

# THE SANDISFIELD TIMES

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## Up, Up and Away New Budget Calls for 9% Tax Increase

*By Debbie Harris*

At the Annual Town Meeting on Saturday, May 14, Sandisfield residents will be asked to vote on a town budget that calls for a 9% real property tax increase. The budget has a \$202,000 shortfall, which must be met by the tax increase. The increase amounts to at least \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation.

While much of the shortfall is due to an approximately \$150,000 increase in Sandisfield's portion of the school budget, this does not account for the entire amount. For the past three years the Town of Sandisfield has adopted a level budget in the hopes that the economy would improve. Unfortunately, as we all know only too well, this is not the case. Therefore, this year it is deemed necessary to make some expenditures that were held off in the past. Salaries for Town employees are being raised an average of 2%. A new, automated, library catalog system that will connect the Sandisfield library with other libraries throughout Massachusetts is being planned. State mandated computer equipment for ambulance calls as well as training to use the new programs are also included in the budget. However, it should be noted that most department and committee budgets are being held at current funding levels, or are asking for minimal increases.

One big new expense is compensation for Fire Department and EMS personnel. This is deemed necessary in order to keep our volunteer ambulance service. Because Sandisfield pays for training Fire Department and EMS volunteers, many people who volunteer for these positions let us train them and then *Cont'd p.4*



*Owner Kenn Basler and employee Cory Rice at the Monterey General Store*

## SO WHERE CAN I BUY A QUART OF MILK AROUND HERE?

*Photo and Article by Larry Dwyer*

Another sign of the hard economic times hit the Berkshires when the Monterey General Store closed its doors on April 3, 2011. Now, the only local shopping alternatives for basic food items for Sandisfield residents are the New Boston General Store, Terranova in Otis and the Mill River General Store.

The Monterey General Store was the only store in Monterey, and it was unique in several ways. It provided fresh baked goods (including French baguettes, croissants, donuts and pastries) on the weekends. Home-cooked soups were always on the menu, and the store featured a full service deli. It also provided free Internet access and live music on Friday evenings.

For local residents, the Monterey General Store served as an oasis; it was a central meeting place where people gathered in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere and bought basic necessities, without having to travel all the way to the *big-box* stores in Great Barrington or Lee.

The history of the Monterey General Store dates back to 1780, and the most recent owner was Kenn Basler, who bought the property in 2004. The reason the store closed is that business steadily decreased in the past two years to the point where Kenn could no longer meet the second of two mortgage payments, and was finally faced with foreclosure. Kenn said, "The first five years here were good and sales were going up and up, but in the last two years there was a steady decline in business. People *Cont'd p.5*



*Photo: Connie D'Andrea*

## The Black Plague

*By Dassy Herman*

I love to garden, to walk, or to just hang out. Since I am very allergic to the dreaded black fly, I spend the month of May all covered up and wearing a mesh bag over my head – so attractive! When I get a bite I try anything anyone suggests. I've found that the most important thing to limit swelling is to wash the bite with soap and water and take an antihistamine as soon as possible. I've tried using the following with varying degrees of success: anti-itch lotions and gels, a poultice of Adolph's Meat Tenderizer with a bit of water, cortisone cream, witch hazel, spit, very hot

water, or very cold ice. Someone suggested Clorox and water, but I'm afraid I'll burn a hole in my skin. Maybe one of those beanies with a fan on top would help. It really is hit or miss as to how well these things work. I think it depends on the strength of the venom - weak in the beginning and end of the month and strong in the middle. I've been told that dragon flies eat black flies, so I'm rooting for those dragon flies to come and save us.

If you know of any other remedies, please share them in a letter to the editor. All suggestions are welcome.



## So Where Can I Get A Quart of Milk Around Here? *Cont'd from p.1*

are watching their pennies and the summer shopping season is getting shorter. July and August are the biggest months for sales, and Memorial Day Weekend is big for us, but then the rest of June is dead. These two months are not enough to carry the store for the rest of the year. Also, ski traffic has slowed. Skiers used to buy breakfast and then dinner in the local restaurants. Now skiers just come up to ski and return straight home to save money."

When asked about the local business Kenn said, "There is no construction going on anymore, and we used to make between 70 and 80 sandwiches a day. We lost that business also." Kenn estimated the breakdown of sales from 75% for second-homeowners and 25% for local traffic, but trade was lost from both.

Kenn, who is still making payments on the first mortgage, was unable to meet the second mortgage when he took over the store operation from Helen Boehm in 2006. When asked, Kenn said, "If it wasn't for the mortgage, we could stay in business."

Kenn then gave an example of how general stores try to stay in business. "In Southfield the general store first became a restaurant and general store, and then a restaurant only. Now the store is lost. More local participation is needed if general stores are to survive. A conversation has to take place in the community."


The closing of the Monterey store follows the closing of the Blandford Country Store and the Five Corners General Store in Williamstown, both of which closed in early 2011. Five Corners was billed as the oldest continuous general store operating in America, and the Monterey General Store was second. Regrettably, these establishments might not be the last general stores to close in the Berkshires, as others are said to be struggling in the current poor economic climate.

As for the employees, Cory Rice worked at the store for two years and is a senior at Mt. Everett in Sheffield. When asked about what it was like to work at the store, he described it as "fun and convenient." Cory lives within walking distance of the store, and he worked stocking shelves, making sandwiches and as a cashier.

**The loss of the store is a loss to the whole community.**

General stores in rural communities can be compared in some ways to anchor stores in shopping malls. Such stores have rents that are heavily discounted, and are the main draw for shoppers: as shoppers walk from Macy's to Bloomingdale's they may visit any number of shops along the way. Without the anchor store, there is no mall. For Monterey, the general store was certainly the anchor store for the town center.

In June 2008, *Berkshire Living* ran an article on general stores. Kenn was interviewed for the article, and, referring to when the Monterey General Store was previously closed before 2004, he said, "The center of town was dead." Now it looks as if history is about to be repeated.

However, there is a plan on the horizon to turn the store into a cooperative, as was successfully done with the Berkshire Co-op in Great Barrington. Creating a co-op is no small undertaking and requires the participation of many members. To get an idea of how the Berkshire Co-op was formed, view its history at [www.berkshire.coop/about.html](http://www.berkshire.coop/about.html). 



## AVIAN NOTES

By Margaret O'Clair

### Woodpeckers Take a Licking but Keep on Drilling



Apart from Australia, New Zealand and various islands down under, it is a safe bet to say that where there are trees there are woodpeckers. This large, ancient and diverse family of birds has adapted to a wide range of forest habitats. Here in Sandisfield we have plenty of trees and plenty of woodpeckers. Starting with the smallest we have: the Downy; the Yellow-bellied sapsucker; the Hairy; the Red-Bellied; and the Pileated Woodpeckers. We are a little too far south for the Black-Backed (Maine/Canadian border) and a little too far north for the Red-Headed (although it is on its way up).

All of our woodpeckers are black and white with the males sporting a jaunty red splash on their heads. The Downy and the Hairy are drawn to suet feeders,

and are somewhat hard to identify because size is the main difference between them. I think of the Hairy with an "H" for huge, which it isn't, but it helps to differentiate between the two.


Woodpeckers have developed all sorts of novel ways to make their arboreal (tree) lives easier and more efficient. Their short legs and zygodactyl (two toes pointing forward and two pointing backward) feet, which are combined with large, curved claws, are perfect for a bird that relies on grasping rather than perching.



Woodpeckers don't climb up and down trees, they only go up or spiral around and up. To do this, and to assist in balance when feeding, they rely on their stiff tail feathers. So important are these feathers that when they need to be replaced they grow the new feathers before shedding the old ones.

What really sets woodpeckers apart from other birds is the modifications to their heads. Bristle-like feathers corner their nostrils to prevent them from breathing in sawdust when they drill. The tongue is barbed and sticky and can be four times the length of the beak; it is stored wrapped around the skull, rather like a retractable carpenter's tape measure. The brain is protected by an extra thick skull that prevents much movement during the drilling process. Knowing that still doesn't satisfactorily explain how the woodpecker survives its feeding habits. It must be like going ten rounds with Mohammed Ali before every meal!

Woodpeckers are a benefit to other forest birds which recycle their nest cavities. Sapsuckers drill lines of "wells" in the tree bark that are also used by hummingbirds, warblers and waxwings.

I have neglected to mention the Northern Flicker, which is a member of the woodpecker family and a regular visitor to Sandisfield. As Lily Tomlin used to say, it is "special" and deserves a column of its own. 

*Photos of Downy & Pileated Woodpeckers  
Wikimedia Commons*

You are invited to join

#### THE OTIS COMMUNITY GARDEN

For just \$25 and an hour a week, you can help feed your family (of one to four) & provide others in your community with fresh, healthy produce. Our mission is to grow vegetables as naturally as possible & to give-away at least half of our bounty. Last year, we harvested over a 1,000 pounds of food right here in Otis. Whether you are an experienced gardener or a novice, there are many volunteer opportunities available for our members besides active gardening. Come hear all about our plans for this year!

The deadline for membership is May 15, 2011.

For more information about becoming a member, please email us at:

[www.otiscommunitygarden@yahoo.com](mailto:www.otiscommunitygarden@yahoo.com) or call MaryAnn Ciccillo at 413-269-7512

