

Neighbors

No. 239

January - February 2026

FREE



Alysha Ings, Willimantic Access Agency Navigator - Supportive Services, with seven-year old hero, Kaylie. Read about Kaylie inside. Contributed photo.

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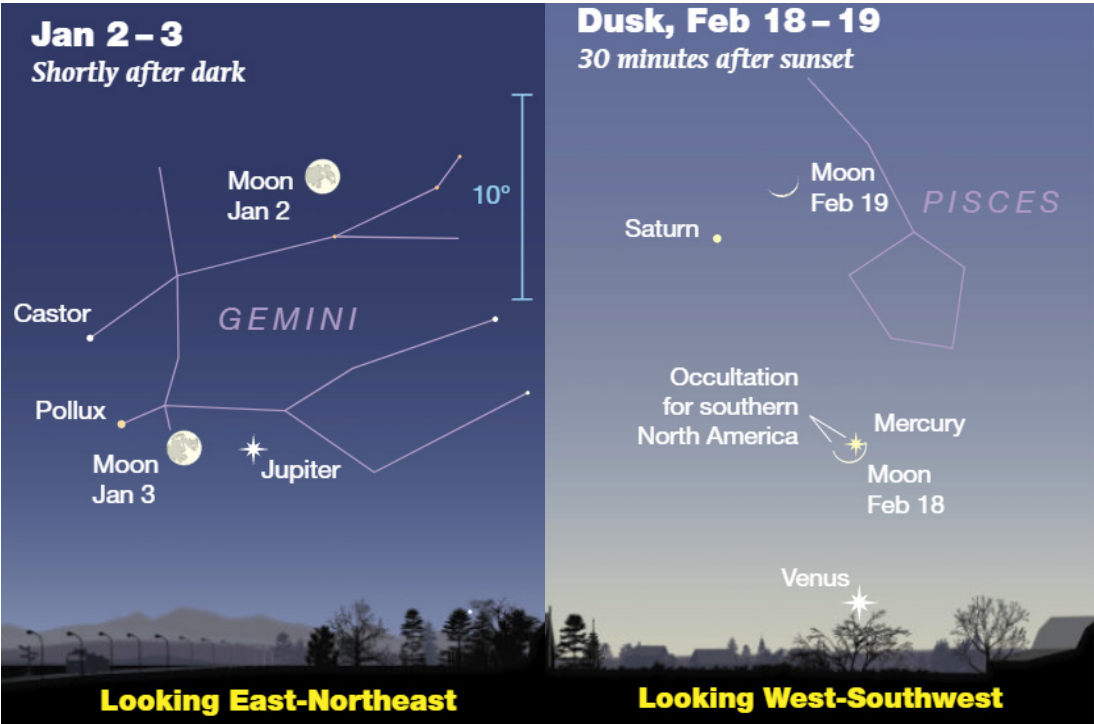
Wintry Nights and Warm Cold Moons

By Bob Grindle

Bundled up against the blustery chill and razor-sharp bite of an early December wind so abrasively raw it seems intent on ending the year on an arctic survival note, rather like the fierce cold that began the year last January, I am standing here in the 4:30 p.m. darkness watching December’s immense and warmly glowing full Cold Moon...an old friend, really ... rise slowly and comfortably over the curb of the eastern horizon, reflecting the light of the just setting Sun, pausing for a moment to rest on Rt. 6 as it begins its journey across the night sky...like a planetary Uber lift, suddenly there, nearby and familiar, as cozy and inviting as the lights on a neighbor’s welcoming porch.

The wind that only a moment ago growled with threatening intent now seems to whisper ‘hop on board, take a ride’—allow me to help you thread a path thru the complexities of a cosmos where nearly a trillion suns, burning hydrogen at many millions of degrees for billions of years, have been unable to warm the vast void of space barely above absolute zero and frigid light travels trillions of miles across endless and ageless dark matter to deliver a

bit of cosmic history to an infant species still too busy trying to untangle from the crippling net of its savage heritage to decode this invitation to explore and perhaps to begin to understand the universe. Ah, but tonight the bright light of the full Moon washes out the icy light of stars glistening



from shores so hauntingly distant in the utterly black void of space beyond our comfortable planetary home here on Earth that simply trying to picture the vastness of such a distance can nearly freeze the imagination. While tonight I may not be able to observe the deep space stars very well, Jupiter and Saturn will provide delightful patterns in the early night sky, even under a full Moon. We are lucky that Jupiter and Saturn are with us through the next two months and in February are joined by Venus and a rare appearance by Mercury.

The full Wolf Moon of January 3rd and then the full Snow Moon of February 1st seem strangely balanced, as if wolves and snow somehow go together naturally. I can remember a couple of years ago at a bookstore in Mystic, Connecticut seeing a children’s book, *Wolf in the Snow*; reading it and being more than a little charmed that the central character was a little girl who comes to grips with fear and courage and compassion...perhaps I was more pleased that the wolves were not the bad guys. So, if you happen to be outside shortly after dark in early January, and the night sky is clear, look up long enough to identify the full Wolf Moon, Jupiter just to the right and the Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux in the upper left...wait a few minutes and perhaps you’ll win the ‘spine chill’ lottery and a coyote will howl just in time to set your imagination sail in search of other adventures.

February’s full Snow Moon slips quietly into the night sky of the 1st, but there is a much prettier picture to be seen later in the month when, on the nights of February 18th—19th, a razor-thin wisp of a waxing crescent Moon sets into the western sky and ever so delicately cups the elusive Mercury, glowing about as bright and high in the sky as Mercury ever gets. Grab your binoculars for a bit of optical assist, and you should be nicely rewarded. At the same time Venus is returning to the night sky and should be with us for the next several months.

Enjoy the next few months as winter pounces on all our lives and the natural world outside our doors settles in for a refreshing and necessary nap. Enjoy planning for the new year as our spaceship hurtles around the Sun on its half billion-mile annual orbit lap and most of all: be well and be part of the wonderful neighborhood that is the world we live in.



Your Regional Cultural Center



SAVE THE DATES! 2026

**Saturday
January 10th**



**Saturday
January 24th**



Monthly Programs:

- “Songwriter Showcase”
*2nd Wednesday
- “Dye & Bleach House Poetry Series”
*3rd Thursday
- “Friday FilmSeries”
*Check Website for Titles and Dates

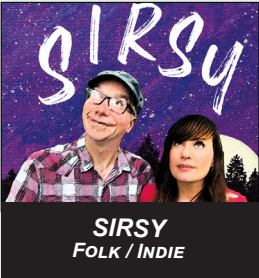
**Saturday
February 14th**



**Saturday
March 7th**



**Saturday
April 18th**



The Dye & Bleach House Community Gallery
& Gardiner Hall Jr History Museum
will be undergoing construction



Grand Reopening planned for Spring 2026!

Neighbors
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Martin Moebus, John Murphy, Bill Powers, Rebecca
Toms, Loretta Wrobel

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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Nonprofit Gem

By Loretta Wrobel

One of the sweetest events in life is when you unexpectedly encounter something that totally surprises you and spins your head around. One such incident grabbed my attention while vacationing in Provincetown this past June. I happened to be staying at the inn where the annual meeting of the Center for Coastal Studies was taking place. It was an exceptionally hot day, even for June, so we were hanging out on the second-floor porch attempting to capture a breeze from the ocean. At the CCS meeting the new executive director, Anne-Marie Runfola, was introduced, and she shared her ideas for the organization and explained what she planned and dreamed of for this non-profit conservation group. I was completely drawn in to her web of possibility and hope for assisting the Cape Cod environment to not only restore the wildlife, ecosystems and coastal communities, but enabling the area to thrive and heal.

During her whole presentation, I was spellbound. I was swept away by her enthusiasm and passion. I was leaning over the railing ingesting every word and becoming more excited about her desire to enhance and grow CCS in spite of the challenges looming ahead. One challenge is the strong probability of loss of funding, especially the anticipated loss of federal funds during 2025 and beyond. I kept rapt attention to her delineation and direction of what she desired and planned for the first year of her leadership. Her commitment to the goals of CCS were specific and well defined. I became charged up just listening to this new leader.

I was unfamiliar with this group before this chance encounter, and had never come across their important marine research, their ongoing efforts to rescue whales and other marine wildlife, and to provide ongoing education to the region. I was beyond impressed with what this organization has accomplished and how it has grown. Our new year - 2026 is the 50th anniversary of the founding of this dynamite environmental agency. It began with three scientists, a half century ago, and has expanded to a team of more than fifty scientists. Plus, they have developed several partnerships with educational facilities and local towns on Cape Cod. They are involved with international partnerships and world-wide research.

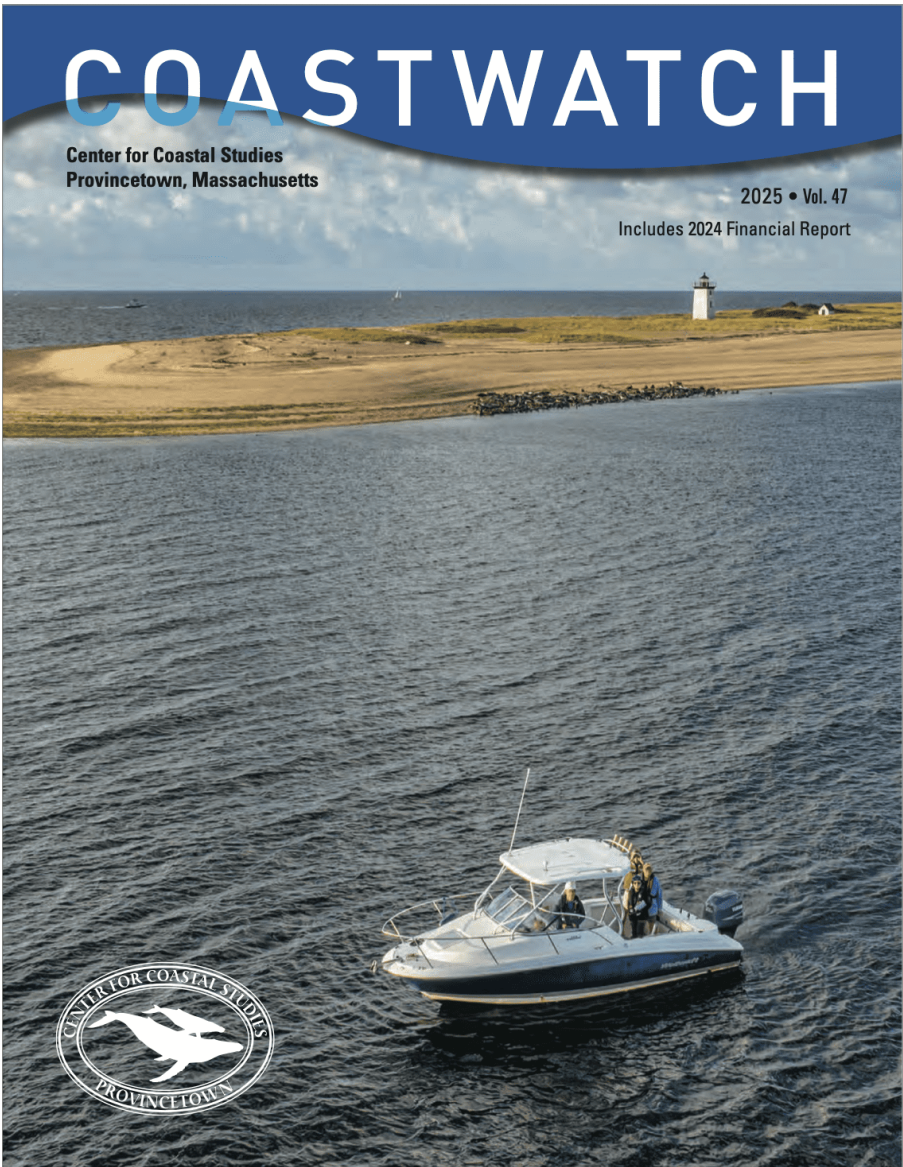
The center prides itself on creating a strong community connection. When I again traveled to P-town in October, I visited the center, as I was curious to explore this particular nonprofit further. Since Ann-Marie had other meetings and appointments scheduled, she graciously connected me to Steve McAlister, Development Director of the center in P-town. Steve was open and generous, and he was eager to meet with me during my time in P-town. He treated me like royalty when I arrived for my tour, answering all my questions, and giving me an overview of all their programs and projects. He shared that he had earlier in the year joined this agency, and was equally bowled over by the depth and commitment of the workers who are connected to CCS. He continues to be impressed with this organization and all the work they have done and are doing. He expressed pride in being a member of this change agency. He spent over an hour with me, introduced me to other staff, and showed me all the different facets of the organization, including the collection of all kinds of sea grass. I never knew there were so many varieties of sea grass, and the center is experimenting with the types that grow better in warmer waters, such as Cape Cod Bay. Sea grass promotes diversity, stabilizes shorelines, and filters pollutants, among other important functions.

The people I met were friendly and eager to share their knowledge from their varied research projects. I learned about the monitoring that is being done around the bay area to study the water quality and improve the purity of the water. The center works with many coastal towns to help improve the quality and remove debris discharging into the waterways. Many area businesses cooperate with CCS and benefit from a healthier coastal environment that



attracts more tourists and business to the Cape. CCS has developed numerous working relationships with agencies, private organizations, state agencies, schools and colleges. These collaboratives are beneficial to all of us and are helping to improve the health of the fragile waterways in the Cape Cod area.

I was fortunate to return to the center for a delightful evening performance by one of the CCS staff, Katie Castagno, Ph.D and director of the Land-Sea Interaction Program. Katie performed original songs featuring lesbian scientists and well-known women who made an impact with their work, research or discoveries. It was a perfect example of the powerful community that has been created at this amazing organization, in that several staff



persons attended the concert to support Katie and celebrate her endeavors. I came away from the evening with a CD of Katie's songs and a deeper respect for what this special group of hard-working scientists has developed. Katie was using her skills as a researcher to seek out women scientists who were not well known, and to share her newly gained discoveries with the local women's community.

This unique nonprofit that is committed to keeping our oceans free from pollution and destruction, and assisting in maintaining healthy waterways while sustaining the abundance of wildlife and beauty of the Cape Cod estuary captured by heart. I became a member of this community, and have encouraged others to support their work. What I witnessed was individuals who are doing earth-saving work, while expending the overwhelming amount of energy required in conservation mitigation now. Definitely a role model for environmental action organizations and a center that continues to dazzle and give me hope and excitement for the possibility of restoring and healing our oceans and marine life. This is the stuff that makes my heart sing and makes me feel that there are good people on this planet and we can turn all the negativity around. It starts with one entity at a time doing its part to give humanity an opportunity to correct our mistakes and be grateful for what our planet does in providing a home for us.

The center is multifunctional. It organizes beach cleanups throughout the Cape and has hundreds participating in their efforts. The center also focuses on attempting to recycle the debris they collect, raising awareness of marine debris. This past year CCS sponsored art exhibits on the Cape, Boston, and Cambridge that displayed the creativity of local artists as they transformed trash into works of beauty.

I admire the staff, volunteers, donors, and all the people who are supporting and honoring this center, and who are pushing forward to make our planet a better place for all of life to not only survive, but to thrive.

Check out CCS <coastalstudies.org> and see what it does for your sense of wellbeing.

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No Way!

By Tom Woron

That’s what I would have said back in January 1996 if someone had said to me that thirty years would go by and the Dallas Cowboys of the National Football League will not win another Super Bowl. It would have seemed crazy to even think that. At the time Dallas had just won their third Super Bowl in a four year span. They seemed to be unstoppable and it looked like they would win many more Super Bowls in the years to come.

The Dallas Cowboys had their beginning in 1960 and did not win a game in their first season of existence. They lost eleven games of the then twelve game schedule but managed to achieve one tie. In the next few years the Cowboys went through the development and growing pains that any new team would normally experience. The Cowboys became a force to be reckoned with beginning in 1966 and from that season through the 1985 season Dallas made it to the NFL playoffs in all but two seasons. In the 1970s the Cowboys played in five Super Bowls winning two of them.

All sports teams at one time or another hit a period of decline and must try to rebuild in order to contend for championships again. That period of decline for the Dallas Cowboys began with the 1986 season when they lost more games than they won. Their record that year was seven wins and nine losses. What would have seemed unbelievable a few years earlier, the Cowboys won only three of the sixteen games in the 1988 season. The 1988 season was the last season the Cowboys were under the leadership of Tom Landry, the only coach they ever had since their beginning in 1960. The following season was even worse for the Cowboys and their fans when they won only one game and had fifteen losses.

After that disastrous 1989 season things looked hopeless for the Cowboys and it appeared that they would not be a playoff caliber team for a while. But they did bounce back with a much improved season in 1990 when they won seven games of the sixteen. In the 1991 season things looked kind of normal again, meaning that what football fans were once used to seeing was happening again. Only two years after winning only one game, Dallas won eleven games and were in the playoffs once again. Then came 1992.

If you’re a football fan there usually comes a time when you must acknowledge that a team you have always rooted against is or was at one time very talented, had periods of greatness and deserved the championships that they achieved.

In reversing their 1988 record of three wins and thirteen losses, the Dallas Cowboys won thirteen and lost three in 1992. Under the leadership of coach Jimmy Johnson and quarterback Troy Aikman, only three years after winning only one game, the revitalized Cowboys steamrolled over anybody in their way en route to Super Bowl victory and the top of the football world. In Super Bowl XXVII, played on January 31, 1993, the Cowboys ran all over the Buffalo Bills winning 52-17. Troy Aikman threw for four touchdowns and running back Emmitt Smith scored one. Cowboys star wide receivers Michael Irvin and Alvin Harper caught passes for touchdowns in the rout as did Dallas tight end Jay Novacek.



Super Bowl XXX: Dallas Cowboys defender Deion Sanders (21) breaks up a pass intended for Pittsburgh Steelers wide receiver Yancey Thigpen (82) on January 28, 1996.

The following season, the 1993 NFL season, the Cowboys won the National Football Conference East Division title with twelve wins and four losses. They then won their conference playoff games, which then set up a rematch of the previous year’s Super Bowl. In Super Bowl XXVIII Dallas again defeated the Buffalo Bills, this time by a score of 30-13.

The Dallas Cowboys, under the leadership of new coach Barry Switzer, again won the NFC East Division with a record of 12-4 in the 1994 NFL season. Still very much a great team behind the passing of Troy Aikman and star running back Emmitt Smith, the Cowboys however were outplayed by their conference rival, the San Francisco 49ers, in the National Football Conference championship game.

With the NFC championship game defeat seemingly just a bump in the road, Dallas was back full throttle for the 1995 season. Another season of twelve wins saw the Cowboys once again finish first in the NFC East Division. They then won their conference playoff games which clinched them a berth in Super Bowl XXX. The anticipation of Super Bowl Thirty (30) (XXX) had a bit of supercharged electricity to it. The Dallas Cowboys were to meet their long time American Football Conference rival, the Pittsburgh Steelers, in the big showdown to determine football supremacy. The two franchises had fought it out in two Super Bowls in the 1970s with Pittsburgh winning both times by four points. Cowboys fans all over the country wanted nothing less than victory over and revenge against the Steelers in the big game to be played on January 28, 1996. They got it. Troy Aikman and Emmitt Smith led the way to a 27-17 victory and Dallas’s third Super Bowl championship in four years, a remarkable achievement.

In early 1996 no one was thinking about 2025 and 2026. However if one could have peered into a crystal ball back then and look ahead 30 years and see that the Dallas Cowboys would not win another Super Bowl, that Super Bowl XXX would be their last championship, no one at the time would have believed it. “No Way!” I would have said. “Just look at this team!” Three Super Bowl victories in four years appeared to be the closest thing to football invincibility!

Since the 1995 NFL season the Dallas Cowboys have had some pretty good teams that just did not win key playoff games to get them into another Super Bowl. In other years they failed to make the playoffs. Whatever they achieved or rather failed to achieve in the last thirty years, it must still be acknowledged that the Dallas Cowboys had, from 1992 through 1995, a period of sheer greatness. They certainly earned their place in NFL history.

The Invisible Ageing Parent

An essay by Carol Wheelock Hall

A parent’s job is to love and nourish their child, teaching them to be independent. If you achieved that goal, then your child or children learned to be equipped for survival. Good job! Perhaps some of us need to relearn that same lesson as we adapt to our ageing lives. Sometimes seniors need to survive isolation.

The children we created now have their own lives. They are busy with work, family, and their own priorities. Many adult children take little time to visit, write, or call their ageing parents. An elder person may thus start to feel painfully invisible, not needed, or wanted. They may feel overlooked, neglected, and out of the picture. They may feel tolerated but not loved. It may not be intentional, but when little attention is given, a lack of value and respect may be felt.

The lesson for ageing parents to learn is to live for themselves. One must love, honor, and find their self. One must step back from those who are too busy, even if they are family, and instead meet new friends, and be a friend. Find entertainment and make plans with others. Choose to go where they are respected and among supportive and positive people. Do activities or join a group that they enjoy and that will nourish them to find acceptance and peace. They will lose that invisible feeling as they seek and find ways to be happy. Know that we all are worthy. Know that we all do matter.

I will write love songs to you
When the time comes
And you’re all alone

I will remember all you were
The smile on your lips
The doubt in your eyes

Love songs from my thoughts
To our hearts
A place to be to remember
All of who you are

The vision of moments
In moments
The turn of your head
The flash of your eyes

In that moment when time has
Stopped for you
I will write love songs

In memory of ones who passed.

By Chamele

One River

By Judy Davis

Ireland. The very word fills me with pride. Its poetry calls me to contemplate my space in this life. Ouvea St. John Gogarty wrote, “Who would survive to outlast his children; to outwear his fame – left when the triumph has one past – to win from age, not time, a name.” And it is the names of rebels seeking freedom from oppression that led George Russell to pen this line: “One river born of many streams rolls in one blaze of blinding light.” I am the proud grandchild of James and Annie Donnelly, who came here from County Leitrim, Mohill being the village. It is because of them, and my mom, Maureen Donnelly Davis, that I was taught to stand tall with my Irish ancestry. Yeats said it best: “I am of Ireland. Come dance with me!”

New Pastor in Mansfield

Submitted by Reverend Dennis Monroe

The First Baptist Church of Mansfield has been the center of organized Baptist worship in town since the early years of the 19th century. As the new pastor here I have felt welcomed and loved by everyone. Along with being the most loving church I have ever experienced, there is a lot of joy present in our services. We are not looking to be perfect people. Rather we are looking to be real and authentic followers of Jesus, and to display his kindness and compassion to all people!

We have a strong foundation of faithful Christians to build upon and we are endeavoring to be Jesus’ hands and feet to our community and beyond! Maybe you have been disappointed or hurt by religion. Maybe you don’t feel like you’re good enough. Wherever you are on your spiritual journey you are welcome here at our church. We believe that Jesus loves everyone and everyone is welcome to become part of our church family.



Maybe God bless you,

With love,

Reverend Dennis Monroe, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Mansfield.

The Natchaug Watershed Advisory Project

Submitted by Maura Robie

What most of us know about living in the Natchaug watershed is just how abundant, unique, and diverse the natural surroundings of this region are. We appreciate the variety of ecosystems and the extensive areas to work and play. Making a living in forestry and agriculture have been passed down through the generations.

A watershed includes the land that drains into a waterbody, like a stream, lake or river and eventually the ocean. As water or snow melt drains across the land, it carries with it various materials referred to as non-point source pollution, impacting the health of the watershed. The land and water in the Natchaug Regional watershed drain into 3 major rivers (the Natchaug, Mount Hope and Fenton Rivers) and is the source of drinking water for approximately 22,000 residents in Willimantic and parts of Mansfield and Windham. The Natchaug is recognized as an overall healthy watershed due to the high amount of forest cover (about 75%), minimal development impacts, and a good deal of state, town, land trust and privately owned protected land.



Federal and state environmental agencies continue to show strong support for the area. Eastern CT Conservation District (ECCD) has been awarded EPA grant funding administered by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to create and facilitate a Natchaug Healthy Watershed Advisory Board (NWAB) for 8 of the watershed towns: Ashford, Chaplin, Eastford, Mansfield, Union, Willington, Windham and Woodstock. This is the first EPA-funded “healthy watershed” initiative undertaken in Connecticut focusing on preventing pollution before it happens and reducing common types of non-point source pollution including bacteria, nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, etc.), sediment, salt, petroleum products, PFAS, heavy metals, pesticides and trash.

A history of conservation cooperation exists in the Natchaug watershed, demonstrated by multiple municipal efforts to establish Greenways and the signing, by the eight watershed towns, of *The Natchaug River Basin Conservation Compact* in 2011. In it, the municipalities agreed to work cooperatively to balance conservation and growth in the watershed, demonstrating that residents, businesses, and academic institutions of the Natchaug watershed towns are cognizant of the special location in which they live. Now in 2025, all eight towns 1st Selectpersons have signed Memorandums of Understanding with ECCD show



Advisory Board Chair Kathy Demers at a Mansfield event. Contributed photo.

in their leaderships’ support for the Natchaug project. It takes a cooperative regional effort using thoughtful land use planning and non-regulatory, cost effective means to protect, and restore where needed, the watershed’s natural resources into the future.

The NWAB and five workgroups have been meeting monthly since the project kickoff in April to focus on implementing recommendations from the **2020 Natchaug Healthy Watershed Protection Plan**, including identifying stressors and solutions to protect natural resources and water quality. Workgroups include forestry & open space, healthy residential landscapes & septic systems, riparian wildlife corridors & pollinator pathways, cold water stream habitat & connectivity and municipal land use officials education. The Advisory Board and workgroups continually welcome municipal representatives, non-profit organizations, lake and outdoor recreational groups, local businesses, farmers and residents with experience in any of the topics alongside an interest to work with neighbors on opportunities such as planning events, creating brochures and planting native vegetation! Please reach out to Maura Robie, Natural Resource Specialist at ECCD: maura.robie@comcast.net to participate. Go to ECCDs website conservect.org/eastern and look under ‘Current projects’ for more information and educational events.

Please ‘Save the Date’ of **May 2, 2026** for a fun-filled Tour/Field day at Windham Water Works and learn how drinking water is treated, how your actions can affect drinking water, wildlife and recreation and visit tables with giveaways, food trucks and more...spread the word! Join us in sustaining our shared home, the Natchaug watershed, for generations to come!

This project was funded, in part, by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The funding is administered by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection.

News from Joshua’s Trust

First Day Hike at Joshua’s Trust’s Pigeon Swamp Preserve

January 1, 2026 10:00 am-11:30 PM

Trail head, far end of Pigeon Swamp Rd.

Celebrate the new year with a First Day hike at Pigeon Swamp Preserve! Join us for a 2.6 mile hike through multiple habitats including pasture, wetlands and forested areas. Relatively level trails take the visitor through a variety of habitats (marsh, swamp, forest, and old pasture). Of historic interest are the remains of an old house

foundation, mill, dam and sluiceway on Pigeon Swamp Brook. Inclement weather may cancel this walk, so be sure to visit <https://joshuustrust.org/events/> for details, updates and cancellations

“Animal Tracks and Tales”

February 8 2026 1:00 pm- 3:00 pm

Atwood Farm 624 Wormwood Hill Road, Mansfield Center

Families with children are invited to join Kathy Demers and Dawn Heasley to learn more about our local

wildlife and identify clues and tracks that can tell us about their presence and behavior. We’ll start off inside our Atwood Farm office building for a short story and preliminary activities, then head outside to walk around the fields and forest edges on the farm looking for tracks and other animal clues. Event is geared for younger children and their parents. Please dress in layers with warm footwear and

mittens since we may be walking in the snow for up to an hour. Registration required. so be sure to visit <https://joshuustrust.org/events/> for registration and updates.

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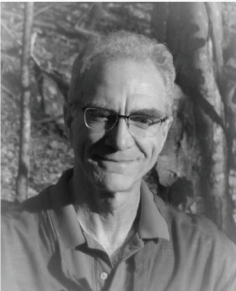
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Deadlines:
March-April 2026:
Deadline: Thursday, February 12th.
Print date: Tuesday, February 17th.
May-June 2026:
Deadline: Thursday, April 16th.
Print date: Tuesday, April 21st.

A French Nobleman and His Warriors Seven-month Stay in Lebanon, Connecticut

By Bill Powers

Armand Louis de Gontaut – Biron, Duc de Lauzun played a significant role at Yorktown during the American Revolution. He commanded the Legion de Lauzon that was composed of French and other foreign soldiers from many nations. At the Battle of Yorktown these same brave men were instrumental in the American and French victory and surrender of the British forces.

The Duc de Lauzun’s Hussars and Light Infantry were encamped at Lebanon from November 1780 until June 1781. Then they joined with General Rochambeau’s troops and travelled eventually on to Yorktown, Virginia. They were a small portion of the larger military force that had landed in Newport, R.I. during the summer of 1780 to bolster America’s efforts for independence from Britain. Lauzon’s Legion included about 220 hussars (light cavalry). In addition, they brought dozens of people to provide support. Since they were a cavalry unit, their horses were included. The Duc de Lauzun was their commander. He had recently returned from a campaign in Senegal where he commanded a victorious military force. While in America, he was under the command of General comte de Rochambeau.

The Lebanon Historical Society Museum & Visitor Center Director, Donna Baron says “There are many ‘stories’ about ‘events’ during the years of the American Revolution which cannot be substantiated but persist nonetheless.” With respect to the hussars and Lebanon, Baron also said: “What Dr. Robert A. Selig has documented, I trust because of the depth and accuracy of his research.” She pointed out “Selig as a highly respected historical consultant who worked tirelessly to learn about the French assistance, especially the hussars in Lebanon, the Duc de Lauzun and comte de Rochambeau during the American War of Independence. Dr Selig was able to procure, analyze, and interpret documents from that time due to his multilingual abilities (English, French and German).”

Our Area of Connecticut was populated largely by patriots. It was a veritable hotbed of revolutionary thinking and action. So, it is understandable, when the Connecticut Legislature named Lebanon as a possible winter encampment site for Lauzun’s Legion, it pleased the good people of Lebanon, at least initially. France’s help was greatly appreciated. Locals were risking everything; and the consequences of losing the war would be unthinkable. Lebanon’s William Williams is quoted as saying: “I have signed the Declaration of Independence. I shall be hanged.” In addition to their patriotic fervor, the goods and services provided to the French Army would be paid for with gold and silver as opposed to paper money which was losing value.“

The Legion’s stay in Lebanon might be characterized by saying: While both the guests and the hosts were able to have their basic needs met, their continuing coexistence was plagued by problems, issues and concerns. The highest-ranking officers were frequently absent from Lebanon, preferring to retreat to the more worldly and refined surroundings of places such as Newport, R.I. Soon after arriving in Lebanon, Lauzun wrote in his memoirs: “Siberia alone can furnish any idea of Lebanon, which consists of a few huts scattered among vast forests.”

With higher ranking officers often gone, the discipline of the troops deteriorated. Troops began to “pilfer and steal” from the residents. For instance, William Williams of Lebanon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, penned a letter of complaint to Lauzun charging that the troops were creating problems for his brother, Dr. Thomas Williams. The hussars were proceeding “to steal wood from Dr. Williams... thirty or more trees... much of his fence, four of five sheep, a number of geese.” According to Robert A. Selig, there were other similar instances and even threats to Williams’ life for complaining. Mary Trumbull Williams, daughter of the governor, wrote just before the hussars left: “O how glad and thankful I shall be when they are gone, for never was I so sick of any people in my life...” For many, the Duc de Lauzun and his warriors’ seven-month stay had finally and gladly run its course.

Bill Powers is a former History and Social Studies teacher in Hartford and Windham.

Pieces of Time

Pieces of time scatter like leaves—
some held tightly,
others carried off on the wind.
We remember some things;
others fall quietly through the cracks.
A life forms not in order, but in fragments—
a patchwork of moments,
half-formed dreams,
unfinished thoughts.

They say time speeds up
as we grow older,
and days begin to blur,
losing their edges.
Routine takes over,
and hours unfold without urgency—
repeating, unremarkable,
sometimes empty.

And then—
without warning,
without reason—
a memory stirs.
It makes no sense,
has no connection to anything now.
Just a flash a brief recall of a prior event
a winter eve, the silence of snow,
that hush of falling snowflakes,
a silence from decades ago.

Or that girl—
standing on the sidewalk,
a glance, a smile,
no words exchanged,
no story that followed.
Only the outline of a possibility,
a question that never got asked.

Why do we keep these moments?
What gives them their weight,
when so much else disappears?
It may not be meaning
that holds them in place,
but emotion—raw, unspoken,
too delicate to discard.

The laughter we forgot how to explain,
the longing we never voiced,
the lives we lived—
and the ones we imagined.
They twist together,
a thread we can’t unwind—
the living and the lost, the real and the wished-for.

We are made of these scraps—
the trivial and the monumental.
Not a clean story,
but a mosaic of moments,
choices, fears,
love that passed through us
and stayed.

Let time keep moving,
let days blend into each other.
Still, from within,
some moments return.

Not everything is lost
just because it’s forgotten.
Some memories stay lit,
quietly—like stars
that fade into the night,
their memory still guides us through the dark.

-Colin Browne

Letters and Emails

Dear Tom,

One of the benefits of this newspaper being on-line is that people can access it in places other than our local neighborhood. Plus, people can share copies with others that they think would appreciate it. Surely other communities have similar papers. I am glad to report that I know of at least a few people in other states that have read and appreciated this paper. It makes me glad to know that our neighborhood stretches past state lines. So thank you, Tom, and thanks to all who work at making this paper what it is. I am glad to be part of it as our words inspire others in our state and beyond.

Jesse R. Clark, Willimantic

How Can You Contribute to Wildlife Success in Your Community?

By Danni Syrotiak

The grasses, shrubs, and forbs found in early successional habitats provide important qualities needed by a variety of wildlife, specifically ground-nesting birds. What exactly is an “early successional habitat”? It is the plants and ground cover that develop in an area shortly after a disturbance. There are different types of disturbances. Natural disturbances include extreme weather events like hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, and, in some cases, insects or disease. There are also human-caused disturbances such as logging and mowing. Succession is the process by which plant communities develop and change over time, starting with early stages and eventually leading to their final maturity, known as climax communities. The phrase “develop and change over time” is a key component of why much of our early successional habitat in Connecticut, and in the United States, is declining.

Early successional habitats are one of the most endangered ecosystems in the U.S., and it is important to understand that one of the ways we can stop this decline is through active management. When left unmanaged, an early successional habitat begins to fade away. As the tree canopy develops, the plant species that formerly thrived in those conditions do not receive enough sunlight. This habitat can very quickly become mature forest, no longer supporting the same species. Although mature forests provide their own benefits, species like the American woodcock, prairie warbler, indigo bunting, and eastern towhee are left without a nesting and breeding habitat once the early successional habitat starts disappearing. Many of these species are listed as threatened or endangered in several north-eastern states, and studies have shown that the American woodcock has declined by 40 percent over the past thirty years. The prairie warbler, as listed in the 2025 State of the Birds report, is designated as a Yellow Alert Tipping Point species, meaning that it has lost more than 50 percent of its population in the past fifty years. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, this species declined by an estimated 1.9 percent per year between 1966 and 2023, resulting in a total decline of 67 percent.

How can you as a landowner and community member contribute to wildlife success? First, it’s important to understand that cutting or thinning trees, mowing, and prescribed burns help support wildlife that depend on this habitat. Moreover, being able to identify invasive species that can overtake and outcompete native shrubs and plants is another crucial element involved in active management. With increased sunlight reaching these habitats, invasive species often have a better chance of establishing themselves. Keeping an eye out for these non-native plants and removing them will help natives that would otherwise struggle without your intervention. Alex DiMauro-D’Amico, stewardship coordinator at Joshua’s Trust, has been putting in time at Agnes’ Pasture, a property that was historically meadow and has since grown in with invasive autumn olive, eastern white pine, and fast-growing hardwood species. “We are reclaiming the meadow through mowing and are making brush piles which will in turn improve nesting for a variety of species,” says Alex.

Mature forests and more heavily forested areas provide a nesting and breeding habitat for certain species, while other species, like the indigo bunting and eastern towhee, will continue to decline in the absence of early successional habitat. More than 73 percent of forestland in the region is privately owned, and it is important that landowners take an active role in managing these habitats for the variety of plants and animals that depend on them for their survival.

As climate change, increased development, and invasive species continue to shift the landscape, the impact you can have as a landowner will continue to grow. By understanding the value of early successional habitat and taking part in active management, you can help sustain the wildlife that depends on these disappearing ecosystems.

Danni Syrotiak is a student in UConn’s Department of Natural Resources and the Environment, and a Joshua’s Trust intern.

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Eddie Floyd

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 Eddie Floyd, best known for his 1966 hit, “Knock On Wood.”

He was born in Montgomery, Alabama, on June 25, 1937, and grew up in Detroit. He was a founding member of the Falcons, a doo-wop (and later soul) group whose line-up at various times included Mack Rice (writer of “Mustang Sally”), Joe Stubbs (brother of the Four Tops’ Levi Stubbs), and Wilson Pickett. Their two biggest hits were “You’re So Fine” (1959) and “I Found a Love” (1962).

Floyd’s first solo releases came out in the early ‘60s on Detroit’s LuPine Records. By 1964, he had moved on to the Safice label, for whom Floyd released three singles. He signed with the Memphis-based Stax Records in 1965 and promptly wrote “Comfort Me,” a hit song for labelmate Carla Thomas. Floyd then teamed up with Stax guitarist (and member of Booker T. & The MGs) Steve Cropper to write songs for Wilson Pickett, who now recorded for Atlantic (which distributed Stax). The Pickett sessions yielded several hit singles, including the Floyd-written “634-5789 (Soulsville U.S.A.)” and “Ninety-Nine and a Half (Won’t Do).”

In 1966, Floyd recorded a song that he and Cropper had written for Otis Redding. Atlantic’s Jerry Wexler convinced Jim Stewart of Stax to release Floyd’s version as a single. In the fall of 1966, “Knock On Wood” hit #1 on the Rhythm & Blues chart and reached #28 pop. Despite its mild crossover success, “Knock On Wood” went on to become a staple of oldies radio. It also produced more than 100 cover versions by artists as diverse as Count Basie and David Bowie. And a 1979 disco remake by Amii Stewart hit #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100.

Other Floyd songs that produced cover versions included “Raise Your Hand” (Janis Joplin) and “I’ve Never Found a Girl (To Love Me Like You Do)” (Bruce Springsteen). Floyd wrote his 1968 song “Big Bird” while sitting in a London airport, waiting for a flight home to attend Otis Redding’s funeral. Though not a U.S. hit, “Big Bird” became an underground favorite, producing remakes by acts like Alex Chilton and The Jam.

Eddie Floyd was one of Stax’s most prolific songwriters. He penned hits for Sam & Dave (“You Don’t Know What You Mean to Me”), Otis Redding (“I Love You More Than Words Can Say”), Rufus Thomas (“The Breakdown”), and Johnnie Taylor (“Just the One I’ve Been Looking For”), among others.

In 1980, Floyd joined his old Stax collaborators, Steve Cropper and Donald “Duck” Dunn, and fronted the Blues Brothers Band on a series of tours. In 1998, Floyd and Wilson Pickett appeared in the film *Blues Brothers 2000*, performing a duet of “634-5789.” In 2008, Floyd returned to Stax and released *Eddie Loves You*, his first album of new material in several years.

In November 2012, Eddie Floyd was inducted into the Carolina Beach Music Hall of Fame. In 2016, he was inducted



into the National Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame. That same year, Floyd received a brass note on the Beale Street Brass Notes Walk of Fame in Memphis.

On September 1, 2017, Floyd, now 80, performed at the Royal Albert Hall for a BBC a 50th anniversary tribute to Stax. And in February 2020, Rock House Records released Eddie Floyd’s unissued 1979 recording, “Guess It Wasn’t Meant to Be.”

Rock critic Dave Marsh included Floyd’s “Knock On Wood” and “Big Bird” in his 1989 book, *The Heart of Rock and Soul: The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made*.

Charted singles:

- “Knock On Wood” (1966) R&B #1 (1 week), Pop #28
- “Raise Your Hand” (1967) R&B #16, Pop #79
- “Don’t Rock the Boat” (1967) Pop #98
- “Love Is a Doggone Good Thing” (1967) R&B #30, Pop #97
- “On a Saturday Night” (1967) R&B #22, Pop #92
- “Big Bird” (1968) Pop #132
- “I’ve Never Found a Girl (To Love Me Like You Do)” (1968) R&B #2, Pop #40
- “Bring It On Home to Me” (1968) R&B #4, Pop #17
- “I’ve Got to Have Your Love” (1968) R&B #50, Pop #102
- “Don’t Tell Your Mama (Where You’ve Been)” (1968) R&B #18, Pop #73
- “Why Is the Wine Sweeter (On the Other Side)” (1969) R&B #30, Pop #98
- “California Girl” (1970) R&B #11, Pop #45
- “My Girl” (1970) R&B #43, Pop #116
- “The Best Years of My Life” (1970) R&B #29, Pop #118
- “Blood Is Thicker Than Water” (1971) R&B #33
- “Yum Yum Yum (I Want Some)” (1972) R&B #49, Pop #122
- “Baby, Lay Your Head Down” (1973) R&B #50
- “Check Me Out” (1973) R&B #58
- “Soul Street” (1974) R&B #65

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 soulextpress@gmail.com.

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Tai Chi Home

The Path Home

By Joe Pandolfo

In a long winter night, the path home-can disappear. With a chill sinking in as things get darker, every step feels surrounded by the unknown.



But there’s a way to transform all that, to find lost trust and tap the inner wisdom. The Taoists say the trick is to just go deeper. Drop your shoulders and tail. Let the ground underfoot hold you and keep you. Breathe out long and slow til you reach the bottom of your breath, til the fear in your heart releases.

And overhead reach into that pool of swirling stars to touch the Pole Star... always in its place, steady and centering, ready to lead you home.

The Connecticut Silk Craze

By Martin Moebus

A white mulberry tree stands at the side of the Spring Hill Inn in Storrs, whispering old promises of quiet fortunes, and taking us back to the time when silk wove its grace in our quiet corner.

Beginnings

Silk’s story in America begins with James I of England. Seeking to supply English factories with silk in the early 1600s, he ordered the planting of mulberry trees, the silkworms’ exclusive food source. He failed, as the English climate wasn’t suitable, and he planted the wrong variety. Undeterred, this “staunch anti-smoker” turned his attention to the Virginia colony, attempting to replace tobacco growing with silk. He charged the Virginians to get going and plant mulberry trees, even writing a book, *The Counterblast Against Tobacco*. James died of a stroke, his son was executed, and the rest of the Stuarts eventually disappeared. With little success in cultivating silk, the Virginians got back to the profitable tobacco business. However, these early efforts were not entirely in vain, as the idea of silk cultivation eventually took root in Connecticut, where future generations would lace their fortunes from the threads of the mulberry tree.

Decades later in Connecticut, our twelfth governor, Jonathan Law (1674–1750), became one of the first to plant mulberry trees and raise silkworms. He was followed by Nathaniel Aspinwall of Mansfield, who, having a mulberry orchard on Long Island, brought trees and silkworms to Mansfield in the 1760s.

By the late 1760s, relations with Britain were strained. Colonists were encouraged to increase local production, including silk, to reduce reliance on British goods. With each cocoon a quiet protest, women raised silkworms and made silk.

In 1769, local wine merchant William Hanks joined the silking fray by selling mulberry trees in Mansfield. Mansfield was the perfect place to begin this new industry as inhabitants were described as a “sturdy class, quiet, and unobtrusive in their manners, yet characterized by a spirit of enterprise and thrift” (*Willimantic Journal*, May 2, 1879). Hanks built the first silk mill powered by water. Later, the Hanks Silk Mill would be moved to the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in Michigan, as an example of early American industrialization.

Col. Jedediah Elderkin of Windham, a veteran of the Battle of the Frogs, planted a mulberry orchard in Windham, making coarse silk handkerchiefs for his daughters and also selling silk in the New York markets. An essential step in silk production, called reeling, involves carefully unwinding the delicate filaments from silkworm cocoons and combining them into a single, continuous thread suitable for weaving—akin to unwinding a spider’s web. The process is intricate because the silk thread is extremely fine, and the slightest tension can break it, requiring patience and precision. Elderkin struggled with reeling, a challenge that would persist for those who followed. After the war, Elderkin continued making silk. Clark & Gray, alias the “Mansfield Experimenters,” bought his equipment upon his death in 1793 and moved it to Mansfield.

Silk is a footnote in our Revolution. Sarah Bache wrote a letter to her father, Benjamin Franklin, in France, where he was serving as a diplomat. She noted how much fun she was having at dances in Philadelphia and also sent along a piece of American silk as a present to the queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Ben was not amused by all the dancing and partying during the war, especially as he was focused on securing French support and was likely jealous of missing out on all the fun.

Women were the leaders in the early silk industry, raising silkworms, spinning silk, and, in some cases, selling it. In Windham, one woman raised six thousand silk balls from a single mulberry tree. Another unnamed woman had a reputation as being the best silk dyer in the region. Mary Kies of South Killingly became the first woman to receive a U.S. patent for her innovative method of weaving straw with silk. By 1875, women were three-fifths of the silk industry workforce.

Then as now, men unfairly blamed women for things beyond their control. In 1831, Peter Duponceau, a “zealous silk culturist,” blamed Connecticut women for not improving reeling methods in 70 years. If it were so easy, why didn’t he improve it himself? A Mr. Lilly gave up on American women who, apparently, from childhood onward, practiced careless ways in reeling, unlike Chinese, Italian, and French women. He hoped that their children would be better educated.

Silk Mania

By the 1830s, a faster-growing mulberry tree sparked an investment frenzy. Families in Mansfield alone raised up to 40 pounds of silk per year, supporting 50 looms in Windham and Tolland counties. The silk craze was on! Everyone thought they had won the lottery with a get-rich scheme that took only a few months of work—done by their wives and daughters, no less! A Hartford nursery sold 30,000 trees in one year. In North Windham, Elder Sharp sold two mulberry trees for over \$100 each, at a time when farmhands earned about \$177 per year. Soon, selling trees generated more money than producing silk. One speculator spent \$80,000 buying mulberry trees in France. Silk mania was everywhere. E. B. Ivatts, a railroad manager, even bought a slab of mulberry wood supposedly planted by Shakespeare. The bubble couldn’t last. The silk market crashed. Then, in 1841, a storm and blight destroyed most of the remaining mulberries in the region.

The silk-growing industry may have been over, but the silk mills in Willimantic were just getting started. Speculation faded, but manufacturing momentum surged. Silk would have to come from somewhere else.

The Silk Mills

Around 1860, William B. Swift started the first silk mill in Willimantic. Fittingly, during Windham’s bicentennial, he owned Colonel Elderkin’s house at the corner of Jerusalem Road and Route 203. There would soon be other mills, including one owned by Arthur Turner.

The Mill on Center Street¹

Not all kings of the industrial age wore crowns—some built mills, and in Willimantic, among the clatter of looms and the hiss of steam, the air didn’t always smell of cotton; it sometimes smelled of silk.

Among the men who shaped Willimantic’s future was Arthur Turner, son of Phineas. His father built his mill by what is now called Amston Lake in Hebron. Arthur joined the industry, starting as a partner of a silk mill in Mansfield. From there, he opened a shop at the Holland Silk Company in Willimantic. On May 1, 1886, Turner opened a silk mill of his own on Center Street, near what is now the Windham Senior Center. There, Turner produced silk thread used for weaving. Turner’s mill shared the building with the Willimantic Armory.

Far from the pastoral idyllic landscapes, mills were noisy and dangerous places, and not just for the workers. In 1888, the noise was so disruptive that a town meeting in the Armory moved to the Town Hall. That same winter, a torrent of mill water surged through the streets of Willimantic, freezing solid from the mill to Main Street and leaving roads filled with slippery ice. Rather than demanding that the mill cease releasing water, residents pressed the town to develop a proper sewer system.

Turner’s Ambitions

Turner had aspirations for a larger silk mill. He acquired a piece of land that had previously served various purposes, including once housing the workshop of Dwight Lyman, a craftsman known for making willow chairs. In 1889, he opened the new mill on the corner of Bank and Valley streets. The new silk mill had dangers lurking behind every belt and gear. A man named Frazer narrowly escaped death when a 12-inch belt snapped. The massive wooden pulley shattered like matchwood. Later that year, a boy, Daniel Griffin, caught in the exposed shafting, was ripped off his feet. He was whirled around at 550 revolutions per minute. His clothing shredded; his ribs were broken and his lungs bruised. Workers found him unconscious and barely breathing and carried him to his widowed mother’s home. Two weeks later he came out of his coma, but unfortunately we have no other reports. Mary Gilman, a weaver, crushed her finger while tending the machinery. Charles Applebee came close to losing an arm while adjusting a belt.



Spring Hill Inn, Storrs.

Photo by the author.

There were also human interest stories. Each day, Arthur Turner took the train to his father’s mill in Hebron, accompanied by his dog, Prince. Prince had impeccable manners—he would patiently wait for all the passengers to disembark before leaving the train himself. Since dogs weren’t allowed in the passenger seats, he quickly learned to head straight for the baggage car, where the trainmen would let him in.

Over the following decades, Turner had his share of troubles with the mill business, shutting down in 1893 during hard times in Willimantic, insolvency in 1894, his son dying of measles in 1895, a disgruntled former employee cutting the main belt at the silk mill in 1907, and again shutting down the mill in 1916 for lack of coal and workers to run it.² A year later, the mill was sold to a new company, this time to a manufacturer of duck cloth, a durable fabric. The silk industry in Willimantic was dying, but the Turner Mill building lived on. The Goyer Company made radio parts there in 1925, including the famous “Windham Station Separating Condenser.” The mill building eventually became a trade school in 1928. It was demolished in 1970 after 81 years.

While cotton may have woven the fabric of Windham’s industrial legacy, silk culture spun its own fine thread into the story—equally enduring and just as vital.

Notes

1. For more info on the Turner mills and other silk mills, see *Willimantic Industry and Community: The Rise and Decline of an American Textile City*, by Thomas R. Beardsley (1993). For additional info on the mills, especially in Windham County, visit the Windham Textile and History Museum.
2. Margaret Dubina, an underage mill worker, worked at Turner’s mill for two years before moving to American Thread in 1916 (Beardsley, p. 90).

Poets at Large at Pomfret’s Vanilla Bean

Submitted by Karen Warinsky

Two area poets will be featured in February at the Vanilla Bean Cafe in Pomfret. These events are sponsored in part by Linemaster Switch and The Putnam Area Foundation, and are free to attend. Event begins at 7 p.m. Contact: karen.warinsky@gmail.com to be in the open mic. Age 16 and up.

Feb 21st: Featuring Quiet Corner poets **Denise Abercrombie** and **Sean Frederick Forbes**. Abercrombie’s work has appeared in numerous publications including *Minnesota Review*, *Fireweed*, *Connecticut Review*, *Phoebe: Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, *Theory*, and *Aesthetics*, *Yale Global Health Review*, *Earth’s Daughters*, *English Journal*, *Waking Up to the Earth: Connecticut Poets in a Time of Global Climate Crisis*, *Writing on the Edge*. She helps coordinate Curbstone Foundation’s Poetry in the Julia de Burgos Park series in Willimantic. Abercrombie teaches theater and creative writing at E.O. Smith High School, and lives in Storrs, Connecticut. Forbes is widely published and is the author of *Providencia*. Forbes is an Associate Professor at UCONN and a summer instructor for the Yale Young Writers Workshop at Yale University.

8 Things To Do Retirement Planning Checklist: Everything to Do Before Spring

By Jonathan Mathews
Associate Vice President, Wealth Advisor



The new year is, of course, a popular time to plan for the future. While this usually is focused on the year ahead, I’d encourage you to think bigger. The first quarter of the year is actually the perfect time to refocus on your retirement goals and update your long-term financial plan. Whether you’re already retired or preparing to make the transition, the first quarter of 2026 offers key opportunities to optimize your strategy, minimize taxes, and strengthen your financial confidence.

Here’s your step-by-step checklist to ensure you’re on track.

Max Out 2025 Retirement Contributions

You have until April 15, 2026, to make 2025 contributions to IRAs and HSAs. This is a valuable opportunity to lower your taxable income and grow tax-advantaged savings. Contribution limits for 2025 are as follows: traditional IRA limit: \$7,000 (plus \$1,000 catch-up if 50+); Roth IRA limit is the same as Traditional (eligibility based on income); and the HSA limit is \$3,850 for individuals and \$7,750 for a family (+\$1,000 catch-up if 55+). If you’re still working, review your 401(k) deferrals and consider maximizing 2026 contributions early in the year.

Review Your Income Plan and RMD Strategy

If you’re age 73 or older, Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) from traditional IRAs and 401(k)s must begin. Q1 is the time to confirm your RMD amount for 2026, strategize the best timing and source of withdrawals, and consider Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) if you’re charitably inclined

Rebalance Your Portfolio

The beginning of the year is ideal for assessing asset allocation and making adjustments. Consider the following questions: Has market performance shifted your allocation? Do your investments align with your risk tolerance and time horizon? Should you adjust income-producing assets based on current rates?

Evaluate Your Tax Plan Early

Don’t wait until April to think about taxes. Planning ahead now can help you to identify Roth conversion opportunities, realize capital gains or losses strategically, and coordinate deductions or charitable giving for optimal impact. 2026 is a critical year to start planning ahead of the 2025 tax law sunset. Strategic moves now can pay off in future flexibility.

Revisit Your Spending and Withdrawal Plan

For those in retirement, revisiting your spending projections at the start of each year is essential. Are you drawing

down from accounts in the most tax-efficient order? Has inflation or lifestyle shifted your needs? Are you maintaining a sustainable withdrawal rate?

Review Insurance, Medicare, and Health Expenses

Health care is a major expense in retirement. Use Q1 to review Medicare coverage (especially if you made changes during AEP), revisit long-term care coverage or health-related spending accounts, and update healthcare proxies or plan for future care costs.

Reassess Estate Plan and Beneficiaries

Life changes, laws evolve, and goals shift. The beginning of the year is the perfect time to confirm your will, trusts, and POAs reflect your current wishes; check beneficiary designations on retirement accounts and insurance; and discuss legacy goals with your family and advisor team.

Leverage The Knowledge and Experience of A Professional – Better Yet, A Whole Team

A seasoned financial advisor can provide critical insights and advice to help keep you on track toward the retirement you want. Even better is an advisory or wealth management firm that takes a team approach, because it applies the knowledge and experience of a variety of professionals at to your plan. At WHZ, we surround our clients with a dedicated group of professionals – a Client-Centered Team – to proactively guide every stage of each client’s financial life.

Closing Thought

A confident retirement doesn’t happen by accident; it happens through proactive planning. As 2026 gets underway, let our team help you check off these priorities and move forward with “Absolute Confidence. Unwavering Partnership. For Life.” Contact us for a complimentary consultation at whzwealth.com or call (860) 928-2341.

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Letters and Emails

To the Editor-

I thoroughly enjoyed Tom Woron’s article on the 1975 World Series between the Cincinnati Reds and Boston Red Sox (*Neighbors* November-December 2025). It was a magical series which showcased several great players--Pete Rose; Johnny Bench; Carl Yastremski; Fred Lynn; Joe Morgan; Tony Perez; Dwight Evans; Luis Tiant; Dace Concepcion; and Carlton Fisk. And Red Sox slugger Jim Rice didn’t even play one game after suffering a season ending injury in August. Ed Sullivan used to open his 1960s variety shows by announcing that he had “a reeceedly big shew” in store for his television viewers that night. Sullivan always delivered on his promise. Major League

Baseball made no such promise to its television viewers but, copying Ed Sullivan, delivered “reeceedly big shews” throughout the World Series, with no clunkers (Game 6 was the most widely viewed baseball game on television at the time).

Mr. Woron, you brought an old man back to the heady days of 1975, something that is hard to do. Your description of the World Series flooded me with joy, excitement and, as a Red Sox, ultimate disappointment. Despite the loss to Cincinnati, Red Sox fans remained bullish on their team. The phrase “Red Sox Curse” was not yet part of baseball’s vocabulary--losses in 1978 (Yankees) and 1986 (Mets) spawned the phrase.

I have two quibbles with the article. Mr. Horon accurately stated that, with the Red Sox leading 3-0 in the sixth inning, Lee “threw a slow curve to Cincinnati’s Tony Perez who then drove the ball out of the park with a man on base cutting the Red Sox lead to 3-2”. The term “slow curve” understates the awfulness of Lee’s pitch. The pitch was akin to a pitch that a high school kid would have thrown to his grandpa in a backyard baseball game. The phrase “out of the park” understates how far Perez’s home run travelled. Perez’s home run ball landed near Nashua, New Hampshire.

Mark Shea, Moodus

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Dear Reader-
Please consider contributing to *Neighbors*-
Write an article about a person you admire or a local program you believe is important. Take a photo of a friend, loved one or pet. Write a poem or a piece of flash fiction. These pages would be full of press releases without submissions from local residents who care about each other and their community.

T. King, Publisher

Spiritual Celebrations of Light and Love in the Winter Months

By Jesse R. Clark

It’s Advent. I sing in church as the Advent candles are lit—hope, peace, joy and love.
It is Sunday, December 21st—the solstice, as we sing “In the Bleak Midwinter.”
I wonder, why is this midwinter’s day if it’s also the first day of winter?
A paradox. Same with midsummer being on the first day of summer.
Is something wrong with our calendars?
Wait...midwinter in December. Shouldn’t December be the 10th month?
I look at the months. Sept-ember, Oct-ober, Nov-ember, Dec-ember...
7, 8, 9, 10.
Ah, yes. Back before the existence of January and February—an experience some of us in the Northeast would be grateful for—when March was the first month, before January—named after Janus, the two-faced figure looking at the past and future—took its rightful place at the beginning of the year.

But, what then, of midwinter?
Midwinter on the first day of winter on the 12th month named after the number 10?
Well, some people follow the *wheel of the year* that observes the solstices and the equinox, breaking it down into midpoints, and midpoints of the midpoints.
If midwinter is the winter solstice, then what is the start of February? Wouldn’t *that* be the middle of winter?
Well, in Ancient Ireland, it was the first day of spring, now celebrated through the holidays Imbolc and St. Brigid’s Day—honoring a Celtic goddess who became the female patron saint of Ireland—an example of a Christian holiday and pagan holiday being intertwined, not unlike Christmas/Yule and Easter.
The next day, we welcome spring with Groundhog Day, though some countries celebrate a Christian holiday known as Candlemas, celebrating Mary and Joseph presenting Jesus at the temple, closing out the time of Christmas and Epiphany.
But let’s go back to that midwinter’s night.

Some may think of the winter solstice, the shortest, darkest day of the year, as the last day of a year and the start of a new one, for it is a celebration of the light coming back, as it’s the darkest right before the dawn.
The sun sets, the moon rises as menorahs are lit, and Christians await the birth of Jesus sharing in a common theme of hope, peace, joy and love as candles are lit throughout different beliefs.
I think of this as we light the Advent candle of joy on the 14th—the first night of Hanukkah—and the Advent candle of love on the winter solstice, the last night of Hanukkah.
Light is coming from the darkness.
Then, after Christmas, Kwanzaa starts as, for a week, candles are lit, reminding people of important virtues such as unity, self-determination, creativity and faith until the new year begins.
Candles are for us all.

In January, we may put away the lights, but that’s when we need the lights the most.
For every year people celebrate January 6th—Three Kings Day.
Although for the past couple of years, that date has a new meaning.
That day in 2021 was certainly an epiphany for some and helped to give birth to No Kings Day.
But the message of that story still rings true—the tale of a ruler who would kill a baby in order to keep his power as the family flees to another country for safety after having no room at the inn.
Light will come in the dark, true, divine love can give hope, peace and joy when all seems dark.

Calendars can confuse, changing from country to country, ruler to ruler; traditions, dates, and celebrations change from culture to culture, climate to climate, religious sect to religious sect; details of stories can change over time, but it is the spirit and message of this time of year that remains the same.
So as we celebrate societal traditions as well as our family traditions, our *paganus* traditions—that is, those folk traditions, rural, country, village traditions—passed down throughout history, changing with the calendars, blending the ancient, medieval, and modern; Roman and Latin with Germanic and English, Celtic and Norse; the Christian with the pagan; we light the candles in the dark, enjoy feasts as we take care of our families, keeping warm and safe as we rest under the midwinter’s moon, celebrating Janus’ look from one year to another and February’s promise of spring, for we know that spring *will* come and the light will shine as we continue going through the journey of the wheel of the year with hope, peace, joy and love for all.
Amen and Blessed be.

In Your Corner

Supporting Our Local Businesses

By Pamela Skelly

Supporting the local community is an important mission of the Windham Willimantic NAACP branch. We do this work in a variety of ways, through committee initiatives and events but also by community-building conversations. Conversations about race and culture can be difficult, but the reward of greater understanding is powerful.

Recently, Egg & Cheese, a new business on Main Street in Willimantic, received a lot of negative publicity on Facebook and in the local newspaper. The restaurant’s owner, Hannah Dupuis, hired a Manchester sign painter online to help promote the business. He sent her a photo of the finished sign, which she liked so much that she posted it on the restaurant’s Facebook page. But the arm holding the sign in the photo had a tattoo of the SS lightning-bolt symbol, which is a white supremacist image. Dupuis had no idea what the tattoo represented when she posted the photo. In fact, she supports diversity and cultural understanding. I also did not realize the meaning of that tattoo and I spent my early years in an Orthodox Jewish community living with my mother’s side of the family. Many times these symbols are coded messages for those in a particular group, so until we learn what they really mean, we don’t realize what they represent.

Members of our NAACP branch met with Dupuis at the Willimantic Public Library to discuss this issue. As a result of the meeting, we determined that there were a lot of misconceptions about who she is and her beliefs. The person holding the sign in the photo does not represent her. We support her commitment to welcoming all members of our community. The key idea to take away is the importance of building knowledge and understanding through difficult conversations. We all need to listen to each other and learn from those interactions.

To show our support, many of our branch members enjoyed a wonderful dining experience at Egg & Cheese on November 15th before our monthly meeting. Our branch wanted to support this business because of Dupuis’s dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Stop in at Egg & Cheese for your breakfast or lunch on Main Street. You’ll enjoy good food at a reasonable price in a warm atmosphere.

Dupuis has prioritized good food along with creating a restaurant environment that emphasizes inclusion of our diverse neighbors. In 2021, she started the first Egg & Cheese in a 300-square-foot shed on Route 32 in North Franklin. Three years later, she opened a second location on Main Street in Willimantic, where you can sit and relax or stop in for a take-out order. (The original location has since closed.) Running a restaurant is demanding work and we appreciate Hannah’s commitment.

Occasionally, I’ve seen signage that makes me want to avoid a business. When I first joined the Willimantic NAACP branch, a member was discussing a local business that displayed a flag that was offensive to people of color. This member informed the business owner, who didn’t care that the flag offended some people. I suppose she only wanted a particular type of patron, which doesn’t seem to make good business sense and certainly doesn’t make any moral sense.

Locally owned businesses are essential for a healthy local economy. At our annual Freedom Fund Celebration, we have honored some local businesses that have given back to our community:

-Peck’s Farm and Equestrian Center: Located in Columbia, Peck’s Farm offers a wide variety of horseback riding lessons including dressage, barrel racing, pole bending, and English style, as well as boarding facilities. The owners, Tamatha and Kevin Peck, “believe in the transformative power of equine therapy for individuals facing physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges, as well as those from marginalized communities.” Tamatha has extensive experience working with horses for over 30 years. As well as horse riding and training, she has formal education for working with people with special needs. Kevin focuses on the fiscal aspects, grounds, and maintenance. His priority is caring for the land and animals.

-Isankofa Skin Care: Founded by Sahra Deer, this company in Windham focuses on developing quality skin care products with ingredients that are locally sourced, organic, and sustainable. “You can take care of your skin while you are taking care of your body, community and environment, supporting farmers and artisans in Willimantic and throughout Connecticut,” is the online description. The company offers a wide variety of skin care products such as soap, hair oil, deodorant, shampoo—any product related to skin and hair. As Deer says, “If you can’t eat it, you probably shouldn’t put it on your skin.”

-The Basketball Guild: Developed by Windham Tech head coach Luke Gildea, the Guild offers camps and training programs for 6- to 14-year-olds. Gildea attended similar camps as a child in Windham and now gives back to his community. He is a coach, teacher, and mentor to the boys and girls participating in these programs. Participants work on skills such as ball handling, footwork, shooting, defense, and teamwork. Most importantly, the players are physically active and having fun – just what our youth need!

These local businesses are owned by minority and non-minority community members. As long as I feel welcomed, I’m happy to support them. Running a business is a risk, and the businesses described in this article started small and their worked hard to make themselves successful. These owners, and others like them, deserve our commendation for the services they provide to our community.

If you feel strongly about civil rights and justice in our country, please consider joining our Windham/Willimantic NAACP branch. Members receive emails for events and meetings, but we keep membership information private. The annual membership fee 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 email us at info@windhamctnaacp.org. You can also check out our Facebook page at Windham Willimantic CT NAACP.

18th Century Mysteries

By Angela H. Fichter

Right here in Hampton, CT there are two 18th century mysteries, and they both start at the North Cemetery, abutted by the Little River. There is a tombstone there that is engraved with the name of Nathaniel Mosely, who died in 1788. The other end of the stone says Right Hand Road to Boston Left Hand Road to Worcester. The guy posting this on Facebook called it a reused stone. I was born and raised in NY. This is a stolen road direction stone, reused as a gravestone. Here are the mysteries Who stole the direction stone, and where did it come from? The stone engraver carved his name on the stone: Lebbeus Kimball. There is a Kimball Rd. just off of Rte. 97 here in Hampton, not real far from the cemetery. Would not be surprised if Lebbeus lived on that road. But who stole the direction stone, and where did it come from? Decades ago I saw more stone direction signs at the edge of roads like Rt. 44 or Rte. 169. Some have been stolen in the past 50 years. And just where was the direction stone used as a tombstone stolen from? I figure it must be a junction where if you went right, you'd end up in Boston and left in Worcester. I googled Woodstock and got the following: a road from NE CT in 1788 to Boston was likely a combination of Old Connecticut Path and Boston Post Road. Old CT Path was a Native American road, picked up by the colonists. Part of Old CT Path is still visible in Woodstock, CT.

Boston Post Rd. was one of 3 routes in 1788: Lower Post Rd. was Providence to Boston. Middle Post Road was Hartford through NE CT to Boston. Upper Post Rd. was Hartford to Springfield to Boston. I vote for the combination of Old CT Path and Middle Post Rd.

As to who stole the direction stone, that's still a mystery. Maybe Mr. Mosely's family could not afford both a stone and a tombstone carver, so someone "helped" them by stealing the road direction stone.

To see a photo of this gravestone get on Facebook and ask for a photo from Gravestones from New England with the names I gave you, the death date of 1788, and the town of Hampton, CT.



Ashford barn.

Photo by Dennis Flaherty.

Joshua's Trust Welcomes New Development & Communications Coordinator

Submitted by Marie Cantino

Joshua's Trust is excited to announce Melica Stinnett as its new Development and Communication's Coordinator. Melica joined the Trust at the beginning of December and brings a diverse toolkit of design and communications experience from her previous work in the nonprofit and history sectors. In her new role, Melica will work to enhance the impact and expand the visibility of the organization in a professional and cohesive way.

Melica's recent professional experience includes working as the Exhibit Designer & Communicator at the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History on the UConn Storrs campus. During her time there, she led the redesign of the museum's biannual newsletter, which she successfully revived after a five-year hiatus. This newsletter effort played a critical role in re-engaging past supporters with the museum's mission and achievements. Additionally, she oversaw the redesign and implementation of the museum's membership program, which had also lapsed due to the pandemic and staff turnover. She is a creative, organized, and detail-oriented professional with a passion for connecting communities to the natural world through visual and verbal storytelling.

Reflecting on her new role at Joshua's Trust, Melica said, "For the past twenty years—since the day I moved across the country to Mansfield—the land that Joshua's Trust protects and shares has shaped who I am as an individual. I'm excited to bring my creativity, experiences, and vision to further the mission of Joshua's Trust and to connect our communities to the natural world."

"I'm thrilled to welcome Melica to Joshua's Trust. Her creativity, communications experience, and genuine connection to the land we protect make her an exceptional addition to our team. I'm excited for the fresh energy and perspective she brings to our outreach and storytelling" said David McCarthy, Executive Director, Joshua's Trust.

Melica continued, "I've serendipitously ventured

onto a desire path that once led me rambling through forests and along trails in Joshua's Trust preserves as a young adult—searching in nature for purpose and place in this big world—to where I am today professionally—at the precipice of this unique opportunity to use my creativity and experience designing for nonprofits to amplify the incredible conservation work happening at Joshua's Trust. I've continued walking the desire path that I started many years ago, now with a commitment to magnify the mission Joshua's Trust, enhance the organization's overall communications impact, grow development and engagement, and most importantly — inspire our communities to connect with nature through the land we steward."

Joshua's Trust, formally known as Joshua's Tract Conservation and Historic Trust, Inc. is a nonprofit regional conservation organization protecting more than 5,000 acres in Northeastern Connecticut, largely through the work of dedicated volunteers. The organization—founded in 1966 and nationally accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission since 2011—is committed to protecting the land and preserving the heritage of northeastern Connecticut for future generations, with a focus on safeguarding open spaces, maintaining trails, and fostering a deep appreciation for the natural and cultural resources that make our region unique.

The work of Joshua's Trust spans Eastern Connecticut through Windham, Tolland, and New London County. In addition to maintaining 42 miles of walking trails for the public to appreciate and enjoy, Joshua's Trust preserves two historically significant sites in Mansfield Center; the Gurleyville Grist Mill and Atwood Farm, the headquarters of the organization. To learn more about the work and mission of Joshua's Trust, visit joshuastrust.org. Administration@joshuastrust.org
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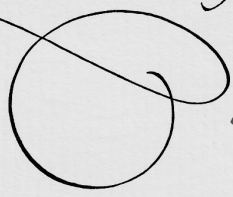
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neglect it; for I shall not
pass this way again.



Stephen Grellet

Calligraphy by Michael Hughey of Tolland.

This is our time on Earth. What are we doing with it?

Caution! Treacherous Invasive Species Ahead!

By Bob Lorentson

I began thinking about invasive species this past summer when two of them made their first appearances in my yard. No, they were not my in-laws. Like in-laws, though, the Asiatic jumping worms and the spotted lanternflies have no native predators to stop them.

It has occurred to me that many opinions are like invasive species—they spread by humans, reproduce quickly, outcompete native populations, have no effective predators, and are capable of great damage. I should warn you, therefore, that some of my opinions may be even more alarming than Asiatic jumping worms or spotted lanternflies. Or even in-laws.

Asiatic jumping worms make our native worms look like the “before” in worm fitness photos. They’re bigger, stronger, crawl farther, eat more, reproduce faster, and “jump” a foot off the ground, shattering the impression that they are only good for a fishhook. They are also damaging ecosystems as they go, however. With their voracious appetite, they make short work of the top organic layer of the soil, altering its structure and stripping it of the nutrients that our native worms and other organisms require. This further leaves the soil unsupportive of many plants and those animals that depend on them. Personally, I would have expected to see fat, happy birds devouring them, but as I haven’t, we may need to start investing in better birds.

The spotted lanternfly, on the other hand, is so pretty it could win a beauty contest. At least until it opens its mouth. No, it doesn’t prattle on about world peace. To the contrary, it sucks the sap from the stems, leaves, and trunks of a wide variety of trees, shrubs, and vines, weakening them and promoting a mold growth that can kill them. It is quickly proving to be an economic disaster for agriculture. As it was only first discovered in the U.S. in 2014 and is now in eighteen states, the spotted lanternfly has adapted to life in the U.S. so well that our only hope may be for it to discover processed foods and stop caring about its health.

Now before you think too much about how terrible these invasive species are, I urge you all to take a deep breath and calm your mind. Then look in the mirror. There, all dressed up and looking like you wouldn’t harm a fly, you will see a suddenly angry example of the most harmful invasive species the world has ever seen. Homo sapiens—a hugely successful species that left Africa 70,000 years ago with a big brain, a small toolkit, and no instructions on how to use either safely. Since then, Homo sapiens has migrated across the globe, eliminated its native predators, and caused wide-

spread environmental degradation, mass extinctions, and a worldwide ecological crisis that has other invasive species thinking they’re gonna need a bigger brain.

The problem with a big brain, however, is that invariably you get to thinking that it’s not big enough. So some of our biggest brains have developed artificial intelligence (AI) to do all that next-level thinking for us, like creating autocorrect to demonstrate how most brains aren’t even on speaking terms with us. Which has made it easy for AI to migrate across the globe, evolve rapidly, adapt to new conditions, and outcompete us in everything from the job market to emotional intelligence tests. #@%&*! that, you say? Then think about this: We, its creator, are its only natural predator. And AI learns from us. If your brain is still speaking to you, is it warning you yet that AI is essentially an invasive species that may try to eliminate the competition? Or at least autocorrect it? I can’t be the only one who hears the smirk in Siri’s voice.

Scientists say that for AI to turn on us it needs two things, neither of which Siri will tell you, no matter how much you swear at it.

1. A logical reason to cause us harm or extinction. AI experts say that developers are anywhere from a few months to a few decades from creating an artificial superintelligence (ASI) that would surpass human intelligence in every possible way, including in its ability to further improve itself. Without our help. And to think we can’t even keep a New Year’s resolution to stop swearing. That may not keep it from seeing us as competition, however, or even an existential threat, particularly if we try to reign it in in any way.

2. Control over such things as our energy grids, financial sectors, elections, media outlets, health-care, social network algorithms, and weapons of mass destruction. In case you’re thinking, “Over my dead body,” there already are LAWS, Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, otherwise known as killer robots, that can search for and engage targets all on their own. And to date, we humans have been more than willing to cede at least partial control of those other systems to AI, even without ASI around yet to so much as nag us to death.

If we think about invasive species at all, it’s usually only when one is threatening to swallow our house, like kudzu, or our children, like the Burmese python. But the most alarming one is already everywhere around us, getting faster, more powerful, and more competitive by the day, just waiting for a reason to show us what an artificial invasive species can do. In 2024, hundreds of AI scientists signed a statement that read, “Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war.” Unless you’re one of those who thinks scientists are an invasive species, we should all be as worried.

Bob Lorentson is a retired environmental scientist and a local writer. His new book is a satirical novel, The Carousel of Beliefs.

4th Annual National Baseball Poetry Contest

Looking to increase
Student Participation in CT
Woodstock Poet Serves
as Festival Ambassador

Submitted by Karen Warinsky

The National Baseball Poetry Contest and Festival is readying for its 4th season where adults and students write about and celebrate the sport of baseball. The Festival includes two poetry contests, the first for grades 4-12, and the second for adults 18+. The adult contest deadline is March 27th and the youth contest deadline is April 17th. Entries may be sent in any time before those deadlines. The Festival culminates May 7-10 in Worcester, MA with a welcome reception, a youth poetry event, an open mic night, two Triple-A baseball games, a fireworks display, and other activities. Prizes will be awarded to 80 poets, 20 in each of the following categories: elementary school, middle school, high school, and adult.



In 2024, a poem written by Karen Warinsky, Woodstock, CT poet and a festival ambassador, was one of 20 from throughout the nation chosen for recognition. Warinsky is again helping promote the festival which is the only one of its kind in the nation. “The aim of this contest is to get students and adults writing poetry on a fun subject that so many love. We are already receiving contest entries from around the country and even from India. We also would like to see an increase in entries from Spanish speakers this year. I would encourage student and adult poets to submit a poem, and hopefully join us at Polar Park in Worcester next spring,” she said.

According to Festival founder Steven Biondolillo, the National Baseball Poetry Festival is the first-ever festival to unite sports and the fine arts. “For the youth who make submissions and/or attend the event, the Festival fosters the appreciation of poetry and the fine arts through the lens of baseball.”

Teachers and parents interested in involving their students can visit www.BaseballPoetryFest.org, where a complete lesson plan and contest form can be found. “Please reach out to me directly for more information,” encourages Warinsky. “I’m happy to again be helping with the contest and festival and can be reached at karen.warinsky@gmail.com.”

The National Baseball Poetry Festival is a project of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and Biondolillo Associates, LLC. Worcester—the birthplace of Ernest Thayer, author of “Casey at the Bat”—is the Festival’s permanent home and early-May—which follows National Poetry Month—its strategic place in the calendar.



Maya Keleher. Contributed photo.

Musical Star grew up here!

By Bev York

Maya Keleher, formerly of Columbia, CT, plays the leading role in Tony award winning “*Suffs, The Musical*.” Keleher portrays suffragist, Alice Paul, as the production tours the country. *Suffs, the Musical*, will be in Hartford at the Bushnell in late January, 2026.

The all female cast explores the long story of the Women’s Suffrage Movement. It took over 70 years for women to finally get the right to vote when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1920. Alice Stokes Paul founded the National Women’s Party that led the militant and radical campaign to finish the work started in 1848 by activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Paul organized the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession and the Silent Sentinels pickets, enduring arrest, prison and a hunger strike to bring attention to the cause.

Maya Keleher, leads the cast with exceptional singing and dancing. The show exudes so much energy as the performers experience failures and victories. The grand finale, “Keep Marching,” shares the message of persistence and hope for women’s rights for the past 100 years and into the future.

Maya, daughter of Sarah Keleher, grew up in Columbia. She attended Horace Porter School, Lyman Memorial High School and graduated from E.O. Smith High School and the Boston Conservatory. During her youth, she was active in Arts in Motion and the Windham Theatre Guild. At the Burton Leavitt Theatre in Willimantic she starred in *Cinderella*, played the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, and was in *The Fantastics*, *All Shook Up* and other productions. Maya, age 32, lives in New Jersey with her husband, Alex, and their English springer spaniel.

Suffs, the award- winning book, and the musical score with lyrics were both written by playwright Shaina Taub. *Suffs, The Musical*, won Tonys for Best Book of a Musical and Best Original Score. The musical is directed by Leigh Silverman, choreographed by Mayte Natalio and the musical Supervisor is Andrea Grody. The show will tour the country for a year.

For tickets to *Suffs, The Musical* which plays from January 27 through February 1, contact the Bushnell Theater in Hartford. To learn more about the Woman’s Suffrage Movement, there will be a free public history program on Thursday, January 22, at 6:00 at the Willimantic Public Library. Bev York will discuss the movement and share the stories and words of six of the suffragist leaders.

a little paper
big on community

At Hampton’s Top Shelf Gallery

Submitted by Janice Trecker

The January February Show at the Top Shelf Gallery, *Winter Dreams*, water color and acrylic paintings by Hampton artist Michael Lynch, opens Saturday, January 3 at 1 p.m.. Lynch employs color fields that combine with delicate drawings of natural forms to produce works that are at once realistic and dream like.

Lynch, a long time resident of the Quiet Corner, came to art in a somewhat unusual way. He was headed for Notre Dame as a potential physics major, when a visit to the famous Woodstock Festival opened his eyes to the potential of the arts. A year later, he left physics for fine arts and says that he has “never looked back” on the decision.

At Notre Dame, he majored in painting and photography. Then in the 1980’s, he spent time with the renowned print maker Bob Cale at the Stonington Print Workshop learning color Intaglio printing. Despite these experiences, he feels that much of his technique and approach has been self taught, noting that during his time as an undergrad, “the creative moment” was emphasized above format training.

To support his art, Lynch says that he has been “a boat painter, a baker, a cook, a waiter, a garbage man, a teacher, a stereo salesman, a carpenter and a cabinetmaker.” He subsequently spent over 25 years at Quinebaug Valley Community College in Danielson as a Systems Librarian and Media Director and also taught courses in computer graphics, desktop publishing, and art.

Although there are many recognizable images in Lynch’s work, he describes his paintings as “essentially abstract in nature.” Representational elements contribute in their unique way to the composition and movement. It’s a dance. A banana becomes an excellent way to add cadmium yellow to a composition. Small sections of seaweed become an excellent reason to add Paynes grey.”


Perhaps this sensitivity to the abstract elements in his work is why Lynch mentions a wide range of artists and styles that he admires, from the drawings of the cave painters and Rembrandt to Frankenthaler’s color fields, pop art, and the post-impressionists. “Love them all,” he says.

Lynch has been active in a variety of arts organizations and has exhibited at the Mystic Art Association, the New Haven Paint & Clay Club, The Vanguard Cooperative Gallery in New London, and Arts Center East in Vernon. Currently a member of the Lyme Art Association, his one man shows include the Lyman Allen Museum in 1985 and the Spirol Gallery in Danielson in 2018.



Lynch lives with his wife Susan, multiple cats and several chickens. When he is not at the easel, he volunteers a few hours a week at the Fletcher Memorial Library and says that “twice a week I pretend I know how to play acoustic guitar and I get together with a few like-minded folks in the area.”

The Top Shelf Gallery is at Fletcher Memorial Library, 257 Main Street, Hampton, Info: 860 455 0175/ www.fletchermemoriallibrary.org.





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Early Winter in the Country Garden

By Brian Karlson Barnes

The seasonal rhythm of northern gardens allows a gardener winter regeneration and garden re-evaluation. Time to enjoy the winter landscape with its hungry birds, brisk air and warming bonfires. Time to re-evaluate your garden’s design and garden-ing. Time to consider making your own compost.

Gardening is an exercise in aesthetics, like decorating your home. Master Gardening goes further to study horticultural interconnections in a community of plants sustained by sun-light, water and nutrients. The third step I feel is an ethical one – spiritual if you wish -- beyond the science. Listen to Gaia and coexist with our natural world.

My *Last Rose of Summer* was still performing brightly in early November, a pink-orange rose with many buds, ***Rosa Knock Out ‘Coral’***. Deciduous **Burning Bush (*Euonymous ala-tus*)** was still ornamental with persistent dark red leaves, pink in the shade. Its form is graceful and the corky ridges (wings) along the branches suggested its common name, Winged Euon-ymous.

New England autumns have lasted later for a decade, but frost is soon on the pumpkin, fodder in the barn. Legendary *Fall Color* persisted. A Figi friend in our temperate weather zone for only his second year, was still amazed by the yellows after the red-orange-to-pink autumn displays of our Eastern Deciduous Forest, most diverse in the world. Not in New Zealand, nor New Orleans, his later homes.

MAINTENANCE A gardener’s work is never done, however. My days to topdress with compost may end with colder weather and snow, but late fall into winter is ideal for pruning (except buds of spring-flowering shrubs, as **Lilacs / *Syringa***). Pruning is different in our age of climate change. Increased summer humidity has brought more pests and disease, so it’s important to improve air circulation and remove crossing branches. I’m offering a Quiet Corner Garden Club tutorial pruning **Kou-sa** and **Redtwig Dogwoods (*Benthamidia*, formerly *Cornus*)** in the spring.

Climate change isn’t going away, so accommodate it by pruning to improve air circulation, and sheltering herbaceous perennials during freeze / thaw cycles.

Jumping Worms aren’t going away either. You can drench soil with mustard-water and hand-remove, but you can’t see the egg cocoons of the next generation. You can introduce a preda-tor and create another problem (Asian worms were imported to feed platypus at the Bronx Zoo). You can replace plants. Topdress with compost or granular organic fertilizers, spray with liquid seaweed (kelp), or anything else a gardener does to improve the soil. The worms don’t like acid soil, so try “pine straw” mulch.

But the worms are here to stay, like Burning Bush. Worry about what you can control. Like compost.

COMPOSTING I use 20-lb bags of commercial compost for clients, but have created a “compost complex” behind my shed where I create my own “gardener’s gold” (and overwinter my mini-nursery). I use some principles developed by a Wayland MA client.

“**Carl’s Lovely Compost**” Carl Love learned to make compost in a Philadelphia PA Central High School science class in 1975, and has refined the process over fifty years.

Composting is the aerobic breakdown of organic material with Oxygen. Aerobic and anaerobic (without Oxygen) organisms compete. Favor the aerobes. You’ll know by the smell. Anaero-bic decomposition stinks! Need Sun, Air (78 % Nitrogen, 21 % Oxygen) and Moisture -- to provide Heat and Pressure.

ENCLOSURE Commercial home composters are small. Bet-ter is 3 feet long, wide and high. Best is two!

(OR a 3-feet layered mound with 3 feet beside for turning the compost as I do - bkb)

-Start with a 3’x 3’x 3’ contained area, or a divided 2-bin 6’x 3’x 3’ at the center -- good with gate.

-Sunny enough to promote heat, yet somewhat shady to prevent drying out -- on bare ground, no floor.
-Sides of wood, cinderblocks, chicken wire or dog fencing lined with plastic, with holes for air.
-Cover with plastic – with holes for aeration -- such as large black garbage bags.

Compostables are brown and green, referring to the Nitro-gen-protein content, not strictly color.

BROWN = low-N material is primary, as dried leaves,

twigs, bark and wood chips.

versus

GREEN = high-N material as grass clippings, food scraps and manure; inoculants can boost the pile, such as compost, dirt, potting soil and potted plants. (not green or brown)

-Dried leaves are the main ingredient, about 90% of a compost pile.

-Wood debris, twigs and debris cut in pieces can help with aeration.

-Soaps: liquid soap, hand soap, dish soap, shampoo and laundry detergent, but no antibacterial products.

-Food scraps can be mixed into the leaves. remove stickers from produce. egg shells are good; eggs are not (too much protein). moldy food is good. do not add meat or dairy products, too much n-protein.

-Grass clippings (high-n), but not used as dried leaves (low-n).

-Coffee grounds: coffee shops are often happy to help. ask shop to save a bag. Coffee filters are fine to compost... but not plastic k-cups.

-Manure of herbivores only.

Unexpected compostables:

- Hair, human or pet. ask a groomer to save dog fur!
- Feathers as the stuffing of feather pillows
- Natural fiber door mats; cut into pieces
- Ashes and incense sticks
- Vitamins (expired ok)
- Aspirin but no other medications

DO NOT COMPOST:

- Eggs, meat, fish or dairy. Too much N-protein and may attract large animals.
- Carnivore feces may contain parasites; leave to the poop pros.
- Thick rinds like grapefruit, or many thin rinds, can slow decomposition, cut into pieces.
- Dryer lint (including natural fibers) does NOT decompose.

PROCESS

- 1 Start with leaves, compost, potted plants or potting soil. Pour liquid soap (not antibacterial) over the leaves and wet them. Water increases pressure.
- 2 Add kitchen scraps -- except eggs, meat, fish or dairy -- and layers of other compostables.
- 3 Water the pile heavily with a garden hose. Soak it. Stick hose in several places until water runs out. If a handful wrings out any water, it’s wet enough.
- 4 Cover loosely with plastic (as garbage bags) with holes to allow aeration and good bugs.
- 5 In 2 days, repeat above. Thereafter, only water when the compost is starting to dry.

TURNING compost will begin heating from the center as de-composition starts. Feel the warmth. No stirring needed. When it begins to cool, turn it. Break up anaerobic pockets of mois-ture and unmixed food waste. If you have a double enclosure, shift to the empty side until you get down to the Gold.

BEST TOOL is a 3 to 5 tine pitchfork. It’s light and material doesn’t clump in the long tines like the shorter tines of a bed-ding rake or garden fork.

Turn every two weeks to accelerate the process. Or wait for heat, and turn the compost over when it cools. Add leaves.

ODOR? Compost and aerobic decomposition smell fine. If compost smells bad, don’t discard it, correct it. Coffee grounds absorb odor. Check pockets of anaerobic activity as above. Decaying protein from excessive food scraps or grass clip-pings smells putrid. Add leaves.

Not Hot? If dry, soak. If moist, not heating, add protein, cof-fee grounds or more food waste.

DONE? When areas look like dirt, the compost is done. If larger matter hasn’t decomposed, screen through a milk crate. Use the fine material, and let the coarse texture keep going!

In doubt? Add leaves.

Wine Tasting Event in Hampton

Submitted by Janice Trecker

Fletcher Memorial Library is sponsoring a wine tasting Saturday, February 21 from 2- 5 p.m. at the Hampton Community Center on Main Street. The event will feature wines from the local Quiet Corner Winery, as well as small bites, door prizes, and a silent auction.

Tickets for the event are \$30 a person and proceeds will go toward the support of the town library. Attendance is limited to persons 21 and older.

The Quiet Corner Winery imports grapes from California, Chile, Italy and South Africa, which are then crafted in crafted in small batches right here in Hampton. The award-winning winery produces a variety of wines, including Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay.

Free Showing of the film *Sugarcane*

Submitted by Megan Bard Morse

Christ Church in Pomfret—in cooperation with the Pomfret Historical Society—is offering a free screening of the film SUGARCANE on Sun-day, Jan. 18, 2026, at 2 p.m. in the church’s Great Hall.

Sugarcane, an award-winning feature documentary, is a stunning tribute to the resilience of Native people and their way of life. The debut feature documentary from Julian Brave NoiseCat and Emily Kassie is an epic cinematic portrait of a community during a moment of international reck-oning. Set amidst a ground-breaking investigation into abuse and death at an Indian residential school in Canada, the film empowers participants to break cycles of intergenerational trauma by bearing wit-ness to painful, long-ignored truths—and the love that endures within their families.

This urgent and timely film brings the hidden story of cultural genocide to audiences worldwide while celebrating the resilience of Na-tive people as they work to overcome cycles of intergenerational trauma. Attendees are invited to stay for a question-and-answer period at the end of the film.

Christ Church is located at 527 Pomfret St., near the intersection of Routes 44 and 169, in Pomfret; overflow parking is available across the street at the Rectory School. For tickets, visit: <https://kinema.com/events/Sugarcane-unoywy>. Reservations are requested but not required.

Christ Church Pomfret is a member of the Anglican tradition, following the Traditions of the Episcopal Church, and seeks to serve all regardless of religious affiliation or none.

We Don’t Hear What She Hears

(a parody of the song Do You Hear What I Hear)

Said our faithful dog to her “Mom and Dad”
Do you see what I see?
 What I see
In the woods behind our warm house.
Do you see what I see?
A squirrel, a squirrel climbing up a tree
With a big bushy tail I can see,
As it climbs high up in the tree.

Said our loyal, brave dog late one night
Do you hear what I hear?
 What I hear
Something outside making a noise
Do you hear what I hear?
The wind, the wind, or could it be a deer?
It’s a deer feeding in our yard.
Hear it if you listen really hard.

A growl, a bark tells us she’s alert,
And we’ll sleep without worry or fright.
Our dog watches o’er us day and night.

(I hope it’s not stuck in your head now!)

-Carol Wheelock Hall

A Seven-year Old Brings Hope

Submitted by Elisha Sherman

Access Community Action Agency is celebrating an extraordinary act of kindness from one of our youngest community champions — a compassionate and determined seven-year-old girl, Kaylie, who raised \$110 to support people experiencing homelessness in our region.

After learning that a newly constructed business had displaced individuals living in a nearby homeless encampment, Kaylie felt compelled to help. Guided by empathy well beyond her years, she decided she had to do something. With her mother’s support, Kelli Carchidi, ACT & QMC Family & School Liaison, got to work raising money to help those now struggling with the sudden loss of their living space.

With her \$110 proudly saved, she and her mother visited three local stores, carefully choosing items that would make a meaningful difference. Her donations included essential supplies that Access staff will distribute directly to unsheltered individuals in need.

“When I learned that a 7-year-old raised over \$100 and chose to spend every bit of it on our unsheltered neighbors, it brought tears to my eyes. Her pure, selfless generosity is something our whole community can look up to. She was the sweetest thing. The world needs more people like her in it. When I went to pick up the donations from her, I looked at her and said, ‘You have such a beautiful soul, don’t ever change that’”, said Aiysha Ings, Navigator - Supportive Services. “This act of kindness reminds us that compassion has no age limit. Her generosity shines a powerful light on how even the smallest members of our community can inspire big change,” said Kathleen Krider, Sr. Director – Community Engagement & Resource Management.

Her thoughtful gesture not only provides immediate comfort but also reflects the very heart of Access’s mission — neighbors supporting neighbors and building a community where everyone is seen, valued, and cared for. Access is deeply grateful for her donation, her empathy, and the beautiful example she sets for all of us.

Access Community Action Agency is designated by the federal and state government as the anti-poverty agency for northeastern Connecticut. We are committed to providing food, affordable housing, job readiness services, and other pathways to economic self-reliance for vulnerable limited-income families and individuals throughout the region.

Memory Café Meeting in Pomfret

Submitted by Laurie Bell

Pomfret Public Library hosts a weekly Memory Café on Wednesdays at 1:30 PM. Memory Cafes are welcoming social gatherings for people living with dementia or other changes in memory or thinking, together with their care partners. The Memory Café at Pomfret Public Library is led by Leah Muller of CT Music Therapy Services. The focus is on making and enjoying music together, as music has been shown to be among the most effective therapies for stimulating cognitive activity.

This free program is open to any family coping with Alzheimer’s, dementia or other cognitive decline in the northeast CT region. It is held every Wednesday; participants can attend as often as they like. The library also has books, magazines, puzzles and other resources for take-home use that are designed for the needs of people at various stages of dementia. More information is available at www.pomfretlibrary.org, or by calling 860-928-3475. The library is located at 449 Pomfret St., Pomfret CT.

Haiku for You!

Haiku is an ancient Japanese form of poetry, often dealing with subjects of nature and the seasons. Although other forms of haiku do exist, for my purposes I follow the convention of haiku as a three line stanza containing lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables. Although I often write on traditional subject matters, I do so from the standpoint of a modern person.

-Joe Zelman

Interviewing Death 5 Haiku

“the dead consecrate
their own ground” there’s a brief speech
for each blood soaked inch

without a body
is it possible to say
“rest in inner peace”

“I’ve been unable
to go beyond the coffin
of my thoughts” “just breathe”

“We do not tame grief
Grief tames us” I weigh your words
As we near the grave

Interviewing death
“I only use ‘fate’ brand scythes”
No lie I dreamed this

5 Dream Haiku

in her flying car
dashboard crows backseat greyhounds
leap in unison

she said in a dream
when the boomerangs come back
heavy rains begin

God the Word that word
in my dream I awkwardly
try to console her

woke up from a dream
mannequins going to hell
on moving sidewalks

can’t imagine why
I told the crowd in my dream
I am enlightened

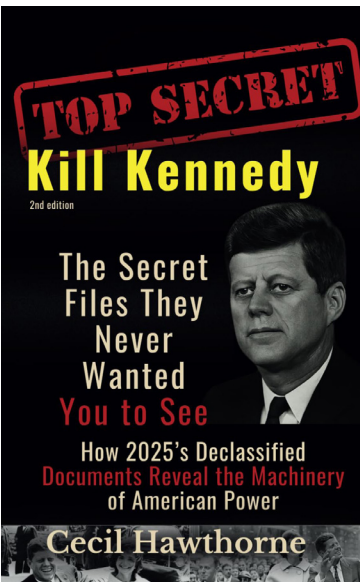
Letter and Emails

To the Editor-

It’s time to come clean on the murder of John F. Kennedy. An exciting scholarly book has been printed that utilizes this year’s release of 80,000 pages of previously suppressed governmental information on President Kennedy’s assassination. Cecil Hawthorne has written a journalistic masterpiece entitled *Kill Kennedy, The Secret Files They Never Wanted You To See*.

President Trump (for the wrong reasons of course) authorized the release of the documents that seven previous presidents allowed to pass on without dealing with the issues of over classification, lies, and silence from the “deep state” which include many very very powerful organizations (like CIA, NSA, FBI, etc). These government organizations are filled with unelected federal officials.

Neighbors readers deserve to view Mr. Hawthorne’s work – his 450 page masterpiece!
-Bill Potvin, Willimantic



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The Protection Provided by Tiger Whiskers

By Luen Yeung

Most people live their lives just waking up, eating, driving to work and getting stuck in traffic. Work all day, then go home and sleep. They feel drained and tired. They can’t wait for the weekend to relax. They work for someone else’s dreams and desires rather than for their own. At the end of the day, they feel unfulfilled and bored. The worst thing to do is live this way for 40 years. We feel miserable and disappointed with ourselves, and some people escape through alcoholism or addiction. Not me. I dream and fantasize about following my dreams, and I give credit to the magician Rick Thomas for encouraging everyone to make their dreams into a reality instead of living an ordinary life. I, for one, want to be more than ordinary.

I want to fulfill the potential of an extraordinary life in which I can explore and travel, saving endangered species. Too many people don’t take the time to think or care about the other creatures with which we share this world.

On March 1, 2025, I drove to the Stadium Theatre in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, where I was delighted to watch the magic of Rick Thomas. I last saw his show in 2010 in Las Vegas for my 21st birthday at the Sahara Hotel & Casino, where Elvis and the whole Rat Pack used to perform. Back in 2010, Thomas had tigers in his act that he made disappear and reappear. He even led one tiger into a cargo box, shrunk the box, and out came a domestic cat dressed up in a white tiger costume. Thomas and I spoke after the show about his statements throughout the performance about following your dreams. All people have dreams to make real, whether they are about creating inventions or gaining freedom. I shared with him that my dream has always been about wildlife conservation. He told me to work hard. At the time, I had a trip planned to go to British Columbia and study orcas in the wild. He said, “We need more people like you!”

Life gets in the way and doesn’t always turn out the way we want it to be. But I still wanted to go see the Rick Thomas Magic Show 15 years later. Throughout his show, he talks about how we must follow our dreams rather than living other people’s dreams. Never let other people tell you that you cannot make your dreams come true. His words impacted me and had the same influence that I remembered from back in 2010. Since I first saw Rick, he has retired all the tigers from his act to the Keepers of the Wild Nature Park on Route 66 near the Grand Canyon. To this day, he doesn’t have tigers in his act anymore. But he still educates people about the fate of tigers in the wild and raises money for tiger conservation. Tigers are highly endangered; there are fewer than 6,000 left in Asia. There are now more tigers in captivity than in the wild. Tigers are worth more dead than alive; tiger parts can be worth \$100,000 on the black market for traditional Chinese medicines.

Onstage and in his book *The Tiger Whisker*, Rick shares a special story about an interaction he had with a family that came to see his show in Vegas. Just as when I was there, he had the audience come backstage after the

show to see the tigers—in their transport cages for safety—and people took pictures with Rick and the tigers behind them. On this day, he found a mother, a father, their two boys and their 13-year-old daughter waiting for him after his show. The father asked if his daughter could come pet Rick’s white tiger.

Obviously, the answer was no. Then a lady from the Make-A-Wish Foundation stepped forward and told Rick that the girl had terminal cancer. So Rick decided that tonight would be different from any other. He told everyone from his crew to hold the tigers in place, and brought the family backstage. He introduced his white Bengal tiger named Samson. Samson was trained but not tame. Rick had the tiger on a leash and let the girl pet its side. The girl was amazed by the tiger’s tremendous size. Rick’s tiger



Rick Thomas and Luen Yeung

Contributed photo.

trainer, Ricky Brandon, got an idea: “Why don’t we give her a tiger whisker?”

In India, they say if you pull a whisker off a live tiger and you’re still alive, it means good luck. So Rick went to the tiger cage and was able to find a loose whisker, because tigers brush their faces on the bars of the cage and their whiskers come off all the time. Rick presented it to the girl so she could remember this eventful night.

A few months later, Rick saw the girl’s parents after his show, waiting in line. Rick said,

“It’s so good to see you! What’s up?”

The parents thanked him and, with tears in their eyes, shared that their daughter had passed away. Rick gave them his condolences and asked, “Why did you come back to my show?”

The father responded, “Rick, you don’t understand: The only thing our daughter wanted to be buried with was the tiger whisker.”

Those words and Rick’s story impacted me. We all have some greatness to give to other people to make them feel uplifted. You could say we all have a tiger whisker to give to others.

It is a dream of mine to go to India and take part in saving tigers from extinction. My goal is to raise money for the Bhopal Urban Tiger Project, a nonprofit for urban tigers in India. I want to help the project’s researchers in locating and monitoring tigers in Bhopal, a city of 2 million people in central India. The project relies on donations to buy camera traps. All the proceeds go to helping urban tigers. Anyone reading this can donate to the link below.

We all have just one life to live. Time is precious and we will never get it back. You have to push forward despite your challenges.

To donate to the Bhopal Urban Tiger Project, go to: <https://urbantigers.org/support-us>

Rick Thomas’s book is *The Tiger Whisker* (Thomas Productions, 2021).

Anybody can reach me at: Luen Young, (860) 428-4862 or yeun_gl@hotmail.com. I can also be booked to do live performances in martial arts, break dancing, and whip cracking.

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The Saga of Woody the Groundhog

By Carol Wheelock Hall

One day in the country a disaster struck, leaving orphaned, by himself a young woodchuck. Woody missed his family, the love, and fun at play. At first he was too scared to leave, so he chose to stay.

After a while he grew tired of his always dark hole. He was terribly lonesome and he got very cold. Finally, Woody peeked outside to look things over. He wanted to eat, by nibbling on some sweet clover.

He still missed his mom and was all alone, so he decided to try to find a new home. He looked, and then ventured out, leaving his dirt den. Down the hill he saw a child, a small human.

Woody waddled, and through a field did wander. Then he reached her play yard way over yonder. The girl excitedly picked him up, and to her he clung. It was a comfort to both of them, so innocent and young.

Parenting was needed. It was for them to decide. Their daughter’s new “pet” must reside outside. The family saw that Woody was always well-fed. He lived many months under their old shed.

The parents were wise and said that one day Woody would mature and would move away. The little girl listened and she understood what would make Woody happy must be good.

Well, Woody did grow up and he began to roam. He found a woodchuck family and a new happy home. The girl learned a lesson: That to sometimes succeed, we all can use a little help in a time of need.

Living with jams

By Elizabeth Huebner

Door jams

Window jams

Jamies as in pj’s

Raspberry jam

Toe jam

To be in a jam

The window is jammed!

R ring finger jammed first

L pinky second

R pinky third

R index fourth

Now that was a jam plus a bone chip
Technically a break but treated as a bad sprain
does it count?

R ring finger AGAIN

Does that make 4 or 5 jammed fingers?

Jammed fingers makes

just about everything hard to do

BUT

With one finger taped to the other

It is possible to dribble and shoot.

Game on!

Note: This is a follow up to my enthusiastic poem “Inside Shot” about discovering the Senior Women’s Basketball Association in Willimantic. This is 6 months into learning to play basketball at 72 years old.

Join Joshua’s Trust

By David McCarthy, Executive Director

Have you ever toured the Gurleyville Grist Mill or hiked the Wolf Rock Preserve in Mansfield? Wandered through Utley Hill or Potters Meadow in Columbia? Maybe you’ve explored the Friedman Memorial Forest in Ashford or the Elizabeth Couch Preserve in Coventry. These are just a few of the special places that Joshua’s Trust preserves and protects across northeastern Connecticut.

Joshua’s Trust is one of the largest nonprofit land trusts in the state, caring for more than 5,000 acres of forests, meadows, wetlands, and 40 miles of trails across 14 towns. We also safeguard historic treasures like the Gurleyville Grist Mill and Atwood Farm, our Mansfield headquarters. Together with our members, volunteers, and partners, we’ve been protecting the natural and historic heritage of our region for nearly 60 years. But our work is far from done. Forests and native habitats face increasing threats, pollinators are in decline, and wildlife is under stress. Each year, more land is lost to development, and opportunities to connect with nature become harder to find. That’s why Joshua’s Trust is taking action — preserving more open space, restoring habitats, and creating opportunities for people to learn about and experience the land and heritage that makes our communities so special.

With your membership support, we protect land, heritage, wildlife, and biodiversity across our region.

When you become a Joshua’s Trust member, you join a growing network of people who care deeply about protecting the Quiet Corner’s beauty, biodiversity, and history. Membership directly supports land acquisition, stewardship, trail maintenance, and community education programs that inspire a new generation of conservationists.

Members also receive voting privileges at our Annual Meeting, invitations to special events, and regular updates through email and our printed quarterly newsletter. Most importantly, you’ll know that your support is making a lasting difference in the place you call home.

We can’t do this work without you. Please consider supporting Joshua’s Trust 2025–26 Annual Membership Drive — today. Your gift has an immediate impact—every contribution helps preserve the land and legacy of northeastern Connecticut for generations to come.

Join us today at <https://joshuas-trusttest.org/donate-2/>
Phone: 860-429-9023 Email: administration@joshuastrust.org
Joshua’s Trust — Preserving Land and Heritage Across Northeastern Connecticut.



5th Annual Community Bonfire

(Bonfire idea proposed by Faith Kenton of Willimantic in 2020, adopted by Town Hall, pallets provided and stacked by Casella Waste Management.)

Submitted by Faith Kenton

After the excitement of weeks of holiday bustle, the New Years night bonfire in Willimantic offers you a quiet peaceful time to reflect. Gather your family and friends on Jillson Square as the WFD lights the pallets. The flames quickly crackle high, sending sparks into the dark sky. Spectators stand looking into the fire thinking quietly, or whispering to a person beside them. Some walk slowly around the circle, looking into hooded faces and discovering an old friend. Standing too near the flames, a person takes a step back. A coat gets unzipped, gloves come off. Children are transfixed by the bright flames, their outlines and ever-changing shapes. They are watchful, uncharacteristically still. There is a laugh from the other side of the fire. Occasionally, someone hums a tune or sings a verse of a favorite song. All are on best behavior, even the dogs enjoying the heat.

It’s over quickly, a short time of high flame and then only glowing embers are left. The people seem reluctant to leave, linger in conversation, turn away slowly to find their cars and re-enter the present. Where have their minds been? What thoughts and reflections, decisions, have surfaced in this quiet, undemanding hour? Most of us are unpracticed in standing still, just watching without speaking. Once learned, quiet reflection and meditation (change one letter and read “medication”) is as good as a good nights sleep, a bottle of pills, a warm blanket for jagged nerves and feelings. Come to the bonfire and practice.

5th Annual Community Bonfire
January 1st New Years Night
6 pm Jillson Square
An Hour of Quiet Reflection
Free, open to everyone

Ashford Business Fair

Sunday, March 22

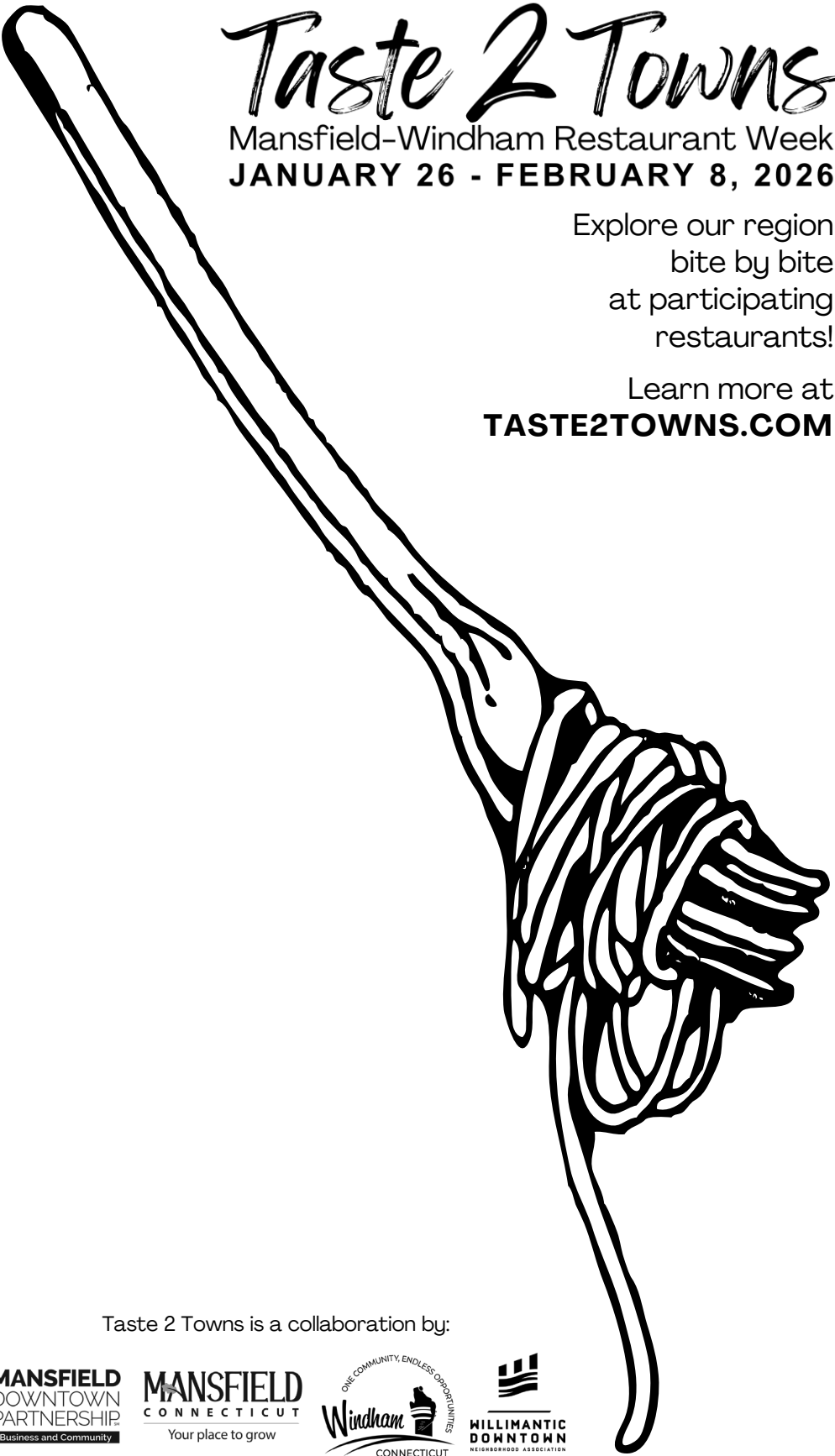
10 AM-1 PM Knowlton Hall
(intersection of Rtes. 44 & 89)

Find Service Providers
You Need and Plant
Your Dollars Locally!



Do business with your neighbors! Join us at the Ashford Winter Farmers Market on March 22 to find the services and products you need right here in our community.

Hosted by the Ashford Winter Farmers Market, plus Economic Development & Conservation Commissions



Taste 2 Towns

Mansfield-Windham Restaurant Week
JANUARY 26 - FEBRUARY 8, 2026

Explore our region
bite by bite
at participating
restaurants!

Learn more at
TASTE2TOWNS.COM

Taste 2 Towns is a collaboration by:



The Neighbors Live & Local Calendar

Compiled by Jesse R. Clark

Friday, January 1st

Yoga Workshop: The Mantra Room at Brooks Bend Plaza, Windham Road, South Windham will have *Yoga & Manifestation Collage Workshop: Set Your Intentions for the New Year* from 10:00-12:00. Part yoga, part vision board making, you can come and set your intentions, getting ready for the New Year. \$35 Go to <https://www.mantraroomct.com/events/new-years-day> for more info/ to register.

Yoga: *New Year’s Day 108 with Erin, Kristen and Bob:* Come to YONO Yoga Studio 59 Church Street, Willimantic at 10:30 am to do 108 Sun Salutations! You don’t have to do them all, but it’s a great way to start the new year! \$25 For more info/to register, go to <https://yonowillimantic.com/event/new-years-day-108-with-erin-kristen-and-bob/>

Bonfire: The 5th annual New Years bonfire will start at Jilson Square in Willimantic at 6:00 pm. Free. Come and honor the new year with community.

Tuesday, Jan. 6th

Yoga: *Winter’s pause: A candlelight practice with Angie* This restorative winter workshop invites you to embrace the quiet wisdom of the season through gentle supported postures, Winter specific meditation and reflection. 6:00 pm- 7:00 pm. At YONO Yoga Studio 59 Church Street, Willimantic \$30 For more info, go to <https://yonowillimantic.com/event/winters-pause-a-candlelight-practice-with-angie/>

Saturday, January 10th

Fundraiser: A Giant Indoor Tag Sale will be happening at The Windham Theater Guild on Main Street, Willimantic. If you have any items to donate, such as clothing, books, music or toys, you can drop them off at the theater between 10:00-2:00.For more info call the theater guild at 860-423-2245.

Yoga Open House: The Mantra Room at Brooks Bend Plaza, Windham Road, South Windham will have an open house where people can attend classes for free between 8:00 am&6:00 pm. Just show up for the class you want! Go to <https://www.mantraroomct.com/events/open-house-weekend> for the schedule of classes.

3 Kings Day Celebration: Windham Public Schools, along with The Town of Windham, will host a Three Kings Day celebration at Windham High School where kids will get gifts while the adults can participate in “Latino Vote 2026” activities such as registering to vote/updating their addresses and a raffle with prizes such as gift cards and mugs donated by the Willimantic Latino Lions Club. From 11:00 am- 2:00 pm.

Live Music: The Mighty Soul Drivers will be playing at The Packing House, 156 River Road, Willington from 2:00-5:00. There WILL be space for dancing! Tickets are \$20.00 in advance (ONLINE) / \$25.00 at the door. For more info/to get tickets, check out thepackinghouse.us/upcoming/2026/01/10-special-program-the-mighty-soul-drivers

Sunday, January 11th

Yoga Open House: The Mantra Room at Brooks Bend Plaza, Windham Road, South Windham will have an open house (see 1/10).

Monday, January 12th

Film: Second Monday Film Series. *Witness for the Prosecution: Filmmakers & The Nuremberg Trials* will be shown at Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse 46 Spring Road, Storrs at 7:00 pm. Donations accepted. Check out Second Monday Film Series on Facebook for more info.

Friday, January 16th

Poetry: Poet’s Corner Poetry Open Mic. Free. Booth & Dimock Library, 1134 Main St., Coventry 7:00. Go to <https://coventryartsguild.org/poets-corner-open-mic.html> for more info.

Saturday, January 17th

Fundraiser: A Giant Indoor Tag Sale will be happening at The Windham Theater Guild on Main Street, Willimantic from 9:00-1:00 with a snow date of January 24th.

Sunday, January 18th

Activism/Art: “Art in Action: A Community Art Building Collaborative” will have their monthly meeting. Contact artinactionwillimantic@gmail.com to learn more.

Wednesday, January 21st

Live Music: The Bread Box Folk Theater Artist Showcase will have their monthly artist showcase from 7:00-9:00 at

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 220 Valley Street, Willimantic. A \$5 donation is suggested.

Saturday, January 24th

Live Music: Bruce John’s *Back to the 60’s* dance will be at the Elks Club Lodge no.1311 at 198 Pleasant St., Willimantic from 7:00-11:00 pm. The Wild Bill Project and Bruce John’s band, The Bandaleros, will be playing classic rock. Tickets available at the Willimantic Food Co-op and <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bruce-johns-birthday-bash-tickets-1976625073805>

Live Music: Danielle Miraglia, an acoustic Blues/Americana, Billboard Blues charting artist, will be playing at The Packing House, 156 River Road, Willington from 7:30-10:00pm. Doors open at 7:00 pm. Tickets are \$20.00 in advance (ONLINE) / \$25.00 at the door. For more info/to get tickets, check out thepackinghouse.us/upcoming/2026/01/24-acoustic-artist-series-danielle-miraglia

Live Music: The Greg Abate Quartet will be performing swing and bee bop at The River Room, 50 Riverside Drive, Willimantic from 7:30-9:30 pm. Doors open at 6:30 pm. Ticket info available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-greg-abate-quartet-tickets-1976462955906?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl> or check out <https://riverroomwilli.com/>.

Friday, January 30th

Live Music: Dan Stevens, Brandt Taylor and Mickey Serently will be performing acoustic blues from 7:30-9:30 at The River Room, 50 Riverside Drive, Willimantic. Doors open at 6:30. Ticket info available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/an-evening-of-acoustic-blues-co-presented-by-the-ct-blues-society-tickets-1977719498258?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl>

Sunday, Feb. 1st

Yoga: *Women’s Somatic Release Breathwork Ceremony & Hands-On Energy Healing* Come to YONO Yoga Studio 59 Church Street, Willimantic from 10:30-12:30 for this workshop. Guided by Samara’s nurturing approach, this ceremony focuses on the sacral, heart, and throat chakras, inviting deep emotional expression and energetic release. It closes with Reiki and hands-on energy work to leave you grounded, clear, and reconnected to your true Self. For more info, go to <https://yonowillimantic.com/event/womens-somatic-release-breathwork-ceremony-hands-on-energy-healing-2/>

Saturday, February 7th

Festival: *Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival* will be from 10 to 2 on Main Street, Willimantic. Featuring a road race, cake contest, Chocolate Chip Stroll and more including the “Cupid Made Me Do It” two-mile urban challenge. Registration atrunsignup.com. For more info, check out Facebook.com- Romantic Willimantic Chocolate Festival

Sunday, February 8th

Live Music: Crys Matthews will be playing at The Bread Box at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 220 Valley Street, Willimantic CT at 4:00 pm. Tickets are available at <https://events.humanitix.com/copy-of-bread-box-theater-spring-2026-music-series/tickets> for \$25 + tax.

Monday, February 9th

Film: Second Monday Film Series will show *February First* – a film about the lunch counter sit-ins during the Civil Rights movement – at Unitarian Universalist Meetinghouse 46 Spring Road, Storrs at 7:00 pm. Donations accepted. Check out Second Monday Film Series on Facebook for latest info and updates.

Friday, February 13th

Poetry: Poet’s Corner Poetry Open Mic. Free. Booth & Dimock Library, 1134 Main St., Coventry 7:00 pm. Go to <https://coventryartsguild.org/poets-corner-open-mic.html> for more info.

Live Music: The Charter Oak Brass Band will be playing at the First Congregational Church of Willimantic at 7:00 pm with a snow date of Sunday February 15th at 3:00 pm. Free to attend.

Saturday, February 14th

Live Music: Soulful singer/songwriter, pianist and award-winning recording artist Jennifer Hill, will be performing at the Packing House, 156 River Road, Willington, turning this Valentine’s Day celebration into “ALL-entine’s

Please note: Links embedded in listings are active in the Neighbors online edition. Go to: neighborspaper.com for link to current and past editions. Ed.

Day” with something for everyone. Doors open at 7pm. Tickets are \$20.00 in advance (ONLINE) / \$25.00 at the door. Tickets and info available at <https://thepackinghouse.us/upcoming/2026/02/14-special-program-all-entines-day>

Sunday, February 15th

Activism/Art: “Art in Action: A Community Art Building Collaborative” will have their monthly meeting. Contact artinactionwillimantic@gmail.com to learn more.

Tuesday, February 17th

Historical Dining : *Party with the Presidents* at Willibrew (AKA: The Main Street Café) on the corner of Main Street and High Street in Willimantic at 6:30pm. Dining choices include historical recipes and libations. Program includes the Founding Fathers and the signers of the Declaration of Independence in celebrating America 250th anniversary. Call ahead for reservations: (860)-423-6777.

Wednesday, February 18th

Live Music: The Bread Box Folk Theater Artist Showcase will have their monthly artist showcase from 7:00-9:00 at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 220 Valley Street, Willimantic. A \$5 donation is suggested.

Sunday, February 22nd

Live Music: Simon Brogie & The XLTs / Jean Baptist will be playing at The Bread Box at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 220 Valley Street, Willimantic CT at 4:00 pm. Tickets are available at <https://events.humanitix.com/copy-of-bread-box-theater-spring-2026-music-series/tickets> for \$25 + tax.

Friday, February 27th

Theater: The Windham Theater Guild on Main Street, Willimantic, will perform *The Importance of Being Earnest* at 7:00 pm(Doors open at 6:30). Adults \$22; Students/ Seniors \$17; UCONN/ECSU/QVCC Students \$15; Children under 12 \$13. For more info or to purchase tickets, go to windhamtheatreguild.org/tickets/ or call 860-423-2245

WTG TAG SALE—JANUARY 2026

The Windham Theatre Guild is holding their Annual Giant Indoor Tag Sale on Saturday, January 17th from 9am-1pm at the Burton Leavitt Theatre. But the Guild needs your help. Start Spring cleaning early and donate any unwanted items you might have to the tag sale. No electronics, computers, or exercise equipment, but clothing and shoes will be accepted. Drop off items to be sold on Saturday, January 10th from 10am-2pm. Come back a week later and check out the sale for some fabulous bargains. All proceeds will benefit the Windham Theatre Guild. For more information call 423-2245.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST
By Oscar Wilde

The Windham Theatre Guild presents *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde as their next Main Stage Show, opening Friday, February 27th at the Burton Leavitt Theatre. The story follows two upper-class Victorian gentlemen, Jack and Algernon, who lead double lives by inventing fictitious alter egos to escape from their dull social responsibilities and to pursue pleasure. Jack pretends to be an unreliable brother named Ernest to get away to London, while Algernon invents an invalid friend that he needs to visit in the country. The story becomes tangled when Jack proposes to Gwendolen, who only wants to marry someone named “Ernest”, and when Algernon, posing as Ernest, falls for Jack’s ward, Cecily. Mistaken identities, outrageous coincidences, and general hilarity ensue. *The Importance of Being Earnest* runs February 27, 28, March 5, 6, 7, 13 & 14, 2026 at 7:30pm and March 1 & 8 at 2pm at the Burton Leavitt Theatre, 779 Main Street, Willimantic. Tickets are available online at windhamtheatreguild.org/tickets or by calling the box office at 423-2245.

The Table

By Sue Calkins

You sit there by the side of the road
I'm sad every time I drive by you.
You were white
now just dingy.
I want to stop in the morning
and cover you with a tablecloth with beautiful blue and yellow flowers.
I want to set a tea pot steaming and warm scones on you.
I want to walk up to the house across the big lawn
and invite your owners to join me.
In the evening when I drive by and you're still sitting there
I want to cover you with a warm red tablecloth.
I want to bring old wooden chairs and steaming bowls of pasta
and big bottle of red wine
with beautiful etched wine glasses.
I want to flag people down and invite them to join me.
When I see you sitting by the side of the road,
I feel sad because I know you are lonely.
Tables are supposed to be worn from the years of family sitting around them.
Tables are supposed to be full of bowls and plates and elbows to hold them down.
Tables are supposed to know all the secrets, and joys, and laughter and sorrow of a family,
But you just sit by the road.
Are you just waiting for me?

Ring in the New Year with Sound: The Healing Power of Singing Bowls & Sound Baths

By Haley Proto

As a new year begins, many of us feel the call to pause and breathe. January often brings a blend of excitement, pressure, and possibility. We look back at what the past year held and forward to what the coming year might become. There is a collective desire for renewal, yet the way we approach that renewal can feel rushed or forceful. Instead of launching into resolutions or self-improvement strategies, there is another, gentler doorway into the year: sound.

Singing bowls and sound baths offer a different kind of beginning. They invite us to step into the new year not by doing more, but by becoming more present. The tones of crystal and metal bowls carry frequencies that calm the nervous system, soften the mind, and help us reconnect to a deeper part of ourselves. In a world that is often loud, fast, and demanding, sound healing becomes a sanctuary — a way to reset from the inside out.

Sound affects us long before our thinking brain gets involved. When a bowl is played, its vibration travels through the air and through the body. These waves interact with our own internal rhythms, guiding us into slower brainwave states where rest, clarity, and intuition naturally arise. It is in these quieter states that we can feel what we truly need, rather than what we think we should need. This makes sound baths especially powerful at the start of a new year, a time when we are encouraged to make big decisions, set ambitious goals, and reinvent ourselves overnight. Sound reminds us that meaningful change doesn't come from pressure — it emerges gradually, like ripples in water.

A sound bath at the beginning of the year becomes a moment of release. The vibrations help loosen what we've been holding onto — tension in the body, old emotional weight, outdated stories about who we are supposed to be. Many people describe feeling lighter afterward, as if something heavy has quietly melted away. Before stepping into a new cycle, we need the space to empty what no longer serves us. Sound creates that space.

As the body relaxes, the mind naturally resets. We shift into the parasympathetic nervous system, the place where healing and restoration happen. From this grounded state, new intentions can arise with more clarity. Instead of resolutions born from pressure or comparison, intentions shaped within a sound bath tend to be simpler, truer, and more sustainable. They arise from the heart rather than the mind.

Some people choose a word or feeling to guide them through the new year — ease, courage, trust, softness, joy. Held within the resonance of the bowls, these intentions become more than thoughts; they become sensations. The vibration helps anchor them into the body, as though the sound itself is carrying them forward.

A New Year sound bath also offers a chance to reconnect with stillness. After the rush of the holidays and the heaviness that winter sometimes brings, settling into a quiet, dimly lit room can feel like a homecoming. Wrapped in blankets, supported by props, and surrounded by gentle frequencies, the body remembers how to soften. The mind remembers how to breathe. In this restful state, insight often appears — not through effort, but through spaciousness.

There is no right way to experience a sound bath. Some people feel waves of emotion; others drift in and out of a dreamlike state. Some feel energy moving through the body; others simply feel calm. Sound meets each person exactly where they are.

Beginning the year in this way carries a profound message: you are allowed to start gently. You are allowed to enter the new year without urgency, without pressure, and without forcing yourself into immediate transformation. Renewal can happen slowly. Alignment can unfold over time.

As the bowls sing and their vibrations ripple outward, they remind us that we do not need to rush into the new year. We only need to listen. In that listening, we find harmony, clarity, and a more grounded way forward — one resonant breath at a time.

John Anton Clark



Need a musician?
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(860) 933-4301

Bread Box Theater Artist Showcase 2/18/26

Watercolor Workshops in Coventry

Submitted by Irina Trzaskos

Discover the Magic of Watercolor with artist Irina Trzaskos and the Coventry Arts Guild.

Step into a world of color, creativity, and inspiration! Join us for a relaxing and immersive watercolor workshops at the beautifully restored Mill Brook Place, nestled in the heart of Historic Coventry Village.

These beginner-friendly workshops are designed for anyone ages 11+ looking to explore the gentle, flowing beauty of watercolor in a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Whether you're a total beginner or looking to refresh your skills, this is the perfect opportunity to unwind, create, and connect.

What to Expect:
Hands-on guidance in watercolor techniques
A peaceful, inspiring setting in a historic mill building
Baked goods & refreshments to enjoy
All materials provided - just bring your creativity!

Take a break from the everyday and let watercolor bring a little magic into your life.

We can't wait to paint with you!
Registration:
To sign up follow the link: <https://coventryartsguild.org/watercolor-workshops.html>
or email Tim via info@coventryartsguild.org for any questions about the workshop
- please email Irina via trzaskosirina@gmail.com

When:
January 17 and February 21, 2026, 10AM-1PM
Where:
Mill Brook Place
(1267 Main 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.

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SOUND BATH

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Sound Bath experiences.





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January 31, 2026

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The
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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).

Dig, Baby, Dig! Union Station Geothermal Breaks Ground New Haven Independent. “With the help of a slew of pipes, a “ground heat exchanger,” and water flowing deep down into the earth and then back up, these bores will take advantage of that depth’s consistent 55-to-60-degree temperature to provide eco-friendly heating during the winter and cooling during the summer to Union Station as well as to the expected 1,000 new apartments to be built at the former Church Street South housing-complex site. ..This is the most efficient heating and cooling system around...”

Could CT have a nuclear energy future? Not if you’re in a rush CT Mirror. “Nevermind that before two new nuclear plants opened in Georgia in 2023 and 2024 — seven years late and double their original budget — there had been no new nuclear power plants in the U.S. in more than 30 years. Now the chatter is around so-called small modular and micro-reactors — touted as easier, cheaper, and faster, leading to a public perception they are ready to be pulled off the shelf and plugged in. But here’s the problem with that. They don’t exist yet.”

Federal judge throws out Trump order blocking wind energy development CT Mirror. “A federal judge on Monday struck down President Donald Trump’s executive order blocking wind energy projects, saying the effort to halt virtually all leasing of wind farms on federal lands and waters was “arbitrary and capricious” and violates U.S. law...Saris ruled in favor of a coalition of state attorneys general from 17 states and Washington, D.C....’ [Trump] was going to jack up energy costs for American families and businesses, further our reliance on fossil fuels and foreign oil, and throw workers off good jobs. We sued, we won...”

Feel The Cold? Offshore Wind Alleviates Grid Woes In Winter, Study Says CT News Junkie. “President Donald Trump has made it his mission to banish offshore wind farms from America...Yet a new report suggests that the president’s moves could be working against grid reliability in key parts of the country. Along the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, offshore wind can play a critical role in keeping the lights on year-round, especially through the winter...gas plants are reliable in the summer but can buckle under winter weather...Ocean winds in the Northeast are at their strongest and steadiest in winter months, making turbines there a way to boost the reliability of power grids connected to underperforming gas plants.”

New England kicks off \$450M plan to supercharge heat pump adoption Canary Media. “New England winters can get wicked cold. This week, five of the region’s states launched a \$450 million effort to warm more of the homes in the often-frigid region with energy-efficient, low-emission heat pumps instead by burning fossil fuels...“It’s a big deal,” said Katie Dykes, commissioner of [CT’s DEEP]... The accelerator’s launch marks a rare milestone for a Biden-era climate initiative amid the Trump administration’s relentless attempts to scrap federal clean energy and environmental programs.”

Connecticut YMCA leases roof to Greenskies for grid-connected solar project Solar Power World. “Unlike a traditional power purchase agreement (PPA), this project was structured as a roof lease. By hosting solar panels on its rooftop, the Soundview Family YMCA will receive approximately \$20,000 annually from Greenskies — providing a consistent, long-term revenue stream without requiring any upfront investment or changes to existing energy systems. The Soundview Family YMCA’s facility already operates a combined heat and power (CHP) system that covers much of its electricity and heating needs. To ensure compatibility and avoid interfering with the CHP system, Titan Energy and Greenskies structured the solar project to deliver power directly to Eversource’s grid under the state’s Non-residential Renewable Energy System (NRES) program.”

Opinion: Our grandchildren will pay for our energy mistakes today CT Mirror. “The reasons for our soaring [energy] costs are complicated. We’re not going to solve them with simplistic solutions – no matter how tempting it may be to opt for what is sold as a quick fix. And that’s what fossil fuel advocates are doing right now – telling us all our problems will go away with one short-term fix: burning more gas. In questionable surveys, hardball Hartford lobbying, and a barrage of media stories, these advocates are pushing Connecticut leaders to build gas pipelines and use more fossil fuels.”

Several CT schools are about to get solar. Here’s how and why Hartford Courant. “Several technical high schools across Connecticut are slated to receive solar as part of a collaboration with the Connecticut Green Bank, officials said. The projects are a collaborative effort between Connecticut Technical Education and Career System, the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services, and the Connecticut Green Bank through the Green Bank’s Solar MAP+ program...The seven solar projects will collectively deliver 4.6 megawatts of clean energy to the schools and energy cost savings of \$5.9 million over the lifetime of the panels.”

Opinion: Clean energy would make Hartford healthier. Here’s a place to start. Hartford Courant. “If Gov. Ned Lamont is favoring a plan to power the Capitol Area System, CAS, with gas-fired boilers, rather than clean, renewable energy, despite his pledge to do otherwise, it is not a good idea. It’s a decision that would cause long-lasting harm to the health and wellbeing of Hartford residents. But it’s not too late to change course...Governor Lamont has built his reputation by advocating for a cleaner, healthier Connecticut. Indeed, his Lead by Example program calls for reducing energy use and greenhouse gas emissions while lowering operating costs in state government facilities. By powering CAS with ground-source heat pumps, he can truly lead by example—and put the health and wellbeing of Hartford residents first.”

Branford schools on track to get new fleet of electric buses by June CT Insider. “The Branford Public Schools are on track to have a large fleet of electric school buses by the start of the next academic year. This change is coming after Branford began a 10-year, \$60 million contract with a carbon-neutral student transportation provider, Zum, this school year. Ultimately, the district is working toward complying with a state law that requires districts within environmental justice communities, including Branford, to be using only zero emissions buses by Jan. 1, 2030... Branford was also one of six Connecticut school districts chosen for the EPA’s Clean School Bus Rebates Program, making Branford eligible to receive up to \$5 million to replace 25 diesel buses with electric versions and charging infrastructure.”

Exxon Heads to Trial on Claims of Campaign of Deception on Climate Change. CT Examiner. “Oil giant Exxon Mobil Corp. is heading for trial on claims the company marketed fossil fuel products in Connecticut that have contributed to climate change in the state. In a 69-page decision issued late last week, Superior Court Judge John Farley ruled a state jury can consider a lawsuit brought by Attorney General William Tong claiming an ongoing, systematic campaign of lies and deception by Exxon Mobil to hide from the public that burning fossil fuels contributes to climate change.” Plus: Exxon Mobil heads to court in Connecticut

First utility-owned geothermal network to double in size with DOE funds. Canary Media. “Gas and electric utility Eversource Energy completed the first phase of its geothermal network in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 2024. Eversource is a corecipient of the award along with the city of Framingham and HEET, a Boston-based nonprofit that focuses on geothermal energy and is the lead recipient of the funding. Geothermal networks are widely considered among the most energy-efficient ways to heat and cool buildings...Progress on the project is a further indicator that despite their opposition to wind and solar, the Trump administration and Republicans in Congress appear to back geothermal energy.”

CT spends \$5.4M to add more fast EV chargers along major highways. Connecticut Public. “Connecticut’s Department of Transportation is spending \$5.4 million to add dozens of direct-current (DC) fast chargers for electric vehicles along major highways in the state. The money comes from the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program, a federal initiative under the Biden administration to add more DC fast chargers to highways across the country. Connecticut received \$52.5 million from the program...The new DC fast charging ports will be installed in cities and towns along major highways, including Interstate 91, Interstate 84, Interstate 395 and Route 7.”

Volvo is Still a Gas

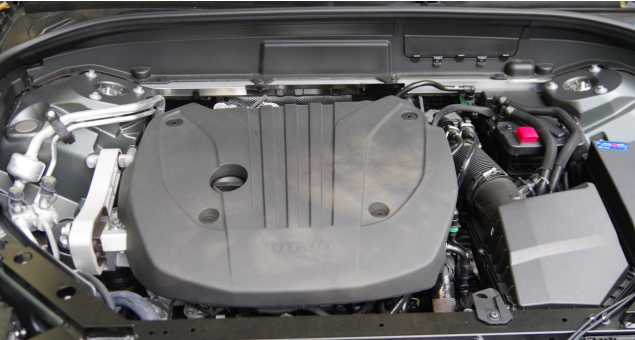


By Bill Heald

It was just a few years ago when the Volvo Car people declared their desire to ultimately stop producing gasoline-powered cars in lieu of all-electric vehicles. They were well on their way to achieving this goal (the only gas cars were Hybrids) when they decided to delay total electrification for a time further down the road. So for 2026, we have a “mild” Hybrid small SUV in Volvo’s XC60 B5 AWD Mild Hybrid Ultima. A best of both worlds kind of SUV, this XC60 features a 2-Liter Turbocharged Inline Four gas engine that produces 247 horsepower. This in turn is supplemented by a mild Hybrid 48-volt electric motor (with 13 horsepower) that functions as a integrated starting Generator and adds regenerative braking to the drivetrain. We then have an 8-Speed Geartronic Automatic Transmission and All-Wheel-Drive, which makes the XC60 ideally suited to New England winters and ski trips. There are two drive modes that slightly alter drivetrain response depending on conditions, and they include Standard and Off-Road settings. For me, though, the car’s best attributes its size: slightly bigger than a compact and slightly smaller than a midsize. This is great for an active lifestyle because there’s plenty of head and legroom for passengers, along with excellent seat comfort and support. With the rear seats deployed you still have 17 cubic feet of cargo space, which expands to 63.3 with the 60/40 rear seats folded. Speaking of cargo area, it’s very well-finished (befitting the sport-luxury class) and is accessed via a power liftgate.



The interior is very well-executed, although it should be mentioned that in the instrument cluster/control department some time is required to find your way around as Volvo has their own way of doing things. The center touchscreen uses the portrait format and the car is heavily biased in using this screen instead of physical knobs and switches for many operations. The image quality for both this screen and the virtual instrument cluster is excellent, and the latter can also display a map directly in front of the driver for navigation assistance.



Our Ultra included the optional Air Suspension, which when in Off-Road mode raises the chassis a bit to increase ground clearance. Otherwise, ride quality is on the firm side and the tall architecture can be felt during spirited on-road cornering compared with Volvo sedans. The cabin is quite quiet at speed, though, and engine acceleration is brisk and smooth with crisp shifts from the transmission. The Pilot Assist Driver Assistance System does a good job of using both Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Keeping to deliver semi-autonomous freeway cruising. Naturally, this being a Volvo the latest physical & technological safety features fill out a very solid machine; ideal for New England’s weather moods.

The 2026 Volvo XC60 B5 AWD Mild Hybrid Ultra is EPA rated 23 city/30 Highway and has a base price of \$59,650. With options, our sticker came to \$68,770. www.volvocars.com

Solar Today - Honoring Earth Day, every day

By John Boiano

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

Well, here we are, the 30% Federal tax credit has expired 12/31/2025... or has it?



Solar Tax Credits Are Changing: What Homeowners Need to Know After 2025

If you’re considering solar for your home, an important shift in federal incentives is coming—and it could change how solar pencils out for many households.

After December 31, 2025, the 30% federal residential solar tax credit (Section 25D) will expire for homeowner-owned systems purchased with cash or a loan. This credit has been a major driver of residential solar adoption for nearly two decades.

However, the story doesn’t end there. While the residential credit is scheduled to sunset, a separate commercial tax credit (Section 48E) will remain available for third-party-owned residential solar systems, including leases and Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), through December 31, 2027.

Who Gets the Tax Credit?

When homeowners purchase a solar system outright—either with cash or a loan—they own the equipment and currently claim the tax credit themselves.

With a **lease** or **PPA**, ownership works differently:
-The solar company owns the system, not the homeowner.

-Because of that, the solar company claims the federal tax credit, not the homeowner.

At first glance, that may sound like a disadvantage. Historically, it often was.

Why Leasing Looks Different Today

For many years, leasing solar panels meant giving up thousands of dollars in tax benefits while still paying monthly fees. That made ownership the clear winner for homeowners who could afford it.

But the market has shifted. Once the residential tax credit expires at the end of 2025, purchased systems will no longer qualify for that incentive. At the same time, leased systems and PPAs will still generate tax credits—just not directly for the homeowner.

In competitive markets, reputable solar providers typically pass a portion of that tax benefit through to homeowners in the form of:

- Lower monthly lease payments
- Reduced per-kilowatt-hour rates in PPAs
- More favorable contract terms overall

In effect, homeowners may still benefit from a tax credit they can no longer claim themselves.

The Role of Interest Rates

Here’s where the math gets interesting. According to EnergySage data, the median interest rate on solar loans is currently around 7.5%. At those rates, monthly loan payments on a purchased system can be significant—especially in the early years.

In many cases:
-A solar lease payment may be lower than a loan payment for a comparable system
-Monthly cash flow can look better with a lease, even if long-term savings are typically lower

What This Means for Homeowners

Solar leasing isn’t suddenly “better” than owning—but it is becoming more competitive in a post-tax-credit world.

The commercial tax credits still available to leasing companies help narrow the cost gap between leasing and financing. When providers pass those savings through, homeowners benefit indirectly from incentives they can no longer access on their own.

For households that prefer:
-No upfront cost
-Predictable monthly payments
-No maintenance responsibility
Leases and PPAs will play a larger role in the next phase of residential solar adoption.

The Bottom Line

The federal solar tax credit hasn’t disappeared—it’s shifted.

As residential ownership incentives phase out, third-party-owned solar systems are becoming a focal point for innovation and competition. For homeowners, that means more choices, new pricing structures, and a solar marketplace that looks very different after 2025.

As always, the best option depends on your financial goals, energy usage, and long-term plans—but understanding how these incentives work is the first step toward making an informed decision.

A Word of Caution on Solar Sales Tactics

Unfortunately, I need to offer another word of caution when it comes to solar sales tactics used by some well-known companies.

You’ve likely seen them—set up inside Home Depot and Lowe’s, and sometimes even knocking on doors. At the big box stores, some representatives position themselves so closely to the aisles that shoppers assume they’re store employees. They may help you find an item on the shelf, only to suddenly ask for your home address and start a solar pitch.

A friend of mine in Manchester recently shared an experience that perfectly illustrates the problem. His home is one of the least viable properties for solar I’ve ever evaluated. Poor roof angles combined with heavy tree coverage make it a 100% no-go for meaningful solar production.

Yet after running into a solar representative at Lowe’s, he was told—confidently—that his home was an excellent candidate for solar. Curious, he played along. He asked, “Are you sure you’re looking at the right house? I’ve been told this would be a pretty bad investment.” The rep doubled down. Then tripled down. “Your house is good—trust me,” he said, offering to set an appointment, sign a contract, roll a truck, and then do a site survey to find out “for sure” if the house worked. We both had a good laugh about that one.

That conversation made me curious enough to test these tactics myself. I visited both Home Depot and Lowe’s at different locations and provided addresses for homes I know, with certainty, do not qualify for solar. In every case—four out of four—I was told the homes were viable for solar. Geeesh, come on Solar Industry.. DO BETTER!

The takeaway is simple but important: know who you’re working with. In today’s solar marketplace, some salespeople are willing to say almost anything to secure an appointment or make a sale. A reputable solar professional should evaluate your home before making promises—not after paperwork is signed.

As always, an informed homeowner is an empowered homeowner.

**** Next month I will covering the new Franklin Battery System that’s taking over the industry with many benefits over some of the more popular names!**

A Personal Promise — and a New Service

I’ve dedicated myself to helping homeowners switch to solar while protecting their best interests. I’ve seen too many people misled by half-truths, hidden fees, or rushed decisions.

That’s why I’m now offering a consulting service:

For a small fee, I will review any quote you’ve received and break down the fine print for you. I’ll verify what’s true, what’s misleading, and whether it’s a deal worth committing to.

Together, we can make sure your solar investment is not only smart, but financially strategic for you!

If you or someone you know wants to explore solar or just wants a no-pressure consultation, I’d love to help. Let’s bring clarity (and honesty) to this industry.

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

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

John Boiano
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Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp News

Submitted by Elaine Nelson

Summer may seem far away but on January 1 our 2026 summer camp information will be available on our website and you can complete registration forms. Start the new year off right and get your summer plans organized early. Take advantage of our early bird discounts if you register by January 31.




January 11, 2026 - Visit the Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp Open House from 1 – 3 PM at 326 Taft Pond Road, Pomfret, CT. 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 24, 2026 – Sno-Ball – Join us from 5 – 8 PM for a fun family Dinner Dance. There will be a sit down baked chicken and mac and cheese dinner prepared by our amazing camp cook and We-Lik-It Ice Cream Bar for dessert. We will have a DJ, dancing for all ages, door prizes, raffles, family pictures and a great night out to beat the winter doldrums. All proceeds benefit the Jim Logee Campership Fund. Adults \$25, Kids 10 and under \$15. Buy tickets by January 20th by calling the camp at 860-974-3379. Snow date is January 31st.

February 21, 2026 - Camper Game Day from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm for children ages 6-12. Games, food and fun for the kids during the holiday vacation week from school. Lunch and snacks included and outdoor gear required as some time will be spent outside. Admission is \$30/child, everyone welcome. Pre-registration requested by February 13. Call 860-974-1122 to register or email: campdirector@4hcampct.org

February 28, 2026 - Visit the Windham-Tolland 4-H Camp Open House from 1 – 3 PM at 326 Taft Pond Road, Pomfret, CT. Meet the director & other camp staff, take a camp tour and have a snack. Brochure and registration materials available at the open house or on the website. www.4hcampct.org

He’s 61”,
but he still
looks up
to me.

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No 14

January and February — 2026

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News, Articles, and Opinions Impacting Connecticut and Our Planet

Printed on December 16th 2025



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Old Rule Comes Back to Native Trout

The brook trout, Connecticut's only native trout, will soon have a minimum harvest size for the first time in more than 70 years. DEEP is adding new protections after monitoring showed the population is declining. Because brook trout need cold water to survive, they are especially vulnerable to climate change. DEEP is designating 22 inland waterways, or sections of them, as Class 1 Wild Trout Management Areas.



BROOK TROUT
(adult male)

Source:
Hartford Courant (2025, December). *Fish species native to CT getting statewide protections for first time since 1953*

CIRCA Looking to Improve Flood Information

Soon, homebuyers in Connecticut may receive more detailed flood information, including flood-risk data and insurance options. The change comes after the heavy flooding last August. The Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) is working to help communities prepare for climate impacts.

In November, CIRCA held an event at Avery Point on Long Island Sound to discuss building a more resilient Connecticut and preparing future generations for climate challenges. A key issue is flooding in low-lying areas. CIRCA Executive Director Jim O'Donnell said the team is exploring the use of flood sensors to monitor rising water levels.

Source:
NBC Connecticut (2025, December). *CIRCA Climate Summit focuses on resilient Connecticut*

International Polar Bear Day

International Polar Bear Day, observed each year on February 27, raises awareness about polar bear conservation, with a focus on climate change and sea ice loss during the critical denning season when mothers and cubs emerge. Organized by Polar Bears International, the day focuses on education, fundraising, and actions to protect polar bears, including social media campaigns, research support, and community events. Polar bears are my favorite animals, so I will definitely be celebrating.

New Sound Money

Nearly \$12 million in grants were awarded across the region. The funding comes from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, a partnership led by the EPA, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and state and federal agencies. In Connecticut, recipients received 12 grants totaling \$3.6 million. With matching funds and shared grants from other states, those projects grew to about \$7 million, supporting stormwater reduction, nitrogen pollution control, marine debris removal, and coastal habitat restoration.

Long Island Sound is the second-largest estuary on the East Coast, stretching over 1,200 square miles between New York and Connecticut. Its watershed, including the Connecticut River, extends into Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire.

The funding supports dozens of projects, including wetland protection, habitat buffers, river-corridor restoration, and community outreach to protect water quality and marine ecosystems in Long Island Sound, benefiting wildlife and coastal communities. The grants to restore and protect Long Island Sound and its watershed signal a significant push in early 2026 to advance coastal resilience and benefit wildlife, water quality, and coastal communities.

The Sound supports millions of people through recreation and economic activity while also

UConn 8th Most Sustainable University in the World

For five years in a row, UConn has been ranked among the world's top 10 most sustainable universities by UI GreenMetric. The ranking evaluates 1,745 colleges and universities in 105 countries based on sustainability performance. In 2025, UConn placed eighth, up from 10th in 2024. Only two U.S. universities ranked in the top 10: UConn and the University of California, Davis.

providing habitat for more than 1,200 invertebrate species, about 170 fish species, and dozens of migratory bird species.

Thanks to the Long Island Sound Futures Fund grants, these projects will receive support:

- The projects will prevent an estimated 618,934 gallons of stormwater and 2,996 pounds of nitrogen pollution from entering Long Island Sound.
- Plans also include restoring 70 acres of coastal habitat.
- They will remove about 161,250 pounds of marine debris.
- More than 300,000 people will be engaged through programs that promote stewardship of the Sound.
- Projects will restore fish passage for brook trout and migratory species such as alewives, blueback herring, shad, and eel.
- The efforts will conserve and improve habitat for shorebirds, songbirds, diamondback terrapins, native pollinators, and other wildlife.
- New oyster restoration initiatives will also be launched.

Source:
CT Mirror (2025, December). *Nearly \$12M in grants awarded for cleanup, restoration of Long Island Sound*

Let Our Fish Swim (Hopefully)

The Connecticut Brown-field Land Bank bought the Kinneytown Dam and nearby land from a Washington State company for \$1. This is a key step in what officials expect will be a \$60 million project to remove the dam and restore the river.

For more than a century, migrating fish in the Naugatuck River have been blocked just 16 miles inland by the Kinneytown Dam in Ansonia. Upstream, the river runs freely for 30 miles from Thomaston, fed by many tributaries that support spawning shad, eels, lampreys, and Atlantic salmon. Attempts to help fish pass, including a 1990s fish ladder, have mostly failed. The dam remains a significant barrier in

the Naugatuck watershed. Local advocates say the dam prevents it from functioning as an actual river and instead makes it behave more like a landlocked lake.

Built in 1844 to power Anson Phelps' mills and Ansonia Copper & Brass, the dam has been idle since its closure in 2013. For years, the Naugatuck River Revival Group has pushed for its removal. The group says removal is planned to begin in 2027, allowing the river to flow more freely toward the ocean. They expect the project to improve fish passage, restore river habitat, and reduce flood risk by returning the river to a more natural course.

Source:
CT Mirror (2025, November). *Kinneytown Dam, a major impediment to fish, could soon be removed*

Federal Judge Overturns Order Blocking Virtually All Wind Energy Development

A federal judge in early December overturned Trump's executive order blocking wind energy projects, ruling that the broad halt on wind leasing on federal lands and waters was unlawful. Also calling it: "arbitrary and capricious".

The decision follows a separate court fight close to home over Revolution Wind, a 704-megawatt offshore wind project being

developed from the State Pier in New London, Connecticut. The Trump administration ordered construction on the project to stop in August, even though it was already about 80% complete.



Source:
CT Mirror (2025, December). *Federal judge throws out Trump order blocking wind energy development*

Natural Heat is Coming

Heat is on everyone's mind as New England heads into the New Year. In late November, five New England states launched a \$450 million initiative to help more households switch to energy-efficient, low-emission heat pumps instead of fossil-fuel heating.

Through the New England Heat Pump Accelerator, Connecticut and its neighboring states plan to expand clean heating and cooling systems to hundreds of thousands of homes, reducing emissions and lowering energy costs. Connecticut DEEP is a part of the effort with Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. The program will speed the adop-

tion of cold-climate air-source heat pumps, ground-source heat pumps, and heat pump water heaters in both single-family and multifamily buildings.

The Accelerator begins in late 2025 or early 2026. Key milestones in 2026 include finalizing incentives in early 2026, offering discounted heat pump products by February, launching workforce training in April, and having all incentives, training programs, and the regional resource hub fully operational by spring. The effort is expected to drive significant growth in heat pump use across New England.

Source:
Canary Media (2025, November). *New England kicks off \$450M plan to supercharge heat pump adoption*

Winter on the River

Winter along the Connecticut River offers excellent wildlife viewing, especially for bald eagles. RiverQuest Winter Wildlife Eagle Cruises are seasonal boat tours on the lower Connecticut River that focus on winter wildlife, especially bald eagles. Departing from Essex, the cruises run during colder months when eagles gather along open water to fish. These typically run through late winter (February/March). Rivergoers can also do their own birdwatching, take scenic drives along the Byway, or stay at riverside inns, but should be prepared for cold, snowy conditions and bring warm gear. In Wethersfield, by the river, Great Meadows Conservation Trust hosts Brisk Winter Walks (January – February). Every weekend in January and February (when scheduled), this group leads brisk walks on its properties. These are open, outdoor, and relatively easy winter hikes, great for exploring woods and wetlands in winter conditions. Another boat on the river is the U.S. Coast Guard, which breaks ice to keep the river open. The USCG Cutter Bollard has handled icebreaking on the Connecticut River since the 1950s, working the stretch from Long Island Sound up to Hartford.

The river still lives. Beavers remain active in their lodges, using underwater entrances to reach food stores. River otters are more visible and playful in winter, sliding on snowbanks, hunting fish, and traveling along the ice edges. White-tailed deer often come to the riverbanks where vegetation is easier to reach. Red foxes and gray foxes hunt small mammals that tunnel under the snow along the river’s edge.

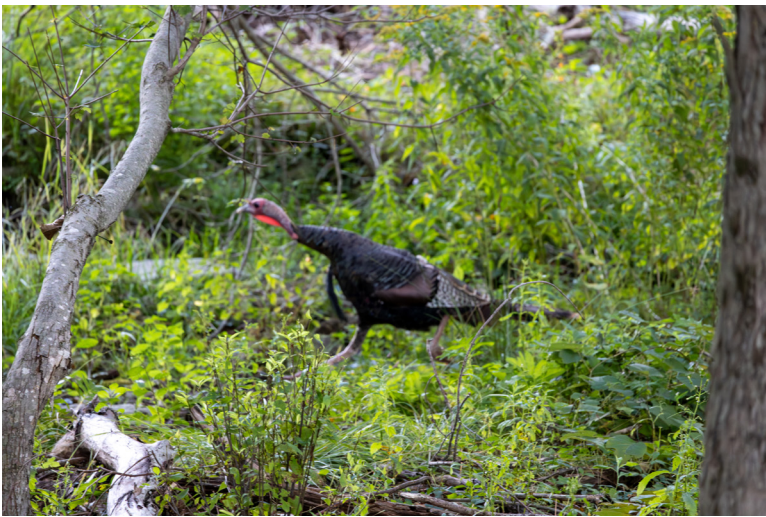


Photo submitted by a reader
Submit yours to: the.planet.press.contact@gmail.com

Our Groundhogs

Connecticut observes Groundhog Day through a few public local events. The most traditional is Chuckles the Groundhog, who lives at the Lutz Children’s Museum in Manchester and is known for his annual Groundhog Day predictions. In Eastford, residents can attend Duck Day, featuring Scramble the Duck, at 7:30 a.m. on February 2nd. Other farms and nature centers around the state occasionally hold Groundhog Day programs using resident animals, often announced locally in late January and open to the public.



New year, No New England Coal

New England says goodbye to coal as Merrimack Station shuts down, the region’s last coal-fired power plant. Merrimack Station in Bow, New Hampshire, ended operations in September, years ahead of schedule, marking the region’s final exit from coal power. The plant had supplied electricity since the 1960s.

Declining economics and environmental pressures made continued operation impractical. The site may be redeveloped with solar power and battery storage. Owner Granite Shore Power officially shut the plant on September 12th. A 2024 settlement with environmental groups and the

EPA required closure by 2028. The early shutdown highlights coal’s loss of economic viability in New England.

Merrimack Station’s 438-mega-watt output has dropped sharply over the past two decades. After running at 70 to 80 percent capacity in the early 2000s, the plant has operated at less than 8 percent over the past six years, mainly during peak demand. Because older coal plants take a long time to start up, they have been replaced by faster, more flexible natural gas “peaker” plants that can respond quickly to demand.

Source: Maine Morning Star (2025, October). New England says goodbye to coal as Merrimack Station powers down

Antler Shedding

If you are looking for shed deer antlers, for whatever reason, late winter through early spring, roughly February to April, is the best time to search. This window comes after snow begins to melt but before new vegetation obscures the ground. Antlers are easier to spot after rain or snowfall, when contrast improves. Focus on areas where bucks commonly gather, including bedding and feeding sites, south-facing slopes, thick cover, and locations near reliable food sources.

Mine to Carry (Part II)

By Shomriel Sherman

I’ve brought a bag with me this time.

When I get to the bottom of the road it’s about halfway full. I cross the street, go and sit by the creek for a spell. We’ve had rain recently, and the waters are babbling as they move through. I sit and gaze until the sound of traffic recedes into background noise. The sun peaks out, shining off the water, its warmth and brightness magnified. I close my eyes and take it into my body until my mind quiets. It is, after all, Shabbat, and the intention is to be here, now. The endless to-do list will wait until tomorrow, and I will be better equipped to handle it if I don’t spend my day of rest obsessing. Even machines, which I am not, need downtime. Unplug, reset.

When the sun starts to dip low in the sky, I pick up the bag and ready myself for the walk up the other side of the street. This is the hard part - the seriously neglected, badly trashed side, the already half-full bag, the no-joke steep hill. *Help me remember the ceremony of this, the chance to become more intimate with Your body. Help me not be resentful, judgmental, self-righteous.*

My elevated consciousness lasts somewhere until my arms start aching and the bag starts breaking. There is still so much left, but I am really out of room in this non-heavy-duty, slightly scented, thin white plastic bag.

One of my learnings is when to call it. Anxiety, which so often takes the form of the hulking to-do list, tells me that I need to fully do a thing so I can cross it off and move on to what’s next. That with enough focus, commitment, and self-discipline, eventually I will achieve the completion of my list. That only then will I deserve to exhale, relax, and just be. But there will always be more trash; of this I am certain.

Midway up the hill, after I’ve determined that I need to tie up this bag and cease considering

whether I can fit any last discards into it, a massive white SUV passes by, then turns down a driveway not far in front of me. After a beat it reverses up the driveway and back down the road. A guy gets out and trots toward me, slightly wild-eyed. Probably about my age, give or take. He reminds me of my friend C.

“Those people down at the end of the road are disgusting,” he says, “dumping all their shit like that.”

“Well, this is probably a combination of all of us, right?” I respond.

He shrugs. “It’s not my trash. But you’re collecting it. Thank you. We’ll take it and throw it away in our barrel so you don’t have to walk up the hill with it. We appreciate you.” He holds his hand out for the bag, then notices the part of a fender I’m carrying in my other hand and reaches out for this too.

“Thanks. I appreciate this,” I say. He throws the stuff in the back, then motors forward and turns down their driveway once more.

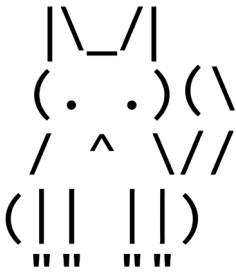
And just like that, my heavy load is gone. And with it, my heavy load of self-pity, of feeling alone in this endeavor. I continue up the road, arms swinging, my focus no longer at my feet. My peripheral vision expands. There is a lilac door on a grey-green colonial, the contrast stunning. Beautiful hordes of mushrooms in so many sizes and shades breaking down and feasting on a rotting stump. A young child laughing, a burbling rising from deep in her belly and bubbling joyfully out her throat.

Here, now. I breathe it in and exhale fully. Shabbat shalom.

Flower of the Month January Camellias



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 -
THE CAT

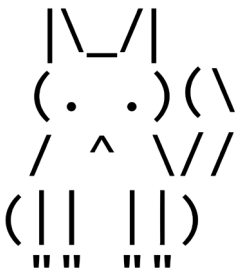
Ferdinand’s Flower Patch



Flower of the Month February Hardy Cyclamen



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.



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Ferdinand’s Flower Patch



Photography and poetry from Dennis Flaherty



Storm clouds between buildings at Center Village Ellington, CT

Amelia Earhart’s Bones

The plane low on fuel stutters and barks
And circles the vacant expanse
The engine emitting groans and sparks
In a sickening spiral dance
Her pale co-pilot scans the vast horizon
Frantically studies the map
Wonders what in the world went wrong
While he was taking a nap

Relying now on a wing and a prayer
To see them through the crash
On gages & needles they both stare
Dark smoke pouring out of the dash
A clump of palm trees down below
On a spit of sand so remote
No sailor would ever think to go
No native ever row a boat

Shattered glass and missing door
They’re upside down and waist-deep
Fifty feet from the sparkling shore
As out of the wreckage they creep
They make it to the barren isle
Then collapse on the golden sand
Give each other a speechless smile
Lay on their backs hand in hand
History bright with queens and kings
Swapping crowns and thrones
While faded fame and fallen wings
Bless Amelia Earhart’s bones



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