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# The Hour

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The Independent Voice of The Community For 141 Years

Edition 346 Vol. 141 I Tuesday, December 11, 2012 I \$.75 I 203-354-1062 or news@thehour.com

### Today's Focus

SWRPA & SWRMPO to hold annual combined legislative briefing 8 to 9 a.m. at Norwalk City Hall Community Room.

### Today's Weather

Sunny, high near 48, low 28.

## Sandy sacks Goose Island



After Sandy

Above, the small structure on Goose Island — part of the Norwalk Islands and Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge — was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. At right, the structure as seen in the summer of this year.

Hour photos / Chris Bosak

## Sandy destroys 100-year-old shack on Goose Island

By CHRIS BOSAK  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — A small stone building that had stood on Goose Island for more than 100 years and was previously used as part of a study on rat populations has been destroyed by Hurricane Sandy.

Goose Island is a 3.4-acre island among the Norwalk Islands and is part of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. In the spring and summer it is home to thousands of nesting gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. It is located on Long Island Sound, approximately one mile away from Calf Pasture Beach. There is no public access to the island.

The building was constructed in 1909 as part of a rat population study commissioned by the Carnegie Institute, according to the book "Kayaking In and Around the Norwalk Islands." Norwalk's David Park, author of the book, said the island was used as a fish oil rendering plant in the 1800s.

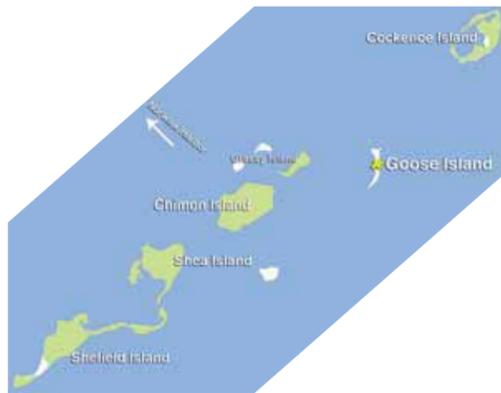
Only two walls of the once-sturdy cement and stone building remain standing. The roof and other walls lies on the island's ground. A flagpole on the island was also toppled.

Rick Potvin, manager of the Stewart B. McKinney

See SANDY Page A5



Before Sandy



### About Goose Island

- GOOSE ISLAND IS LOCATED ABOUT 1,000 YARDS EAST OF GRASSY ISLAND.
- SOME SAY THAT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH WAS DONE ON THE ISLAND TO FIND A CURE FOR YELLOW FEVER.
- OTHERS SAY THE SMALL STONE HUT ON ITS SHORE WAS BUILT AS A SPY LOOKOUT DURING WORLD WAR II.
- GOOSE ISLAND IS AT 41.071°N 73.372°W.

## Index rates schools in city

By MATT COYNE  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — According to the new data released by the state Monday, city schools are solidly "proficient" while outperforming many similar municipalities.

The system, dubbed the School Performance Index, or SPI, is part of the state's new ed-

See INDEX Page A5

## Husband says shot wife in self defense

Alleges Wilton music teacher charged him brandishing a knife

By MATT KIERNAN  
Hour Staff Writer

WILTON — A New Fairfield man told police his wife, a Wilton music teacher, charged him with a knife, forcing him to shoot her Saturday.



Svetlana Bell

Robert Bell, 63, has been charged with first-degree manslaughter with a firearm and other offenses. Bell is accused of shoot-

See HUSBAND Page A5

## Washington Village

## New stoves, fridges on the way

By ROBERT KOCH  
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — Within the next week to 10 days, the Norwalk Housing Authority will replace Washington Village stoves and refrigerators damaged by Hurricane Sandy in late October, according to an official.

Curtis O. Law, Housing Authority executive director, said

See NEW Page A5

BUSINESS.....C1	CONTACT US.....A2	EDITORIAL.....A9
COMICS.....B6	DEAR ABBY.....A10	MOVIES.....A6

OBITUARIES: RICHARD J. BARTOLL, JOHN J. SLATTERY .....PAGE C2



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# New stoves, fridges on the way Achieve program to give Christmas trees to needy

**From Page A1**

roughly 35 appliances were damaged by the storm, based upon an inspection early last week, and will be replaced by the authority shortly.

"Letters have gone out to the tenants advising them that we've placed the order (for the new appliances), and it should be about a week to 10 days until they arrive," Law said Monday. "They'll be comparable and they will be installed. The old ones will be taken away, so the residents will not have to be burdened with getting rid of them."

"We need to make sure this (appliance replacement) gets done as soon as possible," Law added.

Washington Village, a 136-unit public housing complex located along Water Street, was hit hard by the super storm on Oct. 29. Replacing the appliances will run the authority approximately \$40,000, according to Law.

Last month, the authority's board of commissioners reallocated \$80,000 from other projects toward appliance replacement. At

the time, Law estimated that two-thirds to three-quarters of the stoves and refrigerators at Washington Village were damaged by Hurricane Sandy.

The Housing Authority learned in November that the Federal Emergency Management Agency will not cover the expense. FEMA, while covering many insured losses stemming from Sandy, does not duplicate benefits and "replacement of disaster caused damages to appliances is decided on a case-by-case, individual basis based on ownership of the appliance and eligible disaster caused damage," according to one FEMA official.

The storm surge pushed flood waters across Water Street and into many of the apartments. Law estimated that 40 apartments suffered damage. While the damaged units are inhabitable, more inspections and repairs remain, according to Law.

"We're working on the scope of work and how we'll approach it," Law said. "We're still reviewing the damage to the cabinets."

Remaining repair work,

Law said, includes replacing damaged floors and base cabinets that were flooded — and perhaps upper cabinets, also.

"We have to think about the upper cabinets, because you don't want to create a situation that's unsightly," Law said. "We may have to look at doing that as well, if we're not able to get a good match (with the new cabinets)."

The repair work comes as the Housing Authority moves forward with a plan to demolish and rebuild Washington Village under the federal government's Choice Neighborhoods Program.

The draft plan remains under development in anticipation of submission to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development by the end of the year.

Execution of the project would be contingent upon HUD approval of the plan and Congressional approval of funding. The project is pegged at \$30 million. Competition for Choice Neighborhoods Program funding is extremely competitive, according to officials.

**By ROBIN KAMINSKI**  
HOUR STAFF WRITER

NORWALK — There is nothing like the smell of a freshly cut, decorated tree to get you into the holiday spirit.

But if you don't have a tree yet, here's your chance to snatch one up.

Enter the eighth annual Achieve Christmas tree giveaway, which offers up dozens of trees free to the public.

"It's our way of giving back to the community and saying thank you," said coordinator Joanne Virgil. "We don't ask for anything in return, we just want to hand out the trees to those who can't buy one this year."

Virgil said the event is scheduled to take place on Dec. 15 at 7:30 p.m. at the Bethel AME Church, located at 34 Merwin St.

Her late son, Alonzo founded Achieve and brainstormed the tree giveaway in conjunction

with the Rowayton Nativity Pageant, which generously donates more than 100 trees used for its annual holiday show.

"We are so grateful to them (Rowayton) for providing this service to us and the community," Virgil said.

"People really look forward to this every year. Trees are expensive, so we appreciate the work of the pageantry."

Laura Czegledi, a teacher at Rowayton Elementary School and director of the Nativity Pageant said the trees donated for the giveaway hail from northern Connecticut.

"The Rowayton Civic Association is a non-profit and raises money throughout the year for different activities in town, including the pageant," Czegledi said.

"The partnership between Achieve and the association was founded with Alonzo Virgil, who

was a younger, African American man who wanted to give children in Norwalk before and after-school activities. He formed a relationship with the then director of the pageant, Joy Lenters, to donate the trees."

Czegledi said the plump, Christmas trees are used as a backdrop for the 30-minute show held at the Rowayton School at 6 p.m., also on Dec. 15.

"The Achieve people come to watch the pageant and then we help them load all the trees onto trucks and they bring them over to be donated," Czegledi said. "Everyone that gets a tree is encouraged to come and watch the nativity show beforehand."

Those who pick up trees are asked to donate a new, unused toy for Achieve's Toys for Tots program.

For more information on the tree program, call (203) 354-2753.

## Index rates schools in city

**From Page A1**

educational accountability and support system. The index was developed as part of the state's No Child Left Behind waiver applied for in February and granted in May. It replaces the old Adequate Yearly Progress marks.

"(The SPI) enables more precise, more helpful snapshots of school performance," said Commissioner Stefan Pryor. "By heralding schools making significant progress and highlighting schools in need of greater support, the system will also help districts and the state focus our efforts where they are needed most."

The SPI grades schools on a scale from zero to 100 based on a school's Con-

necticut Mastery Test (CMT) or Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) performance average. The state has an 88 SPI goal, with schools below that mark expected to bring their score up by 1/12 of the difference between their three year average SPI and the goal annually.

For the 2011-12 school year, 18 of 19 Norwalk schools fell in the 68 to 88 range, meaning, on average, students are at the "proficient" level. Briggs High School is the only school to not have a SPI rating for last school year. In 2010-11, the school had an SPI of 16.6.

Cranbury Elementary School was the only school to meet the state's goal of 88 in the three years SPI

figures were released for.

While the District Performance Index — an SPI for the entire district — will not be available until late next year and a state SPI is not available, Norwalk's 77.4 three-year SPI average for elementary and middle schools is higher than nearby Stamford and Danbury and other cities deemed similar by the state like Ansonia, East Hartford and Norwich. At the high school level, excluding Briggs and its 20.6 three-year SPI, Norwalk also outpaces those cities, save Stamford.

Neither Interim Superintendent Tony Daddona nor Board of Education Chairman Mike Lyons or Vice Chairman Artie Kasimis were available for comment Monday.

## Sandy destroys shack on island

**From Page A1**

National Wildlife Refuge, said it was unclear what will become of the structure. He said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department is in the "later stages of assessment" regarding the Norwalk Islands.

"We need to figure it out. There are a lot of things to look at and right now we are reviewing the options," he said. "I think Goose Island is a very important island to have. We have to look at the islands and see what makes sense."

The Stewart B. McKinney NWR stretches across the coast of Connecticut. It is located along the Atlantic Flyway bird migration route and provides important habitat for nesting birds. The refuge also includes the Norwalk islands of Sheffield, Chimmon, and Peach.

"Erosion, that was the number one problem on the Norwalk Islands," Potvin said. "There's not a

lot of infrastructure on the islands so we made out relatively well from that standpoint. The islands did provide protection for the city from Hurricane Sandy."

The south side of the islands suffered considerable erosion as Hurricane Sandy battered the shores. The damage comes on the heels of Hurricane Irene causing considerable erosion last year. Both Park and Norwalk boater Larry Flynn over the years have watched erosion take a toll on several islands off the coast of Norwalk and Westport. Park and Flynn each expressed concern for the islands' future. During a boat trip last week, Flynn noted serious erosion damage to Cockenoe, Grassy and other islands.

"If it keeps up, the islands will be completely flat," Park said.

Regarding the building on Goose Island, Park said it was a nice historic landmark, but he sees no reason to rebuild it.

Sheffield Island's seawall was heavily damaged and rocks are strewn about the island. The grass and picnic areas surrounding the lighthouse are now covered with large rocks. The recently renovated lighthouse, which is owned and operated by the Norwalk Seaport Association (NSA), suffered only minimal damage, according to NSA President Irene Dixon. A small house on the island did suffer damage. Dixon said the NSA is working with FEMA regarding funds for clean-up work.

"It will be a very laborious undertaking," Dixon said. "All the work we did renovating the lighthouse paid off. The biggest concern now is the gabion (sea) wall."

Dixon said the funds raised at the Norwalk Seaport Association's annual gala event, scheduled for March 23 at Norwalk Inn, will go towards rebuilding the seawall on Sheffield Island.

## Husband claims self defense

**From Page A1**

ing to death his wife, Svetlana Bell, 47, in their New Fairfield home Saturday night.

Represented by Danbury Public Defender Mark Johnson, Bell saw Judge John Blawie in an arraignment hearing at Danbury Superior Court on Monday. No plea was entered, but a bond was set at \$750,000 and a protective order was issued by Blawie, according to a Danbury Superior Court clerk.

Police say they received a 911 call from Robert Bell requesting an ambulance around 7 p.m. on Saturday. Upon arrival, police say they found Svetlana on the kitchen floor with apparent gunshot wounds.

Svetlana was shot four times in the chest and found unresponsive on the floor of her kitchen after an altercation with her husband, Robert. She was transported to Danbury Hospital, where she was pronounced dead a short time later, police said.

"This is a very difficult situation for us all to deal with as parents in this community," said Lisa Smith, Cider Mill School's Parent Teacher Association representative, in an e-mail on Monday.

Smith said to direct further questions to Gary Richards, superintendent of Wilton schools.

"I know I speak for us all when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with Svetlana's family," said Richards in a statement released Sunday.

According to the Superintendent's Office, no memorial service had been planned as of Monday afternoon.

Richards said counseling services were available Monday for students and faculty to help them process the loss of a "friend and colleague."

New Fairfield resident and a friend of Svetlana's



AP pool photo / Gary Jeanfaivre

Robert Bell, 63, of New Fairfield, appears before Judge John Blawie in Danbury Superior Court on Monday, represented by Public Defender Mark Johnson, left.

for eight years, Susan Spaulding also commented on the incident on Sunday, saying she was "shocked and saddened." Spaulding met Svetlana when she taught strings ensemble to third-, fourth- and fifth-graders at Meeting House Hill School in New Fairfield. Spaulding ran the school store at the time.

"She helped me learn the violin," said Spaulding. "We became good friends."

Svetlana had been employed at Cider Mill School since 2006. She was also a violinist with the Danbury Symphony Orchestra, according to Spaulding.

Spaulding said Svetlana was a hard-working musician, adding that Svetlana learned to play violin in

Russia by practicing 10 to 12 hours each day.

Svetlana had similar advice for her students, which could be seen in an August letter issued to parents of students entering her Cider Mill string program.

"Learning to play a string instrument at Cider Mill depends on three things: small group lessons, orchestra rehearsals in the morning before school, and practice at home," Svetlana wrote in the letter.

Robert Bell's next court appearance is scheduled for Jan. 7 in Danbury Superior Court.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

### Norwalk Medical Group

Announces

**Elliot J. Husarsky M.D.** will be departing the group as of January 3, 2013.

Dr. Husarsky's patients will be cared for by Dr. Varughese.

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