

The Weld Observer

December 2024 -4th Edition

A Store Is Born

As told to Ina Toth

If you had a chance to see the recent TikTok video on Skoolhouse Variety, here's the rest of the story, told by Kevin and Holly Cochran, proprietors extraordinaire.

We purchased the building at auction in 2009. We had always wanted to open a store and serve the community after I (Kevin) retired from the Navy.

The Skoolhouse Variety (SV) became SV at a family dinner, when we were brainstorming. Lila, our daughter, first coined the actual name. It was an 'Ah ha' moment. Skoolhouse Variety was born! Because it was originally the elementary school in Weld, we thought it would be a cute play on how young kids spell when they are first learning.

The best experience we have had is being able to work with family every day! After 25 years of separation and deployments, it is quite nice to be together and make up for lost time as a family.

The most unusual experience at SV was a 'full on' cowboy riding up the road to the store on his horse and with his dog. He asked to graze his horse on the lawn while he rested, before returning to his journey!

One or both of us are always in the store when it's open. The Open Sign is on nearly 100 hours a week. Breakfast sandwiches are the most sold item. We have run out of ice only when the supplier was out or not in the area; climate change hasn't affected that!

SV is somewhat of an unofficial information hub. Town organizations



like to meet and gather here to use the space and facilities, i.e. Snowmobile Club, church and music groups, et cetera. UPS and FedEx are frequent flyers here, too.

Pre-generator we closed when we lost power because the cash register wouldn't work, and we didn't want the coolers to be opened. Post generator, business is as usual!

Finding employees is hard in rural areas; seasonal help usually comes from young people with families at the campgrounds and camps, word of mouth, and usually people with connections to Weld and the area.

Skoolhouse Variety is very appreciative of the community, and we love our customers!

Glad to be here!!

Say Yes to the Salty Rim

by Carol Conant

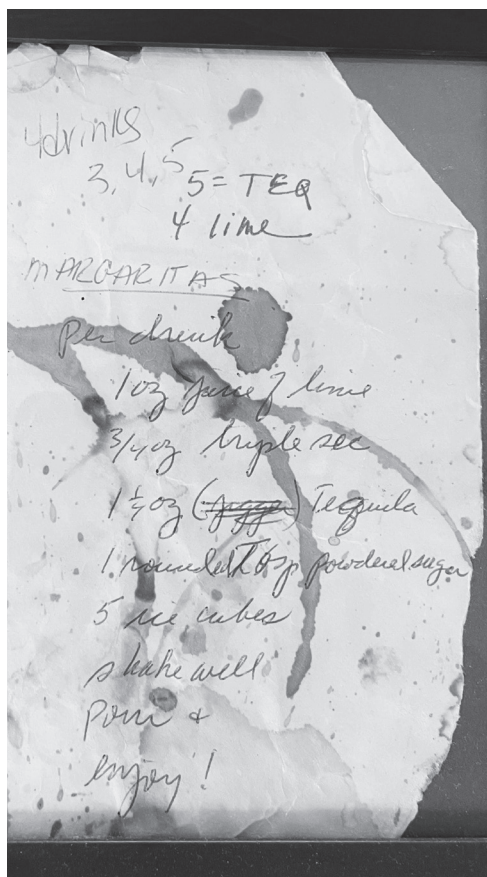
Families often have recipes that they like to make again and again, over the years as they get shared along the way. These recipes can be saved and brought out during a holiday, a celebration or when family members get together at one time or another.

Recipes are often memories written on paper, tucked in a cookbook, typed out on index cards, or neatly filed in a recipe box. In this case the recipe is handwritten by the drink maker, who never for years would share the recipe. The drink maker made them when no one was looking, and we always enjoyed them. We didn't think about how they were made. The recipe is the family margarita. Siblings of mine, in-laws, nieces, nephews all marvel at the recipe.

We know when we got together.... margaritas were going to be made and enjoyed by all, salty rims all around.

Several years had gone by and finally the recipe was written down on an envelope, in my presence, I had the only copy. It has aged, coffee stained and now sits in a picture frame. The recipe brings back fond memories of the family making single margaritas, or we do the math and makes large batches. These tart liquid lime treats are now made from California to Maine or Georgia and up the east coast. My dad's recipe was recently served at my daughter's wedding, in my dad's memory. Cheers.

Recipe: 1 oz. lime juice; 3/4 oz. Triple Sec; 1-1/4 oz. Tequila; 1 rounded tbsp. powdered sugar; 5 ice cubes. Shake well and enjoy!



Blueberry Joy

by Carol Conant

If I say blueberry... you say _____? Pancakes, muffins or jam might be a few most common responses. Folks that live full time or seasonally in Weld know of the native Maine fruit and know where to pick them. I will not try to top any recipes or memories you have of picking, eating or baking with the crowned round fruit. Some memories have certainly turned into story books that share one's fruit picking stories. Weld offers many places to pick the berries from fields, overlooks, mountain hikes and hill sides.

The indigo-blue fruit is the reward the plant offers. However, it offers us so much more, since it grows in the watershed area of Webb Lake. I personally

over the years have noticed within our woodlands in the area the ease of the blueberry plant growing, popping out of sunshine, or so it appears. My walks have me noticing them more as young plants without the berries and I have concluded that I like these plants just as much without the fruit.

The lowbush perennial blueberry plant grows in loose, well drained soils with full sun to light shade. I find them near the forest ground under pines, popping up where I wouldn't expect them and asking myself who planted these throughout the woods where sunshine warms the ground? Plants spread by seed and through the growth of underground stems called rhizomes, spreading roots in a mat formation pattern. These native lowbush plants are considered the 'gold standard' for erosion control.



Blueberry Joy

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Blind in Weld, Maine

by Steve Lambert

My wife, Lo, and I moved to 1202 Center Hill Road on December 17, 2019. We instantly fell in love with the home previously owned by Richard and Theda Fairbanks. The many windows provided ample light for me to make the best of my remaining vision...and what I could make out of the view was just beautiful.

I have a hereditary, degenerative eye disease, Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) which has been eroding my vision since about 2008. Before that time the disease had essentially been dormant, allowing me around forty years of almost normal vision.

RP typically first impacts low-light or night vision, as it eats away at your peripheral vision. Acuity is eventually impacted, but usually later. Every case is different.

My current acuity, with corrective lenses, is 20/70 in one eye and 20/90 in the other. Normal peripheral vision is 180 degrees. I have about 4 or 5 degrees left.

I routinely wear a hat with a brim (to reduce glare) with fitover sunglasses sitting on it, so I can use them as needed.

I have always been a nature lover, taking advantage of any opportunity to hike through the woods, fish from my kayak, walk along the ocean, et cetera. This common love of nature

remains one of the deepest bonds between Lo and me...perhaps the most powerful reason we chose to live in Weld.

Adjusting with and accepting my ongoing vision loss, one which will likely culminate in total blindness, is the most difficult challenge of my life, a process of experiencing still more vision loss, grieving the expanding loss, and again finding a peace of sorts with my new current state.

The vast majority of the many people I know who are low-vision or blind would not choose to live in such a secluded area as Weld. They would prefer to live where more opportunities for socialization and independent living are available to them. And although I sometimes wish I could easily walk to a store, to a friend's house, to an appointment, et cetera., I repeatedly make the conscious decision that living in this beautiful, wild place is more important to me than all the things I sacrifice by making that choice.

When I walk out my door during spring, summer or fall, I can feel the wonderful solitude, the quiet, interrupted mainly by the calls of turkeys, pileated woodpeckers, barred owls, or by the crazy screams of ravens or the high-pitched chorus of coyotes.

The so-varied fragrances that welcome me as I walk along the gravel road, never cease to blow me away with their

powerful, visceral appeal.

Winter walking is even more quiet, and with the foliage gone, allows me to see more deeply into the forest, as the high contrast between the trees and the pure white snow provides a vivid view that is rare for me.

I have met most of my neighbors while on my walks along Center Hill Road. I could not ask for better ones. I feel a deep sense of resonance with the citizens of Weld I have come to know. The open and welcoming kindness in whatever the situation may be, the friendly and easy laughter, the shared appreciation for the peaceful beauty that surrounds us, the helping hand so routinely offered without needing to be asked for, where helping neighbors is just something that we do...all these things and more make living in Weld so special, such a gift.

The people in the community of Weld, as I meet and slowly get to know them, one at a time or in groups, virtually always represent the best qualities people can have.

Being legally blind and on a journey of relentless vision loss is not easy in any situation, in any community. It is a process few people could be aware of. As I continue to learn to navigate my world, more and more often without vision, living in Weld offers me a sense of peace I cannot imagine feeling anywhere else. It's just a great place to be.

Blueberry Joy

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Below the pine needles or the shores of the Webb, deep roots of the plants are what hold the soil. Vegetative plantings and buffers are essential for preventing erosion of our soils that get washed away with storm damage. Although it's not just storm damage with runoff, buffers are helpful for areas within your life space that compresses land underfoot

and those areas acting as a trough for water to flow and not seep in.

Blueberry plants are a perfect solution: no maintenance plantings to consider for your life spaces where erosion is or may occur. My lakeside area has them growing natively. Should your yard, life space or beach front need some new plantings to assist the watershed region, I would recommend planting native low bush blueberry bushes, or as the nursery industry calls them

'blueberry sods'.

Once planted, keep the new plants moist until established. They like pine needles around their base as well as some sawdust or woodchips, should you have them kicking around. You'll be rewarded with bonnet style blooms, fruit for the picking. Be sure to share some with your favorite four-legged friend, oh- never mind, my pup Sierra helps herself and eats them right off the plant.

A Place of Reflection

by Liz Boyle

For the past year, I've been visiting a small, unoccupied house on West Brook Road. It sits before a wooden bridge that spans West Brook. Depending upon the time of year, it opens to a view of fields of grasses and wildflowers, or brilliant white snow, beside the road to Tumbledown Mountain. At first, I went to this place because I loved driving along the water, passing the small camps and the leaning ice shanty, the old, rusted wood stove—now a yard ornament—the glistening lawn balls, rocks, and rusted metal chairs that decorate the landscape. Soon, I realized it was my growing attachment to the little shingled house that was drawing me there. I don't trespass. I look at it from the road.

Right now, the house is becoming one with nature. Some of the roof is blanketed in green moss. Birches nearly hug its walls. It blends effortlessly with the natural world around it. If trees can communicate with each other through the air and through mycorrhizal networks, could it be that they're able to communicate with this house, too? It seems possible.

You might get the impression that this is a very old building, possibly built in the 1930s as part of the New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps, when the government created jobs as a form of relief to Americans. Or it might call to mind the simple, waterfront bait shacks and early colonial homes found throughout New England.

Although I value preservation and restoration, I played around abandoned homes as a child, and they fascinate me to this day. We had two in my neighborhood and all the kids were drawn to them. Surprisingly, the West Brook house was built sometime in the



1970s, from what Mike Lee tells me. Mike grew up in Weld and his grandparents, Edith and Tib Tibbetts, built the house. He thinks back to that time, when he was about seven years old, and he walked five miles from his own home to visit his grandparents.

Mike's grandparents built the house so they could live next to his great grandparents, Janet and Cola Storer. He remembers gathering rocks to place beneath the house and playing inside with his six brothers. He looks at the house and it elicits memories from a childhood much like *The Waltons*, a television program set in 1932.

There was no electricity in his grandparents' house, so no radio or television. The family used an outhouse, gas lights, and a wood stove to stay warm in the winter. They also hayed the nearby fields by hand. His grandfather would lift him up into a tractor-drawn wagon

and tell him to watch his feet because the wagon was filled with lots of relatives who all held sharp pitchforks in their hands. He remembers Nate Storer driving the tractor, and Eddie Jackson was around then, too. Haying was a part of Weld life. It was a dream childhood. At the same time, there's a sense of loss when he thinks about this house. Why didn't it remain with his family? Why does it sit empty? He'd like to see homeless veterans living there.

The house could be described as *Wabi-sabi* and might offer important lessons. According to the Wikipedia entry, "*Wabi-sabi* is a Japanese aesthetic that finds beauty in things that are imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It's based on the idea that everything is temporary, and that beauty can be found in things that are damaged, worn, or broken." Maybe you've noticed such a place in your own lifetime.

A Pagan Hunter's Prayer

by Mark Schneider

Dear Heavenly Father and Earthly Mother, Stepping into the woods today, just as day is breaking, I am reminded again of how much I want to thank you for this opportunity to be here, today, and every other day that I am so blessed. Thank you for the chance to experience not only the grandeur of your creation, but its subtleties as well.

This morning is cool, the day will be clear, the air crisp. But I wanted to take this chance to thank you for whatever weather you might send my way on these sojourns. Some days will be gray and overcast, maybe raining. Other days very cold, so that I finish the coffee in my thermos much too early, warming my

fingers as I cradle the cup. Perhaps there will be high winds, the threat of snow. The mountains and the woods have many moods, and I am grateful for the opportunity to experience them all, firsthand.

Thank you for connecting me with all your creatures, great and small, directly or indirectly. The caw of the crow, the croak and rattle of the raven as he tumbles overhead. The crazed laughter of a pileated woodpecker, his undulating flight bringing him close by. The fresh paw print of a bear, the scat of a coyote. The trumpeting of a moose, the white flash of snow buntings in flight. The ubiquitous chickadee, ever curious, ever animated. Thank you.

I would also like to thank you for the little tricks and deceits you toss my way. The waving white flag of a nervous

buck soon reveals itself to be the solitary sun-bleached leaf of a beech tree, still clinging to the branch, fluttering in the breeze. The rustle of leaves that marks the footsteps of an approaching deer is magically transformed into the harmless inquisitiveness of a red squirrel. And so, I would also like to thank you for the ability to laugh at my own gullibility and folly.

Finally, may this cool, clean air I am breathing purify and nurture not only my body, but my soul as well. May it provide me purity of heart, so that I may hear keenly, see clearly, step softly, and shoot sharply and wisely. By doing so, may my actions in some small way bring you both honor and glory.

I humbly ask these things in both of your nameless names. Amen.

What's Up Outside - Late Autumn

by Lise Bofinger

Except for the beech and the oaks, the leaves are down; as I walk by the field at the top of my driveway, I see shapes swirling in the field. Is it snow? It's too early for that; maybe leaves are blowing in the wind, but the wind is not blowing.

A closer look reveals snow buntings. These birds, I've found, are best identified by their unique behavior; they fly in seemingly random, swirling patterns reminiscent of blowing leaves. This mesmerizing flying behavior, a true spectacle of nature, is a sight to behold. Snow Buntings, or *Plectrophenax nivalis*, are only here visiting from their home in the Arctic. Unlike many of our two-legged summer friends who fly off from Weld to southern states, these tiny birds find the fields and coastlines of northern states just right for a winter hiatus.



SNOW BUNTING BY SCOTT ISCHERWOOD

These birds are white like their fellow arctic inhabitants, the Arctic Fox, Polar Bear, and Snowy Owls. These diminutive birds are ground feeders and will return to the Arctic long before our human summer residents return, leaving for the north as early as March.

As we move closer to the winter months, with those pesky leaves and flowers gone, we find new things to

look for in the woods! Take a walk and decide to seek out lichens. These often-overlooked organisms play a crucial role in our ecosystem and observing them in the winter can provide a unique perspective on their life cycle and adaptations.

What's Up Outside

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Municipal Literacy Corner: Q&A with a Municipal Officer

by Dina Walker

What is the process for becoming a Selectboard Member in Weld?

The procedure to be elected as a Selectman in Weld is prescribed by Maine State Law. The qualifications are simple – a person must be a resident of Maine, a voter in the Town of Weld, at least 18 years of age, and a citizen of the United States.

If you wish to be nominated as a candidate, you must obtain signatures from at least 10 voters of Weld and submit such signatures to the Town Clerk by the filing deadline (60 days before election day). Nomination papers can be obtained at the Town Office from the Town Clerk. A Weld Selectman's term is three years and one can serve multiple terms, consecutive or otherwise.

What makes a good Selectboard Member?

This is quite a loaded but important question, and opinions are likely to vary greatly. For me, the best advice came from other Selectmen and Town Managers. Below are some of those suggestions in a nutshell:

REMEMBER YOU REPRESENT THE ENTIRE TOWN: Although a Selectman is elected by a majority of the voters, once elected, you take an oath to "represent the public" as a whole. This means that the job as a Municipal Officer/Selectman, is to represent the interests of not only the people you know, but also those that you don't.

PREPARE: It's common for new Selectmen to underestimate how long it takes to prepare for meetings and decisions, especially when the role involves responsibilities beyond the scope of one's



PHOTO COURTESY OF WELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Town Officers for 1966, left to right: Bernard R. Vining, 1st Selectman; Dorothy R. Skolfield, Treasurer; John Haley, 3rd Selectman; Clyde E. Hathaway, 2nd Selectman; Charlotte B. Hutchinson, Town Clerk.

past experiences. Preparation in the relevant topics –research, asking folks with experience, and leaning on resources created by the State such as Maine Municipal Association (MMA) and the Androscoggin Valley Council of Government (AVCOG)) – is essential to being an effective Selectman.

FOLLOW THE MONEY: Financial matters are possibly the most important area of focus for Selectmen who, after all, are elected to be stewards of taxpayers' dollars. A huge part of a Selectman's role is weighing the importance of providing, maintaining, or expanding municipal services versus the desire to keep fees and taxes as low as possible.

LEARN: As much as you can about your community and municipal structure. At the very minimum, this includes the municipal departments, staff, and the local school system.

COOPERATE: Since the Selectboard is made up of multiple members, each with individual views and experiences to contribute, cooperation is essential to get things done.

BE ETHICAL & OPEN: This sounds obvious and it's everyone's natural intention. But often, our natural inclination to solve problems quickly can be seen as not adhering to those standards. For that reason, meticulous attention to recommended procedures is the best practice, even when those procedures seem tedious or unnecessary. Common challenges include:

- Did the board give due notice to the public of the town provided activity/service or did it only provide certain people in town with that information?

Municipal Literacy Corner:
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What's Up Outside

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Their role in the ecosystem is remarkable and understanding it can deepen our appreciation for the natural world. Trying to classify lichens by scientific names is tricky, so let's agree to enjoy them because they are a wonderful symbiotic relationship between two organisms. Think back to your days in biology class, learning about mutualism, a symbiotic relationship where both organisms benefit. Most lichen are composed of

algae and fungus. The fungus creates the "home," providing protection and helping with water retention. The algae contain chloroplasts and can perform photosynthesis and make food for itself and the fungus.

If you are interested in learning more about lichens, your first step might be to learn to place them into three basic categories based on their form: crustose (attached very closely to the surface), foliose (leaf-like sometimes with lobes), and fruticose (thread or beard-like). Lichen are not plants and do not have roots; they

absorb their moisture directly from the air and rainwater. For this reason, they are very susceptible to environmental pollutants and can be used as bio-indicators. Lichens are especially sensitive to atmospheric pollutants. The vulnerability of lichens to pollution is a stark reminder of the fragility of our natural world. Too much nitrogen will damage the algae's chlorophyll, reducing its ability to nourish the fungus and potentially killing the lichen. As you travel through the woods this winter, watch for lichen. They are our "canaries in the coal mine."

Municipal Literacy Corner:

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- Did the board investigate the legal requirements that a municipality must follow so that they are taken into consideration when deciding an issue?

- Did the board protect the towns money by following legal requirements, so the town doesn't waste tax dollars on paying fines, increased insurance premiums, or even worse, defending expensive lawsuits when that money could've been better spent elsewhere, like maintaining roads?

- Did the board publish a clearly written and effective policy so that the public and/or municipal employees are informed and have clear guidance on the relevant municipal issue?

Following recommended procedures, as much as possible, can help prevent larger problems from developing.

BE "JUDICIOUS:" The Selectboard's duties legally include acting in a judicial capacity (e.g., as a hearing examiner for employees). We all have friends in

the community and some neighbors that we may know better than others, but when in the role of a Selectman, you have a duty to protect the interest of the town first. Maintaining impartiality is crucial in this role.

WORK THROUGH THE SYSTEM: Respect the roles of the Town Clerk, Treasurer and Department Heads. This is especially important when it comes to personnel matters – a previous Selectman advised me that my areas of focus should be setting clear municipal policy and budget priorities, not managing people or details.

Does each Selectboard Member have a different role?

Under Maine law, members of the Selectboard are all municipal officers sworn into office to serve the public and have equal responsibility to deliberate and decide on town business, as a board, at a duly noticed public proceeding (Selectboard meeting). No one member of the board may decide town business on their own. That said, one member

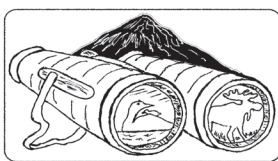
is elected Chair by the board every year, which role includes the responsibilities to organize every Selectboard meeting agenda and enforce the rules of procedure for such public proceedings.

How can members of the public get an item on a Selectboard Meeting agenda?

A member of the public can request an item to be put on the Selectboard's Meeting agenda by contacting either the Town Clerk or a member of the Selectboard. Of course, as the Selectboard generally has a full list of working items already in motion for discussion at each meeting, we may not have time to prepare to discuss your request at the immediate upcoming Selectboard meeting. However, you can always attend the Selectboard meeting and voice your concern or questions during the "open comment" period at the end of the meeting. In general, the more time you can give to the board to consider the matter, the better the response the board can give you.

The Municipal Literacy Corner will be a regular column in The Weld Observer. We'll focus on topics and updates related to municipal government in Maine, based on Dina Walker's experience as Selectman and as a member of the Executive Committee of the Maine Municipal Association (MMA) representing the Town of Weld. The column endeavors to respond to questions from the public on "how does municipal government work?" Our space is limited, but we'll answer as many questions as possible. Questions can be submitted to weldrecnews@weld-maine.org. You can also submit questions on paper by dropping them in the Business Box in front of the Town Office, 23 Mill Street.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN



The Weld Observer

We invite you to contribute content: articles, letters, drawings, cartoons, photographs, and other materials of interest.

We publish in black and white. Captions and descriptive information are helpful.

Please provide your contact information with your submission.

Via e-mail: weldrecnews@weld-maine.org

or drop your submission in the Weld business box

in front of the **Weld Town Office** located at **23 Mill Street in Weld.**

Attention: **Weld Recreation Department**