Commentary

The Bristol Observer

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Our Views

The Bristol Observer

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Established December 9, 2004
Published weekly by The Step Saver, Inc.
213 Spring St., Southington, CT 06489
editorial: 860-621-6751
advertising: 860-628-9645
circulation: 860-628-9438
fax 860-621-1841
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All editorials are intended to reflect the position of the publisher and not that of any individual editorial writer. Signed columns, on the other hand, reflect the position of the author and not necessarily those of the publisher.
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Here's saluting Bristol Hospital

Several years ago, the sad story was the same year after year.

Bristol Hospital would hold its annual meeting of corporators. And the chief executives would give their report about the year that was and the year that would be.

And, looking forward and back, it was the same prognosis. Red, red, and more red.

As the deficits grew, so did the hospital's less than stellar reputation as a medical institute to avoid.

The situation was dire enough that it seemed as Bristol Hospital would go the way of other community hospitals… shuttered all together or unceremoniously absorbed into a larger institution. (Can you say Bradley Hospital in Southington?)

But then something happened. The hospital straightened outs finances. Then the hospital made some shrewd moves that elevated its level of care and improved its reputation in the community.

It's story that reminds us of the New England Patriots. There was a time where they were doormats in the NFL. And they weren't even interesting enough to be loveable losers.

But now look at the Patriots. They are a dynasty. We have forgotten how they used to flounder.

For several years now, Bristol Hospital has kept its finances in the black. And most people barely remember that there was a time when its survival was in question.

The hospital's continuing success is good news for Bristol.

If we had lost Bristol Hospital, it would have been a knock-out blow for a community that is still trying to right a listing ship. The hospital is one of the city's biggest employers. It is also one of the most active community players in the city. We don't even want to consider what Bristol would have been like without it.

The hospital, however, seems to be on a winning streak. Even as the economy lingered in the doldrums, the hospital was able to operate in the black.

The hospital finished its fiscal year with an operating profit of about $147,000 on revenues of more than $132 million.

Not bad.

And the hospital's still doing what it can do to grow.

It opened a new sleep center last year. It opened up a new bariatric surgery center. Both have proven to be successful and raised the hospital's public profile. These are services that might have been available in the area if the hospital didn't recognize the need. And the hospital's cancer center continues to thrive.

We congratulate Bristol Hospital for another year of great work. And we thank the hospital's leadership for recognizing the need for changes that led to its continued success.

Bristol Hospital is key to the city's identity. Its success is the community's success.

Family and football on a Sunday afternoon

David Fortier
Around the House

The 20-year-old, the 23-year-old, Mary and I were all settling in for overtime when the Pats game against the Ravens was ended.

Just like that.

A missed field-goal attempt gave the Pats the win.

Immediately, the 23-year-old received a text from one of his classmates at Boston College. The classmate is from the West Coast and a fan of the 49ers.

"Dude, you have a friend who is going to lose the Super Bowl."

To which the 23-year-old replied, "I don't agree with that."

To which his BC buddy replied, "But don't tell him I said that. He is a lot bigger than I am."

The friend on the Pats, of course, is Aaron Hernandez.

While the game was going on, the texts came every time Aaron was prominent in a play.

Good.

Bad.

Indifferent.

There was a text.

And through it all, didn't we have fun?

But the texts didn't end there.

The 49ers were up next.

Every time Vernon Davis scored for San Francisco, the 23-year-old received another text.

"What a man."

The texting added a whole new dimension to watching a game.

I guess it's the new world order.

Instant communication.

But, anyhow, it is a lot of fun to root for a team when you know someone on the team.

When the announcer ever mentioned that Aaron's dad played football for UConn that was a trip down history lane.

But game watching has other pleasures.

Just hanging out with the family is fun.

The Giants and 49ers was much less intense.

I was looking for the Giants to win against the 49ers, of course, but not with the same urgency as the Pats.

This meant there was more of an opportunity to cover other subjects.

The 20-year-old opened her laptop and started talking about some college programs she was interested in.

But not before checking out a list of the highest paying jobs.

Which led to advice about choosing jobs.

"Money isn't everything."

"It's pretty important."

"But you can have a good life without making a millions bucks."

These the little things that occur while the refs are reviewing a play, like the punt that hit Kyle William's and the Giants recovered.

Of course, Bentley was included.

"Bentley, do you want to live on a ranch or by the ocean?" the 20-year-old asked as she plotted her future.

An option she has always liked would be to work with marine animals.

Of course, the number one priority is working with horses.

The 23-year-old was wondering about the tests he has to take some teacher certification tests. MTEL and Praxis.

We didn't stay on that subject for long because we were on to Joe Paterno.

Sunday was the day that Paterno died.

"You read the article about Paterno?"

It was an obituary that I sent via email that morning.

"Yes, I read it. I think the board acted prematurely when they fired him," I said.

"I think that realize it now," the 23-year-old said.

We have had innumerable conversations about the situation.

Joe Pa's passing, literally a broken man after a long interview with Sally Jennings of the Washington Post, without lessening the horrible nature of crimes against children, was still a sad ending for a legend.

And not just a football legend, but a human legend, with a library named for him.

Not a football stadium.

But then that's the kind of thing that happens when a couple of us get time to sit around watching a game on the tube.

Even when the focus isn't necessarily on the game.

Especially, when there are texts going back and forth and futures being explored, with smart phones and laptops out.

But not all of us get to enjoy the time out totally.

Mary did not stop moving for long.

At one point, she was dragging the vacuum cleaner downstairs where she ended up vacuuming and doing some other chores.

A little while later, she was bringing up laundry.

Then, a little while later she checked the weather, ice and sheet overnight, and she was pretty much done for the night.

The 20-year old took Bentley down stairs a few minutes later.

The 23-year old and I waited for the 49ers and the Giants to go into overtime.

Which was all right with me.

David Fortier, a Bristol resident, is a freelance writer.

Taxpayers want relief

Senator Jason Welch, Representative Whit Betts, Representative Frank Nicastro, Representative Betty Boukus and Representative Christopher Wright:

As you well know, unfunded mandates imposed by the state on cities and towns have proven to be not only challenging but exceedingly burdensome for the municipalities you represent. All of our budgets are being pushed to their breaking points. Household, local municipalities' and state government's expenses are increasing. The message we keep hearing from the public is loud and clear— taxpayers want relief and they want it fast. As individuals, who like you, have dedicated ourselves to representing the interests of the people of Bristol, we are writing this letter to implore you to steadfastly focus your efforts on lobbying for relief for our taxpayers and municipal budgets by stopping and repealing the onslaught of unfunded mandates coming from the state capitol.

A great place to start, that would have an immediate impact, is to eliminate the Board of Education's Minimum Expenditure Requirement. This requirement not only handcuffs local governments from adjusting their educational budgets as needed, but it also eliminates the ability to hold boards of education fiscally accountable. With guaranteed funds, where is the incentive to manage budgets wisely? Unfunded mandates have effectively taken away the power of our Board of Finance and City Council to manage our own affairs as we see fit and as the taxpayers elected us to do.

The Board of Education's Minimum Expenditure Requirement is just one of many "unfunded mandates" that are hindering our ability to manage our own budgets and, in reality, is perceived by the public as a way for state leaders to pass the buck (i.e., responsibility). Many of these "mandates" are founded on good principles and intentions. But without the accompanying funds to support them, they are unreasonable. On the local level, we have had to be very cognizant of prioritizing what we spend money on. We are consistently separating the "wants from the needs" and make difficult decisions on what to cut and what to fund. Unfunded mandates just add to the challenges and short change the taxpayer. Moreover, having officials from the capitol mandating items to be funded by local governments is patently unfair, needs to stop and in fact shows a disregard and a lack of faith that local governments will make the right decisions for their constituents.

In reality, it is the taxpayers (who) are carrying this burden regardless of where the taxes are being levied. If the state can't or won't fund these mandates, then they should be eliminated. Once again, this is a very urgent issue that we are asking you to address. Without legislative help taxpayers all over Connecticut will continue to be forced pay the burden passed along from the state and, in all candor, this is simply not fair to them and they deserve your attention. On behalf of my colleagues, we stand ready to work with you to reform this unfair system. Thank you in advance for your help.

Ken Cockayne, Dave Mills, Eric Carlson, Derek Czenczelewski, Henri Martin, Bristol City Council