

WEEKEND WEATHER

via noaa.gov

Friday — Cloudy
Hi 34° Low 21°

Saturday — Mostly Sunny
Hi 38° Low 29°

Sunday — Mostly Sunny
Hi 48° Low 35°

CONSUMER AFFAIRS DIRECTOR PLEADS GUILTY TO TAKING COUNTY FUNDS



ERIC GROSS

Jean Noel is pictured here at a legislative meeting in 2013.

By ERIC GROSS

The latest bombshell to hit county government has resulted in the resignation of Putnam's Consumer Affairs Director Jean Noel after the 64-year-old Kent resident pleaded guilty to taking \$275 from local contractors to satisfy county-issued fines.

The money was intended to end up in county coffers, but didn't.

Noel, who was appointed to the position in 2012 by County Executive MaryEllen Odell, appeared Monday in Carmel Town Court and entered a guilty plea before Justice Joseph Spofford to

(See FUNDS on Page 6)

Lead Poisoning Worries Putnam Residents

By ERIC GROSS & VIRGINIA CALIFANO

Fifty three cases of lead poisoning have been confirmed in Putnam County from 1993 to 2016 with the majority in the greater Cold Spring and Brewster areas.

Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Michael Nesheiwat brought the alarming news to members of the county Legislature's Health Committee Thursday evening when providing an update to the committee members Barbara Succimarra, Dini LoBue and Roger Gross in addition to Legislators Carl Albano, Kevin Wright, Joseph Castellano, William Gouldman and Ginny Nacerino, who were also in attendance.

Dr. Nesheiwat said while the 53 cases served as a "wake-up call," there had been a general decline in lead poisoning despite an increase in reporting and testing.

Dr. Peter Gergely of Gergely Pediatrics in Garrison said that although lead poisoning is extremely rare, and he hasn't seen it in his patients in a few years, it is not something to be taken lightly. "You have to catch it early so it doesn't slip into a neurodevelopmental disorder," Dr. Gergely told the Courier. He said the first sign of lead poisoning is anemia.

Both Dr. Gergely and Dr. Nesheiwat recommended that all children aged 12 to 24 months undergo a lead poisoning test by their pediatrician.

Children can become poisoned by lead by ingesting

(See LEAD on Page 6)

Music Turns International in Mahopac

By ERIC GROSS



Oriente Lopez brought the house down at Mahopac High School last week when performing with his quintet during an Evening of Cuban Jazz.

Wednesday's event was so special because Lopez' group performed with members of the Mahopac High School Jazz Band on stage.

Lopez also met with groups of students earlier in the day and reflected on his youth and love for music.

Lopez was born in Havana in 1962 and received 15 years of classical music training at various institutions. His local appearance came as relations between the U.S. and Cuba are improving.

"From an early age I was interested in jazz and popular music," he told the students. At the age of 21, he joined the band, Afro-cuba, serving as music director for seven years.

In 1993, Oriente came to New York City and began working as a pianist, flautist, musical director, composer, arranger and producer. Distinguish-

See Music on Page 2.



Oriente Lopez plays the keyboard with the school band behind.

ERIC GROSS

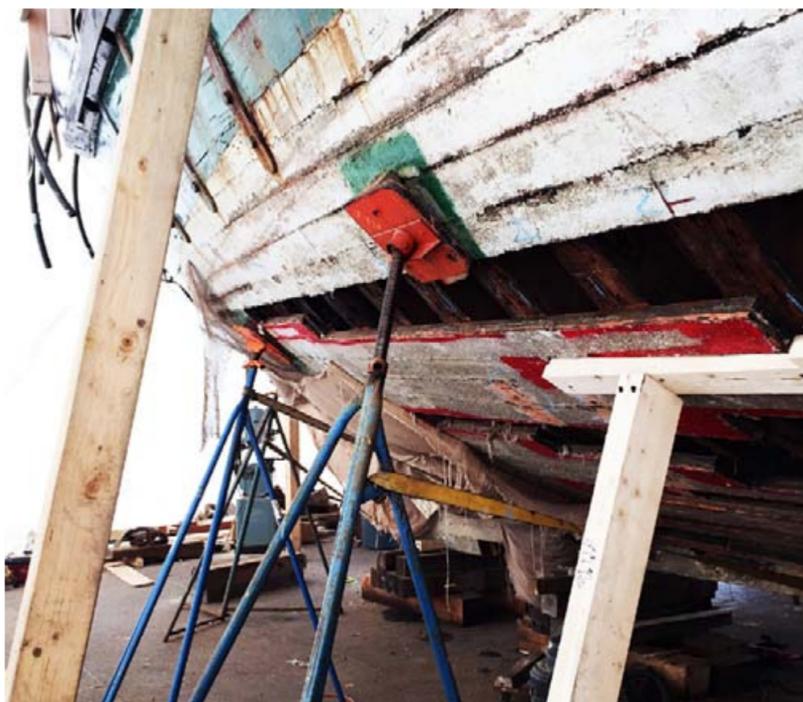
Restoring the Iconic Hudson Sloop Clearwater

By DOUGLAS CUNNINGHAM

The sloop Clearwater, one of the most identifiable and iconic pieces of Pete Seeger's environmental legacy, is now up on blocks and metal supports, its upper structure shrouded in white plastic. Underneath this temporary shelter, workers crawl into, out of and through the 106-foot craft, removing and carefully replacing its wooden frames and planks – virtually all of the wooden pieces amidships below the waterline.

It is painstaking work, removing the deteriorated wood. Placeholders are often needed, because if too much is removed, parts of the ship would simply collapse. Most of the new wooden pieces going back into the sloop are cut individually from oak, then replaced on the ship. Much of

(See CLEARWATER on Page 6)



DOUGLAS CUNNINGHAM

The sloop Clearwater on blocks and metal supports in Kingston. Decaying pieces of the craft amidships and below the waterline are being removed and replaced.

2-Yr-Old Kevin Blackman Dies in His Mother's Arms



ERIC GROSS

Kevin Blackman and his mom, Kelly, at a fundraiser held last year in Carmel.

By ERIC GROSS

Two year old Kevin Blackman has lost the battle but is now with the angels in heaven.

Kevin, the son of Kelly Blackman, passed away on Friday with his mom, godmother, other family members along with doctors and nurses in at-

(See KEVIN on Page 6)

INSIDE:

- CLASSIFIEDS 10
- THINGS TO DO 3
- LEGALS 8, 9
- ARCHIVE 4
- RELIGION 6, 7
- SPORTS 11



Fire

CLOSE CALL FOR HOME IN KENT

PAGE 10

'Evil is powerless if the good are unafraid.'

~Ronald Reagan



New Year

THOUSANDS GATHER FOR CHINESE CELEBRATION

PAGE 5



CLEARWATER (Cont'd from Page 1.)

it is work done by hand.

Launched on May 17, 1969, from the Harvey Gamage Shipyard in Maine, the historically accurate sloop, with its 4,305 square feet of sails, has become one of the most recognized symbols of the Hudson River and environmental education. But today, in recent waters, it's been anything but smooth sailing.

In January, Peter Gross, executive director of the Beacon non-profit, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, announced his resignation. He'd been in place just since May of 2014, and cited "significant differences" between his and the organization's vision for a stronger future for Clearwater.

Sources said the departure was primarily related to a dearth of fundraising.

Board president Anne Osborn, of Garrison, said, "We are grateful to Peter for his non-profit and business experience and the dedication he brought to Clearwater at a very difficult time for the organization. We wish him success and fair winds."

But even now, Clearwater is about \$200,000 short of the final amount needed for the restoration. Dave Conover, education director, said Tuesday that the total project for this restoration work is about \$850,000, with about half coming from the state Office of Parks and Historic Preservation, which the sloop is eligible for because it's a historic vessel. Fundraising by Clearwater is needed to cover the difference. Those who wish to donate can do so



DOUGLAS CUNNINGHAM
Clearwater Captain Annika Savio checks the restoration work on the vessel, now on supports on top of a barge in Kingston.

at Clearwater.org.

This is also the third – and final – phase of restoration work under the waterline, Conover said. The first, in the winter of 2009 and 2010, did the bow. The second, in the winter of 2012-2013, did the stern. He said the amidships work is also the most complicated and expensive of the three phases.

He said they aim to have the ship sailing again in June, barring any dramatic complications. Visibility for the ship is important. "Clearwater really belongs to the Hudson River as a whole and the valley as a whole," he said.

Notably, on the day the Courier visited, two of those involved in Clearwater's formative days, Hal Cohen of Fishkill and Sandy Saunders of Garrison, also tracked the restoration work, occurring along the Rondout at the Kingston Home Port and Education Center for Clearwater. They were part of, in the early 1960s, the fight to stop Consolidated Edison from putting a power plant

on Storm King Mountain. A motivating factor on this side of the river was the anticipated construction of a power line, through Philipstown, if the plant did get built. The rationale, said Saunders, was this: "We're not going to win the Storm King case unless we can get people to love the river ... the mission was to build a Hudson River sloop to get people to look at the river. Obviously, it worked."

Today, the sloop Clearwater – said to be modeled on the *Victorine* that David Lyons captained for the West Point Foundry – is months away from sailing again. And every time it does, or it puts in at someplace like the Cold Spring Dock, the ship reminds us of the incredible, mighty history of the Hudson River.

More information on the restoration is here: <http://www.clearwater.org/the-sloop/sloop-restoration/>. Also check the Instagram feed of our sister paper for more photos, @pcnr.

FUNDS (Cont'd from Page 1.)

one count of petit larceny, a Class A misdemeanor, carrying a maximum sentence of one year in jail.

As part of the plea bargain, Noel agreed to terminate her employment with the county and pay \$275 in restitution, while being sentenced to a one-year conditional discharge, meaning she will serve no time behind bars.

State Comptroller Investigator Dennis Churns told the Courier Tuesday that over a period of "at least two years, the defendant illegally obtained \$4,575 in cash payments from contractors intended to satisfy county-issued fines. The fines included payments made by contractors for conducting various business operations across the county without an appropriate county-issued license."

Churns said "discrepancies were identified when State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli commenced an audit and investigation in 2014."

It is here that considerable dispute arises over what happened in the Consumer Affairs office. Noel's attorney Robert Leader explained that "my client never admitted to taking anywhere near \$4,575. Mrs. Noel admitted to taking \$275 which is equivalent to shoplifting."

Leader added that during negotiations with the Attorney General's office, the Comptroller's office took the position that "since a settlement was in the works, they did not want my client to continue as director past January 1, 2016. An odd compromise was struck that she continue to work and receive her paycheck but whatever time it had taken for the matter to be resolved, the county would receive reimbursement and Mrs. Noel has reimbursed the

county for her salary. This has had nothing to do with money allegedly taken from the county."

In an exclusive interview late Tuesday afternoon, Noel explained her side of the story: "When one has been threatened with the daunting reality and great injustice of guilty until proven innocent – one as a practical matter considers and reluctantly faces acceptance of a lesser injustice as a favor... Yet it never replaces true justice being served. Regrettably, at this point in my life's journey, I must realistically consider that. The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it."

She said the origin of the case goes back to disgruntled employees: "I simply cannot exchange any more of my life or my family's to the injustices fabricated and manipulated by former rogue employees of the department. The circumstances as presented, unfortunately and sadly, is the price extracted by some for my challenging of the status quo and retaliation for firings and job eliminations within the office." She charged she was the victim of an "abusive, malicious prosecution – initiated by bitter vicious individuals – who had routinely participated in unfettered rogue practices with no established internal controls in place for years before I came to the position within the department. I have an unblemished and distinguished 26 year record of public service – before becoming subject to very questionable accusations and pointedly circumstantial suspect evidence."

She concluded, "I have learned in life that new beginnings are often disguised as painful endings."

New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, DiNapoli and New York State Police Superintendent Joseph D'Amico all issued statements Tuesday regarding the case.

Schneiderman said: "Public service should never be about private gain. When public officials abuse their positions for financial gain, there will be consequences."

DiNapoli explained that whenever his office uncovers fraud, "we work with law enforcement to hold people accountable and recoup the public's money."

D'Amico added that the "arrest of Mrs. Noel should serve as a reminder that those who choose to abuse their public position will be brought to justice."

County Executive Odell told this reporter that she was saddened by the latest revelation about a member of her administration: "When Mrs. Noel came on board we changed systems and tightened controls. A data base was created to ensure that taxpayer's dollars were protected."

Odell said when "inconsistencies were discovered in the Department of Consumer Affairs cash reporting, an investigation was begun. My office fully cooperated with our state partners. This administration implemented policies and procedures early on in order to have better control over the finances. Those controls were bypassed."

Noel has worked in the public sector for many years, serving for one term on the Kent Town Board and the Kent Planning Board before being appointed by former Gov. George Pataki to work in his administration during the Pataki years in Albany.

OBITUARIES

Kevin Robert Blackman

Kevin Robert Blackman, also known by many as Our Smiling Warrior, gained his angel wings on February 19, 2016, while cradled in his mother's loving arms and surrounded by family and close friends at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. He fought a long, hard battle against infant ALL but with his big smile and joyful heart, most would never know what he endured. He was 2 1/2 years old. Kevin

and his mother shared a special unique, timeless and loving bond that conquered all.

Kevin is survived by his mother, Kelly Blackman and father, Donald Kuhn, maternal grandfather Kevin Blackman and Mary Blackman, uncle Jason Kaplan and Sara Kaplan, Kelly's godmother, Barbara Morris Reitz and Jim Reitz, godmother Amanda Adovasio along with his many great

aunt and uncles.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. James the Apostle Church Monday, February 22, at 10 AM. Visitation was at Beecher Funeral Home in Brewster, New York, on Sunday, February 21 from 1 PM to 3 PM and 6 PM to 8 PM. In lieu of flowers donations may be made at giftfunds.stjude.org/our-smilingwarrior.

Adele Ziegelmeier

Adele Ziegelmeier, age 87, of Patterson, NY, and Jupiter, FL, died Thursday, February 4, 2016, at her home in Jupiter, FL with her family by her side.

Adele was born on May 5, 1928, in Port Chester, NY to William and Loretta (Lyons) Berbusse. She graduated from Mt. St. Vincent School and attended Franklin Art School.

On June 14, 1949, she married Robert A. Ziegelmeier at St. Paul's Church. Robert predeceased her on July 2, 2002. Adele enjoyed needle point work, she vol-

unteered at Greenwich Hospital. Her family was the most important thing to her; it was the foundation to her life.

Adele is survived by her three children; Regina (Dr. Gary) Norum of Parkersburg, WV, Richard (Julie) Ziegelmeier of Patterson, NY, Robert (Barbara) Ziegelmeier of Somers, NY, her 10 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. She was predeceased by her daughter Rhonda Brooks on October 8, 2014 and her three siblings.

A Mass of Christian Buri-

al was celebrated on Saturday, February 20, 2016, at 10 am at St. Joseph's Church, Somers, NY. Interment of ashes followed at Kensico Cemetery, Valhalla, NY. Friends called at Beecher Funeral Home, 1 Putnam Avenue, Brewster, NY www.beecherfuneralhome.com.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Adele's memory to Hospice Care in Westchester and Putnam County, 540 White Plains Rd., Tarrytown, NY 10591.

Obituaries Continued On Page 7

KEVIN (Cont'd from Page 1.)

tendance at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

According to his godmother, Barbara Reitz, "the little prince's last words were: 'I did it!' while drifting in and out of consciousness.

Reitz recalled: "We all cheered back: 'YOU DID DO IT KEVIN!' and we laughed and cried. He did do it alright."

Kevin was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia as an infant. He underwent treatments at nu-

merous medical facilities including the world renowned St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

Kelly Blackman thanked the greater Putnam County community for its well wishes during her family's ordeal. "God Bless everyone for their prayers. Just when I thought I was too tired for anything...my little guy lit up my whole being. He brightened the darkest of days! His smile made EVERYTHING better!"

Kelly said her son was a "rock star. He rarely cried and was so brave and strong."

Total strangers joined family and friends at two events last summer that raised more than \$9,000 for Kevin.

Reitz said "little Kevin touched everyone's heart. He was a fighter 'til the end. Sadly, the insidious illness that has claimed so many others over the years was too great for Kevin to overcome. Kevin is finally at peace but we will be with him again."

In addition to his mother and godmother, Kevin is survived by his father, Donald Kuhn, maternal grandparents Kevin Blackman and Mary Blackman, Uncle Jason Kaplan and Aunt Sara Kaplan, James Reitz, Godmother Amanda Adovasio in addition to many great aunts and great uncles.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Monday at St. James the Apostle Church in Carmel.

LEAD

(Cont'd from Page 1.)

paint chips containing a lead base. Unlike the situation in Flint, Mich., in which highly corrosive water has caused lead from old pipes to leach into the water supply and poisoned hundreds, the situation in Cold Spring and Brewster is said to be related to the age of housing stock and a large amount of renovation work.

Prior to 1978, lead was common in paint. "The demolishing of any old building or the refurbishing of older structures poses a concern since they contain dust and peeling paint containing lead," said Dr. Nesheiwat.

"Lead isn't used in paint anymore, and most gasoline doesn't contain it," Dr. Gergely said.

Legislator Scuccimarra of Garrison, who chairs the Health, Social, Educational and Environmental Committee, also expressed concern: "I don't want people to panic but the image of a stay-at-home mom scraping a window sill with a bunch of young kids nearby flashes before me. The woman has no idea that the sill contains lead paint. Education is key here."

"Parents are generally very tuned in to the problem," Dr. Gergely said.

Scuccimarra thanked Dr. Nesheiwat and Robert Morris of the Health Department for updating her committee regarding the problem. She also promised to bring brochures to the greater Cold Spring area which will be distributed at town and village facilities to raise awareness: "Our health department does a wonderful job in helping to educate the public. We have to assist them anyway we can."

Taxes Stink.



Why hassle with your tax return when you can have the professionals at Schneider Financial Group prepare them for you.

SCHNEIDER
FINANCIAL GROUP, LTD

Schneider Financial Group, Ltd
824 Route 6, Suite 4 Mahopac, NY 10541
845-628-5400 sfgtaxes.com
Drop Offs Always Welcome

NEWS UPDATES FOR
175 YEARS!
PUTNAMCOURIER.COM

