

RIVEREAST

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Taking a Costumed Plunge... David Lewis (left) and David Joslin (right) came in costume for the annual Turkey Plunge in East Hampton. The event raised over \$16,000 for East Hampton Food Bank.

Criticism After Repeal Of Racism Proclamation

by Diane Church

Andreas Bisbikos was sworn in as Colchester first selectman on Monday, and immediately followed up on a campaign promise – but in the process stirred a controversy in town.

Bisbikos on Monday repealed a proclamation issued in July 2020 by his predecessor, Mary Bylone, declaring racism to be a “public health crisis” in town. Twenty other Connecticut municipalities – including New London and Glastonbury – have also made such proclamations.

When issuing the proclamation last year, Bylone stated that “declaring racism to be a public health crisis or emergency offers a clear path to intentionally acknowledging and addressing disparities and inequities.”

She added, “What we are trying to say with the proclamation is that we acknowledge that racism plays a part in access to health and other pieces like education and things that help us to be healthier people.”

Nevertheless, many in town objected to the proclamation, with then-selectman Taras Rudko telling Bylone last July that “you’re calling our town racist and I take offense to that.”

During Bisbikos’ campaign this summer, he vowed multiple times to do away with the proclamation, so Monday’s repeal was not entirely unexpected. But the fact that he did it unilaterally and on his very first day in office was not well received in Democratic circles.

“People have reached out to me. They are upset about it,” Bylone said this week. “I never said Colchester was racist. I said racism causes problems getting health care. There is racism and prejudice. We were trying to raise awareness that some people don’t have access to

health care because of it.”

Bylone had a career in the health care field as a nurse and administrator.

“People are denied services that are physical, mental and spiritual,” she said. “Then there’s the impact of COVID. People need equal access.”

Selectman Denise Turner, a lifelong Colchester resident and the only Black member of the board, was also disappointed with Bisbikos’ decision.

“I think he was a little hasty,” she said. “He decided to do it without consulting me. I’m the only person of color in the administration. It would have been nice to talk about it.”

Turner also thinks repealing the proclamation was bad for the town as well.

“This is divisive for us,” she said. “You have to have a discussion with the people it affects. When a bunch of white people say ‘racism does not exist’ you’re not getting the true facts.”

Turner said she experienced racism in the local schools when she was a child.

“In sixth grade, a boy called me the ‘n’ word,” she said. “I complained to the teacher. Then the boy denied it. The teacher didn’t do anything.”

Turner also recalled that “another teacher said Black people have smaller brains. Black children never got good grades in that class.”

Turner said the recent examples of racism she has seen in town were more subtle, such as people slamming a door in her face as she follows them into a building. She also recalled while standing in line, a white man in front of her moved his cell phone out of his back pocket,

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Hebron Gets First Female Eagle Scout

by Sloan Brewster

When growing up, Brynn Maleryn knew she wanted to be “the first female something” – and that “something” wound up being the first female Eagle Scout in Hebron.

The 16-year-old junior at RHAM High School said she was never exactly sure how she would break bounds for women, especially since “we’re everywhere now.”

But in 2018, the Boy Scouts of America opened to its organization girls and renamed itself BSA.

Shortly thereafter, in 2019, Brynn and two friends – Rachel Fournier, 15, and Linnea Carlson, 16 – founded BSA Troop 1028, the first female BSA troop in the town.

Since then, she has completed an Eagle Scout project and done a lot of other steps along the way.

Brynn said while she had been a Girl Scout,

the troop was starting to fall apart and the program wasn’t really for her. BSA, which her brothers were in, resonates more with her personality, she said.

“It’s a lot more outdoorsy,” she said. “I really like that – camping and stuff.”

She said she also enjoys when the boys’ troop, Troop 28, and the girls’ troop get together and go on trips and such.

Before Brynn could join the ranks of the 1,000 female Eagle Scouts that have been recognized in the country since 2018, she had to go through the ranks, Sam Izzarelli, Eagle Scout coordinator, said. That meant becoming a Tenderfoot Second Class and Tenderfoot first class and honing “skills that develop background,” such as camping, cooking, navigating, citizenship, fitness and first aid, he said.

From there, Brynn had to be ranked a Star

and then a Life Scout, he said. To do that, she had to complete service requirements and receive 21 merit badges, 13 of which were specifically required while the others could be of her choice.

“Brynn was very creative in being able to go out and find merit badge opportunities, especially during COVID,” Izzarelli said.

For her Eagle project, Brynn decided to build a stone fire pit and stage at St. Peter’s Preserve, a 22-acre property behind AHM Youth and Family Services on Pendleton Drive.

She completed the build on Saturday Oct. 2, the last major step on her path to becoming the first female Eagle Scout in Hebron.

The final, though smaller, step before Brynn is officially named an Eagle Scout is a board of review, which, according to Izzarelli, is pending.

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What should you look for in your loved ones this holiday season?

- Is their home environment well-maintained? Do you notice any weight loss? Do you see any unopened mail or unpaid bills? Are they experiencing loneliness? How is their balance and mobility? Are they taking their medications?

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