



## Gripings of a New Hampshire Taxpayer Fran Heap



I hope *Rooster* readers will pardon commentary, but I simply have to vent about my latest 2024 property tax bill. It's 43% higher than last time and was mailed late on top of everything else. A friend of mine has me beat; his tax bill is 54% higher than last time! So, what is going on?

The NH Department of Revenue Administration typically provides each municipality its certified tax rate by mid-November. Richmond did not receive that tax rate until December, which meant the Tax Collector could not mail the bills until January 3rd, although online bill access was available a few days earlier. One of our readers pointed out that this delay meant it was almost impossible to include the second payment of 2024 taxes as an IRS itemized deduction on the 2024 tax return. Payment is not due until February 5th – thank goodness.

And, about that payment: I'm glad I spoke with Pam Bielunis, our town's Welfare Administrator, because she reminded me that the June tax bill is based on half of the year's estimated budget, while the December (*or January!*) tax bill covers the actual expenditures for the year not already included in the June bill. When I compared the pair of bills for 2023 to the pair for 2024, I realized the full year rate hike was 22%, not 43%, and felt an eensy-weensy bit better.

Here's the rub for those of us of retirement age: the Social Security Administration raised its Cost of Living Adjustment ("COLA") by just 2.5% for 2025, and retirement investments are typically structured to allow up to 4% in withdrawals each year. This means many of us were forced to pull from retirement savings intended to carry us into our final years just to pay property taxes now.

I would urge anyone who is a veteran to go to Town Hall and determine if he/she is eligible for tax relief.

Similarly, the Low and Moderate Property Tax Relief Program ("LMIPTRP") of NH provides a small tax offset against the Statewide Education Property Tax ("SWEPT") to those who are income-challenged. At the time of this printing, income limits were \$60,000 for a single individual and \$75,000 for married/heads of household; this relief from SWEPT is just a pittance of the average NH property tax bill, though.

Speaking of education, there is no doubt that local education is disproportionately the largest part of our property tax bills. Take a look at this breakdown extracted from the Richmond town website:

<u>Jurisdiction</u>	<u>Tax Rate per \$1,000 of Property</u>
Municipal	\$ 2.74
County	\$ 2.59
Local Education	\$ 11.27
State Education	\$ 1.26

Seeing the disproportion, taxpayers could be forgiven if they view local education as a burden rather than a blessing. But are our public schools really the problem?

**Collective Bargaining:** I'm not a fan of collective bargaining over teacher pay when the taxpayers have no seat at the table. On one side, NH's teachers are not particularly well paid, in light of the rising cost of college education and what other New England states pay. On the other, voters have the right to reject the school budget, an action which puts the burden upon the school district to accommodate the collective bargaining agreement, potentially at the cost of other aspects of each child's education.

**Inadequate State Reimbursement:** The outcomes of the Claremont and ConVal court cases have made it pretty clear that the courts have found the State has an obligation to fund an adequate public education. In the more recent ConVal case, the judge found that \$7,356.01 per pupil was the base adequacy cost. At last look, NH was only supplying \$4,100 per pupil, meaning local property taxes have to cover the rest of the tab, just for a bare bones' level of education.

## **Inappropriate Use of the Education Trust Fund and Lack of Accountability:**

Some people in Richmond opine every child should be homeschooled. To me, that just means that every homeschooled child in Richmond would be well-educated in those subjects in which his/her parents were knowledgeable and ignorant in the others – not exactly a well-rounded education. Besides, homeschooling would not stop Richmond property owners from having to pay all taxes on education.

Regarding homeschooling and more, let's talk about how NH has shifted the State's education burden to the local property owner: vouchers, possibly one of the biggest boondoggles ever to the taxpayers. During the 2023-2024 school year, roughly 24 million dollars had been funneled out of the trust fund set up for NH's public and charter schools to families who homeschool or send their children to private school, with no academic rigor requirements and questionable program administration by NY's Children's Scholarship Fund. That's 24 million dollars which could have been used to reduce local property taxes for public education. This voucher program is so lax, I honestly can't see what would legally stop anyone from opening up a "school" in Richmond, spend each school day teaching nothing, and still be paid a minimum of \$4,100 per year per pupil – not exactly how I envisioned my tax dollars would be used.

Years ago, when I decided to send my daughter to a Christian school, I paid for it myself. I didn't expect a handout from other taxpayers to cover her expenses, even though the cost wiped out my personal savings. Private school is a luxury, after all. As to the argument that parents who send their child to private school are "paying twice," what about all the taxpayers who never had children, but whose taxes contribute each year to public education?

When I see how much the Select Board does to pare down costs in Richmond (and sometimes takes it too far, in my opinion), it really sticks in my craw that NH legislators are not as careful.

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Now that I've vented (and I thank you for putting up with all that griping!), my New Year's Resolution is to communicate more with my State legislators. I hope you will do the same.

Online sources used for this commentary:

- [Cost-of-Living Adjustment \(COLA\) Information | SSA](#);
- [Low and Moderate Income Property Tax Relief Program - NH School Funding Fairness Project](#);
- [\(Opinion\) An excellent public education answer is already here - NH Business Review](#);
- [As school voucher program cost surpasses \\$24 million this year, state oversight committee raises questions about transparency and diversion of public funds: Reaching Higher NH](#);
- <https://www.nhpr.org/education/2024-09-03/democrats-call-for-deeper-audit-of-nh-education-free-dom-account-after-initial-review>

## **No Taxpayer Money Needed** **Pam Bielunis**

I would like to thank everyone who supported my fundraising idea for the purchase of a computer for the Town's Welfare and Elections Department (Supervisors of the Voter Checklist). We were able to sell a total of 234 Richmond shirts: 79 short sleeve t-shirts, 69 long sleeve t-shirts, and 86 hoodies. No taxpayer funds were used for the purchase of this computer; it was totally funded by the profits from the sale of the shirts. All the shirts have been sold, and I have no plans to order any more shirts (orders must consist of >70 shirts).

## **Puzzle Swap!** **Melissa Axtman**



It's that time of year: long nights and cold days! So, that means it's time to break out the card table, puzzle mats, and start the process of finding the edges!

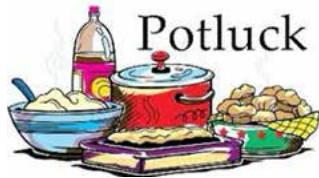
If you're a puzzle expert, just a beginner, or somewhere in between, you have that pile of already done puzzles; you know who you are, and if you want to share the joy of working on a new (gently used) puzzle, why not swap for some easy, mind bending, or just plain fun puzzles?

The Richmond town first Puzzle Swap Meeting is being organized. It is being jointly sponsored by Wendy O'Brien, our Town Librarian, Pam Bielunis for the Veterans' Hall, and me. It is scheduled for February 15th, 11 AM at the Veterans' Hall, pending weather.

So, a few rules... Yes; there are some rules! Only complete puzzles; “the cat or dog took a piece” puzzles are not allowed. They need to be free of any strong smells for our sensitive nosed folks! The puzzle boxes need to be taped to avoid spillage. There is a limit of five to seven puzzles per person for swapping. This is a 500 to 2000 piece puzzle event, so please be mindful of this requirement. Lastly, you must take home any puzzles that were not swapped.

If you have any questions about the event, please contact Wendy O’Brien at the Library. There is no weather make-up date scheduled, so keep an eye out for updates. We will post on the Richmond Community Facebook page by 10 AM if the event is cancelled.

Note: right after the puzzle swap, the Open Mic folks are sponsoring a potluck (see their announcement).



### You are Invited

Lenny Solomon, President,  
the Richmond Historical Society

The Richmond Historical Society and Richmond Welfare Office are sponsoring a potluck luncheon on Saturday, February 15th, at the Veterans’ Hall, from 12:30 PM to 2 PM. The purpose is to thank those performers and listeners who made last season’s Stage 32 Open Mic such a success. Everyone in Richmond is invited to participate. Come schmooze with your neighbors and friends. Who knows? There might even be some music.

If you plan to participate, please send an email to Lenny Solomon at [lenny@solomonbandband.com](mailto:lenny@solomonbandband.com) to share what you might bring, so he can coordinate the offerings. Coffee and hot water will be provided. In the case of inclement weather, the potluck will be canceled. If you have any questions, feel free to get in touch with Lenny.

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## Just a Few Sudoku Life Lessons

### Sister Mary Joseph

The rules for Sudoku are deceptively simple. There is a grid with certain numbers already given to you. You must fill in the remaining boxes with the Numbers 1 through 9 without using any digit twice in the same row, column, or block. It’s not math; it’s pure logic. As you work from puzzle to puzzle, you can’t help but catch on to certain logical principles. You find yourself being forced to think correctly. It’s a delightful experience, and I highly recommend it. Throughout my own puzzlings, I’ve kept bumping into truths which bring home little life lessons to me. It’s not so much that I’ve been learning these lessons for the first time, as much as I’ve been seeing and appreciating them in a new context. Here are a few of the Sudoku life lessons I’ve come across:

#### **1. *Not all problems are solvable now.***

##### **The Game**

A box which cannot be figured out now will need to be revisited later. Sometimes, I will keep coming back to the same spot with the same unsuccessful results. How is the box eventually filled in? Generally, it happens only after certain other boxes have been solved.

##### **Life**

Certain things in life baffle us. How can I learn to manage my time, or cooperate with difficult people, or even read and comprehend Shakespeare? Just because I do not have the answers to my quandaries now does not mean that I’ll never figure them out. I imagine everyone can think of difficulties which had them perplexed at one point in life, but which have since been resolved. Very often, we have no idea what “boxes” need to be filled in before we can overcome the hurdles we presently face. God’s Providence takes care of putting those things in our path that are needful for us to grow.

#### **2. *When we skip ahead, we run the risk of missing something.***

##### **The Game**

Because I got the hang of the Level One puzzles, I was anxious to see how hard Level Four puzzles were. Would I be able to solve the hardest ones? Well, simply put, no, I couldn’t. Desperation and curiosity lead me to go back to Levels Two and Three. Perhaps there was something I would learn there which would equip me to solve the more difficult puzzles. Voila! That was precisely what happened.

##### **Life**

Some of us wrestle with this thing called impetuosity, which makes us believe we can skip the hard work which lesser beings struggle through. It is like attempting to run without bothering to learn to walk.



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Generally speaking, this sort of approach to knowledge and wisdom doesn't work. The ones who have the venerable old heads of white have gained wisdom through years of experience. For most of us, the long, organic learning process will prove more fruitful in the end than the quick and easy shortcut method.

**3. *People think differently, and it is really important to let them.***

### The Game

When sharing this game with a friend, I was tempted to explain to her all of the logical connections which I had discovered in the puzzle. On second thought, I remembered how much I had enjoyed making these intellectual discoveries for myself. It would not have been so fun or stimulating if it had all been explained to me. It was really hard for me not to interfere as I watched her do things very differently from how I would do them. She was taking the longest possible course of gathering information. And yet, I stood my ground. We ought not rob people of the joy of discovery just because they need more time or take a completely different route from our own to reach the conclusion.

### Life

I am reminded of the following anecdote: *There was a student who could not see whatever the video or demonstration in the classroom was because he was in the back. The teacher, seeing the difficulty, stopped herself from interfering and solving the child's problem for him. Instead, she just watched to see what he would do. She was delighted when the little one went and got himself a chair to stand on. He had solved his own problem in his own way.* Sometimes, we attempt to help others by trying to get them to see things the way we see them. I am not speaking here of when we seek to show others objective truths which they do not understand, but, rather, when we take matters of opinion, preference, temperament, differences in approach to problem solving or thinking things through, and handle such matters as if our way was the only way or the right way. If I see myself as superior to those whose minds work differently, chances are people will not actually want the kind

of "help" that I'm trying to give them. A good teacher wants a student to discover the joy of learning, and the teacher accomplishes this by respecting and giving space to the radical uniqueness of each individual's mind.

**4. *Sometimes, the problem is not that I am missing information, but, rather, that I can't see what is right in front of me.***

### The Game

It is a humbling experience to have tried the same box umpteen times unsuccessfully, only to discover that the information I've been looking for has indeed been there the whole time. "I've been stuck on this puzzle for three days because of my own failure to see what was obvious!" How perfectly vexing, and at the same time, revelatory!

### Life

Some of us have a harder time than others admitting out loud to others that we could be wrong. Some of us struggle to realize that this is an actual possibility, even in the privacy of our own thoughts. At what point does self-assurance cross the line and become arrogance? Maybe when it fails to appreciate that men are inherently fallible.

**5. *When we get stuck, sometimes it is better to stop pushing.***

### The Game

When I get stuck in a puzzle, my inclination is to keep with it. Never give up! Of course, duties and the day's schedule often necessitate leaving a puzzle in the midst of a jam. It has happened that I've had to leave a stuck spot and been unable to return for a few days or weeks. Often enough, the forced break has helped, and upon returning

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to the puzzle, I've found that I could think about things with a fresh perspective and get passed the sticky spot. **Life**

When we come to an impasse in life, pushing harder is not always the solution. It isn't quitting or giving up to take a break from the wrestling match. It may be that we are trying to overcome our bad habits or self-ish tendencies. Yes! Good! Never give up! I think the relentless-pushing-approach may indeed work sometimes or for some people. However, I know I have seen it fail. God wants us to learn that our perfection is His business. Overcoming our miseries is a gift that He gives when He sees fit. I wonder if He lets our best efforts fall flat in order to teach us we cannot get out of ruts by sheer force of will. That's all for now.

### Bell Tower Update Pam Goodell



The "hiccup" in the steeple chase for the bell tower repair at the Old Brick Church has turned in to a major stumbling block. A structural engineer has looked at the tower and is evaluating the situation. Repairs now will go beyond the scope of the original work contracted for and will involve specialized contractors to

replace some main carrying beams that are dangerously rotted. So, at the moment, we are doing our homework and trying to find our best solutions. Some temporary work may need to be done to stabilize the tower and accommodate the weight of the bell until permanent work can be achieved. We will keep you posted and ask for your patience and your prayers, as well as any professional expertise you might be able to offer.

### Pesto Pasta Terri O'Rorke

#### Ingredients

- 2 C. any shape pasta (gluten free can be substituted)
- 1 C. pasta water, reserved
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/4 C. + 2 Tbsp. pesto, divided
- 2 C. grape tomatoes, cut in half
- 4 C. broccoli florets, coarsely chopped
- 1/3 C. sundried tomatoes, thinly sliced
- 1/2 C. grated parmesan cheese
- 1/8 tsp. red pepper flakes
- salt and pepper to taste

#### Directions

1. Cook pasta as per package instructions.
  2. While pasta is cooking, get all ingredients ready – chop veggies and grate cheese.
  3. Preheat large, deep skillet on medium heat. Add oil and garlic, stirring for about 30 seconds.
  4. Add 1 Tbsp. pesto, tomatoes and stir. Cook for 2 - 4 minutes, stirring.
  5. Move to one side of the pan, making sure the empty side is positioned directly over heat. Add 1 Tbsp. pesto and broccoli, stir and cook for about 4 minutes.
  6. Remove skillet from heat and add remaining pesto, sun dried tomatoes, half the cheese, salt and both peppers, pasta and pasta water, stirring, letting marinate for a few minutes. Do not cover; broccoli will get mushy. Sprinkle with remaining cheese.
- Serves 6.

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*Valentine's Day*



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## Unfinished Business

Richard P. Drew



On February 2, 2024, the Richmond Planning Board held the final public hearing on proposed Zoning Ordinance amendments for the Warrant Articles of 2024. The changes dealt with updating our Houses of Worship article to bring

it into alignment with state law and attempting to separate what structures would require a building permit from those which would not. All of the Zoning Ordinance changes passed as presented by the Board at that public hearing with no changes that were suggested by the public and the Richmond Conservation Commission. The suggested changes included subjecting canvas shelters, solar arrays, and above ground swimming pools to our zoning requirements and defining “normal landscaping”. The Conservation Commission suggested in a letter to have no structures or disturbances within 25 feet of wetlands.

A definition of “normal landscaping” does not exist in our Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Board introduced this permitted use to our Wetland Conservation District on the ballot in March of 2024. “Normal landscaping” was taken from the *Town of Richmond Excavation Regulations*. This is a term used in large scale reclamation of excavation sites and not used for residential areas. Without a definition, this term allows for any amount of alteration of the terrain in the Wetland Conservation District with no erosion or siltation protection for the wetlands. The Planning Board members said at the January 2024 Public Hearing they would address this during the next go-around. They have not! Instead, the board has concentrated on the accessory dwelling unit ordinance, and they have begun work on the Master Plan.

To see what is now being allowed in the Wetland Conservation District, you only have to look at the 10 foot high fill next to a wetland at 429 Fitzwilliam Road, a driveway leading to a canvas shelter at 87 Athol Road, or

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a 10 to 12 foot wide drainage ditch at 59 Bullock Road. All of these concerning examples are visible from the road, and because we do not have any definition in our Zoning Ordinance, they are considered “normal landscaping”.

A Warrant Article by petition will appear on the ballot this March. This article will give a definition to “normal landscaping” that the Planning Board is reluctant to do. It would allow for altering of terrain associated with allowed structures or which is allowed by variance or special exception. It would prohibit adversely affecting the wetlands with siltation or erosion. This means that if there is terrain alteration in the Wetland Conservation District, protection of the wetlands must be provided for.

The companion to the Normal Landscape definition is another petitioned Warrant Article based on the Conservation Commission’s letter to the Planning Board, dated January 4, 2024. As the Commission members said in their letter, their concern is protection of the wetlands and the Wetland Conservation District. The use of fabric shelters for tool, fuel, and vehicle storage in the Wetland Conservation District - in fact, directly adjacent to wetlands - defeats the purpose of the District. The District’s purpose is to prevent development, prevent destruction of wetlands, prevent unnecessary expense to the town, and encourage appropriate uses of wetlands to preserve them for future generations. This is all spelled out in our Zoning Ordinance in Article 602.

Uses permitted by right in our Wetland Conservation District as outlined in Article 603 include: forestry and tree farming, agriculture, water impoundment and well supplies, drainage ways, streams, creeks, or other normal run-off water, wildlife refuge, parks and such recreation use as are consistent with the purpose and intention of Article 602, conservation areas and nature trails, and open space.

Rights of access and other uses for the productive use of the land are allowed by special exception ruled on by the Zoning Board of Adjustment. They include driveways, drainage, utilities rights-of-way. These uses are listed in Article 604. Any special exception that is granted means that there are certain conditions to be



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met, such as erosion and sedimentation controls and recommendations from the Conservation Commission. Uppermost in consideration is the protection of wetlands and minimizing adverse environmental effects. All articles mentioned can be read in the Richmond Zoning Ordinances located on the Town of Richmond website.

The second petitioned Warrant Article creates a 25 foot buffer from the edge of wetlands where no structures or disturbance of the natural terrain would be allowed without a variance or special exception. This buffer will “help capture a hazardous material spill and provide valuable time to respond with proper cleanup procedures”, a quote in the letter to the Planning Board from the Conservation Commission. The 25 foot buffer would be inside the Wetland Conservation District and does not require further building setbacks.

Protecting wetlands starts not in the wetlands, but in the areas next to them. That area in our town now is 0 feet from wetlands, because of the changes that were made (and not made) to the Zoning Ordinance last year. As the Conservation Commission said in its letter to the Planning Board, a buffer allows time to contain damage to the wetlands. A buffer also protects the soils, flora, and fauna supporting a wetland ecosystem. Remember much of the upland ecosystem that depends on wetlands does not live in the wetlands. Wetlands are needed to filter water, store water for flood control, and provide animal and plant habitat. Not to mention the beauty wetlands have! Looking at the vibrant colors across the meadow Tully Brook passes through during Autumn or ducks landing in Mud Pond on Lang Road are enough to inspire protection of our wetlands.

I hope everyone will support the protection of our wetlands by voting for these additions to our Zoning Ordinance. My understanding at this time is that the Planning Board will not endorse them. The members of the Conservation Commission signed both petitions. One of the Commission’s duties is to protect wetlands and water quality. Its members are very qualified to do this. I would say much more so than the members of the Planning Board are.

## Open Letter from State Rep. Faulkner



Greetings, Richmond residents,

Thank you for allowing me to serve you in my fifth term representing Swanzevy and Richmond in the New Hampshire House. I will be continuing my role on the Public Works and Highways Committee. We deal with all bills related to state properties and transportation facilities, and in particular, the ten-year transportation program and capital investment budget.

This will be a particularly challenging term, as we face some of the tightest financial constraints in recent years, as we craft a budget for the next two-year period. This fiscal challenge is largely due to the huge tax giveaways pushed by the Republican majority, including reductions in business taxes that overwhelmingly benefit a few large corporations and their out-of-state shareholders, and elimination of the interest and dividends tax that is paid only by the wealthiest residents of the state. The inevitable result of these cuts is that a bigger and bigger share of the costs of vital services – fire, police, schools, nursing homes, and road maintenance – will be paid by local property owners through increased property taxes.

Our challenge as legislators will be to look past the bumper stickers and campaign slogans and to evaluate each bill, and every revenue and expenditure proposal based on a few common-sense criteria:

1. does it address an actual problem here in New Hampshire? And,
2. does it do so in a manner that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the harm to our people?

That is how I have approached every vote and will continue to do so.

To contact me, email works best: [fbfaulkner@outlook.com](mailto:fbfaulkner@outlook.com). My phone is (603) 352-2729. Whether we agree on an issue or not, I will do my best to explain my position and to listen to yours.

Barry Faulkner



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### February Events at Veterans' Memorial Hall Pam Bielunis

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

**Pre-Warrant Meeting at 7 PM** - come to see what is on the warrant we will be voting on in March and to ask questions.

Saturday, February 15, 2025

**Puzzle Swap at 11 AM/Potluck Lunch and Music 12:30 PM** - bring puzzles to swap or come to get a puzzle; then stay for the Potluck Lunch event. You can attend either one or both. All are welcome.



### From the Supervisors of the Checklist Pam Bielunis

**At MRHS:**

Saturday, February 1, 2025 at 10 AM

Monadnock School District Meeting

**At Richmond's Veterans' Hall:**

Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 7 PM

Pre-Warrant Hearing

Saturday, March 1, 2025 at 11 AM

Last day to register to vote before Town Meeting

Tuesday, March 11, 2025 from 11 AM to 7 PM

Town Election

Saturday, March 15, 2025 at 9 AM

Town Meeting

**Reminder of New Law:**

You MUST have all documentation proving Age, Identity, Citizenship, and Domicile to register to vote: photo ID, birth certificate or passport, and proof of domicile (mail, bill, car registration).

### Library News Wendy O'Brien

Library Calendar for February

Wednesdays, 10 AM: Storytime

Saturdays, 10 AM – Noon: Drop-in Knitting Circle  
Sat., February 1st: Take Your Child to the Library Day

Wed., February 5th, 11 AM: Richmond Reminisces

Tues., February 11th, 6 PM: Tuesday Book Club, *The Story of Arthur Truluv*, Elizabeth Berg

Sat., February 15th, 11 AM: Puzzle Swap/Potluck @ Vets Hall (*see associated articles*)

Thurs., February 20th, 6 PM: Latino Poetry Night



Take Your Child to the Library Day

On the first Saturday in February, thousands of libraries across the world celebrate Take Your Child to the Library Day, the perfect time to discover some library magic. Drop-in on our celebration in our Children's Room on Saturday, February 1st, anytime between 10 AM – 2 PM. We hope you will stop in for a visit, enjoy the activities, get a library card (*they're free!*), and explore all the wonders that the RPL has to offer your whole family.



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## Latino Poetry Night

*"We've become accustomed to being confronted by poems that confuse, baffle, embarrass, and intimidate us, and for a lot of people, reading poetry is a dreadful experience..."*--Ted Kooser, *The Poetry Repair Manual*.

Here at the RPL, we are hoping to create a better experience with poetry! This winter, we are joining other libraries around the State with an evening focusing on Latino poetry. On February 20th at 6 PM, we will be reading three poems and talking about the theme of "First and Second Homes" as it relates to the Latino community.

## New Titles

*The Lion Women of Tehran*, Marjan Kamali

*Where the Creek Bends*, Linda Lael Miller

*Breaking Glass*, Patricia Walsh Chadwick

*The God of the Woods*, Liz Moore

*The Wedding People*, Alison Espach

## **1st Annual Christmas Caroling Sing-a-Long** Pam Bielunis



On Sunday, Dec 15th, I had an idea to have a Richmond Community Caroling Sing-a-Long Event. I am not musically inclined, nor can I sing, but I like to sing. With the help of my daughter, Amy, we downloaded videos of songs with music and words to project onto the wall at the Vets' Hall. On Saturday, Dec 21, 2024, approximately 25 Richmond residents gathered inside the Vets' Hall for an hour of song and dance (approximately 20 songs). Hot chocolate and cookies were also enjoyed by all. This last-minute event was posted on two Richmond Facebook pages, and emailed or messaged to several residents. It was enjoyed by all who attended. Hopefully, this will be the first of many to come. Next year, we hope to do this earlier in December, either outside with a "Richmond" Christmas Tree or inside the Vets' Hall again.

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## **We Remember Jon Hill**



Jonathan ("Jon") Hill passed away on January 15, 2025. An avid nature lover, Jon co-authored with Carol Jameson the wonderful hiking book, *Nature Walks and Hikes in Richmond, New Hampshire and Neighboring Towns*, the donated proceeds from which the *Richmond Rooster* still benefits to this day. Jon, who moved to Richmond in 1991, owned the Bennett Gorge Conservation Easement land, resided in the former home of his aunt and uncle (the well-known Jennie and Harry Bennett), and voluntarily maintained the trail alongside Brickyard Brook for public use. Jon will be sorely missed.

## **Open Letter: Candidate Offers New Approach to Local Government**



My name is Jerry Merrifield. My wife, Susan, and I have lived in Richmond our entire lives. We both attended the one-room schoolhouse in North Richmond. After it closed, the building was dismantled and reconstructed on Bullock Road, now a private residence. I was in the second graduating class at Monadnock; Susan was in the seventh. Upon returning from Vietnam, we reconnected while she was working for George and Helen Blais at the Four Corners Store. We've now been married for more than fifty-five years and have two adult daughters. One currently serves as a town council member in Merrimack, NH. Both are college graduates with professional careers.

Over the years, I have volunteered for almost every role in our community—except one. I served as a firefighter alongside notable individuals such as Bob VanBrocklin, Dana Taylor, Eddie Martin, Lee Robbins, and Joe Thibodeau.

I also chaired the Richmond Planning Board in its early years, collaborating with dedicated members like George Blais, Brian Mahoney, Harry Bennett, Jean Tandy, and Joan Quintard. Together, we helped shape Richmond into the desirable place it is today.

In 2023, I successfully petitioned the town to increase the veterans tax credit, adding provisions for the surviving spouse and the totally disabled.

For the past nine years, I have served as a Cemetery Trustee, acting as chairman for the last six, a role I truly cherish. It has been my honor to work closely with funeral homes, monument companies, and grieving families, offering compassionate guidance during difficult times. Alongside Jerry Mills, Bill Coll, Hugh VanBrocklin, John Lewis, Jane Lescynski, and sexton Bob Gow, we’ve made significant improvements: installing new flagpoles, signs, and directories; enhancing entrances; uprighting stones; clearing brush; and maintaining the grounds. At the South Cemetery, we revealed a breathtaking vista with stunning sunsets by clearing trees, removing stumps and rocks on the five-acre expansion preserved for future use.

My volunteer efforts extend beyond the town. For thirty years, I served VFW Post 3968 as their adjutant and three years as post commander.

Now, I am ready to take on the one role I haven’t yet filled in town: Selectman.

I believe I am uniquely qualified for this position. My educational background includes a degree in art, advertising, and architecture, along with courses in business law and small business administration.

In 1990, I successfully started Radiator Express (“REI”), an auto parts business that continues on today. At REI, I applied my skills in sales, management, marketing, advertising, law, computing, and accounting.

Looking ahead, my vision for Richmond includes:

- Developing the Four Corners Store property into a vibrant town centerpiece instead of a dirt parking lot. This could possibly be accomplished without any increase in taxes. If elected, I will make sure we apply for grant money that is available;
- Increasing activities for residents, such as completing a pickleball court that promotes better health. This can work in concert with the existing basketball court to lessen the footprint;
- Advocating for more community events like Lenny Solomon’s “Stage 32” at the Veterans Hall and Richmond Reminisces hosted by Wendy O’Brien the town librarian;
- Promote discourse with all departments and citizens, actively listening and following through on their concerns;
- Enforce our planning and zoning to ensure future generations clean air, water and an uncluttered environment.

As the son of Depression-era parents, I understand the value of frugality and recycling. I plan to re-examine our relationship with the Winchester landfill to ensure the best value for our community while continuing to work with the Planning Board to safeguard our environment.

I am a nonpartisan candidate for selectman with no personal agenda. My lifelong connection to Richmond and dedication to its future uniquely position me to contribute more than ever before. As a former Marine, I fought to protect our country; as a Selectman, I will work with law enforcement and other board members to protect our community.

I ask for your vote in March.


Thank you,  
Jerry Merrifield

### New Hampshire’s Voucher System Lenny Solomon

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U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black

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From a friend on Old Homestead Hwy.

Public schools in America were first established by the Puritans during the 17th century. Through the work of Horace Mann in the mid-1800s, primary education in public schools became more prevalent and uniformly taught. At the turn of the century, more students began attending high school and, by 1900, 34 states had compulsory schooling laws. By 1930, every state required students to complete elementary school.

Children can get educated in either public or private schools. Public education implies that the costs are paid for by taxing the public. Private education implies that the cost is paid for privately, i.e. by families. A few months ago, an article in the *Keene Sentinel* discussed New Hampshire's school voucher program which blurs this distinction. Its formal name is the New Hampshire Educational Freedom Account or EFA program. The NH EFA legislation, passed in 2021 and modified in 2022, was designed to help low-income families pay for their children's education in private alternative, religious, or home school settings.

According to the *Sentinel* article, 5,321 school vouchers were issued state-wide as of September 1, 2024 at a cost of almost \$28 million dollars. Therefore, the program provided an average annual grant of \$5,255 to every student. If a student's family availed themselves of this program and even if this yearly figure never increased, the student's family would receive in total over \$63,000 if its child was enrolled in the program from Grades 1 through 12.

New Hampshire public education is funded from three sources. The Federal government pays about 5% of the cost while the state kicks in about 25%. That means that local districts, i.e., property taxes pay about 70% of this cost. State funding is allocated on a per student basis. The cost of educating one student this year in NH is about \$21,000 averaged across all grades. Therefore, the state contributes about \$5,000/student, the Feds about \$1,000/student, and Richmond property taxes pay about \$15,000/yr per student.

When a student leaves the public educational system, eventually state funding to that district is reduced by the cost of that one student. Since the town or school district gets less money from the state, local taxes must pick up the difference. When one student leaves the public schools, you can't lay off a part of one teacher or lower the thermostat a little to save some money. The cost of the publicly available education essentially remains the same.

Ironically, New Hampshire's average cost to educate one student is one of the highest in the nation. In contrast, New Hampshire's contribution to local school districts is the lowest in the nation. The more students leaving public schools mean lower reimbursements to local communities for public education. One can discuss the pros and cons of public versus private education, but that's a separate issue from whether public monies should be funneled into private schools.

From the New Hampshire Department of Education's website, "the state does not prescribe or stipulate what a nonpublic school shall teach nor determine the minimum qualifications of its staff." With regard to home-schooling, it seems to me that NH EFA voucher program can also be too easily abused. For example, Section 193:1 of the New Hampshire regulations states that a home-schooled student can obtain a high school diploma in several ways, one of which is for the parent to write a letter to the Department of Education, stating their child has completed a home school program at the high school level. In other words, there's no requirement for any outside, objective assessment regarding whether that student can read, write, or solve a math equation.

With respect to primary education, the law states that a parent needs to provide an annual assessment which documents their child's educational progress at a level commensurate with the child's age, ability, and/or disability. There are several ways to accomplish this, but, again, there is little objective oversight. For example, one method is for the parent to select a non-certified teacher who teaches at the



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private school of their choice to evaluate their child's progress. Is it in the private school's interest to say they are doing a bad job educating that student? Do you think that some conflict of interest could exist?

Other very conservative states have recently voted down school voucher programs. This past November, almost two-thirds of Kentucky voters defeated a proposal to allow state tax dollars to fund private and charter schools. In Nebraska, 57 percent of voters approved a ballot initiative that repealed a small program intended to give low-income families tax dollars to pay for private-school tuition. In Colorado, voters rejected a broadly worded ballot measure that would have established a "right to school choice" and would have included private schools and home-school settings.

Private education can offer a great and sometimes necessary alternative to some children. That said, quality public education lies at the heart of what our society deems important and critical to our continuing success as a nation. Public education needs to be enhanced, made better and not eroded by funneling money out of that system.

### An Herbal Adventure Karen O'Brien

Morocco – a land unlike any I had visited before, a continent I had yet to explore. My decision to travel there was made easier when I learned of an herbal tour to that country, planned and led by an herbalist/ aromatherapist.

I would be traveling in a small group, visiting herbal cooperatives and special gardens, making herbal discoveries, and interacting with the warm and wonderful people of Morocco.

One of the leaders of the group was an education representative for an essential oil company. She gave us a brief presentation on some of the oils produced from plants grown in Morocco, including neroli, rose otto, and juniper. Neroli (*Citrus avarantium*) comes from the bitter orange flower. In a hydrosol, it is said to be good for hot flashes, as well as an antifungal. The rest of this citrus produces different essential oils, such as petitgrain

(from the leaves and twigs) and bergamot (from the fruit). We learned from one of our guides that bergamot



Herbs

is used sometimes to cure olives in Morocco, imparting a delicate flavor.

In addition to the formal gardens and herbal businesses we vis-

ited, we were fortunate to witness a burgeoning new agricultural venture – cooperatives. These businesses have helped tremendously to increase the economy of rural communities, and are especially effective in helping women of the area produce an income. Though women have gained more rights (since 2004), it is still largely a male dominated society. These cooperatives have afforded women an opportunity to better control their own lives, while still giving them the support and sense of community. There are cooperatives in many areas of agriculture, producing such items as herbal soaps from Moroccan herbs, honey from various plants, and oil from the argan trees. The success of these cooperatives has given rise to a better appreciation of the indigenous plants of Morocco, and so are fostering protection of native plants and greater sustainability.

Argan is a tree that grows only in the barrier forests of the Sahara. The forest belongs to the King, but Moroccans are allowed to harvest the nuts, which is done in two different ways, producing oils for different purposes. The nuts are eagerly eaten by herds of goats, who climb into the trees to feast on the fruits. When they expel the remains (the kernel), women and young children gather the nuts which are then brought to the cooperatives to be made into the cosmetic argan oil. The fruit that is harvested directly from the tree without passing through the goat's digestive tract is made into a highly regarded dipping oil. The argan nut is still extracted from the hard shell by hand, and women sit

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**Richmond Historical Society**

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on the floor, cracking the nut by striking it with a small stone against a larger stone. The rest of the process has been modernized with machinery (expelling the oil from the nuts, bottling, etc). The oil is expensive, but delicious, with a nutty flavor unlike any I've ever tasted.



*Karen feeding the ground argan to goats*

Other cooperatives, such as the Cooperative Feminique des Plantes Aromatiques, concentrate their efforts on the production of herbal soaps. They are proud of their composting, which must be rather difficult in a land experiencing severe drought most years. They grow many varieties of herbs native to the area, including thyme, rosemary, marjoram, mint, and lavender. They are also experimenting with vetiver as an erosion control crop, planting it on slopes in an attempt to stabilize the soil. The vetiver plants develop long, fibrous roots, which are woven into window blinds, mats and fans with a pleasing aroma, doubling the value of this tough plant. Because of the harsh, drought conditions, the oils of many of these plants are very concentrated. The farm is irrigated by drip lines, which must be labor intensive in areas where there are still communal wells from which Moroccans must draw their water.

Wherever we went, the hospitality of the Moroccan people was evident. A visit to any one of the cooperatives or businesses included refreshments before anything else, which was tough when we visited three in one day! An elaborate ritual was required, beginning with the washing of our hands by the host. A large kettle was brought around for our ablutions, and the water was captured in a basin. However, a communal towel was used, negating somewhat the cleansing effect. A typical repast (and this was just a snack) would include bread, with dipping oil, boiled eggs, nuts and fruit, as well as highly sweetened mint tea. Only after partaking of this hospitality, could we then conduct business or tour the facility. It certainly made each visit longer than expected, so we tended to be always on "Morocco time" – late!

Morocco is a fascinating country, a place to embrace with eyes and heart open. From the early morning call to prayer to the very late nightly bustle in the souks, there is adventure around every corner. Bargain in the marketplaces, where heaping mounds of spices and herbs abound, along with food and goods of every

description. Take in the visual experience of veiled and hennaed women, clad in long robes and shoes with upturned toes and be enthralled by the amazing architecture. Taste the tagines, mint tea, couscous of every kind, and the ubiquitous watermelon. Inhale the scent of pungent thyme and fragrant lavender, and the crisp, citrus tones of the bitter orange tree. Rely on your senses and you will truly discover the essence of Morocco.



**When You are Old**  
**William Butler Yeats**

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.



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## Historical Society at Work Fran Heap, RHS Member

It's annual membership renewal time at the Richmond Historical Society ("RHS"). For our active members, there is a \$25 annual fee. For our supporting members, that fee is \$15.

The Richmond Historical Society is funded through donations and membership fees. RHS receives no taxpayer funding, but take a look at what RHS members accomplish!

- Maintain and enhance the Veterans' Memorial Park, the Town Pound, the Tramp House, the Telephone Building, and Brewer Park;
- Raise funds for the installation and preservation of Richmond's historical treasures and military monuments;
- Write grants so RHS can sponsor presentations of cultural and historical interest to our residents;
- Hold Open Mic Night musical events and potluck suppers to support community spirit and our mission.

Please consider joining RHS as either an Active or Supporting Member. Our next meeting will take place at 1:30 PM on February 6th at the Library. All are welcome!

## Thanks to Our Community

Windswept Mountains View Christmas Tree Farm wishes to extend our sincere appreciation to the residents of Richmond and surrounding communities, for the continued support for our Christmas Trees, wreaths, Elves' Nook Christmas Barn and tree fruit sales for 2024.

We are especially wanting to thank our hard-working staff of Richmond residents, without whom, we would not be able to sustain and harvest our crops. They include: Liam Packard, Lynsey Pursell, Connor and Logan MacDonald, Andrew, Caelynn and Casey Jette, Mary Haynes, Mason Harrington, Tucker Murphy, Eli Dirth, Nickolas Forys and Jerry Mills, our Senior Youth.

We are very fortunate and thankful to have such friendly and courteous youth to serve our loyal customers. Best wishes for a healthy 2025!

Sincerely,  
The Taylor and Packard Families



## Words of Appreciation from Magzalea Farm & Sanctuary

You folks came through in so many ways! Year-end donations reached a record which was an absolute weight off our shoulders! The Chewy food drive delivered almost 2000 lbs. of feed and multiple supplements, bedding, treats and more. We go through these items quickly, so, thanks to you, we could breathe easier while dealing with the crazy weather and animal care. So, THANK YOU!



The Richmond Rooster  
an Independent Domestic Non-Profit Corporation



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Pam Goodell, Fran Heap, Sister Mary Joseph, Jerry  
Merrifield, Karen O'Brien, Wendy O'Brien, Terri O'Rorke,  
Lenny Solomon, the Taylor and Packard families.

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**Town Administration**

**Selectmen:** William Daniels, Doug Bersaw,  
Andrew Wallace  
Selectmen Meeting at Town Hall – Mon. 5:30 P.M.  
*Public is welcome to attend. Please call 239-4232 for an appointment if you have an item for the agenda.*

**Town Administrator:** Susan Harrington  
**Administrative Assistant:** Jennifer Thompson  
Mon. 9 AM – Noon, 3 PM – 5:30 PM  
Wed. 9 AM – 1 PM  
Thurs. 9 AM – Noon

*For town business outside of the above hours, please call 239-4232 for a Monday evening appointment.*

**Town Clerk:** Karen O'Brien  
**Deputy Town Clerk:** Cheryl Brake  
Tues. 12:30 PM - 4:30 PM  
Wed. 9 AM - Noon & 1 PM - 4 PM  
Thur. 8 AM - Noon

*For Tues. appointments (5 PM, 5:30 PM, 6 PM), call 239-6202 or email the clerk.*

**Tax Collector:** Steve Boscarino  
**Deputy Tax Collector:** Mary Rogers  
Mon. 4 PM – 6 PM, Wed. 9 AM – Noon

**Planning Board:** Held at Taylor/VanBrocklin Bldg.  
1st & 3rd Tuesdays of the month - 7:00 PM

**Transfer Station and Recycling Facility:** 239-8136  
Tues. 8 AM – 4 PM, Thurs. 8 AM – 7 PM  
Sat. 8 AM – 5 PM

**Library:** Wendy O'Brien, Library Director, 239-6164  
Tues. 3 PM – 7 PM, Wed. 9 AM – Noon  
Thurs. 3 PM – 7 PM, Sat. 10 AM – 2 PM

**Police (Non Emergency):** 355-2000  
**Fire/Rescue (Non Emergency):** 239-4466  
**Fire Warden:**

**Fire Permit:** Buzz Shaw, 239-4238  
**Selectmen** – 239-4232  
**Town Clerk** – 239-6202  
**Tax Collector** – 239-6106

**Highway Department** – 283-6619  
**Taylor/VanBrocklin Building** – 283-6649  
**Building Maint.:** Pam Bielunis

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