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JULY 2021

VOLUME 1 EDITION 10



NEW FIRE CHIEF
HEADING TO TOWN



FEDERAL DOLLARS
TO HELP TOWN,
SCHOOLS



SAND STRATEGY
AT BEACHES



PAVING, SIDEWALKS
FOR WOOLSEY ROAD
NEIGHBORHOOD

MIDDLETOWN TODAY

Gaudet Fifth Graders Publish A Book About Living Through COVID-19

“When The World Was Masked” Draws Strong Reviews

COVID-19 has impacted everyone across the globe in the past year.

Fifth graders in the Gaudet Learning Academy recently published a hardcover book about their experiences in school, at home and beyond to provide the perspective of 10- and 11-year-olds living through the pandemic.

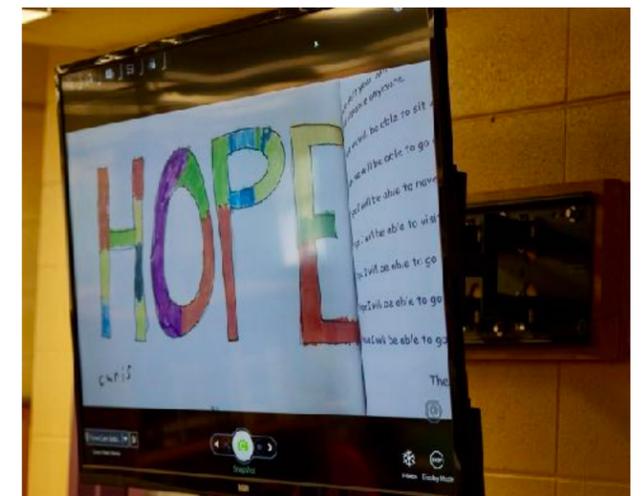
Called “When The World Was Masked,” the book is available online at [Studenttreasures.com/ordercopies](https://www.studenttreasures.com/ordercopies) using the PIN No. 7151927. Books can also be ordered by calling (800) 867-2292. A copy of “Masked” was donated by the class to the library of the Aquidneck Avenue school as well.

Unveiled to the public today during a media event, students talked about their contributions to the book and answered questions about how their world has changed, among other topics.



“To see the progress they’ve made and how they’ve matured this year is amazing,” said Chyleene O’Connor, who co-teaches the class with Tricia Jenkins and Deb O’Bryan. “I feel like this is going to truly be part of their history, something they talk to their kids and grandkids about and the best part about this entire experience is they wrote it.”

The cover of “Masked” features the title of



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Hanley said while the road was ripped up before, the Town did all the necessary sewer and stormwater repairs so the fresh coat of pavement doesn’t need to be disturbed.

“National Grid was great to work with on this,” Hanley said. “They were very accommodating and it just makes sense to go in and do it once and do it right so we don’t need to disturb the neighborhood again for a while.”

In recent years, when working in an area, the Town tries to coordinate all road, sewer, stormwater, gas, water and sidewalk infrastructure upgrades at once. That way, newly paved roads aren’t cut and patched unnecessarily and interruptions are kept to a minimum. By doing all the work at once, there’s typically a cost savings to the community.

Hanley said work in the neighborhood started earlier this month. On work days, there’s typically a flagger posted to assist vehicles looking to exit Woolsey Road onto West Main Road, the busy four-lane road that goes through the center of town.

While work was ongoing, Hanley said traffic in Commodore Perry Village will be restricted to local vehicles only. He also asked that motorists use the one-way Buck Road Extension to exit the neighborhood whenever possible.

“We appreciate everyone’s patience while the work is going on,” Hanley said. “Once it’s all done, it’s going to be much, much better than what’s out there, with all new sidewalks too. I’m really excited this work is getting done.”

Commodore Perry Village resident Jackie Affonso said she appreciated the project, which she said was welcomed. So far, she said the project was making major strides and the progress is obvious.

“I am looking forward to a new street,” Affonso said. “However, I had no idea they are looking to install sidewalks too. That’s great. The road project is long overdue.”



the book along with a hand draw picture from fifth grader Gwendolyn May of two hands holding the planet Earth, which is partially covered with a mask. Based on what students shared from the upstairs library that's doubled as their classroom this year, that image tells just part of the tale of the book, which started in January. For some, COVID-19 brought initial concerns and fears of the unknown, which were later dissipated by "silver linings" like spending more time with family and pets. To others, it was finding new ways to keep busy because playing with friends and traveling was off limits. While there were similarities among some of the stories, each student found a way to focus on different components of the COVID-19 experience, including one who outlined the impact of the toilet paper shortage. O'Connor said students and staff worked hard on "Masked." Much like best-selling novels or other popular books, "Masked" went through several revisions, at least three to the text alone. And that doesn't include the rewrites and improvements made by the students. Throughout, students shared ideas and helped each other

out, all to help better convey their message concisely in a way to best get their points across.

O'Connor said the book was the endgame, but the process of learning along the way was just as important.

"We did many, many drafts," O'Connor said, smiling. "It was a good way for the students to share their thoughts and experiences and I feel like I learned a lot about each and every one of them through this process."

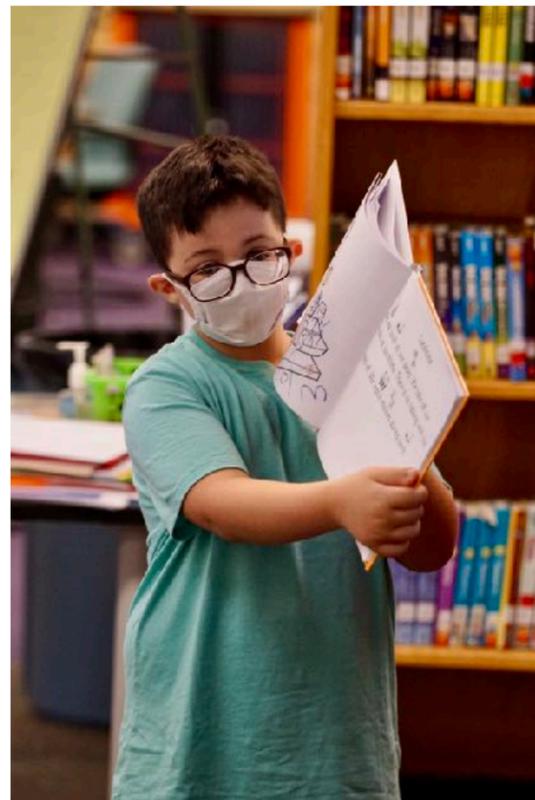
To a person, students said that there was no question COVID-19 transformed their world and they were all happy to see things returning more to normal.

"I think it made a big impact on school," fifth grader Ella Robson said. "It taught me a lot about people."

When Jorge Pacheco started writing his section of "Masked," he said he did so with his mother in mind.

"We dedicated it (the book) to our families because they helped us through the pandemic," Jorge said.

Several students said they were inspired so much by the process that they planned on writing – or had already started writing – books of their own.



Looking to find a better alternative, the Town ceased bulldozing the area and now the water daylight south of the Third Beach boat ramp. That happens after stormwater has been filtered through a marsh on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service property.

"What a lot of people don't realize is the Maidford River originally emptied out where Surfer's End is on Second Beach," Brown said. "It was routed all the way over to Third Beach and we're trying to address it as best we can in a more natural, holistic type way."

Overall, town staff said the moves in the beach area are reflective of a low impact-high return approach.

Instead of building costly infrastructure that relies on complicated solutions, the Town is using low tech, environmentally sound alternatives wherever possible. This approach is encouraged both on the state and national levels.

"The way it used to be, everyone used to try to build their way out of these issues," Brown said. "Today, it's a totally different approach, where we work hard to design solutions that make sense -- low impact, high return kind of projects. There are examples all over town from Middletown Valley all the way to our beaches."

Commodore Perry Village Upgrades Underway

National Grid Covering Almost The Entire Costs Of Paving

The Commodore Perry Village neighborhood off West Main Road is getting new roads and sidewalks.

Thanks to an arrangement worked out with National Grid, almost the entire area will be repaved at no cost to the Town of Middletown. The roads getting redone by JH Lynch & Sons include Bristol Road, Buck Road, Ludlow Road, Ludlow Terrace and Woolsey Road.



Recently, National Grid asked the Town if it was interested in having Lynch upgrade the sidewalks in the neighborhood, known locally at Commodore Perry Village. Public Works Director Robert Hanley said after reviewing the pricing from the Cumberland firm, the Town jumped at the opportunity to get the sidewalks redone at the same time.

If everything goes according to schedule, the project was expected to be wrapped up by the end of the summer.

"Last year, National Grid put in new gas services to the homes in Commodore Perry and after that, they had some

asphalt restoration to do," Hanley said. "We sat down with them and they agreed to grind two inches of the (existing) pavement and put down new pavement. That's going to extend the life of the road for another 20 years."

Leave It Where It Lays

Town Tries A More Natural Strategy At Area Beaches

For years, Town of Middletown staff would relocate sand at Sachuest Beach where it believed it should go.

This year, the Town is trying a new tact and letting Mother Nature call the shots in many areas of the beach instead.

Like the Town's more recent move to not bulldoze sand from the mouth of the Maidford River at nearby Third Beach, local leaders said the change is more natural, less time consuming and makes sense in the long run.



"Year after year, we'd move tons of sand from in front of the concession stand and we'd need to do it all over again by the next season," Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. "This year, there was a discussion and a consensus that we should leave (the sand) where it is and see how it goes. That's where nature intended it, so why fight it, especially when it doesn't interfere with the operation of the beach."

Every spring leading up to the opening of the beaches on Memorial Day weekend, it was commonplace to see big machinery working in front of the main concession building at 315 Sachuest Point Road.

Mounds and mounds of sand would be cleared to give the area a clear view to the water, taking precious work hours away from other projects to get the beaches ready for the busy summer season.

As part of that prep work, paths through the dunes were also cleared of excess sand so beachgoers could get where they wanted.

However, the award of federal beach resiliency money in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, the town was encouraged to keep the more natural, rounded look of the dunes in place. That way, the dunes could do their job and help keep seawater out of the parking lot.

Town officials said the move has allowed the dunes to grow uninterrupted and helped create a sturdier, more environmentally sound dune system that don't require nearly as much maintenance.

In 2016, the Town adopted a similar approach to the mouth of the Maidford where it had been emptying into the Sakonnet River near the Town Beach on Third Beach Road. For decades, public works staff used a bulldozer to remove sand washing in from the Sakonnet that plugged the outlet for the Maidford under a culvert.

"I'm already working on a book with my sisters because of this," fifth grader Vivienne Bright said. "It's going to take a while to do, but it's a fairy tale we came up with."

"It energizes you to write a book," fifth grader Molly Spells said. "It seems like a good project I'd like to do with some free time this summer."

As for the restrictions of COVID-19 lifting somewhat, students said they were looking forward to seeing family and friends more and enjoying the summer.

"I'm very excited to see my family," fifth grader Brystol Rodrigues said. "I haven't seen my great grandmother in a while because of COVID."

"It will be nice to go places and see people a bit more," fifth grader Caryn Terpening said. "We weren't really able to do that much last year."

In the meantime, everyone agreed they'd like to see COVID-19 in the past as much as possible. Those sentiments might have been best summed up by fifth grader Cameron Costa.

"I can't wait to not wear a mask," Cameron said, clearly smiling behind his mask throughout the event. "I want to see my friends' faces."



New Chief For Middletown Fire

James R. Peplau has extensive experience in Waterbury, Connecticut

The Town of Middletown has a new permanent fire chief.

On Monday night, the Town Council unanimously appointed James R. Peplau as the new fire chief following an executive session discussion from Town Hall.

Peplau takes over from Interim Chief Kevin P. Partridge, who served for a couple weeks after Interim Chief Robert McCall asked to return to his role prior to the COVID-19 outbreak as battalion chief.

Town officials welcomed Peplau, saying he's a consensus builder who has extensive experience with fire services, including more than 25 years with the Waterbury Fire Department in Connecticut. Most recently, Peplau has served as battalion chief since 2011 for the 235 member Waterbury department.

A specific date for Peplau to start his new position was not set Monday night, but he was expected to begin in coming weeks.

"Chief Peplau certainly checked all the boxes for us," Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. "He's a proven leader who has thrived in a much larger department who wants

to make a mark here in Middletown and on behalf of the Town, I want to welcome him aboard.”

At the same time, Brown thanked Partridge and McCall for their hard work on behalf of Middletown Fire – and the community as a whole.

“Chief Partridge has done an excellent job filling in for us and continuing to move the department forward,” Brown said. “And as I’ve said before, I think we all know we owe

Chief McCall a debt of gratitude for his work through COVID-19. He helped pull the department together during an extremely difficult time and elevated Middletown Fire much uncertainty due to the pandemic.”

According to his online profile, Peplau describes himself as an accomplished project manager who has secured close to \$19 million in grant funding for fire service and safety projects.

Peplau’s resume also said he has extensive experience in virtually every aspect of firefighting, from prevention, energy steering, training to fire inspection, hazardous materials, paramedics and rescue, among others. Peplau was named the 2017 Waterbury Firefighter of the Year.



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He earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. and a Master of Business Administration from Boston University.

Brown said Peplau comes to Middletown Fire at a good time, with the hiring of eight new firefighters using federal funding aimed at improving fire service. The department also has a new building, state-of-the-art equipment and an experienced, veteran leadership group that’s ready to roll at a moment’s notice.

“Middletown Fire is a proud department, always has been,” Brown said. “If you look back at our chiefs, each one has brought something different to the table and has always moved Middletown Fire in the right direction, leading an extremely talented group of firefighters to serve our community.”

Major Federal Dollars On The Way For Middletown

More Than \$5.5 million Heading To The Town & Schools

The Town of Middletown and its schools are expected to receive more than \$5.5 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds.

According to a brief memo presented recently to the Town Council from Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown, the Town was in line to receive about \$4.7 million in American Rescue Plan dollars.

At the same time, the School Department is expected to get \$957,000 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief money, or ESSER for short.

Town officials said they appreciated the assistance, which would go a long way towards offsetting some of the negative impacts from COVID-19.

“We’re still looking into what we’re going to do with our portion of these one-time federal dollars,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said. “We appreciate all the effort that went into securing this money for us from our federal delegation and all the others who worked to make this a reality for Middletown.”

At the same time, Brown said there was one move everyone could be assured Middletown wouldn’t pursue – plugging holes in the operating budget.

“Because this is one-time funding, if we went in and used this money in our operating budget, we’d be creating a structural deficit,” Brown said. “With everything we do, we want to take a deliberate approach and do what’s right for the Town and our taxpayers.”

Superintendent of Schools Rosemarie K. Kraeger agreed, saying the schools were going to take a measured approach with the federal ESSER money as well.

“We have a tentative plan, but it needs School Committee approval,” Kraeger said. “It also needs to be balanced with the reductions to our budget.”

Federal statistics showed a total of \$350 billion in federal dollars are expected to be awarded to municipalities and other government agencies across the country.

The Biden administration has said the funding was needed to help jumpstart the economy, which faced an “unprecedented strain” from the COVID-19 pandemic. At its height, the Biden administration reported that public sector employment lost about 1.4 million jobs, including layoffs of about 1 million teachers.

As a result, the American Rescue Plan is aimed at turning that tide for state, local, territorial and Tribal governments. That includes \$195 billion to the 50 states, with at least \$500 million to each state, and \$130 billion to local governments like the Town of Middletown.

Town and educational officials said the funding was certainly appreciated to help cover costs. While they acknowledged there might have been savings in some areas, COVID-19 brought on a whole new set of costs that no one could have ever planned for or anticipated.

A couple of examples include the need to staff an emergency phone center in the Middletown Fire Station as well as the opening of a clinic at the Community College of Rhode Island campus to administer vaccinations to the most vulnerable populations of Middletown. In the schools, there was a level of cleaning, air filtration and accommodations for distance learning required like never before.

“I think everyone learned quite a bit coming through the COVID-19 experience,” Brown said. “It made us think about how we do what we do and whether there are more efficient, effective ways to do that important work. I know we’ve incorporated so much that we learned through the pandemic into our everyday work function and our residents and businesspeople should see the difference.”

