



LNG PLAN
OPOSED BY TOWN



SENIORS
MAKE A DIFFERENCE
FOR LESS FORTUNATE



SPANISH
TRANSLATOR HELPS
STUDENTS, FAMILIES



GAUDET 8TH
GRADER STARS IN
"NUTCRACKER"*

MIDDLETOWN TODAY

Police & Veterans Helping Those Who Served In Need

Community Effort Makes A Difference

Across Rhode Island, it's estimated there are about 500 homeless veterans. On a recent morning, Middletown and Newport police officers delivered care packages to some of those folks as well as veterans in need.

The packages through "Coats4Vets" were loaded in bright orange Home Depot buckets included new heavy winter coats, toiletries, personal protective equipment to deal with the COVID-19 and other items.

Meeting up outside the VFW Gilbert-Burton Post 4487 on Underwood Lane, those involved said they felt it was the least they could do for those who've given so much for their country.



"That's what the VFW is here for, to help veterans and the wider community," VFW 4487 Post Commander Allen Wagonblott Jr. said. "There are some people out there that really need help. They're living out on the

street, under overpasses and they've done so much for us, it only makes sense we try to help them. We're going to be doing more of this." Others agreed, saying the stories involving some veterans were heartbreaking.

"You talk to these people and they're so grateful and it's us who are really

grateful," Middletown Police Capt. Michael Faria said. "This is just a small token of our appreciation, to say 'You're not forgotten and you really matter.'"

The effort was just one of many underway in Middletown to help disadvantaged populations.

“That’s one thing you can say about this island,” said local volunteer coordinator Carmela Geer, who helped put together the event. “The people who live here are always willing to step up and help others, even people they don’t know and will never meet. It’s an amazing place like that.”



Operating under the “Coats4Vets” flag, the Massachusetts Military Support Foundation (MMSF) partnered with the Rhode Island State Police, the Rhode Island Police Chiefs’ Association, the Rhode Island Sheriff Department and municipal law enforcement officers like the Middletown and Newport police on hand Friday to make the event a success.

Police cruisers and other official vehicles from across the region went to Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts to pick up the buckets and deliver them to veterans in their communities.

Through the campaign, MMSF has distributed more than 40,000 coats since 2016. Organizers said the New England Patriots, Home Depot and Ocean State Job Lot were key sponsors.

National Grid Considers Buying Homes Near Old Mill Lane LNG Station

Town Opposes Plan

National Grid is looking at buying homes surrounding its Old Mill Lane facility to help improve natural gas service to Aquidneck Island.

According to a recent filing with the state Public Utilities Commission, the step would create more of a buffer between the liquified natural gas station and surrounding properties.

The move comes as National Grid plans on intensifying the use of the Old Mill Lane station on the southern end of Portsmouth to avoid natural gas shutdowns like the one that hit Middletown and Newport in January 2019.

The item appeared before the Town Council recently as part of a briefing by Brian Schuster, National Grid Director of Customer Service & Community Management.

“We’re really trying to solve this challenge we have with capacity and vulnerability,” Schuster said.

Schuster said National Grid would be using the Old Mill Lane plant only in the colder months when the natural gas system was needed on an indefinite basis.

If possible, National Grid would like to push the LNG plant itself back from Old Mill Lane to insulate it further from neighbors, particularly the sound of the operation, Schuster said. At times,

starting the LNG facility can sound like a “loud truck,” something Schuster acknowledged wasn’t ideal, particularly late at night.

Schuster said National Grid also looked at a “hybrid” solution, which had a new liquified natural gas plant operation on the former Middletown transfer site on Burma Road owned by the Navy. Based on detailed research, Schuster said that was not viable and cost prohibitive in the \$100 million plus range. As a result, Schuster said the Old Mill Lane operation became the focus of all its energies to try to solve the ongoing gas woes.

In response, council members said they were concerned with National Grid’s plans to amplify the use of the Old Mill Lane facility, even though the operation was in Portsmouth.

Council Vice President Thomas Welch III and Councilman Dennis Turano said they didn’t understand why National Grid wasn’t pursuing the safest option instead of the least expensive route.

Council President Paul M. Rodrigues said based on maps he’s seen, if there was an accident at the Old Mill Lane site, it would have a significant impact on surrounding properties.

Addressing Schuster directly, Rodrigues said Schuster and National Grid’s CEO would not live in such an area and it wasn’t something any residents should have to deal with either

“We really don’t care if it costs you \$100 million,” Rodrigues said. “If it’s safer, that’s what you guys should be doing.”

News of National Grid’s latest proposal first went live last month with several PUC filings. To read a report on those developments, visit <https://www.middletownri.com/civicalerts.aspx?aid=527> online. To view the documentation from National Grid, check out <https://mdl.town/OldMillLane> online.

The fate of National Grid’s LNG service has been under the microscope since the January 2019 shutdown left more than 7,000 customers without gas service during an especially bad cold snap. Previously, National Grid officials said the company was

examining all reasonable options to address those issues. Those included intensifying use of the Old Mill Lane site, creating an LNG center at the Navy base, forming a new barge system in Narragansett Bay and building a new LNG pipeline, among others.

Of those options, National Grid paperwork indicated redoing the Old Mill Lane facility was the most timely and least expensive alternative at \$53 million. To review those plans, visit <https://mdl.town/NationalGridLNG> online. To see a copy of the presentation from National Grid about the project, visit <https://mdl.town/OMLStakeholder> online.



The Town is part of the process because of the potential impact of the project on the community. However, unlike neighboring Portsmouth where the LNG facility is based, Middletown does not have zoning oversight on the matter. Rather, it's up to the Town Council only to provide Middletown's official input.

"While the Old Mill Lane site is clearly in Portsmouth, that doesn't mean the Town of Middletown won't see very definite impacts from any intensification of use there," Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said previously. "Throughout this process, the Town of Middletown – and a number of other parties – have been quite clear that National Grid needs to find a more reasonable solution to this longstanding problem. They can't just always take the path that costs the least and we've always said this needs to be in an industrial area, not a neighborhood surrounded by homes."

No neighbors spoke during the recent session. Schuster said National Grid has talked with neighbors at Old Mill Lane and the former transfer station site.

In a later briefing, Town Solicitor Peter B. Regan said National Grid now has until April 4, 2022 to file the next set of paperwork concerning the Old Mill Lane operation. The Town has attorney Marisa Desautel in charge of handling the case.

For comments, write Emma Rodvien, Coordinator, Energy Facility Siting Board 89 Jefferson Blvd., Warwick, RI 02888 in writing email emma.rodvien@puc.ri.gov.



Filling A Need Seniors Step Up Big

Hearing of a need for winter coats, boots and more among some local youngsters, the Middletown Senior Center raised \$500 in two days to help.

"No Middletown student should go without or be cold," Senior Center Director Arleen Kaull said.

"It's so great to see such a sense of community here, where everyone is coming together to help families and kids in Middletown," school Family Service Coordinator Megan Mainzer said.



The Point Of A Journey

Schools Welcome Spanish Translator

When she left her homeland of the Dominican Republic at 17, Sharolyn Plungis wasn't sure what was in store.

Despite the reservations of family and friends, Plungis said she knew she needed to experience life outside the small Caribbean island, wherever it may lead.

Heading to Boston where an aunt lived, Plungis worked hard for a travel agency and Walmart, eventually moving up the ranks to manage a superstore in Connecticut with a \$119 million plus budget for the retail giant.

Today, Plungis is the new Spanish translator for the Middletown School Department, trying to build bridges between students, parents and teachers while never forgetting the journey along the way that led her here.

"At the time, I thought it was exciting," Plungis said of leaving the Dominican Republic. "If you asked me if I'd do it now, I'd probably say 'No way.' It would have been easier to stay at home, with everything that's there, but that's not what seemed right.

"I needed to experience the world, to travel and see where I might end up. It's a story a lot of people I work with know. The parents who might not speak English but come here for work and want something better for their kids."



The wife of Charles Plungis, the couple lives in Portsmouth and has two children, Alejandro and Charlotte.

Reading a recent story in the newspaper about the need for a full-time Spanish translator, Plungis said she applied and felt fortunate to be named to the position. Plungis said it was an excellent opportunity to put the skills and knowledge she picked up as an English student at the Harvard Extension School as well as the Community College of Rhode Island, where she studied business administration.

According to statistics, Middletown is seeing a rise in the number of non-English speakers, known as English Language Learners in educational speak. Recent totals showed Middletown schools had about 115 ELLs, or approximately 10 percent of the entire school population.

To assist with servicing those students and parents, the district also recently hired Megan Mainzer, the school's Family Service Coordinator who is also fluent in Spanish.

"It has been so great that she is here to help translate all the handbooks, fliers home, COVID-19 medical information about testing and other information," Mainzer said. "She can be at IEP meetings and help teachers send home report cards in Spanish too. It's all been such a huge help."

Those additions have been huge for the district, Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger said.

"We're very fortunate to have Sharolyn as part of our team," Kraeger said. "She's very easy to work with and does an excellent job making everyone feel comfortable. It's only

been a few weeks, but we can see the huge difference she's making and I know the teachers are just thrilled to have her here to help make Middletown schools that much more welcoming to everybody."



Although she's been on her job for about a month, Plungis said she's already seen a difference – both inside school and out.

"I know when I was announced at Gaudet (Middle School) as the school's new translator, the teachers and staff applauded," Plungis said, smiling. "That was totally unexpected, but really nice and it made me feel right at home. The teachers have been so supportive and have welcomed me with open arms."

Plungis said she felt real satisfaction being able to help non-English speaking parents become more a part of the Middletown school district.

"Translating is what I was brought here to do and it's nice to see when families begin to understand that we truly are here to help them," Plungis said. "To see their confidence grow and to feel more a part of something special, that makes me feel good."

Part of that is because when she first moved to Boston after graduating high school, Plungis said she had a working knowledge of English, but was by no means fluent.

"It can be very difficult, to go somewhere where you don't really know anybody and don't know the language," Plungis said. "What

I'd tell people is to not be afraid and go for it. If you ask somebody for help, what's the worst that can happen? They say 'No?' Most people won't say no."

"Be confident in yourself and what you can accomplish. It's not going to be easy and it will be a lot of hard work, but I'd say it's worth it every time. It's been very nice to be here. Everyone has been so supportive. It's certainly not retail, which can be cutthroat. I don't miss that at all."

In The Spotlight

Gaudet Student Has Starring Role In Holiday Classic

Some people would rather avoid the spotlight.

Thirteen-year-old Charlotte Seymour embraces it.

Recently, the Gaudet Middle School eighth grader was selected for the role of Clara in the holiday classic "The Nutcracker" by Festival Ballet Providence.

Scheduled to run Dec. 17-24 from The Vets in Providence, Charlotte said she's been putting in long hours getting ready for the shows – and loving every minute of it. For tickets or information, visit <https://festivalballetprovidence.org> online.

"When I'm up in front of a crowd, I don't really think about it," Charlotte said. "I'm there to do ballet and that's what I do. I love to dance. I can't remember a time when that wasn't true."

The daughter of Ted and Jenn Seymour, Charlotte and her family are from Canberra, Australia, but living in Middletown for a year. That's because her father is a Commander in the Australian Navy and enrolled at the Naval War College in Newport. Charlotte's sister Victoria is a fifth grader in the Gaudet Learning Academy.

Living and vacationing previously in the United States, Charlotte said she's enjoyed her eighth-grade experience at Gaudet.

While some aspects of teenage life are very different than home, much of it is familiar. Kids like to eat most of the same foods, the clothing is similar and music and entertainment are in the same ballpark, but there is more homework here.

"Sometimes I hear 'What part of Britain are you from?'" Charlotte said, laughing, referring to her distinctive accent. "I just shake my head and explain that 'No, I'm not from Britain or New Zealand.'"

Dancing since the age of three, Charlotte said she's part of a rigorous program in Australia under the lead of Principal Kim Harvey, where she's tested every year before she can move onto the next level.

Knowing she wanted to dance when in America, Harvey and Charlotte's mother combed the internet, searching for the best, most highly regarded program they could find within an hour of Middletown.

Consistently, the Festival Ballet Providence kept coming up, so Charlotte joined up and once she arrived stateside, she tried out for "The Nutcracker." To her surprise, she landed the top children's role along with Cynthia Van Pelt of Newport.

"When I heard it, I couldn't believe it," Charlotte said, her eyes beaming. "It's easily my biggest role and I'm learning so much."

Working with professional dancers has been really rewarding and everyone has been helpful, Charlotte said. To get ready for the mid-December run, Charlotte has been making the trip to Providence every day other than Fridays and the occasional off day to practice.

"It's a lot of work, but it's what I want to do," Charlotte said. "I've always loved to do ballet and it's so great to know when you're connecting with an audience and putting on a good performance."

Sitting in during the interview, Jenn Seymour spoke proudly about all her daughters have accomplished during their American adventure.

"I am very proud of both of them, coming to another country halfway across the world in the middle of a pandemic and embracing everything about it," Seymour said. "For Charlotte, that's been ballet and the ballet life. She's done everything that's been asked of her and more and done it all with a smile on her face." Gaudet Principal William Niemeyer said the entire school community was rooting for Charlotte.

"The students, teachers and staff at Gaudet are very excited for Charlotte, and her role in 'The Nutcracker,'" Niemeyer said. "With both talent and hard work, she earned a role that many dream of. We are very proud of her and look forward to watching her shine this holiday season."

As for the future, Charlotte said she can't imagine a time when she wasn't dancing, particularly her beloved ballet. And if not dancing, then acting, she said.

"Looking back, it's amazing where dance has taken me," Charlotte said. "It's opened so many doors, but none of it would have been possible without the support of my family and people like Ms. Kim and (Festival Director of Dance Education) Marissa Parmenter and (Festival Artistic Curator) Yury Yanowsky. I feel very lucky to be working with all of them."





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SANTA ALERT



THE MIDDLETOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORTS SANTA CLAUS IS BOOKED TO VISIT MIDDLETOWN STARTING DEC.6, WEATHER DEPENDENT

MASKS REQUIRED &
NO PHOTOS WITH SANTA TO KEEP EVERYONE SAFE

FOR SANTA'S SCHEDULE, VISIT [MDL.TOWN/SANTA2021](https://mdl.town/santa2021) ONLINE SANTA TRACKER & UPDATES VIA THE MFD FACEBOOK PAGE