

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

December 15, 1995

The year in review

Taking a look back at the year gone by seems to be a tradition of newspaper columnists everywhere. In my role as your Longmeadow News columnist as well as your legislator, I write this week's column as both a community and a governmental recap of the year.

At the top of the list of notable events is the Center School project. Since the state authorized the renovation project, the town has gone into action, moving classrooms, staff and four hundred elementary schoolchildren into the high school. Looking at the construction site on the Green, it seems impossible that children played on the grounds and learned in the classrooms a few short months ago. I will be watching as the new Center School takes shape.

Also of interest are some changes in town government. The selectmen's office is now under the care of Executive Secretary Julia Whitlock, though most of us will not see a difference. The new telephone system for town offices been the biggest change for me, as I have had to learn a whole new list of phone numbers. I hope the town is able to save on phone bills after going through such an extensive reprogramming of the phone lines.

The Springfield casino referendum was a ballot issue that impacted our town although we had no voice in the outcome. I breathed a sigh of relief when Springfield voters rejected gambling for the city last month. The attraction of venture capital to develop new entertainment complex was tempting, but the nature of the region would change if gambling became the linchpin of our economy.

State government has continued to build a stable base for Longmeadow and all of the towns in the commonwealth. With our balanced budget and reliable local aid, we have made it easier for municipalities to operate. We have pursued a stable environment for businesses as well, enacting tax relief and other cost-saving provisions. These actions will help our economy grow as we approach the next century.

A quiet event for one family has grown to be a momentous event for our entire town. We all watch and pray for Molly McEvoy and her family as she recovers from the heart-lung transplant she received this month. The town's fundraising efforts have been rolled into a huge support group linking the volunteers with her entire family. The courage of a little girl has been inspirational to each of the hundreds of townspeople who have come to know her.

One more event deserves note, symbolizing for me a bright future for our region. Bright Nights in Forest Park is a "happening" that developed quietly as we watched while commuting daily into Springfield. First came the traffic disruptions as new power lines were laid under Route 5. Then the wire structures began to rise on park land. Finally, the bright lights were turned on. Its success embodies the line from Field of Dreams; "if you build it, they will come." Nearly 30,000 cars have driven through the display so far. Congratulations to the Spirit of Springfield, sponsor of the event, for starting a new holiday tradition.

This was 1995. As it ends, I send my best wishes to all of you for a happy holiday season and a Happy New Year.