Concord Monitor Story Features The *Beacon*

By Elizabeth Walters
Concord Monitor staff

The questions start near the end of every month. At the Andover Elementary Middle School, around town and in the post office, everybody wants to know the same thing: When is the new Beacon coming out?

In the 15 months since it first published, the Andover Beacon has become the most comprehensive and most popular way for people in town to find out what their neighbors are up to, including who got married, who's serving in Iraq and how the third- and fourth-grade soccer teams did this season. And at a time when readership is declining in most newspaper markets and communities are decrying a fall-off in volunteerism, the Beacon, which is staffed by volunteers, has managed to become a part of community life.

"People are reading about different programs and getting really involved in things," said Doreen Perreault, who writes stories and recruits other reporters as the school "Beacon guide," or section coordinator. "It's kind of pulled the community back together."

The Beacon took its name from a subscription-based newspaper that closed in 2003, said its publisher, Charlie Darling. Its loss was lamented around town, and Darling, who has a background in publishing, became convinced that Andover needed a new paper. He recruited a board of directors and some writers, and in October 2004, the inaugural Beacon rolled off the presses and into every mailbox in town.

The Beacon operates on a few key principles, Darling said. It seeks to provide its readers with valuable news they couldn't find elsewhere, and it does so by delivering to every home in town. It relies on a large network of writers to cover the organizations they're involved in, an approach Darling finds more sustainable than having just a small group of very hardworking volunteers.

"It happens all over town, in spare bedrooms and on kitchen tables," he said. "You just don't stop recruiting new people."

The Beacon has undoubtedly succeeded in involving the community. The latest 24-page issue features articles by more than 35 different authors, and more than 130 residents appear in photos. Darling received five extra pages' worth of content that will have to wait for next time.

Stories that made it in the recent issue include a breakdown of the town's tax rate, a 25-question quiz about the Andover Rescue squad, bulletins from the Soo-Nipi Audubon chapter and the Lake Sunapee Region Visiting Nurse Association, and a firsthand account from resident Bill Matulevich of his work in Red Cross shelters in hurricane-devastated areas of Louisiana.

"It's one more way to get kids to read, because kids love reading the Beacon," said Jane Slayton, the principal of Andover Elementary Middle School.

It's also a good way to get kids to write. Several students have submitted articles.

"I think they like seeing their name in the paper and seeing the fruits of their labor," said Heidi Terwilliger, who's recruited several young writers as the sports Beacon guide.

Simply by mentioning them, the paper has helped with town events, too. Slayton thinks the reason that this year's Veterans Day activities at the school drew more vets than ever before was that the Beacon previewed the event. Likewise, she said, last year's annual school meeting was over in a matter of minutes in part because the Beacon ran stories beforehand explaining every town and school warrant article.

But the Beacon is struggling with its financial model, which Darling compares to public broadcasting. Like PBS, the Beacon gives people content first, then asks for a contribution. The difference between the Beacon and PBS is that the Beacon has only about 1,150 households to ask for help. Only 150 have made contributions so far.

"To be perfectly blunt, no, we can't continue at the level we're at, long-term," Darling said.

The paper operates as a nonprofit, although it's not exempt from federal taxes because it accepts paid advertising. It has no office to incur utility costs, and it owns no computers. It just needs to break even on the approximately $2,500 a month it costs to create, print and distribute an issue. For that to happen, Darling estimates that the paper needs 150 more households to contribute and 80 paid advertisers; the Beacon now has about 60.

The paper is also selling T-shirts, seasonal subscriptions and gift subscriptions for out-of-town readers.

Darling is an optimist, though. Pointing out in the latest issue that the number of contributing households leaves 86 percent of Andover's homes still to write checks, Darling wrote, "I confess to being a 'glass 14 percent full' kind of person." Plenty of people have told him they're going to contribute, he said – they just haven't done so yet.

Overall, Darling's excited that the 60 to 80 hours he puts in on the Beacon each week for a small salary are paying off. Others are quick to credit him with the paper's success, but he credits the whole town.

"The Beacon is not only about the community of Andover; it's by the community of Andover," he said. "It's part of the community of Andover in a very real way."

As the weather grows colder, the town's ski programs are getting under way. The snowmobile trails will open. The Andover Fire Department will hold its poinsettia sale, and the East Andover Fire Department will hold its Christmas tree sale. The East Andover Village Preschool's students plan to turn themselves into reindeer.

Most people will be too busy to take in everything. But in January, they can read about it all in the Beacon.

The rebuilt and remodelled main showroom at the Barn Store shows no sign of the fire that gutted it last July. Photo: Charlie Darling

The Barn Store Bounces Back

By Charlie Darling
Beacon staff

The July 11 electrical fire that badly damaged the main floor and showroom of The Barn Store on Route 4 in Salisbury is just a memory now. On December 10 the repaired and refurbished showroom was reopened for business.

Since the fire, the store had been operating with a greatly reduced inventory, using the undamaged ground floor and rented trailers to accommodate customers. Employees and customers alike are thrilled to have the main floor back in use and to have The Barn Store's full range of inventory available again.

The rebuilding project included some new features as well. There's now a dressing room off the showroom floor, and a kitchen and dining area should be in operation this spring for breakfast and lunch.

The Barn Store is also planning to sell hormone- and antibiotic-free pork, lamb, and beef. The locally raised meat will be available in a variety of cuts including steaks, chops, bacon, legs of lamb, and the like.

The Barn Store is on Route 4 in Salisbury, a bit south of Route 127. It is open seven days a week, Monday through Friday 7 AM to 6 PM, Saturday 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM, and Sunday 9:30 AM to 4 PM. You can reach them at 648-2888.

College Classes Return To Franklin High

New Hampshire Community Technical College (NHCTC) Laconia announces the new Franklin Campus opening to be located at Franklin High School (FHS) on Central Street in Franklin. Eight new evening classes will be offered at FHS starting January 17.

The new courses to be offered will be:

- Accounting I
- Introduction to Business
- Growth and Development of the Young Child
- Introduction to Exceptionalities
- College Composition
- Fundamentals of Mathematics
- American Government
- Introduction to Psychology

Each course will be offered one night a week from 6 PM to 8:45 PM.

"NHCTC Laconia offered college credit courses at FHS for three years starting in 1998," says NHCTC Laconia Interim President Don Morrissey. "The response was always good, and the College would have remained, but the remodeling of the high school created space issues and space needs required us to leave. We're glad to be back."

Laura Cleaves has been hired as the new Franklin Campus Coordinator for NHCTC Laconia. Cleaves held the position of Registrar at the New Hampshire Institute of Art in Manchester for 10 years. Earlier she had been a clerical supervisor at the University of New Hampshire in Manchester.

Representative Jim Ryan of Franklin has been instrumental in bringing college programming back to FHS and has advocated well for NHCTC Laconia's return. Support has followed from Franklin School Superintendent Dr. Robert McKenney and FHS Principal Dr. Robert Braman.

For additional information and to register for Franklin spring classes, contact Hill at 524-3207 ext. 718 or Rae Gammons ext. 740. Financial aid is available.

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