

THE WILTON BULLETIN

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DEER HUNT PLANNED AT RESERVOIR

by JEFF YATES

Pat Sesto, the town's environmental affairs director, brought before the Board of Selectmen at Monday's meeting a proposal to hold a controlled deer hunt on land owned by the City of Norwalk Second Taxing District Water Authority. The presentation was in response to the board's previous approval of the recommendations of the Deer Management Committee for this fall.

A majority of the selectmen agreed to the controlled hunt.

Ms. Sesto said that the committee had been working closely with the water company to implement the plan for a controlled hunt.

"It is a joint venture between the Second Taxing District and Wilton," she said.

According to Ms. Sesto, the water company had been contacted about the town's interest in holding a controlled hunt, and that she had requested that the water company provide a location for the proposed hunt.

"They had offered up any of their properties for consideration," she said adding that the property surrounding Rock Lake and City Lake had been chosen for its size, approximately 700 acres, and for other reasons.

"The other advantage to Rock Lake and City Lake is that it is fenced," Ms. Sesto said.

The property surrounding these two lakes is located near the southwest corner of Wilton, and is bordered by New Canaan Road, Old Huckleberry Hill Road, Old Kingdom Road, Drum Hill Road,

See Deer on page 25A



Cleaning many closets

Seventh grader Meghan Deardoff and sixth grader Ali Rutishauser sort clothing for the Friends of Children Clothing Drive on Monday. —Scott Mullin photo

Missing woman is found dead

Deceased is focus of embezzlement probe

by DEVIN COMISKEY

A Wilton woman was found dead on Saturday, Nov. 1, along the shoreline of the Saugatuck Reservoir in Redding after being reported missing to Wilton Police on Thursday, Oct. 30.

State medical authorities have ruled the incident a suicide.

Cheryl Sickler, 47, of Bald Hill Road was reported missing, having been last seen by members of the Board of Directors of the Norfield Children's Center around 3:30 on Thursday afternoon. According to Capt. Edward Kulhawik of the Wilton Police Department, Ms. Sickler's husband, Brian Sickler, called the police at 7:28 p.m. on Thursday to report her missing.

Her body was positively identified by police before being transferred to the state medical examiner. On Monday, the medical examiner's office ruled the death a drowning by suicide. Wilton police officials said Tuesday there was no evidence of physical harm on her body or

foul play.

Prior to her disappearance and death, Ms. Sickler was the focus of an investigation into the embezzlement of funds from two nursery schools — the Saugatuck Nursery School in Westport and Norfield Children's Center in Weston — for which she acted as financial director, police said.

According to Weston Police, only hours prior to her disappearance, the Norfield Children's Center board of directors had a meeting about the missing funds, after which Ms. Sickler, who was in attendance, reportedly left the center "very, very upset."

On Wednesday, G. Kenneth Bernhard, attorney for the Sickler family, said Wednesday, "Cheryl was very much loved and respected by her friends and family. This is a great tragedy for everyone involved. She was a lively and vibrant person. She was a delight to know."

Ms. Sickler's body was found by family. See Missing on page 25A

Gould and Napier keep selectmen seats

by KEN MASTRO

Selectmen incumbents were among the big winners Tuesday night.

Seven-term Selectman Marilyn Gould received the most votes of the three Republicans vying for two seats on the Board of Selectmen in the town election's sole contest.

Second Selectman Maria Napier also garnered many votes on Tuesday. She finished only 82 votes behind Ms. Gould and 472 ahead of Howard "Wig" Sherman — the third candidate for the two Republican positions on the board.

Ms. Gould had to enter the race as a petitioning candidate after the Republican Town Committee endorsed Mr. Sherman and Ms. Napier.

A total of 3,614 voters, or 34.7% of the town's 10,407 registered voters, came out to the polls on Election Day.

Ms. Gould received 1,963 votes, while Ms. Napier had 1,881 and Mr. Sherman finished with 1,409. Ms. Gould and Ms. Napier will join Democrats Alice Ayers and Richard Creeth, and First Selectman Paul Hannah on the board.

"Of course, I'm very pleased to be re-elected by this margin," said Ms. Gould.

"One of my goals was to get the public more involved in the process, and it sounds as if it worked — maybe not completely yet, I'd like to get it more robust, but it sounds like it was partially successful at least."

Ms. Napier said she was enthusiastic. See Selectmen on page 24A

ELECTION RESULTS

Paul Hannah (R) 2,244*%
First selectman

Alice Ayers (D) 808*#
Richard Creeth (D) 598*#
Marilyn Gould (R) 1,963*
Maria Napier (R) 1,881*
Howard Sherman (R) 1,409

Turnout: 3,614 of 10,407 — 34.7%

* - elected
% - unopposed
- guaranteed seats

SUV seriously injures pedestrian

Friends were walking dogs on Ridgefield Road; one pet is killed, the other hurt

by KEN MASTRO

A Wilton woman suffered a serious head injury when she was hit by a vehicle as she and a friend walked their dogs along the side of Ridgefield Road late Tuesday morning.

Police said Ann Smith, 49, of Coachmans Place was walking with a female friend and two dogs when a Hyundai Santa Fe sports

utility vehicle driven by a 16-year-old hit her just after 11 a.m.

She was immediately taken to Norwalk Hospital and was still in the emergency room at 5 p.m. Tuesday. The other pedestrian, Kathy Murphy, was not injured.

Ms. Smith was still listed in serious condition Wednesday morning.

Both dogs were also injured and taken to a local veterinarian.

Ms. Murphy's dog did not survive surgery. The dog that belonged to Ms. Smith survived the accident but is injured, according to Dr. Ralph Hunt of the Wilton Hospital for Animals.

Police said Ms. Smith was walking with her friend on Vista Road when she turned right onto Ridgefield Road heading south near the Marhoffer Fire Station.

At that time, Meghan Stebbins

of Scarlet Oak Drive was driving southbound on Ridgefield Road when her vehicle hit Ms. Smith. Ms. Stebbins was the only person in the car.

Although police have not filed any charges yet pending the results of the investigation, Wilton Police Captain Edward Kulhawik said charges will be

See SUV on page 24A

Fire chief is speaker at Vets Day tribute

by JEFF YATES

Wilton Fire Chief Paul Milositz will be the main speaker at the Veterans Day ceremony on Tuesday, Nov. 11, in the town center. Organized by the James B. Whipple Post of the American Legion, the ceremony will begin at 10:15 when veterans from town will meet behind the Wilton Library in order to form up and begin the short march to the

gazebo on the town green.

"I'm honored and flattered to be chosen for this year's event," said Chief Milositz, who joined the Wilton Fire Department in January.

Before becoming a fire chief, first in Colorado, and then here in Wilton, Chief Milositz served in the United States Air Force from 1974 to 1995. His 21-year military career included tours of duty throughout

See Fire on page 18A



Quite a knight

Guinevere, played by Amy Congdon, sings while the rest of the cast dances in the Wilton Playshop's production of "Camelot." The opening performance is this Friday. Performances will continue on Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 29. In addition, there will be performances on two Sundays, Nov. 16 and 23. Story appears on page 18A.

—Bryan Haeffle photo

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Special Section

Missing woman is found dead in Redding near reservoir

Continued from 1A

ily members at 1:18 p.m. on Saturday, a few feet from the reservoir shore, according to Wilton Police.

Emergency workers had temporarily called off the search to replenish supplies and resources after searching for the body in extremely dark and murky waters roughly 20 feet deep throughout the day and night on Friday. Family members had continued to search along the outskirts of the reservoir, according to Capt. Kulhawik.

The body was found approximately a quarter-mile north of the Newtown Road and Newtown Turnpike bridge.

According to Redding Police, an off-duty Weston police officer spotted a vehicle that fit the description of Ms. Sickler's 2002 Acura parked along Newtown Turnpike in Redding at approximately 1:25 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 31. He stopped, checked the vehicle and confirmed that it belonged to her.

"It was close to where the body was later found," said Capt. Kulhawik.

Redding and Weston police officers searched the wooded area on foot, but were unable to locate her.

"The husband called Thursday because he hadn't heard from her. He had expected to hear from her earlier and was concerned when he couldn't get in touch with her. Typically, in such cases, we gather as much information as possible and send out a teletype to other police departments in the area," said Capt. Kulhawik.

The notice was sent out with Ms. Sickler's description and vehicle registration information. It also said in the alert that she was reportedly distraught and possibly suicidal.

Woman investigated

The Saugatuck Nursery School, where Ms. Sickler had been its treasurer since 1995, filed a report with the Westport police regarding "several discrepancies with the books" on Friday, Oct. 24.

"I can't say how much was missing, but it was a substantial amount," said Marty Hauhuth, moderator at the Saugatuck

Congregational Church, which runs the nursery school. "Obviously, we are very saddened by what's happened and our hearts go out to her family and friends. This has been difficult for everyone involved," she said.

In the report filed with Westport Police, Ms. Sickler was the person named as the school's treasurer, according to Ms. Hauhuth.

Det. Dave Eason of the Westport Police Department said that no charges had been filed against Ms. Sickler but there is an ongoing investigation.

In a separate matter, Weston Police Det. Carl Filsinger said his department received a formal complaint a week later on Friday, Oct. 31, about the alleged embezzlement of some \$62,000 from the Norfield Children's Center. No charges had yet been filed. The Norfield Center had been tipped off by the Westport Police since Ms. Sickler was involved with both schools, said Det. Filsinger.

"We received a formal complaint from an attorney representing Norfield on Friday that there were funds missing from several bank accounts. We had some additional information and she became a 'person of interest.' When we put the complaint together with the missing person's report, we had reason to believe she was involved," said Det. Filsinger.

The detective said the case would now be closed.

"Is there enough evidence to make an arrest? Probably. But the investigation is pretty much closed now since she is deceased," he said. "The results of the audit will be included in the file, but we have closed the case as far as developing any more leads or pursuing a suspect."

Giselle Tyler, member of the Norfield Children's Center Board of Directors, in a formal statement released on Tuesday, said, "Cheryl Sickler's death is a terrible tragedy, and our thoughts and prayers are with the Sickler family."

"As a result of allegations made against" Ms. Sickler "by other local institutions and inconsistencies we identified in our own accounting records, we have initiated a formal investigation of her bookkeeping

activities at Norfield. Until our audit is complete, we can neither confirm nor deny any findings."

Chief Douglas S. Fuchs of the Redding Police Department said, "We're working with the Wilton Police, because it's their missing person case, and Weston, since that's where she worked. We're still putting the case together. If it was a straight suicide, then the investigation will end there unless something criminal turns up."

The Connecticut State Police Canine Search and Fixed Wing Aircraft Units were called in along with the State Police Emergency Services Dive Team, the Newtown Underwater Search and Rescue Team and the Wilton Police and Fire Dive Team. Also, a K-9 dog was provided by the state to help locate where Ms. Sickler might have entered the water to determine a search area for the divers. The dog went from Ms. Sickler's vehicle to a spot on the edge of the water. A 100-yard by 150-yard search grid was

generated from this information. The body was ultimately found outside of this grid.

"The officers concentrated their search based on the dog," said Capt. Kulhawik.

"People from the family went out themselves and looked and, sad to say, they were the ones who found the body," he said. "That was tough for us to deal with because that was the last thing we wanted to happen."

According to Chief Fuchs, a complete search of the area and the reservoir had been planned for Sunday. He said seven boats were scheduled to come in, a mobile command post with communications capabilities, state canine units, and an entire grid search of the reservoir were planned. "Waiting the 72 hours would increase the chances of recovering a body by the means of a surface search," he said.

Wilton Police Lt. Robert Crosby, a professional diver who was instrumental in forming the Wilton Police and Fire Dive Team last year, said

the water was so dark that divers were having problems seeing past their goggles. He said in essence, the divers had to feel the bottom of the reservoir with their hands to search the designated area.

Wilton dive team called

Wilton Fire Chief Paul Milositz said this was the first time the Wilton Police and Fire Dive Team was called out and used. The team is comprised of 13 men from the Wilton Police and Fire departments. Eleven of the members were able to respond.

"We were called around 7 a.m. on Friday to search for a possible missing person. The Police Department had some leads and reason to believe the woman might be in a particular area in the reservoir. We were joined by the Newtown dive team, which is a well-established and experienced team that's been around for about 12 years. We proceeded to search a designated area next to an area being searched by the Newtown team. The search lasted

from about 7:45 until around 3 in the afternoon," he said.

"Our assignment was to search a specific area along the shoreline. We searched a fairly large area until the search proved futile and was handed over to the State Police. They have sonar equipment that is much more suited to the conditions we faced. After a while, the water became very murky and visibility dropped as we dove deeper. We had reached the limit of our capabilities," said Chief Milositz.

The chief added that the team had searched to a depth of about 20-25 feet, while the search area was about 25 feet offshore.

"I think the guys did a really good job and I'm very proud of them," he said. "We have been recognized as a viable team with proper training and experience by local agencies and they know they can count on us in the future."

Deer hunt planned at reservoir here

Continued from 1A

Belden Hill Road, and many other streets in town.

Ms. Sesto said that the hunt would be arranged to coincide with the firearm season, which begins Nov. 19 and ends Dec. 9, and that it would later include bow season, which started on Sept. 15 and runs until Jan. 31. She said that the committee would be working with a local hunter to approve 10 people to participate in the hunts, based on references, and a check of their paperwork such as licenses to ensure that they would act responsibly.

From November to December the hunters would be using firearms, and after that any further hunts would utilize bowhunting.

"In order to conduct the hunt, we do need a permit from the Department of Public Health," said Ms. Sesto. She told the board that the water authority had submitted the application to the state in mid-October.

Throughout the hunts, treestands will be used to allow increased efficiency as well as to minimize the risk that missed shots might become a danger, as the hunters will be shooting towards the ground, said Ms. Sesto.

"The plan would be to have a series of paired days," she said explaining that hunters would have two days to hunt the property followed by one or two weeks in which they would be prohibited from the area to allow things to settle down. After the allotted time the hunters would once again be allowed back into the woods.

In accordance with state regulations for Zone 11, the area designated as having exceedingly high numbers of deer, hunters on the property would be allowed to take an unlimited number of antlerless deer by bringing each animal taken to a check station, and receiving a replacement tag at that time.

Ms. Sesto told the board that the state deer biologist Howard Kilpatrick would be training herself and another committee member as check station attendants so that they could have a check station on or near the property that would allow the hunters to maximize the time they spend in the woods.

Ms. Sesto provided the board with numerous precautions that would be taken to protect town residents, as

well as the hunters themselves. Aside from checking out the hunters, the town would be providing additional measures.

"The Police Department has committed to patrol the area throughout the hunt," she said.

Along with the police presence Ms. Sesto felt that the fencing on the property would be a great asset for keeping the hunt controlled and safe. The limited access point for the hunters will be on Old Huckleberry Hill Road, and special permits will be provided for the hunters to display in the dashboards of their vehicles. Before each hunt the police will also be notified of the locations of each of the hunters so that they can respond quickly if the need arises.

A final note by Ms. Sesto was that the hunt would likely generate a large amount of venison that would be donated to area soup kitchens.

"Our participants will have the first choice of what parts of the meat they want," she said, but she added that she still expects a large amount of excess. She said that the hunters and the committee members would be handling the meat according to guidelines set up by the donation centers.

Second Selectman Maria Napier applauded the efforts of the Deer Management Committee to ensure that the hunt would be properly controlled.

"I'm really impressed with the whole safety aspect of this," she said.

Despite the apparent safety of the proposal Ms. Napier had reservations with approving it. She referred to the survey that had previously been completed in order to gauge the opinions of residents on the deer issue.

"Only 32% of the respondents said they would be in favor of a controlled hunt on town lands," she said adding, "I feel like someone has to represent the 68% of the people who were not in favor of hunting."

First Selectman Paul Hannah said that the hunt was a good idea as the deer population was a pressing issue that was causing numerous problems in town.

"Lyme disease has been such a problem, as well as the understorey, along with the automobile accidents," he said.

The proposal passed by a vote of 3-1. Selectman Marilyn Gould was unable to attend the meeting.

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