year, drawing a hundred or so visitors to the event held at Looking Glass Gardens. On Dodd Road

Very special thanks again to Looking Glass Gardens and Sunny Rose Farm for graciously and generously inviting us all to hold a crowded Town party on their lovely property.

The food did not disappoint. Bub's Beans and the Dogs offered an expanded menu including bratwurst and German potato salad in addition to their classic menu items.

We hosted seasonal crafting under the large pavilion and enjoyed the live band, which played classic German festival music.



Drake Regester of Otis and his mother Alanna having a good time at Oktoberfest.



Rose Nelson ready to introduce her palomino-mix, Simba, to Oktoberfest celebrants.

Looking Glass Gardens had free hayrides running back and forth their seasonally decorated and landscaped grounds, while the RecCommittee hosted a baking contest. Of the six entries, the three which didn't win, place, or show were delicious and devoured soon after the judging. They were all winners. Third place was Olivia Lemon who baked Grandma's Fudge Brownies. Emily Melchior took second place with a Gluten-Free Apple Cake. First place went to Jade Mullen with her baked Apple Cider Whoopie Pies.

Thank you to our judges, Barbara Cormier, Steven Seddon, and Elizabeth Nett. We can't wait until next year!

As some of you know, our indefatigable leader Lynn Rubenstein resigned as Chair of the Recreation Committee and from the Committee as of the end of October. She said, "It was time to pass the baton."

We thank Lynn for all her dedication to making this Committee the success it has become and a staple community feature. She will be missed. We wish her good luck in whatever she chooses to do. She will continue to serve the Town, and is a member of the Cemetery Committee.

In the meantime, we need members!

The Recreation Committee should be comprised of seven full-time members. We are currently down to four. We typically meet about once per month where we decide, organize, and vote on our upcoming calendar of events. We have an average of six events per year, give or take depending on budget and community interest.

Please, join us! This is a very fun and rewarding experience and we sure could use some more hands. Contact us at sandisfieldevents@recreationcommittee.info and join us today. 🇺🇸



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- Recreational Trail Layout



Santa Clause is coming to town!

Saturday, December 2. We're sure that Santa is coming to Sandisfield for his annual visit. Details provided soon.



Chestnut Roasting On An Open Fire

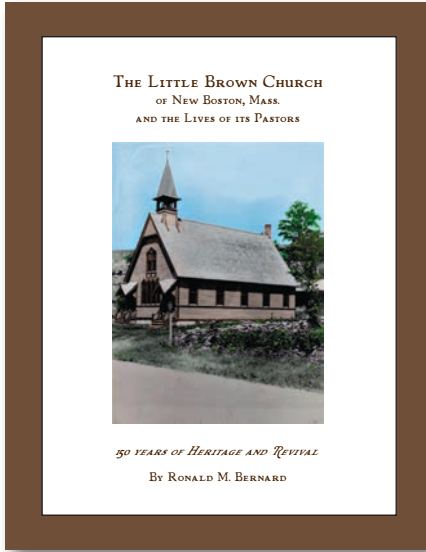
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New Boston Church History Book

PRE-PUBLICATION ORDERS BEING TAKEN. SPECIAL PRICE ENDS NOVEMBER 15.



Sandisfield history writer, Ron Bernard is taking orders for his latest book, *The Little Brown Church of New Boston, Mass., and the Lives of Its Pastors: 150 Years of Heritage and Revival*, which was announced in last month's issue.

The 400 page book tells the story of the Congregational churches in Sandisfield from 1754 through today and particularly the definitive history of the venerable New Boston church and its congregation since inception in 1874.

Besides biographies of all 45 pastors (including some "native sons") who presided at the historic "Little Brown Church," there are also many new (and expanded) general historical accounts that were not included in the history of the town, *Sandisfield Then & Now* published in 2012. Anyone interested in the history of Sandisfield will find much to enjoy in this book.

A special pre-publication price of \$25 is available for orders received before November 15. This *limited* edition book will be available by December 2nd, in time for the annual Christmas Fair at Fire House 2. Net proceeds from the sale will go to the New Boston Church. See order form to the right.

PRE-PUBLICATION ORDER FORM

The Little Brown Church of New Boston, Mass.

- Please reserve ___copy(s) at special pre-publication price of \$25 each plus \$6 each for shipping if necessary. *
- I'll save the shipping charge and pick up my book(s) in Sandisfield.

Make check payable and mail to:
Ronald Bernard, P.O. Box 91, Sandisfield, MA 01255

Net proceeds to benefit the New Boston Congregational Church

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Email: _____

Phone: _____

Enclosed is my check No. _____ for \$ _____

For more information, email Ronbernard@aol.com

Note: This is a limited edition book. Don't wait. Order now!

**Pre-publication price good through November 15, 2023*

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SPECIAL TOWN MEETING, NOVEMBER 8

INFORMATION SHEET

By Jon Sylbert, Town Manager

A Special Town Meeting will be held at Old Town Hall, 3 Silverbrook Road, on Wednesday, November 8, at 6:00 p.m. We encourage everyone's participation.

ARTICLE 1 asks the town to appropriate \$150,322.75 of overlay surplus, an amount released by the Board of Assessors, to lower the FY24 tax levy. The town has been holding an overlay balance of about \$425,000, a portion of which the auditor had recommended the town release as overlay surplus during the last audit in 2017.

Last year, the Town appropriated \$198,114.57 in free cash to lower the levy by \$133,797.23 over the prior year. This year, the Town appropriated \$57,298.00 at Annual Town Meeting to lower the levy, an amount equal to that returned to the town by the School Committee. The additional \$150,322.75 of overlay surplus will further reduce the levy so that it is equal to the increase in this year's operating budget of \$129,531.60. (There may be a small discrepancy when the final numbers are input into the Tax Recap sheet.)

The DOR has instructed the Town that the use of the overlay surplus still requires appropriation by voters at Town Meeting. (It's your money.)

In addition to releasing a portion of the overlay to ease the tax burden, the Town received \$511,953.14 in actual FY23 local receipts not allocated. Approximately \$100,000 of this came from auctioning older vehicles and equipment. Also, last November, the Town recovered \$187,767.39 in back taxes and interest on the Minery estate, about half of which—interest and fees—was allocated to FY23 actual receipts.

The Town will continue to recover and release these and other funds in order to make sure it holds no more in taxpayers' dollars than is necessary to operate.

ARTICLE 2 asks the Town to transfer \$2,500.00 from Emergency Management Expenses to the Emergency Management Grant account to cover the cost of unreimbursed expenses. This is not an appropriation.

The rest of the articles on the warrant use General Stabilization for the following purposes: to pay for five percent of a Firefighters grant award (\$7,976.67), to replenish the reserve fund for future unforeseen expenses (\$7,500), to pay for additional Vo-tech student transportation costs (\$10,000), and to pay bills from prior fiscal years (\$9,716.51).

The town's General Stabilization fund balance as of July 1 was \$615,778.89. After using \$35,193.18, the balance will be \$580,585.71 (plus FY24 accrued interest). The Town-approved Financial Policy recommends holding this fund at 10 percent of the operating budget, which was \$379,103.64 in FY23, so there is plenty to spare.

Please refer to the actual warrant for specifics on these articles. The warrant can be found on sandisfieldma.gov, the front page or the Town Clerk's page. It is also available at Town Hall during business hours.

THE SANDISFIELD TIMES is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization staffed by volunteers from the Sandisfield community and funded by individual and business sponsors. Its mission is to connect the community through reliable, regular, and relevant information. The paper is published 11 times each year, with a joint January-February issue and monthly issues thereafter.

Donations of any amount are needed to ensure the continuation of this newspaper. Please send checks to: The Sandisfield Times, P.O. Box 584, Sandisfield, MA 01255 or donate online at our website: Donations to The Sandisfield Times are deductible under section 170 of the Federal Income Tax Code. Donations do not include subscriptions. Subscriptions do not qualify as donations.

The Times is distributed free of charge to all Sandisfield postal address and boxes. Free copies are available at the following town locations: The transfer station (Wed/Sat/Sun), the Library, and in New Boston at A&M Auto, the Farmington River General Store, and the New Boston Inn. The Times is also available in West Otis at the laundromat, library, and the Farmington River Diner; in East Otis at Katies, Pappas, and the Knox Trail Inn. Also at the Monterey Library (outside box), in Colebrook at the post office and the general store, and at the New Marlborough General Store and the Mill River General Store. Back copies are available for purchase.

The Times can be mailed to your home (non-Sandisfield addresses only) by paid subscription (see form below) or you can read it (free) online as a PDF document at www.sandisfieldtimes.org. Classified ads, 30 words or less, are free.

We welcome submissions, comments and suggestions, including letters to the editor by the 15th of the month prior. Maximum 300 words. We may edit for space, style or clarity. We will try to publish Public Service Announcements when we have room, with priority given to Sandisfield organizations. No portion of the The Sandisfield Times may be reproduced without permission.

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Now Hear This!: Laura Rogers-Castro

Founding Editor: Simon Winchester

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If internet accessible, all letters, news events and tips, ideas, obituary and family announcements, photos (600 dpi if possible) and advertisement queries to editor@sandisfieldtimes.org

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NOW HEAR THIS!

Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro.

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

NOVEMBER EVENTS

Sandisfield Select Board Meetings are currently through Zoom and in-person at 6:30 p.m. on Mondays unless otherwise posted. Please visit sandisfieldma.gov or call 258-4711 for information.

Playgroup on Tuesdays from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. at the Otis Town Hall. Sponsored by South Berkshire Kids. No pre-registration necessary. Led by Nina Carr. This fun program includes free play, crafts, stories, and songs! A great time to meet with friends and meet new friends! For confirmation, please call Nina Carr (258-3314). Free!

Coffee Hour on Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m. at the Council on Aging, Town Hall basement. Snacks and conversation! For more information, contact Nina Carr (258-3314). Free.

Chair Yoga with Wendy Larsen on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on Silverbrook Road, sponsored by the Council on Aging. For more information, contact Nina Carr (258-3314). Free.

Special Town Meeting on November 8, Wednesday, at 6:00 p.m. at Old Town Hall, 3 Silverbrook Rd. See page 3 for information. Read the warrant at sandisfieldma.gov or at Town Hall during business hours. All residents welcome. See page 14 for information.

New Boston Church Service on Sunday, November 12 at 10:00 a.m. at the New Boston Congregational Church, Route 57. This service will honor our veterans. All are welcome.

CONNECTED: A Group Show Featuring Artists From the Region. Opening Reception on Saturday, November 4 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center on 5 Hammertown Road. CONNECTED is a presentation of artists who, by way of place, share ties to South Berkshire County. Featured artists include, Peter Baiamonte, Jess Cofrin, Susie Crofut, Jacob Fossum, Falcon Laina, Josie Miner, Linda Mironti, Jaye Alison Moscariello, Daisy Noyes, Abbe Stahl, Setsuko Winchester, and June Wink. The show will run until December 3.

Sandisfield Woman's Book Club on Thursday, November 16 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sandisfield Public Library. The book selection for November is *Haven* by Ruth Gruber.

Knowing What We Know with Simon Winchester on Saturday, November 25 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at the Sandisfield Arts Center on 5 Hammertown Road. Simon Winchester will read from and discuss his book, *Knowing What We Know: The Transmission of Knowledge from Ancient Wisdom*

to *Modern Magic*. See ad on page 7 or visit sandisfieldartscenter.org for more information. Free.

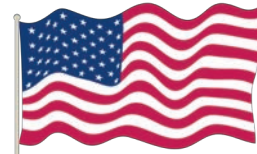
Christmas Fair on Saturday, December 2 sponsored by the Sandisfield Historical Society. For more information, contact Ann (258-4415).

ONLINE EVENTS

A Farm and Garden Show with Sandisfield Residents Bill Taylor and Jaye Alison Moscariello streamed every Monday, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at berkshireradio.org.

The Mental Health Benefits of Nature Online Program on Wednesday, November 8 from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. hosted by the Berkshire Natural Resources Council. Local professionals will discuss the many ways people of all ages can connect to nature, the mind and body benefits, and share personal experiences related to time outdoors. Easy tips, tools, and resources will be highlighted as well. Visit bnrc.org to register.

Dragon, Musketeer, Prisoner: The Hessians of the Revolutionary War in Western Massachusetts with local historian Dennis Picard on Thursday, November 9 at 7:00 p.m. via ZOOM. Folklore holds that the Hessians soldiers of the Revolutionary War period were blood-thirsty mercenaries purchased to fight the rebellious colonists. But is that a truthful depiction of these citizens of the German States? Hear how these men got to our area, why they were here, who they really were, and in the end, why some stayed. Sponsored by the Otis Preservation Trust. To register, visit www.otispreservationtrust.org.

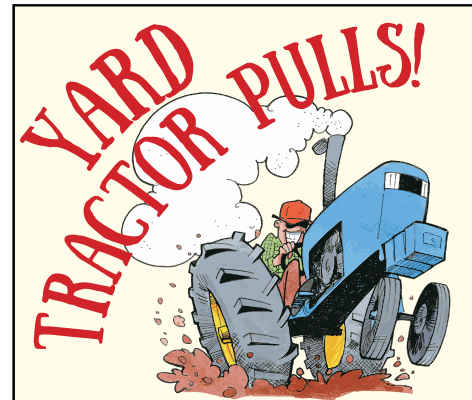


SANDISFIELD
Historical
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November 11, Veterans Day, at 3:00 p.m.

Special guest speaker will be **Tom Beasley**, District Director of Veterans Services in Southern Berkshire Department. He will speak on his and his families service in the military as well as the benefits available to all veterans.

At the corner of South Sandisfield Road.



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5TH
10 AM - 4 PM

AMERICAN LEGION PAVILION

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