

Editorial

History repeats itself

Almost two years ago, *The Community Journal* ran an editorial regarding the status of leadership at Forbush Memorial Library, in Westminster. With a few name changes, lets hope the trustees can again step up to the plate.

"It takes courage to admit when you've made a mistake and character to ask for assistance when you need it.

The board of trustees of Westminster's Forbush Memorial Library is made up of people of courage and character.

At the outset of 2004, in the wake of long-time Director Barbara Friedman leaving, a rift existed within the library community. With a goal of trying to help the library move forward, a small committee made up of trustees and town officials conducted a search that resulted in the hiring of Marilyn Barnes, as the new director.

While Barnes' credentials were never in doubt, it ultimately became clear to the trustees, library employees and patrons, and even to Barnes herself, that she and Forbush were not well matched. She submitted her letter of resignation after less than five months on the job.

At this point the chairman of the trustees, could have assigned blame or thrown his hands up in frustration at the prospect of beginning a new director search. Instead, he and the other trustees showed character when they accepted a recommendation by John Fairbanks, the advisory board liaison, that the trustees use the same multi-faceted search process that had been used two years earlier to hire Westminster's Police Chief, Sam Albert.

In doing so, the trustees acknowledged that the original process was flawed and lacked the process needed to make sure the new director was a good fit for both the library and the town.

The trustees then showed character by voting unanimously to remove themselves from the screening process and asking Stephen Hemman, a member of the personnel board, to chair the search committee. Hemman is the same man that led the police chief search. By doing this, the trustees acted to remove any hint of politics from the search process.

They will reenter the process to interview finalists and select the new director.

Their willingness to put the best interests of the library above personal feelings and political alignments should be applauded.

Inviting the public to actively participate in the search process from the outset greatly increases the likelihood that the new director will be accepted readily by the community.

Including reciprocal site visits in the search procedure will help the search committee learn more about each candidate and will help the candidates decide if Westminster is a desirable place to set down professional roots.

The process may take some time but finding the right candidate for the job is worth the effort."

— First ran Jan. 7, 2005

Letters to the Editor

Do you still think we're overpaid?

To the Editor:

The following is to defend the members of the Ashburnham Fire Department regarding yet another ignorant comment that came from Selectman Chris Gagnon.

In reference to the fire department, Chris Gagnon stated in an article of *The Community Journal* (Issue 33, Aug. 21, 2006) that he was, "...sick of that department. Everyone there is overpaid and they don't do any work."

Although a comment such as this is seen as idiotic and completely absurd to the average citizen, I still find a need to publicly address it.

I recently went through the statistics gathered from fire department attendance records for hours on-call and calculated the total number of hours that were volunteered in the first seven months of 2006. Between the 15 current Auxiliary members, there were a total of 770.5 hours that they volunteered their time to the department.

The current 37 on-call members had 402.5 hours volunteering. The total between the two is 1,173 hours, meaning that at the \$11 hourly wage for a firefighter or emergency medical technician (EMT), the town would have paid out \$12,903. And remember, this is only for the first seven months of the year.

Do you still think we're overpaid? I don't. If you think that \$11/hour is a lot to risk our lives day after day, then you are insane.

As far as not doing any work, I guarantee that there is never a day that something doesn't get accomplished at the stations. There are truck checks done everyday in which all 13 pieces of apparatus are thoroughly tested to make sure they are in the best possible condition. Members take away hours of their lives on weekends to train on trucks and equipment so they can perform their duties more quickly, efficiently, and safely.

Smoke detector, carbon monoxide, and oil burner inspections occur almost daily. State and federal grants are applied for, replacement parts are ordered and installed for apparatus and equipment. Automatic boxes are kept in working order, all while responding to an average of 14 calls a week. There are numerous other jobs and responsibilities performed, this is just a brief list.

Before concluding, there are three things I would like Mr. Gagnon to know:

- 1.) Firefighters, Paramedics, EMTs, and all other emergency personnel are not in their profession for money, but for the satisfaction they get in helping others.
- 2.) Firefighting is one of the most physically and mentally straining jobs there is.
- 3.) If Mr. Gagnon is so sick of the Ashburnham Fire Department, then he can leave because we are not going anywhere.

The Ashburnham Fire Department will continue awaiting an apology from Mr. Gagnon, however; we don't expect him to own up to his mistakes anytime soon.

Jake Zbikowski, Firefighter/EMT,
Ashburnham Fire Department

Bombers thank pizza guys

To the Editor:

We want to send out a big 'thank you' to the guys over at Main Street Pizzeria & Grill. When we approached them to help sponsor our summer all-star team, they generously donated five large pizzas to help us celebrate our last game. These guys are always willing to help, and it is so appreciated! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

The families, coaches, and players of Ashburnham's
All-star baseball Bombers

'I allowed my anger to get the best of me'

To the Editor:

Although I feel the premise of *The Community Journal* editorial "Glass Houses," Aug. 18, 2006, is not worthy of a response, I feel my statement, although misquoted, should be addressed.

The Editor of *The Community Journal* delivered information from the Registry of Deeds about me, less than two minutes before a televised selectmen's meeting began on Aug. 7, an awkward time to begin remembering an uncomfortable situation from 15 years past. I don't regret having had an uncomfortable reaction to it. The editor stated to me "this is gaining momentum."

The information from my past is public to anyone who has the time to dig through the records at the Registry of Deeds or go online. I used my own money to settle all debts and did not declare bankruptcy. On the Public Safety Building Committee, I have neither spending power nor voting power on the \$5.3 million project.

On or about May 15 of this year, I was informed that a full-time fire department employee had been inquiring about any property I might own.

On Aug. 9, I had an opportunity to ask the Editor of *The Community Journal* to explain his statement about a public document "gaining momentum," he told me the information was being shared and "people want to know."

Thinking about a public employee investigating me and assuming he was on the clock, I allowed my anger to get the best of me. I should not have made a blanket statement about an entire department as my anger was fostered by an individual. I also should not assume anything nor make hasty statements.

Before my election, I expressed what I felt were shortcomings in the fire department. Since my election, I have made no remarks regarding the department outside of this event.

I truly appreciate the call firefighters and the services of our fire department. I apologize to those men and women who truly make our fire department work successfully.

Christopher Gagnon,
Ashburnham

Editor's Note: Regarding the above letter, Mr. Gagnon was asked why he apologized for what he said, if he feels he was misquoted?

His answer: "I was misquoted but only in accuracy, not in meaning and it is too many words to add to my editorial. I basically said that they must be overpaid and under worked because they have nothing better to do than dig up stuff on me, thus the apology. If you're going to print my slanderous remarks, you should get them correct."

Gagnon fan speaks out

To the Editor:

The "Glass houses" editorial (*The Community Journal*, Aug. 18, 2006) is a shabby piece of devious and convoluted attempt at character assignation.

Anonymous accusations and assertions which the editor disingenuously appears to dismiss with phrases like "without knowing the whole story" are none-the-less treated as the "glass house" of some imaginary guilt the editor attaches to Chris Gagnon.

With what has to be journalistic dishonesty we read Chris "shouldn't be making financial decisions for the town, let alone chair a committee with a \$5.3 million checkbook". Certainly the editor is aware that Chris doesn't even have a vote on the Public Safety Building Committee, let alone spending authority. And there is an implied insult to the members of the committee that we might be a party to some misuse of the money the town voted for this project.

Chris volunteers a prodigious amount of time on researching details of this project and other efforts which go well beyond any obligations of the chairman's office. The town should be grateful, not carping, of his involvement.

I am astounded that differences of opinion about town policy should be turned into personal animosity. The charge that "there might be a personal agenda here" is downright sleazy character attack.

CJ's editor should be ashamed.

Al Rickheit,
Ashburnham



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