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Ticked off

North end residents displayed their concerns about a growing tick problem that has caused Lyme disease for many of them.

Photo by Michaela Kennedy

A dramatic surge seen in the island's deer tick population

By Michaela Kennedy

Deer ticks are down in number to date this year across Rhode Island, according to sampling studies taken recently through the University of Rhode Island. Counts of the noted carriers of Lyme disease, however, are significantly higher in parts of Newport County, and in particular, Jamestown.

Congressman Patrick Kennedy spoke about the health danger Monday morning at Veterans' Memorial Square at East Ferry. Together with Thomas Mather, director of the Center for Vector-Borne Disease at URI, Kennedy stressed the importance of heightened awareness to protect against Lyme disease infection. "Rhode Island consistently has the second highest rate of Lyme disease nationally, and the numbers have tripled in the last 15 years," Kennedy said.

Sampling done near Beavertail State Park showed the tick count in that area jumped 842 percent since last year. A 50-percent increase in tick numbers was found at a creek on North Main Road.

A standardized protocol for tick sampling used by the URI research team is to drag white flannel cloths over the ground in wooded sites, according to Mather. Ticks grab the cloth, hoping to find a warm, blood meal. The researchers count the critters every 30 seconds for a total of 45-minutes at each location. "We collect thousands of ticks each year, and this surveillance effort has provided us with very reliable data regarding changes in tick encounter risk," Mather explained.

Kennedy also said prevention was important. "Much more needs to be done to educate Newport area residents about the risks posed by ticks and the simple strategies we all can employ to protect

ourselves from being bitten."

Mather advised daily self checks to ward against the tiny bugs. "Ticks develop a sneaky way of crawling up the body," he said. Seven people in the waterfront audience raised their hands when asked how many had been stricken with the illness.

Mather continued that a blood test was not necessarily an effective diagnostic screening for Lyme disease. A second blood test is needed after three weeks for comparison of the white blood cell count, as well as a doctor's diagnosis. Mather advised the best defense was prevention, and suggested using insect repellent that contained permethrin. When asked whether it was a safe chemical, he answered, "The product has been used by the military for 20 years."

Earlier in the season, Conservation Commissioner Mark Baker had warned against spraying permethrin in large quantities until more information on its environmental and health effects were known.

Mather suggested some products that worked well to prevent ticks on the body and on pets. When asked if Mather received monetary compensation for promoting the products, Kennedy stepped in to defend the scientist and his research team. He stressed that the biotechnology innovation being developed may not only save lives but become an income-generating revenue for the state in the future. He advised at present to focus on solutions, not on monetary compensation.

Kennedy noted that he and Sen. Jack Reed secured \$440,000 over the past five years to support

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Motorists may find bridge crossing easier some day

EZPass would end use of tokens

By Dotti Farrington

The Rhode Island Turnpike and Bridge Authority (RITBA) is seeking to hire a consultant to evaluate the appropriateness of using an electronic toll collection system that could cost more than \$2 million to install. The system, EZPass, is widely used in the northeast and would replace the system of discounted tokens, David Darlington, authority chairman, reported Monday.

He said authority directors and staff members have been collecting data about such a system for

three years. They are convinced it would provide a valid convenience for users of their Pell - Newport Bridge, the only toll link in the Rhode Island road system. The authority has issued a request for proposals for consultation about the system. No deadline for receipt of proposals was set, according to the chairman.

Darlington said he expects EZ Pass would mean the end of the tokens, but cash tolls would continue to be taken. He said specifics about the collection system, when it would be installed and started, and the impact on toll rates was to be determined in conjunction

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Former town councilors weigh in on barn proposal

By Tom Shevlin

Three years after voters rejected a proposal to site the town's highway barn facility at Lower Taylor Point, debate has raged among council members and island residents alike over new plans on where to locate the much-needed facility.

Now several former town council members are weighing in on a new plan to site the town's highway barn at Upper Taylor Point.

With a vote slated for Aug. 28 on a referendum to either approve or reject a plan adopted by the town council to locate the proposed facility at Upper Taylor Point, the Press sought the opinion of past council members. Several former council members responded to inquiries, and while the current council was

split 3-2 on the location of the facility, former council members were unanimous in their support for the Taylor Point proposal.

Former council president Fred Pease, for one, supports the decision to locate the facility at Taylor Point.

"I've always thought a location in town made the most sense," Pease said when asked if he would support the Aug. 28 referendum.

Pease, who served as council president during what he described as a "toxic tort suit" in which the town was sued by a developer over contamination emanating from the town's landfill, based his decision on both environmental and economic reasons.

See "Barn" on page 14



On target

Henry Pratt was not content to fish from the shore at Saturday's fishing derby. He tried to hook the big one by getting his feet wet. See the fishing derby story on page 15.

Photo by Adrienne Downing