

Westwood Press

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LOCAL BRIEFS

Men's Group meeting

The Men's Group of Westwood monthly meeting will be held in the Parish Hall of First Parish Church on Thursday, March 17. The guest speaker for this month will be Westwood resident Jerry Cronin. The topic of his presentation will be "The Great Molasses Flood" This was a very unique and catastrophic happening in the North End of Boston on Jan. 15, 1919, killing 21 people and injuring 150.

The meeting will start at 9:30 a.m. with coffee, pastries, and fellowship followed by our guest speaker's presentation at 10 a.m.

THE WINTER CHILL OUT



Students at the Westwood High School practice laughter yoga, a stress-relieving exercise, on Monday, March 7.

STAFF PHOTO BY ERIN BALDASSARI

2012 BUDGET

SELECTMEN:

No home visit cuts

By Matt Cook

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Selectmen voted Monday night to approve a number of cuts to the town's 2012 operating budget but balked at a cut that would reduce the Council on Aging's funding for home visits with the town's elderly residents.

Along with a number of town departments, the Council on Aging had agreed to a \$1,000 cut in next year's budget, finance director Pam Dukeman told Selectmen Monday. The COA said the cut would come out of funding for in-state travel, conference attendance, memberships, and home visits, Dukeman said. It did not specify how much would come out of each item.

"That's a small number in

Craft programs at the library

During the month of March the Westwood Public Library will host three craft programs for Young Adults (grades 6-12) from 3 to 5: p.m.:

—March 11, learning to make leather and bead necklaces;

—March 18, loom weaving to create usable bags; and

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ADOPT A PET

These adventurous guys are looking for a place to call home.

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THE BEST MEDICINE?

Westwood High workshop encourages stress relief through laughter

By Erin Baldassari

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Westwood High School students learned Monday that sometimes fake laughter is as good as the real thing.

A “laughter yoga” workshop was part of the high school’s Winter Chill Out fair on Monday. The Winter Chill Out event showcased several stress relieving techniques, including music therapy, animal therapy, positive affirmations, yoga, deep breathing, and aroma therapy. Students were invited to tour booths and classrooms during their health classes and lunch period.

“Westwood is a high achieving town, and there’s a lot of stress that goes with that,” said school psychiatrist Jessica Cataldo. “We wanted to give students tools to be able to relax in a way that isn’t stigmatizing or singling anyone out.”

Perhaps the most unusual of all the activities presented was a workshop on laughter yoga, a stress management practice that combines laughing exercises with yoga breathing techniques.

“When you laugh, your body releases endorphins like serotonin and dopamine that can actually help relieve pain,” said Westwood Laughter Circle co-founder Linda Hamaker. “It’s really enhanced our lives and let us live with more joy.”

Many of the exercises included mimicking unpleasant events like getting an “F” on a test or being stalled at a red light, and instead of reacting in anger or disappointment, reacting with laughter instead.

“It’s okay to fake it,” Bill Hamaker, Linda’s husband, and co-founder of the Westwood Laughter Circle, said to the students during the workshop. “Faking is good here.”

Fake laughter, the Hamakers explained to the students, has the same physical properties as genuine laughter and often leads to the real deal. Participants practiced eye contact and childlike games to encourage playfulness. While some students participated whole-heartedly, others were more hesitant.

Ryan Farrell, a junior at Westwood High School was skeptical of the laughter yoga techniques.

“I’m forced to be here right now, so it might work if I actually did it, but it’s just not for me,” Farrell said.

Sophia Malonson, another student, seemed convinced of its benefits.

“High school is really stressful. I think this could help a lot of kids,” Malonson said. “I would definitely practice this at



Melissa McManus practices laughter yoga during a workshop at Westwood High School. STAFF PHOTO BY ERIN BALDASSARI

home.”

The Hamakers are hoping to train an interested student to run a laughter circle at the high school that would meet once a week on an ongoing basis.

More information about laughter yoga can be found at letslaughtoday.com or by calling the Hamakers at 508-660-2223.

Contact Westwood Press staff writer Erin Baldassari at 781-433-8335 or erin.baldassari@wickedlocal.com.

the scheme or the town's budget...but the message is

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CULTURAL COUNCIL

Grants go to diverse group

By Erin Baldassari

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With only \$3,800 to spend on over \$30,000 worth of proposals, the members of the Westwood Cultural Council aimed to get the “biggest bang for the buck” by selecting a wide range of groups and individuals for funding this year, said the council president.

The Cultural Council’s 11 grants this year include funding for musical performances, live theater, a guest lecture on nutrition, and an Indian Cultural Evening.

President of the WCC Carolyn Pope said the grants were designed with the entire community in mind.

“We always try to hit as many people as possible,” Pope said. “So we look for applications that reach a broad audience, but we also

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