



The Littleton Weekly Record

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2024

LOCAL NEWS

Talbot Declares For Senate One Race

Page 2

FREE



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Amen. Select Board Unanimously Agrees To Discontinue Opening Prayer. **Page 2**



Select Board members Kerri Harrington, Linda MacNeil and Roger Emerson vote 3-0 to end prayer to open board meetings. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

Board Shuts Book On Opening Prayer

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

LITTLETON—After nearly two years, the Select Board has closed the book on the prayer that had opened board meetings.

It was a practice that began with a suggestion by former Littleton Select Board member Carrie Gendreau.

But with a new board member as of March 12 and opposition from residents voiced during the March 11 meeting, the Select Board revisited it during their meeting on March 25.

“It needs to be addressed,” said Selectman Roger Emerson, who, during a formal vote in August 2022 following two months of opening prayer done on a trial basis, cast a vote against, making for a 2-1 board vote to keep prayer.

Linda MacNeil, who was elected chair of the board on Monday after a 3-0 board vote, agreed that the issue needed to be addressed.

“We have been having, for about the last two years, opening prayer done by pastors within the Littleton community,” said MacNeil. “The consensus of not only the public, but I think of this board, is that it leaves out other denominations. So our idea, our suggestion, would be to discontinue the prayer, but to include a moment of silence after our Pledge of Allegiance.”

She asked for a motion.

“I’ll motion that we move to a moment of silence after the Pledge of Allegiance,” said new Select Board member Kerri Harrington.

Emerson seconded the motion for a 3-0 vote.

“I want to thank the board for the prayer change,” said Lilo Rhein-stein.

During the March 11 meeting, Rhein-stein called the opening prayer divisive and said that she and others of different denominations were not represented in the prayers.

Resident Marie Slack agreed and also called for an end to the opening prayer.

Outside of board meetings, Emerson, at the time of prayer adoption in mid-2022, said some constituents had come to him with concerns, including about prayer opening the town up to lawsuits.

On an issue unrelated to prayer, Rhein-stein also thanked the Department of Public Works for keeping the roads passable during the week-end snowstorm.

“It was almost fully cleared up, at least in my neighborhood, by early Sunday,” she said. “I want to thank you for that hard work, particularly when I heard they had breakdowns. It was never higher than what you could get through with a vehicle. And we got 2 feet of snow.”

The public works crew put in 30 hours between Saturday and Sunday, said DPW director Doug Damko.

MacNeil said called it a “tough storm” and said she heard the plows come through regularly where she lives.

Business Owner Declares For State Senate Race

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

NORTH COUNTRY — Rusty Talbot is no stranger to steep ascents.

He’s an avid rock climber and his business, the [North Country Climbing Center](#) in Lisbon, rapidly rose to the pinnacle of the region’s recreation industry.

Now he looks to scale the state’s political heights.

The 46-year-old Sugar Hill resident this week confirmed his candidacy for the District 1 Senate seat.

He will seek the Democratic nomination in a bid to replace incumbent Republican Carrie Gendreau of Littleton.

While Gendreau has become a polarizing figure for her provocative comments on LGBTQ+ and other issues, Talbot said he wants to act as a uniting force for the region.

“I want the North Country to be represented by someone who is working really hard to promote the interests of all people in the North Country and focusing on issues that matter to the whole population. Things that we can sort of rally around and agree on as challenges,” Talbot said. “There’s so many issues out there like housing, healthcare, childcare, and education which are not inherently divisive. And I want to stay away from the divisive issues and I really think that we need someone to be focusing on the issues that really matter. And I haven’t seen that recently.”

PUBLIC SERVICE

Talbot is the first Democratic candidate to announce for the senate race ahead of the June 5-14 filing period.

A political newcomer, he brings a successful track record as a business owner and en-



Rusty Talbot

gaged citizen.

Talbot founded the North Country Climbing Center in 2014, creating a state-of-the-art facility with a wide range of programming.

He is also president of the Franconia Notch Regional Chamber of Commerce, a volunteer member of the Sugar Hill Fire Department and Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team, and is involved with the Adaptive Sports Partners of the North Country, Littleton Rotary Club, [Granite United Way](#) and Colonial Theatre.

For his work supporting the local economy and giving back to others, he was named Stay Work Play’s 2017 [Young Professional of the Year](#).

“I view the way that I spend my time as being focused around public service. Whether that’s being on the fire department, the captain of the local search and rescue team, or the president of the Colonial Theatre board,” Talbot said.

Talbot’s interest in public service is a family trait.

His late father, [Dr. Lee Merriam Talbot](#) (1930-2021), was the primary author of the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act; Chief Scientist at the White House Council on Environmental Quality during the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations; and Director General of the World Conservation Union.

His mother, [Martha](#), is the co-founder of the Student Conservation Association, past President of the Society of Women Geographers, and Vice President of the Rachel Carson Council.

His grandfather F.N.U. Talbot was a senior official in the U. S. Forest Service, and great-grandfather [C. Hart Merriam](#) was the founder of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“I come from this lineage of folks, I was raised to believe that public service is an important thing,” Talbot said.

“...PLACE WE FELT MOST AT HOME”

A married father of two, Talbot grew up in the greater Washington DC area.

Although he was raised around politics and once attended the same high school as New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, he was never a Beltway insider.

He and his older brother were Eagle Scouts and their adventurous parents instilled in them a love for the outdoors. They hiked, biked, camped, skied, climbed, and spent weeks in the back-country.

While attending Dartmouth College from 1995 to 1999, Talbot explored the New Hampshire wilderness for the first time. It left

See **Talbot**, Page 10

Health Official To Gendreau: Oppose Bills That “Endanger” LGBTQ+ Residents

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

CONCORD — A local health official has called on state Sen. Carrie Gendreau to oppose legislation that he said targets LGBTQ+ people.

Ed Shanshala, CEO of Ammonoosuc Community Health Services, wrote an email to Gendreau on March 30 that states, “I am deeply concerned about the dozens of bills being considered in the 2024 legislative session that endanger LGBTQ+ rights and access to health care in New Hampshire, especially for transgender youth.”

In his email, Shanshala urged Gendreau, R-Littleton, to oppose more than 30 bills currently before the state legislature that he said would adversely impact LGBTQ+ residents and patients.

That includes two bills sponsored by Gendreau that would prevent transgender women from playing interscholastic women’s sports.

In his email, Shanshala wrote to Gendreau, “As our NH State Senator, I trust you will not support a bill that harms the community in general nor the patients we serve.”

He described the proposed legislation as going against the values of ACHS, the North Country, and the state of New Hampshire, and the country.

“These 30+ bills are contrary to who we are as a community and equal treatment under the law,” Shanshala wrote.

Shanshala’s email was sent the evening before the New Hampshire House narrowly approved another bill to bar transgender girls from participating in female sports in K-12 schools and public colleges and universities.

That bill, House Bill 1205, is co-sponsored by another North Country elected official, Rep. Mike Ouellet, R-Colebrook.

The language is nearly identical to Senate Bill 524, which is co-sponsored by Gendreau.

In his email, Shanshala wrote about those bills, “we are concerned about the grave social and mental health implications of banning LGBTQ+ kids from playing sports. There is a tremendous body of research showing that physically active youth have improved mental health outcomes, greater self-esteem and social supports, and lower risks for chronic illness.”

In her capacity as a former Littleton Select Board member, Gendreau ignited a political firestorm in Aug. 2023 when

See **Bills**, Page 10

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Lb

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BUTTAH POPCORN

LOCAL

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Lb

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Lb

Chicken Thighs

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Lb

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2/\$6

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2/\$4

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5/\$5

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2/\$7

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News Briefs

Profile School Names New Principal

BETHLEHEM — Profile School has named a new principal. Brandon Ray has been tabbed to replace outgoing principal Kerry Bushway, effective July 1.

The announcement was made prior to last week's annual meeting.

Ray has a 17-year career in education as a teacher and administrator.

He arrives from Saudi Arabia, where he's been the middle school assistant principal for American International School of Jeddah since 2022.

He previously served four years (2018 to 2022) as principal of Fort Washakie High School, a small accredited public school located in Fort Washakie, Wyoming, on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Before that, he taught math in Alaska and Wyoming public schools from 2007 to 2018. According to Ray's LinkedIn work history, he also served as a teacher leader for the non-profit CPM Educational Program from 2014 to 2018.

In his resume, Ray states, "I continue to advocate for high-quality education for students as a building leader promoting high expectations and student-centered practices based on evidence of success."

Among his skills and strengths, he lists "seeing the big picture." Ray earned two master's degrees from the University of Wyoming in educational leadership and administration (2018) and mathematics education (2016).

He also degrees from the University of Northern Colorado (NA 2014, Mathematics Education and Teacher Leadership), Pittsburg State University (BS 2007, mathematics) and attended Dodge City Community College.

Most recently, Ray enrolled in Wilkes University's 2024 Dubai Doctoral Cohort, according to a Wilkes University social media post.

The cohort is part of WU's International Doctor of Education program.

His predecessor, Bushway, submitted her resignation letter in December.

In the letter, she stated, "The Profile Education Association, as a whole, seems to not agree with my values, beliefs or my daily mantras. The PEA seems to have a different vision as to what needs to be accomplished to provide our students with the best education."

"As a principal, I can not continue being the positive leader for Profile School, work towards continued school improvement without the staff collaborating to be student focused, the value of trust being upheld, or professionalism."

Littleton Looks For New Public Works Director

LITTLETON — After five years, the town is searching for a new public works director. In two weeks, Doug Damko will depart, relocating to another state and returning to his engineering background.

The final day as director for Damko, who worked as a senior civil engineer with the city of Visalia, Calif. for 16 years before heading up the Littleton Department of Public Works beginning in February 2019, is April 5.

In the meantime, Littleton is working to ensure continuity in the department and several of its ongoing projects or those slated to begin in 2024.

The Littleton DPW's projects to begin this year include rehabilitating and upgrading Dells Dam and installing new sidewalks, crosswalks, and improvements along Cottage Street. The latter project has been nearly a decade in the works.

In recent years, town meeting voters have also approved a warrant article seeking \$500,000 to improve, replace, and repair selected roads and sidewalks around town.

Damko has been involved in the pre-engineering and engineering of several projects and has worked in other capacities as Littleton's public works director to move them along.

He has also helped the town develop

long-range plans for equipment, vehicle replacement, and municipal roads and has been involved in infrastructure planning.

Maintaining continuity is the goal, interim town manager Paul Smith said Wednesday.

"Doug has made a very fair and concerted effort to brief everybody, although I don't think all of the projects will receive direct attention until a new director is put in place," he said.

The town has begun advertising for a new director.

"If we get good candidates, we can hopefully have someone on board within a fairly short period of time around his departure," said Smith. "But that depends on the quality of candidates that apply. Should this be a longer transition, then I have been considering putting an interim in place just to make sure that all of the operational stuff that happens in the community continues until a new director is appointed."

After departing Littleton, Damko will be returning to his engineering roots and will be relocating to take a state job in Michigan.

"I definitely want to thank the town of Littleton for a good five years as public works director," Damko said Wednesday evening. "It was work that was a new career path. It was challenging and had a really high learning curve and it's been super-busy all the way through."

Damko came to Littleton with no experience in wastewater management but got up to speed quickly and learned much during

a demanding period when major upgrades were needed at the town's wastewater treatment plant.

His contract with Littleton has a provision for a 60-day notice, and since giving his notice, Damko has been in the mode of ensuring that all projects are covered for the next director.

"Hopefully, that person can be on board pretty quickly after my last day," he said.

With 28 years in public sector work and wanting to stay the course in the public sector, Damko said it was time to switch back to project engineering.

He cast a broad net to see what was out there.

While until recently his family had no connections in Michigan, they have since made some friends and he found a job with the Michigan Department of Transportation, for which he will be working out of a transportation office on the outskirts of Detroit.

"I'm ready to get back to my engineering roots," said Damko.

Although he has worked for a county and for municipalities, it will be his first foray into state work.

"I think it's a good opportunity in my career to try the state," said Damko. "My family is excited and we are gearing up to make the move. It's been a really good learning experience for me in Littleton. It's a vibrant, dynamic town and I appreciate all the people I've worked with."

Challengers Oust Incumbents In Profile School Board Races

BETHLEHEM — The Profile School Board will welcome two new faces.

Andrea Price and Michael Culver were elected to the board over incumbents at the annual meeting on March 21.

Culver defeated board member Ruth Heintz by a one-vote margin, 46-45, for a three-year seat representing Bethlehem.

Culver is a former Profile School Board member (2016-19)

who decided to run again partly because his son will enter Profile School in the fall.

"I'm glad the people came out to vote and I'm excited to serve

See **News Briefs**, Page 6

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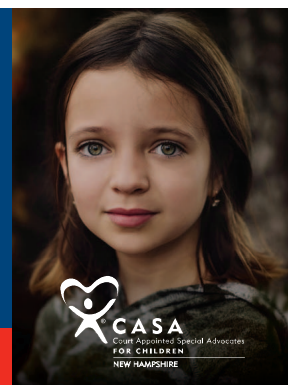


ON THE COVER: The White Mountain Special Olympics team racked up a dozen gold medals at the New Hampshire State Winter Games at Waterville Valley Resort on March 3-5, 2024. Snowshoers included: Front row, left to right: Ava Crompton, Masyn "Bubba" Phillips, Frank Biesler, Corbin Hayward. Back row, left to right: Jacob Lackie, Eliot Webster, Rachel Smith, Isabelle Brocuglio. Skiers not pictured included Evelyn White, Cassidy Hart and Camille Frenette. (Contributed Photo)

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Northumberland: Former Town Clerk Charged As Accomplice In DMV Records Violations

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

NORTHUMBERLAND—A second arrest has been made in connection with the investigation into a town employee who allegedly accessed Department of Motor Vehicle records without permission.

State Police on March 19 charged former Town Clerk Melinda Kennett with eight counts of Computer-Related Offenses and eight counts of Tampering with Public Records or Information. Each count is punishable by a fine of up to \$2,000 and a maximum of one year in jail.

Kennett, 59, was released on personal recognizance bail and is scheduled to appear in Lancaster Circuit Court on June 3.

According to state police, Kennett was charged as an accomplice for failure to oversee Deputy Town Clerk Courtney McLain.

McLain allegedly signed into the Department of Motor Vehicles records system using someone else's credentials and processed 28 separate DMV transactions without authorization from 10:47 a.m. to 11:37 a.m. on May 5, 2023, while Kennett was still serving as Town Clerk.

Attorney Leif Becker, who represents Kennett and McLain, issued a statement denying the charges against both.

"Melinda "Min" Kennett has been charged with 16 accomplice charges relating to the alleged 28 Misdemeanor Counts previously charged to Ms. McLain."

"In short the State alleges that Ms. Kennett was aware of the alleged 24 Class A Misdemeanors being committed by McLain and allowed or aided McLain in those crimes."

"These charges accuse McLain of accessing the NH DMV registration system using the credentials of a coworker, Niccole Vike, during a period in which McLain's access to this system was under suspension, and accuse Kennett of being an accomplice to the same."

"The issue here is that you can not be an accomplice to a crime without a crime having occurred."

According to Becker, the charges are baseless.

"There is clear evidence in the State's possession that Vike properly and legally processed the Motor Vehicle registrations at the

heart of these prosecutions. Vike has told the state unequivocally that she did so. There is photographic evidence placing Vike in the Northumberland Town Office that day. Vike called at least one of the individuals who's vehicle she registered from the Northumberland Town Office on that day," he wrote.

Becker said the charges were political.

McLain was arrested four days before the March 12 annual election, where she lost to Kathy Wiles in a two-way race for Town Clerk and Tax Collector.

"As I've stated previously, these prosecutions are political. I believe there is no coincidence that McLain was arrested prior to an election in which she ran for Town Clerk while the state was happy to wait until after that same election to file charges against Kennett. This amounts to intent to interfere in the Northumberland's election," Becker wrote.

He said many charges were legally insufficient and has asked for them to be tossed.

"Furthermore, I believe that even as alleged half of the charges levied against McLain are legally insufficient as the allegations detailed in 14 of the complaints against McLain in my opinion do not form the basis for a violation of the statutes they correspond to. In turn, this would mean that 8 of the complaints against Kennett are similarly deficient. A Motion to Dismiss half of the charges filed against McLain (14) has already been filed and is pending before the court. This legal insufficiency is something that will be addressed before the Court ever considers evidence."

Kennett and McLain were barred from using the DMV system because of a previous case.

In the summer of 2022, both were charged with Class B misdemeanor counts for violating New Hampshire's statute on motor vehicle laws through the unlawful disclosure/misuse of DMV records.

The charges stemmed from McLain revealing motor vehicle information about Northumberland Police Lt. William Daisey during a Select Board public meeting on July 18, 2022.

Similarly, Kennett was charged because she oversaw McLain.

Kennett subsequently announced her retirement after 20 years. Her last day was March 12.

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News Briefs

Continued from Page 4

again,” Culver said. “I’m excited about being involved and seeing if I can make a difference, especially since my son will be at the school.”

A veteran public official, Culver has served on Bethlehem’s Select Board (2010-16), Zoning Board and Library Trustees.

He hopes he can help the school board re-group after a series of recent incidents made headlines: The abrupt departure of the Athletic Director, concerns raised over student harassment and discipline, and friction between the school board and SAU 35 administration.

“I really don’t have an agenda,” Culver said, saying he simply wants to bring his experience to the table. “Obviously the board has been in the press the last few months [...] so I decided maybe

there needed to be a change.”

Meanwhile, Price ousted vice chair Alice Rocke for a three-year term representing Easton, Franconia and Sugar Hill.

Price (44 votes) won a four-way race over Rocke (30 votes), Brooke Dickinson (5 votes) and Cornelia Lorentzen (2).

She is a first-time school board member whose three children attended Profile School, two of whom graduated and one is a junior.

“I appreciate and thank the community for voting me in,” Price said. “I look forward to jumping in with the other board members so Profile can continue to be successful.”

Like Culver, Price would like to resolve the issues that have made headlines.

“[I hope] we can address these [matters] and move forward,” Price said.

After the polls closed, the Profile School District held its annual meeting.”

The election results capped off an otherwise routine annual meeting.

Voters also approved the 2024-25 operating budget and three-year collective bargaining agreement with the Profile Education Association.

Both passed by voice vote.

They will increase the local education tax rate as follows: Bethlehem, 68 cents; Easton, 23 cents; Franconia, 43 cents; Sugar Hill, 47 cents.

The \$6.96 million operating budget represents a 1.69 percent (\$111,000) increase over 2023-24.

The primary cost drivers are increases in: Salaries and benefits, special education services, out-of-district placements, and SAU services.

The “SAU services” line item will increase by approximately \$65,000 to add another staff member to the SAU 35 finance department.

Meanwhile, the three-year Collective Bargaining Agreement will increase salary and benefits spending by \$199,102 in 2024-25.

Voters OK Lisbon Regional Withdrawal Study

LISBON — The Lisbon Regional School District annual meeting on March 20 approved the creation of a withdrawal study committee.

The committee will crunch the numbers and recommend whether Lisbon Regional should remain with SAU 35, comprising five school districts: Bethlehem, Landaff, Lafayette Regional, Profile School, and Lisbon.

The warrant article was approved by voice vote; the committee will be assembled in the coming months.

According to state statute, the study committee will consist of two school board members and five at-large public members. The superintendent would be a non-voting member.

If the committee supports withdrawal, the Lisbon Regional School District would put the proposal to an annual meeting vote in 2025.

The school board drafted the ‘withdrawal study’ warrant article

in response to chronic financial issues.

In 2023, Lisbon had the 15th-highest local education tax rate in the state at \$18.07 per \$1,000 and the state’s third-highest total tax rate at \$34.26 per \$1,000.

School Board Chair Bob Adams explained, “It’s not that we have any issues with SAU 35 services. It’s purely a financial thing.”

As of now, New Hampshire downshifts education costs.

Its public schools are funded 20 percent by the state (the lowest rate in the nation) and 70 percent by local taxpayers (the highest rate).

The state-to-local downshift has hit Lisbon Regional harder than most districts.

That’s because LRS enrollment has plummeted 38 percent since 2003 and 20 percent during the pandemic, which has hastened the decline of per-pupil state aid.

And because Lisbon has one of the smallest tax bases in the state, local taxpayers have borne the brunt.

As previously stated, its local education and overall tax rates are among the highest of New Hampshire’s 259 towns, cities and unincorporated places.

Faced with those funding woes, Lisbon has underperformed. Its SAT scores, percentage of AP test takers, and post-secondary enrollment numbers are below the state average.

Some say LRS, one of the smallest PreK-12 schools in the state, should close and become a choice town.

However, last year LRS principal Sam Natti said receiving school tuition would be prohibitively high.

“If we cut anything else from our budget, it impacts our ability to legitimately educate the kids of those towns. But it’s going to cost more to close [the school]. So there’s no solution, we’re in a no man’s land,” Natti said in May 2023. “We’re as financially responsible as we can possibly be. But there’s not a lot of resources to work with.”

Health Consortium To Unveil Naloxone Vending Machine

To combat drug overdoses that remain at high levels from the opioid crisis, the North Country Health Consortium is rolling out New Hampshire’s first vending machine that will carry Naloxone, the anti-overdose agent administered through the nostrils to reverse respiratory shutdown instantly.

The machine comes less than two months after the Littleton School District allowed Naloxone, also called Narcan, to be more widely accessible in schools beyond just the nurse’s office. This followed a “save a life” presentation in early February by Littleton Police Chief Paul Smith and Littleton Fire Rescue Chief Chad Miller.

The consortium’s initiative is the newest installment of the Save-One-Life campaign and part of the consortium’s AskPE-TRA program.

The no-cost vending machine will be unveiled at 2 p.m. on April 9 during a ceremony at the consortium’s location at the Mt. Eustis Commons building at 262 Cottage St. in Littleton.

See **News Briefs**, Page 7

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Continued from Page 6

Resources, training, and opportunities to connect with others for the effort will be available following the ceremony.

To cut the ceremonial ribbon, AskPETRA has also invited a special guest from the North Country community who has experience using Nalaxone to save a loved one.

The machine was awarded to NCHC following a competitive grant process, which allowed NCHC to be the location that receives it.

“It’s unique and exciting,” Dhanele Duffy, NCHC communications director, said Monday. “This is the first and only one of its kind in New Hampshire. It’s going to be right there on Cottage Street, pretty much in downtown Littleton and accessible and free.”

The machine will be located at the Mt. Eustis Commons building.

“It’s something that’s needed and we’re excited to be able to provide that to those who need it in the community,” said Duffy.

The person (currently unnamed) who will be cutting the ribbon at the ceremony used Naloxone to save her husband’s life.

“We were really moved by her story so we asked her if she’d be interested in coming and cutting the ribbon,” said Duffy. “She said yes. Having someone whose life has been affected by it is really special.”

In a statement, NCHC representatives said the opioid crisis has devastated communities nationwide, claiming countless lives prematurely.

Fentanyl remains the top overdose killer.

In 2022, more than half of all drug cases examined by the New Hampshire State Police forensic laboratory contained the synthetic opioid fentanyl, compared to less than 30 percent in 2019 and less than 1 percent a decade ago.

Of 422 total overdose deaths in 2023 in the Granite State, 356 involved fentanyl.

The consortium’s AskPETRA program also has Save One Life kits available at regional community distribution sites.

The kits include Naloxone, fentanyl test strips, and other items related to safer substance use and harm reduction.

While the grant is for a single vending machine, more machines in the future could be delivered locally if more funding is available, said Jennifer Goulet, program manager at NCHC.

She described the competitive grant process for the one machine.

“All grant applications differ by who is putting out the funding,” said Goulet. “Typically, there are a determined number of awards that will be given based on the full amount of funds. For this grant, only five awards were possible in the Northeast, and we received one. I am not sure what made us stand out to the funder, but I am happy that we did.”

NCHC’s PETRA Direct Programs will fill a gap in the consortium’s systems related to prevention, treatment, and recovery in northern New Hampshire, said Goulet.

The work that the consortium has completed during the past three years prepared the community to accept and use this machine, she said.

“In addition, I believe that it helped for us

to have an already successful Naloxone campaign,” said Goulet. “The Save-One-Life campaign provides Naloxone kits with information, CPR shields, alcohol prep pads, fentanyl test strips, latex gloves and information, as well as access to no-cost training and the implementation of community distribution sites to increase access.”

Resident Calls For Investigation After Not Receiving Absentee Ballots

Some Littleton residents who were out of state could not vote in the March 12 town election because they didn’t receive the absentee ballots they had requested ahead of time.

Littleton resident Mark St. Hilaire is encouraging the New Hampshire Secretary of State’s office to conduct an investigation to find answers and ensure it doesn’t happen again, especially with the state and federal elections coming up later in the year. He and his wife, Kristen, submitted paperwork in January for town and school ballots to be mailed directly to their listed address in South Carolina.

He said that for Littleton’s 2023 vote, they cast absentee ballots from Florida without a problem and had received everything on time.

After confirming with Littleton Town Clerk Angela Brousseau, St. Hilaire said the 2024 ballots were mailed through the U.S. Postal Service to their rented post box at the UPS store in Beaufort, South Carolina, on Feb. 29, two weeks before the town vote.

But they never received them.

“This is a town election and it’s important,” Mark St. Hilaire said Friday. “I’ve been on the Lakeway committee for the new school and my wife and I were waiting to vote for it.”

On Thursday, he submitted to the Littleton town clerk’s office a formal letter of complaint, which also asks the Secretary of State’s office to conduct an investigation and reach out to the U.S. Postal Service to determine what happened to the ballots.

“Somebody owes the public an explanation,” said St. Hilaire. “It has no reflection on Angela. Since she has become the town clerk, she has been fabulous. But what she told me raised my antennas — ‘you’re not the only one.’”

On Friday, Brousseau said her office mailed about 70 absentee ballots for the 2024 town vote.

In addition to the St. Hilaire’s not receiving their ballots at all, Brousseau said three residents who were out of state reached out to her to say that they did not receive their ballots until the day before the vote, making them unable to mail them back in time for the March 12 vote.

Those residents were in Florida.

All absentee ballots go out with the regular mail.

“They were mailed out of our office on Feb. 29 and there was definitely plenty of time for them to get theirs and mail it back to us,” said Brousseau.

Those Littleton residents in Littleton or within the Granite State did not have late or lack of delivery issues with their absentee ballots.

“It was just those out of state that had the is-

sue,” said Brousseau. “Everybody within New Hampshire received theirs.”

Brousseau contacted representatives at the Secretary of State’s office to inform them that some Littleton ballots never reached those who requested them.

On Thursday, The Caledonian-Record contacted the Secretary of State’s office to determine if other towns in New Hampshire had the same absentee ballot issue and, if so, if the state is investigating the reason why.

“Since local elections are carried out on the local level, we would suggest reaching out to the individual communities regarding any delays they may have had with absentee ballots, said Anna Sventek, spokesperson for the Secretary of State. “Our office provides election officials support, but our role in local elections is limited.”

On Friday, Lancaster Town Clerk Charity Baker said she mailed out ten absentee ballots for 2024 and got all of them back.

“We didn’t really mail a lot,” she said.

While there were no issues this year, there were struggles in previous elections, said Baker.

“I always worry that they won’t reach them in time, but I haven’t had any that didn’t reach them,” she said.

Other town clerks could not be reached on Friday.

In an email sent to The Caledonian-Record on the eve of the March 12 town vote detailing his experience, St. Hilaire said, “Since I was 18 years old (44 years ago) I have consistently voted in every single election whether municipal, state or Presidential no matter where I resided. I have voted many times by absentee ballot. Plus, I’ve had the honor of working with the Lakeway Building Committee and the Littleton School Committee along with other officials to research and plan out a cost effective new elementary school building to replace the worn out and in-

efficient building on Union St. My wife and I were looking forward to casting our votes for this project and the budget questions.”

2023 was the first Littleton town vote for the St. Hilaire’s.

At that time, they didn’t know that the town and school ballots were separate.

But for 2024, Brousseau worked with the school to have both town and school absentee ballots mailed out together so they can come back together, which St. Hilaire said is much appreciated and eliminates the need to contact the school separately.

“What we did this year is send out both ballots together instead of separately,” said Brousseau.

With the major elections coming up in New Hampshire and across the county, however, St. Hilaire said is is concerned about the U.S. Postal Service being able to deliver absentee ballots in a reasonable amount of time.

“It’s just that something happened once these ballots went out,” he said. “Maybe they’re sitting in a basket somewhere, maybe it was a truck that flipped over. Maybe there should be a little accountability from the postal service saying what happened to these ballots. Was it a fluke? Let’s find out.”

On Saturday, Stephen Doherty, New Hampshire spokesman for the U.S. Postal Service, said the USPS is committed to the secure, timely delivery of the nation’s election mail.

“In 2024, just as we have in previous elections, the Postal Service is committed to fulfilling its role in the electoral process when voters choose to utilize vote by mail as a part of the election system,” he said.

“Regarding ballots in Littleton, NH, without knowing how the ballots were directed to South Carolina, it’s not possible to further comment on these two specific ballots,” said Doherty. “Postal

See News Briefs, Page 8

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News Briefs

Continued from Page 7

Management has not received reports of late or missing ballots in Littleton. The Postal Service takes such issues very seriously. We worked closely with New Hampshire's Secretary of State in the leadup to the primaries, and we have reached out to Littleton's town clerk to understand any issues. We are looking forward to a successful election in November."

Board Eyes New Sidewalks, Celebrates Pantry Upgrades

The Bethlehem Select Board is looking at a grant to advance the plan for new sidewalks to extend to the library and elementary school and is celebrating recently completed upgrades to the food pantry inside of town hall, courtesy of a \$15,000 donation.

During the board's March 11 meeting, board member Nancy Strand said the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has a two-part grant for sidewalks, one for planning and development and the other for implementation.

During a webinar she attended, she learned that anyone who applies for the planning and development money is accepted.

There are three rounds of application deadlines, the first of which is in April or early May, and it was recommended that interested parties apply for the first round.

Strand said, "We could at least complete this step of the DOT grant process for the sidewalk."

The DOT cautioned that grants might not be available for a town near another town that previ-

Internet Fiber Construction To Begin In Littleton

After several years of broadband expansion planning at the state level, the installation of fiber-based Internet will begin this week in Littleton as Fidium Fiber expands multi-gig speed fiber service to more than 4,400 homes and businesses.

Residents can expect traffic detours in some areas.

"Construction is scheduled to start in the area as soon as March 29 [Friday] and will continue for the next several months," said Kyle Thweatt, a representative of Consolidated Communications.

Other towns that will see construction along roads in the coming months are Bethlehem, Dalton, Lisbon, and Lyman.

The exact start dates will vary by location.

In 2023, the state of New Hampshire awarded Consolidated Communications, which owns Fidium Fiber, a \$40 million contract to build high-speed fiber Internet.

Installing new fiber optic lines along roads and in public utility areas requires some digging and climbing of utility poles, said representatives of Consolidated Communications.

Crews will be working along the edge of

private property within public rights-of-way and public utility easements, and they said the work might require some temporary traffic detours, noise, and dust.

Paint markings and flags might be placed in areas where construction is active.

The flags will be removed once work is complete.

They said crews will work quickly, clean up after themselves, and aim to minimize any disruption.

"We know this work could be inconvenient for our community and we appreciate your patience while we upgrade neighborhoods to 100 percent fiber Internet," said Consolidated Communications representatives. "More information on the fiber build progress will be shared with town and city officials, as well as residents. Mailers, door hangers, and construction alerts will be distributed to keep the public informed, and Fidium representatives will be visiting neighborhoods to share more about what to expect during construction and how to sign up to be the first notified as soon as service is ready to install."

Residents wanting to learn more about the fiber Internet construction process and to sign up for updates on the progress can visit FidiumFiber.com/Expanding.

Residents with specific construction ques-

tions or concerns can contact 877-769-4771.

The construction map can be found at <https://batchgeo.com/map/littleton-nh-fidium-2024>

In 2022, the New Hampshire Governor and Council awarded the New Hampshire Electric Cooperative \$50 million to build high-speed broadband.

The money for both the co-op and Consolidated Communications comes from American Rescue Plan Act federal stimulus funding.

Although the schedule calls for the entire broadband expansion to be completed in 2026, representatives with the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs, which has its own broadband program for communities, expect completion in 2025.

Once installed, residents, businesses, schools, safety services, and organizations can tap into the high-speed fiber.

In addition to increasing Internet speed (which will be a minimum of 100 megabits per second, with most of what is being installed at much faster speeds), the project aims to fill gaps where there is no service or poor service.

New Hampshire has also benefited from federal Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment program funding and has more than \$318 in total funding for broadband expansion across the state.

ously applied.

"Haverhill applied previously," she said. "It looked like it was around 2016. They got \$200,000 for the planning and development to do a plan of action, and nothing's happened since."

A plan of action is more than the engineering

study, said Strand.

"This is going to be very detailed," she said. "Even if we don't use it for an implementation grant for DOT, it still seems like it will have value going forward, however it's going to be funded. The other piece of it is they really want to emphasize safety. Our project's perfect for that."

The effort can also focus on library accessibility for those with disabilities, said Select Board member April Hibberd.

The town previously formed a traffic calming committee to examine ways to ensure motorists' compliance with Main Street's 30 mph speed limit, which is necessary for the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and other motorists.

Strand said the traffic calming aspect won't be as large an expense as the sidewalks, but the calming piece can also be included and submitted.

She said, "That might enhance our application by making it focus on all townspeople, Main Street, the library, and the school."

Board chairman Mike Bruno said it might be helpful to list other stakeholders, like the Bethlehem Elementary School Board, the Bethlehem Village District, and the library's trustees so that those governing bodies can be included in the grant application instead of just the Select Board.

Select Board member Veronica Morris suggested getting letters of support before the grant application deadline.

The grant, said Morris, can "fund a lot of pots."

It could also buy temporary bump-outs at crosswalks, after which, if they're successful, the town can reach out to DOT about permanent bump-outs, said Selectman Bruce Caplain.

Food Pantry

In December, the Bethlehem Food Pantry inside the town hall received an anonymous \$15,000 donation, which appears to be the largest contribution in

its more than two decades.

The money was used to make significant upgrades, including adding new appliances, shelving, paint and lighting, and to bring the facility up to code in a few areas.

The goal was to make the pantry a safer place for visitors and to give them autonomy in their choices by making the pantry more of a self-serve model.

After two months, that work, headed up by Bethlehem welfare administrator Dawn Ferring, was completed on town meeting day.

"Dawn purchased new freezers and refrigerators for the pantry, painted the floor, and took out shelving," said Hibberd. "It looks fantastic, totally different. It's all organized and she worked really hard. She did a fantastic job."

"It looks like a little mini-supermarket," said Strand. "It looks great."

"She's doing a really good job, too, of getting all different foods in there, milks and cheese and all that kind of stuff," said Hibberd. "There's a lot of produce in there."

She said the town can also put many food items in the nearby Little Free Pantry.

For the Bethlehem Food Pantry, the town has worked with local farms.

"I know Meadowstone wants to do it and has been doing it," said Caplain. "It would be great to keep that up."

Bath: School Budget Survives Zero Increase Amendment

BATH — Voters approved Bath Village School's \$3.38 million budget over objections at

See News Briefs, Page 9

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OMNI MOUNT WASHINGTON



Bretton Woods

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Talbot

Continued from Page 2

an impression.

After graduating from Dartmouth magna cum laude with a history major and anthropology minor, he worked several years as a consultant and eventually returned to Washington, DC.

However, he and his wife dreamed of living in Franconia Notch. They had gotten engaged on Cannon Cliff and held their 2007 wedding in Sugar Hill. So once Talbot got the opportunity to work remotely, the family relocated to the North Country.

“[My wife and I] decided that we didn’t want to raise our kids in Washington, DC. We wanted to bring them to the place that we felt most at home and most comfortable. And that’s when we moved up here,” he said.

In his new home, he found purpose.

He discovered that few locals were taking advantage of the area’s world-class rock climbing, which he likened to people growing up in Aspen who never thought about skiing.

So he founded the North Country Climbing Center to promote the sport to locals, make it more accessible and affordable, create a friendly and supportive regional climbing community, and boost the local outdoor recreation economy.

“I view it as a mission-driven business,” he said.

BECOMING A CANDIDATE

Encouraged by friends and peers, Talbot first

thought about running for state Senate late last year.

He carefully and deliberately researched the matter, to determine if he could take on the challenge.

Through long conversations with many people he learned about the campaign process and what it required, and the role and duties of a state senator.

Then, he had multiple heart-to-heart conversations with his wife, to figure out if they could make the necessary sacrifices.

“It wasn’t a split-second decision,” Talbot said. “I take the commitment very seriously.”

He will appear alongside Democratic Executive Council candidate Emmett Soldati in Gorham [on March 27](#).

However, he will not officially launch his campaign until next month, after the Littleton Rotary Club’s [59th annual scholarship fundraiser](#) on April 12.

Talbot, who is President of the Littleton Rotary Club Charitable Fund, doesn’t want the campaign to impact the fundraiser “in any way.”

The priority for the next three weeks, he said, “is raising a bunch of money for kids.”

“...HELPA LOT OF PEOPLE”

Talbot’s campaign took shape as Gendreau made headlines for her positions on LGBTQ+ issues.

Notably, she called homosexuality “an abomination.”

While Gendreau’s comments were hurtful to many local residents, Talbot was encouraged by people’s response.

Earlier this month, voters replaced Gendreau on the Select Board with LGBTQ+ advocate Kerri Harrington.

“I’ve been really happy to see that, in a lot of situations where we’ve heard hateful and divisive things, we’ve seen a loving response,” Talbot said.

Talbot feels that he and Harrington share a lot of the same traits as community-minded candidates focused on civic engagement.

“I was really heartened to see that Kerri Harrington won her race on that same sort of a platform of: I work here, I love all the people here, and I want to make the town better,” Talbot said.

If elected, he said, he would treat constituents the same way he treats the people he helps through the fire department or the search and rescue team.

“We’re not asking who they are or why they’re there,” he said. “We’re there to help them. And if I can do that on a broader scale, I think that would be great.”

Although he is running as a Democrat, Talbot described himself as an independent thinker and a lifelong undeclared voter.

He said his candidacy would be non-partisan, with the goal of giving the North Country a strong voice in Concord.

“My goal is not to dwell on divisive issues or on a divisive person or on anything like that,” Talbot said.

“My goal is to find solutions that work for the people of the North Country, that we can agree on, that can help a lot of people.”



Rusty Talbot sets out for an ice climbing adventure. (Photo courtesy of Rusty Talbot)

BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS & SERVICES GUIDE



Bills

Continued from Page 2

she spoke against Pride murals on a private downtown building.

In the months that followed, she stood by her views. Notably, she called homosexuality “an abomination” and said a local production of LGBTQ+ themed musical La Cage Aux Falls was “disgusting.”

She did not seek reelection to the board in March.

Shanshala wrote Gendreau this week out of concern for the health of ACHS patients, he said.

Based in Littleton, ACHS is a federally qualified health center established in 1975 that operates five sites and serves more than 10,000 citizens in northern New Hampshire.

“We at ACHS are deeply concerned about the long-term physical and mental health effects of the ongoing effort to restrict transgender rights for our patients,” Shanshala wrote. “Many of the active bills, if signed into law, would create gaps in medical care for trans people. Simply the introduction of these bills only fuels hostility towards LGBTQ+ individuals at a time when we know suicide rates and targeted attacks against this population have tragically increased in recent years.”

“We ask you to please stand with us in preserving the rights, lives, and health of LGBTQ+ individuals, including the privacy of New Hampshire families to make personal health care decisions with their providers.”

Gendreau did not respond to a request for comment.



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David Wayne Gonyer

The family of David Wayne Gonyer, 56, Littleton, N.H., regrets to announce his passing after a brief illness on March 22, 2024. David was born in Woodsville, N.H. on Sept. 5, 1967 to Elmer and Ann (Enderson) Gonyer.



David was a graduate of Lisbon High School, where he spent his childhood days skiing in the White Mountains. He later attended NH Technical College, where he continued his education. David moved on to become an experienced and exceptional interior/exterior painter and due to his intense love of horses and animals he dedicated most of his life to caring for them at Bruce and Maxine Hadlock's barn in Littleton, N.H. David lived most of his life in the Lisbon/Littleton area, but his work with horses took him to many other places including New York and Maine, attending many various horse events.

David lived a simple life and was often described as a kind and caring person, always smiling with a wry sense of humor and congenial greeting for those he met.

David is predeceased by his parents, his brother Michael Liveston; his aunt, Patricia (Enderson) Simmons; uncles, Lawrence "Hap" Enderson, Alton "Salt" Enderson, Robert "Crow" Enderson,

Richard "Dick" Enderson, James "Pep- per" Enderson, and Robert Simmons. He will be missed by his sister, Cindy Lou (Gonyer) Brooks and her husband Clark of Lyman; his brother, Thomas Liveston and his wife Denise (Mozden) Liveston of Claremont; his aunts Barbara Enderson, Carlene Enderson, Jeanette Enderson, and Ann Enderson; as well as several nieces, nephews, grand-nieces, grand-nephews, cousins and close friends.

A Celebration of David's Life will be held at Cindy and Clark's residence in Lyman on Saturday, June 15, 2024, at 11 a.m.

In lieu of flowers, those who wish may make donations to the Tomten Farm and Sanctuary, 929 Court St. Haverhill, NH 03765

To offer the family an online condolence, please visit www.rickerfh.com Ricker Funeral Home & Cremation Care of Woodsville is assisting the family with arrangements.

Ronald M. Magoni

Ronald M. Magoni, 78, of Jefferson Road, Whitefield, N.H., died early Friday morning, March 22, 2024, at his winter home in Inverness, Fla. after a long battle with cancer.

Ron was born in Lancaster, N.H. on Jan. 6, 1946, the son of Vincent and Dale (Miles) Magoni. He was raised in Gilman, Vt., and worked his entire life as a truck driver. He served for several years in the NH National Guard and was an active member of the Gilman Fire Department

for many years.

His wife, Eileen (Bean) of Lunenburg predeceased him. Family was very important to Ron and he enjoyed spending time celebrating birthdays and holidays with family members, some of whom he taught to swim.

Surviving family members include grandchildren,

great-grandchildren, sisters, brothers, a special niece and grand nephews, a special aunt and many close cousins who share music and stories and the love of trucking. Also, some special personal relationships with extended family members who know who they are and one very special guardian angel who loves to dance.

A graveside service with military honors will be held at the Baptist Hill Cemetery in Lunenburg at a later date. An announcement will be made prior to.

Arrangements are entrusted to Bailey Funeral Home, Lancaster, N.H. For more information or to send an online condolence, please go to www.baileyfh.net.

Anna and Gerald Fain

A Funeral Mass for Anna (Lamotte) Fain and her husband, Gerald Fain, will be held on April 13, 2024 in Lancaster, N.H. at All Saints Catholic Church at 11 a.m.

News Briefs

Continued from Page 9

said Prior.

The district will test the new filtration system at the highest lead-level faucet at Lakeway to see if there is any improvement, he said.

"We'll probably have our answer," said Prior.

Fortunately, following testing, the water fountains that the school district has for filling water bottles came back with a "BRL," which is "below reporting limit," he said.

The drinking stations all passed and students and staff are encouraged to use them, said Prior.

The middle-high school has five water stations.

Lakeway has three stations and will soon have four.

Littleton Academy has one and will soon have two.

As for funding the filtration systems, SAU 84 business administrator Patty Brown said here is a lead grant available that will reimburse the district for

the cost.

"We did have a request for the board to approve a purchase of filtration systems because of grant funding through the state," she said. "They are paying for this, but it's first come, first serve."

The school board on Monday voted 5-0 to purchase a high-quality filtration system for each classroom faucet in the district, in an amount not to exceed \$10,000, and to mark all restrooms and classrooms hand-wash only throughout the schools.

White Mountain Special Olympics Secures A Dozen Gold Medals

WATERVILLE VALLEY, N.H. — The White Mountain Special Olympics team racked up a dozen gold medals during a very successful showing at the New Hampshire State Winter Games on March 3-5 at Waterville Valley Resort.

See full story at www.CaledonianRecord.com

Police Explore Adding K-9 Unit

LANCASTER — The Lancaster Police lobbied for a new officer last week.

A four-legged one.

See full story at www.CaledonianRecord.com

County Invites State Officials For Talks On New Courthouse Building Plans

Three years after an assessment was conducted on the Grafton County courthouse, a 50-year-old facility that houses the district and superior courts as well as several county departments, talks are now including state officials about the county's plan for a new building and its contract with the state for the state's use of the courts.

See full story at www.CaledonianRecord.com

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