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FREE

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## Old Fashioned Base Ball on the North Shore

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter



The players in their team uniforms.

Photo courtesy of Essex Base Ball Organization.

REGIONAL - With the snows flying and temperatures in the teens, it may be hard to believe that baseball is only a few weeks away.

The Boston Red Sox equipment truck has left for Florida, a festive annual event at Fenway Park, which team president Larry Lucchino called "a harbinger of spring." Spring training practices start this week. The first games are only a week away.

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## Ipswich Troop Visits Muddy Creek



Photo courtesy of Muddy Creek Animal Care Center

Daisy Troop #78170 (based out of Ipswich, MA) spends an afternoon with Dr. Liebert at Muddy Creek Animal Care Center, in Rowley, learning about the importance of bringing pets in for a yearly wellness visit.

## Comina Avoids the Chopping Block

By Stewart Lytle, Reporter

NEWBURYPORT - Last week the signs went up in the windows of Comina, a home furniture and furnishings store, that announced the store would be closing this week because its lease could not be renegotiated.

After six years on Pleasant Street, two doors from the U.S. Post Office, the Nicholas family, which owns nine Comina stores in New England, faced an impasse in negotiations for a new lease with building owner, Dave Williamson.

The signs in the window at the dog-friendly store said: "We'll miss all of you, especially our four-legged friends."

The news spread like an old-fashioned fire through the streets of this historic seaport town. Other store owners, like Beverly Buccheri at BC Essentials three stores away and Amy Williams, who owns a women's clothing store, were distraught.



Photo by Stewart Lytle

Karen Wood (left) and Mary Donahoe celebrate in front of a Mariposa display at the store.

Customers began to rally, sending emails to the store and to the store owners, asking them to reconsider closing the Newburyport Comina store.

Loyal customer Leslie Barton of Newburyport wrote to Amy Nicholas, the chief operating officer, "I am so so sad to see the store closing. I love the girls, Mary, the shop, the furniture and everything Comina represents."

"Since we have moved in this past May, my husband and I have spent a lot of money and a lot of time with them decorating our new home. They have been the best and I have loved everything I have gotten. You have also provided incredible service in standing behind your products as well. We have sent numerous people to the store and they have had the same experience."

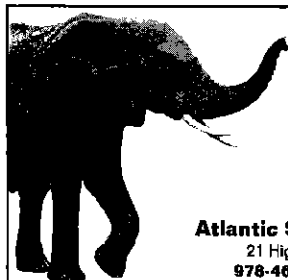
Ludwig Batieler, a New Hampshire customer, also wrote asking Nicholas to reconsider.

"There are no stores in the area that come even remotely close to carrying such sophisticated, contemporary, and beautiful furniture like you do that is being explained to the clientele by a well informed, unpretentious, and polite staff," he wrote in an email to the store headquarters in Connecticut.

Batieler was surprised at the decision to close, he wrote, because of all "the opportunities that seem to abound in the greater area of Newburyport."

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## Comina Avoids the Chopping Block

Continued from page 1

He noted that Newburyport's economy is thriving with a growing number of tourists and new residents. People complain that it is difficult to find a home to buy or rent in the increasingly popular city.

And that is before real estate developer Stephen Karp builds a new hotel or the Newburyport Redevelopment Authority proceeds with its plans for the Merrimack River waterfront project.

"We currently live close to Portsmouth and usually shop stores in Boston and vicinity to find furniture and interior design items, including Circle Furniture and Crate & Barrel in Burlington, among others. So do many others we know in Southeast NH. The reason is simple: There are no sophisticated interior design and furniture stores

north of the Boston area. That is, except for yours."

Then the vendors weighed in. Jos Nicholas, who has been buying for the stores since his mother opened the first one in West Hartford, CN, more than a quarter century ago, got calls from several of the companies that sell their products at the shop.

The owner of Mariposa in Manchester-by-the-Sea was shocked that the Comina shop in Newburyport was closing. She said that shop sells more of her elegant tableware and well-designed gift ware than almost any store in the country.

Vanguard, a North Carolina furniture maker, was also stunned that Comina would close its Newburyport shop.

Amy Nicholas said "It was a very hard decision (to close the store). With such an outpouring of sentiment, it really

made us think. We heard them. We really appreciate it."

So Jos Nicholas and Williamson made a last ditch effort to negotiate a new lease. They reached a preliminary deal by the middle of last week.

"It has been a roller coaster ride," said store manager Mary Donahoe.

By Thursday morning, Nicholas texted Donahoe that it was a done deal.

"We're back," Donahoe cheered.

Customers began showing up Thursday afternoon to congratulate Donahoe and her team, Karen Wood and Lisa Ridabock, on the owners' decision to keep the store open.

One customer who walks by the shop on the way to the Post Office daily said he is confused. "One day you are open," he said. "The next you are closed. Now you are open again. Yeah!"

## Old Fashioned Base Ball on the North Shore

Continued from page 1

But the Red Sox are not the only baseball around.

If you are a baseball fan, like so many New Englanders are, you may also want to come out to watch how base ball (it was spelled as two words until the 1880s) was played in its early days, more than a century ago.

The Essex Base Ball Organization, a non-profit group that strives to educate and recreate baseball as it was played in the 1860s, is gearing up for its 12th season with its first game set for the first weekend in May at the Spencer-Pierce-Little Farm in Newbury. Early spring practices start in April.

Expanding to four teams this year, the league plays games throughout the summer, often attracting other vintage base ball teams from across the country. This year, the league is adding a team from Rockingham, NH, to join with three teams that played last year - the Newburyport Clamdiggers, the Lowell Nine and the Lynn Live Oaks.

Baseball has evolved a lot over the more than a century and a half it has been America's game. The Essex Base Ball teams play a very different game. Pitching is done underhand. Overhand pitching was started in 1885. There are no gloves. A hit can be caught on the

bounce for an out. And any ball that is hit between the lines is fair even if it bounces into foul territory before it passes out of the infield.

The players, or ballists, as they were called in the 19th century, dress in period reproduction uniforms - long trousers and a shield shirt or in a later style lace shirt and knickers.

They play mostly in open fields, not large stadiums. Much like in the movie, A Field of Dreams, there may be corn growing in the outfield and goats running freely through the game.

To the regret of the league's 50 players, there are no huge salaries or signing bonuses. "I wish," said Brian Sheehy, one of the original organizers. "I am waiting for mine in the mail."

The vintage baseball league was started by the Danvers Historical Society, and the first sponsor was the Essex Heritage Foundation.

Maybe because baseball and beer have always gone well together, the league's primary sponsor now is Ipswich Ale. And spectators, called crankers in the old days, can enjoy an Ipswich Ale and other beers at the games, which are often played in conjunction with popular festivals and on holiday weekends.

The games run much quicker than

modern professional baseball. In the three hours it may take the Red Sox to beat the New York Yankees, the Essex Base Ball teams can play a full two games.

Playing base ball the old fashioned way may seem simple. But it is not cheap. The uniforms cost \$150 each, the bats \$80 and the balls \$20. So the non-profit organization is also looking this spring to find other sponsors to join Ipswich Ale in sponsoring the games.

The revival of vintage base ball began in the 1980s. Sheehy said there were teams in New York and Rhode Island 30 years ago. And the sport has been very popular in the Midwest for decades.

So when you are sitting at Fenway Park this year or kicking back in front of the TV with an ale, understand that the highly paid athletes you are watching owe a lot to men like Alexander Joy Cartwright and Doc Adams and many others who formed the first team, the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club, in New York City in 1845.

To pay tribute to that great heritage, join in the fun or make a donation to the Essex Base Ball Organization, visit [www.essexbaseball.wordpress.com](http://www.essexbaseball.wordpress.com) or email [top.historyball@yahoo.com](mailto:top.historyball@yahoo.com).



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**Nicole Reilly is the exclusively listed Criminal and Civil attorney on Newburyport.com**

### LEGAL NOTICE

**ROWLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

In accordance with the Town of Rowley Stormwater Management and Erosion Control Bylaw, as amended, a Public Hearing will be held on Tuesday, March 5, 2013 at 7:45 PM at the Town Hall Annex located at 39 Central Street, to consider a Stormwater Management Permit application filed by The Residence of Carriage Pines LLC, for proposed construction of eighteen duplex units, to paved driveways for access, proposed sewage disposal system, storm-water management area and other utilities at 237 Dodge Rd (Map 9, Parcel 21) in Rowley, MA.


*Doug Watson, Chair*  
*Rowley Conservation Commission*

Merrimack River Entrance  
42° 49'N 070° 49'W

FEB	HIGH	LOW	SUN	
13 Wed	1:21 8.85	1:41 8.78	8:09 -0.65 8:32 -0.58	6:43 5:12
14 Thurs	2:06 8.63	2:28 8.28	8:57 -0.33 9:16 -0.11	6:41 5:14
15 Fri	2:51 8.32	3:17 7.74	9:45 0.06 10:02 0.40	6:40 5:15
16 Sat	3:37 7.98	4:08 7.24	10:37 0.45 10:50 0.87	6:38 5:16
17 Sun	4:27 7.66	5:03 6.82	11:31 0.80 11:43 1.26	6:37 5:17
18 Mon	5:21 7.40	6:03 6.55	12:31 1.03 xx xx	6:36 5:19
19 Tues	6:19 7.27	7:04 6.47	12:40 1.50 1:32 1.11	6:34 5:20
20 Wed	7:18 7.29	8:02 6.56	1:40 1.57 2:30 1.03	6:33 5:21
21 Thurs	8:14 7.45	8:54 6.79	2:37 1.45 3:22 0.83	6:31 5:23

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