



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

Members of the Pham family sing along with the hymn of praise “Let Us Build A House” during a service at the Union Baptist Church on Sunday. The family, originally from Vietnam, was hosted by the church when they immigrated to the United States 50 years ago.

A GRATEFUL HOMECOMING

Vietnamese family returns to Mystic 50 years after they arrived as refugees

By **SOFIA ACOSTA SILVA**
Day Staff Writer

Mystic — Nearly 50 years after they fled Vietnam and found refuge in Mystic, nine of the 10 Pham siblings stood again inside Union Baptist Church on Sunday morning, embraced by the same congregation that once welcomed them as refugees.

“It kind of gives you chills, doesn’t it?” said Bonnie Fitzmorris, a longtime parishioner who was a teenager when the family first arrived in the mid-1970s. “And I was really touched because a couple of the boys, you know, that I knew a little better than the

rest, I mean we looked at each other and we recognized each other after 50 years, you know?”

The family’s return marked the anniversary of their resettlement in 1975, when the church sponsored the Phams after they fled Vietnam near the end of the war. Their arrival was part of a wave of Southeast Asian refugees who were resettled across the U.S., but few local churches took on a family as large as 12 members of the Pham family.

When the Phams were evacuated from Saigon, they spent more than two months in a refugee camp at Camp

Pendleton, Calif., waiting for a sponsor. “And because our family was so big, no one wanted to sponsor us,” recalled Thang Pham, the second-eldest of the 10 siblings. He added that in order to leave the camp you had to have a sponsor.

“We were afraid we were gonna get split up,” chimed in sister Thu Ha Pham. “And then we heard, we got sponsored by the Baptist church — we’re Catholic. His (their father) fear, at that point was also, ‘Oh my goodness, they’re gonna make us convert’...”

She explained that around the

second day they arrived, the reverend at the time brought the priest from St. Patrick to meet with them, and reassure the family they would not be converted.

The family settled into the house next to the church, the Morgan House, which the church prepared and furnished for them. David Madden, then a teacher at the local middle school, volunteered to tutor them.

“I wanted to be part of making them feel at home,” he said. “Everything was different, the language, the

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Parking garage projects proceed

New London expanding, improving Water St. site

By **JOHN PENNEY**
Day Staff Writer

New London — The city hopes by early next year to solicit bids for a pair of multimillion-dollar Water Street parking garage projects aimed at increasing capacity and adding amenities to the 51-year-old structure.

The expansion project will add 400 new parking spaces to a city-owned garage that currently has 910 by expanding the top three floors of the structure over a surface lot adjacent to Water Street. The project would also enhance handicap accessibility, install electric vehicle charging stations and make elevator improvements, according to a project summary.

A separate but related garage project calls for repurposing ground-level space into a dedicated bus depot with a passenger shelter, a move Mayor Michael Passero said will remove idling buses that frequently queue up on the east side of Water Street.

City Parking Authority Director Carey Redd II told the City Council on Monday that a planned “cultural and tourism center” on the garage grounds will include public bathrooms and a waiting room with displayed bus schedules and public announcements, along with new authority offices.

The city in June 2023 was awarded a \$17 million U.S. Department of Transportation grant for the expansion and upgrade work, as well as for a proposed pedestrian bridge to connect the garage to the incoming National Coast Guard Museum being built on the nearby waterfront.

A portion of a \$1.5 million state Department of Economic and

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ELECTION 2025

New London candidates asked about rift between City Council, school board

15 compete for City Council

By **JOHN PENNEY**
Day Staff Writer

New London — Fifteen candidates, a mix of Democratic incumbents and newcomers, along with Republican and Green Party challengers, are vying for seven City Council seats in the November general election.

Four incumbents — Efrain Dominguez, Jr., Akil Peck, John Satti and Jefferey Hart, along with Victoria Mueller, who was appointed to the

council last year — will share the Democratic ballot with newcomers Chris Clouet and Shineika Fareus.

Republicans are fielding six candidates: Aaron Ide, Beloved-Grace Carter, Hans Hartman, Gina Phillips, Kat Goulart and John Russell. The Green Party has endorsed Lucian Varela and Gramma Dot Ames.

The council is not subject to minority representation rules, meaning there is no limit to how many two-year seats a political party may capture. Democrats

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“In recent years, the rift between the City Council and Board of Education seems to have widened, especially when it concerns yearly budget funding. If elected or re-elected, how would you work to develop a closer working relationship between the two groups?”

11 seek school board slots

By **JOHN PENNEY**
Day Staff Writer

New London — Eleven candidates — a mix of incumbents and newcomers from three political parties — are jostling for seven open Board of Education seats this election season.

The Democratic roster includes incumbents Elaine Maynard-Adams and Susan Hambey, as well as Scott Garbini, Karen Bergin and Rich Martin,

who were appointed this year to fill vacancies. Newcomers Rebecca Amanti and Nanci DeRobbio round out the Democratic ballot.

Republicans endorsed Sarah Turner, Ed Bolles and John Martin, while the Green Party is backing Keith Kimball.

The board is not subject to minority representation rules, meaning there is no limit to how many two-year seats a political party may capture. Democrats for years have held all seats on the City Council and Board of

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WEATHER

Today, periods of rain and drizzle, very breezy. High 61. Tuesday, mostly cloudy, chance of showers. High 62. **A6**

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WAKE-UP CALL: PRICE OF A CUP OF COFFEE IN CONN. IS UP 7.7%

An estimated two-thirds of all Americans drink at least one cup of coffee a day, but the cost of it shot up in recent years and may continue to rise under high tariffs imposed by the U.S. on coffee-producing countries.

In 2020, the price of a pound of roasted ground coffee in U.S. cities averaged \$4.43 according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But in 2024, prices averaged \$6.32 per pound, and the most recent data from August 2025 shows prices hit \$8.87 per pound.

Connecticut, like the rest of the nation, is seeing sharp increases in coffee prices. According to data collected by Toast, an operations platform that thousands of restaurants and food vendors across the country use, the price of a hot cup of coffee increased 7.7% in Connecticut from 2024 to 2025. Some states saw increases as high as 11%.

A variety of environmental and economic factors contributed to initial price increases, but tariffs imposed by the Trump administration could push prices even higher.

In July, President Donald Trump announced a 40% tariff on Brazil. However, a 10% tariff was already imposed in April on Brazil, along with many other coffee-producing countries, as a part of the administration’s “Liberation Day” tariff package.

While dozens of countries produce coffee, Brazil makes up 37% of all global coffee production. A report published in June by the USDA found that Brazil’s coffee production has fluctuated over the past five years due to drought and high temperatures, lowering crop yield. Vietnam, the second-largest coffee producer worldwide, also saw crop fluctuations due to drought and high temperatures.

— CT Mirror

Chasing shadows



NAM Y. HUH/AP PHOTO

Runners participate in the Chicago Marathon on Sunday.