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Thursday, March 23, 2006

Forum targets teenage drinking problem

By Donna K. Drago

Next week's panel discussion on underage drinking will provide parents, teens, and members of the community with information on a problem that plagues towns across the country.

The forum, on Tuesday, March 28, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the library, will include representatives from the police department, a liquor store owner, the teen coordinator, the schools' student assistance counselor, and a facilitator from the state, who is a licensed chemical dependency professional. The event is part of the TV Turnoff Week schedule of activities.

According to Laura Hosley, the chairwoman of the island's Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force, who organized the panel discussion, teens typically have their first alcoholic beverage at the age of 13.1 years, which is between grades 8 and 9. Hosley said teens who begin drinking before the age of 15 are four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol than someone who begins drinking after the age of 21.

Furthermore, Hosley said,

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The DOT says blasting to take down the old Jamestown Bridge will begin next month. Photo by Jeff McDonough

First bridge blasting scheduled for April 11

Last night, the state Department of Transportation was expected to announce the biggest kaboom of the year will come not on the Fourth of July, but on Tuesday, April 11, when the center span of the old Jamestown Bridge is scheduled to be blown into the West Passage.

On that day, the DOT will close the new Jamestown Bridge to all traffic between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. and motorists will be asked to seek alternative routes to all their westbound destinations. The demolition will be broadcast live on Cox Cable channel 124 and will be Web cast on www.dot.state.ri.us.

According to the DOT, there will be no safe viewing areas set up for the demolition, but they recommended the Bay Campus of the University of Rhode Island, which has a clear line of sight to the bridge. If there are adverse weather or safety concerns, the demolition may be rescheduled.

Council satisfied with school budget

By Donna K. Drago

The Town Council asked for no further cuts from the School Committee's \$10.67 million budget at their joint work session Tuesday night.

The fiscal year 2007 school spending plan is 5.56 percent higher than this year's school budget and asks the town for a general fund contribution of 4.8 percent.

After the presentation by Superintendent Kathy Sipala, the questions asked by any members of the Town Council were primarily of a clerical nature. The meeting lasted just over one hour.

One new topic that seemed to raise hairs on the backs of the

school board members' necks was on how much money a school department should keep in its reserve fund.

Council President David Long, who had a prior conversation about the matter with Town Administrator Bruce Keiser, asked Keiser to talk about what other towns do with their surplus funds.

Keiser said in South Kingstown, the town in which he recently served as an assistant administrator before taking the Jamestown post, they would take the audited surplus balance and "carry it forward in its entirety" to

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Lawn Ave. school's island future secure for the moment

By Donna K. Drago

At its March 16 meeting, the School Committee discussed how to diffuse growing concern from the community that the Lawn Avenue School will close in the future.

Superintendent Kathy Sipala said she had heard several comments from people that indicated to her that there was a lot of confusion about the middle school's future.

Sipala told the school board, "I don't want to lose one family or one student because of uncertainty." Sipala added, "We have to grapple with this."

Other members of the school board agreed they had also heard

discussion from members of the community about the uncertainty of the Lawn school.

The School Committee agreed that no matter what is decided about the future of the middle school, any changes were not likely to happen for several years.

Concerns began several months ago during School Committee workshops on reorganizing and restructuring geared to tighten up efficiency and costs in the school district.

In January, Councilman Bill Kelly took the discussion a step further by suggesting that the Lawn school be closed and grade

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Town water hookup amendment continued

By Dotti Farrington

Sitting as the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners, the Town Council Monday continued until its April 17 meeting amendment of its regulations on fees for tying into the municipal water system to ensure that all costs would be billed to those connecting, but allowing lower or waived fees for affordable housing.

Spurred by Councilman Michael Schnack, the councilors also held out for more review of a request that has been pending more than a year for an extension of municipal water to a house on East Shore Road, which is outside the municipal water district.

A public hearing was conducted on the regulation change to increase the connection fee from \$2,000 to \$3,000 as an impact

assessment for the capitol reserve fund, and to add installation fees of \$1,850 for connections on town roads and \$3,300 on state roads to reflect actual costs.

The councilors discussed the proposal and decided it needed to be amended to show the installation fees would be the minimum charge with property owners being billed for the actual amount. They also decided by consensus that the regulations should provide for the option of the board to lower or waive fees for affordable housing, with the administration directed to provide criteria to make sure such costs breaks went for non-profit housing, but not to for-profit developers.

The only person to speak at the

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A colorful sign of spring

Spring arrived Monday and these blooming daffodils at BankNewport heralded the new season.

Photo by Andrea vonHohenleiten