

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Helping out fur friends

A vote in favor for the construction of a new animal control facility during the Special Town Meeting means a vote to save lives – animal lives.

The current facility, though overflowing with love and compassion by the staff, is deplorable. Its leaking roof and walls bring the elements inside the old chicken coop, and the threat of a bacterial outbreak is waiting in the wings. Cats and dogs are kept in the same room, and there is no quarantine area for a sick animal that is taken in. Metal on the holding pens has turned to rust, and rodents have now found the shelter a place to call home.

The animal food is kept in the same storage area as the cleaning supplies, and the one sink in the entire building is used for everything. There is no fire suppression system in the building, and there is a lack of storage for animal bedding and other supplies.

The laundry list of problems at the current animal control facility should alarm anyone who has a heart, especially for animals.

It's about time the town acknowledges the fact that animals do not belong in such a place. Selectmen, the town administrator and members of the finance committee deserve a tip of the hat for making sure the article stayed on the STM warrant, and in the amount of \$90,000. There was a very brief discussion to propose approximately half of what town people will see now, but in the end, selectmen supported going all in. They had even proposed a request of \$100,000, which would have fully funded the project. A compromise was made at the \$90,000. The remaining \$10,000 will be funded by the Belchertown Animal Relief Committee, better known as BARC. The non-profit "friends of" organization has done a phenomenal job at fundraising in the short time they've been a group.

In addition to town officials making good decisions, high praise goes to Anna Fenton for pushing for the new facility and advocating for the animals that find it home between being abandoned and being adopted.

LETTERS

Disappointed with school vote

To the Editor:

My husband and I did not make the town meeting held on Feb. 8 at Granby Jr./Sr. High School due to the weather. It was our choice not to go back out in the slippery conditions. We erred on safety for us. Again, our choice.

I am disappointed at the lopsided vote. There would have been two more no votes had we made it. We are both supporters of education. I will supply facts from the Dept. of Education (MA) website to show why we are opposed to such a large renovation.

School year 2011 right through school year 2015-2016 Granby has lost a total of 276 students. This will continue to drop in the coming years. If, in five school years Granby has lost 276 students, how many more with the district loose in the next five years? In 10 years time, how many students will be in the new facility? Not enough.

Deb Matthew
Granby, MA

Belchertown x-c skiers need alternative

To the Editor:

Belchertown cross country skiers are blessed with some of the best trails for skiing in the state, but the lack of snow have local skiers wondering if the storm-tracks will ever pass over southern New England. The next best alternative is to watch skiing online: "Biathlon Eurovision Live Stream."

This website will take you to places like Pokljuka, Slovenia and Ruhpolding Bavaria, Germany and the Alps of Italy and France and more.

Hopefully this visual will keep skiers amused until the white stuff finally makes its entrance to the Pioneer Valley area giving xc skiers solace and natural beauty which makes this sport so special.

Sincerely,

Bill Paul
Chicopee, MA



George Washington, kindred spirit

With George Washington's birthday coming up, I thought it would be of interest to take a closer look at the man behind the holiday. What you may or may not know is that we gardeners share with him a kindred spirit.

Sure, George Washington is best known as the first president of our nation. He was also the Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary Army and a leader of the Constitutional Convention. But if you were to ask him what his most important occupation was, we would say "farmer." His passion was the land, and when he was home on his 8,000-acre Mount Vernon Estate, every day started the same: after breakfast he rode out to oversee his four working farms. Washington read countless books on agriculture and corresponded with other farmers, both here and abroad, testing and perfecting the growing methods of over 60 different crops on the plantation. He was constantly challenged, experimenting with new ways to improve and conserve the fertility of his soil - a concept ahead of its time. As well, tools and planting techniques were altered per his recommendation to enhance productivity. Washington's farm was quite diversified, and grew much of the grains, fruits and vegetables necessary to sustain the plantation - no small feat, to say the least.

If you were to visit Mount Vernon today you would find testimony to George Washington's enthusiasm for gardening nearly everywhere you look. Begin by visiting the Pleasure Garden, and its well-documented recreated boxwood parterre in the shape of a French fleur-de-lis. Scholars speculate the use of this design was to honor Washington's friendship with Lafayette and thank the French for their assistance in the Revolutionary War.

My eight-year-old recently reminded me that it is a myth that George Washington cut down the cherry tree. What he did, rather, was plant a multitude of fruit trees at Mount Vernon, including apples, pears, cherries, peaches and apricots. Washington's gar-

deners also grafted and trained these trees as espaliers, a method of training trees to grow flat on supports like trellises or on brick walls.

The Kitchen Garden was located behind the stables and its abundant supply of manure. This formal, English-style garden grew asparagus, beets, beans, peas and spinach, in small beds edged with herbs. Pears and apples were pruned into 4-foot fences and lined the paths between beds of artichokes, onions, and lettuce. Much of the produce consumed by the Washingtons was grown in this garden.

The Botanical Garden is a quiet, private spot used by Washington to experiment with a variety of crops. In the "little garden," you'll find pecan and hickory trees as well as root crops grown specifically to feed the animals.

Be sure to visit the working exhibit entitled "Pioneer Farmer Site." Here you can see a working farm and a recreated version of an impressive 16-sided treading barn used to thresh grain, invented by Washington himself.

While researching this article, I also learned that I have at least one thing in common with Martha Washington as well. She once wrote that vegetables "were the best part about living in the country." I agree.

The Mount Vernon Estate is located in Mount Vernon, Virginia and is open seven days a week, year round. Admission is \$17 for adults, \$16 for seniors and \$9 for kids 6 through 11. Children under 5 are free. For more information consult their web site at www.mountvernon.org.

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For the last 26 years, she has held the position of staff horticulturalist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys food, as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to dfarmer@turley.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.



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