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PUTNAM COUNTY'S LOCAL NEWSPAPER

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## Publisher Don Hall Dies at Age 91

By Holly Crocco

Don Hall, longtime publisher of the Putnam County Times and Putnam County Press and a Lake Carmel resident, passed away Jan. 30 at Putnam Hospital in Carmel. He was 91 years old.

If you knew Don Hall, odds are you were either awed or aggravated by him. Inspired or insulted. Very few people walked away from him indifferent.

Until recent years when he (finally) got help with distribution, he was the sweet little old man you could find stocking the newspaper stands at ShopRite, and other locations throughout the county, three times a week - happily handing out papers to passersby. He had dollar coins that he enjoyed doling out to kids for no reason at all. He was a self-proclaimed "Eisenhower Republican" who was fiercely loyal to those who showed support for his newspaper.

Hall was equally as passionate about knocking down anyone who stood in the way of his success as a small business owner, with his most notable opponent being the late Fox News chief Roger Ailes, who owned a competing newspaper and

with whom Hall sparred frequently until Ailes sold his newspapers and moved south. Ailes died in 2017.

Hall spoke his mind, even when his opinion was an unpopular one. He could be rough around the edges and unrelenting once he had his mind set on something. But he was a hard worker. Determined, motivated and - especially in his later years - downright unbelievable.

Right up until the last few weeks of his life, he drove himself to work, was almost always dressed in slacks and a tie, and always clean shaven.

Hall, a Navy veteran, purchased four newspapers in 1958 from D. Mallory Stephens, a former New York State assemblyman, whose son Willis Stephens and grandson Willis Stephens Jr. would later hold the same seat in Albany. Along with the Press and Times, Hall also owned the Putnam County Republican and the Mahopac Mercury.

"The Mahopac Mercury I don't know anything about," he told former Press/Times Editor Marty Collins back in 2012, when Collins was documenting the history of the newspapers for the County

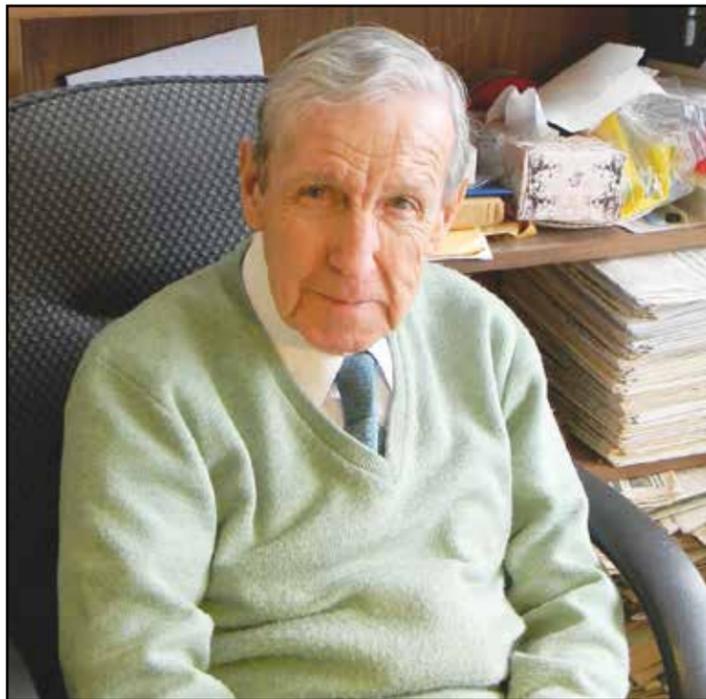
Historian's Office. "As far as I'm concerned, it's just the name of a newspaper that existed and was bought up somewhere in history by the Putnam County Press... when and by whom I have no idea."

But Hall could recall the history of the Putnam County Republican.

"It was owned by two maiden ladies by the name of Blake who ran it out of their Gleneida Avenue office in Carmel," he said. The building, formerly "a wooden house much like others along the street" still stands today. For a long time it was home of the Putnam County Industrial Development Agency and Economic Development Corporation, and Putnam County SCORE.

When the surviving Blake sister died in the early 1940s, the newspaper was left to Stephens who was, at the time, chairman of the Putnam County Republican Committee.

"D. Mallory ran the newspaper for several years before selling it to Charles Wilson somewhere in the early 1950s," said Hall. As best he could recall, Hall said he thought Wilson had been commander of a small ship during World War II. A



Putnam County Press/Times publisher Don Hall.

Yale graduate, Wilson was already the young, wealthy owner of the Putnam County Press and lived comfortably on East Lake Boulevard in Mahopac.

As for the Putnam County

Times, Hall said that paper was started in Carmel in the late 1940s by "a couple of brothers, the Dykeman boys," whose farm was located on Fair Street in Carmel across from

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## Local Fire Depts. Seek Volunteers Pandemic Causes Lag in Recruitment

By Holly Crocco

Time is money, and these days, it seems no one has either to spare.

With communities worldwide rounding out year two of a global pandemic, organizations that are made up of volunteers are seeing a decline in people who are willing and able to serve - especially fire departments.

"Looking at the trend over the last two years, recruitment has been at about 50 percent of what it was from 2018 to 2020," said Putnam Lake Volunteer Fire Department Deputy Chief Dave Raines.

And with people not wanting to expose themselves to COVID-19, the department is seeing fewer people offering to respond to medical calls, he said.

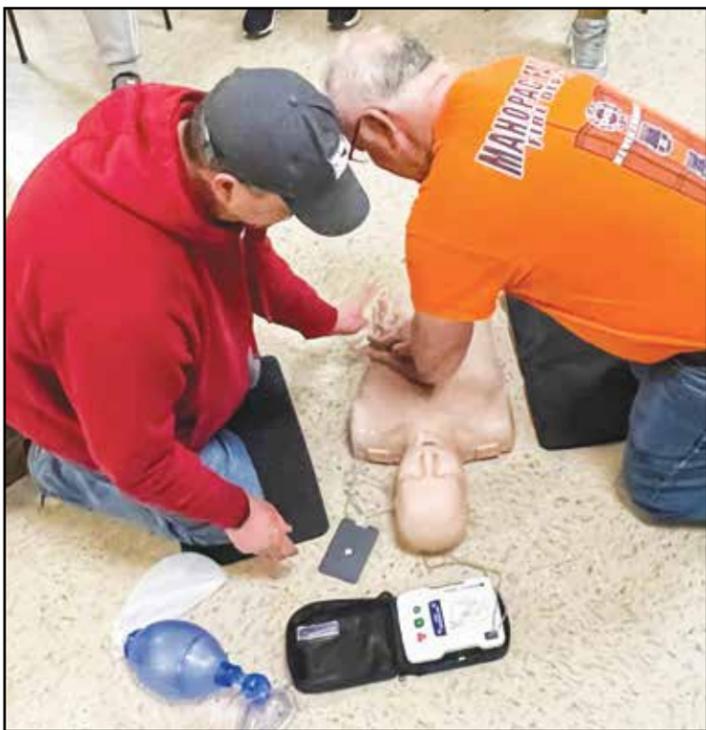
"We're definitely not getting people interested in EMS calls," said Raines. "That's the bigger problem - that's the lion's share of our calls."

The last six months of 2021, he said the department had three applicants, versus the usual dozen or so.

However, Raines said PLFD is fortunate that it had robust staffing in March 2020, when the pandemic first landed in the U.S., and its retention program has been successful in keeping membership strong.

"We're in a good position," he said. "We haven't lost a lot of people, so our need to recruit is not as critical."

By going virtual with some



Members of the Mahopac Falls Volunteer Fire Department perform CPR training recently.

drills and committee meetings, offering smaller group instruction and training exercises, and equipping members with the necessary personal protective equipment, Raines said the department has been able to make sure its volunteers are being kept as safe as possible while it continues to offer the community a strong volunteer force.

"So they (volunteers) feel com-

fortable coming into the firehouse and we're covering all our calls," he said.

However, to further boost its ranks, he said the department is looking at a focused recruitment effort to attract individuals for specific roles, such as driving, traffic control, recordkeeping, IT work and other duties - as opposed to

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## Face Masks Must Remain... For Now Ed Dept. Appeals Ruling Against Mask Regulation

By Holly Crocco

There was confusion across the state last week after a Supreme Court in Nassau County ruled that the state Department of Health exceeded its authority in enacting a mask regulation, and the health department appealed the decision.

The initial ruling was made Jan. 24 on Long Island, after which the NYS Education Department stated that the mask regulation is the subject of conflicting decisions, seeing as the Albany County Supreme Court recently upheld the very same regulation.

On Jan. 25, it was announced that the Department of Health appealed the Nassau County Supreme Court decision, triggering an automatic stay of the regulation until the Appellate Court issues a further ruling.

Therefore, schools must continue to follow the mask rule, and according to Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell, all of the districts in Putnam have notified parents that the mask rule is, in fact, still in place.

"I have heard reports, however, of children as young as 6 years old being forced to socially distance in class because their parents sent

them to school without a mask," she said last week. "That is heartbreaking and unacceptable."

Mahopac School Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo notified families last week that the district's mask mandate would stay in effect until at least Friday, when the full legal case could be heard the Appellate Court.

"I know this has been a roller coaster ride for parents, students, teachers and staff, and I want to thank you all for your patience in these confusing times," he said. "As always, I will keep you posted on any new developments. Thank you for making sure your children are masked on the bus and in school for now."

In August, Gov. Kathy Hochul imposed a state mask mandate for schools via a policy issued by the Department of Health and adopted by the NYS Education Department. The Nassau County Supreme Court judge's ruling said that this roundabout method of imposing a state mandate was unconstitutional, and that the issue should be put to the State Legislature to vote on if the mandate is to become law.

"As governor, my top priority is to get the mask mandate

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## Publisher Don Hall Dies at Age 91

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Simpson Road. They, too, sold their paper to Wilson, who had by that time built a printing plant where he published his newspapers.

“Charlie Wilson bought the equipment and opened a printing company and a newspaper publishing company,” said Hall. “He published the Putnam County Press. He owned the Putnam County Times, the Putnam County Republican and the Mahopac Mercury, but he incorporated them into one, into the Putnam County Press.”

Then, in the mid-1950s, Wilson rather abruptly left the area. Rumored to have had some trouble with the IRS, Wilson relocated to Mexico where he managed several family-owned businesses. Ownership of his newspapers then reverted

back to Stephens, who held promissory notes on them.

Not interested in running the newspapers himself, Stephens turned over their production to a “Rev. Simpson, from the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Carmel” who, Hall recounted, ran the newspapers for a while before “turning them over to a Mahopac couple by the name of Oakley; Frank George Washington Oakley and his wife, Beatrice.”

In 1958, Oakley wanted out of the newspaper business so he could run for supervisor of the Town of Carmel. The elder Stephens approached 28-year-old Don Hall, who was at that time a pickle and ketchup salesman for the H. J. Heinz Company and head of the Young Republicans in Putnam County, about becoming a newspaper owner.

“And I said ‘Yeah!’ I took it over on the first day of February, 1959,” said Hall.

Hall worked alongside the Oakleys in their Mahopac dining room learning the trade. After several months, he quit his job with the H.J. Heinz Company, began

taking journalism classes at New York and Fordham universities at night, and ran the newspaper by day. While studying journalism, he learned about impressive new printing techniques and shortly thereafter transferred his paper from Wilson’s Mahopac-based printing plant, then owned by Tommy Lotrecchiano, to a printer in Bethpage, Long Island.

“The Bethpage company was producing newspapers by photo offset, a new innovation in newspaper production, and they were doing mass numbers of newspapers – as many as 30 to 40 newspapers a week out of the one plant,” said Hall, who liked what he saw and began to search for the right locale to start his own offset printing plant.

Eventually, Hall found an ideal location. It was the old four-story New England House Hotel at 80 N. Main St., Brewster. It was there he opened his own printing plant in 1961, employing 22 people.

Over the next decade, Hall published a dozen newspapers at his Brewster plant. “I had four newspapers in Westchester, four in Dutchess and I had the papers



Don Hall, left, with former Putnam County Sheriff Donald Smith Jr.

in Putnam County,” he said. In addition, he printed the Westchester Business Journal, a Katonah newspaper and one in Yonkers, as well as area high school and college newspapers.

For Hall, it was a golden era of printing and publishing. “My selling point was, you could bring me raw copy at 8 o’clock in the morning and at 8 o’clock at night, (and) I’d give you a newspaper,” he said. “That was unheard of in those days.”

But then, Feb. 2, 1971, the plant burned down.

“I was in Boston opening up Boston and the New England area for a national children’s newspaper that I had started,” explained Hall. “When I returned, I stood there on the street and looked at the thing and said, ‘I’m right back where I started.’”

Hall returned to Mahopac where he had offices on South Lake Boulevard. He “folded up the Westchester papers but kept the

Dutchess County papers going for a few years,” before ending those, as well.

In the last decade, Hall witnessed changes in the newspaper world brought about by technology. “Computers have completely changed the business,” he said. “A weekly newspaper is a second-class thing compared to today’s instant internet news, but they can still survive in an area.”

In his later years, Hall fielded many inquiries about who would keep his legacy alive and if he would be interested in selling his business.

“If somebody came along who was interested in buying it, someone who I felt would continue to do the paper as I have, I might,” he said.

For information about funeral arrangements, please visit the Putnam County Times/Press on Facebook throughout the week. We will post information once plans are finalized.

## Local Fire Depts. Seek Volunteers

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just fighting fires and performing medical backup.

“We’re going to test it,” said Raines, who noted that not everyone is interested in running into a burning building or pulling someone from an overturned vehicle.

Volunteering with the local fire department has many incentives. In addition to the camaraderie and social aspect of it, there are scholarships offered and a length-of-service awards program that utilizes state and municipal funds on a sliding scale to offer pension-like benefits to members based on years of service.

“It has retained many of our older members,” said Raines. “I don’t think the younger kids look at that as an incentive because they

can’t see that far out.”

Carmel Fire Department President Thomas Keck said that while recruitment at CFD is down, his department has been fortunate to have children of members following in their parents’ footsteps and joining the volunteer force.

In addition, CFD – like many other departments – has entered into agreements with surrounding agencies to provide mutual aid for one another.

Keck said the department could use help at all hours of the day and night, but that covering daytime shifts is more challenging, since most people work during the day and have commitments involving their children’s athletics or other extracurricular activities in the afternoon.

Like Raines, Keck pointed out that the department has plenty of roles to fill that do not include just fighting fires. There’s administrative work, fire police, apparatus operators, medical assistance and other duties.

“We have a role for everybody,” he said.

Keck noted that being a volunteer firefighter can be very time consuming, considering the training that is involved. However, he said it is very rewarding and can help young adults stand out from the crowd. “It always looks good on a resume,” he said.

While social distancing and other efforts used to curb the spread of COVID-19 have caused the department to pivot how it keeps its volunteer force trained, Keck said it has pushed through. “It’s definitely been a challenge,” he said. “There’s only so much we can do over Zoom.”

Fortunately, the department hasn’t experienced huge waves of membership falling ill or having to quarantine. In addition, Keck said various community organizations have provided donations of PPE so the department hasn’t run out of masks and gloves for members.

If you think you would like to serve your community as a volunteer firefighter, reach out to your local fire department to see what opportunities await.

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