



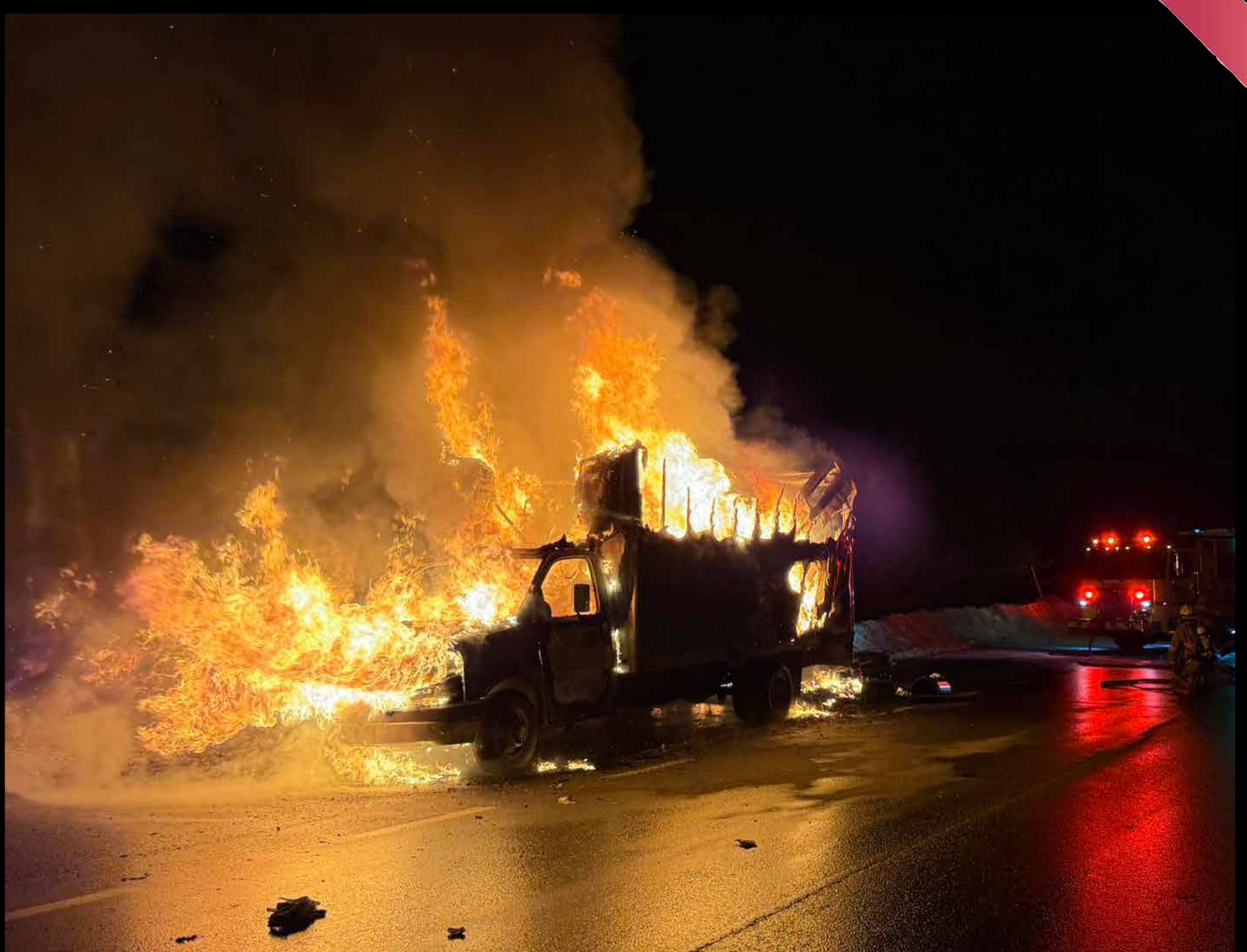
# The Littleton Weekly Record

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026

LOCAL

Alleged Motorcycle  
Gang Member Again  
Denied Bail

FREE



## Truck Ignites On I-93 In Franconia

- Police Release More Details in Gay Slur Spray Paint Case
- Casella Fined \$2M In N.H.'s Largest-Ever Penalty For Landfill Violations
- With Lease Of Town Land, Snowmobile Club Outlines Plans



SUPERIOR COURT

# Alleged Motorcycle Gang Member Again Denied Bail

BY PAUL HAYES  
Staff Writer

LANCASTER — An alleged motorcycle gang member accused of stabbing another patron during a barroom fight in Whitefield was denied bail Monday and ordered held in preventive detention.

During a probable cause hearing, Judge Janet H. Subers ruled that 37-year-old Derek Bentley of Lisbon will be held without bail on a Class A first-degree assault charge with a penalty enhancement for allegedly acting as a gang member, citing public safety concerns.

Subers cited the severity of the alleged assault and Bent-

ley's criminal history, which reportedly includes charges for larceny, theft of firearms, assault and battery on a police officer, and multiple motor vehicle offenses. Bentley is also wanted in connection with the alleged assault of a patron and the owner of The DiSpencery bar in St. Johnsbury last year.

"Given the nature of the charges and Mr. Bentley's identified criminal history, bail will remain as preventive detention, no bail, and the case is bound over to Coos County Superior Court," Subers said.

Testifying for the state, Whitefield Police Officer Benjamin Lalonde said investigators determined Bentley stabbed Phillip Caron during a barroom brawl at Sunny & Jil-



Derek Bentley.

lian's Pub on Dec. 5. Lalonde said security footage showed the attack and Bentley leaving the bar through a kitchen door, crossing into the Dunkin' parking lot and driving away in a truck later identified as his.

Prosecutors allege Bentley committed the stabbing as a member of the Outlaws Motorcycle Club, which the U.S.

Department of Justice has designated as a criminal organization. Whitefield Police prosecutor Wendy Roberts said Bentley is affiliated with the Northern Misfitz Motorcycle Club, which she described as an Outlaws affiliate, and that other members of the Outlaws and Misfitz were present during the Dec. 5 incident.

"We're talking about a person who's involved with one of the four most dangerous motorcycle gangs in the country, which is the Outlaws," Roberts said, adding that the attack "was not provoked."

Bentley's attorney, Len Harden, disputed the state's claims. Harden said no witnesses reported seeing Bentley holding a knife or stabbing the

victim, argued the video evidence was inconclusive and suggested the puncture wound could have occurred accidentally during fights that took place immediately before and after the alleged stabbing.

Harden also challenged the assertion that Bentley is an Outlaws member, noting Bentley was wearing an Outlaws sweatshirt rather than an official leather club vest.

"My client didn't have a leather cut [sleeveless vest]. The leather cut means that somebody's a full member of the motorcycle club," Harden said.

Arguing for bail, Harden described Bentley as a responsible community member who works for New England Wire Technologies and recently purchased a home with his fiancée and her two children, ages 14 and 16. Harden suggested Bentley may have been wearing the sweatshirt because the Misfitz and Outlaws had hosted a holiday Christmas tree distribution earlier that day. He also questioned whether the Outlaws constitute a criminal enterprise, citing the group's charitable activities.

When Harden asked Lalonde whether he had experience determining motorcycle club membership, Lalonde said it was his first such investigation but added that New Hampshire State Police provided intelligence linking Bentley to the Outlaws. Roberts said that information led law enforcement to treat Bentley as an Outlaws member when planning his arrest.

Roberts said that "because of his involvement in a motorcycle gang," authorities conducted a dangerousness assessment and ultimately carried out Bentley's arrest with a SWAT team, assisted by Lisbon, Littleton and Whitefield police.

According to the U.S. De-

partment of Justice, outlaw motorcycle gangs represent New Hampshire's most significant organized gang threat. The agency said a 1999 truce with the Hells Angels allowed the Outlaws to establish a chapter in the state without retaliation.

"The rivalry that exists between the Hells Angels and the Outlaws has caused recent violent flare-ups throughout the state. This violence threatens to end the truce between the Hells Angels and the Outlaws, who often compete for control over lucrative drug markets," the Justice Department said.

Founded in 1935 outside Chicago, the Outlaws Motorcycle Club later expanded internationally and now has more than 440 chapters in 43 countries, including chapters in North Raymond, New Hampshire, and Cornwall, Vermont. The group denies being an organized crime syndicate, stating on its website, "The Outlaws Motorcycle Club is not a criminal organization. It is a motorcycle club."

Law enforcement agencies, however, consider the Outlaws one of the "Big Four" outlaw motorcycle gangs — along with the Hells Angels, Pagans and Bandidos — that authorities say use their clubs as conduits for criminal enterprises. In 2010, Outlaws national president Jack Rosga was sentenced to 20 years in prison for racketeering and conspiracy to commit violence.

Regionally, Kristofer Haken, an alleged member of the Outlaws' New Hampshire chapter, was sentenced to 7½ years in prison for a 2010 shooting in Manchester and later arrested in connection with a 2024 murder in Portland, Maine. Police said both incidents stemmed from brawls between rival motorcycle gangs.

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## ON THE

Franconia Fire Crews responded to a box truck fire on I-93 South late Sunday night. No injuries were reported. (Courtesy Photo/Franconia Fire Department)



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## OBITUARIES

## DOROTHY WHITTAKER

Dorothy Alden Whittaker of Brunswick, Vt., died on Dec. 10, 2025, at the Weeks Medical Center, Lancaster, N.H., following a brief illness.

Dorothy was born in Brockton, Massachusetts, on July 3, 1934, to Gladys (Maertens) Alden and Andrew Julian Alden. She was part of a large extended family centered in Aucoot Cove on Buzzards Bay in Mattapoisett, Mass., where she established her lifelong loves of gardening, collecting rocks and arrowheads, watching birds, baking, listening to opera on the radio while doing Saturday chores, and being around children. She regularly recounted being a very willing enlistee in her father and uncle's "Victory Gardens" during the Second World War, learning to bake from her German emigre grandmother, and learning to identify birds and flowers from her "Down-Maine" grandmother.

Dorothy graduated from Fairhaven High School — where she was a star pitcher on her softball team — in 1952. She went on to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and graduated in 1956 with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a minor concentration in Olericulture (commercial vegetable agriculture). Also in May 1956, she married Brendan J. Whittaker, a Forestry student whom she had met in their Agronomy class when they were assigned to be lab partners. The two are also acknowledged in *The Book of the American Woodcock* by U. Mass professor William G. Sheldon, as being among the students who devoted spring evenings to gathering field data outdoors by listening carefully for the birds' courtship flight songs.

After graduation and marriage, Dorothy taught for many years in elementary schools in Massachusetts (Montague), New Hampshire (Groveton), and Vermont (Rutland, Forestdale, and Concord), where she always managed to incorporate plant science into every year's lesson plans. Somehow she managed to teach full-time and also bake all the family's bread, along with frequent pies and cookies. She also continued to collect rocks, alarming and embarrassing her children more than once by pulling the car over to the side of the road and loading up on "good rocks." Over the years, her son Brendan was often enlisted to run the machinery required to help her maneuver her larger finds into place

around her gardens.

During her summers, when not preparing for the school year ahead, Dorothy applied her childhood gardening experience and her UMass education, and, in partnership with husband Brendan and son Andrew along with help from other family members, started what eventually became Brunswick Gardens vegetable farm on the land in Brunswick, Vt., she and her husband had purchased in 1960 and made their home. Their move to Brunswick also resulted in a long friendship with Izola Irwin of Maidstone, Vt., another skilled baker and gardener, from whom Dorothy often said she learned even more about baking good bread.

Dorothy loved the forests she could see all around her home, in which she gathered the evergreens and cones for making her Christmas wreaths, listened for the thrushes and warblers, and enjoyed the winter quiet of cross-country skiing the old logging roads. But her gardens were where her heart was. Dorothy's Brunswick Gardens venture had a roadside sales stand and also helped supply several regional restaurants such as Le Rendezvous Bakery in Colebrook, N.H., Bessies in Canaan, Vt., and the famous Buck & Doe in Island Pond, Vt., where owner and renowned chef Ronald Langford praised her vegetables, telling her that "her beets were the only ones that didn't bleed on his steam tables."

Dorothy was among the first local growers to pioneer the use of plastic "grow-tunnels" with metal hoop frames. Eventually, she had five, each one named for one of her four grandchildren plus her Seattle nephew Matthew. The four grandchildren ranged from enthusiastically willing helpers in these activities to less than thrilled to have to weed in the summer heat, but all of them regarded Grandmother as an endless source of plant and insect wisdom, yeast baking know-how, and as the authority on pie crusts. They grew up assuming it was normal to sit down to lunch and find old jam jars with unusual caterpillars inside, "interesting" rocks, and her well-worn copy of the book "Tomato Diseases" taking up most of the room on the kitchen ta-



ble. In her very last years, when her memories were fading, her grandchildren could still phone her to get her detailed opinions on their latest bread baking or gardening efforts.

Dorothy had many loyal customers over more than 25 growing seasons from as far distant as North Conway and Pittsburg, N.H. Her peas and tomatoes were in great demand, as was her sweet corn. The corn was seldom harvested ahead of time; customers willingly waited while she picked their orders. Many said it was the best corn they had ever tasted.

Brunswick was her home, and she rarely missed a March Town Meeting, and served as the town's Planning Committee Chair from 2015-2020. She usually chose to walk the mile between home and the town hall. At the same time, memories of her seaside childhood never left her. On visits back to Aucoot Cove, she'd load up her pickup truck with the help of her two Aucoot nephews, David and Joshua, and bring bags of fresh seaweed back to Vermont. She'd lay the seaweed down in her Vermont gardens as mulch on her vegetable rows, bringing her the scent of the ocean in Vermont's landlocked Northeast Kingdom.

As with Dorothy's grandchildren and garden customers, her students from her years of teaching school were a loyal following. One boy named his beloved new dog after her. Another former student phoned her out of the blue decades after he'd been in her class, because he'd recently come across some odd-looking rocks, and he had vivid memories of a walk along the Moose River Mrs. Whittaker had taken with his class one warm afternoon. There, they had collected rocks, discussed the glacial ice sheet from twelve thousand years ago, and identified trees and other riverside plants. Fifty-two years later, he knew exactly who he wanted to call about the rocks he'd just found.

In Dorothy's last years, she was not able to continue all her activities to the extent that she wanted to, but she still managed to outpace all but her most energetic companions. She persisted in her daily walks outside and developed a

new interest, shared with her good friend Mary von Alt, in carefully watching for the caterpillars that would then form a beautiful chrysalis and eventually hatch out into Monarch butterflies. Anyone mowing her lawns had to carefully avoid any milkweed plants. As her own abilities faded, she never lost interest in keeping up with what her youngest friends and relations were doing, listening to the Metropolitan Opera's Saturday matinees on the radio, and enjoying calls from her niece Jane, who shared memories and the latest news from Aucoot. Dorothy treasured a visit from her godson, Bennett, dressed in his cap and gown for the graduation she was not able to attend in person. She took pleasure in calls from the far Pacific Northwest, where she could listen in on the activities of her great-grandchild, and she loved visiting with her young neighbor Rowan, who shared her appreciation for nature's many marvels, including weasels.

Dorothy is survived by her husband of 69 years, Brendan J. Whittaker of Brunswick, her three children, son-in-law, three grandchildren, two grand-daughters-in-law, great-grandchild, and many cousins, nieces, and nephews. Dorothy's ability to remain at home during her last years was greatly enabled by the loving care from family friend Mary Irwin Richardson.

Dorothy also leaves behind her sister Jean Wist (Walter), her brothers-in-law Bradford Hathaway, James Whittaker (Kathi), and her sister-in-law Anne Kallander.

Dorothy was predeceased by her grandson, Brendan Jacob Whittaker, and three sisters, Priscilla Hathaway, Elizabeth Roe, and Faith Paulson.

A memorial service will be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Lancaster on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at 2 p.m., with Father Timothy Brooks officiating.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to the Bennett Brooks Memorial Scholarship Fund, c/o St Paul's Church, 113 Main Street, Lancaster, NH 03584.

Arrangements are entrusted to the care of Armstrong-Charron Funeral Home, Groveton, N.H.

For directions to the service, or to send the family your condolences via the online guest book, please visit [www.armstrongcharronfuneralhome.com](http://www.armstrongcharronfuneralhome.com)

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# Community Mourns Loss Of Jere Eames

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — Community members and town officials are mourning the loss of Jeremiah "Jere" Eames, an influential business owner, real estate developer, town father, and longtime promoter of the town of Littleton.

Eames died in Littleton on Sunday at the age of 82, following an illness.

At the start of Monday's Select Board meeting, Selectman Roger Emerson requested a special moment of silence for Eames.

"He was a big icon for this town," said Emerson.

Eames and his family were instrumental in installing the bronze Pollyanna of Littleton sculpture at the steps of the public library, an initiative that recognizes the "Pollyanna" novel by Littleton native Eleanor Porter and celebrates gladness and optimism.

The sculpture helped put Littleton further on the map, drawing visitors from nearby and around the world.

"It's a true loss for the community," Veronica Francis, who has led the annual Pollyanna Day celebrations, said Tuesday. "Jere was a true Pollyanna. For those of us who are Pollyannas, he was the genuine Pollyanna who always had something positive to say about the town. He loved Littleton. He paved the way to have that gorgeous sculpture there in honor of his mother, who was also an optimist. He carried that forward and was a leader for the town. He will be missed."



Community members are mourning the loss of Littleton's Jeremiah "Jere" Eames, left, who died Sunday at the age of 82. Here in July 2021, Eames was honored with a commendation by then-Gov. Chris Sununu, at right, and the New Hampshire Executive Council. (File photo)

Decades ago in Littleton, Eames ran a popular bar called Jeremiah's and the Galleon Club, which in the early 1970s featured a then-little-known band called Aerosmith, which he recruited to perform.

In the early 1990s, Eames and several partners purchased the Mt. Washington Hotel, which was deteriorating and had an uncertain future, and made the key investments and renovations to turn it around.

Today, the hotel operates year-round, is one of New Hampshire's most popular destinations, and generates robust visitor revenue for the state and local economies.

In July 2021, Eames, a Littleton native, was honored with a commendation by the New Hampshire Executive Council and then-Gov. Chris Sununu.

"Pretty much everyone in the Littleton area knows Jere," Sununu said during the ceremony. "It's an absolute honor to have someone like this represent the state."

The commendation recognizes Eames

as a civic leader, highlights his significant contributions to the Littleton area community, and speaks of Eames' dedication to preserving the town of Littleton's history while encouraging growth.

"Jere's signature word is 'fabulous,'" Karen Keazirian, who has served as executive director of Pollyanna of Littleton, Inc., said during the ceremony. "He also says often that a rising tide lifts all boats ... He's always looking to make things wonderful for everyone."

During his 2021 commendation, Eames said the recent years of growth in Littleton have been "unbelievable."

"The main street and river district are vibrant, the downtown is preserved, and there are so many upbeat young people," he said.

Eames served as the president of the Littleton Area Chamber of Commerce and received the chamber's Citizen of the Year award in 2002, along with his wife, Yvonne.

Eames' businesses, passed to him by his mother, Blanche "Meader" Eames, are now run by his son, Jack Eames, and celebrated 100 years of operation in 2021.

"He was influential in a lot of projects and businesses in town," Francis said Tuesday.

Eames also led the Pollyanna Signature awards, which celebrated those residents who volunteer and work to better their community.

Eames took photographs of that event and others, although he sometimes liked to stay behind the scenes.

"Jere never received the award, yet he deserved it," said Francis.

## DOT Official Responds To Critic, Defends Snow Clearing Operations

BY PAUL HAYES  
Staff Writer

WHITEFIELD — A New Hampshire Department of Transportation employee drew widespread support online after responding to a resident's complaint that state crews were slow to clear roads following a recent snowfall.

Shawn White, who said he oversees plowing on several roads in the Dalton area, posted a lengthy response Thursday on the Whitefield, NH Community Forum after a Dalton resident wrote that "NH DOT is nonexistent up here" and blamed supervisors for poor road conditions.

White said he normally avoids responding on social media but felt compelled to do so after being singled out.

"I am the one that you state in your comment 'who's in charge of them that makes the calls' for the roads you listed off in your comments," White wrote to the Dalton resident. "So I will take some time to educate you."

White said he called his crew in at 3:30 a.m. on the morning in question, with plows on the road shortly after 4 a.m. He

cited staffing shortages and reduced equipment availability, saying crews have been "short staffed and down 1/4 or more of the fleet of trucks needed to complete these routes."

He also pointed to rapidly changing weather conditions, writing that about 2 inches of snow had accumulated by 3:30 a.m., but snowfall intensified after 5 a.m., dropping another 3 to 4 inches in roughly two hours.

"This new snow dumped, just wiped out our whole effort in clearing the roads and now we had more snow on them than when we first started," White wrote.

White said state policy allows for up to 8 inches of snow accumulation on certain routes during a storm and emphasized that crews cannot maintain bare pavement during active snowfall.

"We don't have a black and wet road policy up here in NH," he wrote. "We cannot maintain those types of road conditions during an active snow storm."

White also pushed back against broader criticism of DOT performance, saying crews have routinely been called out early mornings since November and are working significant overtime.

See DOT, Page 7

## LITTLETON

# Police Release More Details in Gay Slur Spray Paint Case

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — A juvenile also participated in the spray painting of a gay slur on a Mill Street storefront, an act that police said was planned months in advance by the adult perpetrator.

That's according to the affidavit for arrest filed on Monday afternoon at Littleton District Court.

Olivia Rose Williams, 19, of Littleton, is charged with a Class A misdemeanor count of conspiracy to commit criminal mischief for driving Richard Francis Leslie Jr., 21, and the juvenile to the Fenix Highlanders Club Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, at 35 Mill St., so they could spray paint the front window and business logo at about 1:40 p.m. on June 21 and then driving them away.

The next day, the word "fag" was discovered in red paint.

Leslie is charged with a Class A misdemeanor count of criminal mischief, which resulted in a \$341 window-replacement cost.

Each is scheduled to be arraigned on March 10.

According to the affidavit, surveillance videos from Schilling Beer Co., located across the street, and from the interior of Fenix Highlanders, which is

owned by Shawn Meenan, captured two people in black clothing with covered faces running up Mill Street from the covered bridge at about 1:40 a.m. on June 21.

The videos, given to police for review and posted publicly, also capture what appears to be a can of spray paint in their hands, Littleton Detective Sgt. Scott Powers wrote in the affidavit.

A week later, Powers received a phone call from a woman who had reportedly been in a relationship with Leslie and stated that she had information regarding the case.

"The person stated she knew Richard did it, because he had told her he was going to," said Powers. "The person said that on April 25, 2025, she and Leslie drove and parked on Highland Avenue in Littleton at Stoddard Field. She said they walked down the rail trail, which is adjacent to the field, so Leslie could 'Think in his head, and plan out exactly, basically what has happened,' referring to the vandalism at Fenix gym."

On the same day, Leslie and the woman were in Tilton and, on the way home, stopped at the Walmart in Plymouth, where they purchased red spray paint, Powers said, who obtained receipts and video surveillance from Walmart.

"The person stated Leslie



Richard Leslie Jr. (LPD)

was planning to go to the Fenix Gym and spray paint it, but did not know what he planned to write," said Powers. "The person stated that Leslie was using the stopwatch function on his phone to see how long it took them to walk from the Stoddard Field on the rail trail to the end of Little Grille. The person stated that while they were walking, they saw someone walking their dog and abandoned the 'dry run.' The person went on to say that Leslie did not intend to vandalize Fenix that night, but to map out his plan."

Powers interviewed Leslie on Aug. 20, when he said Leslie admitted to the vandalism, which he had committed with his girlfriend's brother, a juvenile.

"Leslie stated that he, the juvenile and Olivia Williams were



Olivia Williams (LPD)

hanging out at his residence on Hill Street," wrote Powers. "While hanging out, Leslie said that the juvenile wanted to go and vandalize something. Leslie stated that he knew a place and suggested the Fenix Gym. Leslie stated that they both dressed in all black, had taken

a can of red spray paint that he already had and were driven to Highland Avenue by Olivia in her vehicle."

From there, Leslie and the juvenile allegedly walked the rail trail to Riverglen Lane, crossed the covered bridge, spray-painted the gym, and ran back to Highland Avenue, where Williams picked them up.

After the interview, Leslie contacted Williams, who came to the police department, admitted her involvement, and stated that she was aware that the two had planned to vandalize Fenix, Powers said.

On Monday, Littleton Police Chief Paul Smith said he cannot comment on the juvenile's case or whether the juvenile has been arrested.

In the days following the spray painting, Meenan said his adult son is gay, and anyone

who knows him knows that, and he does not hide the fact.

The affidavit does not state if there is a history between Leslie and Meenan.

The case was given to the New Hampshire attorney general's Civil Rights Bureau for review to determine if it met the legal threshold for a hate crime.

On Dec. 18, the attorney general's office wrote Smith to say that the use of the gay slur appeared on the same day as the first annual North Country Pride Fest and there was an initial concern it was motivated by bias or hate.

The bureau ultimately concluded it does not have the required "clear and convincing evidence" to prove that the crime was a hate crime as defined in law, wrote Sean Locke, senior assistant attorney general and director of the bureau.

## DOT

Continued from Page 6

"Since November there hasn't been many mornings we have not been called out at 4am and we have been working 30 to 60 hours over our regular schedule each pay period," he wrote.

He defended both state and local road crews and highlighted the personal toll of the work, noting that plow operators were out early on Christmas morning to keep roads passable.

"Think about how the children of these plow operators feel not having their mom or dad home, staring at their presents, not being able to open them and enjoy family time," White wrote.

The post generated roughly 250 comments, many expressing support for DOT workers. Among them were responses from people identifying themselves as spouses of DOT employees.

"DOT wife here!" one commenter wrote. "If

you do not think these crews work please give me your phone number. I will be happy to call you when they get called out and return home all hours of the day and night."

Another wrote, "DOT wife here!! Amen to this, no one has a clue what our guys sacrifice to make the roads safe for the public."

A commenter who identified herself as the daughter of a municipal highway department director also weighed in.

"Well said, i'm so proud of my dad Tim Brown and his crew in Lancaster NH and everyone that works so hard to keep the roads clear," she wrote. "Its a thankless job but it doesn't go unnoticed or unappreciated in this home!"

White closed his post by urging residents with concerns to contact the appropriate agency directly and noted that DOT garages across the state are hiring, adding that no commercial driver's license is required to apply and that the department will provide training.



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The Littleton Off Road Riders is celebrating its new base of operations in Littleton, at Riverside Drive and South Street, through a lease of town-owned land. Among those turning out on Thursday were LORR members and town manager Troy Brown, center left, and LORR president Norbert Therien, who did a ceremonial exchanging of the lease. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

### LOCAL

## With Lease Of Town Land, Snowmobile Club Outlines Plans

**BY ROBERT BLECHL**  
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — As the ink dries on a new lease between the town and a local snowmobile club, members of the club are highlighting their plans and celebrating the reinvigoration of a winter pastime.

For the base of its operations, the Littleton Off Road Riders (LORR) is leasing town-owned land at the intersection of Riverside Drive and South Street, directly abutting state snowmobile corridor 105, a former railway bed, and smack dab in the middle of town and in the center of the club's 100-mile-plus trail network.

On Thursday, joined by several club members, Littleton town manager Troy Brown and LORR president Norbert Therien did a ceremonial exchange of the lease.

Several months ago on the site, LORR set up two 40-foot storage containers, a courtyard for security purposes, and brought in four pieces of trailing grooming machinery and other equipment — which before had been inconveniently stored throughout the town and at the residences of several club members — so everything is in one location and can be deployed at a moment's notice for grooming or any need that crops up.

"What everyone was calling this was the compound," said Therien. "But some of the ladies said that doesn't sound too inviting."

So at a LORR meeting, they settled on a new name — the "club hub."

"It's a big thing for the club to have a home," said Scott Simons, LORR trail administrator.

"It's been 50 years in the making, but finally the LORR has a base of operations," said Therien. "The abandoned railroad bed is the perfect access to the 100 miles of trail the club maintains throughout the town of Littleton."

The leased land area is 23,000 square feet, and the common area is 37,604 square feet.

The storage containers house a variety of equipment used to clear and groom trails, providing safe, smooth riding for the public's enjoyment, said Therien.

The first order of business for 2026 is to hope for bountiful snow.

"We do snow dances every morning," Therien said with a chuckle. "It's a ritual. It's a requirement for club membership."

The land was formerly a storage area for the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, which had a salt shed and a roofed structure on the property.

"The canopy is going to remain," said Therien. "We're hanging our banners off of that. It has to be functional, but we want it to look presentable also. We've already received some nice compliments about it. There's a 24-foot span from [storage] unit to unit. Our goal is eventually to have something similar to what the fire station has, a canopy going over that."

The first reason for the new planned canopy is to protect equipment and the second to provide shelter and keep the weather off the backs of club members when they are working on machinery.

The initial term of the lease is for five years, with the potential for extensions.

Currently, there are piles of dirt on the property for the Cottage Street sidewalk

See **Plans**, Page 10



LOCAL

# Casella Fined \$2 Million In N.H.'s Largest-Ever Penalty For Landfill Violations

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

The New Hampshire Department of Justice has fined Casella Waste Systems nearly \$2 million in what is the state's largest solid waste civil penalty for documented violations and mismanagement at its NCES landfill in Bethlehem.

After several years of investigation by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and subsequent negotiations between the NHDOJ and Casella, a resolution was reached on Friday and a consent decree was filed at Grafton Superior Court.

An announcement of the settlement and decree was issued at 8 p.m. Monday by the NHDOJ.

The complaint underlying the consent decree contains several categories of violations spanning multiple years and includes potential supplemental environmental projects with a connection to solid waste landfills, said state officials.

Casella, a company worth about \$7 billion, agrees to pay the state \$1.9 million in penalties, including for mismanagement of leachate, colloquially known as "garbage juice," for drilling through the landfill liner, operating the facility with a quarter-inch hole in the primary landfill liner, failing to report incidents or conduct its own investigations, and for other violations.

In May 2021, NCES was the site of a 154,000-gallon leachate spill that state officials said was not discovered by the company until days later and was

the largest leachate spill in New Hampshire history.

"This consent decree constitutes the largest civil penalty ever obtained by the State for violations related to New Hampshire's Solid Waste Management Act," New Hampshire Attorney General John Formella said in a statement. "Landfills are highly regulated and are designed and built to ensure safety to the public and the environment. This case demonstrates our commitment to holding accountable those that violate our statutes and rules created for the purpose of protecting the State's environment and natural resources."

The decree settles claims related to the placement of waste beyond permitted landfill limits, leachate discharges from the leachate collection system, prohibited storage of leachate within the primary leachate collection system, prohibited flow rate exceedances within the secondary leachate collection system, facility damage reporting, drilling of gas management wells through the overlay landfill liner, failure to appropriately apply adequate daily cover at the end of the business day, incident reporting failures, and other related rule and permit violations, said NHDOJ officials.

Violations outlined in the decree include failure to maintain the leachate collection system and failure to operate the system as required, resulting in a leachate discharge on site; storage of amounts of leachate on the primary landfill liner greater than allowed; causing secondary landfill liner flows in excess of limits; and failure to conduct required investigations

and report such incidents.

Failure to place adequate daily cover at the end of a working day is a repeat violation occurring during the course of years and often found when NHDES representatives visit NCES for an on-site inspection, according to public records.

"While we strive for waste reduction and diversion, NH residents and businesses will always generate some quantity of solid waste requiring disposal," said NHDES Commissioner Robert Scott. "For this reason, landfills are a necessary component of NH's integrated solid waste management infrastructure, and must be managed properly to protect public safety, human health, and the environment. NHDES takes landfill mismanagement very seriously, as demonstrated by this significant and appropriate civil penalty."

For years, Casella representatives have publicly referred to NCES as a "state of the art" landfill and, while pursuing expansions in Bethlehem or a new commercial landfill in Dalton, have made comments on the record to the effect of the facility being well-run with no significant problems and Casella having the knowledge and expertise to run it or operate a new landfill in the North Country.

On Tuesday, local opponents of expansion in Bethlehem and a new landfill in Dalton weighed in on the company's repeated violations and \$1.9 million fine.

"This enforcement action reinforces what we have long known, landfills leak, operators make mistakes and where these generational sites are

located have serious and long term impacts on a community," Wayne Morrison, president of the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change, said in a statement. "There should be no surprise that the same company agreeing to a million-dollar settlement for solid waste violations is now asking the New Hampshire State Senate to tear up its legally binding settlement agreements with the Town of Bethlehem in order to force another landfill expansion."

NCABC members noted what they said is the magnitude of the penalty, one that "reflects not a one-off lapse, but a pattern of chronic noncompliance."

"Public records document repeated violations by NCES and other Casella subsidiaries over decades, including failures to cover waste, illegal placement of waste outside permitted boundaries, leachate spills, delayed and incomplete incident reporting, and permit violations in New Hampshire and other states," they said.

"We believe this pattern of non-compliance and lack of operational control demonstrates that Casella is an unfit operator for either a new landfill permit in Dalton or any further expansion in Bethlehem," said Tom Tower, vice-president of NCABC. "Casella's record is not an accident or a misunderstanding, it is a long history of violations, enforcement actions, and settlements across multiple states. When a company demonstrates this kind of track record, lawmakers should strengthen oversight, not weaken it."

NCABC members say they applaud the NHDOJ and

NHDES "who investigated these violations over multiple years and pursued meaningful enforcement."

The NCES case was managed in the NHDOJ by assistant Attorney General Joshua Harrison, senior Assistant Attorney General, and Environmental Protection Bureau chief Christopher Aslin. NHDES worked extensively over multiple years to investigate the violations and collaborated with the NHDOJ to ensure accountability, said officials.

Casella, however, is not required to pay all of the \$1.9 million, but, according to the decree, can partly satisfy the civil penalty through a combination of "supplemental environmental projects."

They include remediation of erosion of landfill debris into the Saco River at the town of Bartlett's former landfill, for up to \$219,000 credited against the \$1.9 million.

The fine comes at a time when company representatives, in October, told the Bethlehem Select Board they are agreeable to opening up new talks about landfill expansion in Bethlehem and when the company, on Jan. 6, 2026 at the Coos County Registry of Deeds, filed an amendment to its 2018 option to purchase real estate in Dalton that extends the option to Dec. 31, 2027.



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## Plans

Continued from Page 8  
reconstruction and improvements project, which is expected to be completed in the latter half of 2026.

For the site, mixed and seasonal use is planned, with the town using the property in the snowless months for overflow parking and other possible uses.

"The lease covers this for us and then when the town wants it, after all these piles of dirt go away, this area is also going to be utilized if and when they decide to have some functions on Main Street," said Therien. "There's enough room here where they may have people park their buses. It's perfect. In winter, we need it. When they need it, we're not here. And we're confined within that little 40-by-40 foot square and that will take care of that."

The storage containers also store trail signs and related items.

LORR maintains more than 100 miles of interconnected trails in Littleton, from Monroe to Dalton, Bethlehem, and Lisbon.

One trail goes over Mt. Eustis to Bethlehem.

A beautiful trail runs along Moore Reservoir, said Therien.

The main trail, corridor 105, runs through downtown Littleton into Bethlehem — where the old railway bed is planned to be converted to a recreational and snowmobile trail — and taps into a network that can take snowmobilers much farther.

"When they pull up the rails, with enough snow you can make it all the way to Whitefield," said Therien. "From here, you can go to Maine, Canada, Vermont. You can go anywhere you want."

Trails 103, 104, and 105 spur off from 5.

As LORR consolidates its home base, other local clubs are being reformed, and trails reopened.

"Bethlehem was closed for a number of years, but suddenly, like the phoenix, they've risen again, so they're open," said LORR director Steve Hight. "Just recently through the state — we all work under the banner of the state Bureau of Trails — the state said Bethlehem is going to be up and running so make sure your trail connects with theirs. So we had to spend hours and hours of cutting trees and cutting brush to make sure things are relatively smooth."

Hight spoke of the challenge of opening trails during a season of rain and freezing rain, which weighed down tree branches above and beside the trails and required some chainsaw work.

"It's like going through a jungle right now," he said. "It's such a challenge."

Like other clubs in New Hampshire, LORR, a member of the New Hampshire Snowmobile Association, is required to submit a weekly report on trail conditions, which are list-

ed for local residents and those visiting for a weekend or longer.

Trail maintenance is done by a core group of six volunteers.

"It's 100 percent volunteer," said Simons. "No pay."

"They're often grooming into the evening after their day jobs," said Therien.

All grooming operators are certified through the state Bureau of Trails.

The grooming machine only moves at about 10 mph, which, after factoring in 110 miles of LORR trails, can mean 10 or 12 hours of trail grooming for a volunteer.

Volunteers, too, as with many organizations, are hard to find today, compared to past years, said Simons.

"The nice thing is we do have good communication with Bethlehem and Monroe because we're all small clubs and we all have friends in each of the clubs," he said. "They come to our meetings and we go to theirs so we can share



The Littleton Off Road Riders is celebrating its new base of operations in Littleton, at Riverside Drive and South Street, through a lease of town-owned land. On Thursday, Steve Hight, right, a club director, takes town manager Troy Brown for a ride in the trail groomer. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

what's going on."

Also, if a machine belonging to one club breaks down, other clubs are willing to help out.

LORR's expenses are covered by the annual state registration fees for snow machines as well as by sponsors, whom Therien said are "invaluable to the club's success and are very appreciated."

For LORR in Littleton, one possible idea for the long-term future is to build a clubhouse, which LORR currently doesn't have.

The site, though, doesn't have power at the moment and the club doesn't have a lot of money.

"One thing at a time," said Simons. "At least all of the equipment is in one place."

LORR's trail system offers a great economic benefit to the community through the sale of food, gas, and lodging, said Therien.

"There are trails created to give snowmobile access to stores and restaurants, all maintained by the club," he said.

In the past decade, LORR has returned more than \$341,000 into the local economy through purchases of equipment, parts, repairs, signs, maps, lumber for bridges, and other items, said Therien.

LORR is a registered non-profit organization.

"If anyone cares to help us with this, please contact us," said Therien. "Any help would be kindly appreciated."

The negotiated lease between LORR and the town came about through a voter-approved petition in March 2025.

"Thank you to the town of Littleton voters, administration, sponsors, and landowners for making this possible," said Therien.

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