

MONDAY  
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75 CENTS



# The Salem News

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## NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS



KEN YUSZKUS/Staff photo

Gayle Sullivan, left, and Sue Gabriel, director of Beverly Bootstraps, sort the incoming jars, cans and other food, while checking expiration dates. Sen. Fred Berry organized a day-long family festival to get donations for six local food pantries in Salem, Beverly, Peabody and Danvers.

### ► Dropout rates

# Educators: Raising age not enough

BY AMANDA MCGREGOR  
STAFF WRITER

SALEM — In an effort to slash high school dropout rates, the state may require teens to stay in school until 18 — a move local educators see as addressing only one piece of a complex problem. A state report released last week calls for increasing the legal dropout age from 16 to 18, among a host of measures aimed at halving the dropout rate by 2014.

“Should there be more emphasis on some alternative education for those kids? I definitely favor that,” said Ed Sapienza, principal of Peabody High School, “but just keeping them here, holding them hostage more or less until they’re 18, probably isn’t best for anybody.”

Salem High School Principal

David Angeramo said students who are 14 or 15 may begin to entertain the idea of dropping out when their 16th birthday doesn’t feel too far off. Raising the age to 18 could change the mindset, he said.

“It could potentially set up a different mentality,” Angeramo said, “but I do think this is only one piece. There are reasons why they’re dropping out, and those reasons are still going to be there.”

Approximately 10,000 students drop out of school each year across the state, according to the report. That included nearly 300 North Shore high school students in the 2007-2008 school year, according to Department of Elementary and Secondary Education statistics.

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# Great pumpkin comes to Middleton

BY ADAM SWIFT  
CORRESPONDENT

MIDDLETON — What began as a string of illuminated jack o’lanterns lining Maple Street 25 years ago has evolved into a weekend long festival enjoyed by generations of Middleton families.

As families gathered at the Howe-Manning School on Saturday to celebrate the Middleton Pumpkin Festival’s 25th anniversary, festival founder Geraldine Shipley was on hand and marveled at how the festival has grown and changed over the past quarter century.

The original idea for the festival came after Shipley saw a farmer in Maine who had lined the wall of his farm with illuminated carved pumpkins.

“It was really impressive,” Shipley said. When Shipley returned to Middleton, she approached the president of



DEBORAH PARKER/Staff photo

From left, Jackson Kamisky, 2, of Middleton and sister Camille, 4, along with their cousin, Allison Kane, 3, of Danvers, dance and sing along to the music of Judy Pancoast while attending the 25th Annual Middleton Pumpkin Festival Saturday morning.

what was then known as the Middleton Arts Council.

“I brought up the fact that Middleton should have something to interest the children and bring the town together,”

she said. “Topsfield had the strawberry festival and Boxford had the apple festival.”

The first year, Shipley and her small group of volunteers, including Bob and Rita Kelly and

John and Joan Caulfield, had a hard time getting the festival started, Shipley said. Eventually, the volunteers found and carved their own pumpkins and asked people up and down Maple Street to display the illuminated pumpkins.

Over the years, however, the festival has grown from those humble origins. In the early 1990s, Encore!, the town’s performing arts society, began decorating King Street with scenes from children’s books. Soon after, Paul Richardson and members of the Richardson family began volunteering the time and equipment for the haunted hayrides down King Street.

The festival has now grown to include pumpkin carving that was held at the Fuller Meadow School on Friday night, a pancake breakfast held at the Middleton Congregational Church

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### ► Marblehead: Castner death

# Board to discuss probe in secret

BY ALAN BURKE  
STAFF WRITER

MARBLEHEAD — The selectmen will meet in secret session with police Chief Robert Picariello and Assistant Town Counsel Marc Miller on Thursday to discuss the ongoing investigation into the traffic death of 15-year-old Allie Castner.

“This is still an open investigation,” Miller said, explaining why the meeting is being held behind closed doors.

“We’ve all been watching the case through the newspapers,” said Selectman Bill Woodfin, who asked for the meeting. “The board wants to ask some

questions to see if things were handled properly.”

“We want to make sure we know what’s going on,” Selectman Harry Christensen said.

The Police Department reports to the selectmen, Woodfin said. He also acknowledged hearing some complaints from residents regarding Picariello and the way the investigation has proceeded.

Castner was killed Aug. 24 while crossing Pleasant Street, struck by a car driven by Thomas Larivee of Salem. The long investigation and a reluctance by Essex County District

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John Velardi Jr. was a man who lived for his son, Joey.  
Courtesy photo



# Devotion to son kept father going amid a sea of troubles

BY STEVE LANDWEHR  
STAFF WRITER

LIVES  
JOHN VELARDI

Everyone’s life has a story. In “Lives,” we tell some of those stories about North Shore people who have died recently. “Lives” runs Mondays in The Salem News.

SALEM — Little boys are full of questions. In that respect, Joey Velardi is no different. He’s inquisitive, just like his father, and a curly-haired, round-eyed, 2½-year-old bundle of perpetual motion.

People of faith often say their maker, by whatever name they ascribe, never gives anyone more than they can handle, and that there is a divine purpose, no matter how inscrutable, to everything that happens.

That answer won’t satisfy Joey, whose father, John W. Velardi Jr., died at

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# Past actions secure green future

## How Ipswich saved 516 acres of open space in eight years

BY STEVE LANDWEHR  
STAFF WRITER

IPSWICH — Boston has the Emerald Necklace, a string of linked parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted that provide green oases in what is often a concrete and asphalt urban desert.

Ipswich didn’t have the benefit of such an august designer, but its soon-to-be-completed “green ring” didn’t develop by accident, either.

To see why, you have to go back to the 2000 Annual Town Meeting and what may ultimately be viewed as one of the most important events in this town’s rich history.

Voters at the time were asked to authorize borrowing up to \$10 million to preserve open space for recreational or agricultural use, or to protect the town’s drinking water supply, or simply because development was seen as unwise.

The measure drew overwhelming approval.

Today, \$3.4 million remains available in the Open Space Bond Fund, and 516 acres have been protected, at a cost to the town of about \$6 million. On its own, the town would have gone through the money long ago and secured only half



KEN YUSZKUS/Staff photo

A sign on Argilla Road thanks the town’s efforts to preserve open space on the Maplecroft Farm. Canada geese graze on part of the open space at the farm.

as much land.

But by adroitly parlaying partnerships with other organizations, officials have secured an additional \$6 million in outside funding that extended its purchasing power.

The largest transaction was approved at this year’s Special Town Meeting, \$2.2 million — which will decrease the available funding to \$1.2 million — to

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# North Shore Towns

## Grasse outreach program receives the go-ahead

By ALAN BURKE  
STAFF WRITER

MARBLEHEAD — The selectmen have, by a 4-0 vote, endorsed a calendar of events with the town's sister city of Grasse, France. And they've gone even further by encouraging a private group led by Myriam Zuber and Catherine Doherty to seek funding for cultural exchanges and visits from Grasse officials.

Zuber has spearheaded the effort, even arranging a personal visit to Grasse to make contact with local officials, including the mayor. The daughter of a French father and a Boston-born mother, she is a native of Paris now living in Marblehead and working for the Anti-Defamation League.

In the midst of a recession, the effort to cement relations with Grasse will get no funding from the town of Marblehead. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, the French take their sister cities (all seven of them) quite seriously and provide funding as part of their budgets. Government leaders, cultural figures and business-people have already committed to a visit next spring.

Private fundraising is expected to pay for any reciprocal arrangements. "The town has no money to spend," Selectman Bill Woodfin said. The board voted 3-0 to encourage the fundraising program.

Selectman Judy Jacobi, however, withheld her endorsement, voting present. Harry Christensen, who was absent at

the meeting, isn't certain how he would have voted when it comes to involving the town in any private fundraising effort.

On the other hand, he has been an enthusiastic supporter of the idea of reinvigorating the sister city arrangement with Grasse, a city near the Mediterranean coast. Its ties with Marblehead were initiated more than 20 years ago with officials citing the gratitude of Americans — and especially nautically minded Marbleheaders — toward local hero Admiral de Grasse who bottled up the British at Yorktown to help win the Revolutionary War.

Christensen, who speaks French, has never been to France and is eager to visit Grasse. "At my own expense."

## Riding for a cause



KEN YUSZKUS/Staff photo

Motorcycles roar down Lafayette Street during the 21st Annual Witch Ride motorcycle run which draws thousands of bikers to Salem. The annual Halloween motorcycle run is to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

## PUMPKIN: Festival getting bigger, better in its 25th year

Continued from Page 1

on Saturday morning, the day of arts and music festivities held at the Howe-Manning School, and the costume parade, haunted hayrides, and Jack O'Lantern Row that was held on Sunday afternoon.

At the Howe-Manning School on Saturday, it was rare to find even the youngest attendees who haven't been coming back to the pumpkin festival year after year.

"This is my fifth year coming here. It gets a little bigger every year," said 11-year-old Mitchell Becker, a Boy Scout from Troop 19.

Each year, Troop 19 sells popcorn at the festival, and it is typically the troop's biggest fundraiser of the year.

Troop leader Dana Paul agreed that the pumpkin festival has become more popular over the years.

"It was strictly a hayride when we started doing this," Paul said. "Now, it's an all-day, an all-week-end event."

While most of the volunteers for Troop 19 were veterans of the festival, Mitchell Becker's younger brother, Kevin, age 6, was helping sell popcorn for the first time. In addition to helping



DEBORAH PARKER/Staff photo

Michael Berrigan, 4, of Middleton hugs his new pumpkin man balloon hat while attending the 25th Annual Middleton Pumpkin Festival Saturday morning.

raise money for the troop, Becker said he was excited to take part in many of the other family-friendly events taking place at the school, including caricatures, balloon twisting, face painting, and singing and dancing with Judy Pancoast.

Samantha Cabral, 9, and her

dad, John, admired caricature artist Mike Horvath's portrait of Samantha. Samantha said she liked coming to the pumpkin festival every year and was looking forward to all her friends showing up.

Six-year-old Christopher O'Grady said his favorite part of

the festival was the games and the balloons. His mother pointed out that he also liked the bake sale table sponsored by the Howe-Manning PTO.

"I like the rice krispy treats," he said.

Shipley said it is the intergenerational spirit of families growing up with the pumpkin festival that she likes best.

This year also marks a changing of the guards in the festival's leadership, as Amy Ogden-Benoit and Barbara Masse-Zagami took over the coordination of the festival under Shipley's tutelage.

Zagami said she has been honored to help continue the festival.

"It has been such a great Middleton tradition that we are not planning on breaking any time soon," Zagami said.

And although this was also the last year in which Shipley played a part in coordinating the festival, she said she is looking forward to seeing Zagami, Benoit, and the rest of the volunteers continuing it for many years.

"They are doing a wonderful job, and hopefully, they will keep it alive for another 25 years," Shipley said.

## DROPOUTS: Educators say raising dropout age not enough

Continued from Page 1

"You have to explore the reasons why kids drop out," Sapienza said, "and that's a very complex web of anything from family support, to health or alcohol and drug problems, or sheer lack of interest."

The highest North Shore dropout rates were at Salem High (6.5 percent), Peabody High (4.3 percent) and Marblehead High (4.4 percent, an aberration from previous years) in 2007-2008, the most recent year statistics are available from the state. The state average dropout rate is 3.4 percent.

"We put a lot of supports in place," Angeramo said. "This potentially could be one piece."

The 35-page report, titled "Making the Connection," was released by the Massachusetts Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission through the secretary of education's office. It states a goal of reducing the state dropout rate from 3.4 percent to 1.7 percent over the next five years.

Local principals had not yet received the report but heard about the recommendation to increase the age for compulsory education from 16 to 18.

"I think our officials are doing the best they can, and it's a good gesture on their part," Beverly High School Principal Sean Gallagher said, "but there is a deeper root to the problem."

Gallagher said it's key to analyze what makes a student

### LOCAL DROPOUT RATES IN 2007-08

School	Rate (%)	No.
Beverly High	2.1	26
Danvers High	2.7	27
Essex Aggie	0.7	3
Hamilton-Wenham	0.4	3
Ipswich High	0.8	5
Marblehead High	4.4	43
Masconomet High	0	0
North Shore Tech	0.2	1
Peabody High	4.3	82
Salem High	6.5	85
Swampscott	0.6	5
Statewide	3.4	9,959

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Students who drop out are defined as those who leave school prior to graduation for reasons other than transfer to another school.

disenfranchised, whether it's academic failure, social problems, personal trauma or any other factor.

"We try to provide support to intervene before students get to a point where they feel helpless and hopeless," Gallagher said.

At Beverly High, the dropout rate was 2.1 percent in 2007-2008, below the state average.

The commission's report calls for other efforts to combat dropping out.

Both Salem and Beverly high schools have new credit recovery programs. Salem has an alternative program within the high school for students at risk of dropping out, called Bridge Academy, that serves nearly 60 students.

Angeramo said it is crucial

### DROPOUT RATES OVER FIVE YEARS

School	2003-2004	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08
Beverly High	4.1	3.3	3.5	4.4	2.1
Danvers High	2.5	1.2	2.7	3.1	2.7
Essex Aggie	1.5	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Hamilton-Wenham	1	1.3	0	0.4	0.4
Ipswich High	1.3	2.3	0.8	1.7	0.8
Marblehead High	0.9	0.3	0.7	0.7	4.4
Masconomet High	0.9	0.7	0.2	1	0
North Shore Tech	1.1	1.5	1.3	1.7	0.2
Peabody High	3.7	3.5	3.5	4.2	4.3
Salem High	2.8	6.3	4.3	6.8	6.5
Swampscott	1.6	0.6	2	0.7	0.6

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

for students to be engaged in grades nine and 10 to build the foundation toward graduation. New this year, Salem High worked with Collins Middle School and Bowditch School (which is K-8) to identify roughly 30 incoming freshmen for transition classes.

"We identified some students who would potentially have trouble with the transition, and we're giving them extra support," Angeramo said. "We spoke with the parents and held meetings right away to really help the transition."

The report calls some current education policies "vestiges of another time."

"State law permits 14- and 15-year-old students to be granted permission to leave school for physical or medical reasons, employment, or to engage in non-wage work at home," reads the report.

The report illustrates a disconnect in the reasons students

drop out versus the reasons educators believe students drop out. School leaders cite academic, personal and financial challenges.

Dropouts reported "a lack of connection to adults or their school as a leading reason for disengaging from school," the report says, as well as feeling too far behind to catch up, boredom, lack of academic support and a general feeling of being overwhelmed.

Whatever the recommendations, principals say it is a challenge to provide resources — and add programs and initiatives — when budgets are cut.

"Unfortunately in budget cuts the first thing that goes is these support systems, the adjustment counselors and the connection with outside community resources," Gallagher said.

"All this has to happen while you support all the other students at the school," Angeramo said.

## MARBLEHEAD: Selectmen, police chief to meet on Castner case

Continued from Page 1

Attorney Jonathan Blodgett to release any information regarding the case has resulted in complaints that favoritism was being shown to the driver.

Blodgett, who is acquainted with Larivee's uncle, denies this.

To avoid any appearance of a conflict, the case was eventually handed off by Blodgett to Worcester County District Attorney Joe Early. In short order, Early took the case away from the Marblehead police after one officer was said to have a long-ago social relationship with a member of the

Larivee family.

The victim's father, Christopher Castner, appeared before the selectmen in September asking that charges be filed.

The selectmen won't involve themselves in the investigation, Miller stressed. On the other hand, he noted that municipal leaders often act as watchdogs

of police departments.

"I don't think it's unusual at all," he said, recalling that mayors in some communities often sit down to chat with the chief "maybe once or twice a week."

Miller could not say if the board will seek input from authorities in Worcester.

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