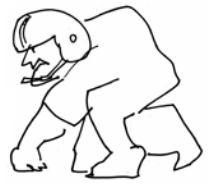




# CORNWALL CHRONICLE



VOLUME 26 : NUMBER 10 NOVEMBER 2016

## Fire on the Mountain

It's Peck Mountain in Cornwall Bridge if you haven't already smelled it from your home. It's also detectable by nose in Canaan, Kent, and even New York state, or by eyesight, dimly, from the top of Mohawk Mountain if you look southwest.

In September we were alerted by robo-calls that a fire was burning. An electrical storm ignited a brush fire near Hawkins Pond, about a mile north of Flat Rocks Road between Spruce Swamp and a branch of the Shepaug River. It was first reported September 15 to the Cornwall Fire Department and then to the DEEP a day later. The fire's initial footprint was about three acres, but after a dry weekend it had quickly expanded to 31 acres. Cornwall firemen responded and the state was called in for assistance as the flames were within the Wyantenock State Forest. A helicopter was dispatched. The fire slowed and was not considered a threat to people or property, only requiring monitoring. It encompassed about 40 acres by Tuesday, October 18.

Then two days of hot, dry air caused the fire to blow up and spread in all directions. By Thursday the blaze had quadrupled in size, burning an area of one-quarter square mile. Heavy smoke set off detectors in Kent. The Millerton Fire Department responded to fire reports it thought were in New York.

The passive approach to tackling the fire, begun at first to protect the state and local firefighters who risk injury in the difficult landscape, was replaced with a more aggressive tack. The Cornwall Fire Department went back in, assisted by departments from Sharon, Warren, Lakeville, and Goshen (about 50 people) as well as about ten firefighters from the DEEP. A fire break has been cut to the south to protect Flat Rocks Road towards which the fire (roughly square-shaped) had advanced one-half mile. An additional break was cut in the west and in the east flames are contained by the swamp. As of this writing, there is still no immediate threat to any property.

Lightning-caused fires are not a common occurrence in Connecticut, according to Helene Hochholzer of the DEEP, though human-made fires are. What's most unusual is that it's still burning/smoldering and ex-

panding six weeks later.

The problem is the terrain, described by Gordon Ridgway "as remote and spectacular land as any in Connecticut." Lightning struck in an area of hemlock and white pine, igniting dry duff and detritus in a landscape of mountain laurel, rocks, trees, swamp (on one side), ledge, leaves, thickets, and difficult topography. In addition to burning brush, the fire has also gone underground, burning roots of living trees, causing them to fall over.

The initial 30-acre site has seen the fire burrow about two feet down. The newly burned area has been strictly a surface fire to this point. All this makes an aggressive fire fight more difficult. An old logging road is the only nearby access. Getting to the area requires knowledge of the Cornwall hinterlands and some bushwhacking ability.

Fires like this are usually extinguished by Mother Nature with the summer afternoon thunderstorms we ordinarily get during a regular season, but this year's storms have been scarce, Ridgway noted. The inch of rain we received on October 22 helped slow it down again, though recent winds from the southwest don't help. Hochholzer says the shorter days and slightly more humid fall air should help. Ridgway says



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## NOVEMBER 2016

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<b>Every Week This Month:</b> <b>Mondays:</b> Yoga, 8:30-10 am UCC; <b>Mat Squad</b> at 6:30 pm UCC; <b>Karate</b> , 6:30-7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ <b>Tuesdays:</b> Zumba, 5:30-6:30 pm Library ♦ <b>Wednesdays:</b> Tai Chi, 5-6 pm Town Hall call 672-0064; <b>Introduction to Fiction</b> , 6:30-8:30 pm Library; <b>Stitch 'n Spin</b> , 7:15-8:30 pm UCC		<b>1</b> ♦ Voter Registration 9 am-8 pm Town Hall ♦ Inland Wetlands 7 pm Town Hall ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall	<b>2</b> ♦ Writing Class Deb Devins 3-5 pm	<b>3</b> ♦ Woman's Society: Artist Susan Hellmann 10 am Library		<b>5</b> ♦ CCT Annual Meeting 1:30 pm Mohawk Ski Lodge ♦ Community Contra Dance 7 pm Town Hall
<b>6</b>	<b>7</b> ♦ Diabetes Class with Anne Hummel 10:30 am-12:30 pm Library ♦ Region 1 Board of Ed 6:30 pm HVRHS Rm. 133	<b>8</b> ♦ Election Day ♦ Eco. Dev. Commission 9 am Town Hall ♦ Election Day Lunch 11 am-2 pm ♦ Planning & Zoning 7 pm Library ♦ Housatonic River Commission 7:30 pm CCS	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11 VETERANS' DAY</b>	<b>12</b> ♦ Food Preservation Program 10:30 am-1:30 pm Local Farm
<b>13</b> ♦ Welcoming Refugees Noon-4 pm UCC Parish House	<b>14</b> ♦ Diabetes Class with Anne Hummel 10:30 am-12:30 pm Library ♦ Free Blood Pressure Clinic Noon-1 pm UCC Day Room ♦ Park and Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall	<b>15</b> ♦ Senior Luncheon 11:30 am-1 pm Wandering Moose ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ <b>Deadline:</b> <b>December Chronicle Copy</b>	<b>16</b> ♦ Board of Education 4:15 pm CCS Library ♦ Board of Finance 7:30 pm Town Hall	<b>17</b> ♦ Cornwall Business Assoc. Mtg. 9:30-10:30 am Wandering Moose ♦ Cornwall Conservation Comm. 7 pm Library	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> ♦ Author Reading: Peter Vermilyea 5 pm Library ♦ Art Night Out Housatonic Art and Frame 6-9 pm
<b>20</b> ♦ Community Thanksgiving Dinner Noon UCC Parish House ♦ Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service 5 pm UCC	<b>21</b> ♦ Diabetes Class with Anne Hummel 10:30 am-12:30 pm Library	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24 THANKSGIVING</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> ♦ Artist's Reception: Kathleen Mooney 3-6 pm Souterrain ♦ Christmas Pottery Reception/Exhibit 3-5 pm CB Pottery ♦ Artist's Reception: Gay Schempp 5 pm Library
<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> ♦ ZBA* 7 pm Library	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b> NEW	<b>Every Week This Month:</b> <b>Thursdays (except Thanksgiving):</b> Pilates, 8:30-9:30 am Library; <b>Toddler Play Group</b> , 10:30-11:30 am Library; <b>Meditation</b> , 4-5 pm call Debra 672-0229 <b>Zumba</b> , 5:30-6:30 pm Library; <b>Mah Jongg</b> , 7-9 pm Library call 672-6874; <b>Adult Volleyball</b> , 7-9 pm CCS gym ♦ <b>Fridays:</b> Yoga 8:30-10 am Library ♦ <b>Sundays:</b> Yoga 9-10:30 am Library; <b>Meditation</b> , 1 pm call Debra 672-0229		

\*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

(continued from page 1)

cooler weather will also help as “this fire is a temperature-sensitive thing.”

Ridgway reports good communication with DEEP, which had been checking the site a couple of times a week and monitoring the edge of the fire with GPS, but is now coordinating with our fire department to make sure someone is out there every day. Volunteers have taken full days off from their regular jobs to clear brush and make fire breaks as well as pump water from Hawkins Pond onto the flames.

Ridgway recalls other fires like this one: on Mine Mountain in West Cornwall about 20 years ago that required the assistance of about a dozen local fire departments and took about a week to mop up; and various fires in the Dudleytown area, which generally didn't get noticed immediately and the fire department had to “knock down.”

The dry climate has caused this one to last longer than most: per Gordon “it's a little taste of the California brush fires.” Hochholzer said there have been 212 reported fires to the DEEP this year, covering more than 400 total acres. She said the Cornwall fire, even before the flare up, was the largest by area.

Fires like this are not necessarily happening more often but they ordinarily don't get this attention because they don't get this big and don't last this long. A good dousing will stall and eventually put it out, but until then keep your eyes out for smoke. “We need people to keep watching this” said Ridgway. We're all in this together.

—Jim Longwell

## Politics Never As Usual in Cornwall

The ebb and flow of national politics—donkeys on one side and elephants on the other—doesn't ruffle the waters of political discourse in Cornwall these days.

It certainly used to. There's a story that Marc Simont, a Democrat in then overwhelmingly Republican Cornwall, was helping with cleanup after Hurricane Carol in 1955. He saw the town drunk leaning perilously over the bridge by the post office in West Cornwall to catch the bottles of beer coming from the flooded Bate's Meat Market. “Be careful,” Marc shouted, “or it'll be another Democrat lost for Cornwall.”

Looking further back, the Cornwall Historical Society has a collection begun by the Rev. Edward Starr which dates from 1776. Among the lists of voters are proclamations from the Whig party in 1849, something called the American Party, a Prohibition party, and a petition to the Board of Selectmen to protest the removal of a fence.

The fence issue is a better indication of the course politics has taken in Cornwall since the town's founding. People might have voted Republican or Democratic but

their real concerns centered on fences, schools, and the state of the town's roads.

The *Chronicle* ran a piece by Ed Ferman in January 2004 which noted that Cornwall's politics had “quietly slipped into a decade-long coma.” The 1970s and '80s had featured heavily contested elections for first selectman and party control flipped between one side and the other pretty regularly. Nominations were contested at party caucuses attended by as many as 100 people. Since Gordon M. Ridgway, a Democrat, was elected first selectman in 1991 (and in every contest since then) things have calmed down considerably.

Political demographics have shifted too. Over the past 25 years, more and more voters have chosen to be unaffiliated independents; as of September 2016 there were 368 of them. Republican registration was at 196 and the Democrats at 457. Democratic Registrar of Voters Jayne Ridgway says the numbers are changing almost daily.

Turnout in Cornwall has been excellent in recent years, especially in presidential election years. Jayne Ridgway attributes this to work by both registrars to keep Cornwall's voter list as clean as possible by sending letters to no-shows; no answer and the voter is off the list. In 2014 the town had the highest percentage turnout of any municipality in the state and won a plaque from the secretary of the state's office.

But what about the parties in 2016? The Republicans are currently quiet and their town committee is without formal leadership. The Democratic Town Committee has 35 members who meet regularly. The group is now focused on state and congressional races with get-out-the-vote efforts and fund-raising parties.

The Republican on the Board of Selectmen, Heidi Kearns, has been vocal and assertive at meetings. Her insistence on better communication and transparency has led to more questions being asked by the public and video of board meetings now available on [cornwallct.org](http://cornwallct.org).

Gordon Ridgway and fellow Democrat Richard Bramley by now have many years of hands-on experience with town, regional, and state government. Like the bank robber Willy Sutton, they know where the money is and, shifting the metaphor, how to get it for Cornwall.

The town has often chosen to be different. In 1789, when it was time to vote to determine whether or not Connecticut would adopt the new Constitution and become one of the new United States, Cornwall proposed that the new nation be called “The United States of America and Cornwall, Connecticut.” Hartford had other ideas and the town had to submit to becoming part of the union. Interesting to suppose what might happen if the same vote were taken today. —Lisa L. Simont

## Welcome

Abbe Lynn Scoville  
to Katherine and Frederick Scoville

## Land Transfers

Howard S. Vogel and Bobbie Best Vogel to Kristeena and Robert L. Thompson, Jr., land with improvements thereon at 82 Cemetery Hill Road, for \$180,000.

Roger L. and Margaret T. Kane to Terrence P. and Patricia C. O'Grady, 3,788 acres of land with dwelling thereon at 196 Great Hill Road, for \$275,000.

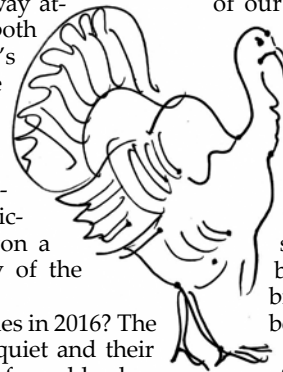
## Cornwall's Bridges

Whether walking, driving, or cycling, when it comes to crossing some bodies of water, there is nothing like a sturdy bridge. Some bridges are simply functional, many seldom noticed, and some are absolutely iconic.

The condition of the approximately 20 bridges in Cornwall is an important part of our infrastructure budget. Long-time residents may recall the 1936 flood that washed away the covered bridge in Cornwall Bridge. In 1920, the state had already constructed the open spandrel concrete arch bridge along routes 4 and 7. This unique design is only one of three in the state, giving the town two iconic bridges. The other is the covered bridge in West Cornwall, reported to be the most photographed structure in the state. Having withstood floods and the occasional truck too tall to clear the entrance, it remains one of only two fully functioning covered bridges in Connecticut.

The town's bridges come in all sizes and types. Of our 20 bridges, eight cross Mill Brook as it meanders through town. Even in the Northwest Corner, flooding can ravage the town's infrastructure. Following the impacts of Hurricane Irene, the bridge on Lower River Road needed to be replaced at a cost of \$500,000. Maintenance and replacement are costly and require careful planning. This fall a small bridge on the far end of Valley Road will be replaced. Current estimates are approximately \$150,000. During the bridge work, the town, working closely with the Cornwall Volunteer Fire Department, will station emergency vehicles on the side furthest from the village. This equipment will serve as a safety precaution for the residences on that side of the construction. The bridge completion is expected shortly after Thanksgiving.

In speaking with Gordon Ridgway on the condition of the bridges, it is clear the infrastructure, while seldom noticed by general traffic, is an important issue for the town crew and our town officials; a focus we can be thankful for as we drive our lovely roads. —Diane Beebe



## Understanding Islam

The United Church of Christ (UCC) in Cornwall has partnered with the UCC in Goshen and in August (with the help of a number of churches) settled a young Syrian family in Torrington. Before coming to the United States, the family lived in a village in Syria, southwest of Damascus, near Israel. Their house was bombed and they escaped to Jordan with important papers, but not much else. After spending two years in Jordan they applied to settle in the U.S. The mother said she wanted to come to the U.S. where women can get an education and have a job, and she is looking forward to that opportunity. The Cornwall UCC and other sponsoring churches are committed for a year to help the family become self sufficient, get green cards, and eventually, obtain citizenship.

There is a lot of talk about Muslims in our society these days, between the political discourse, the devastation in Syria, and the terrorists that use Islam as an excuse for their actions. The state of Connecticut agreed this year to take extra Syrian refugees who are fleeing violence in their country. Local churches in Cornwall, Goshen, Litchfield, Torrington, and Salisbury have brought families to the area. In light of this, there is a move to learn more about Islam and our Muslim neighbors. And, since Syrians are joining our local communities, there is need to grow our understanding of Syrian culture as well.

Already, two well-attended educational programs have been held in Salisbury and in Cornwall. Another opportunity to strengthen our understanding will be held Sunday, November 13, at the UCC Parish House, from noon until 4 P.M., in a program titled Welcoming Refugees: Opening Minds and Hearts. Imam Sami Aziz, founder of the Common Ground Institute and Services, an Islamic consulting firm in Bloomfield, will lead the program. He is also the Muslim chaplain at Wesleyan and Quinnipiac universities and the Imam for the Bloomfield Muslim Community Center.

The purpose of the program is to educate the general public about Islam and Syrian culture so that we may welcome our new neighbors in Connecticut in a sensitive and respectful way. Aziz will be joined for the program by two other presenters: Vjosa Qerimi, public educator with the Common Ground Institute, and Maha Abdullah, a Syrian immigrant who is the Arabic translator for the New Britain school district helping children and families adjust to their new culture.

Registration is required and seating is limited. The program is free and open to all; light refreshments will be served. To register or get more information, please call or email the church office, 672-6840 or [cornwallucc@aol.com](mailto:cornwallucc@aol.com).

—Micki Nunn-Miller

## Students to Honor Our Veterans

When Pat Thibault, longtime Cornwall Consolidated School (CCS) volunteer, found herself in the position of having some spare time, she chose to volunteer more of her time. Volunteering at the Vogel-Wetmore School in Torrington, where they have four, yes four, first grades, Pat noticed a few stark differences

between the two schools that are lucky to have her time. First, the size of the student body. "Four first grades! That's a lot of students!" chuckled Pat. Second, how the Torrington school celebrates Veterans Day. When Pat saw what Vogel-Wetmore does, she realized that most of our regional schools have celebrations as well. CCS was not one of them. So, Pat started the ball rolling.

In a meeting with Principal Mike Croft last year, Pat was happy to have the idea so well received. They met a second time, and since then Pat's idea of our own CCS Veterans Day celebration has become a reality.

On Thursday, November 10, at 10:30 A.M. in the CCS gymnasium, our veterans will be treated to the first of what is sure to become an annual event: Boy Scouts holding flags, hand-made poppies by the students, student-authored stories and poems, music by the chorus and the band, presentations, and a luncheon. With help from veteran Doug Pelletier, friend and fellow CCS volunteer Sally Hart, friend Ruth Neary, and teachers Joyce Samson and Vicki Nelson, 40 invitations have been sent out to our local veterans.

In my conversation with Pat, she asked that I make sure that it is known she is just "behind the scenes." I think there is nothing about this that would make Pat anything close to that. I look forward to this honoring event. Thank you, Pat! —Erin Hedden

## Meeting House Revitalized

Signs of construction activity may still be evident at the corner of Town Street and Cogswell Road; but Ginny Potter, chair of the North Cornwall Meeting House Preservation Committee (NCMH), and Jim Longwell, president of the Friends of the North Cornwall Meeting House (Friends), rejoice that Phase 1 of the renovation of this Cornwall icon is nearly complete. As of this writing, only a few details remain to be addressed before final inspection.

The dumpster, fencing, and large equipment arrived in mid-May. The exterior now gleams with a new coat of paint; that restoration process included clapboard repair and lead remediation. One thousand panes of glass have been repointed, reglazed, and in some cases replaced with historically

accurate glass. While the steeple was never plumb, it is now stabilized and the six-degree tip of Cornwall's own Leaning Tower of Pisa will be monitored. The final outside improvement is a new ramp.

The Cornwall community supported the funding for this major project. Since 2013, the Friends has raised some \$220,000 from near and far; the United Church of Christ raised nearly \$120,000. The selectmen approved and submitted to the state a successful application for a \$100,000 Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant. Finally, the church secured a \$20,000 Survey and Planning matching grant from the state to ensure that plans would be historically appropriate for a building listed on the State Register of Historic Places.

Thanks to donors' generosity and the successful grant applications, members of the NCMH and Friends believe there will be enough money to address the remaining (interior) tasks of Phase 2. The carpeting (of unknown age) will be removed; what is revealed will determine what to do next to the flooring. Cracks in the plaster walls will be repaired and the walls painted. While no date for starting this work has been scheduled, it is a comfortable assumption that all planned improvements to the Meeting House will be complete well in advance of its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2026.

—Barbara Gold

## Cornwall Briefs

- **Monster Update:** Monster would be the cell tower off Bell Road, and we were off base several months ago when we reported that the tower was complete but not in use. It is not complete and, according to the Connecticut Siting Council "foreclosure action is holding up completion of construction and operation of the tower." There is pending litigation between the parties involved. The original deadline for construction was last April 26.

- **STEAP Grants:** They keep coming our way, the latest \$120,000 "for the third cycle of Cornwall's highly successful Façade Improvement Program." The funding will go toward as many as 20 local businesses to upgrade their exteriors.

- **The Valley Bridge:** (Oh that again!) Yup, it is now scheduled to be closed while being repaired the week after Thanksgiving, and that means no traffic can get through during the work.

- **New Ambulance:** It arrived mid-October and had to go through several inspections, but will be in use as you read this item. The new vehicle is equipped with four-wheel-drive, something that could be very effective in mud and heavy snow.

- **Senior Van:** The mini bus Cornwall is sharing with Goshen is in service on a first-come, first-served basis to take seniors to

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medical appointments "and other necessary destinations." It runs Monday to Friday from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. For reservations call 860-489-2535.

• **News from the Registrars:** Our new accessible voting machine is ready for all to try. It is designed for the visually impaired and individuals with limited motor skills. Both audio and touch screen options are available. Voting is done by selecting a number (audio) or candidate (touch screen). Write-in votes will be counted only if candidates have officially registered with the state of Connecticut. —John Miller

## Events & Announcements

### Art in Cornwall

At the Cornwall Library: Susan Hellmann's exhibit "Idyllic Cornwall" through November 12. "Legacy of Fire" by Gay Schempp, November 22; reception November 26 at 5 P.M.

At the Souterrain Gallery: "Cornwall—Little Compton," recent paintings by Kathleen Love Mooney, reception on November 26, from 3 to 6 P.M.

A Christmas exhibit of wood-fired pots at the Cornwall Bridge Gallery; reception on November 26 from 3 to 5 P.M.

At the UCC Parish House, "Images on Paper: Watercolor, Ink, Pencil Works" by Connie Steuerwalt through November 25.

Works by Curtis Hansen and Donald Bracken are at the Toll House Gallery through November.

At the National Iron Bank: Laminated pictures by Melissa Robinson through December 31.

**Motherhouse Events:** Contra Dance with music by Still, the Homegrown Band, Saturday, November 5, at 7 P.M. at town hall. Donations requested.

Old Style Life Skills Series workshops: Smoking (food preservation) November

### Winter Forecast

It's baaack! Old Man Winter didn't show up last year, but this winter will be ice cold and snow filled, with February temps well below zero. Anyhow, that's what *The Farmers' Almanac* predicts. Good news is that oil prices are still low, and so perhaps you can afford to warm our hearts with a small donation.

12; Wool (learn to spin, felt, crochet, and more) November 19; New Moon Gathering, November 29. Contact motherhouse.us.

### At the Library

Peter Vermilyea will read from his book *Wicked Litchfield County* on November 19 at 5 P.M.

The library follows the school closing decisions with regard to inclement weather. If, however, the weather clears and the library's walks and parking lot are safe, the library may open. Please call ahead.

Thanksgiving hours: the library will close at 5 P.M. on November 23 and reopen November 25 at noon.

**Woman's Society:** Talk with Susan Hellman, an occupational therapist and painter, at the library November 3 at 10 A.M. Meeting to follow.

### Senior Events

Blood Pressure Clinic: Monday, November 14, noon to 1 P.M. in the UCC Day Room. Contact VNA Northwest at 860-567-6000 or vnanw.org.

Luncheon: Tuesday, November 15, 11:30 A.M. to 1 P.M. at the Wandering Moose.

### Cornwall Conservation Trust Annual Meeting and Wildlife

**Talk:** Pie and ice cream, farm animals, and discussion on local farming, Saturday, November 5, at 1:30 P.M. at the Mohawk Ski Lodge in "The Perch" room. Bring your favorite pie to share. Donations appreciated (members free).

**Diabetes Course:** November 7, 14, and 21 at the library from 10:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. Free.

**Get out and VOTE!** Tuesday, November 8, 6 A.M. to 8 P.M., town hall.

**Election Day Lunch:** Twelfth annual luncheon, Tuesday, November 8, 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. at the UCC Parish House. Donations benefit the Cornwall Food and Fuel program.

**Prayer Space on Election Day:** At the UCC village sanctuary, November 8, 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. for reflection before or after voting.

**Art Night Out in Cornwall Bridge:** Works by local artists at Housatonic Art & Frame, November 19, 6 to 9 P.M. For more information call 860-619-8097.

**National Iron Bank in Cornwall Annual Holiday Food Collection:** to benefit the Cornwall Food Pantry's Thanksgiving Food Drive. Donations accepted through November 15 during regular business hours.

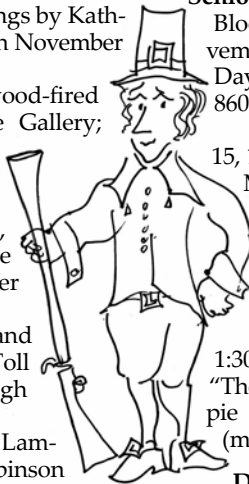
**Community Thanksgiving Dinner:** November 20 at noon at the UCC Parish House. Free. Seating limited. 672-6840 or cornwallucc@aol.com to reserve a spot.

**Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service:** UCC on Bolton Hill Road, November 20, 5 P.M. Donations benefit Cornwall Food Pantry.

**Cornwall Tai Chi:** Beginner class starts November 30 and meets Wednesdays from 5 to 6 P.M. in the town hall. Contact David Colbert at 672-0064 or davidcolbert7@gmail.com.

**Town of Cornwall Social Services:** Applications available to help defray the costs of winter heating. Also, firewood vendors sought for Connecticut Energy Assistance Program. For both programs, contact Jane Muir Sellery, at 672-2603 or cornwallsocialservices@gmail.com.

**Plastic shopping bags needed:** to crochet waterproof mats for the homeless. Drop off bags at the UCC, CCS, or town offices. For more info contact Tracy at 672-6840.



## CORNWALL CHRONICLE

[cornwallchronicle.org](http://cornwallchronicle.org)

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