



Milford-Orange Times

Vol. 16 / Issue 2

www.Milford-OrangeTimes.com

February 12, 2026

Bridal Show Takes Center Stage



The Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce held its fourth annual bridal expo at Racebrook Country Club in Orange on Feb. 1, showcasing bridal outfits and local vendors who serve the wedding industry. Additional photos on page 18. Photo by Robert Creigh.

Fred Wolfe Park Gets New Master Plan

By Brandon T. Bisceglia

After years of debate and deliberations, Fred Wolfe Park has a new master plan.

The Orange Town Plan and Zoning Commission at their Feb. 3 meeting unanimously gave a favorable recommendation to adopt the master plan developed over four years by BL Companies in conjunction with the town's Fred Wolfe Park Committee.

Creation of the plan, however, is not the final step. A previous master plan developed for the park in 2013 ultimately went nowhere.

BL Vice President Derek Kohl has said

the plan would be implemented in five phases over several years, rather than all at once, with a view toward the park's next decade or two. He cited the total cost at around \$20 million.

BL Lead Landscape Architect Dominick Celtruda told the board that the plan represents a roadmap for discussions that will need to continue over the coming years as each piece of the project gets developed.

"It's a vision of what can be," he said. "This will not be a one-and-done

Continued on page 2

Milford School Budget Includes Armed Officers

By Brandon T. Bisceglia

The Milford Board of Education at its Jan. 21 meeting approved a \$118,952,091 budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, including money to add armed security officers at all elementary schools and the alternative high school.

The budget, which was adopted by the board as presented by the superintendent, would see a 4.3 percent increase in overall spending from the current year's \$114,017,417.

The proposal calls for adding armed security officers to the eight elementary

schools and The Academy, plus a lead officer, at a cost to the district of about \$576,000.

The city's middle and high schools already have their own officers. The Academy has a security guard who would be replaced by the officers.

Assistant Superintendent of Business and Operations Sean Brennan said during a Jan. 14 budget workshop that the lead officer would "will assist in professional development/training, safety and security

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Grocery Store, Retail Approved For Milford Plaza

By Brandon T. Bisceglia

The Milford Planning and Zoning Board unanimously approved a plan that would see the site of the former Hooters restaurant and Howard Johnson on the Boston Post Road redeveloped into a commercial

plaza that would include a grocery store, restaurant and other retail space.

The properties include an existing Genesis car dealership and vacant space

Continued on page 14

Send Us Your Poem

In celebration of National Poetry Month in April, the Milford-Orange Times will run selected poems from area residents in the April 9 issue. Submit your poem no later than Monday, March 30 to editor@theorangetimes.com. Include your full name and address (only the name and town will be printed).

Milford Business Alliance Builds Trust



The Milford Business Alliance is a group of businesspeople in the Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce who gather on a weekly basis to share ideas, discuss business trends and exchange leads. The group also creates relationships and trust among members. Front row, from left: Lana Baumgarten, Good Child Development Center; Lisa Valerio, Valerio Tax Edge; Phyllis Mullins, A Healthier Life with Phyllis; Debbie Siena, Security National Mortgage; Reena Katarya, Katamra Growth LLC; Ezio Sabatino, Sabatino Marketing; Steve Cooper, SM Photography; Will Rasario, Merchatics; Dee Rasario, Insured by Dee; Chris Winters, Tramuta Law; Gisselle Vaz-McCann, G-Vaz Care Services; Michael Moses, Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce; Dave Rodnick, Ardmore Printing; and Jennifer Glover -Keller, Jennifer Glover-Keller LLC. Second row, from left: Simon McDonald, Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce; Steve Hechtman, Milford-Orange Times; Marco Rosales, Mrosales Insurance; Tracy Edwards, Stacey Blake Realty; Ariel Calmanovici, ABC Senior Services; Brynn Costello, Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce; and Ken Oakes, Ken Oakes Computer and Tech Services. To join the chamber, visit milfordct.com.

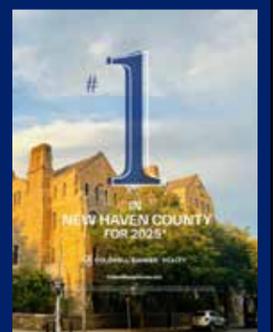


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Fred Wolfe (Continued From 1)

endorsement.”

One change would create a road around the perimeter of the park that would become a town road. It also recommends incorporating small portions of land around the park that aren't technically part of the park now.

It would renovate the existing fields and add one to three new fields over time. It would see the building of bathrooms, shade structures, a demonstration garden and cultural/historical zones.

Phase 1 would focus primarily on the south and southwest portion of the park and include the redevelopment of entrances at Oakview Drive and Hollow Road. It would eliminate a current roadway that cuts through the center of the park and has been identified as a safety hazard, instead looping cars around the southern edge. Phase 2 would see a third entrance built out to Meetinghouse Lane and complete the park's internal loop for cars.

Phase 3 focuses on rehabilitating the central fields. The fourth phase tackles the eastern section with environmental remediation and the building of sport courts, maintenance buildings and a possible community building. Finally, Phase 5 would make adjustments to the north end, which is currently occupied by leased farm fields. The plan envisions either conversions to athletic fields or meadow land.

Several residents who attended the TPZC meeting spoke in favor of adopting the new plan.

Selectman Mitch Goldblatt spoke generally in favor of the plan, pointing out in particular that the additional entrances will ease the traffic for neighbors.

“Expanding this park the way it is, to



The Fred Wolfe Park master plan developed by BL Companies for Orange would see improvements throughout the park over multiple phases.

have all the traffic going through one access is unfair and is not going to be conducive to making it work properly,” he said. “It’s just going to help spread the traffic out so that no one neighborhood is burdened with more than their fair share.”

Resident Lauren Gray, who spoke in favor of the plan, said that she takes her three children to the park every week during the summer.

“This could really make our town special, bringing in businesses, bringing in visitors. This could really be a shining beacon for us,” she said.

Several residents had concerns about aspects of the plan, though.

Tom Pisano, who leads the Orange Soccer Association and has frequently weighed in on matters relating to Fred Wolfe Park, said he was in favor of the plan but worried that things wouldn't be carried out as recommended.

“I just don't want to see us compromising programs,” he said.

Eleni Haskos, whose property on Oakview Drive abuts one of the entrances, worried that the plan called for easements that could affect her ability to use her own property.

“I don't want a lot to impede on my property itself through pedestrian use,” she said.

Selectman John Carangelo, who also chairs the Fred Wolfe Park Committee, told the audience that there may be aspects of the plan that will be tweaked as it goes along. He encouraged residents to continue expressing their views.

“With your help, we can make this a perfect park for all of us,” he said.

In voicing his support for the plan, TPZC commissioner Kevin Cornell said even the first phase would be a marked improvement for the park.

“Getting bathrooms, safe parking, reasonable circulation and traffic control is a great step forward,” he said. “It is a project worthy of a town like this.”

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OEDC Donates To Orange Fire Department



The Orange Economic Development Corporation recently presented the Orange Volunteer Fire Department a donation in the amount of \$3,000. The funds came from the proceeds of the 19th annual OEDC Golf Tournament held in September. The OEDC began partnering on their golf tournament with the OVFD in 2021. From left: Fire Chief Vaughan Dumas and OEDC Executive Director Annemarie Sliby. Photo courtesy of the OEDC.

Milford Library To Celebrate Chinese New Year

The Milford Public Library will ring in the Year of the Horse with the Li-Garden Dance Company on Saturday, Feb. 21 at 2 p.m.

Dancers will share four cultural folk dances and the stories behind them and teach some basic moves to the audience. They will also demonstrate the art of Chinese calligraphy.

Founded in 2017, the dance company's program is rooted in both classical and modern Chinese dance. Their mission is to connect their culture with the community and its people.

Registration is required for the event. For more information, visit milford-pl.libcal.com/event/16069506.

Puzzle Competition Coming To Case Memorial

The Case Memorial Library will host an all-ages jigsaw puzzle competition on Saturday, Feb. 21 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Teams will compete to see who can finish a 500-piece puzzle first or who has fewest pieces remaining after two hours.

Participants must register for one spot for their team – not as individuals. Teams may

contain up to six participants.

Teams are permitted to bring sorting trays. The library will have a limited supply available to teams who do not have their own.

Registration is required. For more information, visit casememorial.librarycalendar.com/event/jigsaw-puzzle-competition-17716.

MAC To Exhibit Milford Painter's Work

The Milford Arts Council will be displaying an exhibit of the paintings of former resident Riva Silverfarb from March 13-15 at the Firehouse Gallery at 81 Naugatuck Ave. in Milford.

Silverfarb expressed herself through both watercolor and oil, often focusing on landscapes – especially beaches, lighthouses

and trees. She passed away in 2025.

The gallery will be open March 13 and 14 from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., and on March 15 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

There will be an opening reception with light refreshments on March 13 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

The show is free and open to the public.

Inductees Named To Amity Halls Of Fame

Honorees have been named for the 2025-2026 Amity Academic Hall of Honor and Athletic Hall of Fame. An induction ceremony and banquet will take place on Tuesday, March 31 at 5 p.m. at Grassy Hill Country Club in Orange.

The honorees for the Academic Hall of honor include Stuart Anderson, class of 1982, journalism; John Belfonti, class of 1990, engineering; Marilyn "Mari" Bonomi, retired teacher; Kimberly McClure Brinton, class of 1985, science and medicine; Debbie Davis, retired teacher; Emily Feng, class of 2011, journalism; and Mitch Goldblatt, class of

1975, government.

The honorees for the Athletic Hall of Fame include Kenneth Appel Sr., class of 1975, track and field; Pat Couden, class of 1982, boys soccer and baseball; Kasey Kesses, class of 2004, girls swimming and diving, girls basketball and girls outdoor track and field; Vito "Topper" Luciani, class of 1957, football, hockey and baseball; Sean Mahon, cross country, indoor track and outdoor track coach; Max Russell, class of 2007, baseball; and the 1985 girls volleyball team.

To buy tickets, visit amityregion5.org or gofan.co/event/5943439?schoolId=CT17350.

Bridges Healthcare Accepting Scholarship Applications

Bridges Healthcare has announced that applications are now being accepted for the Barry Kasdan Scholarship for the pursuit of a graduate or undergraduate degree in human services and the Stella Cretella Scholarship for those in pursuit of higher education through graduate or undergraduate degrees focusing on advocacy and policy reform in mental health services.

Three \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded in all. The successful candidates must be a Bridges employee, spouse, child or grandchild of a Bridges employee, or a resident of Ansonia, Bethany, Derby, Milford, Orange, Seymour, Shelton, Stratford, West Haven or Woodbridge. They must additionally be pursuing a graduate or undergraduate degree in human services or in mental health advocacy/public policy. Applicants in high school

must be completing high school or have a GED equivalent in the year the scholarship is awarded.

The scholarships were established by Bridges' Board of Directors, the Board Endowment Fund Committee and the Board Scholarship Committee in honor of Barry Kasdan's over 30 years of leadership and service to Bridges Healthcare, and in memory of Stella Cretella's over 40 years in advocating for mental illness health reform in Connecticut. Cretella also served more than 10 years on the Board of Directors at Bridges.

Completed applications are due no later than March 31. Applications can be submitted online using the Bridges Healthcare board scholarship application at bridgesct.org/2026-scholarship-opportunity-announcement/. Contact scholarship@bridgesmilford.org with any questions.

Amity HS Performing 'My Fair Lady'

Tickets are now on sale for the Amity High School theater department's upcoming musical production of "My Fair Lady," with showings on March 19, 21, 26, 27 and 28, all at 7:30 p.m.

The Broadway musical based on George

Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion portrays Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle, who is transformed into a lady by phonetics professor Henry Higgins as part of a bet.

Tickets are \$25 and can be purchased at amitytheaterdepartment.com/events.

2026 Events Calendar

- Feb 1-14** Downtown Milford: Hearts For Milford
- May 1 & 2** Wasson Field: CT Foodie Fest
- May 15 & 16** Storefronts in Downtown Milford: Spring Sidewalk Sale
- Jun 1-30** Downtown Milford: Grads For Milford
- Jun 7** Downtown Milford: Pirate's Day
- Jun 6 - Oct 10** Saturdays | Wasson Field: Farmers Market
- Jul 1, 8, 15, 22, 29** Thursdays | Location: TBD: Outdoor Movie Night
- Aug 7 & 8** Storefronts in Downtown Milford: Summer Sidewalk Sale
- Aug 15** Downtown Milford: Fair on the Half Shell
- Sep 17** Downtown Milford: Night Market
- Oct 10** Storefronts in Downtown Milford: Wine Trail
- Oct 23 & 24** Downtown Milford: Halloween -end
- Nov 28** Downtown Milford: Small Business Saturday
- Dec 4** Downtown Milford: Lamplight Stroll
- Dec 17** Storefronts in Downtown Milford: Sip & Shop

Events are subject to change.

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Milford-Orange Times

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- | | | |
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| Cathy Bradley, Running | Patricia Houser, Environment | Jennifer Paradis, Homelessness |
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| Carmela DeVito, Book Reviews | Marilyn May, Milford History | Raymond Spaziani, Wine |
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The Milford-Orange Times is published by The Orange Times LLC, P.O. Box 584, Orange, CT, 06477
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Milford's Legendary Dance Instructor

By Marilyn May

"Miss Connie" taught hundreds of Milford children what fun it was to put on their very first tap shoes, especially when they didn't know the sounds the shoes could make. Just walking across the studio dance floor and getting in line was a revelation in sounds.

She would greet the class, and then the fun began. "Miss Connie" was Constance Moore, who taught many little girls (and a few boys) to tap dance and perform ballet in classes at the Children's Theatre Workshop that she founded in the early 1950s. In private life she was Mrs. John Sullivan of Wallingford.

Her first instruction to a tap class was to take a "step" and then combine "Step, shuffle, toe, heel." Over and over, it was "Step, shuffle, toe, heel." That meant "step" on one foot, "shuffle" the other foot ending with a "toe" tap, then landing back on the "heel" of the other foot. Lo and behold, eventually the class did it all in unison. Look out Radio City Music Hall Rockettes.

The children "Miss Connie" taught, no matter what age, came away from classes with feelings of accomplishment and confidence.

Halfway through each class it was time to change from tap shoes to ballet slippers. Then gripping the horizontal ballet barre with one hand, little dancers would stretch through ballet positions, such as plié and tendu, while learning graceful arm positions as well. These exercises taught balance and poise while strengthening muscles.

Moore was an attractive woman, a tall redhead who wore long eyelashes and

the brightest scarlet lipstick. She grew up around "show people" in her early years, because her father, a graduate of Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory of Music, was the musical director for many shows throughout the country. Her musical training started at age 4, when her father began to teach her to play the piano.

The program notes from one of the Children's Theatre Workshop recitals states, "Each summer 'Connie' visited her aunt in Milford, and after the death of her father in 1931, the family settled here where she finished her grammar school and high school years (MHS Class of 1938)."

It was during these years that she began to study dance.

"After graduation," the program continues, "she taught dancing for three years and then after three seasons in summer stock, she obtained the leading role with the road company of Billie Rose's 'Gay Nineties Revue.'" Rose was a prominent Broadway producer who staged spectacular musicals.

After World War II, Moore was a teacher and supervisor for Arthur Murray dance classes, where she again started teaching tap and ballet to children.

What these program notes don't tell you is that she was loved by all her students. And it was her joy to find that the children looked forward to dance class as much as she did. Her belief was that "Regardless of talent, a child may receive a delightful satisfaction from the lesson if the steps and routines are kept within the child's world."

"Even the most talented of children," she wrote in her recital program, "may become discouraged if not taught to love the art first." As part of dance education, she



The Ballerina Butterflies who danced in "Fantasy in the Park" in the 1954 recital are (standing) Carol Guyott, Linda Roberts, Patricia Botte, Gail Harrison, Mel Moger and Sharon Enger. Seated from left are Susan Johnson and Marcia Arlanian. Photo courtesy of the Children's Theatre Workshop.

believed, "it is important for the student to share what (has been) learned with family and friends."

She never sold tickets or charged anyone who came to the year-end recitals. She considered recitals as "part of the season of training," and she nearly filled the former Milford High School auditorium every spring.

For the 1954 recital, Moore made up 50 original routines for 80 children. Each child, from age 4 to 16, danced in two numbers with cute costumes they were allowed to keep.

The program included this advice: "Costumes, whenever possible, have been made to be worn as a part of regular clothing through summer months. Skirts can be lengthened and trim re-moved. Many such

details are taken into consideration when the recital is being planned by the teacher."

The finale had all 80 dancers come on stage for one final bow, and each child was carrying a small bouquet of flowers. That was a surprise.

"Most students spent only a few years taking dance lessons, but "Miss Connie" gave them enough happy memories to last a lifetime.

At the end of each weekly class, children would line up to say "Goodbye, Miss Connie."

Marilyn May is a lifelong resident of Milford and is on the board of the Milford Historical Society.

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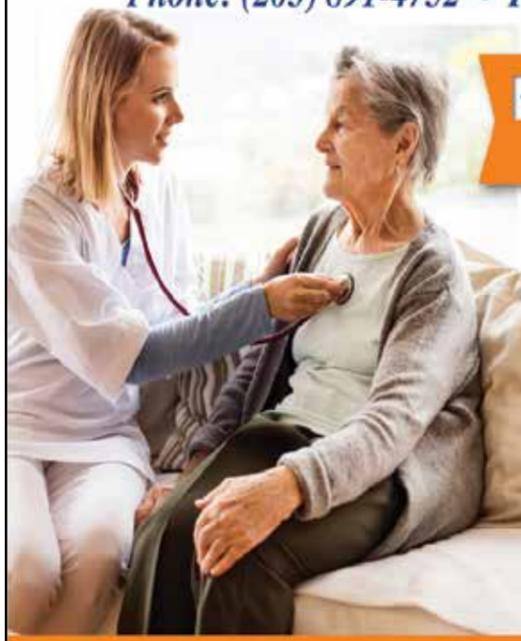
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Opinion & Editorial

All In For Milford: Betting Everything On Our City

By Jesse Williams

What does it mean to be “all in?” That term might be evocative of poker – betting everything you have on the strength of a single deal. In the broader context, most people think of “all in” as holding nothing back in a bid to achieve some goals or reach some objective – athletes committing to a move or play, business owners putting all their time and money into a single idea.

All in for Milford wants to apply the idea of giving everything you have to how we engage with our community – asking neighbors, friends, elected officials, religious leaders, business owners and everyone who has a stake in the success of this city to show up for each other with their whole spirit. We believe that it is only through putting all our cards on the table and betting the house on the people and places we love that this city can be a place where everyone can thrive.

What are we “all in” on, specifically? Our coalition is ready to push our chips forward on the idea that every person in our city should have a warm, safe, affordable place to live, access to food when they need it, streets they can navigate safely and an environment they can nurture and enjoy. We believe this is a safe bet because we have faith this commu-

nity is ready to join us and do the work for their neighbors, their friends and their city. And we believe the only bet that is appropriate when the stakes are this high is “all in.”

AIFM is not a nonprofit, a trade organization or a political action group. Our coalition is purely grassroots, with no formal hierarchy. We are truly a collection of people, many of whom lead other community organizations and many of whom are simply Milford citizens of varying ages, political views and socioeconomic backgrounds, who want only to work to make their city better.

Our founding came in 2021 in the wake of the pandemic, as our community faced both increased needs for these basic necessities, as well as increased division and disconnection among its citizens.

We are far beyond the aspirational phase. Connections, research, communications and on-the-ground work by AIFM have borne fruit, in everything from housing policy to direct support for the most needy in our city. Our work has been recognized with awards from the Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce, the American Planning Association and the Naugatuck Valley Project. We have facilitated vital partnerships between businesses, the school system, elected offi-

cials and other advocates, as well as helped launch (or re-launch) a fair rent commission and a housing partnership committee.

All this shows that advocates understand AIFM’s unique structure and position allows us to work on projects great and small, inside and outside of government, and bridge the kinds of partisan divides that, especially recently, have proven difficult to overcome. AIFM’s success has also sparked the creation of other chapters in half a dozen nearby towns, with the same mission and many of the same successes as we work regionally and across the state on these same objectives.

Our success comes from finding unity and consensus that in many cases already exists. Housing developer Carol Martin, who presented to Milford’s Planning & Zoning Commission last fall in a conversation facilitated by AIFM, noted in a previous conversation with AIFM that while so-called “affordable housing” has often sparked controversy in Connecticut towns, communities that have a dialogue always solve problems better than those who don’t. Doing the work to understand people’s concerns, hopes and needs is often the only way to break down for-and-against binaries that stall any kind of solution to complex problems. Martin said

that the answers to difficult housing problems (right now, how to address a scarcity of affordable places to live) almost always come from within the community itself.

Although housing remains a central focus of AIFM, we want to place a special emphasis on the “all” as it relates to all the challenges facing our city. All of the foundational needs of our city are important and related – what we eat, how we move, how we treat our natural resources. All of the residents of the city have a voice, and all are affected by ways this community provides (or doesn’t provide) shelter, food, transportation and a healthy environment for its citizens. “All” means we must address these needs in a holistic way, applying the expertise and understanding of all these issues as we work on any individual project or partnership. And “all” is the best – and only – way to describe the effort we are putting in to fight for our friends and neighbors in Milford.

Anyone who wants to be “all in,” or learn more about our coalition can visit our website at allinformilford.org.

Jesse Williams is a volunteer for All in for Milford.

Celebrating A New Era At Congregation Or Shalom

By Sarah Darer

When a congregation has had the same spiritual leader for 44 years, change can be frightening. But observing the high holy days with Congregation Or Shalom’s new leader, Rabbi Lindsey Healey-Pollack, proved that change can also be exciting, because it opens the door to new ideas and possibilities.

Rabbi Marisa James, who grew up in Orange and became a bat mitzvah at Or Shalom, joined Healey-Pollack on the pulpit, enriching high holy day services with her wonderful voice. She provided a bridge between old and new, having led services with Rabbi Emeritus Alvin Wainhaus for the last 10 years.

Healey-Pollack brings meaningful new ideas to the synagogue. One that particularly resonated with me was a guided meditation before Yizkor (a memorial service for deceased relatives) on Yom Kippur.

I lost my father to the long, slow, painful goodbye of Alzheimer’s in November 2013, and then my mother suddenly and unexpectedly in March 2015. During Healey-Pollack’s pre-Yizkor meditation, which involved a familiar room where the people you love and miss are waiting, I pictured entering the so-very-1970s wood-paneled den in my childhood home in Stamford.

There were my grandparents, all but one of whom died before I graduated from col-

lege. There were my aunts and uncles, and the great aunt and uncle who acted as surrogate grandparents, and who modeled how a marriage of intellectual equals based on mutual respect worked.

Reconnecting with my late family members in my mind before reciting the Yizkor prayers made it so much more personal and meaningful. For days afterward, I thought about how faith can be so much more than something to wield against those who don’t believe as you do, which we unfortunately see too much of in today’s discourse. It’s a beautiful way to connect with those who came before us, those who helped form who we are today.

At a time when there’s a push to take away hard-won gains from women, it is particularly exciting to see two smart, spiritually vibrant women on the pulpit, leading us into the future.

Come check out the exciting new ideas Healey-Pollack is bringing to Congregation Or Shalom, a congregation with open minds, open hearts and open doors. Learn more at orshalomct.org or contact the office by email at info@orshalomct.org or by calling 203-799-2341.

Sarah Darer is a member of Congregation Or Shalom in Orange.

Letters to the Editor:

Send us your letters to the editor with no more than 350 words to editor@theorangerimes.com. Include your name and full address; only your name and town will be published. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.

Enforce Parking Rules at Amity HS

To the Editor:

I am writing to express concern about the lack of enforcement of parking stickers at Amity Regional High School. This may seem like a minor issue. However, the message it sends to students is anything but small.

Parking stickers (\$100 per car per sticker) are assigned by color and designated parking areas and are a clearly stated rule which is supposed to be monitored by school staff who presumably are overseen by administration. When students see that this rule is routinely ignored without consequence, they learn an unfortunate lesson: rules don’t matter if no one enforces them. Students and parents routinely bring photo evidence to school of rule breaking to no avail or are told by staff to simply not expect a spot despite it being paid for and assigned. How is this normalized behavior?

Schools are not just places for academic learning; they are where young people learn responsibility, accountability and respect for shared standards. Selective or nonexistent

enforcement undermines those lessons. It normalizes the idea that compliance is optional.

If we want students to take school policies – and eventually laws and civic responsibilities – seriously, enforcement must be consistent. Otherwise, we should be honest and admit the rules don’t actually matter.

I urge the enforcement of the parking sticker policy as written or reconsider it entirely. What we should not do is continue sending students the message that rules exist only on paper.

Stacy Deurquiza
Orange

Town Responses to Facility Updates Lacking

To the Editor:

For five years, I have consistently raised concerns regarding the condition, safety, accessibility and long-term cost of neglecting key town facilities in Orange. These efforts have been rooted in civic responsibility, fiscal prudence and a sincere desire to see our town move forward rather than continue to defer known issues.

I have brought forward documented safety concerns, accessibility challenges affecting residents with disabilities and information regarding potential grants that could have helped offset taxpayer costs. I have also advocated for responsible use

of municipal bonding – an established and commonly used tool that allows towns to fund capital improvements over time while avoiding the compounding expense of delay. I understand how bonding works, including voter approval, debt service and long-term planning, and I have approached these discussions thoughtfully and in good faith.

Unfortunately, rather than engaging substantively with these issues, the response from town leadership has too often been to dismiss, minimize or question my understanding and intentions. Repeatedly challenging someone’s intelligence or motives does not move a community forward, nor does it address the underlying problems that continue to grow more expensive with each passing year.

My decision to run for the Board of Selectmen was not driven by personal ambition, but by frustration with inaction. Leadership should be measured not by tenure, but by results. When the same issues persist year after year – while costs rise and facilities deteriorate – it is reasonable for residents to ask whether a more proactive approach is needed.

I do not view raising concerns as being adversarial. I view it as caring deeply about Orange and believing that our town deserves facilities, infrastructure and public spaces we can be proud of rather than continually apologizing for. Asking questions, presenting information and advocating for solutions are not acts of obstruction; they are the foundation of accountable local government.

I remain committed to respectful, con-

structive dialogue and to working toward practical solutions that serve the best interests of Orange and its residents. My hope is that future conversations focus less on questioning individuals and more on addressing the longstanding issues we have been discussing for years.

Sincerely,
Erika Higgins

Two Non-Rhetorical Questions

To the Editor:

Last month, I attended the Board of Selectmen meeting for Orange.

I didn’t want to. Like most of you, I’m busy. Besides, I am lucky enough to live in a town with people who were elected to office or who volunteer to serve our community. While I have opinions, I also have faith in those folks to do the right things.

But I attended because I have strong concerns about an incident in our town. I raised my questions at the meeting. Maybe I’m naïve, but I thought my questions might result in answers.

They haven’t, so I will summarize my two key questions here after a brief recitation of the backstory. Second time’s a charm, right?

First Selectman Jim Zeoli made a decision to not reappoint Mitch Goldblatt to Orange’s Pension Board. Goldblatt has been

Continued on page 7

Opinion & Editorial

A Step Forward For Road Safety



STATE REP. (R-119)
KATHY KENNEDY

There's some encouraging news about safety on Connecticut's roads, and it's the kind of progress worth recognizing.

Working alongside the Connecticut Department of Transportation and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, we recently reviewed preliminary data showing that traffic fatalities declined by 12 percent in 2025 compared to the previous year. That's 274 lives lost, down from 312 in 2024.

Behind those numbers are real people – neighbors, friends, families – so any reduction matters.

As ranking member of the legislature's Transportation Committee, I've long believed that education, consistent enforcement and smart safety investments save lives. This year's data suggest those efforts are making a difference. From targeted patrols by our state police to improved roadway design and public awareness campaigns, these steps are helping prevent tragedies.

But while we celebrate progress, we can't ignore the warning signs.

The data also show an increase in deaths among pedestrians and bicyclists – the very people who have the least protection on our roads. Bicycle fatalities rose sharply, and pedestrian deaths remain stubbornly high. Speeding continues to be a major factor in serious crashes.

That tells us something important: we still have work to do.

Road safety isn't just about drivers – it's about everyone who uses our streets. Whether you're walking your dog, riding your bike to work or driving your kids to school, you deserve to get home safely. That means designing roads that slow traffic naturally, improving crosswalk visibility, strengthening enforcement against reckless driving, and continuing to educate drivers about sharing the road.

I'm also encouraged by early numbers from 2026, which show fewer fatalities so far compared to the same time last year. It's a positive start, but we can't let our guard down. The truth is simple: even one death is too many.

Traffic safety is a shared responsibility. State agencies, local police, lawmakers and everyday drivers all play a role. Slowing down, putting the phone away and staying alert can make all the difference.

As we head into the new legislative session, I'll continue working with my colleagues, law enforcement and transportation officials to strengthen policies that protect every road user.

Progress is possible – we're seeing it. Now we have to keep going. Stay safe out there.

Ban Smartphones In Schools?



STATE REP. (D-114)
MARY WELANDER

Session is officially underway, and although most of us have been working on concepts and policies throughout the year, this is the beginning of narrowing down what proposals each committee will take up and how the budget might be adjusted.

These conversations will continue and evolve over the next two months, with feedback from the relevant agencies and stakeholders – which includes the most important group: you.

Specifically, I want your thoughts on a topic that has been raised in the Education Committee: cellphones in schools.

I think it is clear to many by now that cellphone usage in young children and teens can have devastating effects. Even with parental controls and the existing restrictions within school buildings our kids can access harmful sites at worst or be continually distracted and disconnected at best.

Last year the legislature asked each school district to create a cell phone policy that worked for their individual districts and communities while taking steps to reduce or restrict usage during the school day. If you have school-aged kids or have visited one of our area schools, you've probably heard about policies ranging from "phones must be in backpacks throughout the day" to individual classroom rules that allow some usage as part of their curriculum (digital literacy), or policies in which phones are dropped into a hanging organizer when students enter the classroom.

With any policy there are adjustments that must be made once concepts are actually implemented; this is no different. Some schools across the state have found it harder to create and carry out these policies.

That's where the concept of a "bell to bell" cellphone ban comes from. With specific carve-outs for digital media curriculum and any health-related issues that require connection to a phone/app, this proposal would ban all phones and smart devices (like watches) from the starting bell of the school day through to dismissal.

We are parents to three teenagers; we know how challenging it can be to rein in technology usage. There is a big part of me that thinks this would be a good policy to support.

There is another part of me that is balking at it, mostly from my perspective as a mom. If there is a chance – even remotely – that my kids might be in danger, I want to be able to contact them.

From a legislative point of view, I also have concerns about how this will be enforced and potential costs. Kids are very tech-savvy and may just find a way around it. Will this put our schools back in the same position they are now? Would this require the purchase of a specific item for each phone, like a Yondr pouch? Our school budgets are tight already; would state or local funds be better used in different ways to support our teachers and students?

What do you think? Do the potential benefits of a statewide policy outweigh the potential costs? How would you address this issue? Let me know; email me at mary.welander@cga.ct.gov.

Letters

(Continued From 6)

volunteering on this committee for more than 20 years. His day job includes working with pensions. By all accounts, he is knowledgeable and dedicated, and he is a willing volunteer. Nevertheless, Goldblatt's appointment to the Pension Board was not renewed.

According to the story, Goldblatt was told directly by our first selectman that the decision was political retribution. It wasn't disguised or presented as a euphemism. Goldblatt asked why he wasn't being reappointed; the first selectman responded that Goldblatt's political party wanted change in this election season, so he is giving him that change.

Thus, we come to my two questions:

Question 1: How is this helping our community? We have a smart, willing and experienced volunteer being pushed aside for petty and misplaced vengeance by someone elected to serve our collective best interests. I ask our elected public servants: How exactly does this decision serve us?

Question 2: Are you comfortable quietly watching this happen? Bullies thrive on fear and silence. We can shape this town, and we will with our voices or our silence. Yes, this is something happening to someone else. Not my cousin or coworker – probably not yours either. But I ask you: Do we speak up for each other, or do we allow this?

Sean-Michael Green
Orange, CT

Let's Make the Most of Fred Wolfe Park

To the Editor:

During its January meeting, the Board of Selectmen reviewed the new Fred Wolfe Park master plan. However, residents were not allowed to share public comment. This is a disappointing departure from their usual practice, especially for a rare stand-

ing-room-only meeting.

I support this project and wanted to share a few thoughts I had hoped to offer that night.

First, I want to thank everyone who has cared and advocated for Fred Wolfe Park over so many years, as well as the members of the Fred Wolfe Park Committee who put time and effort to complete this master plan. For those who haven't seen it yet, the final presentation is available at fredwolfepark-masterplan.com. As the project moves forward, I hope the Board of Selectmen asks the committee to continue meeting regularly to help ensure the plan is implemented thoughtfully and continues to reflect community input.

I strongly encourage expanding the committee to include residents who live near the park and representatives from the youth soccer and lacrosse leagues that use it most. Before any construction begins, formally including those voices makes sense. They are directly affected by these improvements and can offer practical insights that will help the project succeed. I also suggest clarifying alignment and lines of communication between the Fred Wolfe Park Committee and the Park & Recreation Commission.

Finally, I hope the town moves this renovation forward sooner rather than later. Construction costs continue to rise, and waiting only makes projects like this more expensive. If work had begun soon after the last master plan was completed in 2013, the overall cost would have been much lower than today. Whether it means using a portion of our current budget surplus or asking voters to consider a modest bond as part of the upcoming town budget referendum, acting now on Phase 1 of the project will save money in the long run.

With continued planning, open communication, and timely action, we can make sure that Fred Wolfe Park becomes a place our whole community can enjoy for years to come.

Dan Fitzmaurice
Orange

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Orange Democratic Town Committee

Orange Democrats Look To The Future

A new generation of Orange Democrats was voted into office in January. While many of the current Orange Democratic Town Committee members remain, we are excited for the 15 new members who were elected and will take office in March.

The Orange Democrats made great strides in 2025 and will build on that in 2026, leading up to the 2027 municipal elections.

What are we doing in the interim? The ODTC will be working in the interim to ensure the election of Democrats, including many of our representatives from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro to the state offices. They are the front line in protecting our rights. We need these people to continue to protect the interests of all Connecticut residents.

The ODTC will continue its outreach to all residents of Orange. Via our social media or our monthly newsletter, we work diligently to keep the residents informed on issues around town.

Orange is a great place to live but it isn't without its issues and needs. If you are not currently receiving our newsletter, you can sign up for it via our website at OrangeCtDems.org. We have a great team that keeps our website up to date with relevant information.

We are proud that the current administration heard our voices during the 2025 campaign. We were pleased to see many of the issues we brought to light are now part of the capital campaign released at last month's Board of Selectmen's meeting.

There is much more work to be done. Our elected representatives on the various boards as well as those appointed will continue to be your voice. As much as some try, we will not be silenced. It is imperative that our elected officials speak up when they know something is wrong.



JODY
DIETCH

A perfect example is when our first selectman chose not to reappoint longtime Selectman Mitch Goldblatt to the Pension Board for purely political reasons. I urge the other Board of Selectmen members to speak up publicly and right this wrong.

Civic engagement comes in all forms. Some people attend meetings; others watch the meetings on Orange Government Access Television via their YouTube channel. All meetings are listed on the town website at orange-ct.gov, as are town agendas and minutes, listed under "Boards and Commissions." We hope many of you get updates from our social media, website and newsletter.

This past year we saw many new people come to meetings and speak up. Many were frustrated at the January Board of Selectmen meeting because of a self-imposed rule by

the Board of Selectmen. This rule does not allow for public comment on agenda items. Many people came to the January meeting to speak on Fred Wolfe Park and they were silenced for the time being.

The Board of Selectmen imposed this rule with the unfortunate thought process that someone speaking during public participation on an agenda item, may have their questions or concerns answered when the board discusses the issue during their meeting. We encourage the board to rescind this rule and allow the public to speak.

If you are interested in getting involved with the Orange Democrats, please reach out to me at JLDOrange@yahoo.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

Jody Dietch is the chair of the Orange Democratic Town Committee.

Insuring Your Future

Who Manages Your Health?

The short answer to the question of who manages your health is: you do.

Many insurance companies have engaged private contractors to reach out to their members for a variety of reasons. They may want to create a "profile" based on medications you are taking, height, weight, vital readings such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels, etc. This is information that your medical providers need to know, or you can see in MyChart, but does not need to be shared with the insurance carrier.

Another reason they might reach out would be to offer to have a nurse come and do a health and safety assessment. This generally involves an in-person visit where a nurse checks your blood pressure, reviews medications, determines if there are fall risks and recommends safety measures.

A third reason can be to notify you about changes to the plan's network, preferred mail

order pharmacy or other benefits.

These services are all optional, not required. If it is not something with which you are comfortable, politely but firmly decline the offers and ask to be taken off the call list. If the unwanted calls persist, contact member services and request them to stop the calls.

What is helpful in managing the relationship between you and the insurance company is setting up an online account. An online account allows you to see the status of prescription refills, authorization requests, claims processing and payments. It will save you time on hold while a service rep researches your issue. It also provides information about vendors that handle eye-care, dental and over-the-counter benefits.

One change that is now impacting those



TRISH
PEARSON

on Medicare Advantage prescription drug plans is the fitness benefit provider. Some insurers have switched from Silver Sneakers to Silver and Fit. Both companies provide similar benefits, but not all gyms accept both plans. One major difference is that Silver and Fit is accepted at the YMCA, LA Fitness and several other gyms. The complete list is available at SilverandFit.com.

The enrollment deadline for Access Health Connecticut plans has been extended because of emergency funding provided by the state, dubbed "2026 temporary premium assistance." The impact will increase the income range to qualify for a tax credit against health insurance premiums on the health exchange.

The extension applies to people who did

not renew or apply for a plan for 2026 because they did not qualify for a tax credit under new rules imposed by the federal government, or they chose a less expensive plan. The special enrollment period also applies to those whose income is 100 percent to 200 percent below the federal poverty level but not enrolled in CoveredCT. These customers will receive temporary increased premium assistance.

If you think you qualify for this special enrollment, contact Access Health CT, which can also refer you to certified brokers who can assist you.

Trish Pearson is a licensed independent insurance agent and certified long term care specialist. Contact her at 203-640-5969 or trishpearson281@gmail.com.

Foodie Foursome

Authentic Thai With A Modern Flair In Stratford

Our Foodie Foursome travels have brought us to different styles and regional culinary treats within 10 to 15 miles of the greater Milford/Orange area. With Asian restaurants taking on increased popularity in our region, we ventured into Stratford to visit Queen Bee Thai Kitchen.

While the building seems to be hiding in plain sight, it is easy to get to and has its own off-street parking. The inside is inviting, and the staff welcoming and friendly. The dining area is light and airy with both high-top and dining room tables, as well as a nice-sized horseshoe bar that helps define the open feeling of the dining room. This restaurant is sure to become a neighborhood favorite.

As we were shown to our table, it was obvious that Queen Bee already has a brisk takeout clientele. This most likely stems from their food truck, Queen Bee Cuisine. Now that they have a sit-down restaurant the truck is used for private events or catering.

Belinda and Javier Martinez, the owners and chefs, are an integral part of the vibrant personality of Queen Bee Thai Kitchen. They not only cook every meal selection, they personally hand-select all of their produce.

On this night Cindy and I were joined by our good friend Mike and our nephew Cooper, visiting from LA.

We started with an awesome selection of appetizers. First out were the fried chicken wings. These meaty wings had a wonderful

crispy coating, half tossed in a Korean spicy sauce and the rest in sweet chili sauce. My favorite was the sweet chili, but our guests loved the tasty heat of the Korean sauce (Cooper had recently returned from South Korea).

The chicken teriyaki dumplings had an impressive savory filling and gently fried to be tender with nice crispy edges. We then tried a martini flight that featured four tasty libations of their own concoctions. The "angry dragon" had a definite kick to it with slices of jalapeno. The "midnight butterfly," a tasty spirit, and the hibiscus and passion fruit drinks were uniquely fruity but not overly sweet. It was a wonderful way to try a variety of different martinis.

Next was the coconut shrimp. The extra-large, butterflied shrimp were coated in a coconut breading and expertly fried to a golden crispy exterior encasing the succulent shrimp.

Our last appetizer was the spring rolls. This might seem a pedestrian choice, but these were among the best we have tried anywhere. They were a little larger than many spring rolls, perfectly crispy yet not greasy, and filled with a scrumptious combination of ground cabbage, carrot and vermicelli noodles.

Queen Bee features family recipes that



STEVE
COOPER

have been passed down from generation to generation. Their broths are fresh-made, the rice noodles hand-pulled and the curry paste is ground fresh daily. We had to try a couple of soups. The khao peak sen chicken is a signature dish, and rightfully so. The homemade noodles in chicken broth with fresh bean sprouts, scallions and cilantro did not disappoint. Neither did another fan favorite: the beef ramen noodle soup had an abundance of tender beef brisket with ramen noodles, boiled egg, bok choy and scallions in a rich beef broth.

Our last choice before the entrees was a papaya salad. The fresh shredded green papaya with green beans, tomatoes and garlic dressed in fish sauce, tamarind, lime and chili was a nice transitional dish.

If I am going to a new pizza establishment, I always try a plain mozzarella and sauce first. It gives me a baseline. For Thai my baseline is pad Thai and drunken noodles. The stir-fried rice noodles with egg, bean sprouts and scallions in the tamarind sauce, palm sugar and shallot was impressive. For our pad Thai we added the chicken as our protein, which was extremely tender. The drunken noodles featured fresh flat (wide) rice noodles that were stir-fried with onions, bell peppers and basil leaves in a spicy basil sauce. The sauce had an ideal viscosity, al-

lowing it to adhere to the noodles and slices of beef, making each bite a treat.

We next went with a vegetarian option. The red curry was incredibly flavorful with its coconut milk, bamboo shoots, pumpkin, bell pepper, eggplant and basil in their house-made red curry paste.

The last two menu choices were basil fried rice with shrimp and egg fried rice with veggies. The basil fried rice featured jasmine rice stir fried with egg, onions, bell peppers and basil in a spicy chili sauce with extra-large shrimp. The egg fried rice was created with jasmine rice, stir-fried, with egg, garlic, carrots and scallions in a savory sauce.

While we each had our favorites, there was not a dish I would not order again. The balance of authentic flavors and spices were spot on, the service friendly and generous portions at a reasonable price.

Queen Bee Thai Kitchen is a true hidden gem. The restaurant is open Tuesday through Sunday starting at 11 a.m. for lunch and dinner. It is located at 1212 Stratford Ave. You can call for a reservation or order for pickup at 475-282-9318.

Steve Cooper is a local, national and international award-winning photographer, culinary influencer, author and executive director of the Milford Performance Center. Contact him at 203-723-3672.

Orange Republican Town Committee

Staying Civilly Engaged

Notwithstanding the fact that January is my birthday month, this was a tough one. A major winter storm – winter storm Benjamin – slammed much of the Northeast, claiming lives in several states and dumping heavy, wet snow that proved extremely difficult to manage.

Here in Connecticut, and right here in Orange, we certainly got our share. Even well-equipped private plows struggled; the dense snow, persistent freezing temperatures and scant sunshine left massive piles lingering far longer than usual. As I submit this column, we’re still dealing with lingering ice and snow piles that block visibility. Please drive carefully and stay safe.

Through it all, our first selectman, Jim Zioli, kept the community informed with steady, reassuring updates via social media. I want to extend sincere thanks to Zeoli, our dedicated Public Works crew, and all the third-party contractors who worked tirelessly to clear roads and keep our streets as safe as possible under such challenging conditions.

January also brought several important town board meetings. I attended the Board of Selectmen meeting in person, and the room was packed with Scouts, residents and employees.

What struck me most – and saddened me – was the level of polarization on display. Politics can bring out the best in people, but

it can also bring out the worst. Disrespectful behavior was palpable: raised voices from the podium, shouting from seats and comments that crossed well beyond civil disagreement.

This is not acceptable. In my years as a Milford Alderman, such conduct was never tolerated, nor would any of us have stooped to it. Disagreement is healthy; disrespect is not. We can debate ideas with intellect and respect, even (especially) when we hold different beliefs. The normalization of rudeness and personal attacks has to stop. Perhaps the deeper issue is that genuine, thoughtful discourse has become too rare.

The most positive highlight from that meeting? Our Scouts and the many organizations that partner with the town on events that benefit everyone. Seeing these young people and community groups gives me hope. I pray their future will be one of greater civility and mutual respect.

I also watched the Board of Finance meeting on Orange Government Access Television, where the Amity Board of Education budget was presented and reviewed. The requested increases – for additional positions and for grants shifting from external funding to taxpayer responsibility – were substantial.



JUDE TOOHEY

Numbers never lie, but the way they are framed can sometimes mislead.

As residents prepare to vote once budgets are finalized and the referenda are set, I urge everyone to read the full details, look at the big picture and consider the long-term implications.

We are fortunate in Orange to have direct say over our budgets through referendum votes. Many neighboring towns and cities do not offer residents that same voice. We must exercise this right responsibly.

During the meeting, a board member raised the possibility of outsourcing certain support staff roles – an idea quickly dismissed. Yes, there would be upfront costs, but long-term savings in insurance benefits, retirement contributions and other overhead could significantly benefit taxpayers. These are the kinds of creative, fiscally responsible options we should explore in the budget process.

One pattern that always gives me pause is how emotion, particularly around all boards of education budgets, so often drives decisions. We frequently hear warnings that without the full requested increase, “our students will suffer” from classroom cuts.

While no one wants children shortchanged,

I question the repeated use of our kids as leverage to secure funding. Why must the conversation default to emotional framing? Facts should be facts; numbers should be numbers. We should vote based on common sense and the actual data presented.

The Orange Republican Town Committee is not here to create chaos, division or false narratives. In spite of all the noise, we are committed to keeping our town safe, affordable and family-friendly. We are here to build on our incredible heritage.

Our town is fortunate that all our elected officials, regardless of party, along with our commissioners, work tirelessly for the community. Each member strives to do what is right within the framework of our town charter and values.

This February, let’s carry forward a commitment to respectful dialogue, informed decision-making and careful stewardship of our resources. Our town, our children and our taxpayers deserve nothing less.

I truly believe our future lies in our combined respect for one another. We may hold different opinions, yet we should respect one another. Dialogue is the only way we work together.

Stay warm and stay engaged.

Jude Toohey is the vice chair of the Orange Republican Town Committee.

Milford Library Hosting Canva Tutorial

The Milford Public Library will present a class teaching how to use the online image editor Canva on Wednesday, Feb. 25 at 6:30 p.m.

Canva has thousands of free templates (and now Affinity Studio) for items from business cards to resumes that can be easily adapted. Custom images and graphics can

be uploaded to Canva to incorporate into your design.

Staff at the library will demonstrate how you can create your own designs with Canva during this in-person demonstration.

No registration is required. For questions about this program, email fdanowski@milfordct.gov.

NYC Comedian To Perform At MAC

Standup comedian Casey Balsham will perform her act at the Milford Arts Council’s downtown arts space on Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 8 p.m.

Balsham is a stand-up comedian living and breathing in New York City. Her comedy is “sharp, fearless, and brutally honest in the best way,” according to the

event listing. She hosts the Shady Sh*t podcast.

Doors open at 7:30 p.m. There will be snacks and beverages in the speakeasy. The MAC is located at 40 Railroad Ave. South in Milford. For more information, visit milfordarts.org/event/standup-comedy-casey-balsham/.

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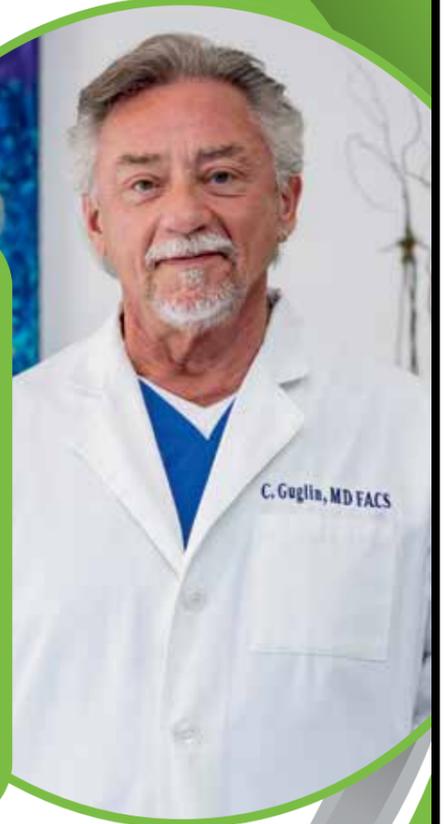
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Orange Board of Finance

State And Local Budgets Challenged By Affordability

As we begin another legislative session in Hartford, and as cities and towns prepare their budgets for the next fiscal year, the topic that consistently comes to the table is affordability within Connecticut and the need for policy changes and solutions.

Affordability has become a challenge, especially within three of the largest sections of our economy: housing, energy and health care. Connecticut's tax and cost structure weighs heavily on residents and taxpayers, yet not enough is being done to remedy the affordability factor.

Even though Connecticut had a strong third quarter performance with 5.6 percent growth in gross domestic product driven primarily by strong output within the finance, insurance and manufacturing sectors, it is still considered one of the most tax-burdened states, ranking 44th for economic competitiveness in the conservative-leaning American Legislative Exchange Council's Rich States, Poor States list.

Let's look at what can be done on health care affordability. First, look to expand subsidies and cost sharing reductions strengthening state level subsidies for the Affordable Care Act and look to expand the marketplace so people can buy their own less expensive health insurance. This would reduce premiums and out of pocket costs for middle income families.

Focus on expanding investment within

community health centers. Federally qualified health centers provide lower cost care and reduce emergency room dependence. Lastly, look at addressing social determinants of health: housing stability, energy security and environmental conditions, all of which directly affect health care costs.

Housing affordability is a bit more challenging, since Connecticut has had a long standing housing shortage. Recent passage of the state's new housing bill has expanded zoning reforms, incentivized multifamily development and accelerated the permitting process. Connecticut municipalities are now faced with feeling the impact of increased population within their communities, driving up the cost of education, health care, utilities, police and fire protection, sewer, water and other city services.

The result of Connecticut's current housing strategy is that there needs to be more local control since the city/town is required to pay for these additional services. There needs to be a unified, accountable statewide plan to address these major cost drivers.

Building permits issued in Connecticut included the largest share for multifamily homes in the Northeast at 67.3 percent, versus Maine which had the smallest share at 26.6 percent. Each New England state has



KEVIN
MCNABOLA

made significant efforts to alleviate housing pressures. The Connecticut congressional delegation announced in May 2024 the appropriation of \$42.4 million to build, renovate and modernize public housing.

Gov. Ned Lamont has forged ties with the private sector and made it a priority to create more taxpayers instead of burdening Connecticut with more taxes. The state needs to attract more corporations and millionaires to

pay for the additional tax burden created by our housing strategy. It is important to understand the reality which Connecticut faces, particularly since the state's tax revenues are heavily reliant on millionaires. These people account for only 0.7 percent of all state tax filers but 30 percent of all income tax receipts.

Lamont recently put forward a plan to be more competitive by including a research and development tax credit for biotech and pharmaceutical companies. The R&D tax credit will be instrumental in reducing the tax burden on small businesses and is definitely a great first step to having Connecticut become more competitive. This is important after the state lost huge companies to other states that created thousands of good-paying jobs, including General Electric, Aetna,

United Technologies and Alexion. All of them have moved operations and headquarters to tax-friendly states, or states that gave them huge tax incentives.

Cities and towns throughout Connecticut are faced with growing challenges to properly fund services. Property values for a single-family home in Orange have increased 45 percent. Just to put the tax impact in perspective, take my house as an example. It is a 2,550 square-foot colonial four-bedroom with 2.5 baths. In 2022 for local taxes I paid \$10,080. For 2025-26, taxes are \$10,917, an 8.3 percent increase.

Property values in Orange are high based on high demand and short supply of homes. It is also no coincidence that the high demand for homes is a direct result of our high-performing school districts, both at the elementary and high school levels. That is the number one reason young families move to Orange.

As we begin our departmental budget reviews in the Board of Finance, I can assure you that the affordability factor will be front and center of our discussions. Compromise will lead to a solid budget that residents can afford during these challenging economic times.

Kevin McNabola is the chief financial officer for the city of Meriden and a member of the Orange Board of Finance.

Orange Recycling Committee

Big Impact: Recycling Better Makes a Difference

Orange now offers more ways to recycle than ever, and every effort makes a difference. With convenient weekly curbside pickup and easy-to-use drop-off options at the Orange Transfer Station & Recycling Center (and other places in town), it's simple for residents to make a real difference.

Yet recycling rates have gone down since last year, and two full truckloads were recently rejected because they contained non-recyclable items. When that happens, the whole load becomes trash, creating more waste and costing more to remove than properly placed recyclables.

Curbside Recycling: Acceptable Items

Nearly every Orange household has a blue wheeled recycling bin that gets emptied weekly. Accepted materials include paper and cardboard; glass bottles and jars; plastic bottles and containers; and aluminum cans (including empty aerosol cans) and foil. There's no sorting required – just place items loose in the bin. A complete list is available at orangerecycles.com.

If you're unsure whether an item is recyclable, the recycling wizard at RecycleCT.com makes it easy to find out. Simply type in an item to learn whether it's recyclable and how to dispose of it properly in Connecticut.

Items to Keep Out of Recycling Bins

Never put plastic bags, films and wraps in curbside recycling bins or the mixed recyclables dumpster at the Transfer Station. These thin, malleable plastics can jam sorting machines, so including them with other recyclables may cause the entire load to be rejected.

They can, however, be recycled separately. Put plastic grocery/retail and bread bags, packaging wrap, zip-top bags, bubble wrap, etc. in the plastic bags and wraps shed at the Transfer Station, or in designated bins at local

stores. If you gather recyclables in a plastic bag, empty them into the appropriate bin, then place the bag in a designated plastic bag bin.

Additional items that may seem recyclable but are not and must go in the trash include black plastic bags and containers; bags for ice melt, mulch, topsoil, etc.; snack bags and candy wrappers; frozen food bags; pet food or litter bags; and polystyrene. If in doubt, throw it out.

Heed Signs at the Transfer Station

The Orange Transfer Station is user-friendly and well-marked. Each bin, container, dumpster, compactor and trailer has clear signage explaining what should and should not be placed there. Please read the signs or ask an attendant for guidance to help keep materials in the right place and prevent contamination of recyclables. You can find out more about the Transfer Station at orangerecycles.com/transfer-station.

More Easy Ways to Help and Save Money

A dedicated glass recycling container (green) is available at the Transfer Station. In one recent month, residents recycled 1,400 pounds of glass, helping reduce trash disposal costs. When full, it gets emptied off-site so if it's not there when you go, save items for your next visit.

Residents can recycle clothing, shoes, household textiles and more by putting items in the white Baystate Textiles bins at the Transfer Station, High Plains Community Center, Public Works or Case Memorial Library. In one recent month, 2,700 pounds of textiles were collected this way, diverting them from the trash stream and generating



ILENE
MOYHER

revenue for the town.

There are four green compost bins at the Transfer Station where residents can put food scraps including fruits, vegetables, meats, bones, eggshells, coffee grounds and leftovers. Residents may dump scraps directly into the bin or place them in a plastic bag and throw the entire bag in – plastic bags are okay. In one recent month, 700 pounds of food waste were composted instead of discarded.

In Orange, recycling is convenient and accessible – and every action makes a real difference in reducing contamination and saving

resources. By obeying signs at the Transfer Station and checking websites for recycling details, you can help maximize recycling efforts.

April 11 is the twice-yearly Paper Shredding and more event at High Plains Community Center, from 9 a.m. to noon. The event includes document shredding, mattress and box spring removal and collections for hazardous household waste, clothing, household goods and electronics. You can find details at orangerecycles.com/paper-shred-mattress-recycle.

Ilene Moyher is a member of the Orange Recycling Committee.

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Women Redefining Retirement To Fill Easter Baskets

Women Redefining Retirement will be filling Easter baskets to be delivered to needy kids at their March 9 meeting at the Milford Senior Center.

The group is a community of women who get together monthly to socialize, to

learn and to make a difference. The group has grown from four women to over 100 members. The group meets at 6 p.m. each month to donate to causes in the region.

For more information, visit facebook.com/WomenRedefiningRetirement.

Real Talk: You Ask, A Pro Answers

Freezing Temperatures And Homeownership

The New England weather this year is a strong reminder of the responsibilities associated with owning a home and the value of its care. There is plenty of information on the dangers of cold weather, such as space heaters overheating while you sleep or generators that are not used strictly outdoors away from the building.

Let's make sure our children, who are newer homeowners, know these things. Another important thing to look out for are the vents from the basement directed outside from heat sources that can be blocked by heavy ice or snow, creating carbon monoxide backup.

Always check your carbon monoxide detectors and make sure that they are all functioning properly. If you wake up nauseated or dizzy, check those carbon monoxide de-

tectors again, as it could be a poisoning symptom.

Look out for what this cold weather is capable of damaging in the next six weeks. Here is a short checklist.

How is the insulation on your attic floor? This helps prevent ice damage and backups. Watch for icicles hanging off the gutters, as that can be a sign of this issue starting. Try to remove the snow on the roof if this starts happening. You can damage the gutters and leaders, so leave it to the professionals.

Cover your air conditioning unit outside with bricks and boards, and this will keep ice and snow out of the unit while letting it breathe. Of course, turn off all the water



BARBARA LEHRER

spickets from the inside that lead out, as they can be the first to freeze up when the temperatures are in the 20s.

The basement is usually a little neglected. If it is unfinished, those low temperatures outside can really wreak havoc. If your basement has above-grade walls, there needs to be heat in the area. Only a boiler gives off heat in the basement, so check that the temperature stays above 50-55 degrees. A forced-air furnace offers no warm air in the basement.

You want to prevent pipes from freezing. An unfinished lower level needs foam sleeves on the water pipes, especially near doors and windows. Local housing supply

stores have plenty. If you can add a small furnace supply vent to the area, that would be a great preventative measure.

Bulkheads need weatherstripping. Caulking the cellar windows is another suggestion, as is tree branch clearance. Even reversing ceiling fans to bring down rising heat can help.

If you have an old house, the hallways for the front and back exits may need electric heating wires, as there is never enough insulation in those walls.

A little prep, a lot of supervision and awareness of the dangers can keep you on your toes this winter. Be safe; see you in the spring.

If you need more information on these issues, email Barbara.Lehrer@cbmoves.com.

Book Reviews

Me Here, You There By Steve Somers

In addition to loving books, I love sports. The Yankees, Rangers and Marquette men's basketball have claimed my heart for the last 50-plus years. I can't tell you how many times I incurred the wrath of my parents when they viewed the phone bill and noticed all the calls to Sports Phone to get Marquette scores.

That all changed in 1987 when WFAN was born. Although there were other sports talk shows, WFAN was the country's first 24-hour, all-sports talk station.

Personnel changes happened quite frequently as the station struggled to find its footing in the New York market. But one voice remained a constant: Steve Somers. This is the story of how a sports-loving San Franciscan made it big in New York City. I listened to him every night; he was my favorite host.

Somers always suspected sports would play a big role in his life. One day he took it

upon himself to visit the broadcast booth at Candlestick Park purposefully to meet Ross Hodges, the radio voice of the San Francisco Giants. Baseball fans may remember Hodges' iconic call, "the Giants win the pennant, The Giants win the pennant!"

That meeting cemented Somers' belief that sports broadcasting was where he belonged. His journey took him to several cities in California, a less-than-pleasant time in Atlanta and several periods of unemployment.

WFAN was a big risk in 1987. The FAN had its growing pains. Initially staffed by well-known national figures like Bryant Gumbel and Pete Franklin, they failed to connect with the sports-hungry New York audience. It wasn't until FAN management began to tap local talents that the station began to take off.



CARMELA DEVITO

Although not local talent, Somers fit in perfectly on the overnight shift. It was his love for New York sports teams that made him connect with his audience. He shared the highs and lows of the Metropolitan (Mets), Jets, Knicks and Rangers with their diehard fans. He used soundbites and characters like the Fearless Forecaster to set the tone for each evening's show.

The callers were the real stars of the show, though.

Jerry from Queens (who turned out to be Jerry Seinfeld) would call to either lament or relish in the achievements of the Mets. Other celebrities would call, but it was the local callers who made the show.

Doris from Rego Park quickly developed her own following. A passionate Mets fan,

she would always end her calls with, "Thank you for your time and courtesy." Her impact on the station was such that when she passed away in 2003 the New York Times ran her obituary and included her in their special year-end edition. Jerome from Manhattan was definitely a character, warranting his own special Twilight Zone introduction.

Somers also paid homage to the people behind the scenes who helped him put on the show every night.

It was a sad day for me when Somers retired. He got me through many difficult times in my life and shared my joy when the Rangers – finally – won the Stanley Cup in 1994. The sports world is a sadder place without him in it.

Carmela DeVito, a voracious reader with a journalism degree from Marquette University, is a retired social worker and a member of the Friends of the Milford Library.



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The Garden Spot

Why Plant Natives?

I recently heard about the kakapo, a large, flightless parrot that is native to New Zealand which only mates when a specific berry from the *Dacrydium cupressinum*, commonly known as rimu, is in bloom. The rimu is an evergreen conifer that is also native to New Zealand.

That's why natives matter. Generally, the rimu only produces fruits every four years. The fruit then takes over a year to mature and produce berries. Approximately every five years you might hear the "booming" of the kakapo mating call.

Fortunately, the kakapo is one of the longest-lived bird species – typically living between 40 and 80 years, with some known to have lived to 100 – so they have time to mate and reproduce. But no native rimu trees mean no more kakapo. A pretty clear

reason to plant natives.

Another reason to plant natives is that they are, by definition, non-invasive. The USDA defines an invasive "as a species that is 1) non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and 2) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health."

In other words, not only will the native plant require less work daily, but it will also not take over the environment and crowd out other beneficial species. Over time, this improves the diversity of plant and insect species. Greater plant diversity in a habitat means greater insect diversity, which means more pollinators.



PAT DRAY

Another critical reason to plant natives is that with few exceptions, insects are herbivores that have adapted over time to eat only certain plants. Those insects are incredibly important to our pollinators.

According to entomologist Doug Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home*, most bird species depend on insect protein and fat for the nutrients required to make eggs and then to feed the young themselves. Tallamy's research illustrates the importance of native plants. He found that native plants supported four times more insect biomass than non-native plants did. Planting natives means more of the essential foods that our pollinators need.

If you want to hear the birds sing (or in the case of the kakapo, "boom") and see the fireflies at night, plant native.

If you are undertaking any landscape planning, one of the best native trees to plant in Connecticut is the white oak. One of our most beautiful native shrubs (and the Connecticut state flower) is the mountain laurel, which thrives in many environments with very little care. There are many other native flowering plants that you can easily learn about by visiting nativeplanttrust.org

As the adage goes, the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.

Pat Dray is a past president of the Garden Club of Orange and a master gardener.

Time Management

Close A Big Hole In Your Day

We all have 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week. That equals 168 hours per week. Time is only spent. It cannot be saved. Did you ever have any time left over on Sunday night that you could lop on over to the following week?

There are only two ways to spend time wisely or, well, not so wisely.

If you are working 40 hours per week you may lose three hours per day (15 hours per week) in a black hole that sucks away and consumes better than a third of the time we have available to be productive in our work.

The black hole? Needless, unproductive interruptions.

An interruption is an unanticipated event. They come to us in two ways, either in-person or electronically.

Interruptions can be good or bad. A lot of what we do daily is to address the "good" interruptions, those that are "crucial" and "important."

What takes us away from achieving higher levels of productivity are the "bad" interruptions, those that have "little" or "no" value.

Examples of good interruptions are when a client or customer calls you to place an order, your boss stops by to inform you that you will be getting the raise, or a co-worker interrupts you at your desk to show you how to complete a project in less time.

These are all interruptions, but they will lead to enhanced results. They are good, so



DON WETMORE

particularly good.

On average, we experience one interruption every eight minutes, or six to seven per hour. In an eight-hour day, that totals around 50-60 interruptions. The average interruption takes approximately five minutes. Some may take several hours or days; others may only take a few seconds.

If you are receiving 50 interruptions in the day and each takes just five minutes, that totals 250 minutes, or just over four hours out of eight – about 50 percent of the workday.

If you were to track and rate each inter-

ruption you experience during the day, (let A = Crucial; B = Important; C = Little Value; and D = No Value), most people will discover that only about 20 percent of their interruptions are of the A and B variety, while 80 percent are of the C and D variety.

Eighty percent of 250 minutes is 200, or just over three hours per day going down the drain being consumed by interruptions that are not productive for you.

Plan ways to reduce the unproductive interruptions. That will close a big hole in your day.

Don Wetmore is a certified business coach and the author of "The Productivity Handbook" and "Organizing Your Life." Contact him at 203-394-8216 or ctsem@msn.com.

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Giving Back

Wines and More: Community Is Always On The Menu

Wines and More Milford is a family-owned and operated business that has been serving the community for over 21 years, located at 242 Boston Post Rd. in Milford. Managed by Corey Shoop, the store employs between 11 and 15 team members, many of whom grew up in Milford, live here now or maintain deep ties to the town.

“Celebrating community is at our core,” Shoop said. “We’re extremely fortunate to be an integral part of the fabric of this town.”

That commitment is evident not only in how Wines and More operates day to day, but in how consistently they give back. The business regularly donates time, resources and financial support to organizations that strengthen Milford, including the Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce, Milford Boys & Girls Club, Milford Arts Council, Milford Rotary, Milford Rape Crisis Center and Beth-El Center.

They are also a proud supporter of local Rotary Club missions, helping advance ser-

vice projects that directly benefit our neighbors. They generously support my annual Purple Pantry Box fundraiser, which provides food assistance to families in need right here in our community. Their willingness to step up year after year reflects a genuine dedication to making a difference beyond their storefront.

What sets Wines and More apart is their belief that a local business should be a place for connection – not just transactions. Customers are greeted by a knowledgeable, friendly team offering a true “high-touch” experience, whether they’re helping someone discover a new wine, sample bottles before purchasing or explore one of their hand-selected bourbon barrels curated through their popular whiskey club.

Beyond wine, spirits and beer, the store also showcases unique Milford-inspired gifts, including custom-designed handbags, tow-



WENDY
BARRY

els, coasters and specialty items created by a commissioned local artist – a thoughtful nod to hometown pride.

One of Wines and More’s most meaningful initiatives is their annual “Barrels for a Cause” event, which brings together the Milford Rape Crisis Center and Beth-El Center for a fundraiser centered around a specially selected barrel of bourbon. Proceeds go directly to individuals in need within our local community.

“For us, staying active locally is about building a place where people feel connected and supported,” Shoop said. “It’s also about leading by example for our children – showing them that kindness, responsibility and showing up for others really matters.”

In an era where one click can deliver almost anything to your door, Shoop hopes

more people recognize the true impact of shopping local.

“Choosing a small business isn’t just about making a purchase,” he explained. “It’s about investing in your own community – supporting jobs, nonprofits and the relationships that keep our town vibrant.”

Wines and More continues to bring people together through events as well, including an upcoming charity wine dinner on March 24 at Bin 100 benefiting the Milford Arts Council.

After more than 20 years in business, Wines and More Milford remains rooted in the same values that inspired them to open here in the first place: genuine service, strong relationships and a deep commitment to the community they proudly call home.

Know a local business that deserves to be recognized? Email wendy@wbarryrealtor.com to nominate a business for an upcoming column. Let’s keep celebrating the people who keep Milford and Orange strong.

Here’s To Your Health

Beating The Winter Blues

Winter has a way of sneaking up on us, especially after the hustle and bustle of the holidays ends. Shorter days, colder temperatures and limited sunlight can leave even the most motivated people feeling sluggish, unmotivated and a little “off.”

The winter blues are real. For many, they impact body, soul and spirit, impacting physical and emotional well-being.

The good news is there are powerful tools that can make a meaningful difference: intentional movement and foods that nourish our bodies.

Exercise is one of the most effective natural mood boosters available to us. Whenever we move our bodies, we stimulate the release of endorphins – often called the “happy hormones” – which help reduce stress, anxiety and symptoms of low mood.

During winter, especially when outdoor activities are limited, it becomes even more important to find movement we enjoy. I do not like being outdoors in the cold unless I’m out for some special occasion.

Recently, I made a personal commitment to prioritize my mental and physical health by joining a barre, Pilates and yoga studio.

Like many people, I felt a seasonal dip in energy and motivation, especially after coming off a three-week cold. A friend of mine invited me to join her for a barre class.

What I realized was that I needed more than willpower. I needed structure, accountability and movement that supported my stress management. I’ve always been a runner, high intensity interval training kind of girl to kick in my endorphins. What I found surprised me a bit. These low-impact, yet challenging workouts of course strengthened my body and kept me flexible. But most importantly, they gave me a sense of calm I didn’t realize I was missing.

Barre and Pilates focus on controlled movements of the core and pelvic floor without overwhelming the body, while yoga emphasizes breath and balance. All three focus on mindfulness. Together they create a powerful combination for reducing stress, promoting relaxation and mental focus. Even just a few sessions a week can help reset



MICHELE
TENNEY

your nervous system and bring you a renewed sense of energy during the winter months.

I can’t leave out the importance of proper nutrition for beating the winter blues. What we eat directly affects our brain chemistry. One-pot wonders chock full of veggies is a better decision than processed foods and sugar that can cause energy crashes and inflammation, which worsen feelings of fatigue and irritability.

The overconsumption of alcohol is also a contributing factor to feelings of fatigue and irritability. Lean proteins, healthy fats, foods rich in omegas, whole grains and minerals support steady energy levels. Be intentional about what you put in your body.

I would recommend vitamin D supplements during the winter. It’s the “sunshine vitamin.” Consult your doctor to make sure which supplements they would recommend. Supplements are not all created equal.

Hydration, hydration, hydration. Especially with all the dryness of this season, it’s important to maintain your daily water

requirements.

Beating the winter blues doesn’t require perfection; just consistency and compassion for yourself. Awareness is the best weapon you have toward changing your thinking and habits. The brain can be taught how to undo unhealthy behaviors the same way the unhealthy behaviors became habits. Whether its joining a studio, taking a daily walk, stretching at home or simply choosing the foods that will help you rather than hurt you, you are worth every bit of effort you put into self-care.

Sometimes the best way to get through the season isn’t to fight it, but reach out to a friend and buddy up with someone. They can help support you through it, one healthy choice at a time. I believe in you. You’ve got this. Here’s to your health.

Michele Tenney is a Certified Personal Trainer and Nutritionist & Wellness Coach. She is a member of the Orange Board of Health. Her website is www.elevatePTW.com. She can be reached at 203-668-2969 or email at Hmgbrd3@gmail.com.

Ponder This

Eldering With Grace

A new term has emerged in our vocabulary to describe aging in the 21st century; functional age. This change in vernacular represents a shift in our understanding of the aging process. Due to increased life expectancy, getting older is now measured, or should be, by functional age rather than chronological age.

Many retired folks are active into their 80s, so age 65 can no longer arbitrarily be considered old. Of course, there are significant variations to this phenomenon of sustained vitality according to culture, economic status, physical health, emotional wellness and overall capability.

A best practice societal approach reconsiders policies and practices that were developed when the process of aging was quite different. Chronological age was once the most important defining factor. The natural aging process is no longer viewed as mere decline but as a time of enhancement and contribution.

My preference is for the term *eldering*, rather than *aging*. *Eldering* is an extraordinary privilege due to unprecedented levels of health, lifespan, energy, time and resources. Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson described eight stages of psychosocial development in the 20th century, yet we have barely begun to consider the ramifications

of this stage of extended aging. Significant opportunities exist for intergenerational collaboration aimed at fostering constructive and forward-looking change. *Eldering with grace* gives hope for maximizing rather than diminishing the experience of living in combination with the energy, innovation and changing viewpoints of the young.

Mentoring within this framework of *eldering* implies mutual simultaneous interaction. Previous notions of mentoring are outdated and not sufficient for challenges in modern, changing communities. Former mentoring models based primarily in the workforce involved a more powerful, usually older, individual providing guidance to a protégé. Developed for and perhaps helpful in the business environment, such a mentoring process focused on the largess of the mentor toward the mentee. There no longer exists a mentor and mentee, but rather a mutual simultaneous interaction between people for the benefit of both.

Mutual simultaneous interaction stems from nursing theorist Martha Rogers, who developed the theory of integrated meaning to human interactions. Integrality encourages



ELLEN RUSSELL
BEATTY

humans to move from the awareness of what one knows individually to the consciousness of what one knows together.

From this standpoint, elders and youngers across the human life cycle need one another to be whole. Mentoring up from younger individuals to elders is helpful, enjoyable and necessary in this rapidly changing world of technology and globalization. Likewise, elders have much to share about relationships, communication and sense of purpose with younger folks who struggle with engagement.

Good happens when older and younger people connect, since active wisdom from each direction can become a stronger force for change. It is the responsibility of a caring society to support these connections that enhance purpose and emotional well-being, both of which are predictors of the ability to thrive. Ideally, as individuals thrive so too can the group, the community and the world.

Both the workplace and communities in general are affected by overall population aging, which is occurring worldwide at an accelerated rate. This shift in demographics requires both individual and community mod-

ifications. Advancing technology is quickly changing how people of all age groups maneuver through everyday life.

There is an opportunity to embrace multi-generational participation for the benefit of all age groups. Staying active by volunteering or mentoring others is one way to stay engaged while continuing to contribute.

How can we contribute to this living planet’s well-being and to one another? The challenging but exciting task for human *eldering in grace* is to give and take active wisdom through mindful encounters with others across the human lifespan. *Eldering with grace* is a process that we must do together.

Dr. Ellen Russell Beatty served five terms on the Milford Board of Aldermen. She served seven years as Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at Southern Connecticut State University, and also served as interim Academic Vice president, Dean of Health & Human Services and Director of Faculty Development. In addition to the broad perspective and a multitude of skills required of high-level administrators, her areas of special expertise lie in strategic planning, accreditation, assessment and planning and budgetary allocation.

Travel Matters

River Cruising In Colombia

For the last five years, AmaWaterways has been working on bringing river cruising to Colombia on the Magdalena River. Dubbed the “river of life,” it is the second most biodiverse river in the world – second only to the Amazon. AmaWaterways faced a monumental task which required finding the right partner in Colombia to build the infrastructure along the river and the right shipbuilder to build two new river ships that are ideally suited to the Magdalena.

AmaWaterways has knocked it out of the park. The itinerary runs on the AmaMagdalena ship from Cartagena to Baranquilla (the second largest Carnivale destination in the world). AmaMelodia runs a similar itinerary with a few differences. Pre- and post-trips include two nights in Cartagena – or you can spend three nights in Medellin and two nights in Cartagena. Post trips includes Panama, featuring a tour of the Panama Ca-

nal.

The bulk of the trip, however, is exploring these small towns and cities along the river to learn about Colombian nature, culture and flavors. There are three river guides onboard who are founts of knowledge about the people, the flora and wildlife of the area. The common birds of the lower Magdalena are mostly indigenous, a birdwatcher’s dream.

The ship is beautiful with only 30 cabins, a restaurant featuring both Colombian dishes and Western food for those who prefer it; and a top sundeck and pool, which you truly enjoy with the Colombian weather. The ship has been designed by a well-known designer from Colombia and the co-owner, Kristin Karst, has hand-picked paintings from Cartagena – from the artsy



KAREN QUINN-PANZER

section of Getsemeni. The lounge is inviting and friendly in terms of the setup, with Jenga and other games to enjoy while sailing down the river.

While the temperature only gets up in the 80s, it’s humid, and AmaWaterways has planned outdoor activities and exploration for morning and just before sunset. In between, you can enjoy Spanish lessons, learning local dances and enjoying musicians such as tonight’s jazz duo.

Mompox is the name of the main city along the river, and we are spending two nights there with nature trips in smaller boats that hold 20 people each so we can get closer to the nature – in early morning and at sunset. We also have the opportunity to go to a filagree factory, which is the most popular

form of jewelry in Colombia – and actually try our hand at this ancient metalwork.

While we are at the beginning of our trip, one of the highlights is spending 48 hours in Cartagena – a more tropical and Latin version of New Orleans. The old town pulses in the evening with people enjoying this metropolis with its bouganvillia and street art everywhere.

The Navigation Museum was very educational about Colombia, the only country in South America bordered by two oceans. With direct five-hour flights from JFK, I highly recommend the river cruise on the AmaMagdalena.

Karen Quinn-Panzer is the owner of Dream Vacations Quinn Panzer Travel. She can be reached at kpanzer@dreamvacations.com or 203-647-3107.

Milford Plaza

(Continued From 1)

at 990 and 1040-1052 Boston Post Road. The development required approval from the board for a zone change, a special permit with site plan review and a lot line adjustment in order to proceed.

The Hooters restaurant closed for good in 2020; the restaurant chain filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2025. The property was bought in 2022 by Key Cars Auto Group.

Luke Mauro of PE Solli Engineering, who represented Key Hyundai before the planning board, said the former Hooters building would be replaced by an 11,000 square foot building that would house a restaurant and two retail stores. The grocery store would be a separate 26,181

square foot building.

All three sections – grocer, restaurant and car dealership – would have interconnected parking lots.

The developer’s traffic analysis estimated that the plaza would generate about 388 new car trips during peak weekday hours and 418 new trips during Saturday peak hours. Those additional trips could be accommodated by the existing signals around the property.

Although the proposed plaza is fronted by the Boston Post Road, it is also accessible by Forest Road and is near a residential neighborhood.

Richard Bryant, a resident who lives on Forest Road, expressed concern that the project would increase traffic on the road, particularly by delivery trucks.

“As far as the trucks entering and exiting, to enter and exit on Forest Road would be an absolute disaster,” he said, adding that the section of road is already a bottleneck.

Board members pressed Mauro over whether the developer could add signage forbidding tractor-trailer traffic from coming through from Forest Road.

“We can put signage in, but with the caveat that the curb cuts still have to be reviewed by DOT,” Mauro said. He noted that the site is already designed so that trucks could turn in from the Boston Post Road, and that a truck wouldn’t be able to make a right-hand turn in from Forest Road.

However, Mauro warned that completely cutting off access to Forest Road could kill the project’s approval from the state

Department of Transportation, as they prefer to see projects of this size have access to a signalized road.

Ultimately the board encouraged the developer to do all it could to direct traffic away from the neighborhood while lauding the overall plan.

“I will be supporting this with mixed and conflicted feelings,” said Vice Chair Robert Satti, reiterating the concerns over trucks on Forest Road. “Giving a new property that has been unused for some number of years different types of uses I think is a good thing for the city of Milford.”

“This is putting empty, vacant property back on the tax rolls, which is a good thing,” said board Chair Jim Quish. “We just want to make sure that it doesn’t disrupt the neighborhood.”

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For Nature's Sake

Why Red Foxes Make Good Neighbors

Connecticut residents who have been out at dawn or dusk in recent weeks and may have spotted a fox in their local landscape can consider it a good sign. According to Connecticut wildlife experts, the presence of foxes in a neighborhood helps foster a balance of wildlife that benefits the entire ecosystem of plants, birds and other species.

Those healthier ecosystems, including parks and backyards, have benefits for human health. Among other things, as a 2017 New York Times article put it, "Foxes may be Lyme disease's worst enemy."

Two state scientists agreed in separate conversations that the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is a welcome sight in our neighborhoods.

Brooks Pitman, a wildlife biologist with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, sees foxes as one of several species, including coyotes, hawks and fisher cats that keep rodent populations in check. As humans have expanded the size

of cities and towns, according to Pitman, species like rats and mice have adapted to the new spaces while leaving predators behind.

Suburban landscapes also attract small animals like chipmunks, mice and shrews – all of which carry *Borrelia burgdorferi* (the bacterium that causes Lyme disease), as well as ehrlichiosis and anaplasmosis. There's something about the smooth suburban lawns adjacent to brush and trees, says Pitman, that makes "a perfect little transitional spot" for rodents and shrews.

Dr. Megan Linske, a scientist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experimentation Station, says people are discovering that "the greatest risk for contracting a tick-borne disease is actually in your backyard, an area that we call the peridomestic habitat," as opposed to a sprawling woodland.

Reflecting on the larger picture, Linske says the ecosystem of the Northeast as a whole is unbalanced, so when meso-predators like foxes show up it is helping to correct that balance.

Neighborhoods already sharing their surroundings with foxes will find tips for a healthy co-existence, including how to build a fox-proof enclosure for chickens, at the CTDEEP website.

For more introductory facts about the



PATRICIA HOUSER



foxes we need in our communities, consider the questions and answers below:

1) True/False: Healthy foxes pose no danger to humans.

2) Foxes are most closely related to: a) wolves b) cats c) racoons

3) True/False: It is normal for a healthy fox to appear out in the open at midday.

4) The average home range of a fox in Connecticut is: a) 8-11 square miles b) 5-7 square miles c) 2-4 square miles

5) True/False: In Connecticut, foxes only eat mice.

6) According to research, foxes help curb the spread of Lyme disease by: a) consuming all the ticks that attach to their own coats b) reducing the presence of disease carrying rodents.

7) True/False: Where a coyote lives, Lyme disease is practically non-existent.

8) According to the Nature Conservancy, the average lifespan of a fox in captivity is 10 to 12 years, but in the wild they live an average of a) three years b) eight years

9) Which of the following are sources of fox mortality in our area: a) road crossings b) rodenticide c) disease outbreaks d) habitat loss and fragmentation e) all of the above

Answers:

1) True. This is a direct quote from the CT-DEEP webpage titled, "Living with Foxes."

2) a. Wolves, foxes, coyotes and domestic dogs are all part of the Canidae family, with foxes belonging to the Vulpini branch that diverged from others 12 million years ago. A fascinating account of similarities and differences between dogs and foxes can be found at the website for the nonprofit Institution for Environmental Research and Education.

3) True. While foxes tend to prefer dawn

and dusk times for activity, it is not unusual for them to be seen at midday as well.

4) c, according to the CT.gov.

5) False. While rodents are the main ingredient in a fox diet, according to the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies, foxes are omnivores and will take advantage of a variety of food sources, including fruit fallen from trees and leavings from unsecured garbage cans. By consuming fruits, foxes assist in the dispersal of seeds through their waste, promoting plant diversity, according to the research site sparkmoor.com

6) b. In a famous 2017 study, researchers found that when foxes were patrolling an area for food, they consumed some mice and forced others into hiding. Tick larvae on the forest floor in those places were less likely to attach to the scarce mice for their first meal, and since mice are the main source of Lyme disease, most ticks in those areas never picked up the disease. The study suggested foxes reduce Lyme disease in an area by reducing the circulation of mice.

7) False. In 2012 Scientific American reported on a study showing a marked increase in Lyme disease in four states in the Midwest and Northeast at the same time that fox populations were disappearing from those places. The decline of foxes in those states also coincided with the expansion of coyote populations. The study showed that where coyotes increased and foxes decreased, rates of human illness with Lyme disease increased.

8) a. Three years

9) e. All of the above. There are a few others, including hunting and trapping by humans.



Red foxes are a sign of a healthy ecosystem in Connecticut. Photo by Deb Eccleston of CTAudubon.

Patricia Houser, PhD, AICP is a freelance writer and researcher focused on environment and sustainability.

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The Arts

Something For Everyone With The Arts

The winter weather is still upon us, and what better way to spend the season than with the arts – from relaxing music to breathtaking visual arts, dance and shows, find your way to wind down from the holiday season.

Haven't taken down your holiday decorations yet? That's okay; add some hearts for Valentine's Day to make it seasonal and spend some time with the arts. Take a friend with you and enjoy something new. It will be time well spent.

Eastbound Theatre presents **Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike** by Christopher Durang, with matinee and evening performances through Feb. 21 at Milford Arts Council, 40 Railroad Ave. South in Milford. This Tony Award-winning comedy centers on the tensions between three middle-aged siblings living in a country house in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Vanya and Sonia lead a quiet, uneventful life – until their glamorous, movie-star sister, Masha, arrives unexpectedly with her much younger lover, Spike. What follows is a whirlwind of comic chaos, theatrical arguments and emotional revelations as the siblings confront aging, identity, family regrets and the threat of losing their beloved home. Tickets purchased in advance online are \$32. They are \$40 at the door for adults and \$5 for children under age 17 with a paid adult ticket. Advance ticket purchasing is available until two hours prior to the start of the show by visiting milfordarts.org or calling the box office at 203-878-6647.

The Wilton Playshop presents **Master Class** by Terrance McNally. Matinee and evening performances run Feb. 13-28 at the Wilton Playshop, 15 Lovers Ln. in Wilton. This compelling portrayal of opera legend Maria Callas follows her story as she schools, scolds and inspires her students. Passion, artistry and wit take center stage in this Tony Award-winning drama. Tickets are \$30 general admission and \$25 senior admission. They can be purchased by visiting wiltonplayshop.org or calling 203-762-7629.

The New Haven Symphony Orchestra presents **Beethoven and Mendelssohn** featuring renowned violinist Augustin Hadelich with conductor and music director Perry So on Feb. 22 at 3 p.m. at Woolsey Hall, 500 College St. in New Haven. The performance includes Symphony No. 6, "Pastoral" by Ludwig van Beethoven, "Violin Concerto" by Felix Mendelssohn, and the modern meditation on land, memory, and identity "Inscription" by Raven Chacon. Ticket holders are welcome to join Music Director So the day of the concert for a free pre-concert chat from 2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the first floor of Woolsey Hall to learn more about this program. Main floor, first and second balcony seating available. Tickets range from \$15 to \$79, with special KidTix. Each KidTix (tickets for youth under 18) will be reduced to \$0 at checkout with each adult ticket purchased. To purchase tickets and for more information visit newhavensymphony.org or call 203-693-1486.

New Haven Museum and Long Wharf Theatre present **Invitation To Engage: 60 Years Of Long Wharf & Beyond**, a multi-gallery exhibition celebrating the theater's rich history and bold future, through February at the New Haven Museum, located at 114 Whitney Ave. in New Haven. Step inside a living history of theatrical innovation with this immersive exhibition showcasing Long Wharf Theatre's 400+ productions, from *The Crucible* (1965) to *She Loves Me* (2024). This collaboration features six decades of groundbreaking storytelling, legendary performances and the bold new direction of one of America's most influential regional theaters. From iconic productions to intimate artist reflections, this multi-gallery experience brings together archival treasures,

interactive rehearsal spaces and a visionary look at the theater's evolving future. Long Wharf Theatre has enjoyed legendary artists like Al Pacino, Stockard Channing, Anna Deavere Smith, Larry Kramer, Phylicia Rashad and John Lithgow. Enjoy hands-on workshops, artist talks and panel discussions. See exclusive behind-the-scenes content and rare archival materials. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors, \$2 for students older than 12 and free for children age 12 and under. The show is open Wednesday-Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. They are closed on major holidays. For more information visit newhavenmuseum.org or call 203-562-4183.

Center Stage Theatre presents **Matilda the Musical** with book by Dennis Kelly and original songs by Tim Minchin, running matinee and evening performances from Feb. 20 to March 8 at Center Stage Theatre, 54 Grove St. in Shelton. This inspiring musical is about an extraordinary girl named Matilda Wormwood who uses her sharp wit, intelligence, and psychokinetic powers to change her own destiny. The story follows her as she deals with her neglectful and cruel parents, a tyrannical headmistress named Miss Trunchbull, and a kind teacher named Miss Honey. At its heart, the musical is about the power of imagination, courage, and the triumph of good over evil. Tickets can be purchased at centerstageshelton.org or by calling 203-225-6079.

Hartford Stage presents **Death of a Salesman**, a classic American theater drama by Arthur Miller. Matinee and evening performances run Feb. 27 to March 29 at 50 Church St. in Hartford. In this poignant story of the high cost of achieving the American dream, Willy Loman desperately craves success for himself and his sons, but stark reality cannot live up to his dreams. The wall of delusions he has constructed quietly crumbles around him while a devastated and demoralized man searches in vain for a hidden path to greatness. Meanwhile, his devoted wife holds out hope, and his sons wrestle with their own failings. Beautifully written and relevant through the decades, this classic play reveals new truths to every generation of audiences. Tickets start at \$20 and can be purchased by visiting hartfordstage.org or calling 860-527-5151.

Long Wharf Theatre presents **Gem of the Ocean** by August Wilson with performances from Feb. 27 to March 15 at 7 p.m. at Canal Dock Boathouse, 475 Long Wharf Dr. in New Haven. Set in 1904 Pittsburgh, this classic begins at the home of Aunt Ester, a 285-year-old spiritual healer and former slave believed to carry the memory of the African diaspora. When Citizen Barlow, a newcomer from the South, arrives haunted by guilt, Aunt Ester sends him on a spiritual journey to the mythical City of Bones to confront his past and ancestry. As the community wrestles with protest, injustice and the cost of resistance, Citizen must choose the legacy he'll carry forward. Tickets start at \$45 and can be purchased by visiting longwharf.org or calling 203-693-1486.

Castle Craig Players presents **I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change!**, a musical comedy with book and lyrics by Joe DiPietro and music by Jimmy Roberts. Matinee and evening performances run Feb. 27 to March 15 at Almira F. Stephan Memorial Playhouse, 59 West Main St. in Meriden. This sharp-witted and humorous play explores the ups and downs of relationships, from first dates to long-term commitment. Catchy songs and laugh-out-loud scenarios celebrate love in all its perfectly imperfect forms. Common and relatable relationship themes are certain to have you nodding



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and laughing out loud. The venue has cabaret-style table seating. Patrons are invited to bring their own food and beverages. All tickets for Castle Craig productions are sold exclusively online by visiting castlecraigplayers.org.

Shubert Theatre presents **Mrs. Doubtfire**, with matinee and evening performances from March 5-8 at the Shubert Theatre, 247 College St. in New Haven. Book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O'Farrell, music and lyrics by Karey and Wayne Kirkpatrick. This musical comedy checks all of the boxes. Out-of-work actor Daniel Hillard will do anything for his kids. After losing custody in a messy divorce, he creates the kindly alter-ego of Scottish nanny Euphemia Doubtfire in a desperate attempt to stay in their lives. As his new character takes on a life of its own, Mrs. Doubtfire teaches Daniel more than he bargained for about how to be a father. This is a hysterical and heartfelt story about holding onto your loved ones against all odds, proving we are better together. Tickets start at \$30 and can be purchased by visiting shubert.com or calling 203-562-5666.

Chestnut Street Playhouse presents **A Few Good Men** by Aaron Sorkin, with matinee and evening performances from March 5-15 at Chestnut Street Playhouse, 24 Chestnut St. in Norwich. The action takes place in various locations in Washington, D.C. and on the US Naval Base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the summer of 1986. This riveting drama tells the story of military lawyers at a court-martial who uncover a high-level conspiracy in the course of defending their clients, two US marines accused of murder. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased by visiting chestnutstreetplayhouse.org or calling 860-886-2378.

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art presents **Peter Waite: Social Memory, Paintings 1987-2025**, now through March 15 at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 600 Main St. in Hartford. A former student of Hartford Art School, these large-scale paintings of familiar sites across New England and historic locations throughout Europe explore themes of cultural significance and the transitional nature of public spaces. The viewer is drawn to the stillness of the spaces, reflecting upon the progression of time. For museum hours, visit wadsworth.org or call 860-278-2670.

The Community Theatre at Woodbury presents **The Gin Game** by D.L. Coburn with matinee and evening performances from March 13-22 held at Woodbury Historic Old Town Hall, 5 Mountain Rd. in Woodbury. This two-person play follows the story of Weller Martin and Fonsia Dorsey, two elderly residents at a nursing home who begin to enjoy each other's company. Weller offers to teach Fonsia how to play gin rummy, and they begin playing a series of games that Fonsia always wins. Weller's inability to win a single hand becomes increasingly frustrating to him, while Fonsia becomes increasingly confident. Conversations about their families and their lives in the outside world start to take priority as each player tries to expose the other's weaknesses. Tickets are \$20 for students and seniors, \$24 for general admission and can be purchased by visiting ctaw-ct.org or calling the box office at 203-695-7107.

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art presents **The Scenic Daguerreotype in America: 1840-1860**, as invented in France by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in the 1830s. This installation is open for viewing now through March 22 at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 600 Main St. in Hartford. The daguerreotype rapidly became the first widely practiced photographic process worldwide in the 1800s.

Eighty-three surviving examples of these jewel-like scenic daguerreotypes are displayed in this exhibition, most selected from an important private collection. Included are two of the earliest American landscape photographs: one never before exhibited in public made in 1840-41 by Samuel Bemis (1789-1881), and a street scene in Cincinnati made around 1851 by James Presley Ball (1825-1904). For exhibit hours and further information, visit thewadsworth.org or call 860-278-2670.

Broadway Series at The Bushnell presents **Kinky Boots**, with book by Harvey Fierstein, music and lyrics by Cyndi Lauper and choreography by Jerry Mitchell, showing matinee and evening performances March 17-22 in William H. Mortensen Hall at The Bushnell Performing Arts Center, 166 Capitol Ave. in Hartford. Charlie Price reluctantly inherits his father's shoe factory, which is on the verge of bankruptcy. Trying to live up to his father's legacy and save his family business, Charlie finds inspiration in the form of Lola, a fabulous entertainer in need of some sturdy stilettos. As Charlie and Lola work together to turn the factory around, this unlikely pair finds that they have more in common than they realized...and discover that you change the world when you change your mind. Tickets start at \$36 and can be purchased by visiting bushnell.org or calling 860-987-5900.

Grand Kyiv Ballet presents **Swan Lake** by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky on March 21 at 7 p.m. at Shubert Theatre, 247 College St. in New Haven. Swan Lake is a ballet masterpiece that tells the story of a prince who falls in love with a beautiful swan princess under a spell. The ballet is renowned for its stunning choreography, intricate set design and Tchaikovsky's captivating music. Its themes of love, sacrifice and redemption continue to resonate with audiences of all ages and backgrounds, making it a timeless classic that has endured for more than a century. This timeless tale of love and magic will be brought to life by the finest dancers of the Grand Kyiv Ballet. The graceful movements of the world's best dancers from Ukraine, Italy, Spain, the US and Japan will give you unforgettable emotions. Colorful costumes and decorations will transport audiences to a world of enchantment and wonder. Tickets are \$59.50 to \$129.70 and can be purchased by visiting shubert.com or calling 203-562-5666.

Orange Players presents **The Alibis**, a hilarious murder mystery-comedy written by Jonathan Dorf, Tyler Duggins, Kathryn Funkhouser, Patrick Greene, Mora V. Harris, Carrie McCrossen, Ian McWethy and Jason Pizzarello. Matinee and evening performances run March 27 and 28 at High Plains Community Center, 525 Orange Center Rd. in Orange. Eight playwrights were challenged to find the comedy in crime in this rogues' gallery of 10-minute plays wrapped in a classic whodunnit. When eccentric billionaire J. Leslie Arlington is murdered, a clueless detective finds the suspects are all reluctant to admit their alibis...because they were all committing other ridiculous crimes at the time. You never know what's coming next when your suspects include disgruntled chefs, teen detectives and vengeful divas. But one thing's for certain: every alibi is absolutely absurd. With 36 cast members and numerous sketchy circumstances, this play is sure to deep you laughing while you guess who is guilty. The show has cabaret-style seating; bring your own adult beverage and food. Tickets can be purchased by visiting orangeplayers.ludus.com, orangeplayers.org or calling the box office at 475-227-7547.

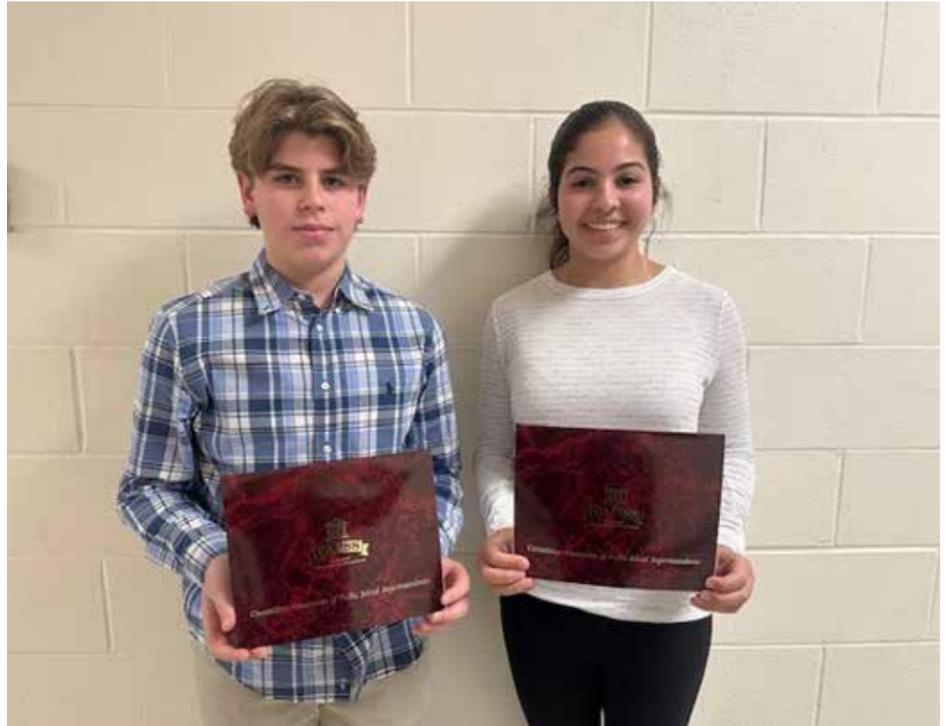
Cyndi Consoli is an actor/director in her ninth term as President and Producer for Orange Players. She can be reached at TheOrangePlayers@gmail.com and 475-227-7547.

Orange Kids Build Giant Snowman



Several children on Hawthorne Lane in Orange built a nearly 7-foot-tall snowman on Jan. 18 after several inches of snow fell. From left: Colin Ferris, 2; Jake Maddern, 5; Claire Ferris, 6; and Kayla Maddern, 2. Photo by Ashley Maddern.

AMSO Students Get Superintendent's Award



Amity Middle School Orange eighth grade students Quinn Smith and Elizabeth Scates were the recipients of this year's Connecticut Association of Public Schools Superintendent awards. The award is based on community service, academic achievement and leadership. The award was presented to the students at a ceremony held at the Amity Board of Education meeting on Jan. 12. Photo by Kathy Burke.

Milford Schools (Continued From 1)

policies and procedures, and daily coverage to help ensure that our schools are staffed in the event of an absence.”

The board held a broader discussion on officers in schools at the Jan. 21 meeting, led by Coordinator of Schools Safety and Security Jeffrey Neilsen.

“What we really want to look at is what can we implement to help reduce risk, accidents and incidents before they even occur?” he said, explaining that armed officers are key to reducing risks.

Superintendent Dr. Anna Cutaia

explained that their experience with the armed officers in the middle and high schools was a big factor in pushing for the additional officers.

“Our relationship and work with them has been so positive that it encouraged us to emulate that in the elementary school,” she said.

Cutaia said there is limited research on whether school officers prevent deaths in school shootings – some studies had found little difference. However, she noted, research from the National Police Foundation in 2021 suggested that the officers had been instrumental in averting some planned attacks from occurring in the

first place.

Neilsen said one of the biggest benefits of having officers on site is that it cuts down on response time when incidents do occur.

“Time is very critical in these incidents,” he said. “If you look at traffic, if you look at weather – all of these things impact how long it takes an officer to get there...having a dedicated, trained, properly equipped resource on school grounds provides an immediate response, rather than waiting for a response.”

The officers would be employed directly by the school district from former and retired law enforcement, unlike school resource

officers who are actively employed by the police department. Neilsen said, however, that the vetting and training criteria would be developed with assistance from the Milford police and exceed state standards. There would also be opportunities for feedback from the school community to learn how the program was working.

The schools budget must still go through the Board of Finance and the Board of Aldermen before it becomes finalized. The finance board has routinely reduced the Board of Education's request in recent years; the aldermen have sometimes restored those cuts after pushback from education officials and residents.

For more local coverage, go to milford-orangetimes.com

STUDENT BILLBOARD CONTEST

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Silverbrook Estates will be accepting applications for its Congregate Elderly Housing Program beginning January 5, 2026. Applicants will be determined eligible and qualified in accordance with the applicable rules and regulations of the Authority which conform to the State of Connecticut Department of Housing rules and regulations.

Applicant must be at least 62 years old

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All interested applicants are encouraged to obtain application forms from the Silverbrook Estates main office located at 100 Red Cedar Road, Orange, Connecticut, 06477. Or call the office at 203-891-8051 and speak with the Property Manager for further details.

Equal Employment Opportunity – Affirmative Action Fair Housing Agency



Milford Chamber Bridal Expo Comes To Racebrook Country Club



The Milford Regional Chamber of Commerce held its fourth annual bridal expo at Racebrook Country Club in Orange on Feb. 1, showcasing bridal outfits and local vendors who serve the wedding industry. *Photos by Robert Creigh.*

Milford Student In Running For 'America's Most Artistic Kid'



A painting by Mila Navarrete-Navarrete, a 7th-grade student at East Shore Middle School in Milford.

Mila Natalia Aziz, a 7th-grade student at East Shore Middle School in Milford, has been selected to compete in America's Most Artistic Kid, a national art competition that celebrates young artists and creative expression. The competition includes several rounds of public voting and showcases student artwork on a national platform.

The competition, run by Bob Ross Inc., offers children the opportunity to display their work in a museum, appear on The Joy of Painting, and take home \$20,000.

"Art has always been her language – long before words," her competition profile

says. "She picked up a paintbrush before a pencil, and by age three she was creating work displays and experimenting with texture and natural elements. Art became her grounding and source of hope during seasons of deep emotional struggle. Drawn to landscapes, rich color, movement, and symbolism, she uses art to express how she sees the world and what she hopes it can become."

The competition has several rounds of voting, starting on Feb. 16 and ending with the finals on April 23. Voting, along with her profile and images of her art, are at artistickid.org/2026/mila-a75f.

Adopt A Pet: Layla



Layla is a medium-sized, short-haired, mixed-breed senior pup. She is up to date on her vaccines, but she hasn't been spayed due to her age. She is a people-focused pup, still bursting with energy and waiting for the perfect cuddle buddy. Since Layla is older, she does have her old lady legs, but she doesn't know that yet. Layla is looking for her final forever home after being tied and dumped; she is one of the shelter's sweetest dogs. She can be adopted from Milford Animal Control, located at 664 East Broadway in Milford. For more information, call 203-783-3279. Photo courtesy of Milford Animal Control.

Scholarship Available To Graduating Orange Seniors

The Friends of the Case Memorial Library is accepting applications for its annual \$2,000 Lucy Scillia scholarship. This scholarship is available to a graduating high school senior currently attending a school in the local area who resides in Orange and will be continuing their education at an accredited institution of higher learning.

The scholarship is a tribute to the late Lucy Scillia, an Orange resident and a member of the Friends of the Case Memorial Library, who had a career as a school librarian. She

also served on the Orange Town Library Commission and was active in library fundraising efforts.

Applications can be downloaded at casememoriallibrary.org/lucyscillia. Applicants must submit an application, references and high school transcript. Completed applications may be mailed or dropped off at the Case Memorial Library, c/o President of the Friends of the Library, 176 Tyler City Road, Orange, CT 06477. The deadline for submission is April 1.

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Kennedy, Animal Welfare Group Lays Out Legislative Agenda



State Rep. Kathy Kennedy, center-left, co-chair of the Connecticut Legislative Animal Welfare Caucus, joined animal welfare group Desmond's Army in January to lay out their priorities for the 2026 legislative session in Hartford. Photo courtesy of Kathy Kennedy.

The co-chairs of the Connecticut Legislative Animal Welfare Caucus, state Reps. Kathy Kennedy (R-119), Nicole Klarides-Ditria (R-105) and Kerry Wood (D-29) along with the state animal advocate group Desmond's Army released its legislative agenda for the 2026 Connecticut General Assembly session in late January, outlining a comprehensive package of proposals to address the increase in reported animal cruelty cases, including starvation and enhance protections for animals statewide.

"Our furry friends give us unconditional love, comfort, and so much joy – and

they deserve laws that reflect that bond. Strengthening Connecticut's animal cruelty protections isn't just good policy, it's the right thing to do to safeguard the voiceless and show compassion for all God's creatures," Kennedy said.

Passed in 2016, Desmond's Law allows court-appointed advocates to speak for voiceless dogs and cats in cruelty cases. The caucus would like to expand the law to cover all companion animals, including birds, rabbits and other household pets.

Legislators in attendance along with Desmond's Army will also call for legislation limiting the use of accelerated

rehabilitation and other prison diversionary programs in cases of violent and egregious animal cruelty, while also calling for the elevation of animal starvation to a felony offense.

A recent Desmond's Army study of 533 Connecticut animal cruelty cases from 2016-2025 found that 85.8 percent of cases were charged as misdemeanors; 68.8 percent of violent crimes were charged as misdemeanors; 40 percent of animal victims were not dogs or cats; and 79.8 percent of violent crimes involved domestic violence.

"Limiting diversionary programs in

violent cruelty instances and classifying starvation as a felony would deter abusers, preserve records for future oversight, and break cycles of violence that endanger communities," said Zilla Cannamela, president of Desmond's Army. "Animal cruelty is a gateway crime to human violence. When animal crimes are addressed, our communities are safer."

Kennedy said during that this legislative agenda comes as Connecticut grapples with a disturbing surge in animal cruelty incidents, highlighted by at least seven dogs found dead across the state in the first two weeks of 2026.

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Dietch To Be Honored With O'Sullivan Award

Dedication, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to community are hallmarks of this year's O'Sullivan Award honoree, Jody Dietch. This annual award, presented by the Orange Democratic Town Committee, recognizes an Orange resident for outstanding community service in the spirit of the O'Sullivan family.

Dietch was born in New Haven and moved to Orange at the age of 4. With brief stints out of town, she returned to Orange to raise her family. Dietch served on the Orange Board of Education from 2007 to 2015, holding numerous leadership roles including secretary, vice chair, chair of the Finance Committee and chair of the Personnel, Policy, and Transportation Committee. Her passion for public service led her to seek town elected office, running for the Board of Selectmen in 2013 and 2015, and for first selectman in 2019. She also served the town as constable from 2023 to 2025.

Dietch served on the Race Brook School PTA as president and as a member of the playground committee. As PTA co-president, working alongside school leadership, she helped develop both the vision and financial support for the Race Brook School track.

Dietch has been a member of the Orange Democratic Town Committee since 2010, and has served as treasurer, secretary and chair. Her leadership has helped shape the organization through the implementation of systems still in place today, including strengthening the Nominating Committee, managing fundraising efforts and overseeing communications through the development of the website, email system and social media presence. She also served as the first

Connecticut Van Manager for the ODTIC and served this past year on both the Nominating and Fundraising committees. For many years she also chaired the ODTIC's presence in the Orange Memorial Day parade.

Dietch served on the board of Kids Count of Milford from 1999 to 2012, including terms as secretary and president, and chaired its annual Harborlight Happening fundraiser. She has volunteered with Congregation Or Shalom, assisting with the design of its 25th anniversary commemorative book, and with the Jewish Home for the Aged as a representative for the Community One commemorative book. Dietch has also volunteered with the Orange Volunteer Firemen's Carnival and helped found The Orange Times (now the Milford-Orange Times), where she wrote a regular column highlighting local volunteers.

Professionally, Dietch was the owner of the Little White House Learning Center from 1998 to 2008. She currently serves as executive director of Congregation Mishkan Israel in Hamden.

Dietch and her husband Jeff have two sons, Howie and Mike. Both she and her sons are graduates of Race Brook School, Amity Middle School and Amity Regional High School. She is also a proud savta (Hebrew for grandmother) to grandsons Noah and Aaron.

Dietch will be honored by the Orange Democratic Town Committee on Wednesday, March 25 at 5:30 p.m. at Birchwoods at Oak Lane. For information on attending or placing a congratulatory ad in the commemorative program, contact Melissa Johnston at msmelissajohnston@gmail.com or 203-520-0331.

Kennedy Joins Child Tax Credit Forum

State Rep. Kathy Kennedy attended "An Affordable Future for Connecticut Families: Child Tax Credit Forum" on Jan. 21, joining fellow lawmakers, advocates and community leaders to talk about one thing families in Milford and Orange know all too well: it's getting harder to make ends meet.

The discussion focused on ways a refundable state child tax credit could help working families keep more of their hard-earned money to cover everyday costs like groceries, rent, child care and utility bills. The event was sponsored by the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity and United Way of Connecticut.

For Rep. Kennedy, the conversation hit close to home.

"Families in Milford and Orange are doing everything right – working hard, raising kids and trying to plan for the future

– but the costs just keep piling up," Kennedy said. "A child tax credit is one way we can give parents a little breathing room and help them get ahead instead of just getting by."

The forum highlighted the need for common-sense, evidence-based solutions and real collaboration with local organizations that understand what families are facing day in and day out.

"At the end of the day, this is about priorities," Kennedy added. "We need to be smart with taxpayer dollars, cut waste where we can and focus our resources on helping families who are feeling squeezed. Affordability isn't a talking point – it's a kitchen-table issue for folks back home."

Kennedy said she will continue to advocate for policies that make Connecticut more affordable for families trying to build a good life in Milford, Orange and across the state.

RWA Boosts Water Assistance For Low-Income Households

The Regional Water Authority, which serves Milford and Orange, has announced enhancements to its Residential Water Assistance grant program, expanding eligibility and increasing grant amounts to better support households experiencing financial hardship. The new guidelines took effect at the end of January.

Residential Water Assistance grants are funded by the RWA and administered by the Dollar Energy Fund. The grants provide financial assistance to qualifying customers based on household income.

According to the RWA, the update seeks to increase participation in the program and help compensate for the closure and uncertain future of the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program, initially funded under the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021. The RWA said it supports its reauthorization.

"Every household should have access to reliable, high-quality water service, even during the most difficult of times," said Bridgette Hoskie, the RWA's director of customer care. "This serves our higher

purpose, to make life better for people, by reaching more families and providing meaningful help where it's needed most."

Under the new rules, the previous qualifying income-based annual grant award of \$175 has been replaced with a two-tier, income-based structure. Eligibility, previously based on federal poverty guidelines, is now based on state median income.

The program provides for \$300 grants for households earning up to 60 percent of the state median income, and \$225 grants for households earning 61 percent to 75 percent of the state median income.

Connecticut median income guidelines can be found at rwater.com/customer-care/residential-water-assistance-programs. Qualifying applicants are limited to one grant per year, and customers who wish to apply for water assistance should contact Dollar Energy at 1-888-282-6816, or visit their website to find an agency that can determine eligibility at hardshiptools.org/AgencyFinder.aspx.

Quartet Serenades Orange Resident



A Coastal Mix Barbershop quartet entertains Sara Macchi of Orange before heading to Fairfield and New Haven counties to present singing Valentines on Friday, Feb. 13 and Saturday, Feb. 14 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Recipients get a song, card, chocolate lollipop and one or a dozen roses. From left: Tom Morrisson of Newtown, Mike and Andrea Rudolph of Trumbull and Marybeth Johnson, Bridgeport. Photo courtesy of Bill McDonald.

Help Wanted: Sales Rep

The Milford-Orange Times is seeking a part-time advertising sales rep. Meet with and talk to local businesses and promote the newspaper. Flexible hours. For more information, contact Steve Hechtman at 203-799-7500.

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Town Hall Meeting- North Haven Mayor Mike Freda

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Featured Speaker Connecticut State Treasurer Erick Russell

University of New Haven
Bergami Center Auditorium for Science and Technology
@6:30pm March 4, 2026

TOWN OF ORANGE Public Notice to Transportation Operators

Town of Orange, Community Services Department is applying for a capital grant under Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities of the Federal Transit Act, as amended by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law legislation, to replace a vehicle used in meeting the special transportation needs of seniors and/or individuals with disabilities in the Town of Orange.

Any interested transit or paratransit operator in the proposed service area may review the proposed application by contacting Stacey Johnson, Director of Community Services, 525 Orange Center Road, Orange, CT 06477, 203-891-4788, or sjohnson@orange-ct.gov.

A public hearing will be held if requested by interested parties.

Any comments should then be sent to Town of Orange, Department of Community Services, 525 Orange Center Road, Orange, CT 06477, Attn: Transportation, with a copy to the Southcentral Regional Council of Governments, 127 Washington Avenue, 4th Floor, North Haven, CT 06473. 203-234-7555. Comments must be received no later than seven (7) days following publication of the Legal Notice.

Obituaries

Full obituaries and pictures (if provided) of the deceased are on our website at www.milford-orangetimes.com and are published at no cost to residents of Milford and Orange.

Raymond Joseph Barba, 62, of Milford, beloved husband of Lisa Barba, passed away on January 9, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

Ronald Eugene Barber, age 81, of West Haven, beloved husband of Christine Randall Barber, passed away peacefully on Saturday, January 10, 2026. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)

Barbara Gaunya Bourdeau, formerly of Milford and Orange, died January 15, 2026, after a long and impactful life full of love and laughter. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

John Lang Button Jr., known to family and friends as Jack, died on January 22 in Milford, Connecticut. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

Marie E. Cirillo, age 82 of Milford, beloved wife of Angelo Cirillo for 62 years, died on Monday, January 12, 2026. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)

Marcia Elizabeth Cobain (née Cole), a beloved long-time resident of Milford, Connecticut, passed away peacefully on January 18, 2026, at the age of 80. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)

Karen Ann Cordner, 74, entered into rest on January 23, 2026. Karen was born in Milford, CT, on April 25th, 1951. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

Clarence M. Corey of Milford, known by his family and friends as Wendell, passed away peacefully on Thursday, January 15, 2026 at Bridgeport Hospital. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)

Robert Loomis Crego Sr., 87 of Milford, passed away peacefully on February 3, 2026, while at his home in Milford, CT. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

It is with heavy hearts, yet in peaceful faith, that we announce the passing of **William Joseph DiSiero** on January 31st, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of **Robert (Bob) Drobish**, who died peacefully on Feb. 2, 2026, at the age of 90, surrounded by his loving wife and three children. (West Haven Funeral Home)

Mary Victoria "Vicki" Elson, age 74, of Milford, beloved wife of Harvey Elson for 19 years, entered into peaceful rest on January 8, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

Thomas Joseph Frank, 78, of Milford, beloved husband of 47 years to Maureen Frank, passed away on January 23, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

John D. "Johnny" Gardino, 67, of Milford, CT, passed away on Saturday January 24, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)

Kaj Gunnar Gartz, age 93, of Milford, beloved husband of Angela Santa Lucia Gartz for 53 years, entered into peaceful rest on Monday, February 2, 2026, surrounded by his loving family. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



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Obituaries

John R. Gomes passed away on January 30th, 2026. John was an extraordinarily loving, caring, and generous man who brought light wherever he went. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



James L. "Jim" McMellon, age 91, beloved husband of 69 years to Mary Ellen (Marshall) McMellon of Milford, entered into peaceful rest on January 18, 2026. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



John Richardson Sr. "Redneck", 85, of Milford, beloved husband of Barbara Richardson, passed away on February 4, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



Cheryl "Cheri" Sullivan (Vaughn), 78, of Orange, CT, passed away December 9, 2025, surrounded by her loving family. (Peter H. Torello & Son Funeral Home)



Eligia H. "Elly" Horan, age 98, of Milford, beloved wife of the late James P. Horan entered into peaceful rest with her daughter by her side on Jan. 12, 2026. (Gregory F. Foyle Funeral Home)



Michael Robert Mulherin, 59, of Orange, beloved husband of Beth Ann (Bartha) Mulherin, passed away on Jan. 21, 2026 after a long, courageous battle with cancer. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



Susan Mary Roberson, 70, of Milford passed away in her home on January 12, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



Michael Theodoseau (1954-2026) a devoted husband, father, grandfather and retired ship captain, passed away peacefully on January 15, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



Helen Len Koziel, 109, of Orange passed away peacefully January 24, 2026 in Connecticut Hospice. She was the wife of the late Joseph S. Koziel. (Lupinski Funeral Home)



Kathleen Teresa O'Neill, age 90, of Milford passed away quietly in her home on Saturday, January 3, 2026, after a long and fruitful life. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



Jane Ellen Siena, age 94, of Woodbridge, CT passed away peacefully at Milford Health and Rehabilitation, Milford, CT on February 1, 2026. (Iovanne Funeral Home)



Lawrence E. "Larry" Warner, Jr., age 88, of Milford, beloved husband of the late Bridget (McDermott) Warner, passed peacefully on January 20, 2026. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



Roberta Litvinoff of Milford & North Branford, CT, passed away peacefully on January 12, 2026. She was 89 years old. (Robert E. Shure Funeral Home)



Tina Lee Paradis, age 64, beloved wife of 39 years to Kenneth M. Paradis formerly of Milford, passed away unexpectedly with her family by her side on Jan. 19, 2026. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



Catherine A. Standley, 94, of Milford, beloved wife of the late Charles Standley, passed away on January 10, 2026. (Cody-White Funeral Home)



Dennis Joseph Weaver, age 63 of West Haven and formerly of Milford, graduated to heaven on January 11, 2026 after a brief illness. (Gregory F. Doyle Funeral Home)



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