Nutfield One on One with Vice Presidential Candidate Joe Biden

Leslie O'Donnell
NUTFIELD NEWS

Nutfield Publishing was invited to have a personal phone conversation with Democratic Vice Presidential Nominee Joe Biden last week. Biden was asked to comment on the country’s emergency response and security capabilities, infrastructure needs, and Republican allegations that a Democratic administration would raise taxes - a claim Biden emphatically denied for persons earning less than $250,000 per year.

“Our campaign knows that many Granite Staters rely on their local weekly papers to stay informed on the issues impacting their families and communities,” said Larkin Barker, New Hampshire Barack Obama-Joe Biden Campaign for Change press secretary. “Speaking with Nutfield Publishing was a unique opportunity to reach out to the residents of Londonderry, Derry, Chester, Sandown, and Hampstead.”

The day before the seventh anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, heading to the airport after a speaking engagement in Nashua, Democratic Vice Presidential Nominee Joe Biden called the gaps in the country’s emergency response system “outrageous.”

In response to a question as to whether the country was in better shape to protect itself from terrorism now, Biden answered “only slightly.”

Emergency preparedness

“I’m the guy who introduced legislation four years ago to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, relating to everything from inspecting for dirty weapons to inspecting every single, solitary cargo container - that inspection would cost $13 per cargo container,” the veteran U.S. Senator from Delaware said. “John McCain voted against that.

“I wanted every chemical company in the country to lay out its security plan - McCain opposed that,” Biden added. “I live near ‘Chemical Alley’ in New Jersey and on the Delaware River. And that area is vulnerable.”

Peppered with “you know” and “listen,” Biden was conversational but forthright and unhesitating in his answers. He listened and stayed on topic.

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Local Forest Home to Surviving Chestnut Tree

Robin Respaht
NUTFIELD NEWS

The American chestnut tree was once prolific along the eastern coastline of the United States from Maine to Florida. Then, over a century ago, an imported fungus from Asia nearly destroyed the species in what some consider to be one of the greatest environmental disasters to transpire in the Western Hemisphere since the last Ice Age.

Next month, in Derry’s Ballard State Forest, members of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) plan to collect pollinated seeds from one of the only surviving pure American chestnut trees in an effort to reintroduce the species to its former territory.

“The American chestnut was once the dominant hardwood in this area,” said

Enrollment Jumps in Grade 5 and at Pinkerton Academy

Robin Respaht
NUTFIELD NEWS

School administrators reported spiking enrollments at the elementary level and in high school in Derry last week, and some school officials attribute the rise to a failing economy.

The Derry Cooperative School District added a new fifth-grade classroom at Derry Village Elementary School in the middle of last week to reduce the squeeze in the school’s four existing fifth-grade classrooms, some of which were overfilled under state law. Pinkerton Academy also witnessed an unexpected jump in enrollment by 40 students, most of whom hail from Derry.

On the morning of Sept. 10, less than 12 hours after the Derry school board authorized the hiring of an additional teacher, Derry Village opened with an additional fifth-grade class.

Superintendent of Schools Mary Ellen Hannon said two dozen Grade 5 students were specifically chosen to be placed in the recently created room. The school also planned an open house to introduce students and parents to the new environment, “so children don’t feel like they’ve been banished from their old classrooms,” said Hannon.

The additional room reduced class sizes in Grade 5 at Derry Village from 31 students per class to 24 students per class.

“It’s not going to make it a small group,” Hannon told the board last week. “It’s going to make it a manageable group.”

District administrators enrolled 40 new students on Sept. 1 alone, the last day of summer for the school district. Many of the new students were in Grade 5 and lived in the Fairways Apartments, located across

continued on page 7

continued on page 5

Testing the Wares

Sean McLaughlin, Aiden Patt, and Conor Seleny, all 6 and from Derry, take turns trying out some of the toys on sale at the First Parish Church yard sale that took place last Saturday in East Derry. Over 40 vendors were at the event, which raised money for the Met Children’s Museum.

Photo by Chris Paul
Singers Reunite at Derryfest This Saturday Afternoon

REBECCA FISHLOW
NUTFIELD NEWS

When Derry native Jennifer Messina was 9 years old, she won the A and E talent show for her age category. That same year, 14-year-old Melissa Blasek, also a native of Derry, won the contest for her age group. The two singers will reunite at Derryfest this weekend to perform for their hometown crowd.

“We always seem to run into each other,” said Blasek, a second-year student at Berklee School of Music in Boston. “I met Jen when she was 9 - we did a singing concert together. We went to the same music school and performed together in the same band.”

Blasek will perform pop and jazz standards at the festival Saturday at MacGregor Park on East Broadway at 12:30 p.m., with Messina following at 12:45 p.m. The girls have both performed with Derry School of Music’s Stagecraft, a band and choral group made up of musicians ages 7 through 17. Messina will join Stagecraft on keyboard and vocals when the group performs at 3:15 p.m. Messina, now 14, has gotten a lot of experience under her belt since that competition. The young performer knew she wanted to pursue her love of singing since third grade, when she began taking voice and piano lessons. She went on to win Derry Idol in 2004. She also holds the title of Miss Kingston Teen, part of the Miss America Scholarship Program.

When Blasek was 5 years old, she told her mother she wanted to be a singer, she said. At Berklee, she performs regularly and has toured the New Hampshire fair circuit, with performances at the Chester, Deerfield, Stratham and other fairs. She aspires to make a living as a performance musician.

“Derryfest is always fun because I always know most of the crowd,” Blasek said, adding that performing at Derryfest is a great experience because the crowd is always enthusiastic and familiar.

“I’m looking forward to getting the audience riled up,” Messina said. “They’re very excited, very happy; they’re always having fun.”

Derryfest

The 19th Derryfest takes place Saturday, Sept. 20, at MacGregor Park, with 120 booths, food, performances and an interactive petting zoo. The festival begins at 10 a.m. and concludes at 5 p.m. Admission is free.

Molly the Trolley will shuttle visitors throughout town to MacGregor Park, where parking will be limited. Handicap parking will be available at the First Church of Christ Scientist next to the park on Boyd Road.

Shuttles will stop every 15 to 20 minutes at the Fireye lower parking lot at 3 Manchester Road, the Nutfield Professional Park at 44 Birch St., and the school district office at 18 South Main St. Stops will be made about every hour at Nutfield Heights Senior Center, 3 Hood Road, Pleasant Valley Nursing Center at 8 Peabody Road; and Haven Health Center at 20 Chester Road.

Early birds can get a filling breakfast at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church pancake breakfast across East Broadway from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. And the annual all-you-can-eat spaghetti supper put on by the Derry Village Rotary Club takes place Sept. 19 at Pinkerton Academy’s senior cafeteria from 5 to 7 p.m.

At noon, the Derry Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 1617 will hold a missing in action (MIA) and prisoner of war (POW) ceremony at the monuments in the park. Rain date for the festival is Sept. 21.

Tree

continued from page 1

Kendra Gurney, the New England regional science coordinator for TACF, a branch of the U.S. Forestry Service. “Then, approximately 40 billion trees were wiped out in just 50 years or so.”

Gurney said few New Englanders noticed the devastation that befell the popular tree because most American chestnuts grew in remote, forested areas. But the outcome of the disease affected local industry, as American chestnut was a common lumber for fence posts, railroad ties, barn beams and home construction at the turn of the 20th century.

Unlike Chinese, Japanese and European chestnut trees, which were each introduced in the United States and harvested as orchard trees, the American chestnut is a 100-foot-high, 4-inch-diameter, straight-grained hardwood. It flowers late in the season, reproduces easily, is unaffected by seasonal frosts and is rot-resistant. During its heyday, a wide variety of wildlife such as bears and birds feasted on the fruit of the tree, which also served as a cash crop to feed livestock. Troubles began for the American chestnut when a boat from Asia delivered the Chinese chestnut to the United States. The foreign tree carried an unknown fungus, later coined as chestnut blight.

Chinese chestnut is resistant to chestnut blight, but American chestnut is not. The fungus, which blocks the flow of nutrients within a tree, eventually chokes it, spread along the eastern coastline, destroying a quarter of the hardwood tree population.

“The American chestnut still exists as a sport,” said Gurney. “The fungus can’t kill the root system, but they typically do not survive as trees.”

All 15 state chapters of TACF have scoured the eastern coastline in a hunt for the few, isolated American chestnut trees that made it through the plague. Of the two found in New Hampshire this year, one is located in Ballard State Forest in Derry.

Earlier this year, just before the American chestnut sprouted its flower, a climber contracted by TACF scaled trees near the lone American chestnut in Ballard State Forest and placed protective bags over its blossoms. Later, the climber returned with a special, hybridized species of American and Chinese chestnut and pollinated the tree.

What TACF has bred over the past decade is a hybrid American chestnut with one-eighth Chinese chestnut genes. The result is a blight-resistant species of the American chestnut tree. TACF scientists hope to harvest the seeds produced by pure American and blight-resistant strains.

In October, TACF and their climber will return to Ballard State Forest to collect the seeds from the American chestnut there. Next spring, scientists will harvest those seeds at a specialized nursery. Of eight sprouts generated from those seeds, TACF expects one to be highly blight-resistant.

By breeding highly blight-resistant trees with others from up and down the eastern coastline, TACF aims to produce a small forest of blight-resistant American chestnut trees that could eventually be reintroduced into their former habitat.

Before any transplanting can occur, scientists will challenge the trees by drilling holes in the bark and infecting them with the fungus.

“So far, it looks pretty good,” said Gurney. “It’s a lot of work for a small outcome, but it’s a pretty important outcome.”

Gurney and TACF’s climber are tentatively scheduled to visit Ballard State Forest on Oct. 3 to collect the seeds from the American chestnut located there.

Tree admirers who believe they have found a true American chestnut in their own backyards should send a freshly cut, 5-inch twig sample with leaves attached to Kendra Gurney, New England Regional Science Coordinator, Northern Research Station U.S. Forest Service, 705 Spear St., South Burlington, VT 05403. Senders should preserve the fresh twig cuts between two pieces of cardboard, not in a plastic bag.