

# The Montague Reporter

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also serving Irving, Gill, Leverett and Wendell

\$1

EDITOR@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

FEBRUARY 11, 2021

ERVING SELECTBOARD

## Erving Bridge Not Suitable For Two-Way Traffic: State

By KATIE NOLAN

Last week, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) District 2 engineer told Erving officials informally that a bridge in Erving Center—the Church Street bridge at the North Street intersection over Keyup Brook—is in poor condition, and must either be closed or made one-lane only. Once MassDOT sends a formal letter to Erving about the bridge, the town will have two weeks to take action.

At Monday's selectboard meeting, chair Jacob Smith said that installing traffic lights and making the bridge bi-directional, with traffic taking turns crossing it, "has probably the least impact to Route 2 traffic." He also suggested the town could make North Street one-way northbound to Church Street and Church Street southbound only, or vice versa.

Selectboard member William Bembury said of the suggestions, "All of them have problems.... The best, for me, is shut the bridge down and don't allow any traffic."

Bembury, Jacob Smith, and town administrator Bryan Smith said they would meet with highway superintendent Glenn McCrory later this week, weather depending, to lay out the roadway with traffic cones in order to get a better understanding of what a one-lane bridge would look like. Jacob Smith said that the fire department would join them with a

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## No Evictions Yet As Aid, Moratorium Stretch Out

By SARAH ROBERTSON

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – On Thursday, February 4 the Franklin County sheriff's Opioid Task Force held a public Zoom meeting to provide an update on housing issues in Franklin County and the North Quabbin region. The meeting focused on housing assistance programs and rent relief from the local to federal level. So far, no Franklin County residents have been evicted, but a federal moratorium protecting many tenants is due to expire at the end of March.

According to data shared by Pamela Schwartz of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, at least 449 final eviction notices had been issued across the state during the pandemic as of last week, 353 of which were for non-payment of rent.

"This is a pretty searing number when you think about what we're

see **HOUSING** page A5

DISCOVERIES

## Through a Glass, Lightly



Terri Cappucci works on a light table as she cleans 4" by 5" glass plate negatives and prepares them for preservation.

LAURA WHITE PHOTO

By TRISH CRAPO

**TURNERS FALLS** – This summer, Turners Falls photographer Terri Cappucci made a rare foray out into the world. Though the pandemic has kept her, like the rest of us, close to home, she was curious to follow up on a tip that a friend-of-a-friend had several boxes of old glass negatives to give away.

It may seem like happenstance that Cappucci ended up with over 4,000 glass negatives dating from the 1800s and early 1900s, an intriguing collection of portraits and landscapes that offer a glimpse into another time. After all, that friend-of-a-friend had picked them up from yet another friend, who had purchased them at auction.

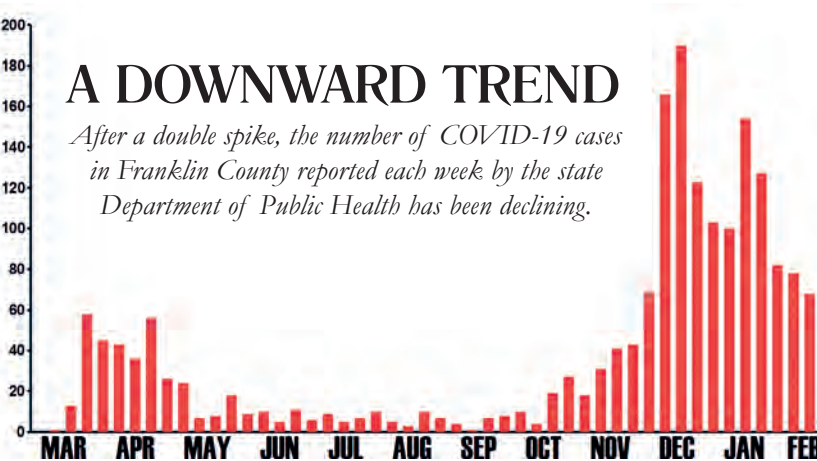
Yet Cappucci, a member of the American Photography Archive Group, had long been steeped in archival methods. After losing most of the prints and film negatives of what she considered her most important work, a 25-year documentary project on elections and voting in South Africa, to a flood, Cappucci had become

obsessed with archiving photographs. She took workshops through the Northeast Document Conservation Center and the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York, and reached out to experts around the world.

Her goal, at first, was to restore and preserve what she could of her own lost work – she's been photographing some of the negatives that weren't too damaged with a macro lens – and to prevent any losses of future work. Along the way, Cappucci realized that the skills she was acquiring could be of use to others and could even generate a little income. She has since started a small business offering photo preservation and digital archiving services.

Cappucci got her start as a photographer at the *Greenfield Recorder*, when photographers still developed their own film and made prints in the darkroom. Her love for darkroom methods and practices extended long beyond their usefulness in journalistic or commercial photography. Out of necessity, she switched to digital

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MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

## Amid Pandemic, Corporate America Responds to Town's Phone Pole Angst

By JEFF SINGLETON

**TURNERS FALLS** – Who says you can't beat "Corporate America?"

The Montague selectboard, which represents a small town of approximately 8,400 people, has stood up the giant electric company Eversource and won. And they did it by refusing to approve the construction of two telephone poles on an obscure town street that overlooks the village of Turners Falls.

This was a personal victory for selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz, whose persistent demands that the electric company remove the many redundant and unsightly poles may have been viewed by some locals as a bit of an obsession. But the confrontation came to a head during a pole location hearing on January 25, when the selectboard refused to approve new poles on either Unity Street or Broadview Heights – it

see **MONTAGUE** page A7

GILL-MONTAGUE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Schools Scramble to Hire Staff

By MIKE JACKSON

**GILL-MONTAGUE** – With coronavirus cases continuing to decline in Franklin County, a long-awaited air filtration report in hand, and a school vacation week left to prepare, the Gill-Montague school district plans to welcome students back into the buildings for optional "hybrid" learning, two days a week, starting February 22. Returning students will be split into separate cohorts for masked and socially distanced instruction, with their

remote counterparts logging in via display screens.

"Parents have articulated concerns to us about the emotional health of their children being challenged during this pandemic," superintendent Brian Beck told the regional school committee Tuesday evening. "Assessment of students' social-emotional considerations right now is probably the most important thing that we can do, in terms of immediately assessing learning loss as we head into the hybrid model."

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## Storm Damage Prompts Further Dingle Clearance



ANDREW FRENKEL PHOTO

More trees, it is reasoned, could fall upon the Bridge of Names.

By JEFF SINGLETON

**LAKE PLEASANT** – The Turners Falls Water District, which owns the land on which Lake Pleasant's Bridge of Names sits, is developing a plan to cut trees which may threaten the bridge in the future. It also hopes to implement a limited forest management plan on the rest of its property in and around the "dingle," a steep valley created by Pond Brook, which empties the lake.

A dingle is purportedly an Irish term for a small wooded valley, as well as vulgar slang, though the name used frequently by village residents refers to the former.

The Bridge, a third of which was destroyed by a falling tree during a storm last October, connects the eastern and western sections of the village. Its own name is derived

from the wooden pickets along the length of the structure, whose purchases were used originally to fund construction and since then its maintenance.

This most recent version of the bridge, which dates to the late nineteenth century when Lake Pleasant was founded as a Spiritualist summer encampment, was built in the mid-1970s. Its ownership is not well documented. A fundraising campaign for its reconstruction initiated by a group called the Lake Pleasant Village Association (LPVA), has been underway for the past three months, with an initial target of \$50,000.

Mike Brown, the superintendent of the water district, discussed the proposed tree cutting project on site last Sunday morning and then

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AT LARGE

## A Shady Plan for Sunny Farmland?

By CHIP AINSWORTH

**NORTHFIELD** – Nathan L'Etoile is urging Northfield residents to watch the February 18 planning board meeting. That's a good idea. He's got a lot of explaining to do. Gene and Bonnie L'Etoile and young Nathan have proposed a 75-acre industrial solar development on their farmland off Pine Meadow Road, in the heart of the agricultural district between the railroad tracks and the Connecticut River.

Nathan needs to explain to the public that he isn't just an average farmer who was approached by a solar company. He is the New England Regional Director of the American Farmland Trust (AFT), a non-profit conservation organization headquartered in DC with regional offices throughout the country including Northampton.

The AFT's annual report lists \$32 million in net assets, including \$4.2 million in grant money and \$6.75 million in contributions. Its 17-page online brochure shows photos of tractors, cows, barns, rows of vegetables, and fields of hay being worked by different generations of farmers.

What, no solar fields? One photo and that's it, accompanied by the headline "Promoting Smart Solar Siting." The agency's PR Department probably had a tough time explaining this one. "We can't be placing solar devices on the farmland we need to grow food," it said. "State policies will guide [solar fields] onto land where it has the least impact on agriculture and the environment."

That doesn't jive with the L'Etoiles' intention of putting their solar arrays over rich, bountiful soil

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cameras for her professional work, which has included freelancing for the *Boston Globe* and *New York Times*. But for her personal, artistic projects, Cappucci increasingly turned to even older methods.

"I make glass plates and tintypes using the same processes and methods that these plates were made under," Cappucci says.

On her website, you can watch her develop wet plate collodion tintypes, make gumoil prints, and create *giclée* and Polaroid film transfers. So of course Cappucci was the right person to end up with the glass negatives. They were practically calling her name.

**A Treasure Trove**

"The first thing that happens when you come upon something like this, is you get really excited," Cappucci said. "But I know it could become an absolute mess if I don't do it right."

So, Cappucci set about the detail-oriented task of cleaning the negatives, and then scanning and digitally archiving each one, including carefully titling them and creating keywords so each digital version can be easily searched for and found.

Despite the amount of work the glass negatives present, Cappucci describes them as a "treasure trove." She is constantly coming across images that surprise and delight her.

"I just scanned an image, dated 1899, of a woman holding a lamb in her arms," Cappucci said. "And she's got something on her head. I can't really tell what it is."

The woman's headwear is curious, perhaps even humorous, but what Cappucci sees, above all, is "a life."

"I feel like I fell into a time warp when I look at these. I can actually imagine this. I've always, always been fascinated by anything from the past. I just want to close my eyes and walk into them and have a conversation," she said.

Speaking again of the woman holding the lamb, Cappucci asked, "What kind of accent would she have? Would she have a deep voice? I could probably write a book and create characters for all of these people."

The glass negatives are clearly from western Massachusetts, Cappucci says. Some are labeled Bernardston, Northfield, or Buckland, for instance. Others, unlabeled, show familiar farm settings and scenes.

They represent the efforts of



*This boy on a tricycle is among the 4,000 images on glass negatives that Terri Cappucci was given this summer.*

multiple photographers. Some exhibit the compositional and technical skills of professionals, while others are of lower quality, perhaps the efforts of amateur hobbyists still teaching themselves the craft. There's a whole box of post-mortem photos, in which a deceased person has been propped up in a group

portrait with his or her loved ones, which Cappucci said was common practice at the time.

"That's the thing, you learn so much about how people did things," Cappucci said. "I like people's lives in photos. I just love it."

The day I spoke with Cappucci, she had just hit the halfway mark in her task — that means she'd handled 2,000 glass negatives, just as a reminder!

"I have cuts all over my fingers," Cappucci said. "I have to wear gloves."

She said she stopped using band-aids when she got cuts and instead, uses electrical tape, "so they can't cut me again."

She uses distilled water and special round cotton pads to clean the glass, wearing rubber gloves so as not to transfer any oils to the surface. After the negatives are clean and dry, she uses a natural, very soft brush, like a makeup brush, to remove any dust. Each negative must then be put into a special archival envelope and stored standing vertically in a box, to minimize future breakage. The supplies are not cheap: fifty 4- by 5-inch archival envelopes cost about \$40, Cappucci said. And that's just one small part of what's needed.

Thus, Cappucci has started a GoFundMe page to help defer the costs of restoring the collection, which she's recently titled "Somebody Photographed This." So far she's reached \$1,190 of her modest \$2,000 goal.

Once all of the negatives have been dealt with, she may pay to store them at an archive house while she considers what to do next. Perhaps a museum might want them at some point.

"I'm not sure what the end result will be," Cappucci said, "where they will go."

In the meantime, she'll continue her labor of love, restoring the glass negatives in between paying jobs. And she'll continue to pursue her own photography in a way she says has been freed to come from a "deeper, more personal place," now that she has another way to make money.

"I've gone back to making handmade prints," she said. "That's what I'm most passionate about."

Her dream would be to start a 501(c)3 non-profit photography center to teach young people about the history of photography, and to get them excited about darkroom processes.

"I'm kind of a photo nerd," Cappucci said. "I was just born with this passion for it. I've always had a camera in my hands. I think people thought I would outgrow it and I never did."

To view the collection of images from glass negatives, visit Cappucci's website, terricappucci.com, look for the heading *Photographic Preservation*, and then choose *Glass Plate Collection*.

She also shares them on her Facebook page.



*This image, created from a scan of glass negative dated 1899, shows a woman with a lamb. Cappucci has not done any digital restoration on the image, but will in the future.*

**GMRSD** from page A1

The district is still scrambling to staff the schools. Just over a week before the planned return to hybrid, Beck explained, ten positions suddenly opened up.

However, he reported, the delay from an announced February 8 start prompted a number of parents to offer their own labor. "I want to thank the parents who have stepped up and either offered themselves as substitutes, or said they're interested in taking on some of these positions to help us get into school," he said.

The district has open postings for two facilities staff, a certified nurse's aide, a long-term special education substitute teacher, and two full-time and three long-term substitute paraprofessional positions. Beck told the *Reporter* that a new food services director has been hired, but no public announcement has been made. The administration sent a recruitment email out to families on Wednesday, encouraging job seekers to log in via *schoolspring.com*.

"There's a strong likelihood people are going to have to quarantine from time to time," Beck told the school committee. "If we're right

on the edge of being staffed up, we'll use up our substitutes very quickly."

**On the Horizon**

The committee heard an update on the FY'22 budget from business manager Joanne Blier. Though an estimated 31,000 students have withdrawn from public schools statewide during the pandemic, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is basing next year's Chapter 70 aid on this year's count.

Gill-Montague's foundation enrollment has dropped from 1,072 to 974 this year, so that revenue line is only projected to rise by \$80,538, as compared with \$607,875 during the previous cycle. "Unless the enrollment comes back up, we will not see additional Chapter 70 in future years, either," Blier warned.

The administration is working to close the budget gap, which it has narrowed to \$66,309.

It will be bridged in part using \$196,000 in this year's Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, which Blier said can be rolled over and used to hire staff to support students' learning recovery and

emotional needs: an adjustment counselor, a speech language pathologist, and first-grade paraprofessionals. The district plans to apply for another round of ESSER funding this spring, to the tune of \$860,000.

Budget presentations to the Gill and Montague finance committees are scheduled for March 3. As it stands, the district expects to assess Gill \$1,710,175, a decline of 4.2% from the current year, and Montague \$10,765,993, an increase of 2.1%.

**Supplemental Supports**

Athletic director Adam Graves came before the committee to report on the district's Athletic Leadership Council, and request that it be granted an official student activities fund.

While the Council has already run food and clothing drives through its Helping Hands program, Graves said that it has grown into "more of service-type community" during the pandemic. The group keeps a resource closet, and any requests for aid are kept confidential by three staff members. This year it provided Christmas baskets to 21 local families.

The committee approved the request.

Graves also reported on two donations recently received by the athletics program, including one for \$2,000 from the Montague Elks Board. "They're always there to help support our school, and our students, when we need it," he said.

**Testing and Vaccination**

The district has not heard back on its application to help pilot "pool-testing" for the virus. Beck explained to the school committee that the schools will have rapid BINAX test kits on hand, but they are intended for staff or students who begin to exhibit symptoms of the virus while at school. "I don't want parents to be confused," he said, "to think that they could send their kids to school to get the rapid test."

Beck also reported that he and 37 other members of the Connecticut Valley Superintendents' Round Table had recently signed a letter urging Governor Baker to allow teachers and other educators to be considered as priority candidates for the COVID-19 vaccine.



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