



Rockland Buzz

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Political Economy
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The Old School
Fellowship Education



A conversation
about local issues
on WRFR,
Wednesdays
from 5 to 6 pm

Down Main Street with Phil Groce Fitting In



Steve Carroll will be interviewing Valli Geiger this Wednesday from 5 to 6 pm on the Metro Show. Valli is the Democratic Party candidate to represent Rockland and Owls Head in the Maine House of Representatives. The Republican Party candidate, Michael Mullins, was interviewed last week. We hope to have both candidates on the Metro sometime soon for a constructive conversation about what our Legislature can do to best serve the people of Maine in these difficult times.

The Metro show is broadcast live on WRFR at 93.3 fm in Rockland and 99.3 fm in Camden, and steams online at wrfr.org.

The Metro Show is also carried on Maine Coast TV on cable channel 7, on mainecoast.tv, and on Roku.

Listeners and viewers are invited to call in with questions and comments: 593-0013.

The smell smacks you in the senses as you enter Trillium Soaps on South Main Street. Never smelled that smell before. It has to be a combination of many scents, but it is like an entire symphony compared to a few violins and maybe one trumpet. Never experienced that symphony before. What are these people trying to tell us? Peter di Girolamo, who owns the store along with his wife, Nancy, was nice enough to inform me.

Peter grew up in new Jersey, just across the river from Philadelphia. He knows city living, but where he lived was more rural. His father worked at RCA in an executive position for 30 years, and his mother was an artist, representational at first, then more abstract. Both now deceased. His father was second generation from Italy.

Peter had an independent and creative streak which was accentuated by an alternative high school education which was mostly self-directed and fostered by a talented and involved faculty, a new idea for education at the time. His parents supported free-thinking and frequently had friends gathering at their home in which cooking was a highlight. After graduation Peter worked on the Jersey shore for a while then drifted to California where he worked in forestry near Tahoe and built campgrounds. That lasted a year.

Important in his life was that his uncles in New Jersey had a penchant for buying rural land in northern Maine where land was cheap at the time. They camped there when they could, which included Peter's family.

While traveling in Maine, the small independently-owned general stores in Maine impressed Peter's father, Guido. He loved them. Then one day in the early 70s at age 55 he suddenly quit RCA and moved to the mid-coast. He bought Ingraham's Store in Rockport which had a 130-year history behind it. He religiously kept it the same flavor, but felt obligated to add something Italian, and that was Guido's Pizza Plaza added at the same location. Peter, then in his twenties, was happy to be included, also along with his sister and two brothers. His younger brother later died in a tragic logging accident.

Peter was the first of the siblings to leave working at the store, and following his abiding interest in things 'natural,' he picked up landscaping and nursery jobs, including a period at Plants Unlimited, where he was happy to learn. He eventually started working on his own landscaping and nursery business in Newcastle.

As it happens, he met Nancy in Newcastle. She was fresh from immigrating to Maine from Alaska. Natural met natural, naturally. She was skilled in leather work and had begun employment at Narragansett Leather. In 6 months, they were married and lived on an island in the Sheepscot River where Nancy was the caretaker.

They were introduced to a lady who made soap and encouraged by reading the book, Soap: Making it, Enjoying it. They started experimenting in their cellar, and found soap-making fun and fitting to their general philosophy of work. With determined effort, they started selling wholesale to local stores, at fairs, and later, by mail. Natural soaps were easy sellers in the 90's what with the co-ops and the blooming organic movement. This home-based industry helped to make raising the one child each had from a previous relationship into a seamless and enjoyable family endeavor.

They rented a small space on Main Street across from the Rockland Café for 10 years and eventually moved to their present digs on South Main in the space previously occupied by the Good Tern Co-op.

I asked Peter what he meant by 'natural.' "Mostly it means a healthy everything—that includes clothing from natural fibers, organic food from co-ops, food and herbs and petals and seeds from our own gardens. Underlining is to cause no harm to others or to the environment, and doing something in our work that contributes to the community and its health. We have always hoped that the small role we play may have some beneficial effect. We are in it for the long term.

"We make 22 different soaps, utilizing up to 30 different organic essential oils from all over the world and only available there. Our website, Trillium Soaps, shows all the soaps and the natural products we sell, such as brushes, that you might use along with any soap. Covid has made international ordering more difficult, but we are making it work. Even though tourists have dropped off, we are getting by with mail order through the website and locals.

"The increase in taxes, especially in the South End, is making us wince. The timing is worrisome. But we can always go back to making our products in the basement of our house in Rockland." I noted that it is nice to be able to come into this shop and see them making the soap in their shiny stainless-steel pots.

You seem to live in the old, but accept the new. "We like the old, and most of the new is good, too. There were no sailboats in the harbor back at the start. Now we can just walk up the street and have a good cup of coffee. Overall, it was so different from what we were used to that at first it seemed like a foreign country: the Maine culture so generationally-rooted, connected to fishing, the canneries still operating. And now, my sister is a massage therapist in Damariscotta, and my brother owns Breakwater Kayaks. Still small, but newer.

"The more recent change has been the electronic age with the culture more homogenous, with lots of money coming in from well-meaning people selling their houses elsewhere at prices unheard of around here. They buy into the new local culture. We still stick to the old. When we first came here, we had great support from friends, family, and especially from the community-at-large. We felt very welcome, and still feel nourished by the community. We try to return that gift."

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Why Our Children Need Schools to Open

by Michael Mullins

Much of the discussion within towns about Covid19 has centered around the opening (or closure, as it were) of public spaces – our streets, our sidewalks, our parks and playgrounds. As governments weigh their choices, their primary considerations are public health and hospital capacity, and the rights of people to move about freely in their daily pursuits.

As we inch closer to fall, the energy of the debate is focusing on schools. Will they reopen, and when? How will classes look and feel? Will they be online or in person?

Public schools are public infrastructure. However the service they offer, organized education & learning, is a special public service offered to young people only at a certain time in their lives. Education is not just an essential service. It is the most essential service to our kids, because it helps to shape them into the adults they will become. Much of this shaping comes from the daily interactions that happen in person. These experiences can be simulated via telepresence, but they cannot be replicated without in- person experiences. The Brookings Institution highlighted this problem in a recent article on school openings, pointing out that our youngest children have lost not only academic but social readiness as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Home instruction can help prevent a slide in academic readiness. Some parents have the capacity in terms of time and interest in home schooling, however many do not. This leaves a

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wide gap between those parents capable of providing rich in-home instruction, and those who cannot.

Particularly vulnerable groups are low income and minority children, and children living with disabilities. Both Lancet Health and the Centers for Disease Control have warned that "...the lack of in-person educational options disproportionately harms low-income and minority children and those living with disabilities. These students are far less likely to have access to private instruction and care and far more likely to rely on key school-supported resources like food programs, special education services, counseling, and after-school programs to meet basic developmental needs." In contrast, the wealthiest families that can afford the extracurricular services that can help close the gap, things like tutoring, group study, summer programs and private instruction.

It's important to remember the very reason public schools were created, to provide a standardized general education for those not wealthy enough to educate their children to a high standard. That is precisely why the public school system exists.

There are innumerable follow-on benefits from this system of in-person education. Improved nutrition, counseling, and better social skills benefit the individual student. Improved civic participation, higher literacy, and lower income inequality are societal benefits, and the foundation of this country's liberal democracy.

The case for in person education is clear. But how to proceed? We will find the answer, as we always do, in innovation, creativity, and flexibility. When classes resume, we need to have special options for children who have health vulnerabilities, or whom have an immediate family member with health vulnerabilities. Anyone who does not want their child to attend in person should be able to opt out. While telepresence may be one tool for these students, we could go further and offer small group instruction, or one on one tutoring.

Homeschooling and independent schools will be more important than ever, and new models such as schooling pods and combined classrooms should be embraced to help bridge the achievement gap.

For administrators, teachers, and parents, the prospects may seem daunting. Trying times like these are when this country and our communities rise to their very best. Renewed energy, new ideas, additional funding, and hard work will allow us to uphold our commitment to of equal public education.

Michael Mullins is a candidate for House District 93 Rockland & Owl's Head

WEEK TWENTY

COVID-19 RANDOM NOTES WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE

by Phyllis Merriam

The other night I noticed a security light had been triggered by a large raccoon feasting on some bird food I'd dumped in order to wash and dry the bird feeder.

The raccoon seemed oblivious to humans gawking at it through the kitchen window. Every now and again it would stand on its hind legs and look around. It was huge.

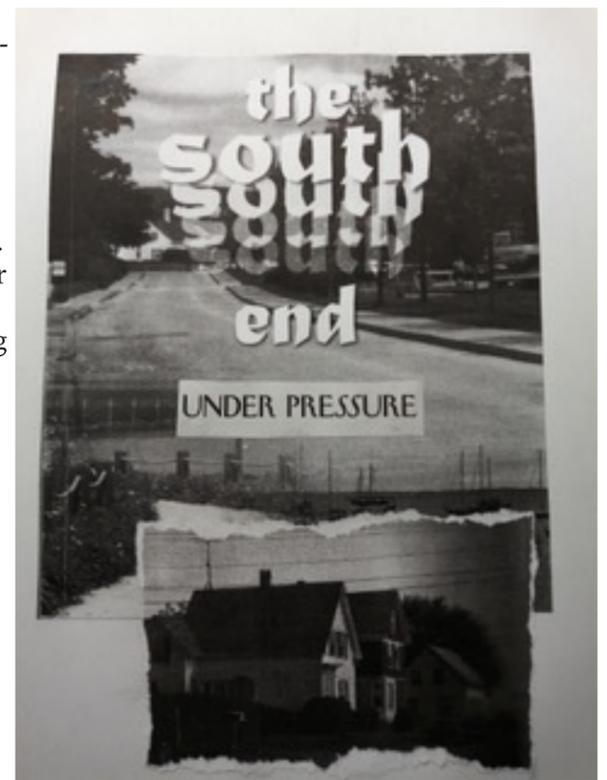
A few years ago, I learned from a documentary, about Toronto's problem, that raccoons have collapsible spines enabling them to access really small spaces.

Hard to believe my husband and I have been sheltering at home for 140 days. Structure and the seasons help define our time. But since there is no end in sight, with no viable vaccine yet and some scientists predicting covid will be around for years, I become anxious and over-think things. Should we take a short road trip? Would tourists be abiding by the CDC? What about public bathrooms? How many disposable masks and hand sanitizers should we bring? And on and on and on.

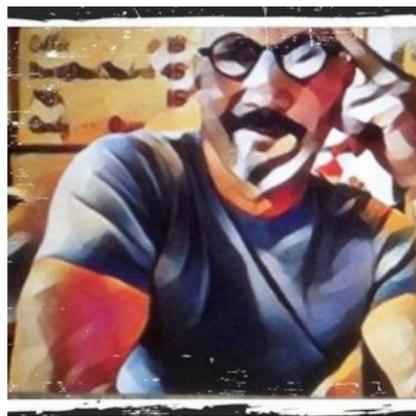
Am depressed by the city's re-assessment of our home and those of our neighbors and friends. The sticker shock is a huge gut punch. Our land went up 92.6% in the re-assessment. There is no way to stop the gentrification plowing through our South End neighborhoods. The city seems intent on turning longtime residents' homes into cash cows for the city's coffers as out-of-state newcomers buy up properties for their second homes. The South End is now the bearer of "fairness" in the re-distribution of the tax burdens around the city. Rockland's failure to hold more frequent property re-evaluations is the result. The city argues that if homeowners sold their homes, the re-evaluations would greatly benefit sellers. While that could be true, where would we go? Our home has been in my husband's family since 1944. My husband is a disabled veteran who deserves to age-in-place. "Thank you for your service" is an empty platitude. A landlord is unlikely to want an outside ramp for his access. Ageing-in-place is a myth. Why should a disabled American Veteran have to leave our home? The homes are far less valuable than the land on which our homes sit. Portland has suspended its property re-assessments due to the new corona virus. No such consideration is contemplated or planned by Rockland even though the city's economy (and those of surrounding areas) has tanked and will take a long time to recover - if they even rebound to pre-covid levels. No helpful, concrete responses from the city are forthcoming.

New wildlife has been observed in our neighborhood. The other day a neighbor saw a healthy fox in her yard around noontime. Other neighbors have seen foxes in their yards as well.

These hot, steamy days make me want to take a nap. This is the hottest Maine July on record.



Glen Birbeck



The Center Must Hold

Wednesdays 6 - 7 p.m. on WRFR, 93.3 & 99.3 fm

Hosted by Eric Gabrielsen. THE CENTER MUST HOLD is a bi-weekly radio call-in program looking at developments of interest, both political and cultural, local and global, with a decidedly irreverent slant.

To paraphrase Yeats. . Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." But friends... With all due apologies to William Butler, The Center Must Hold...

Eric Your host, a sometime instructor and former student of the Autodidact, and currently a licensed trial balloon test pilot. Will present topics, from multiple viewpoints, striving to entertain, illuminate and celebrate the human condition.

But remember correlation is not causation. And nobody ever makes it out alive...

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