



TOWN OF DARIEN NEWSLETTER

December 23, 2022 - Issue 21

MESSAGE FROM MONICA MCNALLY

Dear Darienites,

The holidays are a time to celebrate family, friends and the many wonderful things in our lives. For many of us, it is also a time to honor our faith and cultural heritage in whatever form that takes. Celebrating may mean hanging a Kwanza wreath, going to midnight Mass, honoring the solstice, lighting the menorah, looking forward to Chinese New Year, or just enjoying some time off work.

During this special time of year, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has been a part of making Darien a truly great place to live and work. May you have a peaceful, joyful, and safe holiday season and a wonderful New Year.

Sincerely,
Monica McNally



DATES & INFORMATION

UPCOMING MEETINGS

NEW YEAR'S DAY OBSERVED

1.2.23
Town Hall Closed

SEWER COMMISSION

1.3.23 4:30 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMISSION

1.4.23 7:00 PM

RTM PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE

1.4.23 7:30 PM

DARIEN POLICE COMMISSION

1.5.23 4:00 PM

This is not a complete list of meetings. The entire meeting schedule of all Boards and Commissions is available [here](#).

BUDGET SEASON

The Town budget cycle for Fiscal Year 2024 is already in process. In January, budget-related meetings will commence on a more regular basis. This newsletter will detail upcoming meetings and information in a new section dedicated specifically to the budget. For residents who may be unfamiliar with the process, or want to follow it more closely, all documents and schedules will be posted on the Town's homepage throughout the final budget vote in May.

CANDLE BURNING SAFETY

December is the peak month for candle-related fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association, 8,200 home fires are started by candles each year. A study by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission suggests that 85 percent of candle fires could be avoided if consumers followed three basic safety rules:

- Never leave a burning candle unattended.
- Never burn a candle on or near anything that might catch fire.

Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.

GOVERNMENT 101

On December 12th, the final RTM meeting of the year included the "State of the Town"

speeches by local leaders. Presentations were given by First Selectman Monica McNally, Vice-Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission George Reilly, Board of Education Chairman Duke Dineen, and Board of Finance Chairman Jim Palen.

In her presentation, First Selectman Monica McNally highlighted several major initiatives from 2022 and outlined other ongoing projects. Topics included the Town's efforts to address flooding, the acquisition of Great Island, the new property developments in Noroton Heights and downtown Darien, the adoption of a Community Values Statement by the Board of Selectmen, the creation of the Mental Health Task Force and the agreement with Eversource regarding tree removal and a planting plan on Little Brook Road.

The full presentations can be watched [here](#) on TV 79.

POLICE UPDATE

Congratulations to K-9 Kenny on his well-deserved retirement from the Darien Police Department. Named after fallen Darien Police Officer Kenneth Bateman Jr. who was shot and killed in the line of duty, Kenny worked his last patrol shift on November 28, at the age of 9, after completing 5.5 years of service.

After several months of intensive training, K-9 Kenny and his handler Officer Leslie Silva were placed into service on June 2, 2017. Certified by both the Connecticut Police Work Dog Association and the North American Police Work Dog Association, Officer Silva deployed K-9 Kenny over 100 times for the purposes of detecting narcotics not only for investigations taking place in Darien, but in several neighboring jurisdictions. K-9 Kenny and Officer Silva assisted in investigations conducted by the Connecticut State Police and federal agencies as well.

Officer Silva, who has since been appointed to the position of Detective, has taken over full ownership and responsibility for Kenny. He will live out his golden years at home with Detective Silva and her son. According to Detective Silva, Kenny is adjusting to retirement just fine as he is no longer a "food reward" working dog and is able to eat his meals and enjoy his cookies as often as his civilian buddies get to!

The Darien Police Department extends its appreciation to the Stamford Police Department and Lt. Seth O'Brien for playing such a crucial role in Kenny's regular monthly training. Thank you for your service K-9 Kenny and Detective Silva.



WATER MANAGEMENT

Now that winter has arrived, snow and ice are not far behind. Darien is an active town and any snow and ice on sidewalks are hazardous to everyone that uses the

sidewalks. Please be reminded that property owners are required to remove snow and ice from sidewalks abutting their property within 24 hours. The complete ordinance from the Darien Town Code of Ordinances, Chapter 66 is available to read [here](#). It is important to continue to monitor sidewalks as the snow melts to prevent additional ice from forming.



If you have circumstances that make you unable to clear your sidewalk, help is available. Local non-profit At Home in Darien has volunteers able to assist with shoveling public walkways (they are unable to shovel private walkways or driveways). If you or someone you know needs assistance please email volunteer@athomeindarien.org, or reach out directly to At Home in Darien Executive Director Chris Jones (chris@athomeindarien.org or 203.655.2227). If financial reasons are preventing a property owner from being able to remove snow, the Human Services office may be able to provide assistance. Please call the Human Service office at 203.656.7494 for information.

In addition to clearing sidewalks, it is beneficial to clear snow away from storm drains to allow for drainage and access. When doing this, please be aware of vehicular traffic and perform the work in light colored clothing when visibility is very good.

MENTAL HEALTH

HELPFUL TIPS TO BEAT THE HOLIDAY BLUES AND STRESS

- Keep a regular routine as much as possible.
- Exercise daily – even if it's for 15 minutes and try to keep to a schedule.
- Getting enough sleep should also be a priority – strive for 7 hours per night.
- Moderation! It is easy to overindulge in food and/or alcohol during the holidays. While it may temporarily “ease the pain,” it can actually affect your mood and increase depressive symptoms.
- Stay connected with family and friends who value you – even if it is just a quick phone call or text. Feeling supported and cared for is priceless!
- Say No! Don't overschedule yourself and add more stress to a hectic time of year. It is ok to say no.
- Self-care is critical. Prioritize making time for yourself and doing something that makes you feel good - perhaps an exercise class, a long walk, reading, pampering yourself, spending time with friends, or relaxing with simple deep breathing exercises or meditation.
- Volunteer, particularly if you are not able to be with family or friends. Volunteering to help others will certainly make you feel good and get you around other people.
- If you are struggling, don't be afraid to ask for professional help. The Town of Darien has a list of [Mental Health Resources](#) on the Town website or individuals may reach out to the Human Services Department for further assistance at 203-656-7328.

HUMAN SERVICES



Beginning Monday, December 19, 2022, Operation Fuel began administering an energy assistance program for clients who need aid with meeting their home utility or heating needs (electricity, gas, or deliverable fuel). This energy assistance program is for households living on up to 100% of state median income (\$66,270 per individual) with no asset limit: a household with one person has an income limit of \$66,270, a household of four has an income limit of \$127,443. The maximum grant amount will be up to \$1,000.

This is a large increase in assistance from the previous 75% of the state median income limit. Clients may apply for assistance two times a year versus only once a year. The dramatic increases are a result

of utility companies Eversource and United Illuminating (UI) working with state leaders on a short-term/interim *Customer Relief Plan*. Due to the unusually high energy prices this winter, the program is designed to provide immediate energy assistance to customers in need, including moderate and middle-income customers who are struggling to pay their bills. The Customer Relief Plan includes an Eversource shareholder expense of \$10 million.

Call Darien Human Services for more information or to make an appointment, 203-656-7328.

INTERESTING INFORMATION

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

The tradition of displaying Christmas lights on trees began in Germany during the 17th century as candles attached to the tree using wax or pins in order to illuminate the ornaments that were placed on the tree.

In 1882, after the invention of electricity and light bulbs, the first Christmas tree lit by electric lights was seen in New York. This led to the creation of strings of Christmas lights available for sale beginning around 1890. The first sets of string lights were too expensive for the majority of people to afford. By 1900, many department stores were using Christmas lights to liven up their holiday displays and attract customers. In 1917, a fire caused by Christmas lights led to some reworking and inventor Albert Sadacca came up with safe lights to help reduce the risk of fire from Christmas lights.

Outdoor light displays started in North America around 1927 after the development of safe outdoor Christmas light strings. The idea was so enchanting that the beautiful displays quickly became a worldwide phenomenon for everyone to enjoy.



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The information below is revised and reprinted from:

<https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/tripledemic-flu-rsv-and-covid-19>

With the “tripledemic” upon us, what steps can we take to prevent illness?

Flu, COVID-19, and RSV are all respiratory viruses, but there are differences in how they spread.

With COVID, we have appropriately focused on air quality, but many of these other viruses can spread by touching contaminated surfaces, which makes handwashing and cleaning contaminated surfaces really important.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we were wiping down our fruit, vegetables, and everything with bleach, until we found out that COVID doesn't spread through surfaces—but rather from sneezing, coughing, and expelling respiratory droplets and aerosols. RSV spreads much more through contaminated surfaces. Handwashing and cleaning surfaces are more critical with RSV than with COVID.

Flu, on the other hand, is somewhere in the middle, and can spread from respiratory droplets, aerosols, and through contaminated surfaces. It's important, therefore, to practice what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls “respiratory etiquette”. That means coughing or sneezing into a tissue and disposing of it immediately in the garbage.

It may sound obvious, but the best prevention advice for all three illnesses is to avoid others who are sick. If you or your child is sick, stay away from others until you are

improving and fever-free. And if you have a baby, especially a newborn, be very careful about who visits the first couple months of life. You only want people who are washing their hands and have no symptoms to be near the baby.

How can we celebrate the holidays safely?

With colder weather keeping more people inside, as well as the holidays approaching, it's important to take certain precautions, doctors say. First and foremost, now is the time to get your flu shot and make sure you are up to date on your COVID-19 vaccination, including the new bivalent booster.

The influenza vaccine may not completely prevent you from getting the flu, but it has a really good chance of keeping you from getting seriously ill, being hospitalized, and dying.

Take a rapid test right before you go in the room for a holiday gathering. If everybody does that, it's an added layer of security. And if you are traveling, wear a mask, even if nobody else does.

Finally, if you have any symptoms, you really should not congregate with others. But if you insist, wear a mask and segregate yourself during activities such as eating, when you can't be masked.

We can enjoy the Holidays, just be careful and considerate!

PARKS AND RECREATION

The cold harsh winter weather can make playground equipment more slippery and more challenging to navigate. In preparation for these conditions, the Parks and Recreation Department recently hired a professional company, Playground Medic, to assess all of the playgrounds to ensure all of the equipment is in good condition. The purpose of the inspections are to:

- Evaluate the overall condition of a playground or playgrounds at a given facility
- Identify hazardous conditions needing attention
- Identify maintenance issues that we should be aware of

The playgrounds are constantly monitored and maintained to the highest standards, the assessment by Playground Medic is an additional safety measure.

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