

OurVoice Citizens for Better Government

Volume 1, Issue 1

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Inaugural OurVoice Newsletter

The purpose of the Newsletter is to provide an update and or introduction to Lebanon residents about the activities at OurVoice and to spread word about our website.

I know everyone has busy schedules and we are all under economic pressures from the recession. In times like these it is so important we manage our time and our finances wisely.

This is precisely why OurVoice was launched last fall. To provide a means for residents to stay informed and be aware of issues in the town.

Immediately after the launch I found out about a group "Citizens for Better Government" and I wanted to help their efforts to open town government. If I was a carpenter I would have likely built a billboard, but my background is information technology so I built a website.

It was evident to me after the unexpected property tax increase that measures needed to be taken to improve oversight and controls in our town. Greater transparency needed to be gained on town spending and the contract bidding processes needed some scrutiny.

My thought was to allow easy participation in government by residents by leveraging technology and using a website to share opinion, organize discussions and potentially have roundtables to address issues facing the town. Further, this platform could

be extended to share and promote town events like clinics, sports practice, news, human interest, fundraising and more; ultimately all of this helping to shepherd the town in a better direction.

OurVoice provides residents the ability to get access to information quickly and to stay informed on their own schedule.

OurVoice is NOT an official town website but rather a private website operated for the benefit of interested Lebanon residents.

I encourage you to visit the website to learn more about OurVoice and share your thoughts, views, opinions and muse. The OurVoice concept is truly News, Editorial and Commentary by the people and for the people.

If you have ideas on things you would like to see on the site drop me a line and we will see what we can do.

The website has much to offer and will certainly help keep you better informed, and maybe a little entertained.

This newsletter provides an example of materials you will find online.

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Town Positions Opening This June

There are several positions that will be coming up for vote this coming election in June.

A Selectmen seat, 3 Budget Committee Seats, Recreation Director and perhaps others.

If you have time to offer to serve any of these positions I encourage you to contact the Town Hall for application details. Nomina-

tion papers are due by 5pm April 27th.

It would be great to see some fresh faces in these positions and also at the meetings. There is also a great need for volunteers in town as well.

It is also a good idea to speak with persons in those positions currently to learn more about

hours involved, duties and so forth.

I also recommend anyone running for a position to post and campaign on the OurVoice website.

This is a great way to share your views and opinions and demonstrate why residents should vote in your favor.



Published By

Glen Stadig

Watch Meetings On Demand

At the special Town Meeting last fall over the tax increase, residents expressed interest in having regular meetings shown on TV.

It was learned that to do so through the cable company would be expensive but the town could record and publish meetings through their website very cost effectively and this method also provided the added benefit of residents viewing meetings on demand where the TV cable option did not.

In an effort to provide proof of concept to the residents I used a simple computer webcam and more recently a video camcorder to record Selectmen and Budget Committee Meetings.

Perhaps not as exciting as a Hollywood blockbuster, the videos have proven popular and serve as a detailed record to the meetings.

The recordings also allow for people to hear and observe dialogue and other details often lacking in official minutes.



Partly through evolution, audio only versions of the meetings have been made available for people who enjoy podcasts. This also allows persons with limited internet bandwidth to hear the meetings since the file size is so much smaller.

I believe the Town should place a referendum on the ballot that ALL meetings be recorded and archived for residents to view and or, listen to.

The inexpensive cost provides the average resident the opportunity to stay informed, observe town business and also provides a means for the Selectmen to inform and address residents.

See www.ourvoice.stadig.org

OurVoice Website Features

The OurVoice website was created last fall to provide a portal allowing Lebanon residents to stay informed on news and happenings affecting the town. The website also affords the opportunity for residents to share their points of view on issues, encouraging dialogue, debate, and the opportunity to be heard.

Features of the website include:

- Calendar for publishing your events, fundraisers, meetings or activities.
- Video and Audio feeds of Selectmen and Budget Committee Meetings.
- Informal Opinion Polls
- Meeting Minutes
- Human Interest stories and happenings.
- Lebanon Rescue Chief Reports
- Government, Business and Resource links and so much more...

The website is continuously updated and ever evolving. I encourage all residents to visit, comment on articles, publish articles, view meetings and share your voice. The site is somewhat biased to government topics and activity but is meant to serve all aspects of town happenings.

Please Visit ..and share your voice.

<http://ourvoice.stadig.org>

It's All Attitude—You Can Make a Difference

I often hear frustration when speaking to residents on matters of the town government. Believe me I get frustrated too.

The key is attitude...

Many feel things are out of their control, they don't have a voice, they don't have time, hate public speaking and or believe they lack skills necessary to contribute.

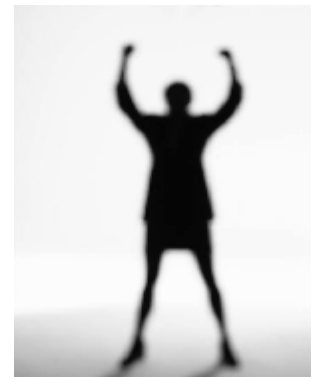
In the end they are frustrated because they believe it's all out of their control and they can't make a difference.

You can make a difference and your voice can be heard. That's the beauty of a small town, a single vote can make a H U G E difference.

The best way to eliminate frustration is to become active, take action, stay informed and be involved.

Lebanon is an awesome town filled with great people and many interesting places.

Keeping a positive attitude and working to constructively improve things can reduce frustration and will impart change.



Why Not Keep Minutes

Selectmen have made it clear that they will meet and not maintain minutes of meetings unless they execute a vote or are in executive session, which both require minutes by Maine law. The Selectmen claim, for example, their Tuesday morning meetings are more informal than the evening meetings and since the public is invited, minutes are unnecessary. Technically it may be true, minutes are not "required" but why operate in such a closed manner?

I believe if Selectmen meet they should record minutes and at a minimum these should include the topics discussed, matters addressed in reasonable detail and indicate persons in attendance. Having minutes of discussion, action and decision can help protect the

town in legal matters and also explain the reasoning for taking a particular course of action now and also to others days, weeks, months and years from now. Minutes are also one of the only tools at the Selectman's disposal to communicate their work to the residents as well as Selectmen who may have been absent from a meeting. Detailed minutes also provide the chronology of events so you can demonstrate courses of action and avoid a he said, she said, discussion that occurs repeatedly at public meetings.

I have sat on many Safety Committees and Project Committees in my life. Minutes were always used as the core tool to manage committee business and action items as well as share the Com-

mittees progress on same. It's my opinion Town business is no different and if anything, Town minutes should provide greater disclosure of detail not less.

The Selectmen could simply institute policy and start maintaining minutes and improving on them on their own but that would appear unlikely. To require it, a referendum would need to be created and added to the ballot.

An extension to minutes would be to record meetings and workshops with digital audio recorders and post the recordings online. This is done in many towns and provides the greatest transparency. It also serves as a tool that may be used by the secretary to prepare full and accurate official minutes.

Spring—Bike , Run, Walk

Spring is starting to knock on the door which means cycling, running and other outdoor activities are due to kick off. Individuals who are looking to find others with like interests are encouraged to post a comment to this article with an email and join-up.

I hear surrounding towns and bike shops etc organizing weekly rides and workouts. It's a great way to meet new people and have fun getting in shape. Informal groups can also provide that extra motivation you might need. So if you're looking to get

some fresh air or are training for the next century or even a triathlon come to OurVoice and connect with other like minded folk.

Seacoast Bike Tour 2009

Imagine what it would be like to struggle for every breath. When you have trouble breathing, it may be difficult to be physically active or focus on anything except breathing. That is what it is like for persons with Asthma, Cancer, COPD and other Lung Disease.

I am going to ride in the Seacoast Bike Tour for Breathe New Hampshire. I lost my father in 2007 due to lung cancer and also know many who suffer lung disease. Therefore, I have committed myself to this very special cause and am looking for sponsors. This is a two day Bike Tour to be held on May 16 - May 17. All proceeds from this 24th Annual Seacoast Bike Tour will benefit lung health education programs in New Hampshire. Since I have volunteered to do the hard work, I am asking for sponsorship on my behalf of this great cause! I need to raise

a minimum of \$350.00; however, my goal is \$1200.00 Every single dollar counts!

Anyone who pledges me \$20.00 or more and enters their pledge online via credit card will be entered in a raffle for three great raffle prizes!

Winners will be notified by June 16, 2009. Prizes will be listed shortly on the Seacoast Bike Tour page of the Breathe New Hampshire website at www.breathenh.org. Contributions may be made by check (made out to Breathe New Hampshire), or credit card (Visa, MasterCard, American Express). I will gladly pick up any contributions.

For your convenience you can also pledge me directly using your credit card by going online to www.breathenh.org and visiting my official Bike Tour site at <http://>

www.breathenh.org/stadig

If you are unable to sponsor me for this event, but would like to support Breathe New Hampshire, I would be glad to provide you with other opportunities such as volunteering or joining my team.

I am really looking forward to participating in this fundraising event and will let you know about my experience when it's all over at the OurVoice website.

Your support is greatly appreciated!
Thanks!

Glen Stadig

The Stimulus Goes Away

I am not sure people realize the stimulus money will go away.

The School Departments were facing a huge short fall which was surely bringing lay-offs and other measures. This also likely would have increased taxes once again to all contributing towns. The County Sheriff's Department was budgeting a cut in deputies and coverage...everyone was feeling the pinch.

Now that stimulus monies are being distributed by the government, I hear the cuts at the schools have been saved and actually some salary increases were passed and the Sheriff's department proposed a plan to place a deputy in Lebanon full-time, costing residents

\$18,000 per year, which by most accounts is a deal.

To me the stimulus provides towns like Lebanon and the school district the time to restructure expenses and make cuts gradually over the next couple years, as well as address needed projects that will provide long term value. The stimulus



allows for projects to be completed as well as soften effects of the recession. It is important that Town Selectmen, School Boards and Officials understand the money goes away. I would caution adding services and staff when things need to be cut. The stimulus monies, in my opinion, should go to much needed projects that provide long term value.

Extreme care needs to be taken with expanding staff and services. Face it available revenues are likely to continue to decline. If they do increase great, but planning should be conservative.

If the stimulus money didn't arrive we would be seeing major cuts in services, and or another huge jump in taxes.

Virge Atkins Fund = Free Health Clinics For Elderly

HomeHealth Visiting Nurses are offering FREE clinics to all Lebanon residents age 65 and over. Clinics will be staffed by professional registered nurses who will provide private consultations, medication review, education, blood pressure checks and other health screenings.

Clinics will be held at the Lebanon Town Hall from 1:00-3:00 pm Wednesday, April 8, 2009 Wednesday, June 10, 2009 Wednesday, August 12, 2009 To make an appointment, please call Steve Frost, Program Coordinator at: 1-800-660-4867

This service is supported by the Virge Atkins Fund, a fund that offers elderly Lebanon residents financial assistance for health related services and products to include eyeglasses, dentures, hearing aids and walkers.

Author - Author

Everyone has an opinion and the Our-Voice website embodies all the elements that come along with responsible free speech.

If you have a story of a resident who has done great things to help others or some news you would like to share, come to the website and author an article.

Perhaps you fancy yourself a writer or poet. The website is a great way to share your favorite pieces.

You may also comment on articles posted by others to debate a point and share a perspective and add to a discussion.

You can author and comment anonymously or under an alias...but it is always preferred to post with your name if your able to.

Lebanon Rescue's Updated Website

The Lebanon Rescue has updated their website recently and added many informative new features including links to their current financials.

This is a great approach since many people ask—where does the money come from and where does it go? You can easily follow the expenditures for yourself in the posted, easy to view format. It would be a welcome improvement to see other departments and even the towns general government take such an open approach.

The Lebanon Rescue Chief, Samantha Cole, goes to great efforts to share their weekly activity of calls, as well as postings of training and other matters, such as vehicle and station maintenance.

One of the nice touches is sharing feedback from surveys that the Rescue Depart-

ment sends to patients. I post a copy of the reports on the OurVoice website and they are available directly at www.lebanonrescue.com/

I encourage you to check out their site. They put forth a lot of effort and certainly, in regards to information sharing have hit one out of the park...

