Holiday market opens

Holiday shoppers looking for unique, handcrafted gifts will find plenty of inspiration at the Flanders Holiday Artisan Marketplace, opening Saturday, November 7, at the historic Van Vleck House, at 5 Church Hill Road in Woodbury.

One of the largest artisan marketplaces in the region, this beloved annual tradition features the work of more than 70 local artisans and makers. Visitors can browse an ever-changing selection of handmade gifts, holiday décor, jewelry, pottery, fiber art, scarves, quilts, wreaths, soaps, ornaments, local honey and maple syrup, children's items, fine art, and much more.

Beautifully decorated for the holiday season, the Van Vleck House provides a warm and festive shopping experience while supporting local artists and craftspeople. Whether searching for the perfect holiday gift or a special treat for yourself, the Marketplace offers something for everyone.

"The Holiday Artisan Marketplace has become a cherished tradition for many families as they begin their holiday shopping," said Vince LaFontan, Executive Director of Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust. "We're proud to showcase the incredible talent of local artisans while providing visitors with a festive shopping experience that supports both local makers and Flanders' environmental education and land conservation programs."

The Holiday Artisan Marketplace will celebrate its Grand Opening on Saturday, November 7, and will remain open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Wednesday, December 23. The Marketplace will be closed on Thanksgiving Day.

By shopping at the Flanders Holiday Artisan Marketplace, visitors support both local artisans and Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust's environmental education and land conservation programs.



Right: Shoppers at a previous Artisans Marketplace browse through gift selections in the main room of the Van Vleck House. The marketplace is a Flanders Nature Center fundraiser. (Submitted photo)

Obituaries

Robert R. Bellemare



It is with deep regret that we announce that Robert R. Bellemare, 80, of Oxford and formerly of Middlebury, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, at St. Francis Hospital surrounded by his loving family. He was the beloved husband of Felicia M. (Tumel) Bellemare.

Bob was born in Waterbury, Conn., on August 25, 1946, son of the late Harry P. and Velma L. (Cyr) Bellemare. He grew up in Wolcott and graduated in 1964 from Wolcott High School, where he excelled in baseball. He earned his associate's degree in marketing from Post University.

Bob was a three-sport athlete with baseball and basketball highlighting his early years, while golf became his life-long love. He played baseball for the Gleem Painters of the Twi-Met League. During his pitching career with the team, they won two trips to the amateur tournament in Battle Creek, Mich., the largest, most competitive gathering of amateur players in the country.

He was scouted by several major league teams, ultimately being drafted by the Detroit Tigers in the second round of the 1967 winter drafts. At age 19, Bob chose to sign a professional baseball contract with the San Francisco Giants. During spring training for the Giants' AAA roster, he was fortunate to play inter-squad games with Willie Mays, Juan Marichal, Willie McCovey, Gaylord Perry, Bobby Bonds, and George Foster. Bob was the first pitcher to sign a professional baseball contract from Gleem Painters, and had a very successful baseball career over four years in the Giants' farm system. In 1968, Bob made the all-star team in the Midwest league and had Carlton Fisk as his catcher in that game. He was awarded the Wolcott Circle of Sports Hall of Fame Award in 1997.

Bob's career in advertising began at Anaconda American Brass, where he was promoted to ad director at age 32. His career continued in sales at Cahners' Publishing for 23 years before the company was acquired by publisher Reed Elsevier. Bob was a top performer, winning five President's Club Awards. He retired from Reed- Elsevier at age 62 in 2009, but continued consulting work for ebmPapst of Farmington, Conn., until his final retirement in March of 2025.

He was an avid golfer who maintained a five handicap and was a member of both the Watertown Golf Club and the Pequabuck Golf Club. He also played at Oxford Greens, where he lived just off the 11th tee in his later years. Over his golf career, he had three Holes-In-One.

In retirement, Bob also enjoyed working in his yard and garden. He especially delighted in time with his cherished grandson, Finn, working in his workshop, going for golf cart rides, and just being together. Bob also had an appreciation for classic cars and totally reconditioned a 1963 Impala SS that won trophies at many local car shows.

Besides his wife Felicia of 56 years, he leaves to honor and cherish his memory; his daughter, Pamela Bellarose and her wife Jessica of Boston, Mass,; a grandson, Finn Bellarose of Boston, Mass.; a brother, James H. Bellemare and his wife Vivian of Bristol; a sister, Jackie Bellemare Banks and her companion James Lapan of Shelton; two sisters-in-law, Sandra Festa of Terryville and Maryanne Castaldi and her husband Richard of Waterbury; many much-loved nieces and nephews who enjoyed his story telling; and many cherished friends, neighbors, and golfing buddies. He was predeceased by his brother, Mark Bellemare and brothers-in-law, Walter Tumel, Jr. and Vincent Festa.

Robert's Mass of Christian Burial was October 27, 2026, at the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Waterbury. Burial will be at the convenience of the family. All expressions of sympathy, including honorary donations to a favorite charity, are welcome. For more information or to send e-condolences, visit www.chaseparkway-memorial.com.

To leave an online condolence visit munsonloveterefuneralhome.com.

Vivien Van Wagner



Vivien Van Wagner (née Rafford) of Syosset, N.Y., and Middlebury, Conn., died on September 5, 2026, after a short illness.

She was born in April 1945, in Brooklyn, N.Y., to Albert and Jessie Rafford. She was predeceased by her husband of 46 years, John Van Wagner.

Vivien graduated John Jay High School and Packer Junior College with honors, where she was class president and commencement speaker. She subsequently earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from C. W. Post University.

She started her career at Bankers Trust, eventually becoming assistant vice president. She served as clerk/treasurer of Muttontown, N.Y. She also worked as a paralegal and photographer.

She is survived by sisters Jane Mann of N.J. and Pamela Rafford of N.Y.; brothers Robert Rafford (Joan) of Conn. and Brian Rafford (Margaret) of N.Y.; also, nephew Brian K. Rafford (Erin O'Neill) and niece Priscilla Mann (Casey Woodruff). She was predeceased by brother William Rafford and nephew Theodore Mann.

She leaves sister-in-law Bobbi Godleski and her children Kevin (Kirsten) Godleski, Eric (Helen) Godleski, daughter Kristen (Bela) Vincze.; and sister-in law JoAnn Vetter (Robert) and their daughter, Teri (Jeff Roncone).

She was particularly close to dear friends Dayle and Irwin Zaretsky and their children, whom she also considered her niece and nephews: Missy (Glen), Hugh, and Ari (Georgia).

Vivien was smart, kind, and extremely generous. She loved and supported the arts. There were no calling hours. A celebration of her life will be held at a later date. Services are being handled by Beney Funeral Home of Syosset.

To honor Vivien's memory, you may wish to support her favorite charity: Doctors Without Borders USA, P.O. Box 5022, Hagerstown, MD 21741, or go to www.doctorswithoutborders.com.

In Brief ... *Cont'd from page 6*

Mattatuck lecture

The Mattatuck Museum will host a lunch and learn with a lecture by guest speaker James Coppa on "Religion in American Federal Indian Law" Wednesday, November 11, from 12 to 1 p.m. Coppa, educator at the Institute for American Indian Studies and graduate student at Hartford International University, will provide a look at how early U.S. courts weaponized theology to justify Native land theft and displacement. Explore how legal rulings shaped definitions of religious freedom and human rights, and why centering Indigenous perspectives on the law is essential as the U.S. celebrates 250 years. Bring your own lunch or order ahead at Sweet Bella @ The MATT. The event fee is $10 for nonmembers; $5 for members. Register at mattmuseum.org.

Genealogy Club

The Naugatuck Valley Genealogy Club will meet at the Prospect Public Library at 17 Center Street in Prospect on Saturday, November 14, at 10:30 a.m. Following a brief business meeting, historian Walt Woodward will present "The Burning Question about Nathan Hale." What really happened to Nathan Hale and what truths have been hidden in the telling? In this compelling lecture, Woodward will revisit the final days of Connecticut's legendary Revolutionary War hero, whose execution was as swift as it was controversial.

Members and guests may attend in person at the Pros=pect Library or via Zoom. Nonmembers can request a Zoom invitation by sending an email with their full name, address, telephone number and email address to nvgcguests26@gmail.com no later than noon, Thursday, November 12, 2026.

Stuff the Bus

Middlebury Elementary School, the MES PTO, First Student and the Middlebury Mentors will hold a "Stuff the Bus" event food drive to benefit the Middlebury Food Bank Saturday, November 14, from 11 a.m. to noon at Middlebury Elementary School at 550 Whittemore Road in Middlebury. Please donate pancake mix, syrup, peanut butter, jelly, canned tuna, soups (chicken and vegetable), canned suppers (stew and chili/Chef Boyardee). rice boxes or bags, mashed potatoes (box or packages), pasta, pasta sauce, cereal, cake or cookie mix, frosting and lunchbox snacks along with nonfood items shampoo (child/adult), deodorant and soap (adult/child). Cash or gift cards will also be accepted.

SMART meeting

SMART's Local Prevention Council meeting will be Thursday, November 19, at 6 p.m. in Room 206 at Southbury Town Hall. For more information, including the room number, email smart@smartinc.org or check on Facebook at www.facebook.com/region15SMART.

Parent Connection

The Parent Connection, a support group for those whose loved ones are using or abusing substances, meets Tuesday nights from 7 to 9 p.m. in Father Fanning Hall at St. John of the Cross Church at 1263 West Street in Middlebury. Enter on the lower level on the Westover side of the parking lot.

Free meal

Master's Table Community Meals is partnering with Huntington Congregational Church in Shelton to offer free Thanksgiving dinner for pick up only Sunday, November 22, from 2 to 3 p.m. or until the food runs out at 19 Church St. in Shelton. This is a drive-up meal only; please remain in your vehicle. For more information, call 203-732-7792 or visit masterstablemeals.org.

Committee

... *cont'd from* **Pg 1**

Vance nor Shaban would second the motion.

Before the motion was made, Mahr first addressed Vance's October 5 concerns, explaining there would be no historic district. Instead a homeowner would voluntarily ask for their home to be declared an historic property. She also said only nonprofits get a tax exemption, so there would be no tax exemption for privately owned homes.

Vance said he still wanted a study committee, a report and then a town meeting on the matter. Shaban said lots of people were apprehensive about having an HPC. He did not say why they were apprehensive.

Vance again expressed concern about bias but did not specify the bias or how he believed it would affect the committee or its work. He said he had done a deep dive into the folks suggested for the committee, investigating their backgrounds and history and so on and so forth. He said he thought things were being done backwards and they needed to do them properly. He said the first step was for the BoS to appoint a study committee. He was unwilling to appoint the committee recommended by the group that had worked on the project for nearly two years.

Shaban said there's a lot of apprehensiveness between the public. "I had a lot of people reach out to me personally that have moved from Litchfield with pretty bad experiences and just concerned," he said.

Mahr responded by saying the BoS is not forcing the town to have this or sticking in stone who the commissioners are. "We are not creating a historic district that then homeowners are are compelled to be in," she said. Vance responded, "We know all that."

Stuller, who was present, tried to interrupt to state Vance was making statements that were factually incorrect. He was stopped because it wasn't yet time for public comment. Vance responded by saying, "It (the committee) should be appointed by the Board of Selectmen, not just a group of your friends to get together and make it happen."

Mahr again explained to Vance that the study would be for one particular property.

Stuller asked to make one comment and was allowed to do so, saying in part, "The study committee is not to study the concept of a historic properties commission. That's not what it's about. That's not what I said. That's not what's in writing. That's not the general statutes. The study committee is to study a building, one building, not a district. We don't want to do a district. It's our suggestion to study one building, come back and say this building is historic for the following reasons. And here's the thing: the study committee is not to investigate and opine on whether the town should do a historic properties commission, that's a different thing. Jen's right. That's your decision, but the committee is to do one thing and then the committee is disbanded."

Shaban then said, "...the charter very clearly states that you should do, before you do the committee, you do the study committee, and if everything prefaced, if everything is going to be prefaced on what the findings are of the study committee. I would feel a lot more comfortable if we reached out to the entire public to see who might be interested in serving on it. Especially if people are going to be very nervous about what comes out of it, it may give it a lot more faith and trust."

Mahr asked Shaban what people are nervous about saying, "We are not doing a district, so there is no geographic boundary in which everyone in there is blindly signed up for this and they didn't get any participation. This is a individual homeowner has the opportunity to take advantage of this process if they choose."

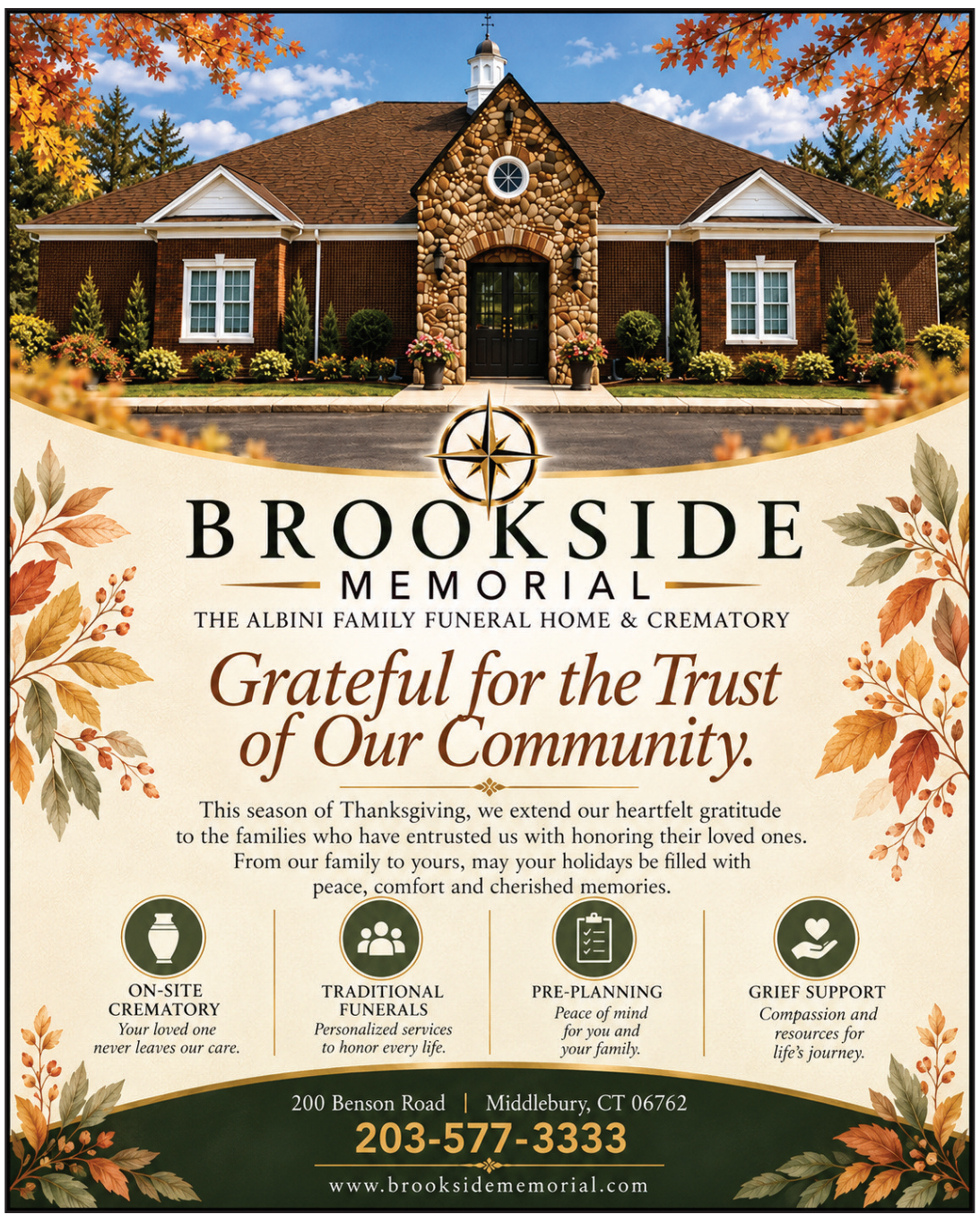
Shaban responded people were nervous because "it's going to build a precedent based on what happens here moving forward it would set precedent."

The three continued to disagree on the matter without reaching a compromise.

At one point, Vance offered what he felt was a good example of what he believed was going on using eliminating the police department. He said, "They want to eliminate the police department, and they get together and they put together a report. They bring it in and they put it down and say, 'All right, Jennifer, let's eliminate the police department...' Well, they're all anti-police people. Now, now we're just going to eliminate the police department because what they put in front of us. That's what you're asking us to do here with the historic properties commission."

When the disagreement had gone on for 37 minutes, Mahr called the question, made the motion, and Vance and Shaban failed to second the motion.

The Board of Selectmen will meet next on Monday, November 2, at 5 p.m. in the Town Hall Conference Room. Mahr has announced interviews for town counsel are scheduled for the meeting so the matter of appointing a study committee for the Judd Hill Road property will be taken up again at the Monday, November 16, 2026, meeting.



Remember to support our local advertisers who make this newspaper possible.