

2010 - Play it again! A look back at the top 10 stories of 2010

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Tri-Town Transcript - Posted Dec 30, 2010 @ 01:52 PM

Boxford Middleton Topsfield —

The Tri-Town Transcript takes a look back at the last 12 months of 2010 - from the wild weather to the political scene - it was quite a year!

1.) New Masco superintendent named

One year after the initial search process began, the Masconomet School Committee selected a candidate for superintendent of the regional school. During a Saturday meeting, the committee chose Tyngsboro School Supt. Dr. Darrell Lockwood, a New Hampshire resident. The Regional School Committee chose Lockwood in a 10-to-1 vote, with member Ken Vogel dissenting.

The original search process, which began early last year following the announced retirement of Superintendent Claire Sheff-Kohn, was thwarted when one of two finalists chose to withdraw from the race at the 11th hour. The Committee chose to restart the search process in the fall of 2009 and, in the meantime, hired former Shrewsbury Supt. Anthony Bent as an interim superintendent for the 2009-10 year.

Lockwood's first day on the job was July 1.

2.) Violent Nor'easter KO's power, fells trees

Winds as strong as 75 miles per hour tore through the Tri-Towns and caused power outages in the majority of homes in both Topsfield and Boxford on Feb. 25. Power was out for some local residents as long as three days.

According to the National Grid Web site, 65,000 customers in Essex County lost power during the storm. During the height of the outages, 2,500 out of the 3,000 Boxford customers served by National Grid did not have power and power in nearly 2,000 of the 2,636 homes in Topsfield was out, according to National Grid.

Middleton, with its own electric light department, had very few major incidents and no widespread power outages. Sgt. Gayle Haley said that there was one incident involving a tree that fell on a parked car and one that fell on a house.

3.) Drowned man may have fallen asleep in floodwaters

A Topsfield man may have fallen asleep and drowned while pumping out his Middleton business during the torrential rainstorm on March 16.

The body of John Liston, 49, was found inside U.S. Casting on Birch Road by his father, James Liston. Middleton police said Liston was alone in the building, pumping floodwaters overnight. Police speculated that he might have fallen asleep and drowned.

Paramedics from the Middleton Fire Department said Liston was unresponsive in the water when they arrived. He was pronounced dead a short time later. Police said foul play was not suspected.

Liston was the owner on record of U.S. Casting, which fabricates polyethylene castings for various uses.

Severe flooding in all three towns led to the closing of roads, businesses and schools as well as flood damage to basements across the Tri-Town area during the March storm.

4.) Breaking ground at Howe-Manning School

Over 350 small construction helmets looked over the future site of the Howe-Manning Elementary School and, as one legislator said it, the future of Middleton. Despite the cold and dreary weather on April 28, state and local officials were all in attendance to take part in the beginning of another 75-year cycle for Middleton schools.

“It seems as though every 75 years we make a major change,” said selectmen chairman and Middleton teacher Nancy Jones. She said that the Howe-Manning was built 75 years ago using funds from a stimulus package created to battle the Great Depression.

Construction on the school was already underway at the time of the groundbreaking.

5.) ‘Write-in’ campaign unseats incumbent

While he did not pull papers from the Election Office, gather signatures, or campaign for a Topsfield selectmen’s seat, Eldon Goodhue accepted the duties and responsibilities of his write-in victory as if he had, pledging full dedication to the work of the prominent board.

Goodhue said he was floored by the victory and simply could not believe that 500-plus people actually remembered his name on Election Day.

On the morning after the election, Goodhue said, “It kind of shocked me to see the numbers...for people to walk in that booth and remember my name and to write it down...I am just so humbled.”

6.) New Coalition forms to tackle tough issues

Is there an increasing amount of drug/alcohol abuse among youngsters in the Tri-Towns? How can the Tri-Town communities work to reduce at-risk behaviors and substance abuse among kids in the towns of Boxford, Middleton and Topsfield?

A new coalition — made up of Tri-Town people from many segments of the community — was recently established under the umbrella of the Tri-Town Council, a non-profit group that services the three towns.

Last spring residents from all corners of the Tri-Town community — police enforcement, churches, schools, parents, businesses, health officials and civic groups — were invited by Tri-Town Council’s Lisa Teichner, programs and operations director, to join the new coalition, which has been named the Tri-Town Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition.

“We’ve spent the last several months investigating what other communities do,” said Teichner who mentioned one of the chief goals is to “reduce access to alcohol and other drugs. “We don’t want to see parents or older siblings providing alcohol to youth. And adults should be locking up prescription drugs, too.

7.) Masco teachers’ contract settled

The Masconomet School Committee and Masconomet teachers signed a three-year contract recently that provides 7 percent in salary increases over the course of the contract. Teachers, however, agreed to increase their contributions in health insurance that partially offsets the salary increases.

While town administrators in the three towns voted against the contract, the Masconomet School Committee felt there was an open line of communication with the Masconomet Teachers’ Association, the union made up of roughly 150 teachers in Masconomet Middle and High School.

“We went in, on both sides, with a real understanding of the fiscal realities we are facing. We spent a lot of time up front talking about those types of things,” said School Committee Chairman Daniel Volchok.

Volchok said increases in health insurance contributions for teachers will, overall, counteract 2 percent of the 7 percent in salary increases, leaving teachers with what is effectively a 5 percent increase for teachers over the three-year contract.

8.) Boxford library plan wins in a close contest

Supporters of the Boxford Library project held their collective breath in the lobby of the Spofford Pond School as Steve Knowles read off the 2010 election results. A few minutes later, the small crowd erupted into cheers of triumph when it became apparent that the library question had passed.

The vote on the Boxford library was a close contest — the project passed by only 108 votes out of a total 4,176 votes cast. Interestingly, there were 77 blanks recorded on the library election ballots.

Voter turnout was high in Boxford with 70 percent of registered voters flocking to the polls to cast votes for governor, U.S. Congress and the four ballot questions including number four, the library debt exclusion.

A total of 2142 people voted for the library, and 2034 voted against the \$7.26 million plan. Forty percent, or \$2.78 million of the project cost will be funded by a state grant.

9.) Hudak wins Tri-Town vote, but falls short of victory

When Boxford’s Bill Hudak took to the stage at the Boston Marriott Peabody on Election night to deliver his concession speech, he spoke from the heart.

“I’m absolutely speechless because I don’t want to ever feel like I didn’t give my absolute best,” he said. “Every person in this room: Let me tell you from the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything you’ve done.”

“My whole life has been dedicated to trying to live with the values my parents instilled in me. Honesty, integrity,” Hudak continued.
“This campaign has lived up to that. Everything we did we did, we did it because it was right.”

10.) Mortimer Road home destroyed in fire

The Sholomith family home on Mortimer home in Boxford was destroyed by fire, but thankfully no one was home at the time and the family’s dog and cat both escaped the fire on Saturday, Nov. 20.

The family of Martin “Marty” and Sue Sholomith, longtime Boxford residents, were staying with friends after the fire ripped through their home. The Sholomith couple has two grown children who are away at college, and two children who attend Masconomet High School.

The fire started because of a faulty dryer, according to the state fire marshal’s office.

Boxford Fire Chief Kerry Stickney estimated the fire damages at roughly \$500,000.

“Unfortunately, no one was home to hear the fire alarms going off,” observed Chief Stickney who pointed out that the Sholomith’s home is in an isolated area located on Mortimer Road off Main Street.

The family’s golden retriever, who was in the garage, made it out to safety, said Boxford firefighters, and when the family returned to their damaged home on Sunday, their pet cat was also found wandering through the yard.

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