



Local organizations help to improve senior safety

By DAN DESROCHERS

Correspondent

WESTFIELD—The American Red Cross, along with the city's fire department and the Westfield Council on Aging, joined together to help deliver and install smoke detectors and other safety-related items to residents at the Hampden Village yesterday.

The 55-and-over community received the items as part of the "Retire the Fire" campaign that has been put forth by both the Council on Aging (COA) and the Westfield Fire Department. The detectors, as well as carbon monoxide detectors in some residences, were put in place in 30 homes by Red Cross volunteers, in addition to File of Life magnet packets and fire and winter safety tips, including fire escape plans.

"This makes me feel a lot better because I'm alone," Joelle Thibodo, of the Hampden Village, said. "I think it's a great program. There's a lot of single older women here and it's hard—you want to feel safe."

Thibodo, whose husband of 40 years, Raymond, died about two and a half years ago, lives alone with her cat Bugsy.

Thibodo's home was one of the 30 residences that received the equipment, and her home had the same detectors inside of it that were there when it was purchased 23 years ago, she said. This was the case

in other homes as well, where other smoke detectors were found to be out-of-date.

According to Westfield Fire Deputy Chief Eric Bishop, the process for this particular project began in January, when he spoke with some of the residents and asked how many did not have working smoke detectors.

Several hands went up.

"It came down to how many don't have detectors," Bishop said. "We extrapolated that it may be up to a third of detectors that could be out-of-date."

So, the fire department and COA worked together to gather how many



Joelle Thibodo, Hampden Village resident and recipient of supplies from the Red Cross, along with her cat, Bugsy.

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Dementia training being offered to town employees

By GREG FITZPATRICK

Correspondent

SOUTHWICK—The Southwick Council on Aging will be addressing a very important topic in the next coming weeks. On April 14 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Southwick Senior Center, the council on aging will provide a dementia training class for town employees.

Armbrook Village out of Westfield will be doing the training. Executive Director Beth Cardillo and Director of Community Relations Julie Waniewski are expected to be the instructors.

"We do this training that provides the people the experience of what dementia feels like," said Cardillo.

An intense training that involves altering the participants senses, Cardillo says that there is also an educational component in order to bring complete awareness about dementia.

"It's an educational program that has a hands-on experience attached with it," said Cardillo. According to Southwick Council on Aging Director Cindy Sullivan, besides her own staff planning on participating in the training session, town officials from the public library, fire and police, assessor's office, Select Board, and maintenance are expected to be represented.

Sullivan finds it important to have other town employees gain more information about how they can tell if their family member or friend is showing warning signs of dementia.

"It's good to get a little bit of training to recognize that," said Sullivan.

Armbrook Village is no stranger to dementia training, as the Westfield News reported back on Dec. 3, 2014 that they partnered up with the City of Westfield. The partnership consisted of training 60 of the city's first responders so they can better recognize the possible signs from residents.

Cardillo added that Westfield became the first city on the East coast to become dementia-friendly.



Baltzar Construction is seen doing working on the Feeding Hills Rd. project, right on the corner of Hudson Dr. (Photo by Greg Fitzpatrick)

Feeding Hills Road project is underway

By GREG FITZPATRICK

Correspondent

SOUTHWICK—After a delay pushing back the start date, the Feeding Hills Rd. project got underway this week. The contractor, Baltzar Construction from Ludlow, began doing work on the corner of Feeding Hills Rd. and Hudson Dr.

Costing an estimated \$3.97 million, Mass DOT (Department of Transportation) is paying for the expenses and also overseeing the project. The Southwick DPW is providing any support or input that they can to Baltzar or Mass DOT.

Reported by the Westfield News on March 9, the project will include three different parts. Widening roads and putting in left-handed turning lanes is the first aspect. The intersections that will have this work done along Feeding Hills Rd. are by Powder Mill Rd., Rebecca Lobo Drive, Hudson Drive, and North Longyard Rd.

Baltzar Construction will also make drainage improvements along Feeding Hills Rd. from Powder Mill Rd. to Hudson Dr. and another installed in the North Longyard section.

The third and final element of the project will feature new sidewalks and bike lanes along Feeding Hills Rd. from Powder Mill Rd. to Hudson Dr. The construction hours for Baltzar will most likely be Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., excluding holidays. According to Brown, construction will continue through November of 2017. During the construction time, the traffic on Feeding Hills Rd. may be reduced to just one travel lane.

Residents are asked to refer to the town websites as there will be periodic construction updates. You can also call the Southwick DPW at 413-569-6772.

Community garden plots available

By AMY PORTER

Correspondent

RUSSELL—For vegetable gardeners with no place to plant or no sun in their yards, one answer might be a plot at the Countryside Community Garden in Russell. An educational outreach of the Friends of SHAEC (Southern Hilltowns Adult Education Center), the community garden is entering its fourth season, thanks to a generous donation of land use by Ron Hess, owner of Countryside Woodcraft next door.

Plots are a \$20 donation for a 20 x 20 area to plant and tend throughout the gardening season. Applications are available online at: www.shaec.org. Free seeds for community gardeners are also available from High Mowing Seeds on a first come basis. Please note that this is an all-organic garden.

Note for the Countryside Community Garden in Seeds of Change Grant Contest.

The Countryside Community Garden has entered a contest to win funds for the garden from Seeds of Change, an organic gardening seed company based out of California. The grants range from \$10,500 to \$25,000, and are selected based on the number of votes received.

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Olan Horne of Huntington prepares a plot at the Countryside Community Garden in Russell. (Photo by Amy Porter)

Baker-Polito Administration announces rate increases for Early Education and Care Programs

BOSTON—The Baker-Polito Administration today announced a 6 percent rate increase for all early education programs that provide care for low-income families, worth \$2.6 million, which represents the largest rate hike for subsidized early education and care programs in 10 years.

The Administration also plans to reinvest an additional \$9.3 million on an annual basis to provide further rate hikes to some infant and toddler care providers to ensure they are paid the median reimbursement rate.

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) will also increase access to child care—serving approximately 1,100 more children during FY'18—by reissuing vouchers from families that no longer need subsidized care during the year, which would have gone unused otherwise.

The significant investment in rate increases will support early educator salaries and benefits at early education and care programs in order to improve hiring and retention issues faced by programs that serve families receiving state subsidies.

Along with the rate increases, EEC plans to ensure income-eligible children receive access to at least 12 months of continuous care, regardless of changes in family status. "We are pleased to work with the Legislature to provide these rate increases for providers who care and educate our youngest residents," said Governor Charlie Baker. "It is vital for these programs to be able to train and retain experienced staff, and these rate increases will help them accomplish that important aspect of any high-quality child care program."

"This significant investment will ensure our state's early education and care programs are able to pay good teachers more, and help



Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker. (file photo)

improve the quality of programs by maintaining continuity of staff," said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.

The rate increases depend on legislative approval to move available funding from Fiscal Year '17 to Fiscal Year '18.

"These rate increases represent a historic investment in our early education workforce, which in combination with other initiatives and policy reforms, lays a strong foundation for meaningful quality improvements in this crucial sector of our education system," said Education Secretary James Peyster.

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Executive Director of Armbrook Village, Beth Cardillo, will be an instructor for the dementia training class. (WNG File Photo)