

The Cape Cod Chronicle



Published by

Hyora

PUBLICATIONS

• Established 1965 •

The area's only independent weekly newspaper.

The Cape Cod Chronicle is published by Hyora Publications, Inc.
60-C Munson Meeting Way, Chatham, MA 02633
508-945-2220 • 508-430-2700 • FAX: 508-945-2579
Henry C. Hyora, President • Karyn A. Hyora, Vice-President

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e-mail: twood@capecodchronicle.com • web site: www.capecodchronicle.com

Circulation Manager: Karyn Hyora

PRINTED BY LUJEAN PRINTING, COTUIT, MASS.
Member New England Press Association

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A great blue heron rests on the gunwale of a sailboat in the Oyster River on a recent morning. ALAN POLLOCK PHOTO

Still Many Unanswered Questions About School Regionalization

The Chatham Harwich Regional School District Planning Board repeatedly uses the need to stabilize and increase enrollment as a main reason for supporting regionalization with Harwich. It also claims that it will become progressively more difficult for Chatham to fiscally sustain its schools on its own.

The argument being made is that by having larger numbers, the new regionalized district would be able to offer and sustain stronger academic and extracurricular programs and that by having that optimal "critical mass" of students, it will somehow be able to take two individual districts that are facing declining enrollment and become the premier school district of choice on Cape Cod. And just what is optimal school size? A quick bit of online research reveals a broad spectrum. Studies have shown that the optimal high school size can be anywhere from 200 to 1,400 students. The most common response was, however, that there is no optimal school size. What is fiscally optimal can be very different from what is viewed as optimal when considering the academic, social and emotional aspects of success.

There are doomsday predictions that if regionalization fails to pass and Harwich goes ahead and builds a new school, Chatham will lose the Harwich students that currently elect to attend Chatham schools. Has anyone asked those Harwich parents and students if they would return to Harwich if a new school is built? As a side note, has anyone asked the parents of all of the students enrolled in Chatham schools if they would keep their children in the proposed regional district? Chatham's high school principal has said that the first question he asks of parents/students that are electing to come to Chatham is why they are leaving their home district. How many of them have said it's because of the physical condition of the school? Harwich's elementary school is relatively new and in very good condition. Yet as of Oct. 1, 51 of their students are attending Chatham kindergarten and elementary school. And while on the subject of the physical characteristics of a school being a reason for declining enrollment, why is it that there are charter schools in strip malls and abandoned furniture stores that are having to either move to larger facilities or build new ones to meet the increased demand? It's not about the physical plant. It's about core curriculum and the overall education experience and atmosphere.

When questioned about how this proposed regional district would be able to retain current students and attract more,

the superintendents have said that the new district would be able to offer additional programs not currently available: the International Baccalaureate Programme (an internationally recognized and highly regarded education program), additional languages, more athletic depth and variety, etc. It has been presented that Massachusetts state law dictates that all teachers with professional status (a.k.a. tenured) will be retained in the proposed regional district. The question of teacher redundancy is obvious and was vaguely answered with references to multiple certifications and attrition. Which teachers have what certifications? Are we expecting teachers that have practiced their particular area of expertise for many years to suddenly start teaching a different discipline and do that in a way that offers an enhanced academic opportunity for our students? How long is this attrition process realistically expected to take? How will the

new district afford to pay for additional and enhanced programs if the teachers' salaries are making up a disproportionately high percentage of the budget due to this redundancy?

Chatham is facing a variety of education challenges. Where the school committee and administration has failed is by not taking a serious, in-depth look at any options other

than regionalization with Harwich. Chatham doesn't need to regionalize with Harwich to make a better school system. The district can offer the International Baccalaureate Programme at all three of its schools on its own and retain more of its own students and realize an even higher number of school choice inflow students. The costs of the program would be easily covered by those enrollment increases, according to a recent presentation by school administration. Chatham can hire the right people to enhance and improve its extracurricular programs. Improvements can be made in the athletic programs independently and by working within the boundaries of the MIAA to offer sports opportunities with other schools. Chatham can market its schools aggressively and effectively in this competitive market of educational choices. And Chatham can do all this without Harwich, provided it continues to have the dedicated support of the community.

Robert N. Long attended the Nauset Regional School system for seven years and graduated from Chatham High School in 1983. He is the parent of two Chatham High School students, and a member of the Chatham School Committee.

**YOU
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by
**Robert
N. Long**

EDITORIAL

A Wireless World

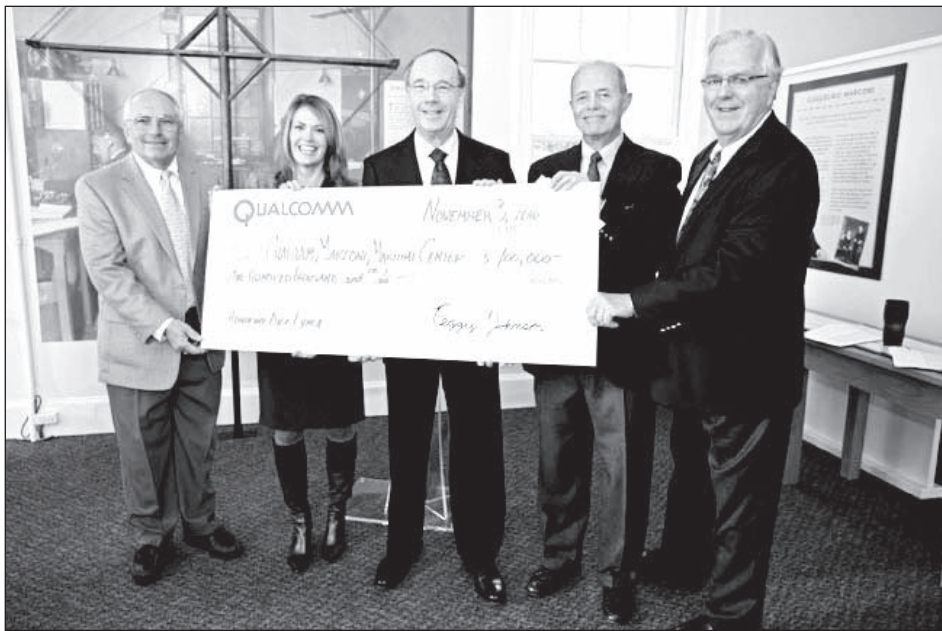
Without the foundation of wireless radio, our world would be a much different place today. Imagine no cordless home phones, no cell phones, no wireless Internet. All of these technologies owe their existence to early communications pioneers such as Guglielmo Marconi, who ignored convention and followed their own visions to create technology that, in its day, was truly remarkable.

Seen in this context, the importance of the Chatham Marconi Maritime Center is quite evident. Last week, the Center, which held a preview opening last summer, received a \$100,000 grant to help make its exhibits and outreach programs even more relevant.

The Center received the grant, Qualcomm's 25th anniversary Technology Innovation Partner Award, thanks to Chatham summer resident Dick Lynch, executive vice president and chief technology officer of Verizon. In explaining why he choose the Center to receive the money, Lynch called the wireless radio station established here by Marconi in 1914 "one of the most significant places in the history of wireless communications." Qualcomm and Verizon carry on that tradition, he said, working together to advance mobile communications and laying the foundation "for the next generation of growth and technical excellence."

The Center's exhibits about the history of wireless should be required viewing for anyone interested in technology and communications. The grant will allow the non-profit organization to make them even better and more relevant, along with expanding education programs that help local students learn that the technology that allows them to receive phone calls and send text messages and photos almost anywhere doesn't just come out of thin air.

We've seen the Marconi Center inspire youngsters now; with the resources provided by the grant --- and perhaps others to follow --- more kids may be motivated to learn about this technology and help usher in future generations of wireless communications.



The Chatham Marconi Maritime Center received a \$100,000 donation from Qualcomm last Wednesday, on behalf of Dick Lynch, executive vice president and chief technology officer for Verizon and a Chatham summer resident. Pictured are (from left) CMMC First Vice President Frank Messina; Peggy Johnson, executive vice president of the Americas and India for Qualcomm; Dick Lynch, executive vice president and chief technology officer for Verizon; CMMC President Chuck Bartlett and CMMC Second Vice President Read Moffett. COURTESY PHOTO