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The Whitinsville Sidewalk Sale makes a comeback

By Magda Dakin

The faces of the people and the buildings may have changed over the years but the spirit of the small business owners in downtown Whitinsville is alive and well. The downtown merchants have banded together as the Milltown Merchants and are jointly sponsoring several new adventures, the first of which is the new Annual Sidewalk Sale on Church Street in downtown Whitinsville.

To be held Saturday, June 16, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the Sidewalk Sale heralds back to the 41 years of sidewalk sales hosted by the Baker's Department Store, from 1961 until 2002.

The event will be held on the sidewalks and street with tables, pop up tents and displays. Church Street will be closed to traffic that day from Pine Street to Cross Street from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.



Downtown Whitinsville in the 1960s when the sidewalk sale began.

Nearly two dozen stores in and around the downtown area will be represented with the theme of Eat, Shop and Play.

Local restaurants will be on hand, as will the Palagi Bros. Ice Cream truck. Be sure to check out food and spice options at The Green Plate, Brozzian Spices and Zen Bear Foods, among others.

The Play aspect of the event will be well covered as many of the newer downtown stores feature this in their storefronts. The Crafty Nest, a hands-on DIY craft shop, and Art Make It Real will feature activities to try while you're browsing. The Pottery Garden, located at Many Creations, and The Family Karate Center will have

live demonstrations throughout the day.

Music Man will be DJ for the event and the Whitin Community Center will host a bouncy house and face painting for the children.

Eva Baker, host of most of those 41 years of past Sidewalk Sales, says they were never rained out in all those years, but they did use tarps to protect some items during the last year. This year's Sidewalk Sale is a rain or shine event as most of the vendors will be under tents and awnings. "Store owners saved things all year long to put in the annual sale and the employees would dress up in costumes. It was one big happy party day," says Eva, of

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Conversion of the former Blanchard School in Uxbridge into apartments proceeds toward a December completion date.

Spirit runs high for Blanchard School rebuild

By Rod Lee

Renovation of the former Virginia A. Blanchard School on East Hartford Ave. in Uxbridge—now well along—is one way to appreciate seeing the historic structure being turned into one, two and three-bedroom apartments.

Another is the enthusiasm of those involved in the work, led by Sugrue & Associates, a commercial construction and civil engineering company located in North Scituate, Rhode Island.

A groundbreaking ceremony held recently at the two-story

wood-frame building, which dates to 1873, drew a good-sized crowd including several town officials and "people who used to go to school there, their children, uncles," Dottie Russo, office manager/assistant project manager for Sugrue, said.

This excitement will propel the project forward, Ms. Russo said.

"We're about forty percent done," she said. "Our completion date is targeted for December. The exterior work, if I remember correctly the owner (Michael Sugrue)

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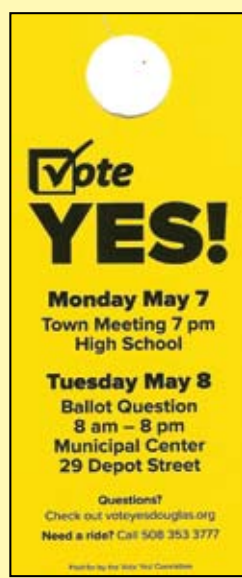
By Justin Snook, Director
Simon Fairfield Public Library

February 27 was the day I found out that the Simon Fairfield Public Library was in trouble. It was no secret to me that the Town of Douglas was under financial duress. The Library had barely squeaked its way into last year's budget. We always hope, though: maybe there will be a big, unpredicted turn-back in certified free cash. Maybe the state will adequately fund all the mandates they place on the schools. Maybe the town will get fair compensation for state-owned land and the Douglas State Forest will be a boon instead of a burden.

But, as predicted, the trend of the past decade continued: costs of provid-

ing services increased dramatically while revenue flatlined. Between a Commonwealth demanding more than it can fund and a tax base that had only passed \$200,400 override dollars since 1982, the Town of Douglas was out of steam. There wasn't anywhere left to trim or strategically cut. When I looked at FY19's spreadsheets, I saw a town so financially wounded that it could no longer afford its public library. As the library director, that was not a very popular stance for me to take. I think it is fair, however, to say that you can't have a

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DOUGLAS LIBRARY

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successful library without a successful community. March 6 was the first meeting of the Board of Selectmen; where we entered discussion of the FY19 budget. I asked for an override for the chance to save my department. But the last two override attempts failed spectacularly: 4 to 1 against and 2 to 1 against. Nobody thought it was possible.

On March 14, at the next BoS meeting, we discussed potential scenarios: big overrides, little overrides (the library's budget isn't very big), a-la-carte overrides... The prevailing opinion, though, remained: Overrides just don't pass in Douglas. It's not possible.

March 20 is where the story took an unexpected turn. By this point, everyone pay-

ing attention knew: either an override would have to be on the ballot or there would be a zero percent chance of the Library being funded after June 30. We packed the meeting with library supporters and were ready for a long, knock-down drag-out fight to get an override on the ballot. The Board was already there, though. Before axing a department and setting the town on a road to likely receivership, they provided us with one more chance. It wasn't a \$200,000 override to save the library anymore. It was a \$1.5 million override to save the whole town.

There was a mere 6 weeks before the town election on May 8. At this point, my involvement in the process had to cease with the exception of politely providing unbiased information. The Vote Yes committee that coalesced around the library, though, hit the ground run-

ning and didn't stop. A handful of library supporters put the rest of their lives on hold to accomplish the impossible. Their passion, dedication, and the sheer amount of work they put into the campaign was awe-inspiring and humbling, and I cannot thank them enough for everything they did. And I mean literally everything. It came down to 14 votes after the recount.

As stressful of a time as this budget season was for our library staff and patrons, it was also wonderful to see people who cared so much. I cannot thank the Vote Yes committee and their volunteers enough for everything they did leading up to town meeting, the day of the election, and the day of the recount. Nevertheless, I want to thank Lisa Moczynski for chairing the committee. I want to thank Lori Jensen-Colbert, Dawn & Fred Fontaine, and Mary Sughrue-Yacino for the mind-blowing amount of volunteer advocacy they pro-



Supporters of the yes vote were out in force at the Simon Fairfield Public library.

BLANCHARD SCHOOL

Continued from page 1

said that will be finished in the next three to four weeks."

Ms. Russo noted that all affected are "happy it is being transformed into affordable housing, and we're keeping the existing maple floors, the bead board and the king cupola on top. I think it's amazing, building something new but also keeping much of what's there."

The Blanchard School was enlarged from its original footprint in 1900 and served as a public school until it was closed in 2002. The hip roof and clapboard siding were distinguishing features. It was the oldest district school still in use in the state until taken out of commission.

Sugrue's reputation in its field of expertise is enhanced by such other housing projects as the Noral Apartments in Dorchester, the Woods at Wareham, the Hamlet Apartments in Newton and 7 Forbes St. in Worcester.

The Blanchard School fits nicely as part of that scenario, Ms. Russo said.

The apartments will be "very spacious," she said.

"Some of the lenders are from Boston. They are used to high-end stuff. They were blown away by what they saw," Ms. Russo said.

One woman looking ahead to the grand opening later this year told her "I don't care if I have to take a sled to get here!"

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

PUBLIC LIBRARY

If you live in Douglas, want a library card, but can't make it to the Library to apply for one, now you can apply online! If you go to the Simon Fairfield Public Library's website (mysfpl.org) and click on 'Cards and Borrowing' under 'About the Library,' you can apply for a library card to be mailed to you. But what can you do with a library card if you can't go to the library, you may ask? From the Library's home-page, you can click on the 'Overdrive Catalog' button for access to tens of thousands of ebooks and audiobooks that you can download to your phone, computer, or e-reader. It doesn't cost anything, so why not give it a go?

vided. I want to thank John Chrastka from Everylibrary for his invaluable guidance. I want to thank Ingrid & Brian Murphy, Jane Moczynski, Kelli Stearns Grady, Katherine Anderson, Diane Carter Creasey, Tom Devlin, Leslie Breault, Teena Porter, Beatrice Escobar, Ramona Lachapelle, Laurie Lynch, Clara Kim, Mitch Cohen, and Brett Argall for their involvement in the committee and volunteerism. Y'all saved a library and I believe y'all saved a town.

Come see who will be the next rhubarb champion

The Douglas Farmers Market opens on June 30 with its annual rhubarb challenge. The rhubarb challenge is an event that pays homage to this amazing indigenous plant. Rhubarb is found in many gardens but also woven into the memories and traditions of many New England family trees. This event encourages folks to come forth with their favorite rhubarb recipes. We welcome traditional family recipes passed down for generations and also the most inventive contemporary inventions that feature this fascinating plant. We have seen entries from beautiful pies and crumbles to chutney, sauerkraut, barbecue, beer, and bread. All of it ... for the love of rhubarb. Whether you grew up eating it or have never heard of it, we welcome you to take on the challenge. This event is one of a kind that will go down in local history.

Entries are judged by community judge panel and we also hold a peoples choice award by offering tastings to market goers. The rhubarb challenge invites those who want to share their culinary talents and love for rhubarb by entering their most scrumptious rhubarb masterpieces. Prizes will be awarded in three categories; sweets, savory, and condiments. Any dish that includes rhubarb in

the recipe is welcome. Join the challenge or just come to taste the unique creations and check out our wonderful market vendors. Tasting plates and good old rhubarb fun is available to all. Participants must drop off entries at 9 a.m. on June 30. Entries will be judged on presentation, overall smell and taste, and the story behind the recipe. For details on the challenge visit douglasfarmersmarket.org.

The Douglas Farmers Market is a wonderful weekly farmers market held on the grounds of the historic E.N. Jenckes Store in downtown Douglas. The perfect stop on a summer Saturday morning to cross paths with others from the community and get your local produce and other artisan goods. The market is excited to welcome back the local vegetables, seasonal fruits, fresh eggs, a local artisan cheese maker, our artisan baker, a local coffee roaster, alpaca farmers, local honey, an artisan soap and more.

New vendors of any kind are welcome, so if you grow it, make it or bake it, they would love to have you. The market will be open every Saturday morning from 9-12 through October. Accepting applications for vendors. Reserve your space today douglasfarmersmarket.org,

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