



The Weathervane

Winter

A Quarterly for and from West Gardiner

2022

Mert Hickey— A True Friend to West Gardiner

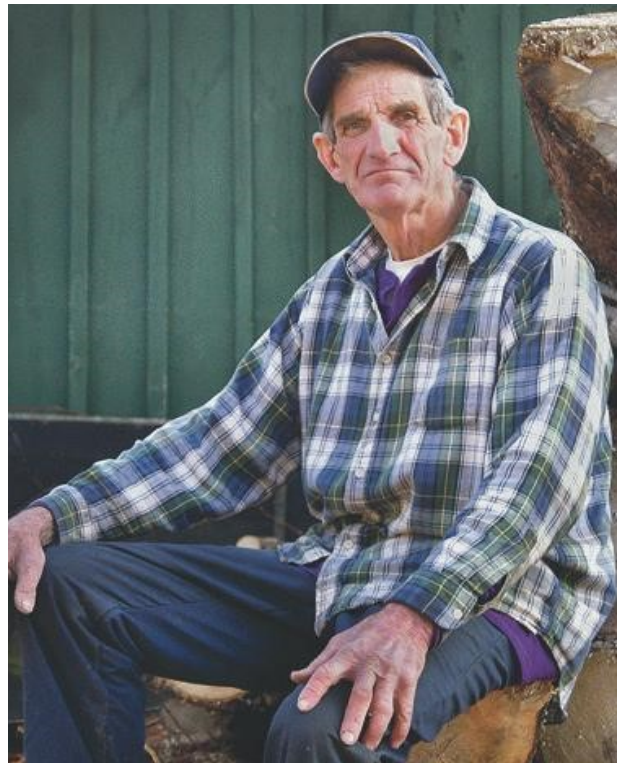
"Never give up, work hard and don't be a dub" – Mert Hickey

Dubbing Around With Mert – Mike Wing

Every month or so, he would sit in our kitchen and tell West Gardiner stories. Susan would chuckle as she followed along and typed. Other days, he would write memories down and Susan would transcribe. We learned a lot about the town that way. His anecdotes were always funny and ironic, the color of "Weathervane." Boy, could he talk about wood, probably because he'd been harvesting it since he was a boy. Ask about oak and expect to learn about Black, White, Red, Scarlet, Bear, Chestnut, Bur, and Swamp White. He knew the tallest Red Oak was in Vienna. He'd seen it. The reminders of his dangerous profession were carried quietly, scars and fractures, hearing loss and soreness. But when this town needed service, he'd get down off the skidder and sign on to help schools, town administration, and the less fortunate. His walk and manner remind me of a Jimmy Stewart picture, just more creased and folded. When he'd stop by and we weren't home, he'd put a porch chair in front of the door, just so we'd know. Come by anytime, Mert.

On Meeting Mert—Phil Davis

Mert Hickey was the first person I met in Maine. It was December 23, 1985. Answering a tiny classified ad in the Boston Globe I had purchased, almost sight unseen, a distressed island cottage on Lake Cobbosseecontee. I arrived two days before Christmas to a beat up cabin and no firewood. Walking down the West Road asking advice I was sent, of course, to Mert. I later came to realize how lucky it was to find him at home midday. I told Mert my need and he replied that the ice was too thin for him to truck across the lake, he would drop wood at shore for me. I would learn over the years it was one of the few times he did not try to drive a loaded truck across the lake! Mert added, "By the way, tomorrow is Christmas Eve, we are having a party, come and meet the neighborhood." He said it with a relaxed cordiality and that party was a wonderful welcome to Maine. I have valued Mert's friendship; worked shoulder to shoulder with him on many island and other projects; and greatly appreciated his wisdom and countless skills. I miss and will miss Mert.



The *Weathervane* staff has decided to honor and remember Mert Hickey with stories and memories. **We ask that community folks submit their Mert tales to Colene O'Neill at coleneoneill1@gmail.com** We will include them in 2022 issues. We hope the stories and tributes touch on all aspects of what he meant to West Gardiner and its residents. **Please help keep his memory alive with "Dubbing Around With Mert."**

Ernie Pierce– Thank you

By Deborah Couture

Thank you to Ernie Pierce for his 3 years as Fire Chief of the West Gardiner Volunteer Fire Department (WGFD). Ernie's years with fire departments started in 1970, when he volunteered for the Hallowell Fire Department as a teenager. He served 10 years there. When he and Sue were married, they moved to the West Forks and he became a firefighter there for 7 more years. In the late 80s they moved to West Gardiner and in 2005, Ernie joined the WGFD. Ernie served as Captain with Chief Chris McLaughlin and as Assistant Chief with Chief Gary Hickey II. He was elected Fire Chief in 2019. This has been an eventful 3 years for Ernie, as 2 of his 3 years were served during the COVID-19 epidemic. Positive gains for the WGFD during Ernie's tenure include federal, state and local grants for COVID supplies, AEDs, pagers, Thermal Imaging Cameras, and air packs. The WGFD also purchased and refurbished a 2011 F-350 truck in 2020 that now serves as a forestry truck for the department.



My High School Experience by Isaac Dostie—Student Writer

I am a resident of West Gardiner who will graduate in June from Gardiner Area High School. While I had never heard of *The Weathervane* until this year, perhaps I can spread some positivity in a not-so-positive two years. I have been accepted at Colby College, the Class of 2026. I want to further my passion for science in the Biochemistry program.

I did not get where I am today without the help and push from amazing educators at the high school. I would like to publicly thank my classroom teachers and acknowledge their help and guidance. Classes such as Advanced Placement (AP) Chemistry, AP Biology, and AP Statistics, taught by Mrs. Whitten, Mr. Harris, and Mr. Gray helped me realize that my passion lies in the sciences. Not only have I experienced an increased interest in high level courses, but I have also found a love for extracurricular activities such as track and cross country, both coached by Mrs. Boudreau. I have been a member of the National Honor Society whose purpose is volunteerism for the betterment of the community. For four years I have been a part of the Latin Club, led by Mrs. Collins, and we compete state-wide against other schools. These experiences have given me the opportunity to establish a work ethic, meet new friends, and develop into the person I want to be.

Due to COVID-19, I was stressed about whether I am ready for the future workload that accompanies college life. My teachers have lessened those worries. The college level classes they teach have allowed me to learn at a college level. Without the help of these public servants, I would not have been able to achieve the grades and background needed to attend a top rated college like Colby. Teachers at all levels deserve more respect than they have been given in the last few years. They have certainly gone out of their way to help me accomplish my goals and attend my dream college. Teachers work diligently to meet the needs of every student. I celebrate and thank all of them.

New Officers Named to West Gardiner Fire Department

by Deborah Couture

The West Gardiner selectmen recently appointed Michael Dovinsky as the new West Gardiner Fire Chief. Chief Dovinsky has served on the fire department for nearly a decade and was Captain for the past several years. Chief Dovinsky appointed Michael Gross as Deputy Chief, Nick Whitmore as Assistant Chief, and Rick Dupont as Captain. There are currently 22 volunteer fire fighters working to serve and protect our community. New volunteer firefighters (adults aged 18 and up) are always welcome and encouraged to apply and join this dedicated team. Applications can be picked up at the fire department or the town office. Meetings occur the second Tuesday of the month at 7 PM and training is on the fourth Tuesday night of the month at 6 PM.

1st Annual West Gardiner Rod and Gun Club Food Drive for West Gardiner families in need

The West Gardiner Rod and Gun Club will be accepting non-perishable food items every Saturday in April (2, 9, 16, 23, 30) Drop off time will be between 9-12 at the club located at 297 Collins Mills Road. Monetary donations can be made at either the WGRGC or at the West Gardiner Town Office during business hours.

Cobbosseecontee Snowmobile Club News

by Charlene McFarland

Late snowfall, bitter cold & very warm temps, wind & rain all contributed to challenging season. Despite it all, the trail crews were out there clearing tails & grooming late into the night to make the trails the best they could be. Thank you to those who used the trails that stopped and picked up debris, appreciate the help. Your donations of cans/bottles in the bin at the transfer station – thank you. Proceeds are used to update our equipment, building or repairing bridges.

West Gardiner Historical Society by Deborah Couture

The West Gardiner Historical Society has not been meeting through the winter months. New business is a warrant in this year's Town Report. The Warrant is in the amount of \$120,000. The funds would be used to finish clearing the lot next to the Auxiliary Hall, have a concrete slab set for the building, connect the well and septic, and begin construction of the West Gardiner Historical Society building. The West Gardiner Historical Society has already started receiving historical items from West Gardiner residents and there is very limited space to store those items. Julie Hickey just notified us that Mert left many items to the West Gardiner Historical Society, too. It is hoped that this warrant will pass so that the Town can begin this very important project to construct a building to preserve the Town of West Gardiner's historical documents and artifacts for future generations. Thank you.

Wreaths Across America – December 18, 2021 by Deborah Couture

West Gardiner townspeople laid over 200 wreaths on every Veteran's grave in 7 cemeteries in the Town of West Gardiner on December 18, 2021 as part of Wreaths Across America Day for 2021. Boy Scout Troop 613 and over 40 residents were involved in helping to place the wreaths on the graves. Participating in the ceremonial wreath laying at the West Gardiner Veteran's Monument and pictured left to right are Veterans and community members: Donald Goggin, USA; Debra Couture, USN; Benjamin Johnston, Boy Scout Troop 613-led the Pledge of Allegiance; Caleb Keune, USN; Dennis Vanleeuwan; USN; Mike Collins, USAF; Abigail Haskell-sang the Star Spangled Banner; Terry Marks, USA; Gary Morissette, USCG; Earl McCormick, USAF; Nancy Derocher, USN; George Decker, USAF; Ron Dixon, USA-playing Taps. A special thank you to all those who purchased wreaths this past year. This is the 3rd year in a row that enough donations were received to decorate all the Veteran's graves in West Gardiner.



West Gardiner Gardeners

by June Zellers

Despite COVID and some messy weather, the Garden Club has been active. We have almost as many new members as long-time members, leading to lively discussions and lots of new ideas. Right now, we're sharing information about starting seeds including a suggested schedule and lots of helpful hints. We had a great treat last fall when Johnny's Selected Seeds donated 250 orange tulip bulbs to us as part of The Plant Happiness Project. We distributed the bulbs among us, and we're all looking to them popping up any time now. We hosted Master Gardener Jean Vose for a workshop on container and raised-bed gardens. Her expertise is helping us plan for the Margaret Peacock Memorial Garden, scheduled to be planted as soon as the site work is finished at the new Historical Society Building. If you have a perennial you would like to donate to this effort or would like to help in some other way, please let us know. Don't miss these upcoming activities:

- April 9: Card sale on Town Meeting Day.
- June 4: Annual Plant and Card Sale, 9 am until noon in the Town Office Parking Lot.
- June 7: Card sale on Election Day The Plant Sale is possible because of donations from our members and others in the community.

We will be accepting plant donations in advance of the sale at the Auxiliary Hall on Thursday, 6/2 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and during regular business hours on Friday, 6/3. Proceeds from the Plant Sale are the Garden Club's major fund raiser. We fund a scholarship for a West Gardiner graduating senior each year. Last year's recipient was James Rinderknecht. Don't forget to check out our web page: <https://www.westgardinergardenclub.com>

We meet the first Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Auxiliary Hall. Everyone is welcome to participate. For more information contact: Charlene McFarland at 582-7239 or cmcfarland81118@roadrunner.com



Dennis Vanleeuwan– United States Navy Veteran

Dennis Vanleeuwan and his family relocated to West Gardiner in 2021. Dennis enlisted in the US Navy on April 16, 2008. His grandfather who raised him was a 24-year retired Senior Chief Aircrewman with P-3 aircraft and his other grandfather was a 26-year retired Lieutenant Commander Limited Duty Officer (LDO) who served in helicopter squadrons (H-3s and H-60s). Joining the Navy was an easy decision for Dennis. Dennis completed 8 weeks of basic training at the Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois and then reported to Naval Air Technical Training Center (NATTC) Pensacola, FL for sixteen weeks of Air Traffic Control (AC-A1) "A" school. He was also selected to receive six weeks of follow-on "C" school specific to the Carrier Air Traffic Control Center (CATCC) after "A" school. Dennis graduated in December of 2008.

Dennis then reported to the USS John C. Stennis CVN-74 (aircraft carrier) in Bremerton, WA. Arriving as an E3 and leaving as an E5 (second class petty officer), Dennis completed 2 Pacific deployments in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Inherent Resolve during his time on the Stennis and fully qualified as CATCC Watch Officer. In July 2012, Dennis reported to Fleet Area Control and Surveillance Facility (FACSFAC) San Diego, CA. His unit supported numerous fleet training exercises and maritime security along the U.S. west coast. He arrived as a 2nd Class Petty Officer and departed as a 1st Class, fully qualified as Facility Watch Supervisor. Dennis then went on to complete Advanced Radar Air Traffic Control (ARATC) "C" school at NATTC Pensacola, FL. in 2015.

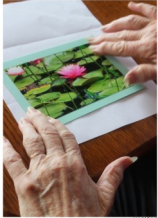
From Sep 2015 to May 2018, he was stationed at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, MD. serving in the Radar Approach Control center and Control Tower. While at Patuxent River, Dennis submitted an application for the Navy's Limited Duty Officer (LDO) program under the 6390 Air Traffic Control designator and was selected in March 2017. He was commissioned an Ensign in May 2018; reported to Officer Training Command, Newport, RI for the LDO/CWO Academy that same month; and reported to the USS Nimitz CVN-68 (aircraft carrier), Bremerton, WA. in July 2018 as CATCC Officer & OC Division Officer. While on the Nimitz, they completed the longest aircraft carrier deployment in the post-WWII era from April 1, 2020 to March 3, 2021 in support of Operations Enduring Freedom, Inherent Resolve and Octave Quartz. During this tour, Dennis was promoted to Lieutenant, Junior Grade. This was Dennis' favorite duty station. Along with a Master Chief and Senior Chief, he was privileged to lead a team of 38 Air Traffic Controllers and four Logistics Specialists in the safe and orderly flow of air traffic and Carrier Onboard Delivery of passengers and cargo. They started with a severely depleted team in terms of qualifications and morale and ended with one of the most qualified CATCC teams in modern history.

Continued on back cover

Hands-On Series Continued— by S.E Costell

Christy Hemenway – Beekeeper, Author, Speaker, Advocate

From PA to CA to VA to NC and Bath, ME, Christy has landed on High Street in West Gardiner. She once raised Gold-Star Alpacas and would herd-sit for others, learning to shear and train the animals. Her “Bee Adventure” began in Bath when a friend asked her to remove bees from an attic. She pulled them out, along with a honeycomb, and her decision to protect bees was born. Christy has written two books: The Thinking Beekeeper and The Thinking Beekeeper Thinks Again – to educate others about the crucial need for treatment-free, clean bees. Her hives help keep bees alive. Christy also plans to brew mead, using hive honey, at her farm. E-Commerce has allowed her to ship her wares everywhere although she’d like to provide mead to local wine bars and dining spots. She is also learning a great deal about the history of her home, the birthplace of so many in West Gardiner.



Connie Barnard - Photographer

Using a Canon PowerShot camera, Connie got into flower and scenic photography. Her work with the West Gardiner Gardeners led her to card making at the behest of Margaret Peacock. Cards sell at Longfellow’s Greenhouses, town events and out of her home. They help fund WGG educational programs for members, as well as the annual scholarships. She spent much of her life as a Special Education aide, began the Project LIVE program and helped start Kennebec County Special Olympics. While raising four daughters, she worked full time and fed her family from their abundant gardens. Maintaining 16 gardens around her home, Connie still cuts the grass with her 4-wheeler. She and John bought the house with 50 acres and renovated it completely. All the land allows her to give her grandchildren house plots, three thus far. Rooted in family, friends and faith, Connie feels blessed at nearly 89 to be able to do all that she does.

Vanleeuwan– con’t Dennis looks forward to his next opportunity to lead sailors. His most memorable event also occurred on the Nimitz. During the 2020 deployment, they had an FA-18/E check in 45 minutes prior to his return cycle declaring an emergency. The pilot stated that the aircraft was uncontrollably dumping fuel, that he had joined on a tanker aircraft to receive more fuel and work the problem, but that his aircraft was dumping fuel faster than it could receive fuel. He said he needed to make an approach to the carrier to land immediately. The ship is not set up for recovery of aircraft. Dennis asked the pilot how much time he estimated he had to hold for a “ready deck” landing, and he replied, “about five minutes, maybe 10 minutes remaining airborne.” As a team, they took a process that normally takes about 15-20 minutes to accomplish and made it happen in six minutes. At the seventh minute, the aircraft crossed the landing threshold and successfully recovered, with all personnel safe. Dennis is incredibly proud of how his team handled it.

In August 2021, Dennis completed Officer Recruiting School at Navy Recruiting Orientation Unit, Pensacola, FL. and then reported to the Naval Talent Acquisition Group New England, headquartered in Boston, MA. His office is officially in Scarborough, ME but he works remotely or from the Augusta satellite office most of the time. He is tasked with prospecting for college graduates seeking a commission in the Navy. He will be there through the summer of 2024.

Dennis’ advice to the young 18-22 crowd out there considering joining the military: Stop thinking and start doing. You’ll always wonder “what if” if you never at least look into it. Find a recruiter with the branch you’re interested in, talk with them, and see if the opportunities they have to offer are right for you. Then talk to your family and your mentors. Talk with veterans. I guarantee you two things:

1. The person who serves a term in the armed forces is incredibly more prepared for the responsibilities of life in the real world when compared to most high school and college graduates.
 2. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Do your research and know your options!
- If Dennis had to do it all over again, he wouldn’t change a thing. He has learned so much more than he ever would have otherwise. He has met people from all over the world and lived places that he may never have lived (like Maine and he loves it here). The Navy has been great to him, and he is humbled and proud to serve our country. Dennis is still serving on active duty with the US Navy. We thank him for his service.



WEST GARDINER NEWSLETTER

The Weathervane

A Quarterly For and From Our Town

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The Weathervane is a non-profit quarterly informational newsletter intended to be unbiased, non-denominational, non-partisan, accurate, and enjoyable.

Schedules of town events, organizations and activities as well as local businesses will be listed in the spring issues.

The Weathervane welcomes story ideas from our readers.

Call 441-9752 or write coleneoneill1@gmail.com