

OTIS OBSERVER

Your Town, Your Neighborhood and You

May 2023 Vol IX Issue 1



*Celeste Watman
Photo: Gail Gelburd*

Celeste Watman: Collage Artist

By Gail Gelburd

Our world is filled with images, colliding, merging, maybe co-operating. We see them on small screens or large screens, as we walk in the woods or down a street, in a store or on a trip.

They are always there somewhere in our mind, in our memories. Celeste Watman takes images from a wide variety of sources. They each speak to her and remind her of places and people that she has seen. She combines them to create precious two- and three-dimensional collages.

Life and other commitments often do not allow us enough hours to make art, but an unfortunate temporary illness gave Celeste the uninterrupted time needed to create a new body of work. Her creative spirit was able to shine through the adversity. Art is a wonderful way to recover. While relegated to her home, she had an opportunity to take the massive amounts of special papers and images that she had been collecting and work full time on creating her art. This past year she then created more than 30 pieces which were on view at the Knox Gallery, Monterey Library, Monterey MA in an exhibition entitled **Reuse/Revision**. (Exhibition dates: March 17- April 29, 2023)

Celeste loves to sit at the large table in her house in Otis, surrounded by art that inspires her. On that

Continued on page 2



*Hungry hummingbird landing
Photo: Evelyn Garvey*

Correction

The *Otis Observer's* April issue included an article on Carol Diehl's Notice Otis Presentation at the library about Banksy, the, as yet, unidentified world "graffiti" artist. However, the name of her book, *Banksy, Completed* was omitted, a fascinating subject and an interesting read.

Celeste Watman: Collage Artist

Continued from page 1

table are mounds of cut up images that seem to find their way to come together. She might work on several images at once looking for just the right shape to complete a piece. She admires the work of Joseph Cornell and Romare Bearden, well known collage artists, but especially likes abstract art. This love of abstraction informs her work. Although her art is not abstract in a traditional sense (it is comprised of real images) her methodology is that of an abstract artist. She has an innate ability to select and compose works of art that combine seemingly incongruous images into a single form that reads and flows as one. Shapes and colors create the composition, while the images are the subject of the piece.



Collage by Celeste Watman
Photo: Gail Gelburd

Iconic structures are found in many of her pieces along with images of flowers, butterflies and buildings. Celeste stated that, "In the collages, there are some reoccurring images (the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, stairs) and themes (friendship, freedom and possibilities). These images appear because I was always fascinated by architecture, structures, objects, and how they are put together. Thus, the collages present relationships among forms."

Celeste has at various times ventured into creating 3-dimensional pieces that hang on the wall. Images combine

with thread, cardboard, textured paper, faux fur and other materials. In the new work, she has also created 3-dimensional objects in the shape of a book that opens and closes. Inside and out, they are of the collage genre, but they are also precious lost objects.

As technology has taken over more of our world, she reminds us of the special moments of holding a book and opening it to learn its story. With this work, Celeste combines her former life as a library director on Long Island with being an artist in Otis. When you hold the book and carefully open it, the story becomes your own. The art is the prompt while the wide variety of shapes and sizes in the exhibition tell of women's lives and passing visions, as well as longings for places past and future. ☺

AMVETS Post 77 and the Otis Cultural Council

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You

By Tom Soules

We run the bottle/can redemption center at the Otis transfer station. Last year was a record year. With your help this year will be even better.

We have blue barrels set up. We accept anything with a 5 cent MA deposit printed on the container. I have been doing this for a few years now and have seen it all. Please take the time to separate your trash from your returnables. We try to inform people of this. With your help we can do it. Please no wine bottles and no cider cans or bottles.

The transfer station is about to get real busy. Please think about where you are throwing that can or bottle with a deposit on it. We are an actual redemption center and we get 7.5 cents per can and bottle. We do great things around town, and for our veterans, with the money. Thank you for your help.

Let's have a great summer together! For more info call Tom Soules at **(413) 429-1119**. ☺



Line Dancing at Knox Trail Inn

By Sue Brofman

A line dancing class will be held at Knox Trail Inn in June! This event will be open to everyone at no charge. There will be one hour of instruction followed by an hour of open dancing. It will provide an opportunity for people of all ages to learn how to line dance or just enjoy the music.

Tina Mole, who will run the event and provide instruction funded by Otis Cultural Council, has been teaching line dancing in Dalton for many years. Several of us from Otis have been taking lessons with her and find her to be an excellent instructor. And do we have fun!

This event will take place on **Sunday, June 4th from 2-4 pm**. The Knox will be serving lunch that day starting at 12 noon. We are grateful to Knox Trail Inn for the free use of their venue.

Hope to see you at Knox Trail Inn on the 4th of June! ☺



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Fish Are Jumping!

By Sandy Balayan

By the time this *Otis Observer* issue goes to print, the Otis Reservoir will be home to roughly 525 new trout that the **Smile Like Jack Memorial Fund** is donating to the community in collaboration with Whitetails Unlimited. Although the state does stock the reservoir yearly, this additional group of trout will have a very special meaning this year.



*Jack loved to fish.
Photo: Mike O'Brien*

Twelve of these trout will be tagged and there are prizes the fund will award if you catch a tagged fish. Are you ready to try your luck? From **April 26, 2023 until April 26, 2024**, if an individual catches a tagged trout, please contact Jack's wonderful Uncle Bill Bailey and he will verify the tag and award the prize.

"Preferably, we would like just the tag so the fish can be released but that is not necessary. The prizes are as follows: tag one is a \$500 Visa gift card; tags two, three, four are each worth a \$200 Visa gift card and tags five through twelve are each good for a \$100 Visa gift card." Contact Bill on Facebook and he will confirm you are a winner and present the prize.

Bill Bailey is the field director of the New England states and New York for Whitetails Unlimited. The nonprofit conservation group raises funds in support of educational programs and is dedicated to the betterment of the white-tailed deer and its environment. The idea for stocking the reservoir as a donation from the Smile Like Jack Memorial Fund came to fruition after a conversation at the Knox over a beer. "Jack loved to fish and this seemed like a positive way to honor him and help the community. We hope to make it a yearly tradition," said Bill.

Over a single weekend, the fish will make their way from a New Hampshire hatchery by truck (not by swimming or boat, LOL) and be released in several places around the lake by small boats and directly into the water from the two reservoir boat ramps. The temperature change is shocking to them but after a minute they adjust

and off they go. In fact, Bill said in places like Alaska, fish are dropped over water by plane. Again, after acclimating to the new water, they are fine. Trout can survive in the reservoir all winter for those ice fishing enthusiasts. It takes a long time to fish out all that are stocked each year and there is no size limit. So keep fishing till all the tags are claimed.

"Jack loved the outdoors from the time he was little. He always enjoyed teaching anyone, young or old, to fish. This is a very fitting way to commemorate that love and give the community the joy of fishing like Jack," said his Uncle Bill.

For more information about the fund, go to **smilelikejack.com** or for more info on Whitetails Unlimited visit their website at **whitetailsunlimited.com**. They both also have a presence on Facebook. Be sure to use the Whitetails Unlimited-New England-Northeast territory Facebook page to reach Bill directly. ☹

To learn more about the Smile Like Jack Memorial Fund please see page 8.



Be Bear AWARE

Bill asked us to inform the community that bears are out and about and they are HUNGRY!!! Time to put bird feeders away and close garages. Also remember to secure anything that may interest these curious creatures. Raiding garbage cans and scattering the contents around is certainly one of their favorite activities.





Farmington River Regional School Updates

Farmington River Community Productions Presents *The It's Never Too Late Show*

The Farmington River Community Productions is pleased to announce its third annual upcoming spring production, *The It's Never Too Late Show*, with generous funding support from the Otis Cultural Council. The musical will be performed live at the Farmington River Elementary School in Otis on **Friday, May 19th at 6:30 p.m. and again on Saturday, May 20th at 4:30 p.m.** The production is the third student written and performed musical since 2020.



Musical cast rehearsing

Photo: Laura Catullo



Musical in rehearsal

Photo: Laura Catullo

This year's show highlights endangered animals in peril of extinction. The format for the show is a late night talk show with guests who have something to share about their experiences with extinction and endangerment, such as rainforest birds, dinosaurs, polar bears, gorillas, pandas and many more. There will be a talk show band, hosts, guests, audience participation games

and lots of music, laughter and fun!

As in the past, the musical was written by an ambitious group of fourth, fifth and sixth graders with the help of Ms. Catullo, the Arts Teacher and Musical Director. Every spring, Ms. Catullo asks students to submit ideas for the next year's musical. The ideas, which must include a theme about conservation or saving resources on earth, are then summarized by Ms. Catullo into one possible plot thread, incorporating as many of the ideas submitted as possible. In the fall, prior to the scheduled performance, the students then decide on the sequence and treatment of the script, create the dialogue, select the songs, write the parody lyrics for some of the songs and audition for the roles.

Every year more and more students want to be involved in every aspect of the production, including writing the script, acting the roles, helping with backstage work and creating props and stage sets. Additionally, a hard-working parent volunteer group has supported the production by helping with stage

management, baked goods for the bake sale, selling 50-50 raffle tickets and preparing their children for their stage roles. The production has also enjoyed the collaborative support of local musicians, choreographers and science and earth-savvy individuals who lend their expertise toward each production's ultimate successful performance for the community each spring. It is truly a community effort in supporting the children's creative work.

Please join us for one or both of the performances as an audience member of a live talk/variety show! Both performances are free of charge, though donations will be accepted! Seating will once again be café style with several tables for families, as well as individual and row seating for smaller groups of attendees. There will be an intermission with baked goods and snacks for sale as well as other merchandise to raise funds for the theater department. A 50-50 raffle will also be included with the festivities of each performance.

An art exhibit of posters of endangered animals will be featured in the entrance hallway, along with other illustrations and information provided by students about the need to protect our environment.

We look forward to sharing this year's production with you and hope to see many of you in our audience on one of those dates! ☺

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AMVETS Post 77 Memorial Day Remembrance Service

Members of AMVETS Post 77 and other local area veterans invite the public to participate in the annual Memorial Day Remembrance Service. We appreciate the continued support shown by so many as we endeavor to create a more respectful and solemn opportunity for everyone to pause and pay tribute to the service members who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom.



The Remembrance Service will be conducted from 12 - 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, May 28 at the Otis Veteran's Memorial in front of the town library.

Prior to and immediately following the ceremony, a small group of veterans will travel to every cemetery in Otis and Sandisfield to pay our respects by playing taps and firing volleys. Our cemetery visits will be conducted throughout the morning and into the afternoon on May 28th. We apologize in advance for any disturbance this may cause.

Questions regarding this can be directed to the Commander, AMVETS Post-77, Mr. Thomas Soules at **(413) 429-1119**. ☎



OTIS FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

By Terry Gould

The Otis Food Pantry has been truly running on sunshine these last few weeks. Numbers of visitors each week is constant, and our neighbors continue to step up and keep our shelves full.

As I sit to write this, volunteers have just delivered food for distribution to the Farmington River Elementary school to give a boost to some families for the coming April vacation week. We put out the word and we were not disappointed. Jamie from Otis Ridge and the Smile Like Jack Foundation arrived at the pantry with everything on our list and volunteers packed up totes of non-perishables; enough for everyone. The local Catholic Church put together even more food and we topped off the totes nicely. Our email elf spread the word and we now have stocked shelves to last through the vacation week at the pantry as well. Berkshire Bounty and the South County Food Web made sure that we had enough fresh fruit and vegetables to share as well.

Volunteers made extra time to get shelves stocked and food packaged quickly and happily. We would like to shout out to Larry Gould and his truck for picking up from Berkshire Bounty and High Lawn Farms every single week, and Mary Kay Pinkham who is waiting for the delivery every week as well. Jane Gleason visits Whorle's each week to purchase a frozen meat item for each family to take home. Eila Bell has been our baked good volunteer, stopping at Big Y each Wednesday morning so folks can take home a loaf of bread or sweet treat. The pantry would not function without this delicate dance of volunteers and donations.

May, 2023

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Easter Sunday, the Knox Trail Inn and their Pay It Forward crew treated their neighbors to dinner. Overall, 23 dinners for two were either picked up or delivered on a gorgeous sunny Easter Sunday.

As we move into the warmer months, and should you stop by the Otis Town Hall, you may find the pantry outside so everyone can enjoy the sunshine.

The Otis Food Pantry exists because of everyone in our community: individuals, businesses and volunteers who care about their neighbors and friends. Everyone, doing just a little something, makes this a success for the entire community. ☎



GROWING PAINS

By Stephanie Skinner

It is that time of the year. The weather is lurching between freezing rain and sudden bursts of blistering heat. Iggy is discovering endless new scents to explore, and plenty of “oh my god **DROP IT!**” on our strolls. Tom turkeys are raucously telling the ladies how virile they are, and the mighty crocus, the first flowers of real spring, are gamely shouldering their way into the lengthening sunlight.

That last 18” of snow is forgiven and forgotten.

So, now is the time to engage in my annual ritual of magical thinking; I shall make an easy to manage, always fertile vegetable garden – the reason I live here, the meaning of life.

During that last snow fall I ordered seeds and seed potatoes from Fedco, a non-profit in Maine, and, thus, supplier of cold hardy varieties. I’ve spent much of the winter researching and stocking my war chest. I am officially ready to rain down shock and awe on potato beetles and their creepy fat white grubs and soul killing vine borers who regularly snatch life from squash plants who have spent their summer joyously running across the fields making big come-hither flowers aplenty.

All winter long I have haunted my favorite Facebook page (look away now if you are cuss averse); Shitty Harvests. Here, many tens of thousands

of us from across the globe, eternal optimists one and all, share our stories of beans ready to harvest – eaten by bunnies or errant pets, lemons and potatoes galore the size of dimes, broccoli laden with aphids and hilariously suggestive carrots and melons. As they say, you have to laugh or else you’ll wail.



Assortment of seeds ready to go.

Photo: Stephanie Skinner

But, this year, my garden will amaze and delight me and my friends. It will be free of pests (after the deluge ...) and weeds will tremble at my approach and lay down to die before me. Picture me as Scarlett O’Hara, only older and fatter ... *As God is my Witness, I shall never go hungry again!*

Today I started to prep the raised beds wherein the lettuce, carrots and herbs

will go, safe from the bunnies we’ve so enjoyed seeing this winter and early spring gamboling and seemingly multiplying? (You will be forgiven if you need to put down your coffee and let out a wild guffaw at this bit of folderol and rubbish as my Aussie Dad used to say.) Tomorrow I will plant the English peas and there will be fat clustered pods containing the sweetest fruit imaginable in only 60 days. Next week I will make eight handsome mounds to house the four varieties of potatoes I’m growing (early, mid, late/storage and purple, of course) ... after I spray down the tilled field with beneficial nematodes (don’t ask ...) Sometime in July I will dig up some early baby spuds and raise my filthy hands to the sky and shout, I HAVE GROWN TATERS! They will taste like Otis and they will be righteous.

There is really nothing better than throwing stuff in the ground and walking away only to find it later converted ONLY by rain and sun to dinner. I hope to share a first of the garden recipe with you in two months. There’s that happy talk again!

In the June issue I’ll be rhapsodizing about garden perennials which you can (and should) plant and ignore; ramps in the shade and rhubarb in the sun – so you have no excuse.

All this getting ready for summer life here in the middle of April is so invigorating! I am gambling, of course, on the weather staying above the frigid line. I think it will.

Cue: The theme from Jaws. ☹

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OTIS COMMUNITY GARDEN



By Margie Klein

It's another season after a long winter. We are told to live in the moment. We did follow that advice and made it through those short, cold days, and long dark nights.

We read our books and cooked our soups and baked our bread and gazed at the bright stars because we are lucky to live here with no light pollution. But, time marches on and the days are longer. We see the Merganser ducks out on the pond, the geese have returned and the beaver is busy at work. Time to think about our garden and the joy of getting our hands dirty, planting seeds and watching our garden grow.



We have a great crew of workers mounding the beds with fresh composted soil from Meadow Farm in Lee. We should have an abundance of crops adding sweet potatoes and delicata squash to the list. This is an exciting time of year. There are currently a limited number of memberships available in the community garden crew. You can become a member by contacting otismagarden@gmail.com or by picking up an application at the Town Hall. Our goal is to serve the food banks in our area. We also help the seniors in our area. It is a rewarding cause. There is also a new Facebook page — the Otis Community Garden that you can check out.

So, we're off to a great start and to all of you readers, happy spring. ☺



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Jack with his dog, Bo.
Photo used with permission of
Star and Mike O'Brien

player at Monument Mountain in Great Barrington, saving to buy a lot for a house he planned to build for his future. With the help of his dad Mike, he was able to spend two months before he passed away living in the nearly completed house they built together in eight short months. A true labor of love for the father and son who adored each other.

“There is not one picture of Jack where he is not smiling. He loved life and the people around him. Being very community minded, Jack would stop to help anyone at any time and loved to take youngsters under his wing. Jack was extremely passionate about his interests and always willing to share his knowledge,” said his Dad.



Smile Like Jack

By Sandy Balayan

A very special young man met with an untimely accident and left his loving family all too soon. His name, Jack William O'Brien, is familiar to every town member and area residents for so many reasons. His death has left his family heartbroken but determined to keep his name and legacy alive. They established the Smile Like Jack Memorial Fund and have been raising money to honor his memory. **Since its inception last March, the fund has raised about \$125,000** which is truly remarkable. Through various efforts, this figure continues to grow and benefit our community and others who loved the outdoors much like Jack did.

Growing up in Otis on the Reservoir, and being part of a large extended family, afforded Jack the time and venue to develop a love of the outdoors. Hunting, fishing, boating, jet skiing, snowmobiling and anything with a motor fascinated Jack. He loved to build and work with his hands. At thirteen, he took over his retiring grandfather's landscaping company and immediately began the hard work of making it his own. He was able to grow the business, as well as finish high school as a star football

Jack's parents Star and Mike, as well as his sister Erin, have been hard at work with a devoted board to establish this memorial fund very quickly and in their words set clear goals. “Our goal is that the Smile Like Jack Memorial Fund will bring other individuals with similar passions the opportunity to live their legacy just as Jack would, working immensely hard in the trades and living life to the fullest in the great outdoors.” To that end, the fund provides scholarship money for those pursuing an education in the trades, provides educational opportunities about the outdoors and helps those in need in the community.

The First Annual Smile Like Jack 5K/10K Walk/Run was hugely successful. It is planned again for this July 8th and will hopefully continue for many years to come. The fund has awarded many gift cards to Big Y for Thanksgiving and to the Otis Food Pantry. In fact a call by the pantry, due to an unusually high demand for this past Easter, was filled immediately by Smile Like Jack.

A young man from Vermont had heard about the fund through social media and

recently received a scholarship enabling him to enter taxidermy school. Also, a student from Connecticut received a scholarship to study to become an electrician. A surprise announcement will be made as soon as all the details are finalized that will benefit Monument Mountain High School for many years to come. That collaboration has already seen many honors commemorating Jack's love for his high school football career.

Please go on the website **smilelikejack.com** or the Facebook page to learn about the fund and all things Jack. There is also information on apparel and items available to buy that raise money for the Smile Like Jack initiative. Mike has been working hard with a lawyer and accountant, who have donated their time, to help secure tax deductible status for the fund which should be completed very soon.

This profound loss of a native son has shaken the entire community. Creating this fund insures that the legacy of Jack William O'Brien will be alive for generations to come. The outpouring by the community and support the family has received has been so overwhelming. Star, Mike and Erin wanted to thank the community for this love and support and ask everyone to always remember Jack smiling. The Otis community is truly filled with a lot of heart, soul and love. The O'Briens will always be in our hearts. ☹

To learn more about the fund stocking the reservoir see page 3.

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Halls General Store sets the record for catching the biggest fish in Otis history.

Photo: Mark Anthony



Wanda Houston and her band rocked the Knox Trail Inn on Saturday, April 1st. Special thanks to Wanda, her band, the Knox Trail Inn for hosting and the Cultural Council for their support in the successful outcome of the Otis Preservation Trust event.

Photo: Hilary Harley



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OTIS HISTORY

Legendary Locals of Otis

By Peter Cameron

Recently, I came across a book entitled *Legendary Locals of the Southern Berkshires*. In it were references to individuals the author considered most influential figures of southern Berkshire history. There were a few true “residents” listed but most were either short time residents or summer visitors. Many were from the modern day, the 1800s and later. Some like author William Bryant and NAACP activist W.E.B. Du Bois were born here but left. Formerly enslaved Elizabeth “Mumbet” Freeman was forced to live here until she sued for her freedom and won, abolishing slavery in the Commonwealth. Most came from either Pittsfield or Great Barrington and had

few ties to the Otis area. It led me to ponder who the legendary locals of the Otis area were.

Local history is hard to find. Most is oral history passed down within families or old records, often missing or incomplete. Having worked in a high school for 19 years, I can attest to a lack of study into local history and in general, older history. Sadly, the history texts found in most classrooms treat the study of history based on the cause and effect of events, glossing over the human factor. Largely forgotten are the men and women who wrote that history with their sweat and blood. This makes identifying those that went above and beyond quite difficult. Who in our local history devoted their lives to do so much for the majority? Throughout Otis history many fit this category, but I realized that one group was superbly qualified. Even today we reap the benefits of their actions. Keeping this in mind, I would like to put forth my list of those Legendary Locals of Otis.

This is the honor roll of Revolutionary War veterans for Otis, Massachusetts. Some lived in town. Many lived in the surrounding area and served in the Otis Militia. Others moved to town after the war. These 62 veterans fought the war that created the United States of America, and let’s not forget their families who sacrificed much, while they were away fighting. David Kibbe, Sr. made the ultimate sacrifice at the Battle of Fort Ann, New York. Many are distant branches of our family trees. These Legendary Locals of Otis, mostly forgotten as time marches on, along with veterans of all wars, deserve to be recognized, especially as Memorial Day approaches. ☺



Peter Cameron is an Otis, MA resident and a retired policeman. He is a graduate of Central Connecticut State University with a B.S. in History with a concentration in U.S. Colonial History.



- | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Samuel Adams</i> | <i>Richard Cook</i> | <i>Samuel Hubbard</i> | <i>Joshua Parish</i> |
| <i>Benjamin Babb</i> | <i>William Crittenden</i> | <i>Samuel Hubbard Jr.</i> | <i>James Pelton</i> |
| <i>Benjamin Baldwin</i> | <i>Eleaser Cross</i> | <i>Adonijah Jones</i> | <i>Samuel Pelton</i> |
| <i>Albright Blackwood</i> | <i>William Cross</i> | <i>Phineas Jones</i> | <i>Stephen Pelton</i> |
| <i>Benjamin Brewer</i> | <i>John Davison</i> | <i>Stephen Kibbe</i> | <i>Thomas Pelton</i> |
| <i>Brazillas Brewer</i> | <i>Zephaniah Davison</i> | <i>David Kibbe, Sr.</i> | <i>Isaac Penfield</i> |
| <i>William Brooks</i> | <i>David Dunning</i> | <i>David Kibbe, Jr.</i> | <i>Isaac Phelps</i> |
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| <i>Jonathan Jordan</i> | <i>Isaac Finch</i> | <i>John Kibbe</i> | <i>Reuben Shuglur</i> |
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OTIS LIBRARY NEWS

By James Ring Adams,
Otis Library Trustee

“We are small but brave.” This is how the spokesman for a royal museum in Brussels described his institution, but it strikes me as a pretty good motto for the Otis Library. We are looking forward bravely now on two fronts.

Most pressing is the selection of a new library director to replace the retiring Kathy Bort, whose strength and energy were greatly treasured. The thorough and well-designed selection process is nearing its final choice as I write, and a decision will be made shortly. Both finalists have much to offer.

The longer-range concern is a possible grant for a new library building. You might remember intense discussion last year about a pilot project by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), which would have funded three-fourths of the

eligible costs of a new building for a small community library. Thanks to tremendous work by the Trustees’ subcommittee and strong support from the town, Otis was one of two finalists, only to lose out to a town in the eastern part of the state (that is nothing new). But the pilot project led to a permanent MBLC small-town grant program, and Otis is still eligible.

In fact my colleagues on the Board of Trustees put in so much work on the pilot program, planning for the building, selecting a site and even preparing environmental studies, that we have a good head start on the new grant application. Several of the Library Trustees have addressed the Board of Selectmen to explain the opportunity and the Select Board has agreed to take the first step and file a Letter of Intent. We hope that if the town stays firm in its support, we should be a very strong candidate for the grant.

The timeframe for the project will of course be longer, maybe by several years. But it will give us time to think bravely about the future of central Otis, whose elements are already taking shape. A new library in the center of town could be the keystone of a thriving Otis Cultural and Recreational area, supplementing our existing National Historic District that would be a boon for the local economy as well as

an expanded benefit for residents. Refurbishment of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church would provide a venue for concerts and programs drawing on our rich supply of local talent and beyond.

The present library building, one hopes, would become the Otis Museum, bringing our collection down from the inaccessible second floor and allowing its expansion. Skiers at Otis Ridge might be attracted to stay for evening programs, increasing business for local restaurants. A culture zone based on a new library building would be a low-cost, environmentally friendly yet fecund breeding ground for prosperity.

Such brave thoughts for the future build on our past accomplishments, and it’s fitting to close with a tribute to Kathy Bort, who formally retired at the beginning of the year. Kathy became Director of the Otis Library 15 years ago after serving as Dean of Students at Lee High School. I have admired her strength of character in defending the interests of our library patrons. She continues to give us welcome advice and will be an example of courageous conduct as we move forward. ☺



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ASTROLOGY

Fertile Ground

By Hilary Harley

May gently invites us into her month of Taurus. We are between eclipses while Pluto and Messenger Mercury are retrograde; so treading gently eases us into this warming month. We are given pause to reflect where we stand in our lives: *how we spend our days*.

Taurus is practical, grounded energy, particularly occupied with ROI: return on investment. As the first earth sign of the zodiac, Taurus reminds us: what you plant, you shall grow. The corollary is: you reap what you sow. No small matter this.

So it makes sense to step lightly into what is beginning to take form. Tune into May's abundant divine guidance. Spiritual Neptune aligns with Motivating Mars heightening our internal GPS, steering us toward more meaningful pursuits as we put our dreams into action.

It doesn't get any more real than May 5th when the Full Moon lunar eclipse in Taurus-Scorpio occurs. This eclipse means business and is a veritable kick in the pants, or, more like your wallet. Here's why: the Taurus Sun rules values. It is the original *show me the money sign*. The Scorpio Moon rules transformation. Conjoined to Awakener Uranus, we receive a giant wake up call, to pay

attention, to *do life differently* than we have before.

Significant blessings may unfold: A dire prognosis may turn around, or we might feel like *we hit the jackpot* in some wonderful way. Key questions to ask now are: *what do I value? What do I stand for? How do I want to INVEST my time, resources and power?* It is time to live with purpose. If you have been looking for a reason or purpose, *this is your eclipse*.



Two days later on Sunday, May 7th, Venus turns into Cancer the Crab, drawing us toward family and home, comfort food and snuggles. Soak up these cozy rays of Venus in Cancer; with Mercury

retrograde for one more week, use this time for review, reflection and research because on Monday, May 15th, Messenger Mercury turns direct motion. Time to sign contracts, book travel plans, purchase large ticket items. The message couldn't be any clearer when Generous Jupiter turns into Taurus on Wednesday, May 17th. The delicious ripening earthy soil is waiting. What do you want to grow more of in your life?

A word of caution here: The Taurus Jupiter-North Node duo clashes with Powerful Pluto through the rest of the month. Taurus planets want to stick to *doing what it knows will work* while Aquarian Pluto pushes us out of our comfort zone. Watch for a clash between old and new.

The struggle between old and new is embedded in the New Moon on Friday, May 19th. With *five* planets in Taurus, we could not ask for any more fertile ground to plant our desires. Deliberately hand write three to five goals or intentions that you seek to grow over the next month, season or year. Then bury in the softening earth or safely burn.

Motivating Mars turns into fun and feisty Leo on the same day the Sun shifts into Communication Gemini, Sunday, May 21st. The week following is dicey as Mars-Pluto square the lunar nodes. When pushed to the edge of yourself ask where you can find common ground and be flexible? How can you give a little without giving yourself completely away?

This is our collective challenge now: how to focus on what gives purpose and substance to our lives while adapting to a rapidly changing world? ☯



Otis resident Hilary Harley is a counseling astrologer and hosts *Mystical Messages* podcast. She is an art aficionado, a community volunteer, the mother of two daughters and owner of an elderly Tibetan Terrier.



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The Reel World of Films

By Eileen W. Cohen

Two families boasting contrasting cultural backgrounds will be featured in the upcoming comedy, *About My Father* starring stand-up comedian, Sebastian Maniscalco, and iconic Oscar winner Robert De Niro as an Italian immigrant father and son duo. Maniscalco, who has appeared in supporting roles in films like *Tag*, *Green Book* and *The Irishman*, makes his big-screen feature debut in this movie that is based on his upbringing, especially with his father and extended family. As a co-writer of the screenplay and executive producer, Maniscalco plays a “fictionalized version of himself” that is encouraged by his fiancée to bring his hairdresser father, Salvo, to spend a weekend together with her crazy rich and eccentric family – leading to a major culture clash.

Fans of Maniscalco’s hysterical stand-up routines (I happen to be one of them) will love this film since it’s in the same vein as his performance material (using physicality and choreography to “act out life’s little agonies”). Oscar winner De Niro, veteran master of the craft of acting and known for his impressive

repertoire of dramatic and comedic roles, will once again flex his comedy chops, playing the straight man as he did in films like *Meet the Parents*, *Midnight Run*, *Analyze This* and *Analyze That*. The film is slated to open on May 26th.

Vin Diesel will resurrect his role as Dominic “Dom” Toretto in the film, *Fast X* the 10th film in the *Fast and Furious* saga opening in theaters on May 19th. Audiences know when the past comes to haunt you in the form of a lethal opponent, be ready for “pulse, pounding action.” This high-octane, adrenaline pumping thrill ride featuring heart stopping stunts and car chases, will pick up where the previous movie left off. Protagonist, Dom Toretto, together with his family and crew will continue with their adventures, even against impossible odds, using cars and other vehicles to save the world. Fans will remember that in November, 2013, the *Fast and Furious* franchise lost actor Paul Walker (Brian O’Connor) but in this film, his persona remains alive in the *F & F* Universe and an official goodbye to Walker will be featured in the movie. Joining the core cast is *Aquaman* actor, Jason Momoa, playing a villain out for revenge. But, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson will not be returning. This is the last installment of the global franchise – the epic finale ride.

Disney’s live-action *The Little Mermaid* movie, (a remake of the beloved 1989 animated feature that received Oscars for original song and score) stars actress Halle Bailey as Ariel, the beautiful

and spirited youngest daughter of King Triton. Funny lady Melissa McCarthy stars as the villainous Ursula, the sea witch. The original music is by composer Alan Menken and *Hamilton*’s Lin-Manuel Miranda. The story is loosely based on the 1857 Hans Christian Andersen tale of the same name. Andersen’s fairytale version is about a mermaid who falls in love with a human (a prince) when she surfaces from the ocean and is faced with a life-or-death decision. Andersen’s dark-themed tale is one of love and self-sacrifice. Disney’s adaptation reimagines the fairytale for modern audiences and the happy ending has the little mermaid (who has longed to be with the humans on land) and the prince getting married. The film has a release date of May 26th. Over the past 10 years the Disney studio has found much success with live-action remakes of its animated classics: *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. Next year, Disney will bring *Snow White* starring Rachel Zegler to the silver screen.

There’s a big outpouring of anticipation for the fan-favorite space saga, *Guardians of the Galaxy 3*, rated PG-13 for language, suggestive drug references and intense sequences of violence and action. This superhero film, based on Marvel comics, stars Chris Pratt as protagonist, Peter Quill (Star-Lord). Quill, who is still grieving the loss of Gamora (Zoe Saldana), needs to rally his team for an intergalactic adventure to defend the universe. The first Guardian movie was released in 2014 followed by a sequel in 2017. On May 5th die-hard fans will see the Guardian saga return for their final adventure – their last lap around the galaxy and some say “the penultimate cinematic ride.”



Enjoy spring and until next month ... ☺

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Eileen is a retired NYC school administrator and college professor. She is a part time Otis resident and an ardent cinephile with a love of creative writing, cooking and grandparenting.

NAME THAT OTISITE Contest!



Can you solve this month's contest mystery? If you are the first to identify the family name of the women in this photo, you will be the winner of the contest and win a prize! In addition, a bonus prize will be offered if the person identifying the women can also identify the house.

Try your luck with this picture. Remember, if there is more than one winner, first in gets the prize. Good luck!

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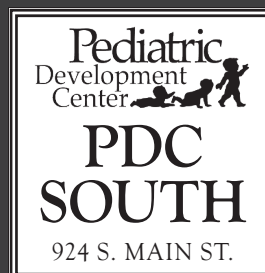
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Thanks go out once again to the Knox Trail Inn for allowing the *Otis Observer* access to their wonderful collection of memorabilia. This picture dates back to 1894 and features the first summer cottage built on Big Pond by Burton Babb. Babb built it for the Conner family of Westfield and they named it "The Birches." Visit the Knox to see this and many other pictures and signs that are part of the history of our town. ☉



The first summer cottage on Big Pond called "the Birches" built by Burton Babb in 1894 for Sam S. Conner of Westfield.
Left to right: Beulah Conner, Bertha Brooks, Lon Herrick, & Sam S. Conner.



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Fill It Up!

By Ross Knowles

We saw this past winter exit Otis with one last 30"+ blast of snow (March 13-14). With spring now in full force, here comes the anticipation of Otis Reservoir enthusiasts, and that would be for a full reservoir.

So, how do we achieve a full Otis Reservoir? Is it melting snow, spring rain or maybe a little of both? The absence of one is certainly a problem. The absence of both would be ugly!

This topic has graced the dining room tables of Otis Reservoir enthusiasts, and at times, has been warmly debated (usually while sipping adult beverages) since the beginning of Otis Reservoir time. It's likely because every year we rely totally on fickle Mother Nature to bring us the last bit of liquid gold necessary to raise the lake level. Let's delve into this topic a bit more deeply.

Most Otis residents realize the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) pulls the plug on the Reservoir around the middle of October every year dropping the lake level approximately eight feet vertically. There are numerous proven reasons for applying this effective lake management strategy, but we'll save that for a future issue. With

summer quickly approaching, it seems only fitting that a favorite seasonal topic be brought out of hibernation. So, is it the spring rains or is it snow melt that fills the reservoir?

During the winter months, the DCR maintains the lake drawdown level by constantly monitoring and adjusting the lake level as needed, especially after rain events. It usually goes unnoticed as the variation is in inches. This can be slightly challenging. Ice plays a role for its recreational value to ice fishermen, snowmobilers, skaters, cross country skiers, etc. Normal years can produce an ice thickness of 12" - 24", with some years approaching 36" thick. These same variations can apply to snowpack, too. When winter rain events occur, rain and melting snow coming from Big Pond and surrounding tributaries raise the lake/ice level of the Reservoir. The DCR must release enough water to keep the lake as close to drawdown level as possible. If the water level increases too much the edges of the ice could become unsafe, unusable, create damage and not achieve drawdown results for effective lake management.

As spring approaches, the DCR begins raising the lake level. Yes, this does occur while there is significant ice remaining. They do not wait for the ice to completely melt. Close the gate too soon and the rising ice shelf can do serious damage to property owner's frontage.

Close too late and valuable spring rains and snow melt may be lost. The DCR has been very successful with this tricky dance.

Come mid-March, the normal winter snowpack has already begun to melt while the typical ice shelf remains well intact. In many cases the snow pack is close to being gone while the lake level remains well below what's consider full. This situation happens most years. With the gate closed and the ice and snow gone, will the lake ever fill up? Most years (8 out of 10) conclude, yes, it will fill! How? Spring rains! Does snow melt contribute to the rise of the Reservoir? You bet it does! During the transition period, melting snow running off the frozen ground can contribute 5-6 feet of vertical rise in the lake level. This leaves a shortage of 2-3 feet of water necessary to fill the Reservoir. Where does it come from? Again, the spring rains. Insufficient spring rain creates the rare years the Reservoir doesn't fill completely. Those are the years people seem to remember. So yes, snowmelt is a contributor, but it's the spring rains that top off the lake level. The majority of years the Otis Reservoir is full by Memorial Day, and everything is good in O-Town!

The next time you frown at those chilly, rainy spring days, smile and remember it's what gives us a full Otis Reservoir! ☺

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Laugh with Carolyn

Our resident joke teller, Carolyn Lawry, shares another one of her gems with us this month. Long known for sharing whatever tickles her funny bone with family and friends, Carolyn is a delight to talk to and loves to share her great sense of humor with the readers of the Otis Observer.

Stan was wandering around a fairground and he happened to see a fortune teller's tent. Thinking it would be good for a laugh; he went inside and sat down.

"Ah ...," said the woman, as she gazed into her crystal ball. "I see you are the father of two children."

"That's what you think," said Stan scornfully. "I'm the father of three children."

The woman grinned and said, "That's what you think." ☹



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Tribute to BECKY BLIVEN

By Katharine Adams

A native daughter of Otis, Becky Bliven was devoted to her work with children as well as the care of her parents. Departed on March 22nd, she is widely described as having had a great sense of humor.



Becky Bliven

Photo: Katharine Adams

I loved seeing Becky in the hallways at school. I felt instant levity just to see her approach, knowing a funny quip would issue forth.

For over 30 years, she served as a paraprofessional at our local elementary school. Garth Story, former Principal of Otis Consolidated School starting in 1989, warmly remembers Becky and Ray Bliven, her father (also the custodian), along with Lisa

Thomas, the cook. “Becky worked as an aide who was always happy to deliver messages from the office to teachers,” Garth shares. “She helped Lisa in the kitchen, who was to become among her best friends, and do any other job needed—including making sure kids got on the right bus!”

“She could fill in nearly anywhere,” continues Garth. “After school, she was even part of her dad’s cleaning crew!” Dependable, often working with students needing extra guidance, “She would not take any guff.”

Laurie Flower, technology director at Farmington, remembers that in the 17 years she worked with Becky, she enjoyed her peanut butter and fluff sandwich every day! “The only other person I’ve heard who eats the same thing each day is Warren Buffet. That’s not bad company! It says a lot about how important consistency and routine were to her.”

Describing Becky’s dedication to making sure every book in the library was properly catalogued, Laurie says, “She never put a book back on the shelf that wasn’t perfectly repaired. They were like little treasures to her!”

Denise Zuidema, former school nurse at FRRSD, worked with Becky since 1998. “She was funny! Great sense of humor. She took amazing care of her parents, and shared many stories about her niece, Emily Pitoniak, her sister Flo’s oldest child. Becky loved that girl as if she were her own.”

A diehard Dallas Cowboys fan, “She would wear her lanyard all the time, along with her jersey on ‘sports day’ at school,” recalls Denise. “And I remember hearing her come down the hall in her pair of too-big-for-her-feet rain boots. I’d laugh, and she’d laugh back.”

Her Pre-K days were her best, Denise shares. “When she moved upstairs to the library, I think a piece of her stayed in PK. She loved those little ones.”



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Regarding Liam, her pet, “She treated that dog like a human and loved him until her last days. She talked about him almost as much as she talked about Emily!” Denise says. Gratefully, Liam has been adopted into a wonderful new home.

Friends Carol Blakeslee and Jane Gleason fondly remember Becky’s quirky, dry sense of humor. “We used to eat lunch together at the school,” Jane offers, “and she always got me laughing! She had a huge impact on the kids—she could really reach them.”

Anne Dempsey mentions Becky being her classroom assistant for 20 years, beginning in 1991 when she joined as preschool teacher and early childhood coordinator: “Becky had already been with the program since its inception in 1987, so she oriented me both to the program and to the town, itself.”

Anne describes, “We started our work together in the ‘old’ school building, where our preschool group met on the lower level, after the kindergarteners went home. With no bathroom on that level, Becky climbed many ‘steps,’ accompanied by small people at her side. Imagine our enthusiasm eight years later, when we moved into the new building, complete with a ‘purpose-built’ preschool space,

our own entrance, playground, and—three small bathrooms!”

Anne describes Becky as rarely absent. “She took each part of a typical day and met it head-on. She helped with zippers and buttons, kept track of who was the leader, who brought what for snacks—even enlisting their help to ‘set the table.’”

During movement time, “to get the wiggles out,” Anne shares, “Becky would move right along with the rest of us. Sometimes, she’d even demonstrate her ‘crab walk,’ down on all fours! You had to see it to believe it!”

They kept baby chicks, hermit crabs and even caterpillars (that did, in fact, become butterflies!). “One memorable time,” relates Anne, “we had a playground visit from two baby goats. It began to rain, and they somehow entered the classroom and climbed up on the tables ...”

A favorite PK place was the block area, where Becky began “construction projects” with a small group. If not completed by close of school, she would preserve the assemblage for major additions or repairs the next day. “Our days at school were full of activities, benefitting from her steady help. Becky helped hundreds of children begin their journey through their school years.”

Friend and coworker Heidi Utenis describes Becky as having been “like a sister,” describing a theme mentioned by many: her great compassion. “She was drawn to less socially active children, and sat them on her lap during story time.” ☉

In honor of Becky’s devotion to the children, donations can be made to Farmington River Regional Educational Association Fund, PO Box 674, Otis, MA 01253, benefitting young program students.

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For inclusion in the Calendar, please send notices to
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Note: Check events calendar townofotisma.com for up-to-date notifications/cancellations.

MAY

NOTE:

1. **Otis Town Hall is open from 8 am – 3 pm, Monday - Thursday.**
2. **Otis Library Winter Hours (Until May 28):**
 - **Wednesday – 11 am-5 pm**
 - **Thursday – 12 pm-6 pm**
 - **Friday – 11 am-5 pm**
 - **Saturday – 9 am-1 pm**
 - **Closed Sunday, Monday, Tuesday**
3. **Otis Library Summer Hours (Starting May 29):**
 - **Monday – 10 am – 4 pm**
 - **Tuesday – 12 noon – 6 pm**
 - **Wednesday – 10 am – 5 pm**
 - **Thursday – 1 pm – 7 pm**
 - **Friday – 10 am – 5 pm**
 - **Saturday – 9 am – 1 pm**
 - **Closed Sunday**
4. **Rec Center - Temporarily Closed**
5. **Annual Town Meeting, Tuesday, May 16, 7 pm**
6. **Town Election, Tuesday, May 23, 10 am – 7 pm**
7. **Farmington River School Closed May 29 – Memorial Day**
8. **Town Hall Closed May 29 – Memorial Day**

9. **StoryWalk, children and adults will enjoy a reading of “Grandpa Green” by Lane Smith while making a fairy house, fort or artistic creation with materials found on and off the Farmington River Trail, the StoryWalk will be up through May 5.**

Mon., May 1, 9 am – 12 noon, Council on Aging **CHP Wellness Van**. For information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

Mon., May 1, 8, 15 and 22, 10 am – 2 pm, **Council on Aging**, Otis Town Hall, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email at eilabell2@aol.com

Mon., May 1, 7 – 8 pm, **School Committee Meeting**, Farmington River Regional Elementary School

Tues., May 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30, 8:30 am, **Inspirations at <https://www.facebook.com/noticeotis>, Viktoria Seavey**, jumpstart your day with clear intention, centered inspiration and positive imagination, call or email Otis Rec Center for more information **(413) 269-4541, otisrec@verizon.net**

Tues., May 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30, 10 am, **Otis Play**, parent/child playgroup best for children birth – 5 years of age, this is a free program, no registration required, Otis Town Hall

Tues., May 2, 11 am – 12 noon, **Historical Commission Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Wed., May 3, 9 am – 2 pm, Council on Aging Traveling Foot Nurse, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

Thurs., May 4, 11, 18 and 25, 8:30 am, **Inspirations ONLINE at <https://www.facebook.com/noticeotis>, Viktoria Seavey**, jumpstart your day with clear intention, centered inspiration and positive imagination, call or email Otis Rec Center for more information **(413) 269-4541.**

Thurs., May 4, 11, 18 and 25, 10 - 11 am, Chair Yoga, Connie Wilson, Ages 12+, Otis Town Hall, call or email Otis Rec Center for more information **(413) 269-4541, otisrec@verizon.net**

Thurs., May 4, 12 noon, **Council on Aging Out to Lunch** at Russell Inn, Route 20, Russell, for information call Eila at (413) 269-0103 or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

Sat., May 6, 13, 20, and 27, 9:30 – 10:45 am, **Mat Yoga, Connie Wilson**, Ages 16+, Kripalu Yoga, all levels, Otis Town Hall, call or email Otis Rec Center for more information **(413) 269-4541, otis-rec@verizon.net**

Sat, May 6, 9 am – 11 am and 3 pm – 5 pm, **Voter Registration Deadline, Last day to register to vote for the Annual Town Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Mon., May 8, 4 -5 pm, **Board of Assessors Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Mon., May 8, 7 - 9 pm, **Planning Board Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Tues., May 9, 6:30 – 8 pm, Town of Otis **Select Board Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Wed., May 10, 10:30, Exercise Class for the Aging Body, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com, Otis Town Hall

Thurs., May 11, 4 pm, **PTA Meeting (Zoom)**, Farmington River Regional Elementary School

Thurs., May 11, 6 pm, **Otis Library Meeting (In person and Zoom)**, inquire at info@otislibraryma.org for more information

Tues., May 16, 8 am – 5 pm, **Mailed Ballot Deadline, deadline to apply to have a ballot mailed to you**, Otis Town Hall

Tues., May 16, 6 - 9 pm, **Conservation Commission Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Tues., May 16, 7 – 9 pm, **Annual Town Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Wed., May 17, 12 noon – 2 pm, **Council on Aging Potluck Lunch**, entertainment at 1 pm by Davis Bates, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

Wed., May 17, 6 – 7:30 pm, **Cultural Council Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Fri., May 19, 11 am – 12 noon, **Council on Aging Brown Bag Program**, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

May, 2023

Mon., May 22, 8 am – 12 noon, **In-Person Absentee Ballot Deadline, deadline to apply for in person absentee ballot**, Otis Town Hall

Mon., May 22, 10 am – 2 pm, **Council on Aging Haircuts** with Linda Lewis, call for an appointment, Eila at (413) 269-0103 or email Eila at eilabell2@aol.com

Tues., May 23, 10 am – 7 pm, **Town Election, deadline to apply for in person absentee ballot**, Otis Town Hall

Tues., May 23, 6:30 – 8 pm, **Town of Otis Select Board Meeting**, Otis Town Hall

Mon., May 29, **Memorial Day, Town Hall Closed**

Wed., May 31, 9 am, Council on Aging Board Meeting, Otis Town Hall, for information call Eila at **(413) 269-0103** or email at eilabell2@aol.com

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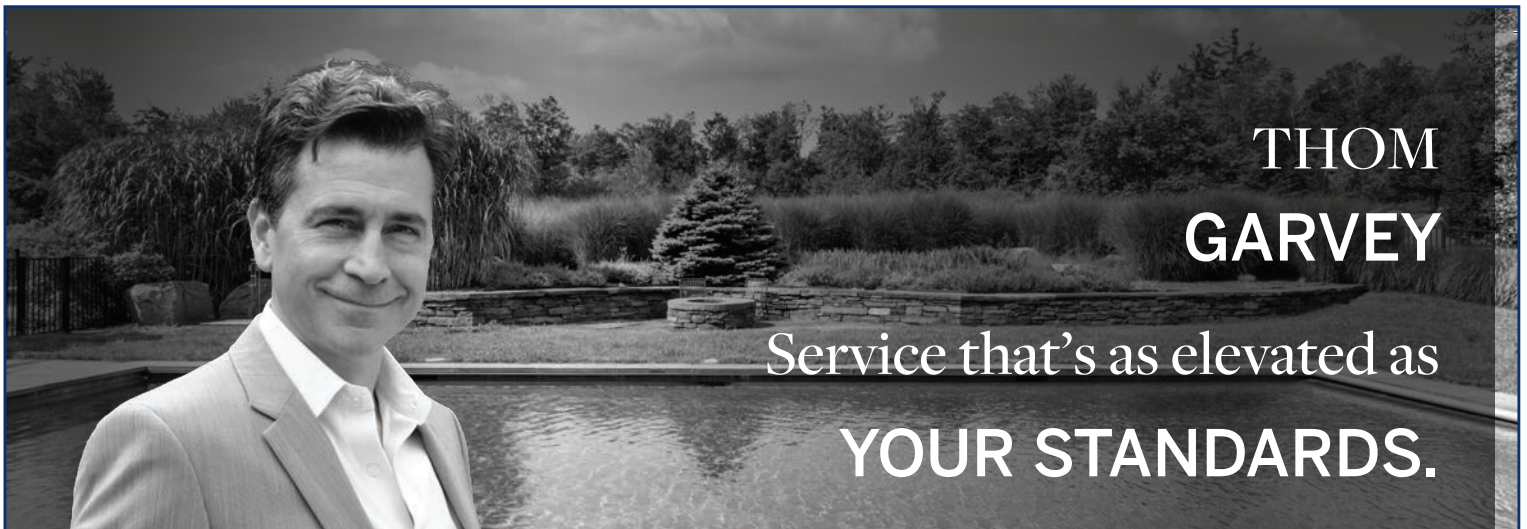
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