Social workers: Fostering love

EKATERINE TCHELOZIEO AND CLAIRE GALVIN
CHILDREN'S STAFF WRITERS

WILLIMANTIC — The Willimantic office of the state Department of Children and Families has become a 15-year-old Breanna Babbit.

And social workers have become her family, who, likes to go by “Bre” and currently lives in Cromwell, has been with DCF since she was 22 months old and has worked with a lot of social workers.

When she chose not to discuss the details of her fostering situation, Breanna allows her DCF adolescent specialist Amy Gilman almost like a family member.

Gilman is working with Bre for a few years now, making their relationship stronger each day.

“She calls me every day,” Gilman said. “And I’m not lying when I say this, she makes me smile every time.”

Gilman said, at times, when her job takes a toll on her, talking to Bre makes her feel better.

“She doesn’t make it all about her,” Gilman said. “She checks in on me too. Bre knows that I need her as much as she.”

Social worker Jennifer Benzle, left, listens while Tiffany Saltkeid, right, talks about her job as a social worker in the Willimantic branch of the state Department of Children and Families recently. (Roseann Purba) / Staff

Love a two-way street with ‘Bre’

MICHELLE FIRESTONE
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITERS

WILLIMANTIC — Planning and zoning Commission members are now reviewing feedback on an application by Cumberland Farms to open a gas station and convenience store on Route 44.

That public hearing remains open until at least April 23. Cumberland Farms is seeking to purchase property owned by Gene and Paul Dickenson, who own Memory Lane Antiques Center and Memories Too Antiques Center on Boston Turnpike. Cumberland Farms’ application involves building a store that is a little more than 5,000 square feet with a gas station.

Gene Dickenson, who is 79, said Cumberland Farms offered him a good price for the business, which has been there for almost 40 years.

“They came to me with a good offer and it was time for us to retire,” he said.

The Dickensons own the business and rent space to different dealers.

If the deal goes through, Dickenson said, Cumberland Farms would buy the corner property, while the Dickenson plan to keep the land where Memories Too Antiques Center is located.

He thanked the Town of Coventry and loyal customers for their support over the years.

Coventry Director of Planning and Development Eric Trott said less than 50 people attended a hearing last month on the application, as some were encountering traffic concerns and questions about underground storage tanks.

Commission members continued the public hearing to April 23, with the PZC meeting beginning at 7 p.m. that evening at Coventry Town Hall.

“We’re hoping to get some feedback from the (state) Department of Transportation before the hearing closes,” said Trott.

He said the PZC may choose to continue the hearing beyond April 23 to wait for input from the inland wetlands agency, which meets April 22.

Trott said the commission can have the hearing open for 35 days, until May 14, before it will need to request an extension.

Essentially, the use is allowed by a special permit application for convenience stores and sale of gas,” he said.

Trott said the applicant did CUMBERLAND, Page 4

Last March was National Professional Social Work Month and this coming May is National Foster Care Month. As a result, the Chronicle spent some time with state Department of Children and Families social workers, as well as a trend in DCF care to learn about the issues and triumphs of a difficult profession that is also highly rewarding.

To contact us:

Editorial: 860-429-9023
News: 860-423-8466 or delivery@TheChronicle.com

To submit news photos: 860-423-8466 or news@theChronicle.com

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A spitting image

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