



# The Littleton Weekly Record

THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2025

LOCAL

County Issues Final  
Proposed \$47 Million  
Courthouse Plan

FREE



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## Old Home Day Posthumously Honors Longtime Organizer

Franconia's 2025 Old Home Day and parade was dedicated to Bill Mellekas, longtime parade emcee who died on Feb. 2. A poster of Bill (pictured left) was made in his honor. (Photos by Robert Blechl)

- ◆ Pet Memorial Rainbow Bridge Is Dedicated
- ◆ Planners Deny Subdivision For Main Street Golf Course
- ◆ State Tours Lakeway As Part Of Building Aid Application



## BETHLEHEM

# As Questions Swirl, Planners Deny Subdivision For Main Street Golf Course

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

As questions and concerns swirl about the future of the Bethlehem Country Club and if the property will be redeveloped, Bethlehem planners on Wednesday denied a requested subdivision.

In November 2020, after seven decades of municipal ownership and 2019 and 2020 warrant articles giving town meeting voters options and asking, in March 2020, if they would approve a sale to a private entity, the Select Board, given the go-ahead by voters, sold the property to Bethlehem residents Mark and Kim Koprowski for \$425,000.

The price factored in greens and a clubhouse that needed more than \$400,000 in upgrades.

At the time, Kim Koprowski stated that the long-term intention is to maintain it as a golf course.

Located at 1901 Main St., the property features an 18-hole Donald Ross-designed golf course that debuted in 1910, having been upgraded from the original 9-hole course built in 1898, as well as a clubhouse constructed in 1912.

A condition of the sale requires that it remain a golf course for five years, which lapses after Nov. 20, 2025.

Seeking the subdivision are the Koprowskis, who want one lot of 99.26 acres, where the clubhouse is located, to become two lots of 1.62 acres and 97.64 acres to separate out the clubhouse.

Recommending that the board hold off on an approval was alternate planner Rob Gilgen, who researched the three restrictions that were part of the sale and are recorded in the Grafton County Registry of Deeds.

The first condition is that the property be operated as an 18-hole public golf course for a

period of five years, with substantially the same configuration as at the time of sale, which can include business accessories, such as the restaurant operating out of the clubhouse and an ice cream shop.

The second condition prohibits the sale of any individual parcel from the whole for development or other purposes for the five years, he said.

The third, which is not germane to the requested subdivision, is that the snowmobile corridor at the northern segment of the premises remains open to the public, he said.

"The way I read this is that the premises have to be in the same configuration as at the time of sale through Nov. 20 of this year," said Gilgen. "If the property is subdivided, it's no longer in the same condition as it was."

The planning board, he said, does not have the authority to grant a subdivision at present.

Ex-officio planner April Hib-

berd, who also conducted research, agreed.

That means any action on a subdivision would have to wait until Nov. 20, after the five-year period has ended, said Alecia Loveless, chair of the planning board.

After concluding that they cannot table the matter, the board voted unanimously to deny the subdivision.

The 138-acre property encompasses five parcels along Main and Prospect streets.

In late 2018, a market analysis estimated a total fair market value of \$850,000, noting that the \$450,000 required for upgrades would result in a fair sale price of approximately \$400,000.

Today, the total assessed property value is \$1.283 million, according to town property records.

For a future hearing, the same notices to abutters will be sent out, said Dawn Ferringo, clerk of the planning and zoning boards.

"In order for everyone on the boundaries of the entire golf course to be noticed, the applicant would have to agree to pay for the cost of mailing the registered letters," she said to planners. "Their only requirement is to cover the properties that abut the actual lot. You'll have to think about whether the planning board wants to absorb that cost if they don't agree. Or we could just mail the notices and have them not go registered and have them be the cost of a regular stamp."

The Koprowskis did not attend Wednesday's hearing.

On Thursday afternoon, The Caledonian-Record sent Kim Koprowski, who has run the business operations, two emails and a text message asking if the subdivision is being sought in preparation for an upcoming sale of the property in whole or parts, if she plans to sell the property or keep it, if anyone has approached her about buying all or parts of it, if any potential buyers are seek-

ing to keep it as a golf course or redevelop it into something else, and what are the plans if redevelopment is on the horizon.

Responses were not received by press time.

Koprowski closed golf course business operations in October 2023, after what she said were mounting financial struggles. The course has remained open for walking golfers. Inside the clubhouse is El Mirador Restaurant, which has remained open.

Kenneth McKim, whose wife owns a condominium along Fairways Drive that overlooks the golf course, told town planners that there are a lot of questions that don't seem to have answers.

"My understanding is there's been some purchase offers put to that golf course to maintain that as a golf course and not be developed as other types of properties," he said.

Many in the area adore the golf course, said McKim, who asked if Bethlehem understands the implications.

"It's a Donald Ross golf course," he said. "They're being registered in the national historic archives right now. They're not being removed. You can't touch them. That's happening all over the country, mainly New England and the whole Northeast coast."

Currently, the Bethlehem course is not registered nationally and is not on the New Hampshire Registry of Historic places.

McKim, who has had the condominium in Bethlehem for 35 years, said he loves the golf course, would like to see the property maintained, and any redevelopment would ruin his view and that of others.

"I don't believe there's enough focus on this situation right now as we get closer to November," he said.

McKim also told town planners that the property is not being maintained to the standards of an 18-hole golf course and is in violation of the sale agreement.

Because of a question about that, the requirement that the property be maintained as a golf course was addressed, and it was determined that the agreement didn't go that far. The property is currently operating as a golf course, said Hibberd.

Many residents want to see it remain a golf course, she said.

An enterprising business owner can find ways of making money, including with the restaurant and having a rental property, said McKim.

"It's unfortunate where we are right now," he said. "People around it, abutters, whoever they are, can get a GoFundMe, get a real estate attorney, go after this and then go after the town in litigation because it was incorrectly done at the very beginning. Maybe some of the public meeting notices weren't done right. I don't know. There's plenty of avenues to go here. The best avenue is this, to sell it to somebody that wants to continue it as a golf course, for a reasonable price."

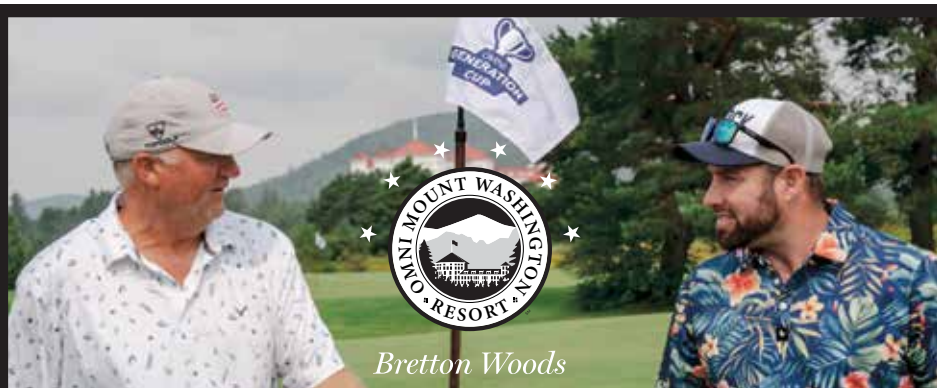
Board members said the town no longer owns it and therefore has no say about what happens after the five-year agreement expires in November.

"There is recourse that I believe people in the town have," said McKim.

In January 2022, David Brantley, a developer from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pulled a request for a special exception for 60 apartment units on a 3.3-acre parcel at 1895 Main St., beside the clubhouse, following social media chatter and concerns.

That parcel is owned by Geaux Bethlehem LCC, established in January 2022 and having as members Brantley and Milford Wampold III, also of Baton Rouge, according to New Hampshire Secretary of State filings.

Geaux Bethlehem's registered agent is Joel Brantley, of Bethlehem, who attended Wednesday's planning board hearing remotely.



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## ON THE COVER

Franconia Old Home Day parade 2025. To celebrate the return of the stolen ArtWalk banana, Sam Cashin, pictured here with his mother Amanda, at right, dressed as a banana and handed out candy. The chief towed a surprise float carrying the banana that the temporary thief had returned a few weeks later. (Photo by Robert Blechl)





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# State Monitors Nuisance Bear In Bethlehem

**BY ROBERT BLECHL**  
Staff Writer

Although bear-human conflicts in 2025 have been down statewide compared to previous years, New Hampshire Fish and Game is monitoring one problem bear in Bethlehem, where residents and business owners are being advised to secure their trash and remove any food attractants.

Contrary to social media reports, there is no current plan to trap the bear or remove her, Dan Bailey, the state's bear project coordinator with NHFG, said Tuesday.

The hope is that what looks like a promising wildberry season will soon keep the black bears in the woods and away from residential areas.

"From a statewide perspective, conflicts have been very manageable, lower than your average year at this point in the season, and I'm hoping it continues on that trend," said Bailey. "We had a lot of rain this spring."

Healthy rains lead to more

natural foods in the woods, where many bears prefer to feed if they can.

"We tend to see conflicts peak right around early July because a lot of those berry crops are becoming available now," he said.

On Monday, NHFG received more calls about a problem bear in Bethlehem, one that is becoming increasingly habituated to humans.

"The issue going on in Bethlehem is there's been this sow with two cubs," said Bailey. "We've had reports of her all spring and into the summer, mostly getting into garbage. She's figured out trash collection day. She's been highly visible throughout the day in Bethlehem on pickup day, as well as getting into residential and commercial dumpsters. The problem is it's been tough to change her behavior."

Bailey and the bear project team have been working with Bethlehem homeowners.

"A lot of them seem to be doing everything right, keeping trash in until the day of collection," he said. "She then comes

around within an hour of them putting trash out, knocks it over, makes a mess. We also have reports she's been at a variety of bird feeders in town. We've been trying to work with those individuals to cease feeding the birds. We've tried to explain that it is making her even more comfortable in residential areas. It's a variety of factors, but the problem is she's becoming so comfortable around people that people are having a tough time getting her to move on and move back to the woods."

The bear has also been seen on a number of porches and it's been reported at multiple locations that she has been attempting to get into the doors of homes.

"When it gets to that point, that's something we really don't tolerate because it escalates to a public safety concern," said Bailey. "We've been watching her. We have no direct plan right now to set a trap. If that occurs, we would be likely euthanize her if it rose to that level where we need to set a trap, just because we know relocating adult bears is not an ef-

fective solution. They typically return to that home range. The cubs would not be euthanized. They would be brought to the Kilham Bear Center, our rehab facility in New Hampshire that we work with, and they would be released back into the wild at 18 months of age, so around this time next year. But there are no plans on the books right now to set a trap or try to remove that bear right now."

With the bear favoring downtown and heavier residential areas, NHFG is concerned, and that's why department representatives are working with residents and hoping the issue resolves itself.

"It's all about food availability," said Bailey. "If there's more food in the woods, more food than she's getting in town, there's a chance she will move back to feeding on natural foods."

Although other bears have been reported in the town, the sow is the one that has been appearing the most frequently and generating the most calls.

Bailey encourages residents to do a better job of securing food attractants.

"If she isn't getting food in these residential areas, she will

move on from that," he said.

While many residents put out trash on the morning before pickup, some still put it out the night before, when the bear has gotten into trash.

A decade and a half ago, when bears were a big problem in town, Bethlehem adopted a wildlife ordinance that requires trash in dumpsters and containers to be secured. Violators can face fines.

"Bethlehem is one of the few towns that does have tools to counter these things," said Bailey. "They have that ordinance in place. It's whether or not the town is enforcing it."

Compounding the problem, though, are tourists or short-term residents who might not be aware of an ordinance or of a need to secure trash from bears.

"Anywhere in North Country and Whites and even down into the Lakes Region, there's this large summer influx of tourists and turnover on rental properties that always creates a lot of issues," said Bailey. "We see it in other towns. There's these communities, especially around the ski resort areas, where these short-term rentals are a big issue. Bears are getting into trash and getting used to feeding



*New Hampshire Fish and Game is monitoring a bear in Bethlehem that is bringing her two cubs into downtown and ransacking trash containers for food. As of Tuesday, there were no current plans to trap or remove the bear. (Photo contributed by Vermont Fish and Wildlife)*

around residential areas."

The next round of natural foods could make sailing into the summer a little smoother.

"If we see a good berry crop — and everything seems to be pointing in that direction — then conflicts start to really trail off now," said Bailey. "If we have a mass failure, like a drought summer, those conflicts persist right into early September. My main emphasis is it's people's responsibility in town to do their best to manage food attractants and keep these situations from happening."

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# State Tours Lakeway As Part Of Building Aid Application

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

As part of SAU 84's application for state building aid to partly fund a new elementary school in Littleton, representatives of the New Hampshire Department of Education (DOE) recently toured Lakeway Elementary School, the facility that local school officials seek to replace.

During Monday's school board meeting, Dale Prior, SAU 84's technology and operations director, provided an update, including the school district's current ranking on the state building aid list.

In August, the board is also expected to decide whether to put a warrant article seeking a bond for

a new school on the March 2026 town meeting ballot, after opting to forgo a bond article in March 2025.

The March 2024 bond request garnered nearly 51 percent of the votes, but fell short of the required 60-percent super-majority.

The tour was required as part of the DOE building aid application, which SAU 84 submitted on April 1, along with two other school districts competing for funding for their projects.

Littleton's submission included a gross maximum price of \$41.25 million for a new school that, if approved, would be built on 17 acres of land at the top of Crane Street being offered for donation by the Daughters of the Charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

If awarded, SAU 84 could receive about \$8.5 million in building aid.

In 2023, there were 17 schools on the state building aid list; now, there are four, said Prior.

"Most schools either funded themselves, went a different direction, or they're still on the list," he said.

There's still a school district ranked ahead that has a project priced at \$176 million, which means it would own the state's building aid for a biennium, said Prior.

New Hampshire develops two-year, or biennium, budgets, the most recent of which took effect July 1, 2025.

"Worst case scenario, we're ranked seventh, best case scenario, we're ranked fifth," said Prior.

"However, they did inform us that legislation cut building aid for the current biennium ... Those four or six schools ranked ahead of us would have first priority."

The first opportunity for building aid consideration for Littleton would be in June 2027, which would make aid available with an affirmative vote at the March 2028 town meeting, or around that time, he said.

"And again, the schools ahead of us would have priority," he said.

State officials reminded SAU 84 that the last time the state went into a building aid moratorium, the moratorium lasted five cycles, or 10 years, said Prior.

"We don't have to sit here and do the math to say if that would be the case, our project that we estimated last year of \$40 million is well over \$50 million in 10 years, probably closer to \$60 million," he said.

Prior and school district representatives spent three hours with three DOE officials for the Lakeway tour.

"We talked about our deficiencies, then walked the building and walked outside," he said. "They definitely saw some of the things we talked about. Without going on the record, they agreed that we

made the right decision dealing with our deficiencies of recommending a new build versus a renovation."

If the school board decides to change course and pursue renovation, it would no longer be on the state building aid list and would have to begin the application process anew, because a renovation would, under DOE rules, constitute a substantial change to the project, he said.

To remain on the list, even though there's currently no funding available, SAU 84 is required to submit a letter by May 1 of each year to inform the DOE that it wishes to remain on the list and that its project has not undergone substantial changes.

The Daughters have a contract with the Littleton School District in which they will offer the 17 acres for donation until 2030.

A conversation with the Daughters might be of value, said Prior.

If everything goes well and if voters in March 2028 approve a bond and building aid is awarded, the project would still not be completed by the contract expiration, he said.

"If we were to change sites, that does not substantially change your project because you're still

addressing the same number of deficiencies," said Prior. "That would still be an option down the road, but I'm pretty sure we don't have a free parcel of land as an option. The good news is a lot of people fell off the list. The bad news is there's no money to give out anyways. And based on what we've learned internally about federal funding and state funding, I would venture to guess that building aid is going to be more than just one biennium cycle away."

The district can make the project look good to the state the best it can, but will have to figure out an alternative or move forward, he said.

The school district, too, will not stop putting money in the existing Lakeway building just because it's trying to figure out if it's going to renovate or build new, said school board member Erica Antonucci, who serves on the Lakeway Building Committee.

"We do need as a board to decide probably at the next meeting in August, or very last meeting in August, if we're going to put this project on the ballot for 2026 or not," she said. "The committee will need to start marketing and seeking other financial resources."

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Yellow  
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## Honoring Faculty and Staff at St. Johnsbury Academy



Jessica Angell, Science

### CLASS OF 2008 IMPACT PRIZE

Is an honor bestowed by each graduating class upon a faculty or staff member who has demonstrated exceptional loyalty to the school, effective advising skills, and a drive to improve the Academy by actively working to enhance the educational experiences of both day and resident students.



Sean Hegarty, Facilities

### UNSUNG HERO AWARD

The Unsung Hero Award is presented irregularly by the Board of Trustees to a teacher or staff member who has demonstrated their great value to the Academy over time and in ways that are not glamorous, but that are habitual and sustaining.



Diantha Jones, Science

### ATWOOD PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

Is named for Dr. Norman Atwood, Class of 1936, Professor of English, and Academy Trustee from 1969 until his death in 1991. This prize is presented to a teacher in the beginning years who has exhibited creativity, compassion, and consistency in addressing the needs of students, and who has demonstrated professionalism through enthusiasm for his or her academic discipline, and support for the traditions and the history of St. Johnsbury Academy.



Jeremy Roberts, Career and Technical Education

### LAUDAMUS VERAM MAGISTRAM

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# Old Home Day Posthumously Honors Longtime Organizer

## Stolen Banana Makes Triumphant Return

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

FRANCONIA — Saturday's Old Home Day parade featured two stars: Bill Mellekas, the longtime parade organizer and emcee who died on Feb. 2 and had the parade dedicated in his memory, and the ArtWalk banana, once stolen but since returned, which was carried on a surprise float.

Mellekas, who was a few months shy of his 70th birthday, had retired after a career as a popular teacher at Lafayette Elementary School. Outside of the classroom, he had been a dedicated community volunteer upon his arrival to the North Country more than four decades before.

"I am here today in a fine

bowtie in honor of the one and only Bill Mellekas," said Tim Egan, of Sugar Hill, this year's parade emcee. "Let's all take a moment to either applaud or tip your hat or bow your head to the fine gentleman, Bill Mellekas, our dear departed Lafayette instructor. Someone just said, 'I loved Bill.' Many people loved Bill."

Bill loved kids and loved kids' books, said Egan.

He had one job, and that first job was teaching grade school at the Carolina Crapo School in Sugar Hill, and he continued when it moved to Lafayette Regional School in Franconia, said Egan.

For his tireless volunteering — which ranged from donating his time to nonprofit groups, preparing meals for the community's seniors and



Franconia Old Home Day parade 2025 featured retired Sugar Hill Police Chief Gary Young and his 1976 Harley Davidson. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

those in need, and keeping the area's arts and culture thriving — Mellekas was featured in the 2017 Caledonian-Record's "Making a Difference" series.

In addition to serving as a library trustee, Mellekas was also a part-time bail bondsman and a justice of the peace.

One of Mellekas' great friends is Irene Amsbary, librarian for Sugar Hill's Richardson Memorial Library.

"Bill was involved in the theater and loved photography," said Egan. "But when I asked Irene Amsbary what was Bill's favorite hobby, she said, with a

huge smile, people. So it's fitting today that our parade celebrates him."

The parade saw the participation of three dozen local groups and businesses, all named by Egan as they walked or rolled past, along with fire engines and trucks from several local towns bringing up the rear for the finale.

Near the front of the line was Franconia's new fire engine.

And the banana.

"Oh my God, this is not on my schedule," said Egan. "It's the banana and it's been found."

On May 29, the 3-foot-tall fiberglass banana titled "Elevated Fruit" and created by artist Paul Belensky was stolen from its perch outside of Chef Joe's Catering on Main Street.

Then, two weeks later, it was returned to its same location,

unharmd.

To celebrate the return, Police Chief Mac Cashin, behind the wheel of his cruiser, towed a float carrying the banana. Walking alongside were his son, Sam, dressed as a banana, and his wife, Amanda, wearing a fruit hat, handing out candy.

To date, the identity of the banana poacher remains unknown.

The parade, though, closed the final chapter on the caper, with signs on the float reading "crime evidence" and "case closed" and yellow tape reading "restricted area" and "police line do not cross."

To dispel any rumors that the banana had been stolen again, the back of Cashin's float had a sign reading, "Borrowed with permission from artist Paul Belensky."

## SAU 58 Seeks Fourth Superintendent In Just Over Two Years

### STAFF REPORTS

School Administrative Unit 58 is seeking an interim superintendent to lead the district starting Aug. 1 — the fourth person to hold the role in just over two years.

The position opened following the departure of Anne Landry, who served as superintendent from July 2024 through July 2025. Landry was hired

from Vermont's Caledonia Central Supervisory Union, where she had been director of student services and briefly acting superintendent. She succeeded Ronna HasBrouck, who led SAU 58 from 2019 to June 2023, and Pierre Couture, who served as interim superintendent from August 2023 until Landry's appointment.

Now, the SAU 58 board is again seeking an interim leader to oversee four small North Country schools: a K-8 school

with 65 students in Stratford, a K-5 school with 112 students, a 6-12 school with 179 students in Groveton, and a K-6 school with 29 students in Stark.

The superintendent will work with three individual district school boards, each of which meets monthly, and one SAU-wide board that meets three times per year.

Candidates must be certified or certifiable as a superintendent in New Hampshire. Internal applicants are encouraged

to apply. Applications must be submitted through [Schoolspring.com](http://Schoolspring.com).

While the current search is for an interim leader, the SAU board may consider candidates for a permanent position and could offer a multi-year contract with regionally competitive salary and benefits.

SAU 58 serves the communities of Northumberland, Stark and Stratford. More information is available at [www.sau58.org](http://www.sau58.org).

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# Pet Memorial Rainbow Bridge Is Dedicated

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

LANCASTER — A group of partners came together to create something new in the community — Rainbow Bridge, a pet memorial, which debuted on Sunday, with dozens of area residents and their dogs and pets turning out for the dedication.

“It’s for anybody who’s had any kind of pet that crossed the Rainbow Bridge,” John Jaworowski, a director of the Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce, said just prior to the formal dedication.

Anchored in poems and literature, “crossing the rainbow bridge” is a metaphor in which animals that die are transported to a lush meadow, where they are restored to health and play and wait to be reunited with their owners before crossing into heaven.

The bridge in Lancaster — which was built from volunteer labor by Lionel Cloutier, Keegan O’Connell, and Alex Johnston — was disassembled from its building spot in Groveton and moved to Lancaster, beside The Granite Grind, where it was put back together and placed on a plot of land owned by Rita Cloutier.

On it, area residents can place the collars of their pets who have passed on.

The land is beside a memorial park dedicated to the memory of Cloutier’s husband, Greg Cloutier, who died in September 2022.

The Rainbow Bridge is dedicated to the memory of David Weiner, founder of the Lancaster-based Ministry of Dogs, a dog-walking and pet-sitting business, who passed away on

March 14.

The idea came about after Jaworowski, a self-proclaimed “old” Eagle Scout, visited an Eagle Scout website.

“There was an Eagle Scout out in the Midwest who built this as an Eagle Scout project for his town,” he said. “I saw the picture and said ‘wow’ and presented it to the chamber of commerce and everybody was real excited about it.”

Jaworowski showed a photograph of the bridge to Lionel Cloutier, a cousin of Greg, who said he could build it.

Rita Cloutier said she would pay for the materials.

With Weiner having founded the Ministry of Dogs, those on the chamber board agreed it would be a great idea to dedicate the bridge in his memory, said Jaworowski.

Anyone can attach a collar to the bridge for any pet or animal.

While the bridge serves as a memorial, the nearby St. Paul’s Episcopal Church holds an annual blessing of animals each October.

“I was told back in the past that people used to bring not only their cats and dogs, but their horses,” said Jaworowski. “I think maybe some day there may be a horse collar on here. I have no idea what will show up on the bridge. We really think it’s a special thing for the town, for the people here locally. It gives people a chance to hang a collar if they want and go sit on the benches and just reflect on the pets that they’ve had in the past. It’s a nice quiet spot. It just brings another thing for Greg’s park. It all fits in as a memorial.”

“This little bridge represents a place where people can come together to remember the pets that have passed away and



On Sunday, the Rainbow Bridge, a memorial to pets, debuted in Lancaster. Explaining how it came about is John Jaworowski, of the Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

crossed the rainbow bridge,” Debbie Szauder, pastoral associate with St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, said during the dedication. “This belongs to the community and is a welcoming place for everyone who loves their pets, both past and present.”

Stephanie Weiner, wife of David, thanked the Chamber of Commerce, community partners, pets that inspired the bridge, and those who chose to honor David with the dedication.

She asked attendees to take a moment to think about the people in their lives and their unique personalities.

“Everyone has quirks, characteristics, and idiosyncrasies that make them them,”

said Weiner. “David saw this in every animal he cared for. Through his dog walking and pet sitting, he cared for their needs, but he also cared for their unique qualities — their personalities, their quirks, and their feelings. He believed that all animals are sentient beings, creatures capable of experiencing feelings, and through his work, he made it safe for them to fully express themselves to him.”

Each day, while walking or visiting animals, David took photographs that captured their essence and shared them with their owners, and was proud to be able to get to know his clients’ pets, she said.


The day David died, Wein-

er — who attended Sunday’s dedication with their two greyhounds, Marty and Major Tom — had a vision of him arriving at the Rainbow Bridge, where he was greeted by their first two greyhounds, his dog and bird from his youth, and by his client animals that passed through the years.


“For those grieving the loss of a loved one — human or animal — may they live on in your heart, and may their memory be a blessing,” she said. Jaworowski thanked the project’s donors, who are named on the bridge plaque: Rita Cloutier, who also serves on the chamber board, for what he said is her “extreme generosity”; North Country Ford; Schurman Motor Co.; Annie’s on Main; the Northern Gateway Chamber of Commerce; Lionel

See **Pet**, Page 11


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# County Issues Final Proposed \$47 Million Courthouse Plan

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

After several years in development, Grafton County has issued its final report presentation for the proposed new county courthouse, a project that involves demolishing the existing structure and replacing it with a new and larger building.

In the report, Lavallee Brensinger Architects — which was enlisted in 2024 to study replacement, as recommended in the 2021 facility assessment by EH Danson Associates — estimates a total project cost of \$47,383,337, based on third quarter 2026 construction.

In their conclusion, the firm recommends a new building encompassing 64,668 gross square feet to meet the projected 2045 needs of the Grafton County Sheriff's Office, dispatch and

communications, New Hampshire Department of Corrections probation and parole, the Grafton County attorney's office, Grafton County Register of Deeds, county maintenance department, New Hampshire Department of Motor Vehicles, and the New Hampshire Judicial Branch, all of which completed questionnaires and participated in meetings to review current and projected needs.

An existing conditions review concludes that the current 40,000-square-foot courthouse must remain operational during construction and the new courthouse must remain as close as possible to the county jail, and the public entrance must be visible from the road.

The courthouse building committee and design team determined that the location of the existing courthouse's parking lot balances the criteria as a site,



*The final presentation report has been issued for the proposed new Grafton County courthouse, the public entrance for which is depicted here. (Contributed architectural rendering)*

said architectural representatives.

A new courthouse, located in approximately the same spot as the existing facility but closer to the road, would replace the courthouse at the county complex in North Haverhill, which was built in the early 1970s.

Demolition of the existing structure is included in the price tag, Grafton County commis-

sioners noted in their June 24 meeting.

The next step would be for the county commission to recommend it to the executive committee of the 27-member Grafton County Delegation, which would then make its recommendation to the delegation.

The delegation, which represents the county's towns, would take the final vote. A two-

thirds delegation vote in favor would be needed for approval.

Proponents of replacement say county departments and services have grown in the past five decades and the current building does not meet 21st century needs; many departments are increasingly cramped for space; machine components are original and no longer being supported by the companies that manufactured them; there are building and life-safety code deficiencies, accessibility issues, and high maintenance costs in the existing building; and a new facility would carry energy and operational efficiencies that save money.

Some residents have voiced concerns that the cost is too great for small towns.

During the June 24 commission meeting, county maintenance supervisor Jim Oakes said replacement, rather than

renovating and adding to the existing courthouse, is the recommended path, and if it's determined that replacement is too costly, the county must still face the issues that need to be addressed in the current building, and to not address them would be negligent.

Martha McLeod, the county commission chair, said the three commissioners need to review the architectural report and decide their next steps.

The New Hampshire Bureau of Court Facilities currently pays \$338,208 to the county to lease a courtroom, office space, and storage space encompassing 21,291 square feet for Grafton Superior Court and Haverhill District Court.

Among the major occupants in the existing building are the sheriff's department, emergency dispatch, and the county attorney's office.

## BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS & SERVICES GUIDE



## Presby Brothers Go Into Propane Business

BY ROBERT BLECHL  
Staff Writer

Trevor and Thad Presby are adding another business line in the North Country — propane.

"In Franconia, we just set two big tanks that look like submarines," said Trevor Presby. "We are going into the business and will be selling and providing propane services to people in this area."

Although several propane companies headquartered out of state provide service locally, the goal of the new Presby business is to have a local connection that offers reliable service and fast response, he said.

The coverage area will encompass Littleton, Bethlehem, Franconia, Sugar Hill, Easton, and Lisbon.

"We want to provide service to the locals and bring back the one-on-one contact, so you'll be talking to someone in Franconia, not Texas or Nova Scotia or whoever it would be," said Presby. That's how we do our

oil business already. It just adds onto our oil and our plumbing."

Staff will be on hand for 24-hour service.

"We already have that, but we're adding that to the propane line," said Presby. "We've been doing heating oil for years and now we're adding that line for 24-hour on-call and added some technicians and drivers. We've added about five more staff members for this business."

The new propane line could serve thousands of homes and businesses, he said.

The business has taken on its first accounts, hired a person who has more than three decades of propane experience to manage it, and brought in five tractor trailer loads of tanks to swap out.

"We should be able to start selling propane in mid-July," said Presby. "It's good for the area. There's only one other local propane company. It would be nice to get back to those roots where we have a local company that can service you. We're just

See Presby, Page 11

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## Presby

Continued from Page 10  
happy to serve the community and do another business that

we think the community needs. It fits in with everything we already do, the gas stations and grocery stores.”

With locally based service, the goal is to never have anyone

run out of propane, he said.

“The nice thing about this is we get a lot of calls about snow plowing and we have to snow plow for the propane companies,” said Presby. “Now, we’ll

just schedule it right out of our office. If we know the truck has to get up a bad driveway, they don’t have to worry about that service anymore. We’ll take care of it in-house.”

## Pet

Continued from Page 9  
Cloutier; Johnston; and Keegan, the latter of whom did all the bridge metal work.

“It’s kind of a labor of love, and hopefully, it will be here for a long time,” said Jaworowski, whose name is also on the plaque as a donor.

“As we dedicate this space, let’s consider that our pets are a valuable part of the community,” said Szauter. “Without them, it would be very boring for sure. There are service animals, there are rescue animals, there are animals who visit nursing homes, and there are those that are pets and day after day continue to provide unconditional love. May this Rainbow Bridge become a place where grief can be accepted and healing may begin, where old friends are remembered and new friendships are established.”

She then read a poem titled the “The Rainbow Bridge” and written by Edna Clyne-Rekhy, who wrote it when she was 19, after the loss of her beloved lab, Major.

“With great joy, we dedicate this rainbow bridge to

David Weiner and the entire town of Lancaster,” said Szauter. “We declare that it is now a part of the community and available to all ... If you have a collar or a representative of a collar, we have a place here for them to stay.”

The dedication included a reading of the blessing of the animals — in which Szauter said animals are a gift that brings joy and lessons about love and resilience — followed by a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Rita Cloutier attended with Miss Tootsie, her long-haired dachshund.

“She replaces two other dachshunds that I lost four years ago,” said Cloutier. “I lost two in one year, [ages] 14 and 15.”

Cloutier attached to the bridge an orange collar that belonged to Bear, her large Labrador mix who was known all around town.

In the past week, even before Sunday’s dedication, the bridge had nearly a half dozen collars wrapped around its rails.

“I’m hoping there will be a lot more collars to make that rainbow,” said Cloutier.

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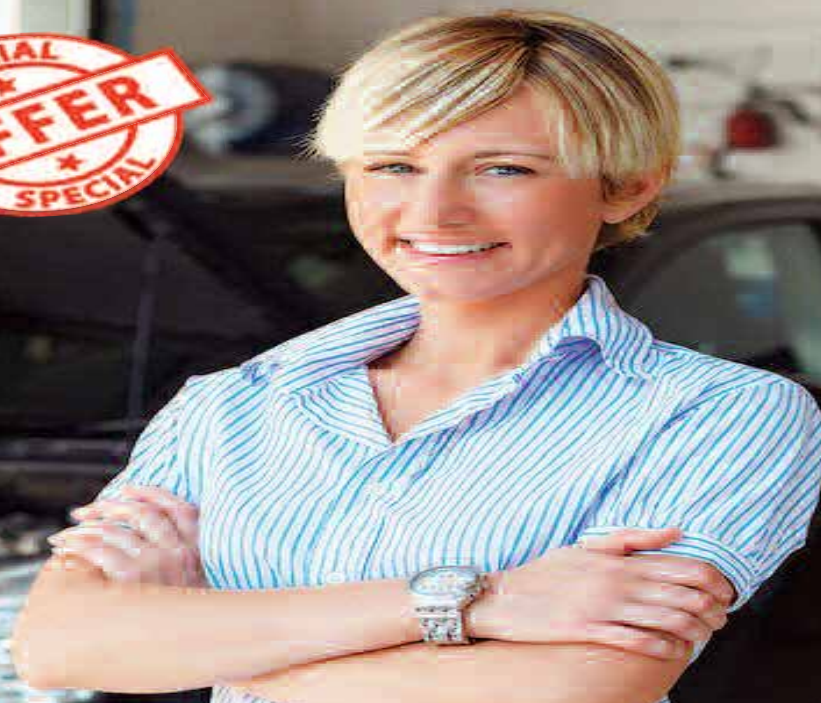
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