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Spartan volleyball team honored ... page 7

Southern Dutchess News

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Saw your way to holiday joy



Lance Battenfeld of F.W. Battenfeld & Son in Red Hook demonstrates how to take down a Christmas tree at the cut-your-own operation.

- Photo by Curtis Schmidt

Cutting own Christmas tree a family experience

By Ray Fashona

Driving with Bryant Rawls on a tour of his 40,000 or so Christmas trees is an education.

Rawls, owner of Bilmar Nurseries in Pleasant Valley and Fabulous Firs in the Town of Poughkeepsie, has been in the tree business for more than 60 years. His take on the cut-your-own experience is that it's a way for a family to bond.

"Really, it's something for the children to do and something they'll remember forever," he said.

Rawls' two farms feature totally cut your own (Fabulous Firs) and trees ready

Listing of Christmas tree farms, page 3

to take home (Bilmar). Most people, Rawls said, prefer the adventure of cutting down their own tree.

Driving through Rawls' acres and acres of trees, his words ring true. His cell phone rings nearly nonstop, with people asking when they can come to cut down a tree, are there saws available, is help provided for loading a tree onto the top of a car.

"I like to answer the phone myself," Rawls said. "I hate answering machines and this way I can give people direct

information."

Steve Malkischer of Hopewell Junction has been cutting his own tree for "quite a while," and he said it's a way of helping a family bond.

"It's a challenge," he said. "It's an adventure. When there's snow on the ground and you're out there searching for the perfect tree, it involves the whole family and it creates good memories."

Malkischer, who is the principal of Spackenkill High School, called the experience "festive" and said it makes the holiday season more joyful.

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With little drama, county OKs 2015 budget

By Ray Fashona

POUGHKEEPSIE – The Dutchess County Legislature adopted the 2015 budget Dec. 4 with much less drama than last year. Still, the process had moments of controversy, although the spending plan passed easily, 19-6.

The \$441.7 million budget reduces the tax levy by \$300,000 and will result in a tax reduction for homeowners (County Executive Marcus Molinaro said the lower levy combined with a state rebate check for staying under the tax cap will result in a 2 percent decrease.)

The spending plan was criticized by some members of the Democratic minority, six of whom voted against the plan.

"I struggled with the issue of the current bonding the county has in play vis à-vis the 2015 budget and I am concerned about the impact it will have on taxpayers when the bill comes to pay those bonds," said Assistant Minority Alison MacAvery, D-Beacon/Fishkill, who voted against the budget. "Also the Capital Plan lacked cost estimates. Although project plans are not completed I believe it is critical to have, at a minimum, the estimated expenditures within the plan document."

Speaking before the budget vote, Molinaro told legislators the budget was "sound and balanced."

He pointed out that the budget contained no layoffs and dedicated more funding to boosting the blossoming tourism business, especially "agritourism."

Budget Director Valerie Sommerville said the use of some \$4 million from the fund balance to keep the tax levy down was prudent because it left the county with more than \$22 million in the fund balance – within the recommended state limit of 5 percent of the total budget.

As is his wont, Legislator Joel Tyner, D-Clinton/Rhinebeck, attempted to make a series of amendments to the budget before the vote. All were voted down. At one point, Tyner and Legislature Chairman Rob Rolison, R-Poughkeepsie, engaged in a loud exchange as Rolison told Tyner he was out of order and Tyner shouted about the GOP majority's refusal to allow several Democratic initiatives onto the committee agenda.

Tyner's amendments were mostly small change compared to the total budget, \$100 here, \$1,000 there.

After at least 30 minutes of failed amendments by Tyner, Majority Leader Angela Flesland, R-Poughkeepsie, told Tyner the budget process had been going on for months and the changes he was suggesting could have been discussed long ago.

"What you are doing is disingenuous, at best," Flesland said. "You had your chance" to make budget recommendations for several months.

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Your News



Students package 10,000 meals for Haiti

By Kristine Coulter

There was a packing party at Faith Christian Academy on Friday, Dec. 5. Students, faculty, members of the administration and volunteers used the day to pack 10,000 meals for children in Haiti or other Third World countries. It was the first "Feed the Need" Packing Party in the state, according to organizers.

"I love these events because we have an opportunity to impact students and make an impact globally," said Steve Farris, Consulting Champion Events Group. Farris said the company was founded to enrich more people's lives.

"To bring this to a Christian school is of utmost importance," he said.

Sara Jacob is FCA's Dean of Academics and Administrative Affairs.

"Everyone is just very excited. Since the beginning of the year the students have been talking about community," explained Jacob. The event raised funds for the school and for Haiti.

All the classroom doors were decorated with the theme of Haiti, she said. "They really did research on Haiti," Jacob said.

Continued on pg 4



Volunteer Carol Fairey and Faith Christian Academy student Sophia Masesa pass down packages of food along an assembly line during the packing of 10,000 meals.

- Photo by Kristine Coulter

Viewpoints

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters may be edited for legal considerations, reader interest and length. Please include a telephone number and address for verification purposes. **Deadline for letters is Friday at noon.** Letters must be submitted by e-mail to be considered for publication. Letters can be e-mailed to newsplace@aol.com, and the phrase "Letter to the Editor" should be included in the subject line of the e-mail.

County budget could have been slimmer

To the Editor:

The County Legislature could have saved \$10 million county tax dollars in the 2015 budget in these six proven ways:

1. Fully funding pro-active, cost-saving youth and drug treatment programs. Our county Youth Bureau's Project Return program should be restored, along with full funding for Nubian Directions.
2. Real reform of our county's criminal justice system (Newt Gingrich and Van Jones are right: JobsNotJails.weebly.com).
3. No-money-down solar power for county property (as in Schenectady County, Clarkstown and Esopus).
4. A living-wage law for large retail chain stores/restaurants like Wal-Mart and McDonald's (May 2013 report from the House Committee on Education and the Workforce).
5. Stopping GOP proposal for more welfare for corporate jets at our county airport (stop \$2.6 million water pipeline and tax exemption for jets).
6. Stopping the inexplicable near-doubling of our county's Tourism budget to over a million dollars.

Instead, half of that \$10 million should be immediately given back to our county's towns, cities and villages – the \$5 million annually our county government has been taking from them the past two years.

Incredibly, Dutchess GOP has proposed no increase whatsoever in any chemical dependency services, case management, emergency treatment or any mental health services to anyone in the county, according to pages 257 through 260 of the Tentative Executive Summary for the County Budget.

This in spite of what Robert Allers, the Dutchess County Commissioner of Community and Family Services, stated Nov. 19 openly and publicly in our County Legislature's Chambers during a Budget, Finance and Personnel Committee meeting – that "there's been an increase of 19 percent in kids coming into care because of cuts in mental healthcare."

Joel Tyner
County Legislator
Clinton/Rhinebeck

Once again, government is wasting our money

To the Editor:

I bet most people who are reading this don't know what I was astonished to learn. Being built right now, downstairs in the Capitol building in Washington D.C. is a 2,000-square-foot GUN RANGE! Automatic targets. Sound-proofed walls. 80 shooting lanes.

Republican Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said, "We've spent a lot of time designing and planning this gun range. Dreaming of construction has been our biggest focus since the last elections."

Please excuse my ignorance! I stupidly thought their main focus was making our country a better place for the hard-working people who pay their salaries. Not to relieve stress for those people who have no idea what it means to live paycheck to paycheck! The price: \$37 million. That would pay for a lot of books and school lunches, torn up roads and bridges and help lots of veterans that are having a rough time. Unbelievable!

Kate Adams
Fishkill

County approves 2015 budget

Continued from pg 1

She called his long list of amendments "disrespectful" to the process.

Beacon Democrat April Farley praised the budget's focus on enhancing tourism, noting that her city has seen a renaissance because of increased tourism dollars. She said the budget was an example of "thinking outside the box."

The 2015 budget has encountered little opposition – unlike last year, when Molinaro asked for a repeal of the exemption on home energy tax to balance the

budget. The repeal was later rescinded after Albany ponied up some \$5 million in one-time, emergency funding.

At a public hearing on the budget Dec. 2, only half a dozen people spoke and none had any major complaints about the spending plan.

At the Dec. 4 meeting, Poughkeepsie activist Mae Parker Harris told legislators they needed to give more consideration to homeless people and others who are having a difficult time in the current economy.



Kindergartners Cyrus Cowings, left, and Christopher DiGennaro sign their names on a sheet of paper to send to Haiti.

- Photo by Kristine Coulter

Students offer help to Haiti

Continued from pg 1

Students have learned about Haiti's history, geography, food and culture.

One of the topics that caught the students' attention was the idea that children in Haiti eat dirt cookies. Jacob said women in Haiti have to pay for dirt they fashion with sugar to make cookies.

"When we showed that video (of dirt cookies), that sparked the turnaround," stated Jacob.

Louise Lombardi, event director, said planning for the event began in early September.

"In a matter of 12 weeks, the kids have been just great. The teachers have been great getting the parents involved," commented Lombardi.

The funds will continue FCA's academic success and aid the children in Haiti, she added.

To see the event that day, Lombardi said, "It's exhilarating - very emotional."

All the 10,000 meals – which were packages of vegetables, rice, protein and soy – were packed and sealed by the end of the day.

First grade teacher Sharon Sjogren has 13 students in her class.

She said her students have been learning about "what the children in Haiti face every day – the shortage of food."

She said the students were surprised and upset to find out other children were eating dirt cookies.

"They want everybody to have a good meal," said Sjogren.

Six-year-old Katie Riorean said, "We're celebrating kids in Haiti." She was happy that they were going to feed them.

"I hope they know that we love them and we hope that they like the food we're giving them," said Elena Vargas, 12, who is in the seventh grade.

Elena said, "That's a lot of food" about the 10,000 meals being sent to Haiti. "It's going to be a lot of fun boxing it all."

Sixth grade teacher Krystal Muzamali helped put hairnets on her students.

She hoped the students learned and remembered about giving service and giving to children in need.

Math teacher Gary Nagelhout said about the event, "I love it. It's been good watching the excitement build over time." He mentioned that he hopes the students remember "how important it is to bless those that don't have what we have."

Trevinn Banton, 5, said they were there "to feed the needy."

Parent Mike DiBrango volunteered.

"It's awesome – all schools should be doing this," said DiBrango, who has one child in the school.

Leslye Bell, who now lives in the City of Poughkeepsie, came from Haiti. She left Haiti in 1976 and has not been back to her home country since 1982.

"It's a country in dire need," said Bell. "I decided to come and help."

Bell noted, "It's so great to see the kids because most of the food will be going to families. I'm excited to see the food going to Haiti."

After the devastating earthquake in January of 2010, Bell said, people are still in need. "I know that they need the food. I know how much of an impact it will make," she said.

Volunteer Carol Fairey stated, "My heart goes out to the people of Haiti. I wanted to do something to let them know there are people praying for them and who care about them."

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