

Record-Journal

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'Mr. Geary?' ... 'Here'

Council approves Benigni's Planning Commission nomination

By Bill Yelenak
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — Arthur R. Geary Jr. quietly slipped into City Council chambers minutes before the meeting began and waited for the council to approve the consent agenda that would again place him on the city's Planning Commission.

Geary had served on the Planning Commission for almost 20 years, but lost his seat last month when Mayor Mark D. Benigni and the Democratic Town Committee instead recommended local developer *Ross Gulino*. Benigni, however, decided the wrong decision was made. He asked for

and received Gulino's resignation so he could nominate Geary at Monday night's meeting.

"The overwhelming support that I've gotten is unbelievable," Geary said Monday. "I'm excited about going back on the commission."

As soon as the council approved the consent agenda, Corporation Counsel James W. Abrams and Geary made their way into the hallway, where Geary was again sworn in as a member of the commission. Geary received congratulations from Abrams and residents in the hallway, but the well wishes only lasted a moment.

Geary had a meeting to attend.

He walked down the flight of stairs to City Hall's first floor and paused for a moment outside room 131, where a Planning Commission public hearing had been taking place. Then he stepped into the room, and the applause from members of the commission and the audience began.

"Good timing, Mr. Geary," Planning Commission Chairman Enrico Buccilli said amid the applause. "We just finished the public hearing and we're ready to start the meeting."

Geary got handshakes from his fellow commission members, and then it was

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Chris French / Record-Journal
Arthur R. Geary Jr., right, is sworn in as a member of the Planning Commission by Corporation Counsel James W. Abrams, Monday in the hallway outside council chambers.

Bringing the future into the present



Amy Stolling, a senior at Maloney High School in Meriden, works on her VEX robot at Maloney last week. The VEX is a smaller (about a third of the size) and less expensive — \$1,000, compared to \$13,000 — robot, compared to the one used in the FIRST program. The VEX is traditionally used to introduce students into the field.

Christopher Zajac / Record-Journal

Learning is this team's FIRST goal

By Jeffery Kurz
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — The recent snowstorm shut down schools and sent students home. But it didn't stop the members of Gus Robotics Team 228 from gathering at the Maloney High School technical education department that evening. An important competition looms and there was work to be done.

That included painting, in bright team-color orange, the platform that will carry the robot. Students were also putting a smaller robot, called a VEX robot, through its paces.

The big mechanical fellow, Gus, which weighs in at about 120 pounds and stands 5 feet tall, was not in the house. Under the rules of the competition, the robot had to

FIRST Facts

What: FIRST Robotics Competition, New England regional
When: Thursday-Saturday
Where: Connecticut Convention Center, Hartford
Who's participating: 40 teams competing, including Meriden, Southington and Cheshire schools
More info: www.us-first.org

be stowed away by midnight Feb. 21. So Gus has been biding its time in storage, at an undisclosed location somewhere in Middletown.

The name Gus is derived from a 1999 team name, "Augustus Robotics Maximus."

Beginning Friday, Gus will be on full display, along with a host of other robots at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford, site of the New England regional competition. This year, more than 28,000 students from around the world, making up about 1,100 teams, will compete in the FIRST Robotics Competition. Winners of regional competitions move on to a championship event, held in Atlanta.

FIRST, or For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, is a competition started 13 years ago by Dean Kamen, who invented the Segway. Teams from towns across Connecticut now participate, including from Southington and Cheshire high schools. In Meriden, the competition brings together students from all three city high schools.

"It's the only thing that's probably non-competitive among the three schools," said Samantha Harkness, a senior at Wilcox Regional Technical High School and one of 25 Meriden students, about half of them female, participating this year.

"We're competitors everywhere else but when it comes to robotics, we're all one happy family," she said. "We don't argue about what basketball team is better than yours."

And while it is a competition, the robotics event is not like the smash-up contests you see on television. Teams are actually penalized for damaging another robot.

The spirit of competition that reigns is described as "gracious professionalism" by Gordon Morrison, a Maloney physics teacher who is

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City budget introduced by Kendzior

By Bill Yelenak
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — City Manager Lawrence J. Kendzior introduced a \$175.2 million budget to the City Council Monday night and called for a tax increase to maintain city services.

The budget, which is about \$7 million more than this year's, would require a 2.35-mill increase to meet increasing costs in health benefits, pension benefits and workers' compensation claims, according to Kendzior. Taxes would increase by 5.53 percent for residents living in the city's inner district and 5.83 percent for res-

idents living in the outer district. The mill rate would be 44.84 for the inner district and 42.69 for the outer district. More for the inner district would cause garbage pickup to incl-

2006-07 fiscal year budget (proposed)

Total budget	\$175.2 million
Mill rate increase:	2.35 mill
Tax rate percentage increase:	
for inner district	5.53 percent
for outer district	5.83 percent

ed; residents in the outer district pay for private collection. The tax increase would mean a resident who owns a home assessed at \$142,000 would owe an additional \$

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Serafino's sports renovated look

By Mary Ellen Godin
Record-Journal business editor

WALLINGFORD — Diners at Serafino's Ristorante Italiano who come for the veal parmigiana might want to linger for the Old World atmosphere.

The Italian restaurant and banquet room at 72 South Turnpike Road were recently renovated to reflect the hills, vineyards, columns and stone work of Italy.

The one-room dining area has been sectioned off into three more intimate areas called the Tuscany room, the Roman room and the Napoleon room.

"It was too plain, too green," said owner Ciro Schiano DiCo-

la. "It's a little bit fancier now." The work began in late January and involved new shingles, rock and stonework in each of the rooms and higher ceilings and upgraded light fixtures in the banquet room. The hallway is done in faux marble block. White columns grace the entrance to the Roman room. The rooms are painted warm coral and plum and accented with murals of grapes, gardens and hillside vistas.

DiCola estimates that he spent \$100,000 on the renovation, which was finished in time for the restaurant's six-year anniversary Monday.

Future plans call for

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Court gives military a recruiting victory

By Gina Holland
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Critics of the Pentagon's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on gays found no support at the Supreme Court.

With the country at war, justices sharply rejected a free-speech challenge from law schools and professors who contended they should not be forced to help military recruiters because they disagree with the policy.

Schools had become the latest battleground over the military policy allowing gay men and women to serve only if

they keep their sexual orientation to themselves.

Justices, on an 8-0 vote Monday, said that closing their campuses to recruiters was not an answer.

Chief Justice John Roberts said that campus visits are effective recruiting tools. As he said, "a military recruiter's mere presence on campus does not violate a law school's right to associate, regardless of how repugnant the law school considers the recruiter's message."

The ruling does not, however, answer broader questions

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Outside:

Mostly sunny and chilly. Highs around 40. Tonight: Cold, lows in mid-teens.

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