

LOCAL

Gun-buyback event closes for day after organizers run out of cash

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The joys of cruising on Long Island Sound

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Fairfield home offers convenience for commuters

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FIX THE TRAINS

BANDWIDTH BATTLE

Rail safety program creates need for resource

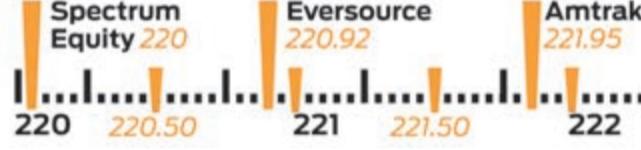
By Tatiana Cirisano

In the wake of Amtrak's tragic May train derailment in Philadelphia, railroads are scrambling to deploy a train safety system before Congress' Dec. 31 deadline.

But whether the railroad will implement it in time remains — quite literally — up in the air.

The accident-prevention technology known as positive train control, or PTC, uses wireless spectrum, invisible airwaves that transmit data to slow a speeding train or alert operators to potential colli-

NO AIRWAVES TO SPARE



sions. But spectrum is both expensive and scarce, especially in the Northeast Corridor, which connects eight states, including Connecticut.

"PTC is not off-the-shelf technology," said Association of American Railroads spokesman Ed Greenberg. "It has been a technological challenge for the industry."

With the deadline looming, tensions are escalating between Congress, the railroads and the Federal Communications Commission, the agency charged with regulating radio frequencies, over who is responsible for the safety system delay.

But to Jim Cameron,

See Safety on A5



Autumn Driscoll / Hearst Connecticut Media

A Metro-North train passes a radio tower in Bridgeport on Wednesday.

A BASIC QUESTION, AND ...

A long search for answers

Greenwich teen struggled for years before accepting transgender identity

By Silvia Foster-Frau

"I said, ... 'I'm not going to lose my kid, I'm going to change things right now. I'm going to pull you back out.' And you know, it was just a matter of love and talking and making sure I didn't just give up. And here we are. Right?"

Evan nods. Despair only brought the pair closer. So, three years later when Evan told his mother he might want to change, Wendy supported him — even though the change was a big one.

Evan Connors used to be Meghan Connors.

After struggling through freshman, sophomore and junior years at Greenwich High School, finally, last summer, Meghan told her

See Teen on A10

"Ninth grade was like getting sucked into a black hole. ... I didn't know who I was."

Evan Connors



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Evan Connors sits outside his alma mater, Greenwich High School.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

The city's a stage for top race

Finch, Ganim in fight for political lives as they look for key endorsement

By Michael P. Mayko

BRIDGEPORT — They've battled over police substations, dueled over housing developments and now vie for votes.

They court candidates, make all kinds of promises and drive for defections to their team. It's all about the

politics.

But for Bill Finch, the city's incumbent two-term mayor, and Joe Ganim, a former five-term mayor who spent seven years in federal prison, it's much more: The mayoral matchup is looming as a fight for their political lives.

"What the voters see are



Finch Ganim

two career politicians," said Mary-Jane Foster, another mayoral candidate waiting to get her sharp elbows into the fray. "One is a failed

See Race on A5

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

RACE

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mayor desperate to keep his job, and the other is a convicted mayor desperate to get a job. Both will stop at nothing to get what they want — they're in the process of eviscerating each other."

All this is happening in the quest for the crown — the Democratic Town Committee endorsement. It will be bestowed on one of them on Tuesday night in Testo's Italian Family Restaurant, the castle of kingmaker and Democratic Town Chairman Mario Testa.

"That endorsement is so important," said Donald Greenberg, a Fairfield University political professor, avid campaign watcher and Foster supporter. "When you are endorsed, everyone else is running after you. Your name's at the top of the ballot. You've got the momentum for fund-raising. And you're not wasting (time) scrounging for 2,000 valid voter signatures just to get on the ballot."

For now, the word on the street is Ganim has more than the 46 votes necessary to secure the nomination from the 90-person Democratic Town Committee.

And the word is also that the Finch administration is working overtime to change those numbers with promises only it can keep.

Even Ganim concedes the numbers could change in the wake of political pressure, but he's in the race "to the end," he said.

If Ganim — ex-mayor, ex-prison inmate, ex-practicing lawyer and dogged campaigner — keeps the 46 votes, the committee could be writing the opening chapter in one of the biggest political comebacks in Bridgeport history.

"Everybody loves a comeback story," said Robert Halstead, seeking re-election from the 132nd district and supporting Ganim.

"Bridgeport loves a comeback story."

Apparently so does its Democratic Town Committee.

Three years ago, they endorsed Ernest Newton II for a state senate seat. That happened just two years after his release from a five-year federal corruption prison term.

Newton, however, was defeated in a three-person primary.

Foster, the former Bridgeport Bluefish co-owner and current University of Bridgeport vice president, is banking on history repeating itself.

"The city is fractured and I offer the best alternative," she said.

Best in show

For the past two months, Ganim has been in frenzied campaign mode.

He's everywhere — at fire scenes, consoling shooting victims, discussing development ideas and strategizing with the anti-Finch Democrats.

A simple walk down the street generates honking horns, shouts of encouragement and extended hands wherever he goes.

"Did you see him at the (Barnum Festival) parade?" asked Ralph Ford, the 139th Town Committee district leader. "People hugging him and kissing him. He's like a rock star."

And Finch wants a piece of all that love.

So in the past month, neither candidate has been hard to find.

After gunshots felled another victim in Trumbull Gardens last month, Ganim and then Finch opened "unofficial" and official city police substations in the area.

Finch's police chief took it a step further and read the riot act — actually a memo read aloud at daily roll calls — for any officer thinking about using Ganim's pseudo-substation.

Days after Ganim gamely walked with the reporters



Autumn Driscoll / Hearst Connecticut Media
Mayoral candidate Joe Ganim greets a potential voter in front of the police department's former West Precinct.



Michael P. Mayko / Hearst Connecticut Media
Mayor Bill Finch plays Ludo, a Jamaican dice game, with several residents on Grand Street on Wednesday.

down East Main Street, Finch, in a move somewhat out of character, graciously invited Hearst Connecticut Media to join him in a personal journey through The Hollow.

Debonairly dressed in a fitted blue shirt with long-sleeves accentuated by gleaming cuff links — his collar tightly clamped by a paisley tie of metallic gray — a jaunty Finch stood out in the blue-collar neighborhood, where jeans, cutoff shorts and T-shirts are de rigueur.

Residents readily recognized His Honor, opening their doors and gleefully taking selfies with him.

Behind One Stop Variety on Grand Street, the mayor took time to learn how to play a friendly but competitive game of Ludo, a Jamaican dice game.

Earl Douglas helped Finch beat Nigel Johnson, probably better known as the rapper "Scrappy Ranks."

Basking in his victory, and undoubtedly plotting another, the mayor soberly turned down a congratulatory offer of Red Stripe Jamaican-style beer.

A few hours later, he was embraced by Jasmin White, who pulled out a smartphone with the cheek-to-cheek selfie she took of the mayor at the July 2 hip-hop concert still on it.

"It's gotten a million hits," she exaggerated.

At Center Street, Finch found himself inside the Asian Evangelical Church, learning Cambodian and surrounded by at least 50 kids of all colors and creeds.

"I love campaigning," he said. "I'll make about 2,000 phone calls, knock on 2,000 doors ... and wear out two or three pairs of shoes."

Summer blockbuster

While Finch may love campaigning, Ganim appears to live it.

But both candidates appear to thrive in the media spotlight.

Take July 15.

Just before 1 p.m., there's Ganim, the collar open on his crisp blue shirt, his sleeves rolled up, rough-and-ready for anything. He's inside Chaves Bakery, outlining his 100-day neighborhood development and improvement plan to some 18 businessmen.

"This is the framework through which we will improve the business climate in Bridgeport," he tells them, as staffers hand out copies of his proposal. He reminds them how this street "was like a war zone" until his administration tore down blighted buildings and brought in businesses like Chaves.

Joe Deyulio, of Atlantic Textiles, likes what he hears. He advises Ganim that life is like driving a car — "the big window in the back is where you've been and the windshield in front

is where you're going."

And he thinks Ganim is going to City Hall, comes the November election.

Just blocks away, Finch is bearing over his own neighborhood improvement plan as he walks through the ongoing construction of the modern, environmentally friendly Longfellow School.

He calls over to two local workers he knows, Paul Lentine and Leroy Heath, shakes their hands and thanks them.

"I was born and raised in Bridgeport," said Lentine. "It's good to see all these new schools going up, being able to work on them, make a living and pay my taxes."

As Lentine walks away, Finch remarks how great that makes him feel — bringing jobs to local people, especially ones where they are building something "as great as a school."

The mayor then strides across the street to the Ocean Terrace firehouse.

It was here, on July 24, 2010, that Finch experienced perhaps his worst day as mayor — confirming the deaths of Lt. Steven Velasquez and Firefighter Michel Baik, who perished in a runaway fire.

Ganim crossed State Street and stood in front of the West Side police precinct.

It was here that he enjoyed one of his biggest successes, opening a police precinct to reduce crime — only to have it shuttered and sold by his opponent.

"What does that say to the residents and business owners?" he asks.

To those listening, it says a Ganim victory.

And if that happens?

"That's Hollywood stuff," said Ford, the district leader.

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