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January - February 2025

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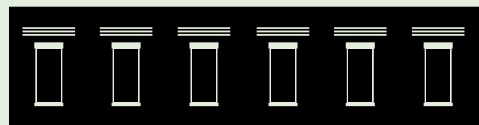
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“Threads in Time”
On Exhibit



The Promise of a New Year

By Loretta Wrobel



This time of year, I usually feel the excitement and anticipation of the coming new year with all the promise and hope for a better world and a healthy new year. This year seems different, as there is chaos and instability all around the globe. Several of my friends have expressed intense worry and overwhelming fear about the political situation in our Country with the change following our November election. It hardly seems like a usual new year, and the trepidation mounts as the December days click off and 2024 is soon to expire.

I witness people in shell shock as unpredictability increases and the news grows more traumatizing and shocking, as murders, bombing, and the bad news blares out at us. How do we begin to negotiate our way through all of these confusing upheavals?

For me, the first step is to self-nurture and focus on what I need. Am I trying to spread myself too thin? With the holiday season we all are faced with doing more, connecting with family and friends, and rushing to "get it done" before the end of the year. What is crucial to accomplish in the moment? That simple question slows our racing minds and allows us the opportunity to check in to see if we are pushing ourselves. Perhaps some examining can give us time to breathe and readjust. Often stuff can wait, but we can't!

What if we miss a deadline? Another deadline will come along. When we are driving too fast for our body functioning, our decision making is impaired. I recently had issues with my bank account because I was rushing and wanting to get it done, without pausing and considering the best action to take. I know that no action is often the proper response to a proposed threat. I didn't pay attention, and rushed into reacting when I was tired, stressed, and hungry. Naturally, I ending up with much more work and time lost, as I had to sort out and grapple with the mess I had created. So yes, I learned my lesson and didn't lose any money, but I sure did give myself lots of stress and lost time and energy, having to correct and change several financial accounts. I would vote for learning an easier way.

What I discovered is that it is essential to take care of myself first before I jump head first (or wallet first) into trying to resolve a potential issue which may or may not be an issue at all! Quick decision-making is how we are trained in this out-of-control world, which needs to be

amended. We are told to multitask, do everything faster, and don't waste time. This makes us vulnerable to mistakes, stress, and desperate decision-making.

The year 2025 can be daunting, but we need to be more deliberate about our actions, how we spend our energy, and how to support ourselves. When I feel vulnerable and scared, it is not the opportune time to decide on a strategy or a course of action. Taking time to examine all aspects and not be frozen in intense feelings is a key first step. Dropping out and not wanting to pay attention is not helpful. What motivates me is to share my feelings and listen to others. In this manner, a more productive course of action can evolve.

I was inspired by what Elizabeth Warren wrote following the November 2024 election. She began by saying: "To everyone who feels like their heart has been ripped out of their chest, I feel the same. To everyone who is afraid of what happens next, I share your fears. But what we do next is important, and I need you in this fight with me."

She caught my attention immediately with that beginning! And she went on to list a plan of action. She devised this from her past experience in the United States Senate, and her previous experience with Trump's first presidency. Here are her four steps: First, fight every fight in Congress. Second, fight Trump in the courts. Third, focus on what each of us can do. And finally, Democrats currently in office must work with urgency.

I was heartened by her intelligent response. She responded rather than reacting from a place of despair and hopelessness. Springing into action using her expertise and not staying frozen in her fears allowed her to think through rather than give up. Each of us has something to offer, except when we fall into depression, and withdraw. Our energy is lost.

I love her point about each of us being grounded in what we can do. We don't need to do it all. We can join with others and create a stronger force. No one can change or amend the political situation alone. When I lived in NYC in the 1970s, I remember gay rights activists organizing and protesting in New York City, which transformed into a movement. This eventually resulted in gay marriage and other legal protections for the LGBTQ+ community. It took a village and lots of courage from brave pioneers who would not back down, but who kept pushing forward with protests, letters, pursuing legislators, and coming out to their families and friends. It didn't happen overnight, but it surprisingly happened in my lifetime! Looking back at history often helps guide us to the best path to cope with our present situation.

It is imperative that I keep my eyes and ears on what I can do. To be realistic about my strengths and limitations. Not to overload myself with taking on too much. In today's world we need to keep track of our own well-being, and giving what we are capable of without operating from a sense of irrational guilt or pressure. To do more seems to result in less satisfaction and more stress. When I stop and consider before I leap, I am less likely to leap off the cliff!

To be mindful and operate emanating from a sense of peace and clarity requires an abundance of discipline. We are trained to respond immediately with our cell phones, computers, and 24-hour interruptions. Did you get my text? My email? I haven't heard from you in ___ minutes, hours, days (you fill in the blank).

I feel a surge of hope and promise that we as individuals, groups and communities can rise up to the challenge before us and assist in the ongoing growth of our country into a fairer, wiser, kinder, more inclusive and peaceful society. As Elizabeth Warren says, "Every step toward progress in American history came after the darkness of defeat. Abolitionists, suffragettes, Dreamers, and marchers for civil rights and marriage equality all faced impossible odds, but they persisted. Now it is our turn to pull up our socks and get back in the fight." Yes, we can persist, together!

Deadlines:
March-April 2025:
Deadline: Thursday, February 13th.
Print date: Tuesday, February 18th.
May-June 2025:
Deadline: Thursday, April 10th.
Print date: Tuesday, April 15th.

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The Purpose of Neighbors:
 -To encourage reading
 -To provide a place where ideas, writing, artwork
 and photographs of area residents can be shared
 -To encourage people to get involved in their
 communities
 -To begin to solve national and global problems
 on a local basis
 -To provide useful information
 -To serve the inhabitants and environment of our region

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From the Ground Up - Buying Local in Connecticut

Taking the Torch from Dennis

By Rebecca Toms

Editor's note: *In our last issue, I wrote that I hoped another neighbor would continue this column now that its longtime writer Dennis Pierce is moving on to other pursuits. I'm happy to say that Becca Toms of UConn Extension has offered to continue Dennis's important work.*



Back in the very beginning of 2020, before the pandemic, Jiff Martin, an Extension educator at UConn, received a grant from the USDA to help promote "Growing Direct Sales for Northeastern Connecticut Farms." None of us at UConn Extension knew how difficult it would be to start a project like this at the beginning of a global pandemic, or how necessary the work would be as folks looked for local solutions to supply-chain problems. Though we dived right into the work, it took a year for us to come up with a name that we could share with the community for this project. That name, and brand, was Grown ConNECTed.

Many of you may have heard of us before, even if it's just picking up a copy of our *Guide to Farm Fresh Food in Northeastern Connecticut* that we release every summer. But four years down the road now, there are still many folks that haven't gotten to know us, so let's dive deep.

Grown ConNECTed is a project to connect you (reader, mother, teacher, shop owner, eater, town mayor... whoever you are) to the local farms that are selling directly to you, the consumer, in our Northeastern Connecticut region. There is so much bounty that comes from the "Quiet Corner" of our state. The land here tells stories of deep roots, shaped by generations of farmers and, even earlier, by Native Americans who first cultivated and cared for it. At the same time, brand-new farms are constantly appearing that seem to magically come to the surface in hidden nooks off of Route 6, or on the side roads of Route 44. Both the old and new have their own heart and passion for why they stay in, or get into, the business of farming.

This brings us to the second reason Grown ConNECTed exists—it's right there in our name: *connected*. We believe food is about more than sustenance; it's about relationships. The farmers in this region don't just grow food—they pour their passion for their craft and community into every crop and cut. When you visit a local farmstand, have a warm conversation with a neighbor who also happens to be a farmer, and bring home fresh, local ingredients, the food on your table becomes something extraordinary. Suddenly, that roast tastes richer, that sauce simmering on the stove—perhaps your nanna's cherished recipe—feels like a shared story, elevated by heirloom tomatoes that were tended with care. It's almost as if you can taste the love, the hard work, and the connection in every bite. That's the magic of meals made with ingredients from our Grown ConNECTed farmers—nourishing not just your body, but your heart and community as well.

I appreciate all that Dennis Pierce did in writing this column before me to help you get to know individual farms, and I would love to carry on that tradition. Just like Grown ConNECTed does through our website (grownconnected.org), our guide, and our social media, I want you to get to know these hidden gems that are basically in your back yard, and the connections that our farmers have with the land, animals, and community (that's you!), which give them the drive and purpose to continue the hard work of farming.

Of course my writing always comes back to the fact that the hard work we do for our families and communities is from the heart—that's what keeps us doing it! But it also makes me think of a recipe that was a bit laborious for me, and that I made in deep winter when I still had local products to play around with (and time to clean the multitudinous messy bowls I created!): Winter Squash Tamales.

After enjoying tamales made by so many hands over the years, I decided to try and understand what that process truly meant, and the labor of love I have heard that it was. Needless to say, it became an all-day affair, with many dirty dishes. It also filled my kitchen with a bounty of delicious tamales—enough to invite family over for a cozy meal, tuck some away in the freezer for the future, and share with friends in the weeks ahead, offering them a little warmth and nourishment to brighten the cold, quiet days of winter. They were 100% worth all the work.

Winter Squash Tamales

adapted from a recipe in *Food & Wine* (foodandwine.com)

Dough:

- 2 cups peeled and diced winter squash (any kind)
- 3 cups vegetable broth
- ½ cup chopped scallion (white and green)
- 1 bunch or 6 scallions
- 1 tablespoon canned chipotle en adobo sauce (chiles for filling)
- 2 cloves local garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 3 cups masa harina, preferably Colombian such as pan harina (or if you really want to make it a labor of love, make your own with local dried corn from the recipe here: honest-food.net/how-to-make-masa-harina/)
- ¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup vegetable oil

Filling:

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small bunch scallions (white and green), finely chopped, about ½ cup
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 chipotle chiles in adobo, sliced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ cup Spanish olives with pimentos, chopped
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ¼ cup capers
- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 1 scant teaspoon finely grated orange zest
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro

About 16 corn husks, or 22 corn husks for smaller tamales, soaked in water until soft

For the dough: Put the squash in a pot with broth, scallions, adobo sauce, garlic, salt, and cumin. Cook until squash is fork-tender, about 15 minutes. Reserve the broth by removing the squash with a slotted spoon. Set aside half of the squash for the filling, then mash the remaining squash in a large bowl. Mix in the masa with a fork. *Slowly* pour the seasoned broth over the filling, mixing with a fork (or hands) until smooth. *Slowly* stir in oils, a little at a time until dough is soft and moist. Slow is key to keep it smooth! Cover with plastic wrap and set aside.

For the filling: Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the scallions, garlic, chiles, cumin, and salt and cook until soft. Add the saved squash, olives, raisins, and capers and cook, stirring occasionally, until well combined. Add broth and orange zest and cook, stirring occasionally, until broth is slightly absorbed, about 2 minutes. Stir in cilantro, remove from heat.

To assemble: Cut 2 husks into 24-inch lengths about ½-inch wide. Place the other soaked corn husks on cutting board, open side up. Place about ¼ cup dough in the center of each husk, leaving enough husk free to enclose the tamale. Spoon 2 to 3 tablespoons of filling on top. Then cover the filling with about 2 to 3 tablespoons more of dough. Wrap the husks around the filling and twist and tie the ends with reserved strips to make party favor-shaped tamales.

Set up a 10-inch steamer basket. If you don't have that, use a round cookie cooling rack elevated above the water in a pot. Lay tamales in steamer, cover and cook until the husks get slightly translucent, about 50 minutes. Remove tamales from steamer and let rest for 5 to 10 minutes before serving.

Now, because my pot was smaller and I made a double recipe, I had to do multiple batches (the steaming really does take a while!), but the result was absolutely heavenly—something I never knew winter squash could do.

Hope you give this a try, and if you haven't discovered our UConn Extension program Grown ConNECTed, head over to grownconnected.org now to check us out!

The Nap Habit

Morning activity, then lunch sustained, the mind and body are suddenly drained. When young, they considered some folks saps to indulge each afternoon in naps.

Now with age, they can understand a lack of energy felt firsthand. Thankfully, they learned to reconsider, and discovered how to regain their vigor.

They find the couch or bed to stay, lie down, close eyes, and drift away. Rest a few minutes, maybe for hours to feel renewed, regain their powers. Now, after lunchtime's filling of grub, they regularly visit the napping club.

-Carol Wheelock Hall

Writer

Every writer I have ever read, from Judy Blume to William Shakespeare, has dissolved into my blood.

Every word left its mark, staining my red heart with black ink.

The good mother across the street sways her head back as she laughs, piling kids and baked goods into the backseat.

I'll never be like her, I think. Never drive to soccer games, jugs of Kool-Aid in the way back, armed against the flaccid stares of the other moms and dads.

I'll never know the laughter on Christmas mornings, or the late struggles of a kid with a runny nose and a high fever.

No, the pages are calling to me today, come out and type me, jot me down with the sunshine of your cold and bleating heart.

- Jolene Munch Cardoza

Time of Life and Perspectives

Morning of Life: I can't wait...

For my birthday and new toys
For Christmas morning and all the gifts
For playtime with my friend
For summer vacation when school ends
For a date with the one I like
To get my license and a car
To earn my own money

Afternoon of Life: I look forward to...

My wedding day with the one I love
That promotion for a job well done
Owning a first home with pride
The birth of a baby in our family
Vacation to relax, and to see new things
Hobbies that are fulfilling
Retirement and not setting the alarm clock

Evening of Life: I appreciate...

Children doing well in their lives
Pleasant people
Nature and good weather to enjoy outdoors
Get-togethers with family or friends
Peace and quiet
Visits from loved ones
Being remembered as a good person

-Carol Wheelock Hall

the Neighbors paper
Locally Written
Locally Wread

a little paper
big on community

Looking Up

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star... As a Treehouse Decays, What's the Price of Air?

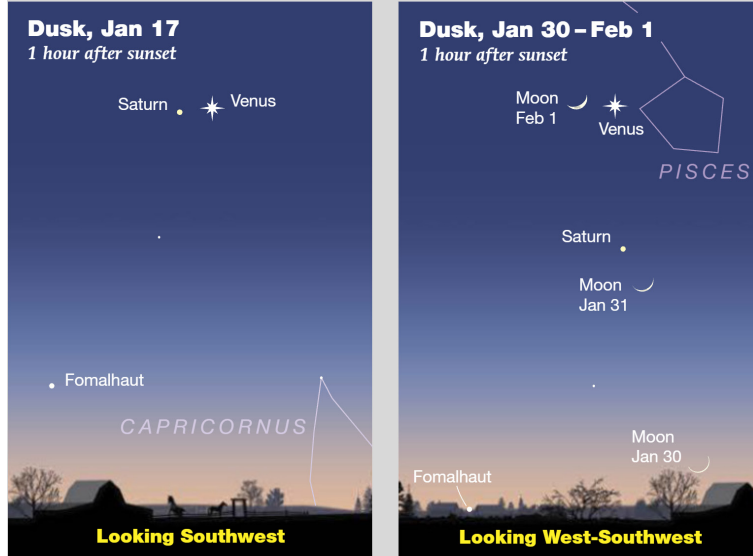
By Bob Grindle

So long as there is a single twinkling star in the night sky, shining from across the uncharted distances of dark matter space, there will be someone, somewhere, perhaps stepping out of a crowded room and into the darkness, or stopping on a crowded street to look up, or waking from a crowded dream or, maybe, simply pausing for a moment in a crowded life...could be several someones...staring up into the abyss of enchanted cosmic emptiness and, with an uneasy sense of foreboding—or not—listening to the night wind as if the Earth was speaking with the Universe around it, and listening...breathing in, breathing out, every bit as alive as the ground beneath our feet. Perhaps, in our unease, we are telegraphing back to that blinking star: 'we are here.' For the first time in the billions of years that life has been evolving on Earth, a creature—homo sapiens, us—can stand at this proscenium arch of the night, look up and contemplate not only itself but its place in the Cosmos. But do we? Hmmm...

As I stand here breathing in the early winter exhale of the forest around me, I vaguely remember something I think chief Seattle (Seathl), who was chief of the many tribes who called the Pacific Northwest territory around the Puget Sound home, said in an 1854 speech he delivered to the United States Congress when he was pressured to sell the tribes' lands to the American government. He asked that they try to understand that the very air around them had given his ancestors their first breath of life and had received their final gasp, and that this same air filled the lungs of his children with the spirit of life...So he refused to sell something he did not think it possible to own. Looking up into the cold December night sky, breathing in the crisp winter air and wondering perhaps if the twinkling stars are chatting with one another, I shake my head to think that in the effort to tease-out the science of our planet's every corner we may have overlooked what is sacred...the air we breathe, the water our earliest ancestors could drink from any stream or river or lake and the very Earth we walk on. I wonder if our modern 'chiefs' would sell and what would be their price...a trip to Mars?

Not long after our son started elementary school, he and a couple of classmates decided to build a treehouse. Conveniently, just uphill from our house and easy to keep an eye on, there was a copse of four sturdy eight or ten-inch young ash trees rising out of the old root base of a long gone mature white ash. This perfect foundation for a treehouse sanctuary was at the edge of a nearly half-acre wooded hideaway (for youthful adventure)...the kind of place you are sure to find in rural areas in every corner of our United States...there's an 18th century cellar-hole and foundation from the original Neff homestead, a rank hedge of ancient lilacs that perfumed the entire hillside in early spring and countless maples and hickories and oaks plus a few tulip trees, cottonwoods and witch hazels. The three friends spent most of the summer of '83 building their first tree house. Tonight, I am standing on the decaying remains of that long-ago treehouse and those four ash trees—in 40 years they had grown to impressive size, but quickly succumbed to the emerald ash borer and we cut them down last year. Looking up into the dark screen of a mind-numb-

ingly old Universe; standing on ground where childhood dreams and a treehouse took root and are now decaying slowly back into the earth; breathing in the night-scented air and hearing the forest exhale under the canopy of an incomprehensibly complex Universe that has cradled everything that ever was or ever will be, a part of my inner-most being shakes off the cold of the warms me with a sense of what makes a place sacred...what makes a moment holy, and I know that Chief Seattle had it right.



It is cold this mid-December night; the warm candle-like glow of the full "Cold" Moon does nothing to relieve the chill. Turning to walk downhill toward the lights of the house and smelling the scent of a wood fire—perhaps some of the ash we cut this year—my body starts to feel the illusion of warmth well before going inside. For all the couple million years our species has trod its evolutionary trek, the Moon has been our steadfast companion, ever massaging our planet's tides and our body's moods, shapeshifting and scene-lighting the climatic upheavals and cosmic convulsions of an Earth in dress rehearsal. Our earliest ancestors developed stories to help remember the recurring cycles of the Moon and to anticipate what the seasons would bring and what history had left behind...the names given to Full Moons capture the flavor of many of those stories.

The haunting cries of wolves in the winter landscape gave rise to the Algonquin tribes knowing the full Moon of January (the 13th this coming month) as the Wolf Moon...fortunately, as I approach the house I do not hear any howling, but then it's not January yet. In Europe, the January full Moon is known as the Ice Moon or the Old Moon, not sure why 'Old,' though by mid-January winter is starting to wear out its welcome. The full Moon of February (the 12th in 2025) is, understandably, known as the Snow Moon, but rather poignantly, due to the rigors of finding food in the dead of winter, it was also known to many native American communities as the Hungry Moon...the Cherokee tribes knew it as the Bone Moon.

As the natural world around us here in the northern hemisphere settles in for a winter's respite from the frenetic pace of spring, summer and autumn, I hope you find time to relax and have occasional conversations with yourself, those you love and the natural world around you...those conversations are the best kind of prayer. Be well and be kind to this starship we travel the Cosmos on.

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The Case for Obituary Preview

By Delia Berlin

Some weeks ago, a neighbor casually mentioned that when she cannot sleep at night, she gets up to work on her obituary. I did not find this particularly shocking, since this neighbor is an older person and both David and I wrote drafts of our own obituaries during the early days of the Covid pandemic. But it made me curious because, almost invariably, obituaries of people I knew contain facts that I did not know. I often regret having missed the opportunity for questions or related dialogue about some of these facts.

Although obituaries can take many forms, they are revenue generators for local papers and they help to keep them solvent. It takes just a minute and a half to read the average obituary, and most funeral homes offer a variety of templates to facilitate the task of writing one. There are also numerous trademarked programs that provide interactive customizable frameworks.

Usually, full name, place and date of demise are included in any death notice. But beyond that, everything seems to be optional. Date of birth or age, for example, are often omitted, as is cause of death.

Late author Barbara Ehrenreich, in her book *Natural Causes*, observed that cause of death is usually included in obituaries of young people, but it gets mentioned less and less as the age of the deceased advances. She observed that the cause of death was superfluous once people had be-



come “old enough to die” and she considered reaching this milestone reason for celebration, not grief.

An obituary should answer the question “Who was I?” But an internet search of that question only provides fictional answers, more appropriate for questions such as “Who

was I in my previous life?” A search of “Who am I?” however, may give more useful insights that can guide obituary writing. These include narrating someone’s past, defining their values and passions, finding what gives them purpose, and describing their relationships and challenges. I suppose any of these things partially defines a person. But it is up to each individual to select their most central qualities, and these may not be readily apparent from casual social acquaintance, or even closer association.

Ultimately, it will not matter to the deceased in what light they are presented after death. But it may matter a great deal to their loved ones, left behind. It may be a good idea to share obituary drafts with them, to avoid the frustration of unanswered questions when incomplete stories or facts are read too late. This exercise may also result in new insights about a loved one while the person is still alive, allowing relatives and friends the opportunity to correct misunderstandings or misconceptions. So, as you greet this New Year, this is an idea for a novel resolution. May the party begin.

Do You Take Supplements?

By Angela H. Fichter

If you are elderly, like I am, you probably take supplements as recommended by your doctor. Guess what? The doctor probably didn’t give you any info on how to take these things safely and in a manner that improves your health.

For instance, an eye doctor who wants to improve his elderly patient’s eye health may tell his patient to buy an over the counter (meaning without a prescription) supplement called PreserVision. This supplement is full of different vitamins and minerals. If you are anemic, your doctor may tell you to take iron pills that you can get over the counter. If you have osteoporosis, your doctor will tell you to take calcium and vitamin D, which you can get over the counter. What no one tells you is that in order to take these supplements safely and in a way that improves your health you have to ask Google to learn what minerals and vitamins should not be taken at the same time as others, because they won’t be absorbed well. Plus you have to ask Google if any of your supplements should not be taken in the same mouthful as medication. For example, Mayo Clinic on Google says blood pressure medicine and antibiotics should be taken at a different hour than calcium pills.

I bet you already know that spinach is full of iron. Remember Popeye the cartoon? He’s flexing his biceps and eating spinach. But iron is full of oxalic acid, which can inhibit calcium absorption. You mean you eat spinach at dinner with a glass

of milk for the calcium, but don’t get all the calcium from the milk because that naughty spinach is full of oxalic acid? Right. Further, don’t take your calcium pill and your iron pill at the same time. Rhubarb is full of oxalic acid too, so if you are crazy enough to put vanilla ice cream on your rhubarb pie, you are not going to get much calcium from that ice cream. Take your iron pill and your calcium pills at different times of the day. Zinc can also interfere with calcium absorption, especially if it is a high dose of zinc. PreserVision has zinc in it so I now take it at a different time than my calcium pills.

After reading all this stuff on Google I treated myself to a bowl of pumpkin chocolate chip ice cream. A big bowl. Then feeling a little guilty I checked on Google for chocolate and calcium absorption. Yes, chocolate inhibits calcium absorption because chocolate has oxalate in it. Remember when you were a kid and your friends drank a lot of chocolate milk? My family insisted I drink a quart of regular milk a day. Chocolate was for dessert, and I couldn’t have dessert at breakfast.

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How to Tell Your Friends from the Endangered Species

The Wild Pigs

By Bob Lorentson

The wild pigs are neither a motorcycle gang, a pack of alcohol and testosterone-fueled idiots, or what principals call Middle School students in a cafeteria. The wild pigs are too intelligent for that. In fact pigs, whether wild or domestic, are considered the fourth smartest animals, which isn’t bad for even-toed ungulates whose closest relatives couldn’t count the toes on a cloven hoof. Cows, camels, hippos and the like may be all right in their way, but a pig can perceive time, remember objects, and learn from experience, things that still give me trouble.

On the other hand, inside every domesticated pig is a demolition crew waiting for its chance to demonstrate why we should all be wary of intelligent animals. When domesticated pigs go feral, they can cause enough ecological damage to impress a developer. Wild pigs, thankfully, don’t have anything to prove, except that there’s more to them than bacon.

It’s a good thing that wild pigs are intelligent because they would never get by on their looks. There are 18 species of wild pigs, each with a face to make a trophy hunter think twice about putting its head on a wall. The first thing you notice about wild pigs is their snouts, which is never a good place to start with an animal. It might help if you think of a pig’s snout as its internet connection and social media app, which can locate food, friends, mates, and danger without fear of being hacked and having its identity stolen. Just don’t go so far as to think about replacing your smart phone with a pig’s snout. That could get really ugly.

To protect their investment in snouts, all wild pigs have formidable, razor-sharp tusks. These tusks are modified, ever-growing canine teeth that protrude from their mouths and curve upwards in often bizarre and questionable ways. They are useful for weapons, digging tools, status symbols, discouraging close relationships, and scrimshaw.

If you can get past the snouts, wild pigs will disappoint those who were expecting more. They have small eyes, small ears, compact bodies with short legs, and a short tail with a tassel, just to show that they can be

whimsical when they want to. They should have left it at that. Many species have facial warts that have no apparent purpose besides driving home the axiom that it is pointless to put lipstick on a pig.

Wild pigs are Old World animals that can be found from the hot tropical forests and temperate grasslands of Africa and Southeast Asia, all the way to Siberia. They are omnivores, which to them means they will eat anything and call it food. Unlike some of their relatives, they only have two-chambered stomachs and do not ruminate. It’s probably too late to learn.

The mating behavior of wild pigs is not what you think, if you’re the kind that thinks about this sort of thing. I can’t be the only one, can I? Female wild pigs tend to live in large, close-knit family groups called sounders. This allows the more solitary males to keep them all pregnant at once and get it over with. The females then have large litters of up to 13 infants each, which is a good enough reason for the males to go back to being solitary. Eventually, however, they all take a mud bath and grunt contentedly.

Sadly, 12 of the 18 species of wild pigs are vulnerable to extinction, mostly due to humans destroying their habitats. The future of domestic pigs looks bright, however, as their natural habitat, the grocery stores, are continually expanding. Here are a few wild pigs who can probably recognize the butcher in all of us:

Pygmy hogs are dark grayish-brown, have inconspicuous tusks, no distinctive markings, no facial warts, and no idea what’s happening to them. In part this may be because they live in grasslands that are much too tall for them. They are active during the day and spend up to 10 hours looking for food and a glimpse of something other than grass. They eat roots, grass, fruit, insects, and birds, and are eaten by pythons, raptors, mongooses, and humans. Between eating and worrying about being eaten, pygmy hogs have no time for fun.

At 15-20 pounds, the pygmy hog is by far the smallest of the wild pigs. That’s the least of its worries. Human activities have shrunk its range to just a small area in northeastern India, where there may only be about 250 mature individuals left. Additionally, pygmy hogs them-

selves are apparently the only range of the pygmy hog sucking louse. Sometimes I think that nature is a complex web of life, and humans are the spiders.

The hairy babirusa has to be one of the oddest sights in nature, along with curling and sumo wrestling. It has a beautiful coat of long, thick, golden-brown hair, and then goes and ruins the effect with two sets of tusks that can only be described as a dentist’s worst nightmare. The lower tusks are bad enough, as they rise vertically outwards from the lower jaw, dagger-like, and then curl backwards like they didn’t mean it. But it is the upper tusks that we should all worry about, as they very well could give body piercing parlors some new ideas. These are foot long tusks that pierce right through the snout and then turn back frighteningly close to the eyes. Fortunately, the hairy babirusa looks more dangerous to itself than to other animals.

The hairy babirusa also goes by the names golden babirusa, Moluccan babirusa, and Buru babirusa, probably because people just like saying babirusa. I wish I had a reason to say it more often myself, but soon it may only be called the extinct babirusa. It’s range is now limited to only three small Indonesian islands where excessive logging, hunting, and attacks by feral and domestic dogs have reduced its numbers to around 4,000.

Like all warty pigs, the Visayan warty pig deserves a better name. How would you like to be identified by your worst facial feature? It could have been called the striped pig for the white stripe over the bridge of its nose. Or the shaggy maned pig for the long mane of the males that stretches from its tail to its forehead and hangs over its eyes. Or even the sexually dimorphic pig for the fact that males outweigh females by four to one. Of course it could have simply been called the Visayan pig, due to the fact that it looks like a pig, walks like a pig, grunts like a pig, and is considered a delicacy like a pig. For better or worse, there really is no disguising a pig.

If any wild pig has PTSD, it is the Visayan warty pig, and not just because of its name. It is now extinct from 95 percent of its former range in the Philippines, mostly due to hunting, habitat loss, and the spread of diseases by introduced domestic pigs. The Visayan warty pig may be a pig, but it is 95 percent less of one than those causing it to be listed as the most endangered wild pig in the world.

(Bob Lorentson is a local writer and the author of *YOU ONLY GO EXTINCT ONCE (Stuck in the Anthropocene with the Pleistocene Blues Again)*.)

Unsung Heroes of Soul:

The Five Stairsteps

By Dean Farrell

As host of "The Soul Express," I play the biggest names in 1960s and '70s-era soul music. I also mix in the many great soul artists who did not necessarily become household names but were no less talented. This month's column is about the Five Stairsteps, who made the *Billboard* Hot 100 fifteen times but only once cracked the top forty.

The Chicago-based group consisted of the sons and daughter of Betty and Clarence Burke: Alohe Jean, Clarence, Jr., James, Dennis, Kenneth A/K/A "Keni," and (briefly) Cubie. They were known as the "First Family of Soul," though that moniker was latter passed on to the Jackson Five. Clarence Burke, Sr., was a detective with the Chicago Police Department. He backed his kids on bass guitar, co-wrote their songs with Clarence, Jr. and Gregory Fowler, and managed the group. They called themselves the Five Stairsteps because when they stood from tallest to shortest, it implied a staircase.

After they won first prize in a talent contest at the Regal Theater, the group received offers for recording contracts. Fred Cash of the Impressions was a friend of the Burke family and introduced them to Curtis Mayfield. They signed with Mayfield's Windy City Records, which was distributed by Cameo/Parkway. The group's 1966 debut release was a Gregory Fowler song, "You Waited Too Long." It peaked at #16 on the *Billboard* Rhythm & Blues chart and grazed the Hot 100 at #94.

In 1967, Cameo/Parkway went out of business. From then on, the Stairsteps' recordings were distributed by Buddah Records. Their second album, *Family Portrait*, was produced by Clarence, Jr. They often toured with the Impressions.

In the spring of 1970, the group released their signature hit, "O-o-h Child." It reached #14 on the Soul chart and did even better in the pop market, hitting #8. The record sold over one million copies and received a gold disc from the Recording Industry Association of America. It also was the Stairsteps' only single to climb higher than #49 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

Also in 1970, the group appeared in the concert film, *The Isley Brothers Live at Yankee Stadium*, along with other Buddah affiliated acts. By 1971, they had dropped the "Five" from their name and started calling themselves the Stairsteps. Alohe Burke left the group in 1972 to begin a spiritual journey. She also attended college at Emory University.

In 1976, Billy Preston introduced the Stairsteps to George Harrison, who signed them to his Dark Horse label. Their album *Second Resurrection* spawned the single "From Us to You," their biggest hit since "O-o-h Child." It was co-written by Clarence, Jr., and Keni Burke.

The Stairsteps had broken up by 1977, but Keni Burke stayed on as a solo act with Dark Horse. He self-produced his first LP, *Keni Burke*. He also became an in-demand session bassist and joined Bill Withers' band. Burke co-produced Withers' album, *Menagerie*, which included the single "Lovely Day."

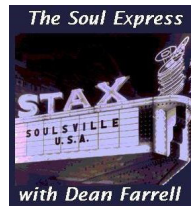
In 1978, Clarence, Jr., teamed up with the New York-based producer Alex Masucci to form a new group, the Invisible Man's Band. Their 1980 single, "All Night Thing," reached #9 on the Soul chart and #45 pop.

In 1993, a remake of "O-o-h Child" by Dino reached #27 on the *Billboard* Hot 100. Other remakes included the Spinners, Nine Simone, Dusty Springfield, New Birth, the Edwin Hawkins Singers, Richie Havens, Dee Dee Sharp, Mary Wilson, Ramsey Lewis, Hall & Oates, Trey Anastasio, Janet Jackson, Lisa Loeb, and Jill Sobule. In December 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked "O-o-h

Child" at #402 on its list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

Cubie, the youngest Burke child, never really sang with the group. He did, however, grow up to be a popular dancer with the Dance Theater of Harlem and other troupes. Cubie died on May 14, 2014, at age 49.

Clarence Burke, Jr., died on May 26, 2013, just one day after his 64th birthday. Clarence Burke, Sr., died on July 16, 2020, just one day before his 91st birthday. And James Burke, 70, died of pneumonia on February 19, 2021.



Charted singles:

- "You Waited Too Long" (1966) R&B #16, Pop #94
- "World of Fantasy" (1966) R&B #12, Pop #49
- "Come Back" (1966) R&B #15, Pop #61
- "Danger! She's a Stranger" (1967) R&B #16, Pop #89
- "Ain't Gonna Rest (Till I Get You)" (1967) R&B #37, Pop #87
- "Oooh, Baby Baby" (1967) R&B #34, Pop #63
- "Something's Missing" (1968) R&B #17, Pop #88
- "A Million to One" (1968) R&B #28, Pop #68
- "Don't Change Your Love" (1969) R&B #15, Pop #59
- "Baby, Make Me Feel So Good" (1969) R&B #12, Pop #101
- "Stay Close to Me" (1969) Pop #91
- "We Must Be in Love" (1969) R&B #17, Pop #88
- "Because I Love You" (1970) Pop #83
- "O-o-h Child" (1970) R&B #14, Pop #8
- "Dear Prudence" (1970) R&B #49, Pop #66
- "Didn't It Look So Easy" (1971) R&B #32, Pop #81
- "I Love You—Stop" (1972) R&B #40, Pop #115
- "From Us to You" (1976) R&B #10, Pop #102
- "All Night Thing" (as the Invisible Man's Band, 1980) R&B #9, Pop #45

Please check out the Unsung Heroes of Soul blog at <https://60459fe07898a.site123.me/>

Dean Farrell hosts "The Soul Express" Fridays from 7:00-10:00 p.m. on WECS, 90.1-FM (www.wecsfm.com). He plays vintage soul music of the 1960s and '70s—everything from #1 hits to long-lost obscurities. Dean's e-mail address is soulexpress@gmail.com.

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Finding the Source of the Shetucket River—Part One

By Martin Moebus

In the nineteenth century, the quest for the source of the Nile captured the hearts of many of an explorer. You may have heard of David Livingstone, the missionary/explorer who disappeared into the African wilderness only to be found by Henry Stanley of “I presume” fame. Livingstone never found the source of the Nile and died in the attempt. A Google search for “which explorer found the source of the Nile” comes up with John Speke, who took three expeditions and many years to find it.

My search for “which explorer found the source of the Shetucket River” comes up empty. So, aspiring to win the fame and glory waiting for the fearless explorer who discovers its source, I proposed to take on this expedition. Last fall, this intrepid explorer gathered his compass, sextant, chronometer, and maps, and set off on the journey.

As with many names from our area, *Shetucket* comes from a Native American word: *nashoue-tegw-et*, or “land between rivers.” The Thames River watershed includes the valleys of the Quinebaug and Shetucket waterways. (A watershed is also called a drainage basin, but “watershed” sounds a lot nicer.) The Shetucket River watershed is the largest in Eastern Connecticut, encompassing over 1,200 square miles.

I started at the mouth of the Shetucket, which is in Norwich. There, the beautiful Shetucket joins the “frantic” Yantic River (on the right in the picture) to form the start of the Thames River. The Thames flows 16 miles to Long Island Sound and is the third largest river in Connecticut. Most of its water comes from the Shetucket.



The mouth of the Shetucket.

George Washington Was Here!

George Washington and his crossing of the Delaware makes all the news, but we had our own historical crossing of local waters. On March 5, 1781, Washington crossed the Shetucket on a ferry heading for Newport to visit the French general Rochambeau. If he had known what the citizens of Norwich were going to do to the river, he might have taken a different route.

The Norwich Salute



Discharge Outfall number 17.

Heading upriver, it wasn't long before I came across this tunnel (see picture) beneath the city of Norwich. Could it be a hidden gateway to treasure and fortune? No, it is a drainage hole and sewer outlet during rainstorms. Welcome to Discharge Outfall #017!

Norwich has a history of using the Shetucket as its waste disposal plant. In 1890, a publication called *The Leading Business Men of Norwich and Vicinity, Embracing Greenville and Preston* bragged about it: “In connection with what nature has done in this respect, Norwich has built—nine and one-half miles of sewers, —which empty themselves in a rapid current into the river.” Norwich is described as a place “free of epidemics of every kind, malaria, fevers or fever and ague” and, a little later, “5,111 feet of sewers were built in the streets of Greenville, —making that thrifty manufacturing suburb of the city a healthy, as well as a pleasant place of residence.” Sounds fine, unless you lived by the river!

By 1945, Norwich was dumping 3,450,000 gallons of raw sewage per day from over 20 locations. If it

rained, even more emptied into our poor river. Something had to be done. The state commanded the state police to deliver an order to the mayor to “get busy with your plans for a disposal plant for the city consolidated district.” Of course, the cantankerous city and mayor ignored the order, dragging their feet and fighting all the way to the State Supreme Court. Norwich lost. By 1956, Norwich finally had to build its first sewer. Being Norwich, it ignored all its connections to the Shetucket and continues happily dumping its stormwater and waste into the river to this day.

In 1971 the sewer system came under the jurisdiction of Norwich Public Utilities, or N-PU. They have been trying to clean up Norwich's messy bottom ever since.

Hidden behind the non-threatening term CSO (combined sewer overflow), Norwich sends an average of more than 94 million gallons of poop water per year into the Shetucket, and Discharge Outfall #017 is the worst! Fear not, our beloved NPU estimates that only 1% of this is dung—so “only” 940,000 gallons of doo-doo go into our beloved river. This is in addition to the 79 million gallons more being put into the Thames further downstream.

NPU has been hard at work trying to do better and finally has a plan. The “good news” is that when the new sewer plant is built by 2028, and liners are placed in the old sewer pipes, Norwich will “hopefully” have a CSO “event” only every two years on average.



Greenville Dam.

A little over a mile up from the start of my journey, we come to the Greenville Dam and the farthest point on the river affected by tides. This is the first of four dams found on the Shetucket. It spans almost 400 feet and is of “timber crib” construction, originally built in 1882. Today it is operated as a hydroelectric plant generating clean energy for Norwich. As it would be too expensive to replace, NPU has been busy maintaining the dam, restoring and reinforcing the boxes that hold the gravel in place along with the boards that make up the dam. About 2.2 megawatts (enough to power 2,000 Norwich homes for a year) is generated in the eight months per year that it is used.

According to NPU's website, the factories in the Greenville area dyed the river a colorful green or red depending on the day. Bleach was also dumped, killing the fish. It wasn't pleasant for the millworkers either, who, having no showers, used the river to bathe in. Today we don't turn the river colors anymore or dump bleach, but since the first dam was built, migrating, or diadromous, fish have had a problem. These types of fish spend part of their lives in freshwater and part in saltwater, and use the higher water locations as spawning or growing grounds. Even if the fish swim past the rancid Norwich foulness in the river, they cannot get past the dam.

It is reported that in the early 1800s, there were so many shad that farmers could pitchfork them out of the river. An article from 1884 talks about catching 30 three-pound shad in a day. By 1892 the shad were “leaving their old haunts in the Shetucket” (*The Day*, 1894), and the Greenville Dam was to blame, along with the dyehouses and sewers.

The Willimantic River was once abundant with shad, and the dam builders initially committed to transporting the fish upriver to preserve the local fishing tradition. However, their promise gave way to greed, and they began selling the shad instead. Shad fishing was no more (Windham Bicentennial, 1893).

In 2009, our fishy citizens finally got the State of Connecticut to address this problem. Fish who got out the vote included the alewife, river herring, American shad, sea lamprey, American eel, and sea trout. The Connecticut plan provides a way for our splashy companions to reach suitable spawning grounds and nurseries up the Shetucket River. These efforts have had the most benefits for the American shad and American eel. Shad are found in the ocean and use the rivers connecting to Long Island Sound to travel to our lands. They come upstream to spawn in the spring, with the young eventually returning to the ocean. They were the fish that fed the nation's founders (Wikipedia). Eels travel in the opposite direction. They live in freshwater and spawn in the ocean. Any eels in Windham

are most likely female. The females migrate upriver with the males, staying near estuaries or a short way upriver. Years later, they head back to sea—the Sargasso Sea, where they spawn once, then die.

The Greenville Dam, and the others, now have fish ladders that let fish go upriver during the spring run. This is part of the effort to restore shad and eels to their old haunts. Last year, 2,834 shad used the Greenville ladder, along with 382 other fish. An eel ramp/ladder is also available for eels making their way upriver. Of course, being near Norwich, the fish and eel have to dodge Discharge Outfall #24 by the Greenville Dam. According to the Last Green Valley organization, the river between the Greenville Dam and Norwich is a popular fishing area. I would be careful eating any fish!

Mouth of the Quinebaug River

Past the Greenville Dam, we come to where the Shetucket meets the end of the Quinebaug River. In 2023, almost 60,000 eels took a turn up the Quinebaug looking for home and the site of the infamous Nipmuc dinner, a tale told in a previous column.

Mouth of the Quinebaug river.



The remaining eels follow the Shetucket past the Ponemah Mill Dam. Only two American shad and four eels were counted here in 2024. As the eels have their own secret passage, they are sneaking past this dam uncounted. A U.S. Geological Survey in 2012 tracked 83 eels with radio tags moving downriver from Baltic to the Greenville Dam. It took them about 15 days. Hopefully, we can travel a bit faster.

Ponemah Mill.



Next up, the Occum Hydroelectric Plant and McKeon Park—a beautiful place to put a kayak in—are found. The Occum Dam also sports a fish ladder and eel passage to help with migration.



Above three photos: Top - Mckeon Park. Center - Occum dam with fish ladder. Bottom - Heading up river.

All photos contributed by author.

Heading Upriver

We have come to a break in our travels for now. Upriver, beautiful scenes await us. Will the source of the Shetucket be found? What adventures await? Stay tuned and read the conclusion in the next issue of *Neighbors!*

Tax Season 2025: Key Dates, Tax Law Changes, and Strategies for The Year Ahead

By Leisl L. Langevin, CFP® CDFA®
Senior Vice President, Financial Advisor



As we enter 2025, the tax landscape is especially significant with several major changes on the horizon. It will be more important than ever to stay informed about your finances and to work closely with your accountant and financial planner to ensure your financial plan stays as tax efficient as possible. Here's a brief overview of the key tax dates, figures, and potential changes to know and consider in the year ahead.

Key Tax Filing Dates and Deadlines in 2025

The 2025 tax filing season begins, of course, on January 1st, with the deadline to file 2024 taxes falling on April 15th. Should you ask for an extension, the deadline to file an extended return is October 15th.

Inflation Adjustments Coming in 2025

The IRS has announced inflation adjustments that will affect taxpayers' standard deductions and tax brackets in 2025.

The standard deduction for single taxpayers increases by \$400 to \$15,000. The deduction for married couples filing jointly increases by \$800 to \$30,000, and those who file as head of household will see a \$600 increase in their standard deduction, to a total of \$22,500.

For 2025, all tax bracket thresholds are increasing by approximately 2.8%. This means taxpayers can earn slightly more income in 2025 before moving into higher tax brackets, while the tax rates themselves (10%, 12%, 22%, 24%, 32%, 35%, and 37%) remain unchanged. For example, a single filer in 2025 can earn up to \$626,350 before hitting the top 37% tax rate, compared to \$609,350 in 2024 - a difference of \$17,000. Similarly, married couples filing jointly can earn up to \$751,600 in 2025 before reaching the 37% bracket, up from \$731,200 in 2024 - an increase of \$20,400.

Other increases for 2025 include: the health FSA contribution limit increases to \$3,300 (up from \$3,200 in 2024); the estate tax exemption increases to \$13,990,000 (up from \$13,610,000 in 2024); the annual gift exclusion increases to \$19,000 (up from \$18,000 in 2024); the maximum earned income tax credit increases to \$8,046 for three or more qualifying children (up from \$7,830 in 2024); and the transportation fringe benefit monthly limit increases to \$325 (up from \$315 in 2024).

A Critical Financial Planning Consideration: The 2025 TCJA Sunset

The end of 2025 marks a pivotal moment as key provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) are set to expire. Without congressional action, January 1, 2026, will bring significant changes. These would include: higher tax rates across most brackets; substantially lower standard deductions; the return of personal exemptions; the removal of the SALT deduction cap; lower estate tax exemptions; a reduction in the Child Tax Credit from \$2,000 to \$1,000; and changes to qualified business income deductions.

It's important to take these potential changes into account and adjust your financial plan accordingly if and when they occur. At WHZ, we're helping our clients to

navigate these changes through personalized strategies aligned with their particular needs and stages of life.

Here's a high-level look at what you may want to consider if the sunset of the TCJA goes forward, depending on where you're at in life.

For those under 55, you may want to consider: accelerating your income into 2025 when beneficial; maximizing your contributions to tax-advantaged accounts; converting to a Roth IRA while tax rates remain lower; planning education funding with tax advantages in mind; and conducting an overall review of your investment strategy to ensure continued optimal tax efficiency.

If you are over 55, you may want to: evaluate your estate plan before the exemption amounts decrease; consider accelerating planned charitable giving; review your retirement distribution strategies; assess the timing of your Social Security benefits; and plan for potential changes in retirement income taxation.

Business owners and executives have some additional things to consider. You may want to: review your business structure in consideration of potential tax changes; evaluate the timing of income recognition and expenses; evaluate and optimize retirement plan strategies; consider succession planning implications; and review your compensation structures and benefits.

And lastly, if you have a high net worth, you may want to: consider estate planning adjustments before the exemption reduction goes into effect; review and adjust your gifting strategies to ensure they remain tax efficient; evaluate the structure and funding of any trusts; consider accelerating capital gains recognition; and plan for potential changes in itemized deductions.

Whatever your particular situation, it will be important to stay aware of these potential tax law changes and be ready to adjust your financial strategy accordingly. There's clearly a lot that could change and many moving parts to consider so if you're not already working with a trusted accountant and financial advisor, this would be a good year to start.

Our team at WHZ stays current with evolving tax legislation and its implications for our clients, so that they don't have to. We take a comprehensive approach through our Plan Well, Invest Well, Live Well™ process, ensuring their tax strategy aligns with their broader financial goals while maintaining flexibility for potential legislative changes.

To discuss how these changes might affect your financial plan, schedule a complimentary consultation on our website at whzwealth.com, or by calling (860) 928-2341.

Authored by Senior Vice President, Financial Advisor Leisl L. Langevin CFP®, CDFA®. Securities and advisory services offered through Commonwealth Financial Network®, Member FINRA/SIPC, a Registered Investment Adviser. 697 Pomfret Street, Pomfret Center, CT 06259 and 392-A Merrow Road, Tolland, CT 06084, 860.928.2341. <http://www.whzwealth.com> These materials are general in nature and do not address your specific situation. For your specific investment needs, please discuss your individual circumstances with your financial advisor. WHZ Strategic Wealth Advisors does not provide tax or legal advice, and nothing in the accompanying pages should be construed as specific tax or legal advice.

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T. King, Publisher

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If Walls Could Talk: The Provenance of Pomfret's Beloved Whistler House

By Donna Dufresne



When one buys an old house, it usually comes with baggage. I'm not talking about the leaky roof and the crooked floors (although old houses have their share), but the folklore and stories attached to a building pushing two hundred years old. Some contain ghost stories meant to scare the bejesus out of the new owners while resident squirrels roll nuts across the floor that sound an awful lot like rattling chains. Unless there was a murder in the house or George Washington visited, most of the stories of its inhabitants are absorbed by the walls and forgotten. That is, unless someone famous lived there. One such house just west of the Vanilla Bean Café carries the notoriety of being the home of the artist James McNeill Whistler from 1850 to 1851 while he and his brother, William, attended Christ Church Hall Academy.

The two-story colonial, built in the early 1800s by Bela Searles, once had a twin which was owned by Capt. Perry Bowers. There was a long-standing discrepancy in Pomfret about which house the Whistlers lived in. According to a 1922 newspaper headline, "Whistler's Pomfret Home Destroyed by Fire," the Whistlers lived in the Bowers house, just west of the Searles house, which burned to the ground and was replaced by a stylish 1920s bungalow. However, an analysis of land and probate records and the letters and diaries of Anna Whistler, the painter's mother, confirms that

Anna rented the two floors of the Searles house while her widowed landlady, Mrs. Searles, lived in a small apartment in the back.

Anna wrote about the Bowers house in letters to acquaintances, describing Captain Bowers's Octagon Room, which he built to hold the piano he bought for his daughters. Anna described the room as seen from the windows in the parlor on the west side of the Searles house. As Anna was packing up to leave in 1852, she lamented in her diary that Mrs. Searles was sad to see her go. They had become friends during the nearly two years Anna had rented the house, with Mrs. Searles helping Anna and her live-in maid/cook preserve vegetables from their garden, local fruits, and the meat from William's hog raised in the back yard. They spent evenings by the fire, sewing and gossiping, and Mrs. Searles likely offered grandmotherly advice while Anna fretted about her son James and his errant ways.

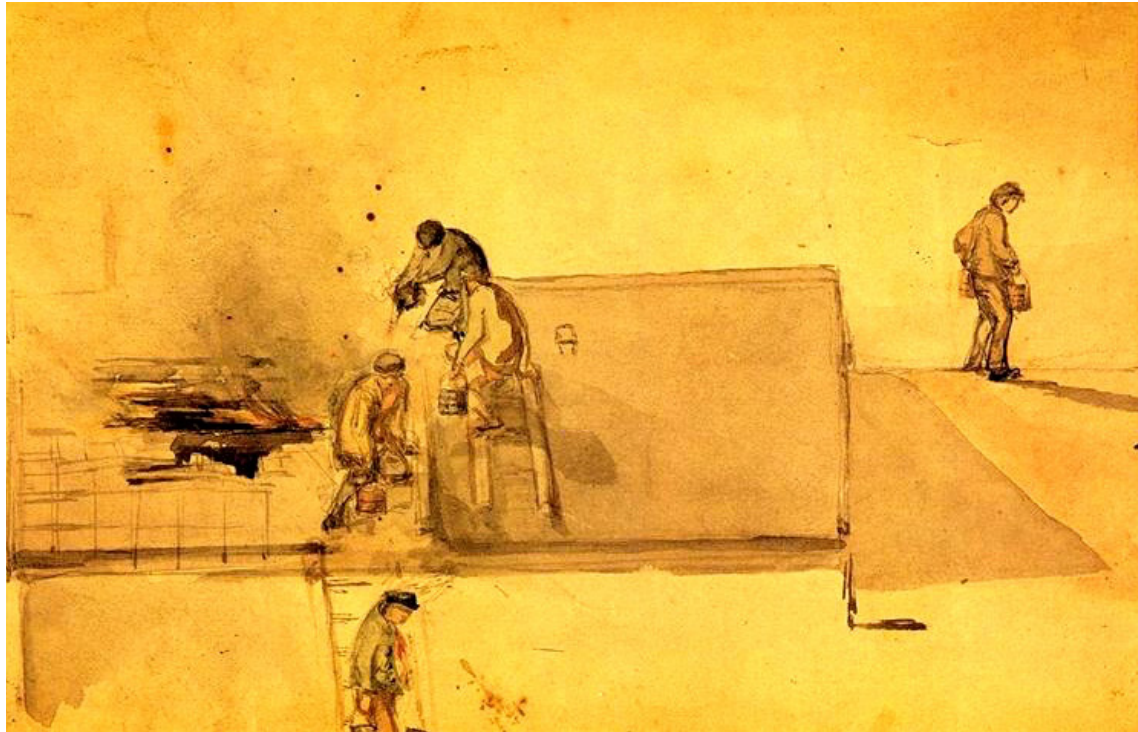
*

Anna Whistler arrived in Pomfret in the fall of 1849, still reeling from the loss in April of her husband, George Washington Whistler, who died of cholera in Russia while building the St. Petersburg to Moscow railway for Tsar Nicholas I. The family lived in St. Petersburg in luxurious apartments while he designed and engineered the railway. Anna was in the process of settling her husband's estate and retrieving his body for burial in the family plot in Stonington, Connecticut, when she visited Rev. Roswell Park in Pomfret. Park, a friend and classmate of G.W. Whistler at West Point, later gave up civil engineering and went to divinity school. His academy in Pomfret had received excellent reviews and Anna was determined to enroll her sons in a reputable school.

Don't be fooled by the prim lady in black depicted in James Whistler's famous painting of his mother. Although a devout Episcopalian and a pious example of nineteenth-century womanhood, Anna was anything but reclusive. During her stay in Pomfret, she hobnobbed with her elite neighbors and the wealthy Newport crowd who had begun summering there. She befriended Dr. Lewis Williams and his wife, who lived in the old Thompson Inn on the corner, and she cared for some of the doctor's patients in her spare room while they convalesced. She socialized with Rev. Dr. Alexander Vinton's family, a Mrs. Wilkinson, and her dear friends Mr. and Mrs. Rev. Roswell Park.

While managing the two-story apartment in the Searles house, Anna's rich social life included visitors from New York, Boston, and Europe. She had help from her housekeeper, Mary Brenon, who had followed the family from Springfield, Massachusetts, to St. Petersburg and stayed with Anna after George Whistler's death. Money was tight compared to the years with her railroad architect husband, who earned a yearly salary of \$12,000 from Tsar Nicholas. In Russia she had managed an estate, a summer house, and many servants, including her sons' tutors and art teachers for James.

James McNeill Whistler recalled his Pomfret years as impoverished compared to the life he knew in Russia. However, Anna was ever the frugal housewife and managed to give her family a comfortable middle-class life



A fire in Pomfret painted by James Whistler in 1851.

despite the deep cuts in her income. Her widow's dower provided her with railroad stocks and an income of about \$1,500 a year. It was enough to pay the tuition for James and William, and Mary Brenon's modest salary. Her rent in the home of Mrs. Searles was \$150 a year. Still, Anna pinched pennies, mended and refashioned her old clothes, sewed clothing for her sons, and helped Mary Brenon make quince jam and poached peaches, which were sent to city friends as gifts.



Whistler's Mother

From Anna's descriptions in letters and diaries it makes sense that she rented the main part of the house while her landlady, Mrs. Searles, lived in the back wing. Her apartment was spacious enough to provide bedrooms for herself and the boys; a room for her mother, Martha McNeill; and a guest room that could accommodate Dr. Williams's patients. When patients were occupying the spare room, Anna had to rely upon her gracious landlady to put up her guests. In one of her copious letters, Anna described a visit from a young diplomat whom the family had known in Russia. She had just finished reading to a patient of Dr. Williams when her friend "flew up the stairs" to embrace her. The landlady allowed him to sleep in her best chamber in the back, and Mary Brenon rose early to cook a hearty breakfast before he left at 6 a.m. to catch a train at Pomfret Depot (now Putnam). A diary entry describes a

roof fire at the school, which James sketched from an attic room looking southeast. It is the only known surviving sketch done by James Whistler in Pomfret.

From Anna Whistler's letters we get a snapshot of life in Pomfret in the 1850s. On numerous occasions, she mentions the train on the Norwich-Worcester track, which opened in 1839. It was a railroad that her brother, William McNeill, had designed and built with George Whistler.

As the widow of a railroad executive and engineer, Anna Whistler traveled frequently by rail with her family on free passes. They went to Norwich by train to visit her sister in Stonington, and took the rail to New York to visit friends and later to visit James at West Point. She advised her sons on how to navigate the system of railways, steamships, and coaches to get back home to Pomfret via Providence when

the Putnam branch was shut down. Still in their teens, James and William used the rails to escape the rural quiet in Pomfret during school breaks and reclaim the cosmopolitan lifestyle to which they were accustomed. With her apron strings loosely tied yet tightly held, their mother ensured they were properly chaperoned by relatives and respectable friends.

Anna Whistler's life depended on the Norwich-Worcester line for daily mail, newspapers, and, most importantly, visitors from afar. She complained in a letter to James, who was visiting New York in April 1850, "Willie has just brought me word from the post office, no mail expected today! because of an accident on this railroad." In another letter, she advised Jamie to spend a day at Corner House in Stonington with his aunt and take the railroad his father built to Providence on his way home from

New York. She explained that the

Norwich and Worcester Railroad was out of order. The Whistlers surely had the run of the main house with frequent guests from near and far. Anna kept a kitchen garden and encouraged William to raise chickens and a hog. There were kittens which the Bowers girls visited and played with, and a mastiff puppy named Bruno which was the talk of the village and received visitors to admire his enormous size. Coincidentally, when the Jessurun family lived in the Whistler House they had a series of mastiffs that hung out on their Vanilla Bean Restaurant patio in the 1990s.

*

James McNeill Whistler only spent a year in Pomfret before he enrolled at West Point. His mother and brother stayed on for another year before William enrolled at Columbia University and went on to medical school. After her sons were relatively settled, Anna Whistler moved to a cottage in upstate New York which was built for her by some friends. When James moved to Europe to pursue his art career, she joined him and became his manager. After the Whistlers left, Mrs. Searles rented the house to a series of Episcopalians who were raising money for the building of Christ Church. Eventually, the house was sold to one of the Vintons, and at one point it became the rectory for the Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church. For many years, the house was owned and rented out by absentee landlords or used as a summer home. The house had been vacant for several years until recently. Now it has been renovated and rented to a new family, who are building memories in the house once occupied by the Whistlers.

Sutherland, Daniel, *The Extraordinary Life of Whistler's Mother*, The Conversation website, 2015, <https://theconversation.com/the-extraordinary-life-of-whistlers-mother-42027>

Norwich and Worcester Railroad, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norwich_and_Worcester_Railroad

George Washington Whistler, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_Whistler

Probate Court Records, George W. Whistler, 1850, Pomfret.

New Executive Director at Willimantic's Mill Museum

Submitted by Ed Silverstein

Aaron Skarzenski recently was appointed the Executive Director at the Windham Textile and History Museum, better known as the Mill Museum.

In his new role, Skarzenski is the Willimantic museum's permanent chief executive officer leading staff and the many volunteers to ensure visitors have an outstanding museum experience.

Much of Skarzenski's prior professional museum experience took place at Philadelphia's American Swedish Historical Museum.

The American Swedish Historical Museum is the nation's oldest Swedish-American museum having been founded in 1926. Located in Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park, it's situated on land given by Queen Christina of Sweden to settlers of the New Sweden Colony.

While at the museum, he was a curatorial assistant where he assisted the curator in such tasks as installing and de-installing exhibits, as well as the planning and research of exhibits.

He also was an interim curatorial liaison and a visitor services manager where he oversaw daily museum operations.

In addition, Skarzenski received a master's degree in curatorial studies at the University of Chicago. While a graduate student, he received a prestigious Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education.

At Chicago, he additionally worked as a teaching assistant for a modern Japanese art and architecture course. He was also a preservation assistant for the university's library.

His advanced degree required him to complete an original and rigorous master's thesis. His was on Japanese painter Chikatoshi Enomoto. Skarzenski presented his research during the 2022 Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs at the University of Kansas.

Previously, he was an honors graduate of Philadelphia's Temple University where he was selected for the university's Phi Beta Kappa honors society. Over three semesters, he completed a 1,400-artifact catalogue as part of his preparation for a museum career.

During time spent in Europe, he also worked as an intern for Sicily's Pernice Residency Program focusing on the artist Dennis Balk, the very first artist to reside in the prominent retreat located on a historic farm and winery. Over the course of a year, Skarzenski also was an educator in Japan as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. He worked as an assistant language teacher at Aomori Nishi High School.

Skarzenski was selected as Executive Director following an extensive search and interview process by the Mill Museum Board of Directors.

He takes over from Interim Executive Director Jamie Eves who continues in his other role as the museum's Senior Curator. Eves received a major honor in October from his colleagues at the Connecticut League of Museums.

A new award was named in his honor by the league. Eves was the award's first recipient in a ceremony at the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks. In the years ahead, other museum professionals in the state will be given the Jamie Eves Award as part of the league's annual Awards of Merit ceremonies.

Likely, each year, the league will present the Jamie Eves Award to a museum practitioner who, like Eves, has shown excellence in research and teaching, elevated history and culture at the local level, and advocated for and expanded the capacity of smaller museums to serve their communities, according to a league statement. Eves also has taught history at UConn and Eastern Connecticut State University for decades and is Windham Town Historian

Located in Willimantic's historic former headquarters of the American Thread Company, the Mill Museum houses a museum, historical society, library, and archive. Through its exhibits, programs, activities, and collections, the museum preserves and interprets the history of textiles, the textile industry, and mill communities in Connecticut.



Aaron Skarzenski. Contributed photo.



Photo of Richard and Louise Berry taken in 1951. Courtesy of the Berry Family.

Berry Family Protects Killingly Woodland

Submitted by Michael Green

POMFRET CENTER—The Berry family recently donated 15-acres of woodland in Killingly to the Wyndham Land Trust who will keep it in its natural state and protect it from development.

“We are pleased to donate this property in loving memory of our parents, Louise S. and Richard C. Berry,” said their daughter Robin Berry. “We’re grateful to be able to honor our parent’s wish that the land surrounding our family home be held in conservation. My siblings and I have fond memories of enjoying this property and are delighted it will now be accessible to others.”

Louise and Richard Berry were well-known figures in the Quiet Corner who touched many lives. Louise, a Killingly native, was best known as the school superintendent for the Town of Brooklyn and, at the time of her retirement in 2016, was the longest serving school superintendent in Connecticut history. She also served in the 1970s as State Senator for the 29th district. Richard was best known as an executive of Rogers Corporation, where he worked for more than 40 years.

Louise and Richard lived in their home on Mashentuck Road in Killingly where they raised five children. They helped to build the house in the early 1950s, and subsequently acquired three adjacent parcels of land. Their short-term goal was to provide their kids with a wild place to roam, but their long-term goal was to preserve the rural nature of their own corner of Killingly.

When Louise passed away in 2022, her children were left with a strong connection to the house on Mashentuck Road and a family tradition of environmental protection. Her son, Don, is the President of the Lakes Region Conservation Trust, based in Center Harbor, NH at the northern tip of Lake Winnepesaukee. Don recognized that donating the family land along Mashentuck Road to a local land trust was the best approach to ensuring its long-term protection. It was a natural step for him to contact the Wyndham Land Trust.

The three parcels cover 15 acres with road-frontage, a small pond, and rocky ledge and connect with extensive undeveloped land to the northwest and to the east. The Land Trust gratefully accepted the donation, which will be named the “Berry Family Preserve.”

The Wyndham Land Trust was formed in 1975 and now protects over 6,400 acres in Northeastern Connecticut. The work of the all-volunteer group is possible through the generosity and dedication of its members, and donors.

To learn more about the Wyndham Land Trust visit wyndhamlandtrust.org. You can also follow them on Facebook and Instagram.

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— book review in *Neighbors Paper*, January 2024

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Tai Chi Home

Your Deepest Wish

By Joe Pandolfo

Winter wind sweeps the white pines, then hushes. You hold your breath still without a sigh... hold back a longing for the warm gold memory of some autumn afternoon, for that long lost summer love, for the young growing days of spring gone by.

Let the wind lift your sigh. Let your longings stir. Those are the embers you can kindle when the nights are longest and coldest... when the bright eyed star on the dark horizon knows your deepest wish before you even say it out loud.

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Surprises at Mount Assiniboine

*“Look deep into nature,
and then you will understand everything better.”*
– Albert Einstein

By Bill Powers

Perhaps you are like me. Going on an organized tour, while on vacation, is not my thing. Instead, staying in a place for a couple of weeks is the only way to go. Simply put, it is a wonderful way to come to know a place while hiking its trails and paddling its waters. It fulfills your desire to be out-of-doors, while immersing you in the magic and wonders of a place. It allows you to discover its local animals and plants, its mountains, woodlands, valleys, lakes, and other special features.

My wife and I travelled from Connecticut, late one July across North America to British Columbia and Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, and to take a “LOOK DEEP INTO NATURE.” The last leg of our journey involved a short helicopter flight to the park and its lodge. As the sleek red and white chopper lifted slowly and gently from the heliport in Canmore, Alberta, my courageous wife closed her eyes and tightly clutched my arm with one hand. With her other hand she held an airsickness bag, “just in case”. Previously, she had responded poorly to traveling in small aircraft. As it turned out- she was fine. From the air the views of that portion of the stunning Canadian Rockies were captivating and breathtaking. Our visit was the beginning of a dream come true and actually it turned out to be much more than we expected. Let me explain.

OBSSESSED

During the summer of the previous year, our local PBS station showed the television series: “Great Lodges of the Canadian Rockies”. The Canadian Pacific Railway was involved with building lodges in the Canadian Rockies. Among them was the backcountry Assiniboine Lodge constructed in 1928. The Provincial Park had been established in 1922. The PBS program highlighted Mount Assiniboine Park and Lodge. As we viewed the scenes, we were immediately fascinated not only by the beauty of the Mountain (often called the “Matterhorn of the Rockies”) but also its glaciers and glacial lakes, and the surrounding peaks and alpine meadows. So much so, we vowed then and there that **we must go there!** - The sooner, the better. We had become obsessed. Without hesitation, we contacted the lodge. It would be at least a year before we might get a reservation to visit and that was not guaranteed due to demand. Regardless, we decided to be optimistic; we created a budget in order to save for the trip. In a few days a registration application packet arrived in the mail. It included a wonderful panoramic photo from the air of Mount Assiniboine, the surrounding soaring peaks, meadows and Lake Magog with the lodge set close to its shore. We hung it prominently in the kitchen where we could view it several times a day, which periodically, in a good way, reinforced our obsession. Frequently, we were drawn to its beauty and thoughts that our hopes would become a reality. Several months later we were contacted – **we were in!** As time went by, our anticipation and excitement grew.

HITTING THE TRAIL

For me, bears are about the most interesting creatures on this Earth. Having had the opportunity to

learn in the field about their behavior with noted wildlife biologist Dr. Lynn Rogers, I always hope to see them in the wild. My wife however, depending on the situation, tends to be less enthusiastic. When our chopper arrived at Assiniboine in mid- afternoon, we entered the Lodge through a side door and checked in. We were actually there! Immediately, we deposited our bags in our room. We grabbed some water, granola bars, trail maps and backpacks. In less than five minutes and with great anticipation, our feet were on a trail and immediately absorbed into some of the most spectacular scenery ever to have blessed our eyes. For twenty minutes we gradually ascended through splendid high alpine meadows on a narrow well-worn path. At a point where it curved drastically and started down-hill, my wife who was in the lead, suddenly stopped and pivoted around to face me. Her piercing eyes were wide and ablaze with fear. With a trembling voice she managed to softly say only one word – **“BEARS!”** While I glanced quickly in the direction of the bears, who were on the trail directly ahead, she managed to wriggle around me and begin quietly walking back in the other direction. I quickly grabbed her shoulders from behind and softly said “Wait!” She replied in an alarmed whisper, “What are you doing? We gotta go!” I said, “one second, you have the camera.” As I hurriedly removed the camera from her backpack she responded, “You’re crazy, I’m going back.” All the while I was thinking, “I hope we’re down wind.” I was able to get a quick shot with a panoramic camera before silently backing away. My wife’s alertness had prevented us from walking into the midst of a Grizzly sow and her cub while they foraged at the side of the trail. We quickly returned to the lodge to share our news. As we approached the main door through which we had exited the lodge at the beginning of our walk, we noticed a sign prominently displayed on the *outside* of the door which read, **“BEWARE – A GRIZZLY SOW AND HER CUB HAVE BEEN SEEN IN THE AREA – USE CAUTION.”**

WHAT WAS THAT?

The next morning after breakfast, we set out again with a plan to hike a different back country trail. It was a beautiful cool and sunny day. We soon found ourselves in a remote wilderness with incredible views of Mount Assiniboine, mountain lakes, peaks, and meadows. After a few hours and climbing to a ridge line overlooking a large valley and lake, we stopped for a rest and to enjoy our trail lunch. It was time for a chunky peanut butter and wild blueberry jelly on rye with caraway seeds, washed down with cool lemonade we had packed. A quiet snack fit for royalty while gazing upon a spectacular landscape. Since leaving the lodge, we had not seen another human being during our adventure on top of the world. Then we heard it. Something broke the silence. I said to my wife, “What was that? Do you hear something?” “Yes” she replied, “what is that?” We continued to listen carefully while scanning the horizon. Slowly, the faint sound gradually became louder! We soon agreed that it was the sound of a bagpipe softly wafting above the gentle breeze. All of a sudden, the sound became much louder as a line of smartly stepping, kilted marchers came into view atop an opposite distant ridge. We watched and listened intently as they progressed along their way. A shrill rhythmic whistle intermittently replaced the sound of the bagpipe, providing the cadence for the marching figures. Slowly they disappeared again beyond the ridge line. We never imagined a serenade during lunch in the highlands by a bagpipe was possible. What a wonderful surprise.

BEAUTIFUL BUT HOW DID IT COME TO BE THIS WAY?

I was a city kid. Woodlands, parks, forests and

especially wilderness areas were not part of my life. In my neighborhood there was a small parkette – actually a playground which opened up only in summer. Our only trails were the sidewalks except for an occasional well-worn path through a vacant lot. Much later in life, I was very fortunate to discover the woodlands trails of Connecticut. Having been deprived of the experience as a youth, I had an immediate positive and dramatic reaction when experiencing Connecticut’s hiking trails. Literally, a whole new wonderful world opened up for me with so much to experience and to learn about. Whether hiking in nearby woodlands or in a wilderness area, it was beneficial and rewarding in many ways. Perhaps it contributed to my sense of accomplishment, confidence and competence. It brought a sense of wellbeing and happiness. For me, experiencing the splendor of nature by feeling the trail underneath my feet and the wind on my face, with the sights, sounds and smells provides a wonderful inner peace and sense of refuge from life’s stressors.

While exploring the natural beauty of our world, a hiker is invited to be present amongst its richness and diversity, while making physical, emotional and spiritual connections. Such extraordinary and fulfilling experience can also make one curious about what it is that underlies the very nature of a place. If there is an urge to know more of what the natural sciences can teach us about a place, there is nothing better than traveling in the field with knowledgeable people to satisfy the curiosity. Their interpretation of the physical features, the natural history of the plants, animals and ecological significance is like adding a thick layer of tasty frosting to the cake of the wonders of nature we experience. Spending time in the field investigating granite domes at Mount Cardigan and Acadia National Park or forest interpretation in Connecticut’s Yale Forest with ecologist Tom Wessels can be extraordinarily illuminating. In the future your experience of walking on granite or hiking through forests can be dramatically enhanced. To me, a better understanding of how the physical features of a place might have been shaped has always been important to me. When this occurs my experience and enjoyment of a place increases immeasurably. Learning about White Mountain geology in the field with prominent glacial geologists during Mount Washington Observatory’s White Mountain Geology workshops is just one example. They informed my hiking in the White Mountains of New England. Hiking in the region became ever so much more meaningful. Another example, anyone participating in Appalachian Mountain Club August Camps who had the pleasure of knowing our camping companion named Duncan, a retired oil geologist from New Orleans, can attest to the enjoyable hiking experiences with him. No matter the location of the August Camp destination that year, he would in advance research and prepare talks about the geological history and prominent features of the area. He discussed this with campers around the evening campfire. The next day during a featured hike, he pointed out features and interpreted what we were seeing. For me, these and similar experiences, with guided learning in the field, are integral to make hiking adventures more complete and satisfying.

Now back to Assiniboine. Our unforgettable bagpipe serenaded snack was followed by an even more incredible day on the trail. While returning to the lodge, my curiosity was peaked and my mind was working overtime trying to conjure up explanations to account for the creation of this beautiful place. At the family style dinner in the lodge’s dining room, we joined and were pleasantly greeted by three couples. One of the women asked, “Are

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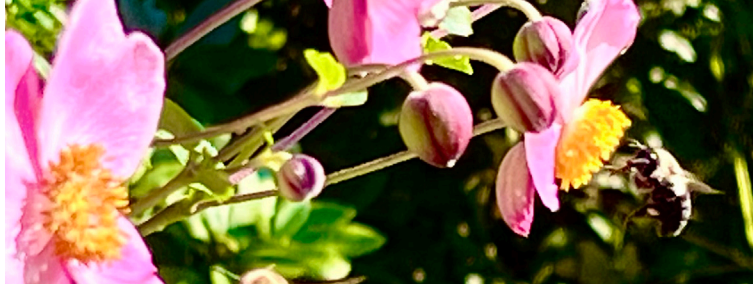
Style is yours and yours alone

What is Good Garden Design?

By Brian Karlsson-Barnes

My style is wildly naturalistic. I let many weeds go, less work, but it's also an ethical issue. Some weeds have stylistic value in form and color. All feed the Web of Life.

Style is subjective, however, yours and yours alone. Many prefer manicured landscapes. Some prefer guided chaos in the garden to static horticultural design. But design is more than a sense of aesthetics; it is also a matter of coexistence with bees, butterflies and other invertebrates that are crucial to life on Earth.



Bee at my *Anemone vitifolia* "Robustissima".

THEN seek beauty. First suiting a site and fitting the space is good garden design, whatever the sense of style and beauty. Whether conventionally manicured or wildly naturalistic.

WHY WILD? Whether to rake, mow, mulch, or blow? Or to leave leaves for the bees and other invertebrates (lacking backbone) that are critical to life on Earth? Bees and other insects pollinate plants, disperse seeds, aerate soil, recycle nutrients, and are food for birds and other wildlife. Some clean water and build ocean reefs. Ecosystems collapse without them.

Connecticut invertebrates "overwinter" right where they spend the summer... but hidden. Many rely on fallen leaves and other debris to shelter from the elements.

-Great Spangled Fritillary & Woolly Bear caterpillars hide in leaves from cold weather and predators.

-Red-banded Hairstreaks lay their eggs on fallen oak leaves, the first food of emerging caterpillars.

-Luna Moth & Swallowtail Butterfly cocoons and chrysalises appear disguised as dried leaves.

-Yellow Spotted Millipede juveniles recycle nutrients by eating the humus layer on the forest floor.

-Stick Insects drop eggs from trees to overwinter in leaf litter until spring, appearing as seeds that ants might take to nests, burying them where they hatch more safely in the ground.

-Bumble Bees nest in underground cavities, trees or brush/leaf piles, notably abandoned rodent burrows. In autumn, mated queens tunnel inches into the earth to hibernate for winter. 30% of native bees, such as Leafcutter & Mason Bees, are tunnel-nesting. These solitary-nesting species need narrow tunnels or other small spaces in dead wood, hollow stems, or brush and leaf piles. Bee kind.

Credit: *Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation*

Leaves sustain invertebrates and also suppress weeds, save soil moisture and stimulate nutrition. They can be mulch-mown into a lawn as organic fertilizer, or be mulched and bagged as a rich nutrient for garden beds. The Web of Life is best served, however, with undisturbed leaves.

Everything in Moderation including Moderation

-Oscar Wilde

MODERATION How much of your land can be undisturbed for wildlife habitat? In smaller suburban yards, simply reducing lawn helps winter habitat. Mowing less. On my rural two acres, some areas have reverted to weeds providing food and shelter for wildlife, as bunnies, our new pets living under the shed. I like many weeds, such as Burning Bush (*Euonymus*), Pokeberry (*Phytolacca*), Goldenrod (*Solidago*) and clump grasses.

LAWN TIP Overseed with Clover (*Trifolium*) to distract rabbits from eating ornamental plants, and to fertilize the lawn by "fixing" nitrogen (80% of air) in soil. Clover is a broadleaf plant. Avoid herbicidal "weed & feed" fertilizers that poison soil to kill broad leaves, and only feed narrow-leaved grasses.

Leaving leaves doesn't sacrifice a property to wildness. Undisturbed leaves serve invertebrates best, but leaves are very valuable. Mulch-mow into lawn until too many, then bag / blow into beds, around trees and shrubs, or into compost. Top-dress leaves with mulch for a cleaner look.

Style is yours and yours alone. I like a wild landscape, but if your style is more manicured, consider a zone of weeds and "wild leaves" that protects bees, butterflies and other invertebrates. Some aren't convinced of my mini-meadow's beauty, but I extoll the graceful mow line that leads the eye into our wee woods, where larger vertebrates lurk.

Brian Karlsson-Barnes, Master gardener / designer,
Chaplin CT & Boston MA
Briankarlssonbarnes@gmail.com Text 617.957.6611

CREDENTIAL As a landscape designer (Bachelor of Environmental Design / B.E.D., Univ. of Minn. School of Architecture, then self-taught), I've designed gardens in bitter Minnesota, mild Massachusetts and milder Connecticut, from sub/urban Minneapolis and Boston to rural Chaplin. UU Spirituality has informed my environmentalism. I've learned planting protocols from spatial and horticultural studies, notably master gardening in Wellesley, Mass., and serving as a docent at Boston's Arnold Arboretum. Best way to learn plants? Work 7-years as a project manager for a large design-install company with many herbaceous and woody plants like Weston Nurseries of Hopkinton, Mass.

But I learned how to plant from gardeners.

As a master gardener / designer teaching community education in Newton, Mass., I used Hort Lists that selected plants by size, bloom period and sun exposure, and conceptually designed sites for students. My mantra:

**Suit the Site
Fit the Space
Then Seek Beauty**

FIRST Suit the site's sun exposure, soil and moisture. Full-sun is 6 to 8 hours of direct exposure in summer; full-shade is 0 to 2 hours. The 3 to 5 hours between are what I consider bright shade and the trickiest planting condition; morning shade is different from afternoon shade. With good drainage, existing soil can be amended with organic material. I advocate compost saucers for the first years of root establishment. The saucers both hold water and leach nutrient, and irrigation sustains a dry garden through drought. Water Makes Things Grow.

SECOND Fit the space with a plant's mature size. Shrubs are often over-controlled with tip-pruning that causes dense interior growth. Climate change is bringing more humidity, disease and pests to New England, so selective pruning can improve air circulation.

Herbaceous perennials take some 3 years to mature with smaller root systems that are more easily transplanted as plants grow. More work. Good to plant the larger "bones" of a planting first, the woody plants. Shrubs take 5 to 7 years to mature, and trees take decades, so locate plants where they can remain.

you enjoying your stay so far?" My wife told them about wonderful time on the trails, our encounters with bears, kilts, bagpipes and the splendor of the place. We learned that they were three retired Canadian couples who came to Assiniboine every year for a reunion. The three husbands formerly were business colleagues. The couples had become very good friends over the years. One of the men asked me what I thought of the place. I told them about our experience finding Assiniboine on a PBS special and that it is everything I had wished for with only one thing missing. "I wish that there was a geologist here to help me to appreciate the geological history." Their reaction was totally unanticipated. They all burst out with laughter! The three men were professional geologists. They assured me they would do their best to answer my questions. We had a session that evening, right after dinner, with books and maps. There was a wonderful introduction to the geology of the region. The next morning, we joined them for a hike that included abundant and detailed interpretations about what we saw. This was another unexpected Assiniboine surprise and a wish come true. All the pieces were now in place.

Bill Powers is a retired Licensed Professional Counselor and teacher.

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We, Too, Sing America

By Phoebe Godfrey



As I sat down to write this *Neighbors* article at the end of the year, I was torn as to what I should share with you, my readers, that could be of help, or, better yet, offer hope, in the coming year. If you have read my articles in the past, you know that the re-election of former President Trump by a popular majority would have brought on feelings of horror and heartbreak, further solidifying all that I believe still needs radical change and healing in this country if we are to ever fully honor the values we claim to uphold. However, unlike the Harris campaign, I choose not to focus on people and ideas that I do not support. Rather, I am going to focus my energies on those people and ideas that I do support and which I think are the essential antidotes to our nation's colonizing, capitalist, fascist, environmentally destructive, racist, sexist, anti-LGBTQ+ diseases. The way I plan to do this—and I invite, you dear reader, to do the same—is to put your energies and your attention, the only power we actually own, into creating, growing, and animating action in y/our local communities as antidotes to the aforementioned diseases. Let me give you some examples of the actions I plan to take and why, so that you may get ideas and inspiration.

It is no exaggeration to say that in the following years our nation's stance on addressing climate change and environmental destruction will only further deteriorate, plunging us and the entire world into ever-increasing climate and social chaos. Having spent four days with UConn faculty and students back in November in Asheville, North Carolina, witnessing the horrific environmental, social, economic, and spiritual damage done to people and the places they live from Hurricane Helene, I further understand the global gravity of this trajectory. As such, along with my ongoing academic commitments to teaching and researching in this area, I am also applying to be more involved in Windham's sustainability committee, as well as other town/community-based climate change/environmental initiatives. We live on the local level and must become better stewards of our inhabited places and spaces.

On another topic that baffles the heart and mind, given that there was nothing legal about European colonization resulting in Native American genocide and land theft, threats of mass deportation linger on the horizon, much like the ominous smoke from our ever-increasing fires (see above). As the child of parents who immigrated from the U.K. in the 1960s and later became citizens, I am secure, but this does not make me complacent or lack empathy. The action I am taking (I attended a meeting on immigration held recently at the Windham Town Hall) and have taken in the past is to support a local organization called the Neighbor Fund, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that supports the immigrant communities of Windham and Tolland counties, providing direct financial support to those who

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

—Langston Hughes, from *The Weary Blues*, 1926



Photo of Langston Hughes taken by Jack Delano in 1942.

need legal support and other kinds of help because of their immigration status.

I am also going to continue to support CLiCK, the nonprofit my wife and I co-founded, as it too not only supports immigrant food businesses but also is helping us all have a more resilient and sustainable local food system by supporting small local farmers and food entrepreneurs. One of the key areas of need in Asheville was food (and still is for some), and much of it was provided by World Central Kitchen (who also work in Gaza), using a local restaurant as their kitchen (serving up to 1,000 meals a day). Were such an "unnatural crisis" to hit this area, CLiCK would be one of the sites available for those in need (which could include me and you) to get free food.

Finally, as with all fascist ideologies/governments, distraction and scapegoating is written into the playbook, manifesting in ongoing racism (which is of course inseparable from the immigration non-issue), sexism, and oppression of the LGBTQ+ community. As one who identifies as female and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I plan to continue to advocate for our rights, including our rights to be visible and to choose how we live in our bodies. I also identify as an anti-racist white person, and as such I support all organizations that work to promote racial/social justice, such as our local chapter of the NAACP, even if I am not an active member.

I also plan to keep writing for the *Neighbors* pa-

per and supporting the power of sharing diverse, inclusive, and enlightened ideas on a small, intimate scale.

In so doing, I think, we are articulating what I and many others have understood, even against stultifying odds, to be the ethos of this country, despite its horrific past, rife with violent human suffering. For, as Langston Hughes so profoundly wrote, "I, too, sing America," or, as I am echoing, "We, too, sing America"—not just those who in claiming such an identity, make a mockery of its meaning.

I still believe in this as yet unmanifested ideal and in Hughes's prophecy that tomorrow we will *all* sit and feast at the table and those who have tried to stop us will "be ashamed."

To support or get involved with the organizations mentioned above, see:

Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee on Energy and Sustainability <<https://www.windhamct.gov/441/Ad-Hoc-Advisory-Committee-on-Energy-and->>

The Neighbor Fund <<https://www.theneighborfund.org/>>

CLiCK Inc. <<https://www.clickwillimantic.com/>>

Windham/Willimantic Connecticut NAACP

<<https://windhamctnaacp.org/>>

PASSION & PULSE: A Night of Love Poems and Rock Music

Coming to The Bradley Playhouse Theater for FIRE & ICE Weekend

PUTNAM-- Poets at Large will be at The Bradley Playhouse Theater, 30 Front Street in Putnam, CT on February 8th, 2025 from 7-10 p.m. in *Passion & Pulse: Love Poems and Rock Music*, with special guests The Vig, a Worcester band. Tickets for this special concert/poetry smash-up are \$25.00 (\$30.00 at the door) for this evening of music and spoken word capping off Putnam's Fire & Ice Weekend.

The evening will consist of several 20-minute sets of music by The Vig interspersed with open mic poems/spoken word performances all about love; the good, the bad and the ugly. Beverages are available. Order through the Bradley's website or at their Box Office at 30 Front Street, Putnam, CT. Contact karen.warinsky@gmail.com if interested in being in the open mic. The Vanilla Bean and The Putnam Business Association are assisting with this event. Poets at Large is a project of Windham Arts and is ADA compliant.

Watercolor Workshops in Coventry

Artist Irina Trzaskos and the Coventry Arts Guild are excited to host two creative workshops where we will be exploring the beautiful watercolor media. Take a break from your busy world by spending a winter morning in warm and cozy surroundings.

On January 11th we will paint a dreamy watercolor landscape and will learn the basics of watercolor painting techniques.

On February 8th we will learn to paint watercolor flowers and will explore the fundamentals of mixing vibrant colors in watercolor.

No previous experience is necessary for any of the two workshops, all art materials to complete the project will be provided. After the workshop, every participant will also get access to a prerecorded video tutorial of the lesson.

The workshop will take place at the Patriots Park Lodge, which has a stunning view of Coventry Lake.

In a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, you will be able to explore your creativity through beautiful watercolor media.

This workshop is beginner friendly and everyone ages 12+ is welcome to attend.

Registration:

To sign up follow the link: <https://coventryartsguild.org/watercolor-workshops.html>

or email Tim via info@coventryartsguild.org

When: January 11 and February 8, 2025, 10AM-1PM

Where: Patriots Park Lodge, 102 Lake St, Coventry

Cost: \$30 for Arts Guild Members, \$50 for non-members.

A 2025 Coventry Arts Guild membership will be included for non-members as a special promotion.

Your membership privileges can be applied to future Coventry Arts Guild workshops and events in 2025.

Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp Events

326 Taft Pond Rd, Pomfret Center, CT

Submitted by Elaine Nelson

January 12, 2025

Visit the Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp Open HHHouse from 1 – 3 PM. Meet the director & other camp staff, take a camp tour, registration materials available. Take advantage of early bird discounts – details available at the open house or on the website. www.4hcampct.org

January 25, 2025

Join us at our Sno-Ball Family Fun Dinner Dance from 5 – 8 PM. Sit down baked chicken and mac and cheese dinner prepared by our amazing camp cook, We-Lik-It Ice Cream Bar, DJ, dancing for all ages, door prizes, raffles, family pictures and a whole lot of fun. This new event is replacing our April 5K Race and all proceeds benefit the Jim Logee Campership Fund. Adults \$20, Kids 10 and under \$15. Buy tickets by January 20th by calling 860-974-3379. Snow date Feb 1.

February 15, 2025

Join us at our Camper Game Day from 8:00 AM – 3:00PM for boys and girls ages 6 – 12. Beat the winter blues!! Lunch and snack provided with games, crafts and lots of fun. Bring appropriate clothes to be outdoors for part of the day. Admission is \$25/child. Call 860-974-3379 to register by Feb 10 or email: registrar@4hcampct.org

February 16, 2025

Visit the Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp Open HHHouse from 1 – 3 PM. Meet the director & other camp staff, take a camp tour, registration materials available. Take advantage of early bird discounts – details available at the open house or on the website. www.4hcampct.org

Be the Sun

By Jesse R. Clark

I think back to a time, toward the end of the year, scrolling through Facebook. I came across all these posts from people complaining about the past year, saying that they couldn't wait for this year to be over, complaining about how horrible it is. This wasn't the first time I came across this phenomenon. It seems that for the past few years on Facebook, people complain about the year that is ending as if everyone unanimously agreed that that year was horrible. One, maybe two years, fine—but three or four years in a row? Come on.

This inspired me to do something positive. I decided to spend the following year cutting out positive, inspiring stories from the newspaper and collecting them in a box. That way I would have tangible proof that the year was, indeed, a good one. That decision was made at the end of 2019. From one perspective, it looked like I had my work literally cut out for me. Fortunately, I came across enough positive stories in 2020 that they seemed to be waiting for me to cut them out. By the end of the year, I had an entire box of newspaper stories and was able to see 2020 for all its positives, not just the Covid cases.

I am thinking about this now. There is a lot of fear today. It seems to be fear of the future, for the future is unknown. We tend to speculate about what the future will look like when we don't know, and our survival instinct wants to prepare us for the worst. At the same time, we know we can't live that way. That is the struggle—how can we prepare for the worst while still striving to live our best life?

To quote one of my favorite songs, “You’ve got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don’t mess with Mr. In-Between.”

I love the message, but it has the same problem as the song “When You’re Smiling”—when it mentions the “negative,” it says to eliminate it. “When You’re Smiling” has the lyrics “When you’re crying, you bring on the rain, so stop your sighing and be happy again.” This may seem downright insensitive if you are feeling down. It sounds like it’s saying, just stop being sad. Just eliminate the negative emotions, right?

The secret is in the nuance. *How* do you eliminate the negative? First you have to acknowledge it. It is a part of reality. Life at times can be quite negative. The answer is in the next part—latch on to the affirmative. Fear of the unknown, making up the worst-case scenario: we can't live in that state, because in that state of fear comes two reactions—either paralysis or lashing out at others. Neither one is helpful. A society controlled by fear cannot prosper.

I have found myself struggling between two sides of me—the “Realistic Idealist” and the “Cynical Optimist.” The Realistic Idealist is thinking that I, along with a small group of people, can actually get national/international leaders to change their minds/actions on different issues. The trick is finding a way to accomplish this goal. This certainly isn't unrealistic, since there have been times in the past that it has happened on a large scale, but it also seems to be extremely unlikely. That's when my cynical side comes out. My cynical side says, “Why bother?” when it comes to trying to affect this kind of change. However, my cynical side still cares deeply about the issues affecting those close to me. So I reset my sights on local politics and community issues.

How do the national/international issues I care about affect my local community? There is where I find my optimism. I find meaningful changes that I, and

others, can make. I see the love, the care, the kindness in taking care of one another, doing what we can. That love gives me hope. That love brings me peace and joy. I am not giving up on making a difference, I am choosing to focus on what I can do. This is a concept that people recognize in the Serenity Prayer: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace.* This is only half of the prayer, but I feel like it gets to the heart of the matter for everyone, even if you don't believe in God.

Now let's talk about joy. How can we live a joyful life during times of distress? There is an expression that “Comparison is the thief of joy.” This means, for example, that if you compare yourself to others, it may cause you to feel bad about yourself. However, I—being a positive person—say that, if used correctly, comparison can create joy, or at least gratitude. All you have to do is compare the right things.

I have been a bell ringer for the Salvation Army two years in a row. I am almost always smiling, and that smile is a genuine one, even on cloudy, windy, rainy and cold days. How can my smile be so genuine? Because I am filled with the joy and the love inside me. I am here, making a difference, welcoming people with a seasonal greeting, a smile, a wish for them to enjoy the day. People aren't used to seeing someone smiling or filled with such sunshine and joy, especially on cloudy, windy, rainy or cold days, rushing to and from their car and the store. Sometimes they mention the weather in a negative sense, but I don't mind because I compare that day to another day when the weather may have been worse. And on that day when the weather was worse, I found my own joy, had my own fun, blessed that I was able to bring a little bit of love, caring, and human connection to someone's day.

Yes, there are times when the clouds hide the sun, making it suddenly chillier. I instinctively get angry, tensing my body up, but that only makes it worse. So instead, I laugh and move around a little, for I know that the clouds are only temporary and, even during the dark, cloudy, windy parts of the day, the sun is always there, always constant, even if it's just momentarily hidden. Some may not think of it like that as they are quickly leaving the store to get to their car, just like some may think that 2020 must have been an unfortunate year for me to decide to look for positive news stories. But I say that made it the *best* year to do it, for if I could find the positives in *that* year—a year filled with existential fear, a contentious national election, protests and cries for justice, a spike in the “us vs. them” mentality, and topped off with such violence—we can find them in any year.

The key thing about the sun is that it isn't forceful like the wind; it just stays there, warming things up. So keep looking for the sun, and if you don't see the sun, *be* the sun warming the hearts and minds of those you meet, giving peace to the fearful by melting their stress and anger. Not everyone will be receptive to it and it may not change *everything*, but it will certainly affect those who are willing to pay attention. And that is a great first step.

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CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS, 2023

Contra Dance

First Friday of each month
 Patriots Park Lodge, 172 Lake Street, Coventry, CT
 7:30 - 10:30 p.m. Introductory session at 7:15
 Partner not required, all dances taught
 Live Band & Caller See: HCDance.org
 Questions: Dennis at knowdj@frontier.net

A contra dance is a social dance that one can attend without a partner. The dancers form couples who form sets in long lines. At the course of a dance, couples progress up and down these lines, dancing with each other couple in the line. The dance is led by a caller who teaches the sequence of moves in the dance before the music starts. This sequence is repeated as couples progress up and down the line. Since there is no required footwork, many people find contra dancing easier to learn than other forms of dancing.

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Regional Community Media & Arts News

Greetings everyone! I hope the holidays treated you and your families well with some peaceful times together.

I also hope that 2025 will be a better year for us with less stress and political stupidity. Our nation did not treat itself well this past year and the world is either scratching its head or licking its chops. The greatest mistakes and tragedies come from taking reality for granted or not even knowing you have an existential choice. This is where great art comes from, this is where politics ends, and life just is. I am happy to share it with you!

I begin with a preview of new coverage for the *On the Homefront* series in the months ahead and some arts funding news. If you need airtime or have news to share use email to connect: john@humanartsmedia.com.

IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE RESTRUCTURING IN CONNECTICUT STATUS OF WINDHAM HOSPITAL SERVICES

<https://www.facebook.com/WindhamUnitedtoSaveourHealthcare>

If you are breathing and have a pulse, then you know our healthcare system has been going through major changes. They are not all good and the ongoing news stories of many family impacts show that the gyros of control, cost, quality, and access are out of balance. The trend in ownership, management, and operation of our state's health institutions is shifting increasingly from the public to the private or nonprofit sectors. Insurance companies, big pharma, and the pharmacy chains are in the middle of the process, perhaps cashing in or ultimately getting burned on both sides, depending on the levels of ROI versus helping humans stay healthy.

Some people think the size and scale of our current dilemma presents a good case for single payer/public coverage for all and keeping profit completely out of the equation. This is not necessarily socialism, but I am tired of people getting hysterical with the mere use of the word. Really? We will dig a little deeper into that concept with the hope of finding fresh solutions or solutions that work elsewhere that we should explore now.

I have been covering this issue as it has played out in the form of the closing of the birth unit at Windham Hospital several years ago and the public response. It is an ongoing controversy in our region that remains unresolved.

A new feasibility study is finally underway, and that process involves public participation and comment at hearings. Members of Windham United to Save Our Health Care (WUSH) were informed in mid-December that the hearing will be in "early January" but there is no date, time or location set yet. Go to their Facebook page (above) for updates. Join to get more information—contact them to testify and share your story or concern.

My program will continue with monthly updates from WUSH for information sharing. When the hearings begin and the information is collected, I will contact staff at Hartford Health Care and Windham Hospital to share some history and context for change, and their thoughts and reactions to the hearings.

How it plays out, the process used and how people are treated, and the results, will reveal the original intentions and hopes of the proponents of the changes and the anticipated benefits. I want to give proponents the best opportunity to make their case for people in our region. I will be sure the whole story is told by all major players in their respective roles in a safe media space. With increased open dialogue and information sharing the best intentions of all have the best chance to be realized.

THE HOUSING CRISIS—TENANT UNIONS RESPOND

<https://www.cttenantsunion.org/>

History and change are happening regarding people and housing in our state! Recently 17 tenant unions have formed across Connecticut, giving a voice and new power to individuals and families who are suffering under the weakness and limitation of our existing system of managing and regulating relationships between landowners,



property managers, and renters.

The link above to the *Connecticut Tenants Union* is a great resource. I have covered this excellent work on my program for almost two years, including groups in Putnam and Willimantic, and this will continue.

Apart from the courts, local government can be (1) the last opportunity for citizens without lots of money who are looking for justice with housing and landlord challenges, or (2) a last refuge for delay and obfuscation from those trying to evade responsibility for honoring their agreements (the big stall).

There is good local news! Once again, I want to congratulate the Town of Windham for creating its own Fair Rent Commission. It did not have to do this, the town population was below the required threshold, but people wanted to do the right thing anyway. Bravo! I hope other towns do the same to get their act together before the new levels of housing are developed. It is wise for leadership to manage the growth by debating and accepting affordable housing principles in advance before applications trigger expensive legal processes.

Many towns continue to use restrictive zoning rules to limit or control housing development at a time when there is a serious need for more. I strongly support those who want to preserve environmental quality and life habitats. Local town control is the bulwark we rely upon to protect us from, shall we say, politely, the zealous overreach of developers who know how to game local government processes and the lack of civic participation in decisions. People are busy, I get it, but the gap in participation in the various committee-related process decisions can have serious unintended consequences that come to light too late.

"Affordable housing" is an unfortunate meme that is often used by towns and developers to debate (or delay) how much new housing construction should include units that are for those who are not the highest income earners. Serving only the rich as you build a future for young people and families is unfortunate and short-sighted. I understand the challenge of balancing larger-scale development in a few locations with smaller-scale projects in more locations. But reality today demands a new reconciliation of the class divides we do not discuss. Can we get on with it in 2025?

ARTS NEWS AND RESOURCES

https://portal.ct.gov/decdartsportal/about-us?language=en_US

The *Connecticut Office of the Arts* provides a wide range of support throughout the year to individuals and arts organizations. Whatever your path or level of development with your art, COA offers training, networking, funding information, and special events. Visit their website above and sign up for newsletters.

Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut - Applications are now open for 2025 grants that empower youth, promote basic needs and rights, and benefit the environment through our Regional Impact and Environmental grant cycles. Regional Impact grants include Norwich Youth, Southeast General and Willimantic Basic Needs. The Foundation encourages you to discuss your proposal concept with program staff before starting an application. If your organization is new to us, an initial conversation is required for your application to be considered. Deadline: 11:59pm on Friday, January 10, 2025.

CT Humanities - Quick Grants are small implementation grants of up to \$4,999 that support small-scale humanities activities such as discussion-based public programs, exhibitions, and tours. All projects should be discussed with Grants staff prior to applying. Next Deadline: February 7, 2025.

Please thank and patronize our advertisers for making the Neighbors paper possible. Thank you. T. King, Publisher

ON THE HOMEFRONT CONTINUES LOCAL SERVICE



The *On the Homefront* series is now operating as an integrated media hub for community service on all local platforms on a 24/7 basis—radio, YouTube, podcasts, public access TV, Neighbors (print), streaming and mobile.

-Flagship originating broadcasts will continue in Willimantic at WILI AM 1400 and 95.3 FM on Wednesdays from 5:00-6:00 pm.

-WICH Radio 94.5 FM and 1310 AM on Fridays from 11:00 am to 12 noon. Covering Norwich and New London, rounding out our three-county coverage area.

-WILI YouTube Channel for all Monday-Friday local talk shows—available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@wiliradio7000>. Each program has its own playlist with all the shows. Search on "WILI Radio" and subscribe!

-The On the Homefront audio podcast archive is available 24/7. Subscribe to get every new program! <https://www.wili.com/on-the-homefront-podcast/>

-Archive of my media/arts columns in Neighbors at: www.neighborspaper.com and: <http://neighborspaper.com/category/back-issues/our-writers/john-murphy/>

-Channel 192 at Spectrum Public Access TV. On the Homefront is featured Tuesdays at 5:30 pm and Fridays at 8:00 pm. Check out the other unique shows!



JM with new ECSU President Karim Ismaili.



JM with Kia Baird from the Cultural Coalition.

As always, thanks for reading *Neighbors* and for listening to or watching *On the Homefront*. I appreciate your interest and support for local media wherever you find it—and I hope you will stay connected with this project and join me in the studio when you have news to share!

Always keep the faith,

John Murphy
john@humanartsmedia.com

In Your Corner

By Pamela Skelly

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was the leading figure in the mid-twentieth-century struggle for civil rights. Dr. King was a charismatic leader whose deep, resonant voice spoke the truth in his speeches and sermons. Because people sensed his authenticity and honesty, they became involved with the civil rights movement even when they faced dangerous adversaries.

Inspired by his Christian faith and the peaceful teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King used nonviolent resistance to fight for equal rights for Black Americans. Sadly, his life was cut short by a violent death. If the purpose of his assassination was to stop the freedom fighters of the civil rights movement, it didn't succeed. Instead he became a symbol of how our society could be better by ensuring equal rights for all citizens, no matter their skin color.

On Monday, January 20, 2025, we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. As a legal holiday, schools, government offices, and some businesses will be closed. Many people will honor Dr. King by participating in a day of volunteering in the local community. Assisting people in the community is exactly what Dr. King did—not just for basic needs but also for the spirit.

Background

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929, King saw the impact of segregation in his daily life. His father, Martin Luther King Sr., was a pastor who stood up to segregation, once leading a march of several hundred to Atlanta's city hall to protest voting rights discrimination.

King attended Morehouse College, the same college attended by his father and maternal grandfather. Graduating in 1948 with a degree in sociology, he enrolled in a seminary before pursuing a doctorate in theology. He served as an assistant minister at Boston's Twelfth Baptist Church while a student. In Boston he also met a student at the New England Conservatory of Music, Coretta Scott, who would become his wife.

The Civil Rights Movement

At the age of 25, Dr. King became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he became involved in civil rights. In 1955, he served as spokesman for the Montgomery bus boycott, garnering the participation of nearly all citizens of the Black community even though as a result many had to walk miles to work each day. After 381 days, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in transportation was unconstitutional.

King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with other Black church leaders to protest against Jim Crow laws in 1957 and served as its leader until his death. It was his belief that peaceful protests for civil rights would lead to positive media and public opinion. He was correct. The television coverage of the brutal attacks on the activists by white officials garnered sympathy nationwide.

In 1959, King, his wife, and a colleague traveled throughout India, meeting with many leaders in and out of government. This trip had a significant influence on his understanding of nonviolent resistance and his commitment to America's struggle for civil rights. In a radio address made at the end of the trip, King reflected: "Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity. In a real sense, Mahatma Gandhi embodied in his life certain universal principles that are inherent in the moral structure of the universe, and these principles are as inescapable as the law of gravitation."

King went back to Atlanta in 1960 to serve as co-pastor with his father at the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

In 1963, working with the NAACP, SCLC began organizing sit-ins in public spaces in Birmingham. When the police used pressurized water jets and police dogs against peaceful demonstrators, public opinion nationwide sided with the demonstrators. The campaign forced the city to desegregate public spaces.

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 was organized by King and SCLC working with the NAACP and other civil rights groups. In the nation's capital, he gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech to an audience of 250,000 people.

In 1965, King joined other activists in the Selma-to-Montgomery march. Again, white officials subjected the peaceful protesters to brutal attacks which were

televised across the country. Within six months, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, banning the disenfranchisement of Black Americans.

In the following years, Dr. King expanded his attention to speaking out against the Vietnam War and economic issues. In 1968, he was in Memphis, Tennessee, to support striking Black sanitation workers when he was assassinated in his hotel.

Legacy

Martin Luther King Jr. received numerous awards and honorary degrees throughout his life and posthumously, such as:

- NAACP Medal, 1957
- Nobel Peace Prize, 1964
- American Liberties Medallion by the American Jewish Committee, 1965
- Presidential Medal of Freedom, 1977
- Congressional Gold Medal with his wife, Coretta, 1994

In 1983, Congress declared the third Monday of every January as Martin Luther King Jr. Day to celebrate the legacy of this civil rights icon.

Quotes from Martin Luther King Jr.

"Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in."

— Youth March for Integrated Schools, April 18, 1959

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that."

— *Strength to Love*, 1963

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

— "I Have a Dream" speech, Washington, D.C., 1963

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."

— Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Oslo, Norway, 1964

"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits."

— Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech

"The time is always right to do what is right."

— Selma, Alabama, 1965

"We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience."

— Montgomery, Alabama, 1965

"We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

— Washington National Cathedral, 1968

We at the NAACP proudly carry on his work on behalf of Black Americans and to keep his dream alive for future generations. Our branch will be celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day locally. You can look for details in upcoming announcements on the Windham electronic message board and in the newspaper.

If you also feel strongly about civil rights and justice in our country, please consider joining our Windham/Willimantic NAACP branch. Members receive emails about events and meetings, but we keep membership information private. An annual membership is \$30, a reasonable price to support a worthy organization. Please visit our website at <https://windhamctnaacp.org/> to learn more. You can contact us at (860) 230-6911 or by email at info@windhamctnaacp.org. You can also check out our Facebook page, Windham Willimantic CT NAACP.

To all our contributors-
Thank you!

Without your submissions of writing, poetry, artwork and photographs, this paper would not exist. T. King, Publisher

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Coventry Senior Center: Wed 9:30-10:30a

Lebanon Senior Center: Tue 4-5p, Thu 6:30-7:30p

Lebanon Library: Thu 5-6p

Storrs Friends Meetinghouse: Sat 8:30-9:30a

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News from South Windham's Smith Library

Submitted by Aubrey Hines

January & February Events at Guilford Smith Memorial Library, South Windham, CT
 Hours: Sundays, Mondays - Closed; Tuesdays 10am-8pm; Wednesdays 10am-2pm; Thursdays 5pm-8pm; Fridays 10am-2pm; Saturdays 9am-12pm

We are a public library located in South Windham but we serve all surrounding communities as well and warmly welcome new visitors.

Check out our January program offerings:
 Thursday, January 2 from 5-7pm: Drop-In Craft: Paper Succulents (Adult program, no registration required)
 Friday, January 3 at 10:30am: Foodie Friday: Grilled Cheese & Soup (Children's program, registration required)
 Saturday, January 11 at 8am: Gentle Yoga in the Library (Adult program, registration required)
 Tuesday, January 14 from 10am-8pm: Drop-In Sticker Coloring (Children's program, no registration required)
 Thursday, January 16 at 6pm: Cookbook Club (Adult program, registration required)
 Saturday, January 18 from 9am-12pm: Drop-In Winnie the Pooh Craft (Children's program, no registration required)
 Thursday, January 23 at 6:30pm: Spicy Romance Book Club (Adult program, we will be discussing the first Bridgerton book, "The Duke and I" by Julia Quinn; copies can be picked up at the library starting January 2; no registration required)
 Saturday, January 25 at 8am: Gentle Yoga in the Library (Adult program, registration required)

Ongoing January programs:
 Every Tuesday at 10:30am: Drop-In Storytime and Craft (Children's program, no registration required) - the last storytime of the month is always a kids' yoga storytime. Bring your own mat or use one of ours.
 Every Wednesday at 10:30am: Wednesday Wonders: Art for Homeschoolers (Children's program, for ages 5-12; registration is required)

Looking forward to February, we are planning even more fun, including something exciting for Take Your

Child to the Library Day on Saturday, February 1, 2025! This year's special program will include a stuffed animal sleepover the night before followed by a pajama party and family pancake breakfast with a special storytime on Saturday. Registration will be required for this program.

Other February program offerings include:
 Saturday, February 1 at 9:30am: Take Your Child to the Library Day - Pajama Party (Children's program, all ages, registration is required) - kids and their families are welcome to drop off a stuffed animal the night before (Jan. 31) for a library sleepover, then join us Saturday morning for a pajama party complete with a pancake breakfast and storytime!

Thursday, February 6 from 5-7pm: Drop-In Craft: Fabric Hearts (Adult program, no registration required)
 Friday, February 7 at 10:30am: Foodie Friday (Children's program, registration required)
 Saturday, February 8 at 8am: Gentle Yoga in the Library (Adult program, registration required)
 Week of February 11: Drop-In 3D Valentine's Day Cards (Children's program, no registration required, happening all week)
 February 14 at 11am: Valentine's Cookie Decorating (Children's program, registration required)
 Saturday, February 15 at 8am: Gentle Yoga in the Library (Adult program, registration required)
 Thursday, February 20 at 6pm: Cookbook Club (Adult program, registration required)
 Thursday, February 27 at 6:30pm: Spicy Romance Book Club - book is TBD (Adult program, no registration required)

Ongoing February programs:
 Every Tuesday at 10:30am: Drop-In Storytime and Craft (Children's program, no registration required) - the last storytime of the month is always a kids' yoga storytime. Bring your own mat or use one of ours.

If you're interested in learning more about any of our programs and services, please contact the library by calling 860-423-5159 or visiting our website: <https://guilfordsmith.blog>.

Common Sense Car Care

By Rick Ostien

The memo that winter is here must have gotten lost somewhere. In the last month I have lost count of the one headlight vehicles I have seen. Having both headlights working is extremely important in bad weather. They allow you to see and to be seen on the road. Please take note of your vehicles headlights and get them repaired as soon as possible for the sake of safety.

There are also large numbers of cars and trucks that have not been cleaned properly on the roads. This is another dangerous practice. Large amounts of snow and ice left on the roof or the rear trunk can be like a missile to the driver behind you. This missile can not only take out a windshield, but it can cause a serious accident. Please be sure you have a snowbrush or a snow broom to keep your vehicle clean for the sake of safety.

The high cost of repairing windshield wipers can be avoided by just cleaning the snow off the windshield. The windshield wiper was not designed to remove heavy snow or ice. That is why you need to clean the windshield by hand with a snowbrush. It will save the wiper motor and a very costly repair. The electric windows on our cars and trucks can also be damaged if the glass is frozen to the door. This can be avoided by simply spraying dry silicone on the rubber gaskets that are around the door. Here is where being proactive will save you money on costly repairs.

The pretreatment method that most highway departments use can create more problems. The first layer of snow melts and the second layer becomes slush. I hate slush. Slush causes more accidents than just untreated snow. If the temperature drops before the road is plowed and salted it freezes. The theory that salt will give traction only works until the salt starts to melt. The days of using sand for traction and salt for melting is gone. The tires on most of today's vehicles are all-season. These tires are rated for all the elements. When purchasing an all-season tire be sure to check the rating for snow and ice. Six to ten is very good. Sport sedans with low profile tires, I suggest a V-pattern directional tire which will help channel the snow away from the tread of the tire.

Please be sure to give some thought to your tires, wipers, windows, and lights. It is so much better to be proactive and be protected than to have to deal with costly repairs or accidents that could be avoided.

From the Franc Motors family to your family, we wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Happy Motoring and stay safe out there.

Rick Ostien is the owner of Franc Motors in Willington.




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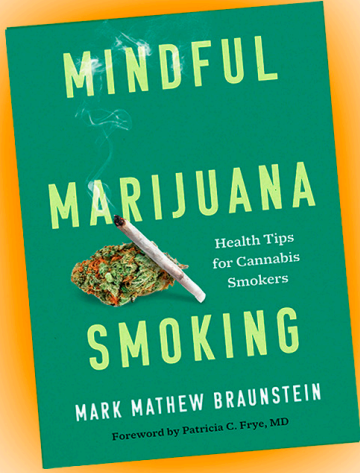


QUIET CORNER FIDDLERS

Is there a violin in your home hiding under a bed or tucked away in a closet somewhere? Are you an active player or has it been many years since you played? The Quiet Corner Fiddlers are seeking new members and we would love to have you join us. We meet on Monday evenings to play jigs, reels, waltzes and traditional fiddle tunes. If you are interested in joining us, please email Bernie Schreiber for further information at b.schreiber@snet.net.

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Who Killed the Country?

By Dean Farrell

Who killed the country?
"I," said the president.
"A despot on day one,
"My reign has just begun.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the Republican.
"I leaned evermore right,
"Til my conscience took flight.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the Democrat.
"At debate, he was lacking,
"So I sent his ass packing.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the Congress.
"When you filled me with morons,
"Disaster was foregone.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the Supreme Court.
"I took away your rights,
"And now you've lost the fight.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the church.
"Jesus was my excuse,
"For my hate and abuse.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the billionaire.
"A president I bought,
"And the world is distraught.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the Russian.
"In your horse race I meddled.
"Now you're in a fine fettle.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the media.
"I kissed Orange Man's butt,
"Now your fate is clear-cut.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the TV network.
"I sated the people,
"With shows non-cerebral.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the insurance company.
"All your claims I denied,
"Though you got sick and died.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said Big Oil.
"My gunk filled the oceans,
"Setting slow death in motion.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"I," said the corporation.
"My carbon emissions,
"Led to climate demolition.
"I killed the country."

Who killed the country?
"We," said the people.
"We disdained education,
"Which helped murder the nation."
"We killed the country."

America: it was nice while it lasted.



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CT Green Energy News

Submitted by Peter Millman

Welcome to the CT Green Energy News, a weekly digest of stories that has been condensed into a monthly format for *Neighbors* readers. To read the full stories online, just Google the titles below. You can also subscribe to the free weekly email newsletter by contacting Peter Millman at peter.millman7@gmail.com.

News and events for advocates of clean energy, energy efficiency, and climate action at the state and local levels, focusing on Connecticut. Brought to you by People's Action for Clean Energy (PACE) and Eastern CT Green Action (ECGA).

CT lawmakers respond to utility's credit downgrade. WSHU. "Eversource — Connecticut's largest utility — had its credit rating downgraded by the Standard and Poor's agency earlier this week. The state's regulatory environment is to blame, said the company. [But] "They're obviously lobbying for a more relaxed regulatory environment," said state Senator Norm Needleman, the Democrat who co-chairs the Energy and Technology Committee in the state legislature. He disagrees with Eversource's contention that the downgrade will increase costs for ratepayers. "I think the ratepayers gain significantly by a more rigorous regulatory environment to hold Eversource and other public utilities more accountable," he said. The rating agency gave too much credence to the utility's complaints, said state Senator Ryan Fazio, the ranking Republican on the committee."

CT's push for \$855M 'smart meter' plan for homes, businesses likely means increase in electric bills. Hartford Courant. "Electric rates for most Connecticut utility customers could increase again as the result of a decision by the Public Utility Regulatory Authority to press ahead with an \$855 million plan to replace existing electric meters on homes and businesses with energy saving smart meters. The smart meters, known as Advanced Metering Infrastructure, are designed as part of a two-way communication system that enables electric utilities to monitor customer energy consumption, resulting ideally in reductions in bills when power is used in off peak hours. They also notify utilities immediately of power outages... The meter replacement program [will]... appear under the public benefit portion of customer bills. A utility industry official familiar with the smart meter plan said its costs should appear as a separate line item in customer bills. And he said, unlike the public benefit program, Eversource will be able to profit from the meter replacement program."

Opinion: Wind power can help lower CT electricity costs. CT Mirror. "Electricity prices in Connecticut, and throughout New England, are set in an hourly wholesale energy market. In this system, the price of electricity is determined by the most expensive power plants operating at any given hour. In New England, natural gas power plants tend to be the most expensive plants providing electricity, so they generally set the electricity price for that hour. And when the cost of natural gas spikes, the cost of Connecticut's electricity spikes too. Offshore wind, on the other hand, offers a much different dynamic. With no fuel costs, offshore wind electricity can be bid into the wholesale electricity market at a price close to zero."

More good news for heat pumps in Massachusetts, as regulators order National Grid to develop special rate. Energy News Network. "Environmental advocates are hailing a decision by Massachusetts regulators that will give more than 1.3 million households access to lower winter electricity prices if they use a heat pump in their home. Public utilities regulators on Monday ordered National Grid, the state's second-largest electric company, to develop a lower, seasonal rate for houses with heat pumps. The decision comes three months after the state approved a similar rate plan by Unitil, an electric utility that serves 108,500 Massachusetts households. "They hit the nail on the head here..."

Fifth-generation Connecticut orchard invests in 1,500 solar panels. Yale Connections. "At Bishop's Orchard in Connecticut, sunlight helps grow apples, berries, and pumpkins. And now Bishop's Orchard is also using sunlight to produce electricity with nearly 1,500 solar panels. The panels are located on the roof of the farm's market and on a previously unproductive piece of land that was not suitable for growing crops. And they provide about 75% of the orchard's electricity needs. Keith Bishop, the fifth generation of his family to run the orchard, says he was motivated to go solar in part by a desire to help future generations keep the farm going."

Woodbridge Launches HeatSmart Program to Cut Energy Costs, Go Green. Woodbridge Town News.

"As part of a four-town initiative, Woodbridge is partnering with the South-Central Regional Council of Governments (SCRCOG) and the Sustainability Committee to bring this exciting energy efficiency and heat pump outreach program to our community. Residents of Woodbridge, Hamden, Meriden, and North Branford now have access to valuable tools and services to make their homes more energy-efficient, reduce utility bills, and contribute to a cleaner environment. HeatSmart connects residents with expert advice, resources, and utility-authorized contractors to improve energy efficiency and embrace cutting-edge solutions like heat pumps. This program builds on the success of similar efforts in nearby towns and is supported by experienced representatives from People's Action for Clean Energy (PACE). With their guidance, HeatSmart Woodbridge will empower residents to take real steps toward saving energy and reducing costs."

Multi-State Offshore Wind Pact Weakened After Connecticut Sits Out First Selection. CT News Junkie.

"The first and only U.S. multi-state agreement to buy offshore wind power is under strain after one of its members declined to participate in the recent selection of developers for three projects off the coast of New England...Connecticut didn't take a role in the selection of developers for about half of the power target...even though it has committed to increasing its use of offshore wind...a spokesman for Connecticut's Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, said the state is still considering its options..." "Governor Lamont's indecision on the offshore wind procurement is baffling," said Charles Rothenberger, an environment and energy attorney for Save the Sound... Massachusetts and Rhode Island have demonstrated in the past that they are just as cost-conscious, if not more so, than Connecticut, yet they felt comfortable with the current proposals."

Massachusetts legislation looks to remove barriers to the state's shift from natural gas. Energy News Network. "Under a bill that has already cleared the state Senate, gas utilities and regulators would get new powers to offer customers "something else" such as heat from networked geothermal...Nearly a year after Massachusetts regulators laid out a vision for the state's evolution from natural gas distribution to clean energy use, lawmakers are coalescing around legislation that would start converting principles into policy. The wide-ranging climate bill includes several provisions that would allow utilities to explore alternatives to gas and empower regulators to place more limits on the expansion and continuation of natural gas infrastructure, changes that supporters say are critical to a successful transition away from fossil fuels."

Adding To The Grid In Middletown. CT News Junkie. "Local leaders and developers gathered this week to celebrate the completion of a small solar energy system on a landfill...in Middletown, providing a small boost to the New England power grid while also making better use of the 2.5 acre, capped landfill. Developed by West Hartford-based solar developer Verogy, the project will produce 809 kilowatts of electricity (or 0.809 megawatts), and will be enough to power about 105 homes, according to Verogy officials...Middletown is benefitting from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which was signed into law in August 2022 and will provide a 30% rebate..." "This project demonstrates the potential of capped landfills to contribute to renewable energy goals..."

Acadia Center Offers Rebuttal to Key Points in Flawed Analysis on New England Energy Policies and Costs. Acadia Center.

"...a new report entitled "The Staggering Costs of New England's Green Energy Policies"...presents a deeply flawed analysis and distorted view of the region's future energy outlook. The report, which Always conducted on Energy Research (AOER) "concludes that if every New England state maintains their green energy mandates, it will double electric rates and cause rolling blackouts in the region..." Their analysis and conclusions fail to stand up to even the most basic scrutiny, which is also the case for the related "analysis"...which, based on Acadia Center analysis, overestimated the annual cost of a recently enacted energy storage policy in Massachusetts by more than 25x to 30x, as detailed further below. It is incredibly unfortunate that this report continues to rely upon similar ill-informed assumptions and questionable calculations to vastly inflate the cost of the energy transition by multiple factors."

Norwalk police unveil first electric vehicles. Other departments are testing them, too. News12 Connecticut.

"Norwalk police are going green. The department unveiled its first two electric police cruisers on Friday. And it's not just Norwalk. Across Connecticut, a small but growing list of police agencies are experimenting with zero-emission vehicles...Westport police have used all-electric Teslas for five years now. The department's patrol vehicle can log 16 hours a day on a single charge...Westport's Teslas cost more up front, including an expensive retrofit to add a police light bar and protective cage. But a 2021 financial analysis found that the department's first Model 3 nearly paid for itself in one year. While it was \$15,300 more than a gas-powered Ford Explorer, the Tesla saved \$12,582 in gas alone — plus even more in lower maintenance costs."

Geothermal System Now Operating at Smith College in Massachusetts. Renewable Energy Magazine. "The geothermal project—the largest capital undertaking in Smith's history—is replacing the college's aging fossil-fuel-fired steam heating system with an electrically-powered geothermal one. The new system—which will also provide cooling to many campus buildings in summer—will lower Smith's carbon emissions by 80%, helping the college to reach its goal of carbon neutrality by 2030...As the first college in the region and one of the first nationwide to launch a move to geothermal energy, Smith is viewed as a model by other colleges, K-12 schools, and municipalities."

Opinion: Third Act Connecticut to Lamont: Be a stronger voice for a sustainable state. CT Mirror. "Last month, Third Act Connecticut...delivered to Gov. Ned Lamont a letter imploring him to voice even greater support for Connecticut's initiatives on behalf of sustainable and affordable energy. The letter is posted on our website here...Why write to the governor now?...Connecticut is now embroiled in a political power struggle in which sustainable energy is being scapegoated for the electricity price hikes that many Connecticut residents have recently experienced...Among our letter's key points: Cutting greenhouse gasses is the best path to fighting global warming — and reducing electricity bills. [And] Offshore wind is essential to achieving Connecticut's sustainability goals... We deeply appreciate the governor's steadfast environmental advocacy to date. But at this critical time, we also need him to advocate for — and act in accord with — this key truth: the majority of Connecticut citizens overwhelmingly support a cleaner environment, the climate change fight and the implementation of sustainable energy."

Opinion: Connecticut and the need to change from diesel school buses to all-electric zero-emission. Hartford Courant. "Converting to all-electric school buses benefits health and preserves the environment for future generations...Connecticut has made progress in transitioning to electric school buses, but there is more to be done. California is leading the way in adopting electric school buses, followed by New York, Maryland, Florida, Virginia, Texas, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Connecticut needs a committed timeline like California, which made the year 2035 its target. Connecticut recently filed a bill to create a zero-emission vehicle roadmap by Nov 15 and to create a forty-member Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Coordinating Council to manage plans."

Opinion: CT must pump up momentum for heat pump adoptions. CT Mirror. "Unlike traditional heating methods, heat pumps use electricity to move heat, making them significantly more energy-efficient...The average homeowner in Connecticut can expect energy cost savings of about \$771 a year, which is significant...Beyond financial savings, heat pumps offer substantial health benefits that are often understated. Traditional heating systems, especially those reliant on oil, natural gas, or propane combustion, emit pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and particulate matter...These pollutants can accumulate indoors, compromising air quality and exacerbating respiratory conditions...Connecticut has taken steps forward by joining the New England Heat Pump Accelerator Coalition...With up to \$100 million allocated to Connecticut, the state has a significant opportunity to boost outreach, streamline installations, and ensure equitable access to this technology."

Solar Today - Questions and answers about solar in our community and beyond

Honor Earth Day every day!

Greetings all,

I invite you to join a peaceful revolution by simply changing how you buy your electricity.



Just a head up... The utility companies announced last month that Utility price increase are coming again January 1st, 2025. Be sure to check 3rd party supplier rates against Eversource rates. It may save you some money! You can check rates by going to: www.energizect.com, hit the rate board drop down on the right side tab, then hit "compare energy supplier rates". Please reach out to me directly if you need help navigating 3rd party suppliers.

BTW – Here in CT, it is illegal for 3rd party suppliers to charge you a cancellation fee! If you want to change companies, call the 3rd party supplier and let them know you are cancelling. It will take to the end of your current billing cycle for the change to go into effect.

People often ask me, "When's the best time to go solar"?

An old industry saying is; *"The best time to go solar is when you first thought about it"!*
The real answer for me is; *When you're ready to look into it and when it feels right for you!*

When is the best time of year to go solar?

First I will lay some groundwork:
After deciding to have solar installed at your home, the process takes approx. 90 – 120 days. If you're lucky (*if engineering, the utility and town permitting are in your favor*), the process from saying yes to install and then turning the system on is in the 60 – 90 day timeframe.
The sun cycle for the most gained solar production during the year is late April to mid-September. When a solar system produces more energy than your home uses, the extra production is tracked by a netting meter (*see last month's article on how net metering works*) and those kilowatts show up on your electric bill as a credit. You use those credits at night and through the winter. When I design a solar system, I look at a homeowners current usage from the last 12 months and see if their home can fit a system that offsets as much utility power as possible. A 365 day synopsis is evaluated and then a discussion around system sizing and financial comparisons are at hand. At this point we know if it will make financial sense.

OK so when's "really" the best time of year to say yes to solar?

Based on the information above, to get the most out of your first years production, **November through February is the best time!** This way the system is up and running by the time the sun starts to produce the most usable energy for the year. *With that said, ANYTIME, and as soon as possible is the best time!*

Here in New England, it's typical that a roof mounted solar array produces 70-85% of the arrays annual production from April to September.

What is the motivation to go solar or home hydro electric power generation?

People are motivated many different ways about going solar. Financially, emotionally, environmentally, their lack of love for the utility company, etc..

My solar back story:

When I went solar about 14 years ago, I was motivated for a few reasons that were; helping the environment, financial reasons and to role model the lifestyle I choose to embrace.

A little push to seriously look into it was when I saw my first electric bill in our new home that has geo-thermal heating and air conditioning. I am not much for air conditioning except on super-hot and humid days and the first winter before I installed a fireplace insert our electric bill was very high. That's really what triggered me to get serious about it. Even though we do not buy / burn oil or gas, except for our propane cooking stove, the electric bill was shocking, even back then, 14 years ago.

I did my own research with online calculators and I tried to figure it out myself but it wasn't until I had a solar representative come to the house and explain everything to me that I realized it would really make sense for us. It was a fast decision and I have not regretted it since.

A few years later I was so inspired that I jumped into the industry as a sales manager at SolarCity, training over 500 people on how to sell solar and then went off to start a couple solar companies with other industry professionals.

My newest venture with residential renewable energy is the Home Hydro unit.

Recently a lot of folks that cannot or do not want to go solar have been asking me about the new Home Hydro Electric Power Generating turbine that installs in your basement. It's been a game changer for quite a few folks for sure.

To this day, I am passionate about helping others transition to Solar and Hydro powered energy.

If you, or anyone you know, would like to learn more about capturing the Suns energy or Hydro Electric technology to power your home, please reach out.

Keep it simple, keep it local... Zen Solar

Thanks for reading and let's make every day Earth Day!

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Where to find the Neighbors paper

Ashford

Terry's Transmissions
Ashford Spirit Shoppe
Ashford Post Office
Hope and Wellness

Pomfret

Weiss, Hale & Zahansky
Vanilla Bean Restaurant
Pomfret Post Office
Baker's Dozen Coffee Shop

Bolton

Bolton Post Office
Subway-Bolton Notch

Putnam

Subway
Putnam Post Office
Putnam Library

Brooklyn

Brooklyn Post Office
Baker's Dozen Coffee Shop
Salem Village

Scotland

Scotland Post Office

South Windham

Bob's Windham IGA
Landon Tire
So. Windham Post Office

Chaplin

Chaplin Post Office
Blondies Restaurant

Stafford

Stafford Coffee Company
Subway
Stafford Post Office
Stafford Cidery
Stafford Library
Mill Pond Store

Columbia

Columbia Post Office

Coventry

Highland Park Market
Meadowbrook Spirits
Subway
Song-A-Day Music
eyeTrade

Tolland

Birch Mountain Pottery
Subway
Tolland Post Office
Parker Place

Eastford

Eastford Post Office

Ellington/Crystal Lake

3 J's Deli

Willington

Franc Motors
Willington Pizza I & II
Willington Post Office
Willington Library
Willington Senior Center
The Packing House

Hampton

Hampton Post Office
Organic Roots Farm
Hampton General Store

Lebanon

Lebanon Post Office
Market on the Green

Windham/Willimantic

Willimantic Food Co-op
Schiller's
CAD Marshall Framing
Clothespin Laundromat
Main Street Cafe
That Breakfast Place
Super Washing Well
Elm Package Store
A1 Service Station
Blondie's Restaurant

Mansfield/Storrs

All Subway shops
Storrs Post Office
Starbucks
Liberty Bank
Chang's Garden

Mansfield Center

East Brook Mall

Windham Center

Windham Post Office

Mansfield Depot

Thompson's Store

North Windham

Bagel One
Subway
No. Windham Post Office

Support our local farmers.

You and your family will eat better.

Our community will be healthier.

Look for locally sourced produce when you dine.

Shop at the Willimantic Food Co-op, Bob's IGA and other local markets.

Frequent our farmers markets. Winter markets are now open.

To find a farmers market close to you visit the CT Department of Agriculture website for a link to markets.



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-John Lennon

The Planet Press

Happy 2025!

No 9

January & February — 2025

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The Planet Press Mission

We strive to build a resilient community through accurate, and engaging environmental news. Our mission is to illuminate issues affecting Connecticut, fostering positive change through informed dialogue. We value diverse voices and aim to preserve Connecticut's natural beauty for future generations.

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The US Recorded Its Hottest Autumn on Record

A new report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reveals that prolonged above-average to record-high temperatures across much of the United States made the meteorological autumn, from September to November, the warmest on record.

The record-breaking warmth this fall increases the likelihood that 2024 will be one of the hottest years on record, if not the hottest. As of November 2024, the year-to-date temperature for the contiguous U.S. was 3.3 degrees Fahrenheit above average.

Lamont Announces CT Electric Vehicle Mandate Is No Longer Under Consideration

Governor Ned Lamont has decided to abandon the state's effort to mandate electric vehicles, which was discussed last year.

Lamont's remarks followed President-elect Donald Trump's nomination of former U.S. Rep. Lee Zeldin as the Environmental Protection Agency commissioner.

Under the proposed regulation, beginning in 2035, Connecticut car buyers would have been required to purchase an electric vehicle when shopping for a new car.

This mandate was tied to California's Clean Air Standards, which Connecticut adopted in 2004 but no longer adheres to.

UConn Researcher Looking for Improved Method of Collecting Marine Mammal Blood Samples

Milton Levin, an associate research professor in the Department of Pathobiology and Veterinary Science, is heading a new \$132,292 study funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The study aims to validate an existing paper-based technology for use in studying marine mammals. The Department of Pathobiology and Veterinary Science is part of the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources.

This technology aims to enable researchers to study marine mammal health using significantly less blood than traditional methods. Unlike conventional approaches, which require 5 to 20 milliliters of blood, the dried blood spot cards need only a few drops.

The process is straightforward: researchers use a needle

to draw blood from the animal, place three to five drops onto each dried blood spot card, and store the cards until they return to the lab for testing.

This approach could also benefit the study of smaller or critically ill animals, where collecting larger blood volumes is not feasible.

For instance, Levin explains that while researchers can safely collect up to 50 milliliters of blood from a seal—the species he works with most often—significantly smaller amounts are required for animals like fish or bats.



DEEP Lifts Statewide Ban on Burning on Public Lands Under Its Administration

The decision follows recent rainfall, which has “substantially improved” conditions and reduced the risk of forest fires.

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection announced that the statewide burn ban for the state's Forests, Parks, and Wildlife Management Areas has been lifted.

DEEP officials stated that since October 21, Connecticut “has faced one of the most challenging wildfire seasons in recent history,” with a total of 227 fires reported, monitored, and managed.

They added that the combination of the driest period on record and high winds created ideal conditions for wildfire activity.

Advantages of Residential Solar Energy

☀️ **Cost savings:** A significant advantage of solar power is the potential to reduce your monthly utility bills. While electricity costs have steadily increased—rising approximately 5% over the past decade—the cost of solar has dropped by more than 70%, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association®. Over the typical 25-to-30-year lifespan of solar panels, homeowners can save between \$25,500 and \$33,000 on electricity.

☀️ **Increased affordability:** The cost of installing solar panels has been steadily decreasing.

According to Investopedia, the upfront cost of a residential solar power system ranges from \$3,500 to \$16,000, depending on the system's size. Additionally, Energy.gov highlights that the U.S. has extended the federal residential solar tax credit, allowing homeowners to claim a 30% tax credit on the cost of solar systems through January 1, 2033. Various financing options are also available, making solar energy more accessible and affordable.

Connecticut Fares Better Than Many States in Terms of Climate Risk

In 2023, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recorded 28 weather and climate disasters, each causing at least \$1 billion in damages. Connecticut experienced the effects of three of these events: a winter storm and cold snap in February, along with two flooding events, one in mid-July and another in mid-December.

The National Centers for Environmental Information reports that Connecticut has experienced at least two billion-dollar weather and climate disasters this year: an East Coast storm in January and a severe weather outbreak

in June.

Hurricane Helene delayed the National Centers for Environmental Information's report for the first month of fall. The storm caused severe damage in the southern Appalachians, including Asheville, North Carolina, where NCEI's headquarters is located. Helene also knocked the NCEI data storage center offline.

A report by SafeHome.org, based on data from Climate Central—an independent non-profit organization of climate scientists—ranks Connecticut as the ninth-best state for climate change resilience. This places

Connecticut ahead of 39 other states, which are more vulnerable to the impacts of a warming world. (Alaska and Hawaii were excluded from the report due to insufficient comparable data.)

Connecticut scored 128 on the climate change risk index. For comparison, Vermont had the lowest risk index in the country at 30, while Florida had the highest at 308.

According to the report, Connecticut's primary climate risks include inland flooding, coastal flooding, and extreme heat.

Bald Eagles in CT

Connecticut is a winter haven for eagles that migrate south from Maine and Canada when their habitats freeze. They come here to feed and often nest at large reservoirs and along major rivers.

During their mating season in January, you're more likely to spot a pair or a nest near the water, where they can easily hunt for fish.

Arctic Tundra Becomes a Source of Pollution

NOAA scientists and their collaborators have documented significant changes in the Arctic.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and its partner researchers in their 19th annual Arctic Report Card, the Arctic tundra has transitioned from storing carbon in the soil to releasing carbon dioxide.

For thousands of years, the tundra has stored more carbon than it has released. While warming has boosted plant productivity and carbon uptake in the region, carbon emissions have surpassed this increase, mainly from wildfires.

While the net carbon release over that period has been relatively small, the report's authors consider it a troubling indicator. The soil beneath the Arctic permafrost contains roughly twice as much carbon as the current amount in the atmosphere and nearly three times as much as all the above-ground biomass in the world's forests.

In 2024, nine of the 20 long-term permafrost monitoring stations across the Arctic recorded the highest temperatures on record.



How Connecticut Recycles

According to a state report, Connecticut produces 3.6 million tons of municipal solid waste each year.

About 1.3 million tons, or 37%, were diverted from landfills through composting, recycling, or anaerobic digestion—a process that breaks down organic waste.

About 1.3 million tons, or 37%, were diverted from landfills through recycling, composting,

Climate Change Drives \$600 Billion in Insurance Losses

New research reveals that human-induced climate change has been responsible for a third of weather-related insurance claims this century. The costs are rising rapidly, and insurers are underestimating the associated risks.

According to a report by the Insure Our Future network, representing numerous non-profit organizations, global warming has caused losses totaling approximately \$600 billion over the past

two decades. Climate-related insurance losses have risen from 31% to 38% in the last decade.

An analysis by Insure Our Future of 28 leading global property and casualty insurers revealed that "climate-attributed losses" ranged from \$475 billion to \$720 billion between 2002 and 2022. In 2022 alone, \$52 billion of the \$132 billion in weather-related losses were linked directly to climate change.

Connecticut Shares in \$12M Funding for Long Island Sound Restoration Projects

Federal officials announced in early December that millions in grants would be allocated to enhance the health of Long Island Sound.

A total of over \$12 million will support 31 different projects.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are funding efforts to accelerate nitrogen reduction.

Experts note that these projects help decrease groundwater nitro-

gen, significantly improving Long Island Sound's water quality.

Also, two thousand students from Connecticut will receive education on ways to improve the health of Long Island Sound.

The funds will also support upgrades to Ocean Beach Park in New London, a project to restore salt marshes in Old Saybrook, a new coastal access site in Stonington, and initiatives to improve fish passage in the state's rivers.

\$2M Settlement With Pike Fuels

Filed with the Connecticut Superior Court on November 14 under the title Stipulation for Judgment, the settlement mandates that Pike Fuels pay \$1.2 million in civil penalties to Connecticut, along with \$700,000 for environmental remediation efforts, and \$100,000 for the Connecticut AG's Consumer Fund.

According to Attorney General William Tong's statement, the issue originates from an investigation conducted by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection that began in 2019, which "found a series of environmental violations, including years of falsified records, inaccurate emissions reporting, failure to conduct required equipment inspections, failure to report changes and

repairs to their storage tanks, non-permitted construction of a new tank, and demolition without inspecting for asbestos-containing materials, among other violations."

Flower of the Month January Camellias



New Study Challenges the Belief That Birds Migrate to Save Energy

A study published in Nature Ecology & Evolution revealed that a group of partially migratory Eurasian blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) did not conserve more energy by wintering in warmer regions compared to a population that remained in a colder environment.

"We suspected an energy deficit for the resident birds, but there was no significant difference between the net energy they spent compared to the migrants," Nils Linek, the lead author and a researcher at the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, shared in an interview with Mongabay. "If there's no energy benefit overall, there must be other cues or reasons to migrate."

The study found that migrating birds began conserving energy nearly a month before departure by reducing their heart rate and

body temperature.

The research asks why birds migrate without an energy benefit and how the unaccounted energy is utilized.

Hidden migration costs are hypothesized, such as immunological functions, competition from other birds in their migrated area, or the energy needed to stay alert in a new environment.

When Animals Can Speak

In medieval and Tudor England, a legend told of farm animals conversing with one another on Lussinatten, the year's longest night. This tradition is believed to tie into the theme of the world being turned upside down, a concept often associated with winter solstice celebrations such as Twelfth Night.

On this day, the King and all those in power would become peasants, while the peasants would take their place as the high and mighty.

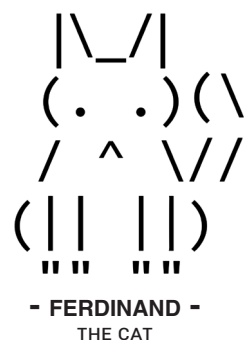
Animals can now speak. Animals take the upper hand, often revealing truths humans would rather not hear. This is a familiar reminder to treat those considered lesser with kindness and respect.

Twelfth night is celebrated on January 5th and 6th.

Whitetail Bucks Shed Their Antlers

Antlers are shed annually in late winter, usually between January and March. These discarded antlers, known as "sheds," fall off without causing the buck any harm. During spring and summer, new antlers grow back, often larger than the ones from the previous year.

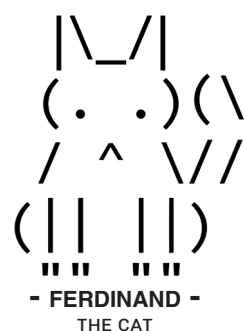
Camellias bloom in winter and symbolize admiration, perfection, and faithfulness. Their delicate yet resilient nature aligns with January's quiet beauty and strength. White Camellias, in particular, evoke purity and new beginnings, much like the fresh start of a new year.



Ferdinand's Flower Patch



Cyclamen is a small and uniquely distinctive genus. The Hardy Cyclamen flourishes in cool, shaded areas. It is cherished for its beauty and resilience, blooming under challenging conditions and adding charm and vitality to the garden during the colder months.



Ferdinand's Flower Patch





Princess pine (left) and Southern ground cedar.

Our Neighbor's Photography



Willimantic resident and *Neighbors* writer, Phoebe Godfrey, was visiting the Asheville NC area recently and took photos of the devastation from Hurricane Helene.

News from Joshua's Trust

A Clubmoss PSA for the Holiday Season

Michelle Poudrette, Development and Communications Manager, Joshua's Trust

The Lycopodiaceae (clubmoss) family is an ancient family of vascular plants that originated about 380 million years ago making them one of the oldest lineages of living vascular plants on Earth. If you've been on a walk in the woods with me, you've likely heard me boast that they existed before cockroaches.

They're diverse, too, comprising 16 genera and 400 or so species, worldwide. New England is home to six genera and 15 species as well as three species of Huperzia. Two that you might see along the trail in our area are shown in the photos below (*Dendrolycopodium obscurum*, princess pine and *Diphasiastrum digitatum*, southern ground cedar).

As lovely and festive as they are, please reconsider using them for holiday decorations. *Dendrolycopodium hickeyi*, Hickey's tree-clubmoss, and the much more common *D. obscurum*, flat-branched tree-clubmoss, are very slow growing plants. I've read that it can take 10-15 years for them to reach the reproductive stage. Often called "princess pine," these probably get picked the most. They

are unlikely to recover. So, if you are looking for a little greenery to spruce up your home for the season, may I suggest pruning branches of pines that have recently fallen or taking a few branches from your Christmas tree, instead? For the love of clubmosses!

We currently only have one event scheduled for January and February. We hope to schedule a couple more walks or events for January and February, so be sure to visit our Events page (<https://joshuustrust.org/events/>) for new offerings, updates and cancellations.

Joshua's Trust events in January

First Day Hike at Pigeon Swamp Preserve

1/1/25, 10:00-12:00 AM

End of Pigeon Swamp Road, Lebanon, CT

Welcome in the new year with a 2.25 mile hike through multiple habitats including pasture, wetlands and forested areas at our Pigeon Swamp Preserve in Lebanon. If the weather has been wet, the trail may be wet and muddy in places. Dress accordingly and be sure to visit <https://joshuustrust.org/events/> for details, updates and cancellations.



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