



LOOKING BACK WITH 20 VIS2ON

Art at the Eustis Estate

9

Equity Survey

2

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Select Board looks at East Milton study

By Elaine Cushman Carroll
Milton Times staff

After many months of study, the biggest surprises for the planners who worked with the East Milton Working Group were that the demographics of the area are changing more quickly than they thought and most members liked the idea of “transformative” measures.

While calling the views of the study group of residents “a mixed bag,” Judi Barrett of Barrett Consulting said that a majority of the two dozen members were interested in making substantial transformative changes to revitalize the eclectic commercial area bisected by the Southeast Expressway.

In presenting the findings to the Select Board, Barrett said the group of about 30 residents in the working group included a cross section of stakeholders.

The group worked with Barrett’s group, Dodson and Flinker, a design landscape company, town planners, and Planning Board members.

They came up with a “vision” statement for the area despite not being in agreement about many matters including the optimum height for buildings in the area.

Barrett served up those findings before the Select

See EAST MILTON Page 8

Singing through the storm



Kaitlin



Kelli

The Neville Sisters performed Aug. 4 inside the Council on Aging building when rain threatened to cancel the parks department summer concert. Kelli and Kaitlin Neville belted out their songs while the concert’s sponsor, Susan M. Galvin, town clerk, watched from the sidelines.

Friends of Blue Hills go extra mile

By Elaine Cushman Carroll
Milton Times staff

When Matt Panucci and his family were in search of a new home about four years ago, they happened to drive down Randolph Avenue.

He looked to his left and saw Blue Hills Reservation and looked to his right and saw the same.

Panucci liked what he saw.

The Panucci family was moving from Belgium where the plentiful access to open space was vital to them,

and they agreed that they had found the right place.

“We were looking for a community where we had access to that kind of a resource,” he said. “My passion is for hiking and running the trails.”

Panucci’s passion runs even deeper today. He is the president of the board of trustees of the Friends of the Blue Hills and has grown to be a strong advocate for the 7,000 acre reservation that spans six communities, along with working his full time job.

During COVID-19, places like the Big Blue hiking trails and Houghton’s Pond saw dramatic increases in attendance.

With this popularity came an increased need to groom the trails, pick up trash, and manage more traffic and full parking lots.

The reservation is owned by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation but the Friends group gives the DCR rangers and workers more

See BLUE HILLS Page 16

ALSO THIS WEEK

- Water Rates 5
- Shane Brandenburg 14
- Select Board responds..... 15

Fire Station project makes progress

By Elaine Cushman Carroll
Milton Times staff

The plans on the major revamp of Milton’s three fire stations are moving steadily ahead this summer.

The town has signed a purchase and sales agreement for the property at St. Agatha Parish for the new East Milton station and designs for the work are nearing completion.

The Fire Station Building Committee (FSBC) is getting ready to select a new Owner’s Project Manager for the work that could begin as early as this fall.

In addition, two “procedural” finan-

See FIRE STATION Page 10

New physician joins Hyde Park Pediatrics

By Elaine Cushman Carroll
Milton Times staff

The newest member of the Hyde Park Pediatrics team, Dr. Raj Kulenthirarajan, set his sights on becoming a pediatrician when he was still in junior high school.

Although at the time he couldn’t completely rule out the possibility of becoming a marine biologist or a “bone doctor,” as he called it as a seventh grader, he knew he was obsessed with

science.

Dr. K, as he likes to be called, forced himself to take a step back during medical school to make sure he was right for the speciality of dealing with kids from birth to the age of 18 and whether it was right for him.

“It was,” he said with a smile.

“I’ve always had a goal and I knew what I wanted to do,” said Kulenthirarajan in an interview near the Hyde Park office on Truman Parkway. The of-

fice also has offices at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital Milton (BID-Milton).

He began his life’s ambition in mid-July. He will take over the post opened by the retirement of Dr. Anthony Compagnone, who is retiring this fall.

Kulenthirarajan is currently seeing patients in Hyde Park and will also work out of the BID-Milton location starting in late September.

See KULENTHIRARAJAN Page 3

Friends of Blue Hills go extra mile

BLUE HILLS from Page 1

eyes on the park, as well as many sets of hands ready to work.

The reservation has long and close working relationships with a variety of organizations that operate on the spaces, including the Friends, the Blue Hills Observatory and Science Center, the Blue Hills Ski area, Brookwood Community Farm, William Shea Rink, the Norman Smith Environmental Education Center, and the Massachusetts Audubon Society that operates the Blue Hills Trailside Museum.

“We all work together. We advocate for each other,” said Panucci of the various groups.

“One of the things we’re dealing with now is increased usage,” he said during an interview at the outside area of the Trailside Museum, where new enclosures for the river otter and turtles are nearing completion.

The museum has remained closed due to COVID-19 but restrictions outside have loosened up a bit.

Major renovations are in the works for the weather observation station and in the planning stages for the Eliot Tower, which dates back to the 1890s and is named after the reservation’s visionary, Charles Eliot.

Coming off a July “membership month,” the Friends are currently encouraging even more people to join them through creative programming like the 125-mile challenge, Panucci said.

The group’s annual event will be held on Oct. 10 with both in-person and remote aspects. The event, which

includes silent and live auctions, was fully remote last year.

Despite, or maybe because of, the pandemic, the Friends have added about 200 members a year for the past two years, growing their membership to roughly 1,400 people.

“We are running fast as an organization and need to continue running fast to keep up with all of this new activity,” Panucci said.

Panucci is one of the roughly 650 people who joined the 125-mile challenge and taking part has pushed him to explore areas of the reservation, such as Fowl Meadow, that he had overlooked before.

“My big challenge now is trying to get that last 25 miles done,” he said.

Panucci is no stranger to trails.

Early every morning, Panucci and his wife Jamie can be found running the trails with the family dog, usually in the area around Ponkapoag Pond. For those who follow the trail maps, those trails are in the 5,000s.

“I love that section of the park. It’s a nice four-mile loop around the pond,” Panucci said.

He said members run the gamut from those who are out taking their mountain bike down Big Blue to those who are enjoying a cookout at Houghton’s Pond with their families or a simple stroll in the sunshine and clean air.

Panucci said that members come from all incomes, backgrounds, and even from around the world.

“Anybody who cares for the outdoors and conservation and cares about having a fantastic place to be in nature,



Friends of the Blue Hills President Matt Panucci enjoys the Blue Hills Reservation every day. He is shown near Trailside Museum.

these are our members,” he said.

The Friends group began 42 years ago with a group of “forward thinking people” who were passionate about protecting the park from weather changes, against the pressures of development, and making sure it was well-maintained, he said.

The mission has remained consistent, according to Panucci.

“We’ve been out working on the trails for 40-plus years. We’re still taking a couple of groups out every month to do trail events, maintain the trails, rake the leaves out, and fix the foot bridges. A lot of it hasn’t changed,” he

said.

Panucci said the biggest question remains “How do we continue to fight the good fight and protect this fantastic resource we have?”

“We can’t take it for granted,” he said. “As soon as you do that is when bad things happen.”

“We’ve got a lot of people who expect this great experience and that is what the Friends are working on,” Panucci said.

Information about the Friends can be found on Facebook and the group’s website at <https://friendsofthebluehills.org/>.



Always welcoming, visitors to the Blue Hills Reservation can access parking lots like this one near Trailside Museum on Route 138.



Houghton’s Pond is a popular swimming attraction in the Blue Hills Reservation and also includes many trails. The pond is a kettle pond, formed by glaciers, and has steep drop offs.



Visitors to the reservation share the space with wildlife, including this little chipmunk.



Enjoy the views, and bring your bug spray, when visiting the many trails in the six hills that make up Blue Hills. (Photos by Elaine Cushman Carroll)