



# CORNWALL CHRONICLE

VOLUME 16 : NUMBER 12 JANUARY 2007



## "It's All About the Land..."

Cornwall's "revaluation year" began to involve most of us in mid-November when Assessor Barbara Bigos mailed out the results of the state-mandated revaluation. The letters shocked some and pleasantly surprised others. They also told us how to estimate the property tax due next year.

For starters, there are positive aspects to the revaluation. First, the tax rate is projected to go down from 21.8 mills to 12.5, based on an estimate made by Board of Finance Chair Ralph Gold. In simpler terms, the rate will drop from 2.18 percent of your old assessment to 1.25 percent of your new one. This rate reduction will occur because the new Grand List will be nearly 100 percent more than the 2001 list, due largely to zooming market values of land and buildings. (To put that in context, the Consumer Price Index rose just 16 percent in the last five years.)

Another nice feature is that taxes on your car or truck will fall. Those assessments are determined on a statewide basis, so vehicle owners in Cornwall will face much lower taxes next year when our mill rate drops. (But the "missing" revenue from vehicles and similar property has to be made up by higher taxes on real property. That's part of why the mill rate won't quite drop by half.)

A not-so-nice fact about the revaluation

comes about because it reflects the rapid increase in land prices in the Northwest Corner. This has driven up both assessments and taxes for low-income families living on fixed incomes. Together with the rising cost of heating fuel and electricity, increasing land values are creating a serious affordability problem for many long-time Cornwall residents.

### SOME OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE REVALUATION:

• "It's all about the land," Barbara explained to more than 200 owners at the three sessions she held in the Town Hall. The average assessment will increase by 94 percent from 2001 to 2006. Within this overall change, however, the value of most houses went up only 25 percent to 50 percent, while land values soared by 200 percent or more.

• "The market is what counts." Barbara says the revaluation is essentially based on what Cornwall properties have sold for in the past two years. To be updated, past sales must be increased by 1 percent a month because property prices have been rising rapidly in the area, at least until recent months. The new Grand List assesses all property as of its value on October 1, 2006.

• Market value is what the assessor looks for. This converts directly into the assess-

ment, Barbara notes, because Connecticut statutes require that an assessment must equal 70 percent of the property's total market value.

• "Land values vary more than building values." Barbara focused more on land than buildings in this revaluation. Her starting point for valuing a residential lot was the size of the basic lot, whether it was located in a one-, three-, or five-acre zone. Excess acreage above the basic lot size was valued at \$10,000 an acre.

• Positive features of a site—good views, ponds or streams, stone walls, privacy, etc.—can add to its value. Restrictive covenants, rights-of-way, or other constraints on the use of land can lower site value.

• Barbara warns that comparing percentage increases in assessments with those of your neighbors is of no use in obtaining an adjustment. In large part, that's because she isn't convinced that Cornwall's last revaluation was accurate enough.

• She also admits, quite frankly, that "assessing is more art than science." Inevitably, judgmental factors enter in, no matter how hard an assessor tries to be precise.

### ...A FEW MEASUREMENTS

Barbara gave the *Chronicle* a computerized version of her preliminary Grand List for 2006 so that we could compare it to the

(continued on page 2)

## JANUARY 2007

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	<b>1</b> NEW YEAR'S DAY  Annual New Year's Day Breakfast 8:30 A.M.—1 P.M. UCC Parish House †	<b>2</b> CCS Reopens Park & Rec. 7 P.M. CCS Library Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall Inland Wetlands 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	<b>3</b> TM	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> Blood Pressure Screening Noon—1 P.M. UCC Parish House Region One Bd. of Ed. 7 P.M. HVRHS	<b>9</b> P&Z 7:30 P.M. Town Hall Housatonic River Comm. 7:30 P.M. CCS Library	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> LQ <i>Who Killed the Electric Car</i> (Free Film) 7 P.M. W.C. Firehouse †	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> Cornwall Association 9 A.M. UCC Old Styles Life Skills: Cooking on an Open Hearth 10:30 A.M.—1:30 P.M. †
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BIRTHDAY  Deadline: February <i>Chronicle</i> Copy	<b>16</b> Bd. of Selectmen 7:30 P.M. Town Hall	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> Bd. of Ed. 5 P.M. CCS Lib. Bd. of Fin. 7:30 P.M. CCS Lib. VFW Post 9856 8 P.M. W. C. Firehouse	<b>19</b> TM  Story Hour 1:15 P.M. Library	<b>20</b> Family-Style Contra Dance 7—10 P.M. Town Hall †
<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Democratic Town Comm. 7:30 P.M. Library ZBA 8 P.M. Town Hall*	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> FQ	<b>26</b> Story Hour 1:15 P.M. Library Informal Round Sing 7:30 P.M. Town Hall †	<b>27</b> Cornwall Historical Society Open House 4—6 P.M. †
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> Cornwall Vol. Fire Dept. 7:30 P.M. W. C. Firehouse Tax Deadline †	<b>Every Week This Month (except Jan. 1):</b> <b>Mondays: Jam Session, 7:30 P.M. Village Meeting House; Men's Adult BB, 8 P.M. CCS Gym</b> <b>Tuesdays: Adult Volleyball, 7—9 P.M. CCS Gym</b> <b>Wednesdays: Play Group, 10 A.M. Playscape or UCC; Stretch Class, 4 P.M. Town Hall; Tai Chi, 7 P.M. CCS; Women's Adult Basketball, 7 P.M. CCS Gym</b> <b>Thursdays: Meditation for Mothers, 1:15 P.M. UCC Day Room</b> <b>Saturdays: Ice Skating, 7—8 P.M. Hotchkiss School (see page 4)</b> <b>Sundays: Meditation Group, 1—2 P.M. Debra Tyler 672-0229 for location</b>		

\* Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

† Details in Events and Announcements

(continued from page 1)

2001 Grand List prepared by the previous revaluation consultant. Here's what we found:

- The *median* market value of Cornwall's residential property went up by 106 percent from 2001 to 2006. That means that the values of half the properties rose by less than 106 percent and half by more.

- *Average* market value rose by 94 percent, a bit less than the *median*. The average is calculated by dividing total residential property values by the number of properties. Cornwall's "average" house and lot is now assessed at \$467,000—up from \$238,000 five years ago—and by implication has a market value of \$667,000 (two-thirds of a million bucks!). This "average" residential property is estimated to pay \$5,800 in real estate taxes next year, compared to \$5,200 this year.

- Out of a total of 833 residential properties in Cornwall, the revaluation gave assessment increases of less than 100 percent to 373 of them. Another 355 properties got increases between 100 percent and 200 percent. And 105 properties saw their assessments soar by between 200 percent and 400 percent.

- There are now 44 residential properties in Cornwall assessed at more than \$1,000,000 each. This is up from only seven properties assessed at over \$1,000,000 in 2001.

These numbers may change a bit when the final Grand List comes out next spring, due to what's described below.

#### ...THE APPEALS PROCESS

In December, more than 200 Cornwall property owners made appointments for 15-minute meetings with Barbara to talk about their new assessments. Mostly, what they wanted were reductions, but in a number of cases they merely wanted an explanation. Barbara says that as a result of these meetings about 100 owners will get reductions due to the additional information they provided her. A few owners may see increases! Such changes can happen because someone points out that property lines differ from those shown on the assessment records.

When asked if any of these face-to-face meetings got difficult, Barbara replied diplomatically: "Everybody has been polite; no one has been rude." She went on to say that reactions in Cornwall have been better than in other towns she has revalued, including Salisbury, Harwinton, and Morris. "It's easier to deal with the wonderful people of Cornwall."

The next step in the revaluation process allows anyone to request a hearing by the Board of Assessment Appeals (see page 4). After that, anyone who wants to protest further must go to court. The final steps in the year-long revaluation process will be when the Board of Finance sets the new mill rate next May and tax bills are mailed out in June.

—David A. Grossman

## KC Baird Tells Why

The West Cornwall Market may have been a small store, but in a village the size of West Cornwall, its closing is big news—and sad news for many of us. The *Chronicle* sat down with proprietor KC Baird a few days before he locked the door for the last time.

CC: The closing of the market is clearly going to have an impact on our community. The first question we have is *why*?

KC: *It's simple. Lack of sales, coupled with rising costs. Fixed costs not covered by volume.*

CC: What were your expectations when you opened the market three-and-a-half years ago?

KC: *My original thinking was that there would be less traffic-generated volume, but because more people actually live in West Cornwall, the lack of traffic would be made up by business from the population of that part of town.*

CC: How did your business break down between full-timers and weekenders?

KC: *Between 65 and 70 percent of my sales came from weekenders. In the beginning the school was under construction, and that helped the business. But remember that the previous store was closed for a number of years, and I think that locals developed other shopping habits during that time—shopping closer to where they worked in some cases. People were buying food to last the week and especially stocking up on things like staples.*

CC: The market was one of the few businesses in town that employed high school students. What will happen on that front?

KC: *That is one of the biggest losses in closing the market. High school-age kids had their first job working here, and it was a good experience for them. I can't hire everyone down at Baird's. I've had at least a dozen kids working here and they have been good workers.*

CC: What are your plans going forward with Baird's?

KC: *I want to re-set the store and fill up the shelves, and I want to bring the atmosphere from the West Cornwall Market to Baird's, where I feel it has been missing. Also, I will talk to an organic food wholesaler about selling organic items, or find other ways of going organic, but I need to know what people are looking for.*

CC: Do you have other plans for Baird's?

KC: *I am considering expanding the store and am looking at a piece of land immediately next door. Expansion would allow for an area for a bake shop, a butcher shop, and more tables for people to eat at. We will also be preparing complete meals for customers to pick up, dinners especially. We will also have pizza available—whole pies for take-out.*

CC: Where do you think Baird's market now falls short?

KC: *Variety is definitely a problem. It's difficult because certain distributors have minimums that we can't meet. The smaller distributors don't have the variety I would like to offer. We lost our long-time poultry supplier, Stone Church Farms,*

*for this reason. We didn't have enough business for them.*

CC: What is your biggest regret about closing the market?

KC: *The feeling of failure, not realizing that there was something I could do to make the business more profitable. On the other hand, I met a lot of people I didn't know before and I hope those people will continue to support Baird's.*

—Tom Levine

## Welcome

Isabella Raine Li to Laura Tyson and Ricki Li  
Lillian Maya Wilson  
to Maya Foty and Webster Wilson

## Good-Bye to a Friend

Stuyvesant (Peter) Barry

## Congratulations

Chastity Parker to Timothy Corwin

## Land Transfers

Ronald P. and Ingrid J. Laigle to Peter D. Caruso, 5.3 acres at 92 Cream Hill Road for \$400,000.

Arnold H. Leichtman and Nilda Perez-Leichtman to Kim Savage Realty, LLC, 5.979 acres on Whitcomb Hill Road for \$275,000.

Estate of Desmond Vernon Nicholson to Greg Galloway, Gina Maolucci, William J. and Rebecca L. Hurlburt, half interest in 24 Rocky Cove Lane for \$325,000.

Louise D. Nicholson to Greg Galloway, Gina Maolucci, William J. and Rebecca L. Hurlburt, half interest in 24 Rocky Cove Lane for \$325,000.

Myron Hofer to Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc., half interest in 49.2 acres on Route 43.

Adeline Hofer to Cornwall Conservation Trust, Inc., half interest in 49.2 acres on Route 43.

## Taking to the Trails

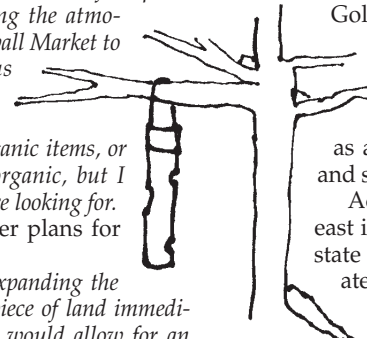
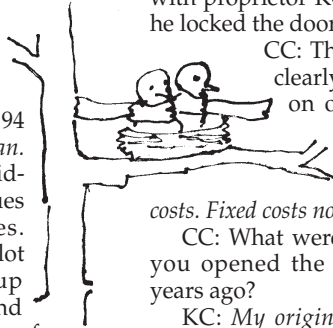
Our month for snow has arrived! The Great Mountain Forest weather station in Norfolk has daily records that go back to 1932. Average January snowfall over all those many years is 21.7 inches. This leaves us with a good prospect of enjoying the great outdoors on skis, snowshoes, and sleds.

Gold Road, off upper Cream Hill Road, is a state forest road (marked) 1.2 miles long (no cars permitted) with a gentle slope. For years it has served as a perfect spot for family skiing and snowshoeing.

Across Cream Hill Road on the east is Wickwire Road. This is also a state forest road (marked), appropriate for snowshoes and cross-country skiing. The wide road is approximately 1.5 miles long with gentle ups and downs. A lean-to used by hikers when the Appalachian Trail passed through Cornwall is still in good condition with the exception of some graffiti. Even though it is possible to continue after the "turnaround," the trails left and right have not been maintained. Turn back.

The big field at the Hart Farm on Cherry Hill Road is an ideal spot for family sledding. Keep in mind, however, that at the end of a sled run there is apt to be a stone wall.

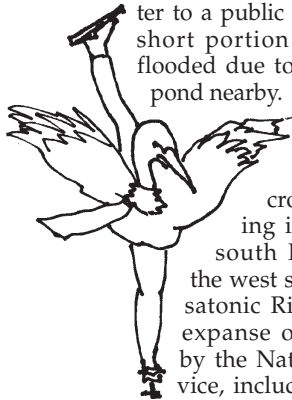
There are many fields in Cornwall good





for cross-country skiing. (Most land, however, is privately owned and requires permission from the owner.) The big field owned by CL&P off Upper River Road is perfect for cross-country skiing. It is also a place to practice your tracking skills. Animals come down from the mountain to forage for food left over from last year's harvest.

It is also possible to walk, ski, or snowshoe for several miles on a narrow trail heading south along the river. Drive on Lower River Road past the Trinity Conference Center to a public parking area. A short portion of the trail is flooded due to a huge beaver pond nearby.



One of the most exhilarating spots for cross-country skiing is at the end of south River Road on the west side of the Housatonic River. This great expanse of land, owned by the National Park Service, includes the Appalachian Trail. With a good snow on the ground you can follow the trail along the river on snowshoes. The large fields have been mowed and are perfect for cross-country skiing. To get there from the Covered Bridge, drive down Route 7 and turn left just before you reach Route 4. Follow lower River Road for about a mile until you see the Appalachian Trail sign. Park nearby.

The upper end of Town Street is not plowed in winter. (In fact, most state forest roads are not plowed in winter.) You can park where this road becomes Housatonic State Forest. (Be sure you don't block a private driveway nearby.) You have two choices. You can ski to the right up the gradual slope of Gray Road about a half-mile to a barrier and then return. Or, you can ski downhill until you reach Music Mountain Road and then return.

This article covers only a small number of trails in Cornwall. More hikes will be reported in a future issue of the *Chronicle*. Moreover, a map delineating all the trails will be available at the Library in late spring.

Obviously, you hike, snowshoe, or ski at your own risk. Because winter weather is unpredictable, our first selectman says it is essential that you dress warmly and take along water and a snack. Even more important, tell someone where you are going and, if possible, when you expect to return.

Marked trails are the safest at this time of year.  
—Carla Bigelow

### Some Taxes Come Home!

STEAP—a mouthful of letters signifying the state's Small Town Economic Assistance Program—is now reviewing details of two new Cornwall projects and closing the books on a third.

The larger of the two new grants—\$250,000—will go to the Cornwall Histori-

## Letters to the Chronicle

### A LETTER WE LIKE

*Kudos to Ed Ferman for his informative and concise article about the new property assessments. It answered questions we've asked our neighbors and questions yet unasked. Even in my state of 100+% shock, I am well informed. He did what a good editor should do: address a hot button topic and address it with authority and clarity.*  
—Malou Rawls

### CEMETERY REMEMBERED

*My article about Cornwall's cemeteries (Chronicle, November 2006) should have included one that really belongs in the list: St. Bridget's burying ground in Sharon, west of Cornwall Bridge (River Road, north side of Routes 4 and 7). Founded in 1883, it was laid out in a rare and graceful concentric design. The former Catholic church in Cornwall, now converted to a residence, is next to the Wandering Moose on Route 128.*  
—Ann Schillinger

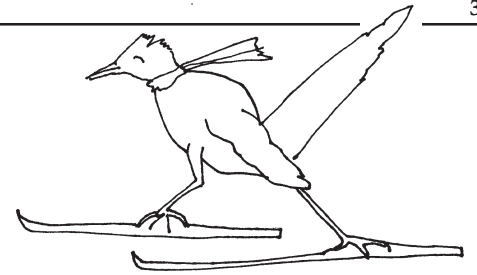
### GREMLIN GRIPE

*Certain rituals occur when I receive a new Cornwall Report: cover appreciation, a first reading of the Animal Control Officer's report,*

call for a "Cornwall bandstand." Rumor has it that Fred Thaler and the Town Hall Players are eying the facility for fair-weather productions.

The Hughes Memorial Library in West Cornwall is also in line for a STEAP grant: \$200,000. According to First Selectman Gordon Ridgway, the project will eventually involve more than the Library itself. The building and grounds constitute the only "public space" in the village of West Cornwall. Initial plans call for a septic system, restrooms, a kitchenette, and meeting space with a large table for various organizations. The restrooms will not be open to the public during non-library hours, although toilets with public access may be added at some time in the future.

Nearly complete is the ball field/pavilion/parking lot/walking track complex adjacent to Foote Fields, below Cornwall Village on Route 4. The ball field—built to Little League specifications—has enjoyed a first year of use with the turf still intact. The pavilion is structurally complete, with plans for power, water, and a concrete floor ready for different times in the future. More picnic tables are coming soon, open to the public. Other uses will add to the original



*then a quick scan of the whole book. This year I made a photocopy of the crossword puzzle to work on later, admired the stamina of Rick's dog Lucky, and decided I liked the use of blue paper.*

*Then I found some errors—caused by gremlins?—on the pages listing "Town Officials of Boards and Commissions." First, "HISTORIAN Michael Gannett" was missing from the list, leaving a space in the column. Mr. Gannett continues to serve as our Cornwall historian. Second, the phone number for the Cornwall Historical Society should be 672-0505, not the number for Jim Gold, former CHS president.*  
—Ginny Potter, President, CHS

### ARE RESERVATIONS NECESSARY?

*After reading Ann Schillinger's intriguing piece on Cornwall cemeteries (December Chronicle), I wondered how many of these sites are active and how one would go about arranging for a burial plot. Are these places hard to get into? Are there any prerequisites, other than the obvious one, for admission? Perhaps a follow-up article offering useful phone numbers, etc., might be helpful.*  
—Don Bachman

A town meeting will be scheduled—probably in early February—to approve the Historical Society and Hughes Library projects. As with the ball field and pavilion, funds will initially come from town reserves, to be reimbursed at 100 percent by the state. Town expense will be minimal, mainly for necessary legal and financial details.  
—Bob Potter

### Gettin' Ready!

The Town of Cornwall has received Homeland Security grants over a three-year period to provide for equipment, training, and planning to meet the needs of local first responders in regional or national emergencies. Funds received were, in 2004, \$19,518; 2005, \$12,911; and 2006, \$5,355.

Some of this money has gone to meet requirements imposed by the Department of Homeland Security, such as a high-band radio base station in Cornwall's Emergency Operations Center, i.e., the West Cornwall Firehouse. High-band radios will be used for communication between Cornwall and the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security regional office. Also required is personal protection equipment provided for first responders. This includes

impervious coveralls, boots, gloves, and gas mask assemblies.

Other funds have been used for 40 cots should the CCS gym be needed as an emergency shelter, a generator for the Town Hall to power that building as a supplemental emergency operations center, and a portable ham radio system to be used in the field. Some of Cornwall's portion of the grant money is spent regionally. We hope Cornwall will never suffer a regional or national emergency, but it is good to know preparations are being made.

—Joyce Hart

## Events & Announcements

**A New Year's Pancake Breakfast** will be served in the UCC Parish House on January 1 from 8:30 A.M. on to benefit the La Casa Project.

**Who Killed the Electric Car?** If interested, come to a 92-minute documentary at the West Cornwall Firehouse on Thursday, January 11, at 7 P.M. Learn more about the possibilities of renewable energy and sustainable living. Discussion will follow. The program initiates an ecological effort in Cornwall, a collaboration of Filmshare, the UCC, and the Library.

**The Board of Assessment Appeals** will hold hearings by appointment in March. Applications to schedule a hearing will be available at the Town Clerk's Office between January 15 and February 20.

**911 House Numbers** must be clearly visible from the road at all times, not concealed by winter snow or long-lasting holiday greenery. Local Rescue Squad and Fire Department drivers may or may not know your house without a number. Ambulance drivers from out of town almost certainly will not, and may be delayed in emergencies. This has happened more than once.

## We Get a "D"

Back in November, the *Chronicle* announced a test in this corner: We would compare that month's response to the coupon below with a study of advertising effectiveness conducted by the Harvard Business School. Sadly, our coupon failed to beat the average.

The money that came in didn't cover our costs; we had an operating deficit of \$294 for the month. If November was typical, the *Chronicle* will soon be out of business. We hope January will bring new resolution to those readers we didn't hear from last year. We depend totally on your support. Thanks.



**Art in Cornwall:** At the Library, Ken Krug's show of *Book Paintings* will continue through January 20. Beginning January 23, David Nickeson will exhibit photographs from his extensive travels.

At the Insiders/Outsiders Gallery, there is a rotating group show of New England artists going through the winter.

At the National Iron Bank, Dennis A. Swett will be showing his paintings in acrylics during the month of January.

## Motherhouse-Sponsored Events:

- Saturday, January 13: the Old Style Life Skills Series will continue with Wyatt Whiteman demonstrating open-hearth cooking from 10:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M. Bring a lunch dish to supplement the hearth-prepared food. Cost is \$35 per family. For information and reservations: Debra Tyler, 672-0229, or [lifeskills@motherhouse.us](mailto:lifeskills@motherhouse.us).

- Saturday, January 20: A family-style contra dance will feature the Homegrown Band and Bill Fischer at the Town Hall from 7 to 10 P.M. For information: Debra Tyler, 672-0229, or Rachel Gall, 672-6328.

- Friday, January 26: An informal round sing at the Town Hall will start at 7:30 P.M. For information: Debra Tyler, 672-0229.

## Park & Rec. Activities:

- Every Saturday in January there will be ice skating for Cornwall residents at the Schmidt Rink at the Hotchkiss School from 7 to 8 P.M. All skaters must wear hats.

- Registration for baseball and softball is coming soon; check for details and forms at [www.cornwallparkandrecreation.org](http://www.cornwallparkandrecreation.org).

- Note that some of the times for adult sports in the CCS gym may have changed (see calendar).

**Short Biographies** on the Cornwall website ([www.cornwallct.org](http://www.cornwallct.org)) now number ten, with Denny Frost added to Ann Peterson, Elizabeth Locke, Charlie Gold, Pat and Jerry Blakey, Helen Tennant, Ralph Scoville, Marc Simont, Fred Bate, and Bill Beecher. All the bios are interesting, most surprisingly so. And while you're at the site, look at "Planning Cornwall's Future," especially David Grossman's "Cornwall in the Zeros Decade," probably as detailed an MRI as any town ever received.

**"Support Cornwall Agriculture,"** says the cover of an informative new brochure prepared by the Ag Commission and Local Food Project. The folder contains a map showing Cornwall suppliers and detailed information on what is available from different sources. The brochure is available at the Town Office, the Post Offices, Baird's, and other locations.

**The Cornwall Historical Society** will host a winter-warming open house on Saturday, January 27, from 4 to 6 P.M. Although the exhibit "What Did We Do Before TV? Leisure Time in Winter" shows some non-electric examples of an earlier time, the lights and the furnace will be turned on, and refreshments will be served. Everyone is welcome; bad-weather date is January 28.

**Taxes Due:** The second half of real estate, personal property, and motor vehicle tax bills is due January 1; payments must be postmarked by January 31 to avoid interest. No additional bills are mailed; use bills that were mailed in July. The tax office is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 1 to 4 P.M. Call 672-2705 for further information.



## CORNWALL CHRONICLE

### JANUARY ISSUE

Jane Bevans, Illustrations  
Ginny and Bob Potter, Editors

### FEBRUARY ISSUE

Elisabeth Kaestner and Paul De Angelis, Editors  
[paul@abouttown.us](mailto:paul@abouttown.us)

MANAGING EDITOR Tom Bechtle

CALENDAR EDITOR Anne Baren

CIRCULATION Nan and John Bevans,  
Lucy and Jack Kling

### DIRECTORS

Robert Potter PRESIDENT • Cheryl Evans VICE PRESIDENT  
Edward Ferman SECRETARY • Audrey Ferman TREASURER  
Hendon Chubb • Anne Kosciusko • John Miller  
Sandy Neubauer • Lisa Lansing Simont  
Tom Bevans (1912-2003) FOUNDER

## THE CHRONICLE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

We hope you enjoy this on-line edition of the *Cornwall Chronicle*. Remember that all our revenues come from readers like you, and we need your help to continue producing this electronic edition along with the print edition. If your contribution is \$10 or more, we'd be glad to mail the print edition to any out-of-town address. Please mail your tax deductible gifts to: Cornwall Chronicle Inc. 143 Cream Hill Rd., West Cornwall, CT 06796. Comments, letters and news may be e-mailed to the publishers at: [elfhill@aol.com](mailto:elfhill@aol.com)