

# THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

*Tribunus*



*Plebis*

RELIABLE. REGULAR. RELEVANT.

*Volume XIV, Number 11*

*March 2024*

**I**t was the lazy evening of Presidents' Day, February 19th. I was in our kitchen making Welsh rarebit for supper when the toast – unattended, I admit -- began to burn, spectacularly. Within seconds a cluster of smoke alarms went off and an electronic version of the Voice of God boomed out declaring that the house was on fire (it wasn't) and that everyone should leave IMMEDIATELY (we didn't).

This has happened before - I admit this also – and so I sped in languid fashion to the control panel to call the dispatch center, give them my password, punch in the code, and tell them all was fine, it was just a careless mistake, my bad. The alarms would then fall silent and the small crisis would be over.

Except – not on this occasion. The control panel was new, lately upgraded to a new-fangled version, and where usually there was a call-and-confess 800 number, now there was nothing to be seen. A text message flashed up on my cell-phone, but it merely offered a number that, when I called, said the office was closed and would I try again next morning.

No time! God's yelling continued to declare an inside catastrophe and told us to vacate. The dog fled upstairs. Family members looked in vain online and I found that miserable sheaf of papers that now passes for the Berkshire County phone book. And all the while the clock was ticking and the Voice was booming its end-of-the-world instructions until, as I feared, came the sound of dread, the coyote-like howls of approaching sirens.

Within moments, a screech of brakes, shoutings galore, and there rushed in a tsunami of blue lights and several hundred thousand dollars-worth of Sandisfield firefighting equipment was parked expectantly in our driveway.

I was standing outside, trying to look as apologetically nonchalant and puzzled and geriatric as

possible, watching while a battalion of friendly men in yellow fluorescence surged into the living room. They couldn't have been more pleasant, and efficient. They made sure all was okay, that the uncharred house still stood, the family was intact, the dog was alive (he was found under a chair, sleeping unconcernedly). The chief wrote up some paperwork, declined our grateful offers of tea or burned toast, turned off his blue flashers, and the convoy of vehicles growled back up to base.

## A Fire Alarm, and a Fond Farewell

*By Simon Winchester, Founding Editor*

I was thankful, impressed – it had been twelve minutes from smoke alarms to the arrival of our town's Finest – but also shamefully chagrined.

When next morning I rang Eric Pachulski, our interim chief, to thank him and tell him I'd write about how brilliant everyone had been, he asked me simply to mention one thing: that the Fire Brigade needed recruits, and so I do.

JOIN UP, PLEASE!!! You will be joining a fine and dedicated team, a credit to our community, and they are selflessly devoted to keeping us and our property safe and well and secure.

There is a certain irony – a poignant irony indeed – in my writing here about the Sandisfield Fire Department.

And that is because this – a brief and somewhat inconsequential story of a false alarm, involving a government department with whom, in this paper, I have not always seen eye-to-eye – will be the very last article that I shall contribute to the paper.

I am stepping aside from The Sandisfield Times, and leaving the doings of our community to the writing skills of others.

The reason is very simple: I have a rather complicated book to complete by the end of this year, with much travel required, and much essential concentration on the intricacies of the chosen topic. I would be able to do justice to neither the book nor the newspaper were I to try to do both, and so I had to choose.

Knowing that there was an exceptionally able team under the leadership of Bill Price, who's been running the paper since 2012, I chose to work solely on the book.

This month sees us usher in our fifteenth year of publication.

The Times is in fine shape – with a loyal and dedicated readership, a contented gathering of advertisers, a cohort of generous financial supporters, the same loyal and talented designer – Tina Sotis – as through all our decade-and-a-half of history, and a team of writers, editors and contributors who – all volunteers, please continue to note – keep our paper, to the best of our various abilities, reliable, regular and relevant.

Of all the hyper-local papers that have sprung up in recent years, Sandisfield's is by general agreement by far the best. And the town of Sandisfield is all the better for the paper's existence, I feel sure. Which was our joint ambition when we decided to make a go of starting a newspaper, on that snowy winter's night back in 2010.

So – no platitudes here (there is no room: Bill Price is an exceeding tough and space-conscious editor!). Just a fond farewell to a newspaper for which I have enjoyed working and for the evident success of which I'm proud and grateful.

Just now I must bid you all – colleagues and readers alike – a fond farewell and thus – as my alarm company's Voice of God continues to insist – leave IMMEDIATELY. 🚒



# Janey Beardsley Designated

FROM THE TOWN WEBSITE

## MCPPO DESIGNATION

After months of grueling classwork and three exams passed with flying colors, our own Janey Beardsley has been designated as a Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official.

This designation will bring a new level of professionalism to town government and add to Janey’s considerable skillset.

As expressed in a letter from the Office of the Inspector General and the OIG Academy, which waived the \$2,000 classroom fees for the Town, Janey joins an “elite group of public sector professionals.”

“Congratulations! We are pleased to inform you that we have approved your application for the MCPPO designation. Award of this designation demonstrates your commitment to excellence in public procurement. You are among an elite group of public sector professionals to earn a OIG Academy, Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official designation.”

*Jonathan Sylbert  
Town Manager*



# Sandisfield Arts Center

## CALL FOR ARTISTS

### DANIEL MANACHER PRIZE FOR YOUNG ARTISTS

The 3rd annual Daniel Manacher Prize for Young Artists is open. The deadline is April 7, 2024. Up to three artists will be selected as finalists, each receiving \$400 to support their art practice. Winners will be announced on June 1, 2024. An exhibition of the finalist's work will be held in October at the Sandisfield Arts Center. For more information see [sandisfieldartscenter.org/.../call-fo-artists.../](https://sandisfieldartscenter.org/.../call-fo-artists.../)



*Art by Daniel Manacher*



## Thanks, Chief

In December, members of the Sandisfield Fire Department presented their former chief, Ralph Morrison, with a plaque to commemorate “his selfless contribution of 40+ years as Chief and 50+ years in service” to the department and to the residents of Sandisfield.

In a post on Facebook ConnectSandisfield, the department wrote “we are so proud and thankful for everything Ralph has contributed to this town in the past five decades. It has been a difficult adjustment for the entire department since his resignation as Chief in November, but we are appreciative

that he’s been here to continue to guide us into the next chapter. His knowledge, experience, and passion are invaluable to our department.”

Above, Ralph and his wife, Sandy, accept the award, an engraved, bronzed fire ax.

# School Committee Agrees to “Take a Look”

## IMPROVED EQUITY IN MEMBER TOWN COSTS TO BE CONSIDERED

By Bill Price

(Additional reporting contributed by Jane Kaufman, *Berkshire Eagle*, February 20, 2024. Used with permission.)

The School Committee of the Farmington River Regional School District voted at a special meeting, February 26, to consider changes in allocation of the costs of operating the district.

The goal of the changes will be to increase the district's long-term financial sustainability by improving the equity between costs borne by Sandisfield and Otis.

As a starting point for what became a very constructive discussion, the Committee used a resource document prepared by three representatives from the district – Superintendent Tim Lee, School Committee Chair Denise Hardie of Otis, and School Committee Vice-Chair Carl Nett of Sandisfield.

The resource document presented a history of the financial agreement between the two towns and outlined in detail how the district's cost has been allocated between them. The agreement has not been changed since its adoption 32 years ago, although almost all underlying economic measures have shifted dramatically.

In a comment in *The Berkshire Eagle*, Superintendent Lee said: “This year, I think, is the first year that there's really been some clear data attached to the issue. So I think that people are just beginning to understand now, how apportionment is different for the two towns – how the equalized valuation of the two towns has changed over the 30 years and what sort of impact that is having on the towns and their ability to sustain the district.”

The resource document stated that if the district was funded the same way as other municipal school districts in the State, then Otis and Sandisfield each would be paying amounts based on total assessed property value, or what is known as equalized valuation. It also pointed out that the total assessed property value of the district is just over \$1 billion, with 74 percent of that in Otis and 26 percent in Sandisfield, yet currently Otis pays just 60 percent of the district's assessment, while Sandisfield pays 40 percent.



The resource document also pointed out that when the agreement was put into place in 1992 the difference between the equalized valuations of Otis and Sandisfield stood at \$153 million, while today it stands at \$494 million, and that the district founders could not have anticipated such a drastic economic change.

The resource document also indicated that the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education publishes a measure each year for each town that indicates the maximum the town “could reasonably afford and be expected to contribute toward its educational expense.” While Otis is currently contributing \$1,395,696 less than the maximum the state says it could afford, Sandisfield is contributing \$266,226 more than this maximum, raising concerns about the future financial sustainability of the current allocation method.

### TWO KEY ISSUES RESOLVED, ONE TO GO

Just over three years ago Sandisfield began exploring alternatives to being part of the regional district. Sandisfield's concerns focused primarily on three issues: academic performance of the elementary school, the School Committee's need to hold the administration accountable, and the financial sustainability of the district.

The first two issues have since been fully resolved.

Academic performance of the elementary school has improved substantially from a low of 18 percent (measured by the State's Accountability Percentile) in 2019 to today's all-time high of 71 percent. This is only 4 points from the level needed for Tier 1 designation by the State. If this improvement trend were to continue, the elementary school could find itself the top-rated elementary school in all of Berkshire County.

The reborn and reenergized School Committee has four subcommittees working on substantive issues, including a comprehensive review and update of all district policies. Also, the district no longer has one person playing the combined role of Superintendent and Principle. The shift to two administrators has increased accountability and provided additional capacity to tackle tough issues.

These hard changes that have recently been made on difficult and delicate topics have no doubt resulted in great improvement of the district. This perhaps underlays the optimism expressed by Superintendent Lee that the remaining issue of financial sustainability might be also be resolved.

As he told *The Eagle*: “We've arrived at a place this year where we've got a pretty high level of collaboration between all members of the school committee, regardless of the towns that they're from, and I don't think in the past, that was the case. If there is an understanding, and perhaps movement on the part of the school committee towards a revised apportionment scheme that serves both towns, I think that's the best possible outcome.”

And there was, indeed, significant movement by the School Committee at the special meeting toward a revised apportionment scheme.

The full resource document can be found at: [https://frrsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Financial-Sustainability\\_022024\\_FINAL.pdf](https://frrsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Financial-Sustainability_022024_FINAL.pdf)



## "How's Your Road?"

By *Brigitte Ruthman*

It's a question that precedes just about every conversation I have with visitors from Thanksgiving until Easter. "That" road is Dodd, which is at the top of the hit list of the town's most problematic dirt byways, an unresolved issue that is exploding into a fiscal and potentially legal nightmare.

Much like Fox, Hammertown, South and North Beech Plain, Sage, Roberts and several other miles of dirt roads in Sandisfield identified as in need of repair, Dodd continues to mud up, wash out, and be at times impassable even though quaintly dusty by June.

Scenic reminders of New England's horse- and oxen-drawn beginnings, dirt roads have been altered by climate change and heavy use, a far cry from a time when they could be abandoned to mud and a school vacation. In many cases, access has not kept pace with the demand for rural living space.

The main roads have been paved over, but Sandisfield still has 81 miles of dirt roads, 58 percent of its total. Caring for those 81 miles sucks up about 40 percent of the Town's budget.

It's therefore astonishing that no action plan was developed following a 2020 Rural Dirt Road Assessment and recommendation study conducted for the towns of Sandisfield, Sheffield, and New Marlborough. It warned of the impending costs that will only worsen and present significant expenses to these and other towns like them as climate changes further erode poorly designed road foundations.

This year's town budget is on track to increase by about five percent with a \$78,000 increase in highway expenses alone. The tax burden is on residents who already pay more than 86 percent of towns in the Commonwealth based on per capita income.

Back in 1996 when I first drove up Dodd Road one beautiful afternoon in June, there wasn't much traffic or freeze/thaw cycles that would by 2016 turn it at times into a muddy mire. It

could be so impassable to emergency vehicles and 4-wheel drive pickups that on one occasion an excavator had to be employed by a neighbor to rescue his mud-trapped wife.

It's a case in point about runaway costs that threatens to bankrupt the Town without proper planning and without a proper legal foundation.

In January of 2020 at one of many Select Board meeting I attended to plead for remedy, Selectman Brian O'Rourke admonished complainers by quoting from published reports about similar problems throughout the county. And anyway, he noted, the town can't afford expensive fixes.



"Sandisfield is not unique during mud season," he said. "We are doing as much as all the other towns. It's a money problem."

At that meeting O'Rourke, a builder, learned of 160 acres for sale along an unmaintained single-lane, uninhabited, and nearly impassable section of Dodd Road. Within days, he had bought the land for about \$1,000 an acre – a fire sale because of its inaccessibility.

The tables then turned and O'Rourke demanded road improvements and got them – about \$20,000 in November 2023 to upgrade and widen a 1,400-foot seasonal section beyond the last driveway on Dodd to accommodate his intention to build homes for himself and immediate family. The work was outsourced to a road contractor who answered a bid that didn't mention the road by name. The improvements and widening failed for the same reasons the rest of the road already had – poor drainage and an improper base, and this time added a wetlands violation component that resulted in a cease-and-desist order to

the Select Board from the Town's Conservation Commission. It was the same section that had been improved and a culvert repaired a year earlier by town employees using town equipment and materials for an unknown cost.

This time, just last December, the Town closed this section of the road, illegally blocking access to three landowners including access to my own firewood lot. Thus the Town spent tens of thousands of dollars only to turn a passable road into an impassable one.

No surveys were conducted prior to the botched work, which is a prescribed requirement in most towns which research a road survey "layout" for proper boundaries in order to gain voter approval.

It became convenient at the recent January 29 Select Board working session to heap blame on outgoing highway chief Brad Curry even though the town manager had discussed the work with O'Rourke on site.

At that same meeting, the board then assumed the responsibility to launch a third attempt and spend another \$50,000-\$60,000 to make proper repairs to the same 1,400 feet. Forward motion was halted when selectmen said they were unaware of the cease-and-desist order from the Conservation Commission caused by road work failures and erosion of nonvirgin material into a wetlands area. The Select Board acknowledged a communication breakdown. It's unclear how much restoration, survey, and engineering studies might eventually cost the Town.



I can't help but wonder how far \$100,000 spent wisely might have gone to improve the rest of the mile-long road or others like it at risk of a repeat of the Dodd Road muddy money pit disaster. It's a cautionary tale. 🍷

### 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.*

# The Dodd Road Extension Quagmire

By Bill Price

The plan to extend Dodd Road beyond Joshua's Farm has slipped into a quagmire of its own.

The usable portion of the mile-long dirt road begins at its intersection with New Hartford Road, passes Looking Glass Gardens, effectively ending at #45, the entrance to Joshua's Farm. This driveable section of road, delightful in good weather, can turn into a quagmire of mud when the top few inches thaw above the frozen road in winter, occasionally trapping even 4-wheel-drive vehicles and cars and pickups, causing a few residents to abandon their vehicles and slog home on foot. Several generations of Select Boards and DPW superintendents have tried and failed to make the maintained portion of the road secure in all seasons.

The current Select Board is making its own stab at it, but lacks the money to redo the road entirely. The board is considering drainage changes and other improvements, possibly leading to ultimately black-topping the road.

Meanwhile, last November the board slipped into its own Dodd Road quagmire. According to November 13 minutes, the board was asked to extend the road beyond the maintained portion. Brian O'Rourke, a local builder and former selectman, asked the board to find a way to permanently repair the unimproved portion

of Dodd that extends about 1,400 feet beyond #45 before running into the Sandisfield State Forest. O'Rourke needed to be able to reach forest property he bought in 2020 where he planned to log a portion and build one or more homes.

The board and the Department of Public Works began the process of accommodating the plan, without taking the steps of acquiring permits or notifying abutting neighbors which would be required of a Town resident. The DPW often proceeded with roadwork under the rubric of a blanket approval agreement, which granted it pretty much carte blanche when repairing or improving the Town's dirt roads.

As work progressed, the outsourced construction crew, with little or no oversight, failed to create a proper base under the new roadway and as well as failing to ensure drainage. During subsequent heavy rain, the new roadway became a river of mud leading into the wetland.

In December the Conservation Commission issued a Cease & Desist order to the Town. The work had already ground to a halt, after a cost

so far of about \$20,000. Because of heavy rain and the under-constructed roadway, the newly extended portion of Dodd became even more impassable than it had been before the work started.

The Town put up "Road Closed" signs just beyond #45, blocking access to three private lots beyond it.

According to neighbors along Dodd Road, this was the second attempt to improve and widen this part of the road. The first attempt, a year earlier, also failed, although a new culvert was installed through the wetlands. At a January working session, the Town Manager reported that heavy-equipment operators had estimated the cost to repair the 1,400 feet extension beyond #45 would be \$50,000-\$60,000, probably not including the road drainage.

Some of the steps taken by the Select Board to extend the road can be reviewed online at sandisfieldma.com at the board's meeting minutes for November 13, 2023, January 22, 2024, the January 29 working session, and the January 29 meeting.

At its February 12 and 20 meetings, the Select Board discussed how to respond to the Cease & Desist order and how to fulfill the requirements demanded by the Conservation Commission, one of which was to produce a Notice of Intent for the work and another to restore the area to its original condition. The Town may also be required to conduct a survey and to further prove that the extension is a public byway, although it has been found as such on existing state maps.



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Mar 2nd October Road 8-11pm

Mar 9th The 413s 8-11pm

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Mar 17th The Hilltown O'Blues Jam 2pm

Mar 22nd Country Line Dancing with Tina 7:30-9:30pm

Mar 23rd Evan Lanoue Trio 7-10pm

Mar 24th Easter Candle Workshop 1pm

Mar 30th Acoustic Bandwidth 7-11pm

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# The Pilbin Property

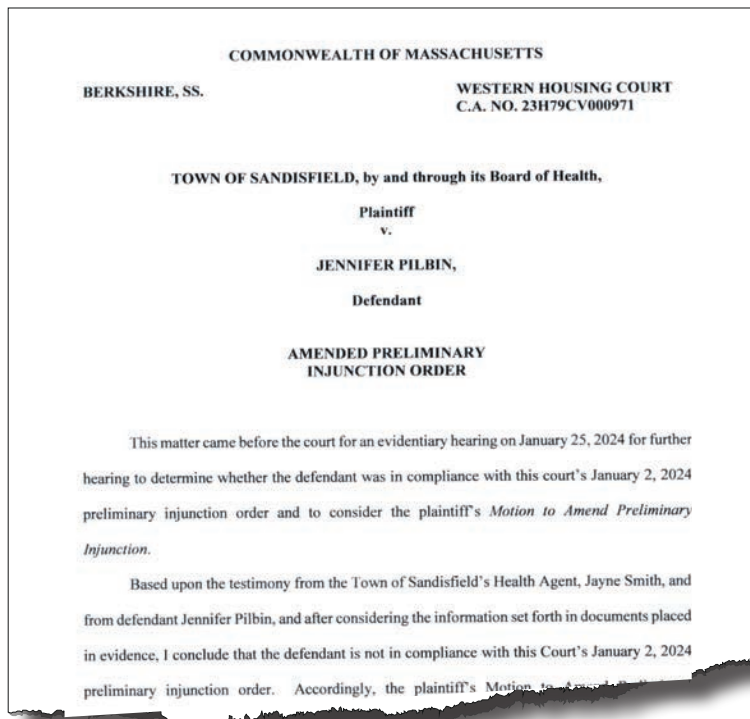
## SANDISFIELD TAKES A RESIDENT TO COURT

By Bill Price

The dispute between the Town of Sandisfield and Jennifer Pilbin is back in court.

A public hearing is scheduled for March 6 at Western Housing Court in Pittsfield to ensure that Ms. Pilbin has carried out January 30 instructions of the court to vacate and clean up her property at 12 West Hubbard Road in Sandisfield.

If the court finds she has failed to do so, Associate Justice Jeffrey M. Winik has said the punishment could be that she be “prohibited from entering the property for any reason without first obtaining permission from the Town of Sandisfield or an order from this Court.”



For a number of years, various Town Select Boards have tangled with Ms. Pilbin over the condition of her property, as well as the Sandisfield Department of Health and a few discussions with the Planning Board, most of which resulted in more debate, findings, resolutions, all of which were delayed, ignored, or cancelled for one reason or another, often by Ms. Pilbin or her lawyers.

Last August Ms. Pilbin's property was under foreclosure by the bank holding her mortgage, but because of her bankruptcy declaration in September that procedure was put on hold.

In November the Town filed a civil complaint in Western Housing Court that resulted in a January 2 ruling that Ms. Pilbin and her mother not be allowed to continue living in the RV/trailer where she had been living without water, septic, or electricity since buying the property in 2019.

At a second hearing on January 30, Justice Jeffrey M. Winik found that Ms. Pilbin was still living on the property, not in the trailer but rather in tents, a pod, and occasionally in a Nissan Altima. The judge found that “multiple defective and dangerous conditions, taken together, constitute an immediate threat to the safety of Ms. Pilbin, her mother, and those persons occupying abutting properties.” He noted defective electric wiring strung on the property, portable propane heaters, and numerous filled plastic gasoline jugs stored

near generators and living spaces, and that “the retention and dumping of human waste on the property poses a grave and immediate threat to public health.”

At the hearing, The Berkshire Eagle reported that “Pilbin told the judge she has a traumatic brain injury and explained that both she and her mother have disabilities and deserve accommodations. She also said the Select Board and the Board of Health ‘have been very aggressive.’”

Rather than sympathy, the judge found that the “public interest outweighs any harm that Ms. Pilbin may experience by being required to vacate property that is being used in a manner that endangers the health and safety of the Town’s residents.”

She was directed to cease using her property as a living space as of February 2 and to remove the trailers, tents, pods, debris, and other trash by February 29.

The Town was directed to inspect her property every Friday to ensure her compliance.

On March 6, Judge Winik was to determine if Pilbin had complied with the order and if not he could prohibit her and her mother from entering the property for any reason without Sandisfield or the Court’s permission.

In the meantime, Ms. Pilbin’s problem turned up on Facebook Connect Sandisfield when her mother, MaryAlice O’Connor, posted a letter published in The Berkshire Eagle complaining that Sandisfield was denying a citizen the use of their own property. As often on Facebook, comments ranged from righteous indignation to “what about the Constitution?” to reasoned arguments for one side or another, including excerpts from the Town bylaws.

The issue was not settled on ConnectSandisfield, but might be at the public hearing March 6 in Western Housing Court, 76 East Street, in Pittsfield. The hearing is open to the public and anyone with a comment or an opinion is welcome to attend and maybe even speak. ■



**Spring Forward** Change Your Clocks  
Check Smoke Detector Batteries



# Sandisfield Arts Center

ARTS CENTER 2024 PREVIEW

## New Presentations and a Few Favorites

**TOMAS KUBINEK,  
JOSH LUXON-ROBINSON,  
AND TRIPLE PLAY WITH  
CHRIS BRUBECK**

*By Hilde Weisert*

We're still putting the finishing touches on the 2024 schedule, but we're pleased to share some highlights for the first part of the season.

Our doors open Saturday April 27 when Sandisfield history writer Ron Bernard presents a talk and slide show on his latest book, *The Little Brown Church of New Boston, Mass, and the Lives of Its Pastors: 150 Years of Heritage and Revival*.

We are delighted that this year's judge for the Daniel Manacher Young Artists Prize (see "Call for Artists," page 2) is the eminent artist Josephine Halvorson, Professor of Art and Chair of Graduate Studies in Painting at Boston University. Halvorson is a neighbor, with a home in New Marlborough and a studio in Sandisfield. Open to artists 17-26 years of age who reside or go to school in Berkshire County, the competition's call for artists runs through April 7. Visit [www.sandisfieldartscenter.org](http://www.sandisfieldartscenter.org) for details.

Our Gallery opens another outstanding season on Saturday May 4 with a 4-6 p.m. reception for "After the Thaw," a group show of work by members of the Guild of Berkshire Artists.

On either Saturday May 5 or the following Saturday, the 11th, we open our Memorial Garden with poems and a reception in honor of Val Coleman. A contribution by Val's family was instrumental in turning the garden into a living reality.

June has two events featuring world-class performers:

On June 15, Tomáš Kubínek brings his internationally acclaimed solo performance

to our stage. "A collision of theatre and music-hall, his exuberant one-man show is equal parts comic brilliance, virtuosic vaudeville, and irresistible charm." Kubínek has had sold-out runs around the world, including on Broadway and at London's Royal Festival Hall, where England's Time Out described him as "Hilarious and enormously talented!"

On June 22, Triple Play with Chris Brubeck returns. Their shows mixing folk, jazz, blues, and classical music always sell out, so get your tickets early. Tickets go on sale in late March.

Both the Kubínek show and Triple Play are supported in part by grants from our own Sandisfield Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

Sunday June 30, we host "Pick Up the Pen: Start Your Writing Project," a community workshop by the talented author and performer Lara Tupper.

More music in July: The first weekend, Ben Luxon narrates a program bringing James Joyce's Ulysses to life with some of the songs from the book sung by tenor Dan Luxon and piano accompaniment by Josh Luxon-Robinson. Josh, who dazzled the Sandisfield audience last year with Romantic piano selections and a Gershwin encore, returns Sunday July 28 for an afternoon piano recital.

Please check our website at [sandisfieldartscenter.org](http://sandisfieldartscenter.org) in late March for the full schedule and to reserve tickets. 📄

## False Fire and Police Alarm Bylaw to be Enforced



*Posted On The Town Website,  
February 1, 2024*

Because of the cost and effort required to answer false fire and police alarms, the Town announced in January that it will begin to enforce the bylaw, adopted in 2019, that outlines rules and regulations covering alarm devices that signal directly to an emergency department.

Fines will be imposed, as well.

1. First violation in a calendar year: warning
2. Second violation in a calendar year: \$150.00
3. Third and subsequent violation in a calendar year: \$300.00

In addition, all emergency alarm systems need to be registered and approved by the Police or Fire Department, as appropriate, upon installation. Owners/operators of alarm systems already installed should register their systems with the Sandisfield Police or Fire Department, as appropriate.

Please refer to the full text of the bylaw at [sandisfieldma.gov](http://sandisfieldma.gov), under Home News and Announcements. 📄

*The Historic*

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# Paige's Place

## DINERS! LISTEN UP!

By Ron Bernard

There is a new restaurant called Paige's Place, on Route 8/ South Main Rd., in downtown West Otis. Located in the former Farmington River Diner, Paige's is well worth a visit.



Eric Danforth and Megan McClure, have embarked on fulfilling their vision to offer casual diners something different, a country place with good local food at reasonable prices. And a welcoming, unhurried atmosphere...a gathering space.

Eric is a native of Dalton while Megan hails from Pennsylvania. They met in Maine where Eric was a cook for the Appalachian Mountain Club Initiative. For the past eight years they have been at Gould Farm in Monterey. He started as a team leader, then gained serious experience in their major kitchen before being named manager of the Bakery for the last two years. The couple have two pre-school-age children, Ronan and Eliot.

Eric understands Berkshires culture and mindset. He thinks that the discombobulation caused by the pandemic and its aftermath have been hard on people here. Eateries have closed and entertainment



Eric Danforth and Megan McClure welcome all diners to their new restaurant. They operate Paige's Place with the help of Ronan, 4, and Eliot, 24 months.

Photo: Laureen DuBon, courtesy of the Otis Observer.

and gathering venues have withered. "It feels like a food desert here," he said. He also believes that traditional socialization has suffered along with fewer places for people to get together. For a while now the couple has been chewing on the idea of a cozy diner-café blend in a welcoming open space.

They noticed last fall that the Farmington River Diner, a beloved local eatery, was up for sale. They approached owner Lynn Pyenson who was eager to retire. Eric said, "She made time for me and I came away feeling that this opportunity was right for us. The need was obvious and the scale and atmosphere were right too. We want to carry on the tradition but add a little vitality and variety to the experience."

The property sale closed in December and the doors opened on January 12. A venture like this is not without risk and the couple has, with the encouragement and help of family, invested significantly.



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The restaurant is named in honor of Eric’s late mother, a generous person who was devoted to helping people in need. She was also active in the betterment of community life. Her spirit has influenced their idea about making Paige’s more than just a place to eat and run. The motto is, “food, coffee, community.”

Any patron of the former diner will recognize the space which, only a few weeks in, has not much changed. The dining area has been slightly rearranged with a few new accoutrements, hints of what may come. An old fashioned turntable with a great stack of vinyl records plays pop classics, softly, all the time. We had lunch with Tom Petty.



What is noticeable is that breakfast and lunch fare has definitely been upgraded, albeit the range of menu items is a bit limited – for now. Our BLT on fresh sourdough roll with a side of greens was indeed delicious.



We asked, “How’s business?” Eric said, “It’s been quite busy, we are pretty much full all the time. People say to us every day, ‘Thank you. We really needed this,’ which is encouraging.” Megan said, “Frankly, we had no idea if anyone would come but it has been amazing, so far.” Word-of-mouth and feature articles in the Eagle and Otis Observer in January have raised awareness. While there we happened on Sandisfield friends who were checking things out. “The food is good!” they said.

The couple plans a “grand opening” in May. Look for notices and ads starting next month.

Meanwhile, they are proceeding in a deliberate, business-like way, assessing progress day-to-day and looking for feedback, ideas and wants from the public. “We have all sorts of plans,” Eric said. It will be interesting to see how Paige’s Place evolves. 🍷

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# Fire and EMT Reappointments

## ITEM: REVIEW & MAKE APPOINTMENTS – VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS, EMTs, & DEPUTY FIRE CHIEFS

From Select Board Minutes, January 29

Chairman Steve Sedden reports the Select Board [had] failed to appoint the Volunteer Firefighters, EMTs, and Deputy Fire Chief. [Discussion ensued with Police Chief/Deputy Fire Chief Michael Morrison holding that Sandisfield's Fire Chief had always made these appointments and Chairman Sedden's belief that it had always been the responsibility of the Select Board to appoint officials into the Department.]

Deputy Fire Chief, Eric Pachulski has provided a list of all the current Firefighters and EMTs for the Select Board to appoint. Michael notes some members are more active than others.

Steve questions Ralph Morrison's reappointment [as Fireman/EMT] as he resigned in 2023. Michael reports Ralph only resigned as the Fire Chief, not as a firefighter/EMT. Steve expresses hesitation towards Ralph's reappointment.

Michael expresses concern that the ambulance will be in jeopardy without Ralph because there is "really only one EMT... that's active," Rico Sanchez. He notes that they have three EMTs in the process of getting their final certifications and paperwork in order, but until then he believes the Ambulance cannot run properly without Ralph as the State may revoke their license without enough EMTs.

Robert Fedell requests clarification on the four other EMTs listed if Michael claims

only Rico is active. Michael reports, "Zoe's [Marinelli] probably on her way out, Sherri's [Jennison] on a leave of absence, Mike's [Loglisci] not very active." Michael confirms that Alec Morrison and Shamus Gerrity will take their final written EMT test in February and their new potential hire, Charles Kuzmech, while being nationally certified as an EMT, [is in the process of acquiring Massachusetts certification.]

Due to the events regarding Ralph Morrison as Fire Chief recently, Steve does not feel confident reappointing him. A motion was made and seconded to appoint everyone on the list, except for Ralph Morrison.

Discussion opens. Michael reiterates that he feels the decision to not reappoint Ralph puts the ambulance squad in jeopardy. Barbara Cormier notes that there are other certified EMTs in Town and Sandisfield has Mutual Aid. Michael states that the Town cannot rely solely on Mutual Aid, as the majority of Town's have a lack of EMTs and are utilizing Mutual Aid at the same time.

It's questioned when Mary Bredenfoerder will be back as an EMT, Michael states he has "no idea."

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to appoint everyone on the list, except for Ralph Morrison.

– Steve Seddon, Aye; John Field, Aye; Robert Fedell, Aye. 🗳️

*Editor's Note: See a related Letter to the Editor, page 17.*



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## Search for Fire Chief Continues

Currently Police Chief Mike Morrison and Fireman Eric Pachulski are serving as Interim Fire Chiefs. In December, the Select Board and the Fire Department approved a job description for Fire Chief and will evaluate options for a permanent position during the Town's budgeting process, with the goal of presenting a new leadership budget/structure to voters at the Annual Town Meeting.

A link to the Fire Chief job description is available on the Town website at sandisfieldma.gov. 🗳️

# recreation COMMITTEE



## “Hop Into Spring” Coming Up

### JANUARY BREAK ENDS WITH VALENTINE CRAFTS

By Laurie Seddon


The entire Rec Committee enjoyed reconnecting with the couple dozen residents who joined us after our January break for our Valentine’s Day Craft Event on February 10. It was so nice to see so many neighbors at the start of our 2024 season.

A special thank you to the Council on Aging for the use of their facilities downstairs in Town Hall. It was such a nice fit. We had invited everyone to join us for Valentine-themed crafting and refreshments with keepsake boxes of different shapes, festive tables with red, pink, and white tablecloths. and a huge assortment of bedazzles, paints, stickers, roses, and more with which to personalize your keepsake box. We also had Valentine card kits ready to be assembled and decorated.

There was plenty to munch on while waiting for our paint/glue to dry: assorted bagels, mini-muffins, and fruit. Thanks for joining us.

**Our next event: “Hop Into Spring.” YES, WITH BERKSHIRE BUNNIES. Saturday, March 23 from 1:00 a.m. until noon at Old Town Hall.** Everyone is invited to join us for seed planting, flowerpot painting/crafting, light refreshments, and, yes, BERKSHIRE BUNNIES will bring their cute, cuddly, real live bunnies for us to meet and hold and pet.

“Hop Into Spring” is one of our most popular events so we have to ask you to please send an RSVP so we know how many to expect. Please let us know by March 15 at [sandisfeldevents@recreationcommittee.info](mailto:sandisfeldevents@recreationcommittee.info).

And save the date coming up for our Spring Fling Dance, **Saturday, May 4 from 5:00-8:00 p.m.** at Fire House #2 on Rt. 57. Don’t miss it. 

# Hop Into Spring

with the  
Sandisfield Recreation Committee

Everyone is invited! Join us for seed planting, flowerpot painting/crafting, light refreshments and...

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10AM to 12PM

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# “Promiscuous Pollination” for a Better Garden

By Tom Christopher

Joseph Lofthouse, a farmer and author of *Paradise*, Utah, recently changed the way I think about my Sandisfield garden.

As a horticulturist, I was taught to be a plant connoisseur. My teachers and mentors encouraged me to focus on the “best” variety of each plant species I grew. That meant the strain that produced the biggest, most colorful flowers, or in the vegetable garden, the hybrid crop that produced the biggest fruits in the greatest numbers.

That attitude, Joseph told me, had serious implications for his own farm and garden in the sunny and dry mountain valley where *Paradise* is located. Daytime temperatures there commonly rise into the 90’s in midsummer, yet, he told me, frost might roll down from the surrounding peaks during any month of the year.

Joseph bought seeds of the “best” melon and squash cultivars but harvested hardly a fruit. Which, given the special conditions of the local climate and soil, wasn’t surprising. Those cultivars were like thoroughbred horses; they can deliver a phenomenal performance but only under ideal conditions. The vegetable prodigies need regular, abundant moisture, not the once-a-week irrigation Joseph could provide in his dry climate. They need rich soils or regular fertilization, and they need a reliable, typically long, growing season. Finally, according to Joseph, these plants lacked genetic diversity.

They had been bred for uniformity and this lack of genetic diversity meant that they had extreme difficulty in adapting to any different conditions.



There was a spot of light, however, in Joseph’s gloomy harvest. A strain of corn, ‘Astronomy Domine Sweet Corn’, whose seed he had obtained from Alan Bishop, a grower in Indiana, flourished, although the ears it bore were of different sizes and shapes and kernels of different colors. In addition, every individual plant performed slightly differently. That was because this strain of corn was a so-called “landrace,” a genetically diverse strain that cross-pollinated freely to adapt to local conditions. The Indiana grower had started by interplanting hundreds of different corn cultivars and allowing them to interbreed without restraint. Each year he would save seeds from individual plants that grew robustly and bore tasty ears, and these became the basis for the next year’s crop. Over a period of years, this produced a race of sweet corn that was adapted to local conditions, and that, because of its greater genetic diversity, could continue to evolve as needed.

Lofthouse made the Indiana landrace the basis of his own corn breeding program and in a matter

of a few years had corn that flourished in his field without fertilizer, without pesticides, with minimal weeding, and only weekly irrigation.

He has since gone on to create similar landraces not only of melons and squashes but also all sorts of other vegetables.

Aside from the practical considerations of adaptation to local growing conditions, the ability to co-exist with pests without the aid of chemicals and sufficient vigor to compete with weeds with only one weeding soon after planting, Lofthouse emphasizes one more quality. The harvest must taste great, and not only in his opinion. He regularly consults with chefs, friends, and customers to get their input. He’s gardening for the community, and he trades seeds with other local growers so that they can all improve their vegetables and fruits, and the others’ donations help maintain the genetic diversity of his strains.

Not all vegetables are equally suited to Lofthouse’s treatment. A key is that the species must practice what he calls “promiscuous pollination.” That is, the plants must accept pollen from other specimens so that there is constant, spontaneous crossbreeding.

When I asked Lofthouse if the landrace treatment could help me develop a strain of tomatoes that will bear well even on my chilly, cloudy, and rocky Berkshire hilltop, he cautioned me that tomatoes typically self-pollinate so that offspring tend to be very similar genetically to their parents and so do not evolve as easily as corn or melons. Still, he said, tomatoes do occasionally cross-pollinate and he is working on creating a strain that outcrosses routinely to provide a foundation for gardeners such as me to create locally adapted landraces.

For more information about this intriguing style of gardening, you can listen to my conversation with Joseph Lofthouse by logging on to my free podcast, *Growing Greener*, at [www.thomaschristophergardens.com/podcast](http://www.thomaschristophergardens.com/podcast).

For full details on creating and managing landraces, you can purchase Joseph Lofthouse’s book, *Landrace Gardening, Food Security Through Biodiversity and Promiscuous Pollination*, from online book sellers or as a signed copy from <https://goingtoseed.org/>. I’ll be taking this book into the garden with me next spring. 🍷



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Our new website: sandisfieldlibrary.org

**Women's History Month** is celebrated every March in the United States and in other countries around the world. We honor the women of the past, suffragists, politicians, scientists, and artists who have made our world better. To understand more about women's role in the world check out these books at the library!

*Fly Girls* – How five daring women defied all odds and made aviation history.

*The Rebellious Life of Rosa Parks* – She not only sat down on the bus, she stood on the right side of justice her entire life.

*The Girls of Atomic City* – the story of the women who helped win World War II.

*Beyond Innocence* – the autobiography of Jane Goodall in her letters.

*The Women's March* – a novel of the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession.

*The Radium Girls* – the dark story of America's shining women.

### EVENTS AT THE LIBRARY

March 28 at 6:30 p.m., the **Sandisfield Ladies Book Club** will meet to discuss *The Crossing* by Elly Griffiths.

March 20 starting at 6:00 p.m., we have **Games Night** at the Library. Join in for the flavor of the month, Pinochle, Rummy, Apples to Apples, Scrabble and more. All ages are encouraged. Bring your wits and your smiles. We'd love see them both.

All month long – It is never too late to participate in the **Massachusetts Center for**

**the Book 2024 Reading Challenge.** The March challenge book is a book whose protagonist has a different culture or lifestyle from you. April's is a book about nature, the environment or climate change.

### LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY SHELVES (ADULT FICTION AND NON-FICTION)

- *The Raging Storm* by Ann Cleeves
- *Ghosts of Honolulu* by Mark Harmon
- *My Friends* by Hisham Matar
- *Wandering Stars* by Tommy Orange
- *American Girls* by Jessica Roy
- *Burma Sahib* by Paul Theroux
- *The Women* by Kristin Hannah
- *You Only Call When You Are in Trouble* by Stephen McCauley
- *How to Be* by Adam Nicholson
- *Martyr* by Kaveh Akbar
- *Three-Inch Teeth* by CJ Box
- *End of Story* by A. J. Finn
- *The Bad Weather Friend* by Dean Koontz
- *The Summer Book Club* by Susan Mallery
- *A Grandmother Begins the Story* by Michelle Porter
- *Holmes, Marple and Poe* by James Patterson
- *5 Ingredients Mediterranean* by Jamie Oliver

### YOUNG ADULT / OLDER CHILDREN

- *Diary of a Wimpy Kid No Brainer* by Jeff Kinney
- *Cat Kid Comic Club #5: Influencers* by Dav Pilkey
- *I Survived the American Revolution, 1776* by Lauren Tarshis
- *I Survived the Great Alaska Earthquake, 1964* by Lauren Tarshis
- *I Survived the Wellington Avalanche, 1910* by Lauren Tarshis

### CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- *Happy St. Patrick's Day from the Crayons* by Drew Daywalt

- *Grumpy Monkey Spring Fever* by Suzanne Lang
- *Nightshade Revenge* by Anthony Horowitz
- *Kelp Finds a Way to Help* by Natalie Shaw
- *Are You Big* by Mo Willems

### LIBRARIAN'S BOOK REVIEW

*Deus X* by Stephen Mack Jones.

There is nothing like a good murder mystery to curl up with late at night, when the wind rattles the windows and the snow flies. *Dus X* is the fourth novel in Stephen Mack Jones' mystery series whose protagonist is former cop August Snow. The books stand alone and there is no need to read the first three in order to enjoy this one. But they are all great, little reads.

Unlike other mystery/cop novels I have read, this series does not take place in bucolic settings such as a small English villages or metropolises such as New York City or San Francisco. Here mystery abounds in the decaying city of Detroit and a former Detroit cop and now private investigator, August Snow is on the case. He is a man on mission, to rebuild a part of broken Detroit (with the help of numerous friends and a \$12 million settlement for wrongful termination). He is proceeding one brick at a time. As Snow has plenty of money, he can kill off or buy off villains that get in the way. This can lead to funny scenes. August Snow does not do his sleuthing alone. He is helped by friends and family including but not limited to Tomas, his tough as nails godfather with an arsenal to match, and Lucy, the computer hacker. The book is a lovely balance of plot, characterization, and dialogue. 📖



# Comings and Goings



## JUDITH ARNOLD

1942-2024

Rest in Peace Grandma, Judi. BINGO!

Judith A. (LaMudge) Arnold, formerly of Housatonic and Sandisfield, entered into eternal rest on Thursday, January 18, at her home in Ohio.

She died peacefully with her daughter by her side.

Judi was born on February 4, 1942, to Donald H. and Emma E. LaMudge. She was raised in Housatonic and was a 1959 graduate of Searles High School. She enjoyed working as a teachers' aide for many years and also sold real estate in Southern Berkshire County.

In 1990 Judi married Francis L. Arnold at Our Lady of the Valley Church in Sheffield. Together they owned and operated White Birch Flower Farm on Sandisfield Road and sold flowers throughout Berkshire County and Connecticut. During their 31 years together, Judi and Francis traveled the world over many times.

After Francis passed on December 12, 2021, Judi relocated to Northern Ohio to be close to her children and grandchildren. She quickly became a fan of Cleveland's sports teams. She loved baseball and enjoyed watching every Cleveland Indians game. She made many new friends while residing in Ohio and enjoyed attending community events there.

Judi passed away after a very brief illness and leaves behind two children, her son, Billy Snyder and fiancé Amy Lucas of Ohio, and her daughter, Melissa Allen and her husband Robert of Milton, Florida. She is also survived by three grandchildren: Alexandra, Nicholas, and Emma.

Her Memorial and Celebration of Life will be private.





**IRVING M. LEVINE**  
1930-2024



Irving M. Levine, of Sandisfield and White Plains, New York, died on January 11 in White Plains. Irving was a longtime civil rights activist and community organizer.

In 1965, Irving and his wife, the former Marion Steier, bought the former c.1840 Baptist parsonage next to the Sandisfield Arts Center on Hammertown Road. They were frequent weekenders and cherished their time in their Sandisfield retreat. They were introduced to Sandisfield by their friend, Sid Pinsky of Silverbrook Road, who was also a community organizer in New York City during the turbulent 1960s.

Raised in Brooklyn, Levine served for 25 years in various roles at the American Jewish Committee, including head of urban affairs and, later, director of national affairs. As the principal organizer and chairman of the National Consultation on Ethnic America at Fordham University in June 1968, he

championed a “new pluralism” that, unlike the “melting pot” theory, balanced small group identities with a commitment to society as a whole.

“There are many pathways and byways to living in a pluralistic society,” he told The New York Times in a 1982 profile. “People ought to have a chance to identify in the way they feel most comfortable.”

After an early retirement, he helped found a think tank on new progressive visions for U.S. and Middle East policy.

Levine is survived by his wife of 72 years, his children Lori Levine, Michael Levine, and Robert Levine, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.



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# Cultural Awards Announced

By Jennifer Hibbins

The Sandisfield Cultural Council is pleased to announce that we have awarded \$6,000 in grants to 18 organizations or individuals to provide cultural programming to the residents of Sandisfield and surrounding areas in FY2024.

- Becket Arts Center, Music Brings Communities Together
- Berkshire South Community Center, Berkshire Ukulele Band and Berkshire Sings
- Ed the Wizard Pirate Party at Sandisfield Library
- Farmington River Elementary for field trips to Amelia Park Children's Museum, Berkshire Museum and Old Sturbridge Village, plus a Community Musical production
- Farmington River PTA, Family Hoedown with Cliff Brodeur
- Greenagers, Education and Trail Stewardship
- Jane Burke, Sparks at Flying Cloud Farm (creative learning for children)
- Lara Tupper, Pick Up the Pen: Start Your Writing Project at Sandisfield Arts Center
- MUSIC Dance.edu, Hip Hop Dance Chair Exercise for Seniors
- New Marlborough Village Association, Meeting House Programs
- Sandisfield Arts Center, Chris Brubeck and Triple Play
- Sandisfield Arts Center, Tomas Kubinek: A Family Spectacular
- Sandisfield Cultural Council, Sandisfield Memorial Day Parade
- Sandisfield Recreation Committee, Sandisfield Family Fun Day
- WAM Theatre, 2024 Season of Events

In keeping with our council priorities, grants were awarded to applicants that best met the following criteria: The venue should reach a large group in the community. Community-wide gatherings are desired. School children and activities related to learning are a high priority, as well as events for senior citizens in town. Local presenters dealing with the arts, humanities and sciences are encouraged.



The Sandisfield Cultural Council is supported by an annual grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, as well as funding of \$500 from the Town of Sandisfield.

The Council seeks additional members to carry out our mission to broaden and enhance the cultural life available to the town of Sandisfield and its residents. Members who join now will have time to get up to speed before the next grant cycle in the fall. Reach out to any current member for more information on joining: Alexcia Adams, Karema Almeida, Connie Canty, Ellen Croibier, Jennifer Hibbins, Jennifer Lenz, or Ashley Nikituk. Or contact us by email at [culturalcouncil@sandisfieldma.gov](mailto:culturalcouncil@sandisfieldma.gov)

## FROM THE TOWN WEBSITE



### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY: PLANNING BOARD ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

The Planning Board is seeking an Administrative Assistant!

Job responsibilities include writing and posting minutes and agendas, processing bills, and being the liaison for the Planning Board and the public. Expected commitment is two hours per week.

Full job description, compensation information, and how to apply can be seen on [sandisfieldma.gov](http://sandisfieldma.gov).

### FY23 ANNUAL TOWN REPORT



Posted on Town website: December 22, 2023, 11:18am

#### ANNUAL REPORT

The FY23 Annual Town Report is now available. Two reports are pending and physical copies will be printed thereafter for anyone who requests one.

The Report can be viewed on [sandisfieldma.gov](http://sandisfieldma.gov) on the Town Clerk's page




### NEW BURN PERMIT APPLICATION PROCESS

Posted on Town website: December 8, 2023

The Town of Sandisfield has a new Burn Permit Application Process!

Please see the Fire Department web page on [sandisfieldma.gov](http://sandisfieldma.gov) for burning regulations and how to apply for a permit!

As a reminder burning season is between January 15th and May 1st.



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## Letters to the Editor

### WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH?

A Select Board meeting on January 29 left me baffled.

The selectmen reviewed a list of Fire Department personnel, and Selectman Seddon said he was OK with all on the list except one person, Ralph Morrison. Ralph had resigned as the chief of the Fire Department, but continued as a firefighter and more important as an EMT.

The ambulance is required by law to have a licensed EMT on board in order to respond. Police Chief Mike Morrison replied that the town had several individuals close to being state licensed, but not EMTs yet. Currently, Sandisfield has few licensed first responders available. Chief Morrison and I both expressed that the welfare of town residents would be in jeopardy if Ralph were to be removed from the list of EMTs and we needed to rely on the current EMTs to respond to most of the calls. The selectman's response was to point out other EMTs on the book who could respond and mutual aid from neighboring towns.

Chief Morrison clarified that only EMT Rico Sanchez would be responding, as the other EMTs on the book were very limited in responding at this time, if at all, for various reasons. Chief Morrison also informed the selectmen that the state could revoke our license without enough EMTs. The selectmen continued to consider mutual aid and non-responding EMTs as sufficient. Keeping Ralph as a responder was not an option.

Mutual aid adds time to any emergency response and is already stressed in its responses. The mere size of our town takes a toll on ambulance response time. The selectmen only need to allow Ralph to remain on the Fire Department/EMT until other EMTs become certified or even until Ralph ages out. It is appalling that they would risk the welfare of town residents just to continue an attack on Ralph. Also, volunteer EMT Rico is being forced to be a full-time EMT without full-time compensation or concern about his availability.

This continued attack on Ralph is unprecedented and sadly continues to poison the town. When will they stop?

*Mary Turek  
Sandisfield Road*

### "RELIABLE. REGULAR. RELEVANT."

What about journalist integrity and reporting being fair and unbiased? Your Jan/Feb 2024 cover article and headline " 'Cityiots Win a Round' " is neither.

Your paper states "The story and photographs, published January 13, are republished here with the permission from The Eagle."

The Eagle's online edition of this story does not include the "Cityiots" derogatory phrase in the headline, yet was featured on the front page of the Sandisfield Times as misleading clickbait. This does an injustice to all Sandisfield residents invested in our community, whether we are full time, part time, seasonal or legacy.

This could have been handled much more responsibly as to the facts of the issue. Please do better to connect members of our small community to each other.

*Laura Bykowski  
Cronk Road*

### TO THE TIMES STAFF:

I really enjoy reading the Times and all it represents. My best for the upcoming year.

*Richard Hand  
Sanford, Maine*



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# Closing a Couple of Loops

By Margaret O'Clair and Bill Price

To finalize the discussion of how the dilapidated, falling-down houses on Rt. 8 at the foot of Tolland Road were demolished in 2010, we are reprinting here, with permission from The Berkshire Eagle, a letter to the editor by Margaret O'Clair of River Road. The letter is self-explanatory and furthers information contained in our "Letter From the Editor" in our January/February Times.

Letter to the Editor, The Berkshire Eagle, January 14, 2024. Reprinted with permission.

## MORE BEHIND SANDISFIELD TIMES' 1ST STORY

To the Editor:

I read the article about the hyperlocal papers popping up in the Berkshires with interest. ("In recent years, hyperlocal papers have popped up

across The Berkshires. Here's how they serve their communities," Eagle, Jan. 11.)

Unfortunately, the section about the first edition of The Sandisfield Times leaves out some important parts of the story: "The leading story in the first edition covered two broken down houses long visible on Route 8. Within six weeks, the ruins were gone."

The Eagle quoted the paper's founder, Simon Winchester: "My gosh, there's the power of the press. We can actually get things done."

Oh, if only it had been that simple.

Months before the publication of the article, the Sandisfield Board of Health, of which I was a member, decided to tackle the problem of the derelict houses in New Boston. There was little interest or support from the powers that be, so we decided to begin a citizens' petition drive. We gathered enough signatures to pique the interest of at least one Select Board member, and slowly the wheels of government began turning.

The Board of Health reached an amicable agreement with one of the property owners and, with help from the State Department of Public Health, we took the second property owner to court, where we prevailed. More legal work, more paperwork and more time were needed before the town was able to take the properties and put the demolition work out to bid and then "the ruins were gone."

It was nice to have the support of our local paper, but the truth is the heavy lifting was done by others.

Margaret A. O'Clair, Sandisfield

## A SYNAPSE SNAPS

A sense of full disclosure obliges me to acknowledge that I misspoke last month when in our print edition I attributed the work of the 2010 Sandisfield Board of Health to a "Margaret O'Brien" rather than Margaret O'Clair. My neighbor Margaret rang me up to remind me that we had been friends for 35 years and that my referring to her as "O'Brien" suggests that it might be time that my spurs be displayed on a wall rather than on my boots. I at once knew why I had made such a mistake. For another venue I had been writing about a child film star from the 1940s, Margaret O'Brien, and when I rewrote the sentence about the Board of Health simply typed too fast, causing a random synapse to snap. I apologized to my friend Margaret and we changed "O'Brien" to O'Clair in the online Times before our IT guru, Jean Atwater-Williams, released the online version to the ether. 🍷

Bill Price

Editor, The Sandisfield Times

# St. Patrick's Day Dinner - March 16

5:00-7:00 p.m.

at Fire Station #2 on Rt. 57.

Corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, homemade bread, beverages, and endless desserts!



\$18 for adults, \$7 for under 12. Dine in or take out

Dinner sponsored by the New Boston Congregational Church.



**Adam Brown**  
Consulting Forester  
MA License # 461

P.O. Box 171  
Sandisfield, MA 01255

[shireforestry@gmail.com](mailto:shireforestry@gmail.com)

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## WINTER SNOWFALL

2023-2024 Snowfall to date as measured/estimated at a Beech Plain back-yard weather station.

### November 2023

|             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| November 1  | 1.0 inches |
| November 21 | 2.0        |

### December 2023

|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| December 11 | 1.0 |
|-------------|-----|

### January 2024

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| January 7-9   | 11.5 |
| January 16    | 3.5  |
| January 19    | 1.0  |
| January 23    | 1.0  |
| January 28-29 | 4.5  |

### February 2024

|                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| February 13           | 1.5                |
| February 17           | 1.0                |
| February 23           | 1.0                |
| <b>Season to date</b> | <b>27.5 inches</b> |

# NOW HEAR THIS!

Edited by Laura Rogers-Castro. Please send notices for Now Hear This! to [editor@sandisfieldtimes.org](mailto:editor@sandisfieldtimes.org)

## MARCH 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](http://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 up with friends and meet new friends! For confirmation of dates, please call Nina at 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 at 258-3314. Free.

**Chair Yoga with Wendy Larsen** on Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on 3 Silverbrook Road, sponsored by the Council on Aging. For more information, contact Nina Carr at 258-3314. Free.

**Town Caucus on Monday, March 4 at 7:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on 3 Silverbrook Road.** The Caucus is for nominating candidates in the following offices: Moderator, Board of Assessors, Select Board, Board of Health, School Committee, and Planning Board.

**Presidential Primary on Tuesday, March 5 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on 3 Silverbrook Road.**

**St. Patrick's Day New Boston Church Benefit Dinner** on Saturday, March 16 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Fire Station #2. The dinner will include corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, homemade bread, beverages, and endless desserts. \$18 for adults and \$7 for children under 12. Dine in or take out. See ad for St. Patrick's Day dinner on page 18.

**Hop Into Spring** with the Sandisfield Recreation Committee featuring Berkshire Bunnies on Saturday, March 23 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Old Town Hall on 3 Silverbrook Road. There will be seed planting, flowerpot painting/crafting, light refreshments, and bunnies! Everyone is invited but please RSVP by March 15 to [sandisfeldevents@recreationcommittee.info](mailto:sandisfeldevents@recreationcommittee.info).

**New Boston Church Palm Sunday Worship Service** on Sunday, March 24 at 10:00 a.m. For more information, visit [newbostoncongregationchurch.org](http://newbostoncongregationchurch.org). All are welcome. The New Boston Church is located on Route 57.

**New Boston Church Easter Sunday Worship Service and Easter Egg Hunt** on Sunday, March 31 at 10:00 a.m. The children's Easter egg hunt will follow. For more information, visit [newbostoncongregationchurch.org](http://newbostoncongregationchurch.org). All are welcome. The New Boston Church is located on Route 57.

### ONLINE EVENTS

**A Farm and Garden Show** with Sandisfield Residents Bill Taylor and Jaye Alison Moscaricello streamed every Monday, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at [berkshireradio.org](http://berkshireradio.org).

**The Mount Book Club** via Zoom. on Thursday, March 21 from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. and will feature a discussion on Edith Wharton's *The Reef*. Visit [edithwharton.org/event/](http://edithwharton.org/event/) to register. Books are available for free online at Project Gutenberg.

**Slaying Dragons: *The Liberation of Sue Moody*** on Thursday, March 21 at 7:00 p.m. presented by author Gail Gelburd and sponsored by Notice Otis, in collaboration with the Monterey Historical Society. This is a Zoom and in person (Monterey Library) event and free to all. To register, please visit [www.otispreservationtrust.com/noticeotisevents](http://www.otispreservationtrust.com/noticeotisevents).

### EVENTS IN SURROUNDING TOWNS

**Playgroup** on Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Monterey Library, sponsored by South Berkshire Kids. No pre-registration is necessary. Meet for stories and songs followed by creative crafts. For information, please call Nina Carr at 258-3314. Free!

**Transformational Breathwork** with Sandisfield residents Antonia and Roger Vanoro on the last Friday of every month from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. at the Monterey Community Center. A combination of deep rhythmic breathing, vocalization, self massage, and energetic movement. The suggested fee is \$3 For more information, visit [ccmonterey.org](http://ccmonterey.org).

**Saturday Morning Bird Walks** at 10:00 a.m. on the River Front Trail in Great Barrington. Meet at the Berkshire Co-op Market and join Ben Nickley of Berkshire Bird Observatory. For questions and to register, email Ben ([ben@berkshirebirds.org](mailto:ben@berkshirebirds.org)) Beginners welcome. Free.

**Baked Potato Dinner** on Saturday, March 2 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. to support St. Ann Family Center's Youth Group students for a Service Trip.

The St. Ann Family Center is located at 134 Main Street in Lenox \$5 includes baked potato with toppings, beverage, and dessert.

**Wildlife Tracking** on Friday, March 8 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at CHP Great Barrington Health Center. The program will introduce basic track and trail patterns found in snow or muddy conditions while participating in an easy to moderate hike. There is some off-trail walking with elevation changes and unstable footing. Meet at the end of the parking area at the information kiosk and hiking trailhead. To sign up, visit [bnrc.org](http://bnrc.org).

**Sheffield Winter Market** on Saturday, March 9 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Dewey Hall on 91 Main Street. Local produce and meat, baked goods, crafts, and gifts. Live music.

**Great Barrington Winter Farmers Market** on Saturday, March 16 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Housy Dome on 1064 Main Street in Housatonic. Featuring locally grown and produced foods, including cheese, meats, breads, and more. Local musicians performing across a variety of styles and genres will be showcased.

**Free Bulb Show** through Sunday, March 17 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. every day at The Fitzpatrick Conservatory at the Berkshire Botanical Garden. The Bulb Show features thousands of bulbs in dozens of varieties, each one identified, including an evolving collection of traditional New England favorites such as narcissus, tulips, and grape hyacinths together with hardy varieties new to the show. Free for all!

**Great Barrington Arts Market** on Saturday, March 17 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Saint James Place on Main Street. This annual Winter Market features the finest regional artisan products.



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Donations of any amount are needed to ensure the continuation of this newspaper. Please send checks to: The Sandisfield

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*The Times* can be mailed to your home (non-Sandisfield addresses only) by paid subscription (see form at left) or you can read it (free) online as a PDF document at [www.sandisfieldtimes.org](http://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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*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](mailto:editor@sandisfieldtimes.org)*