



HOME: Youth Economic Group opens 'Spark'. **1B**

VALENTINE: Special ideas as special day draws near. **4-5A**

TRACK & FIELD: Tri-Valley boys, Sullivan West girls cop titles. **8B**

Documentary captures last days...

Kutsher's
... and enduring legacy

BY DAN HUST

MONTICELLO — Holding on longer than Grossinger's, longer than the Pines, longer even than the grand dame of the Concord, Kutsher's Country Club outlasted every other major Borscht Belt hotel.

Still, this storied Monticello resort couldn't outlive changing times — a 20th century destination out of fashion (and out of steam) at the dawn of the 21st.

That's when Caroline Laskow and Ian Rosenberg made their way to Kutsher's. Now married, in 2002 they were dating and looking for an interesting getaway.

They had never been to the resort, but upon arrival, they discovered a place where ice-skating lessons, classic nightclub acts and endless borscht were served in a setting straight out of the 1960s.

"We had a blast!" Caroline recalled. "It felt a little like being in Colonial Williamsburg," said Ian — a place where time stood still, where people were unfailingly friendly, where being Jewish and being American were celebrated simultaneously.

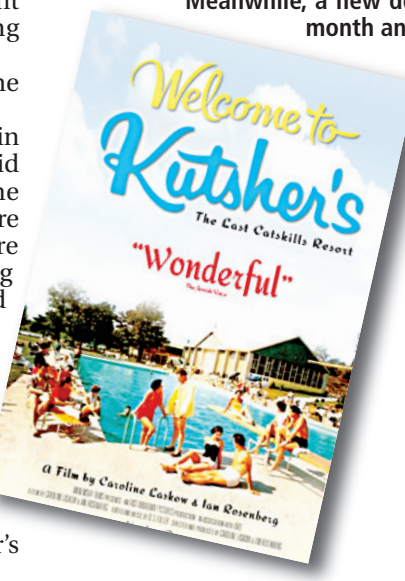
And where a good story was just waiting to be told. Both directors and producers in the film and television business, the duo contacted Mark Kutsher, who invited them to come 'round during Kutsher's 100th anniversary in 2007.

"He just gave us open access," marvelled Caroline. "We felt so lucky to be welcomed into the resort with our cameras."

What those cameras cap-



Demolition work quietly proceeds at the former Kutsher's Country Club near Monticello this week. Meanwhile, a new documentary about the famous, long-lasting resort is debuting this month and next.



LEFT: A poster of the movie when it premiered in 2012. ABOVE: Documentary directors Ian Rosenberg and Caroline Laskow flank longtime Kutsher's ice skating instructor Celia Duffy at the Lincoln Center Premiere in 2012. They've since added more footage.



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Village of **Liberty** Mayoral Election:

Dan Ratner loses all party backing

BY ELI RUIZ

LIBERTY — In a surprising development, Village of Liberty Mayor Dan Ratner Sr. has lost all party backing as he prepares for next month's election.

The lifelong registered Republican did not win support from Democrats, Republicans, and the Independence and Conservative Parties, who are all now backing Village Councilman Ron Stabak for mayor.

"What they've [the parties] done is disenfranchise the voters of Liberty," fumed Ratner in a Wednesday interview with the Democrat. "If you don't have a candidate then you have a rigged election."

Asked why he believed the parties have shifted their support to Stabak, Ratner offered simply, "Politics... I don't play politics and a lot of people don't like that... It's my style of governing they're taking issue with."

Liberty Democratic Committee Chair Bill Liblick explained, "It's not that [Ratner] lost the backing of the parties, it's that there were two caucuses [and] I didn't see him [Ratner] at [either]."

"They were open caucuses," continued Liblick. "The people of the parties nominated their candidates, and the people on election day will vote for whomever they want to vote for... if he [Ratner] wants to run under an [independent] line then he's totally free to run."

Liblick continued, "The fact of the matter is that the people feel that Ratner's been a dedicated person to the Village of Liberty... still, there's been this feeling that Ron Stabak can take this village in a different direction. He is now backed by all the major parties."

Ratner was elected to



DEMOCRAT FILE PHOTO
Dan Ratner Sr.

office two years ago, without a viable Democratic candidate, Ratner made an appearance at that year's Democratic caucus and asked to be their candidate. Ratner, running on the Democratic and Commitment to Progress lines, defeated incumbent Mayor Rich Winters, whose name appeared on the Republican, Conservative and Independence/Common Sense lines.

This year, according to Liblick, though Ratner did send a few representatives to support him at last Tuesday's Democratic caucus, the mayor himself did not show up.

"The vast majority of voting Democrats endorsed Stabak," said Liblick.

"He [Ratner] can make all the allegations he wants but the fact is the people voted for who they wanted to be their party nominee... again, it's not the parties, it's the voters," affirmed Liblick.

"What folks need to understand is that two years ago I backed Mayor Ratner and we ran together," offered Stabak. "We were aligned at that time, so I'd

PLEASE SEE **MAYOR**, 3A

Despite vandalism, Spring Glen resort goes forward

BY CHARLES GUY HARRITON

SPRING GLEN — The transformation of the former Homowack Lodge into a highly-touted Spring Glen Resort received a setback when vandalism to the tune of \$50,000 halted the project.

New York State Police in Ellenville and Wurtsboro arrested 42-year-old Richard C. Hage Jr. of Pine Bush and charged him with third degree burglary, a felony, and misdemeanor fourth degree criminal mischief.

Police say that Hage vandalized the project with graffiti and destroyed some of the work that was underway. Hage was remanded to the Sullivan County Jail on \$10,000 bail by Town of



A worker covers the graffiti on a building of the Spring Glen Resort.

Mamakating Justice Cynthia Dolan.

Beautiful Earth Group is renovating the old resort and owner Lex Heslin said he is in debt to the police work, as Hage had vandalized the project more than once. Heslin, of the Brooklyn-based company, said additional security measures are being taken to insure there are no copycat crimes against the resort.

"[Hage] has a 'signature' scrawl, he's left [graffiti] all over the area," Heslin said.

Lauren Francis, Beautiful Earth Group associate and manager of sustainability, said the perpetrator had "broken in more than once, leaving his trademark scrawl."

Mamakating Supervisor Bill Herrmann also applauded the work of the state troopers, saying, "the people need to know that they're safe and that their property will be protected to the fullest extent of the law."

The Homowack was a mainstay of the Borscht Belt era, and included indoor and outdoor skating rinks, pools and tennis courts and some of the first automated Brunswick bowling lanes.

According to Francis, "Vestiges from these glory days are said to attract 'urban explorers' and graffiti artists looking to promote their 'tags' and photos on social media like Instagram and Twitter."

PLEASE SEE **RESORT**, 3A



Lex Heslin oversees work on his property while John Zeh is working the excavator, clearing a former bungalow colony just up the hill from the old Homowack. Lex says the acreage being cleared will host solar panels, vertical wind turbines and a shallow geothermal system, all of which will be used to power the resort (with extra left over to return to the grid).

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COMING UP 4A
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SPORTSMAN OUTDOORS 7B



Begin Again ready to start on home for veterans in Liberty

BY DAN HUST

LIBERTY — Plans to create a home for veterans transitioning from service back into society got a major boost on January 23.

That's when Begin Again Transitional Services (BATS) closed on the house and property at 15 Dixon Avenue in Liberty — and only paid legal, deed and title fees.

The 2,800-square-foot house and surrounding parcel were donated by the children, Ronald Greenberg and Nancy Greenberg Pithis, of the former owners, the late Jack and



Arline Greenberg. "The family really felt good about it," said Rev. Norman Graves, pastor of New Beginnings Community Worship Center, of which BATS is an

outreach ministry. "They saw how dedicated we were." "Now we just have to clean it out," added Anthony Covington, vice chairman of BATS' Board of Advisors (which includes Irene Davis, Brian Rourke and Christine Schiff). The century-old residence is in good shape but needs new paint, room renovations and minor repairs to become the six-bed transitional veterans home Graves and Covington envision. That's why, thanks to the efforts of Congressman Chris Gibson, they're getting ready to welcome an engineer and repre-

PLEASE SEE **VETERANS**, 3A

POLICE NOTES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The display of weapons seized on January 30 after a raid on a house in Lumberland. Two individuals face charges.

Weapons cache seized in Lumberland drug raid

LIBERTY — On Friday, January 30, the State Police Community Narcotics Enforcement Team, Troop F Liberty, and the State Police Special Operations Team working in conjunction with the Sullivan County District Attorney's Office executed a search warrant at 251 Haring Road in the Town of Lumberland, Sullivan County. The search warrant was the result of a narcotics investigation. During the search of the residence State Police seized heroin, marijuana, prescription drugs as well as 134 long guns, four assault rifles, one electronic stun gun, and two handguns. The two handguns and several of the long guns were reported stolen from Pennsylvania. William T. Cropley (53) and Gina Cerciello (26) both from the address, were charged with criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree, criminal possession of a weapon in the third degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the third degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the fourth degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the fourth degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the seventh degree, and unlawful possession of marijuana. Cerciello was arraigned before the Town of Callicoon Justice Honorable Edward McKenna and remanded to Sullivan County Jail on \$15,000 bail. Cropley was arraigned before the Town of Highland Justice Honorable Anthony LaRuffa and committed to Sullivan County on \$75,000 bail.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Gina Cerciello, left, and William T. Cropley have been charged with multiple felonies as a result of a narcotics investigation.

fourth degree, criminal possession of stolen property in the fourth degree, criminal possession of a controlled substance in the seventh degree, and unlawful possession of marijuana. Cerciello was arraigned before the Town of Callicoon Justice Honorable Edward McKenna and remanded to Sullivan County Jail on \$15,000 bail. Cropley was arraigned before the Town of Highland Justice Honorable Anthony LaRuffa and committed to Sullivan County on \$75,000 bail.

Monticello men burgled from empty residences

WURTSBORO — The New York State Police at Wurtsboro arrested Darren Mance (39) and Amiel Maerling (22), both of Monticello for burglary in the third degree, larceny in the fourth degree and criminal mischief in the second degree, all felonies, as well as petit larceny, criminal possession of stolen property in the fifth degree and criminal trespass in the third degree, all misdemeanors. The arrests were the result of a reported burglary to a seasonal residence in the Town of Thompson where Mance and Maerling entered



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Darren Mance, left, and Amiel Maerling face burglary charges.

an unoccupied residence, stripped it of the copper pipe and removed several power tools including chain saws, a lawn mower and a power washer, along with other items. Both men additionally illegally entered an unoccupied bungalow in the Town of Thompson and removed a quantity of copper pipe from that location. During the course of the investigation, Mance was additionally found to possess several street signs stolen from the Town of Mamakating. Maerling was released on bail to appear in the Town of Thompson Court at a later date. Mance was remanded to the Sullivan County Jail on \$30,000 bail to appear in the Town of Mamakating Court at a later date.

Woman strikes disabled vehicle, injures two

FALLSBURG — The Town of Fallsburg Police Department arrested Jessica Walts (37) of Wurtsboro and charged her with vehicular assault in the first degree, a felony, and driving while ability impaired by drugs, a misdemeanor. It is alleged that Walts rear-ended a disabled vehicle on the side of the road being worked on by two men, brothers, who sustained serious injuries. Both had to be airlifted to Westchester Medical Center. Walts was arraigned in front of Honorable Ivan Kalter and sent to Sullivan County Jail in lieu of \$7,500 bail.

Read the Democrat!

RESORT: Moving forward

FROM FRONT PAGE

The 330-room, 46-acre property is currently being re-purposed by its new owner into a park, with recreational facilities and an organic farm purveyor as well as an "Eco Lodge." Development will come in phases. Plans call for a high-tech green facility with an electricity microgrid, powered entirely by renewable energy. Natural foods and supplies will be grown locally. The owner has invested upwards of \$1 million, including cleaning, securing and stabilizing the 350,000-square-foot property. Heslin said he grew up in Atlanta, "with nature" as he put it, and later moved north. Thirteen years ago he learned about the availability of a 35-acre bungalow colony next to the Homowack and bought it. Back then, he related, the Homowack "was a beautiful resort, with a well-tended hotel and golf course." The resort was eventually bought by an Orthodox Jewish group. In 2009 the lodge was being used as a girls camp under the name

Machne Bnos Square. Mamakating cited the facility for violations and tried to have the camp shut down. The New York State Department of Health eventually closed the camp for numerous health hazards. The 46 acres eventually wound up in foreclosure and last year Heslin put in a successful bid at the Sullivan County property auction and now owns 81 contiguous acres.

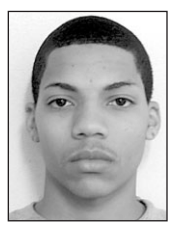
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IN THE COURTS

Court affirms murder conviction in homicide

MONTICELLO — District Attorney Jim Farrell announced that the Supreme Court Appellate Division Third Department, in Albany, on January 22 affirmed the murder, robbery and weapon convictions of David "DJ" Perkins, of Monticello. Perkins was convicted by guilty plea of murder in the second degree, robbery in the first degree and criminal possession of a weapon in the second degree in October of 2010 in Sullivan County Court and was sentenced to 18 years to life in state prison. In his appeal Perkins challenged the voluntariness of his confession, taken by members of the Monticello Police and New York State Police, who investigated the homicide. His appeal also claimed his sentence was excessive. The appellate court rejected all of his arguments and affirmed all of his convictions.

In a decision authored by Justice William E. McCarthy, the court found that the Sullivan County Court's denial of Perkin's motion to suppress his confession was proper and that his confession was knowing, intelli-



David Perkins

gent and voluntary in all respects. Perkins admitted to participating in the robbery and homicide of 25-year-old Carl Williams in June of 2009 near the Shore Garden Apartments. Perkins and Ja'Quis Lowery, also of Monticello, who is serving a 15-to-life sentence for his role in the robbery and murder, admitted to setting out to rob Williams while both were armed with loaded illegal handguns, one of which discharged killing Williams. Farrell said the evidence in the case established that Perkins was the shooter. A third man, Lawrence Watson, was also convicted and admitted to directing Perkins and Lowery to rob Williams with the loaded guns and he is currently serving 22 years to life in state prison. Farrell said, "We are very pleased with the Appellate Court's decision and hope it brings some measure of solace to Carl's family and his mother, Janette Williams, who since Carl's death has engaged our community in an continuing effort to prevent further street violence and these actions have made a substantial positive impact on the residents of Monticello." Executive Assistant DA Meagan Galligan wrote the appellate brief and the case was argued in Supreme Court by DA Farrell.

MAYOR: No party backing

FROM FRONT PAGE

aligned at that time, so I'd like to say, in fairness, that the Republicans... they didn't even endorse him [Ratner] last time, so it's not like the Republican party abandoned him... they never endorsed him."

Involvement in local politics for just two years now, Stabak, a retired Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) officer, explained, "What happened was that I went to the Democratic caucus... I was nominated but it wasn't the party that decided on the nomination, it was the people."

Stabak continued, "I made a whole lot of phone calls over the weekend and went out and knocked on doors [with] Sal Cracolici. I went out and engaged with and talked to the people... I don't know what Dan [Ratner] has done out there, and this is no criticism at all toward him, but it's

the locals... it was the local people who decided, not either of the parties. The parties are now just backing the choice the voters made."

Stabak is hopeful of his chances come March: "I was fortunate enough to have enough people there [Democratic caucus] that we actually won 2.5 to 1 against him [Ratner]. No insult to Dan, but it was not the parties, it's the populace; the voters."

Asked if he thinks Ratner might feel betrayed, Stabak remains cordial, "I've been very very open with Dan, and as a matter of fact we spoke last night (Tuesday night)... I've asked him to go and get those 75 signatures and get on a line... his own even. I really want to see Dan on the ballot and in this race."

"In the end," added Stabak. "I just want a nice, clean race... I want Dan on the ballot... I've told him so. This way the people can decide."

VETERANS: Place to call home

FROM FRONT PAGE

representative from Soldier On (a nonprofit which works to end veteran homelessness) to figure out how to refit the house within the regulations of the Veterans Administration.

They're also looking for two more advisory board members, one a veteran, to guide them on what Graves says is a mission given to him by God. "Most people didn't think it was possible," the reverend acknowledged. "I said, 'God gave me a vision, and He will make it happen.'"

"People can't believe how far we've gotten," added Covington. "... You've just got to keep moving in the direction the Lord takes you in."

The two are especially grateful to the Greenberg and Pithis families for their generosity in giving away a home they could have likely sold for six figures.

Now BATS is turning to the

community to fund not only the renovations work but the equipment and staffing needed to start up and operate the veterans home.

A penny social is already in the works (utilizing various items of interest still left in the house), but the big fundraiser is a benefit dinner scheduled for April 17 at the Eagle's Nest in Bloomingburg. The \$65/guest dinner will include a silent auction of valuable products and services donated by local businesses. Tickets are now available.

Covington welcomes more donations of both auction items and cash, and in the future, he'll also be looking for furniture and appliances. He can be reached at 914-850-6189 or at bats.nbcwc@gmail.com.

"We really want it to be a nice place for veterans," Pastor Graves affirmed.

KUTSCHER'S: Its last days

FROM FRONT PAGE

Freddie Roman, ice skating instructor Celia Duffy, activities director Larry Strickler, and of course, the Kutsher family, led by "First Lady of the Catskills" Helen Kutsher.

"All these people were such wonderful characters," acknowledged Ian. "They weren't blinded to the realities of the day, but they were still holding on."

Ian and Caroline stitched together the pieces of their Kutsher's documentary in time for a 2012 premiere at Lincoln Center, but by then they were aware the resort was shutting down and on the verge of being sold.

"We felt the film was ready

to be seen, but we really didn't have a final ending," said Ian.

So after Kutsher's was purchased by an international media mogul in 2013, the couple returned for a 2014 auction and, later, the start of demolitions — a sad but fitting end to their hourlong tribute to a defining Catskills destination.

Capping eight years of effort, "Welcome to Kutsher's: The Last Catskills Resort" will have its first true theatrical release this month and next in Florida and California.

It is dedicated to Helen Kutsher, who died in 2013.

"We were really honored to be able to talk to Helen," affirmed Ian. "She's someone we fell in love with."

Kutsher's Movie: What you'll see

"Welcome to Kutsher's: The Last Catskills Resort" captures more than the rise and decline of a Monticello fixture. Filmmakers Caroline Laskow and Ian Rosenberg caught the final vestiges of a singularly American way of life, of vacationing, of escaping not just urban chaos but centuries of oppression.

And within that grand tapestry are interwoven strands of very personal, very familiar, very poignant stories, often about the family behind the hotel.

"We had a good marriage," Helen Kutsher says at one point, speaking of her husband, Milton. "We had a good life together."

"Our best times were the 1970s and 1980s. We were busy building," muses her son, Mark, shortly before the camera shows a 100th anniversary sign in 2007 optimistically predicting, "The Future Is Bright."

Entertainers also loom large in the documentary, from Ray Charles and Joan Rivers to Sid Caesar, Howie Mandel, Louie Armstrong and a memorable piece of vintage footage showing comic Andy Kaufman wrestling a woman in 1979.

Kutsher's legendary sports programs are also profiled, especially basketball great Wilt Chamberlain, who began his career as a Kutsher's bellhop (so did Jerry Seinfeld, according to another clip).

Those unfamiliar with the dish for which the Borscht Belt was named will find understanding here — along with a tribute to those who made and served it in endless

amounts.

"Probably the most employees we have are in the kitchen and dining room," says Mark Kutsher. "It's not fine dining, but it is good dining."

The last of Kutsher's tumblers (entertainers) is shown, as well, with Krazy Tyrone engaging guests in a classic "Simon Says" game.

Even one of the final events at Kutsher's, a music festival called All Tomorrow's Parties, is glimpsed, with a new generation of resortgoers relishing what one of them calls Kutsher's "cross between [the films] 'Cocoon' and 'The Shining.'"

Indeed, most facets of the resort are featured in some fashion, save for the one that never arrived: casinos.

"That is not in our future anymore," a wistful Mark is seen admitting in 2007.

But what's in Kutsher's past cannot be forgotten, thanks to a family, a staff, and a host of guests who share generously of their experiences (would you expect anything less?) in "Welcome to Kutsher's."

"We gave a lot of people good vacations and very good memories," acknowledges Mark. "I think that's really our legacy."

To find out more, visit kutshers-doc.com. Screening dates and locations are available there, as is the chance to share your own Kutsher's story with other website visitors. Local screening venues are being sought, while a DVD release is anticipated around Memorial Day.

POLICE NOTES

'Tool Bandit' arrested on several charges

MONTICELLO — On Saturday, January 31, deputies from the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office arrested Michael Chase (43) of Liberty. He was picked up as he left the Catskill Regional Medical Center. Chase was wanted on two bench warrants, one charging felony violation of probation, the other charging misdemeanor possession of a controlled substance and evidence tampering. Chase is also the subject of an investigation by the Sheriff's Office involving the theft of tools and other equipment from unlocked vehicles parked at Home Depot and WalMart

in Monticello. Chase gained notoriety in April of 2010 when he and a codefendant, Nickie Cirielli, were dubbed "The Monticello Tool Bandits" after deputies arrested them for stealing from contractors' vehicles parked at the Thompson Square Mall. Last year Cirielli committed suicide by jumping off the George Washington Bridge after being implicated in a murder in Suffern. Chase was committed to the Sullivan County Jail without bail. The investigation is continuing.

AUTO • HOME • LIFE • RETIREMENT State Farm Hours: Mon - Thurs 9am-6pm Fri 8am-5pm • Sat 9am-1pm Closed Sunday 18 Thompson Square, Monticello, NY 794-7000 robert.wells.k2on@statefarm.com Robert Wells Agent

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MONTICELLO CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT Alternative Veterans Exemption Public Hearing Thursday, February 12 at 7 p.m. Emma C. Chase Elementary School 28 Pennsylvania Avenue, Wurtsboro

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