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FIREHOUSE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Father-daughter team launches new comedy

NEWBURYPORT — Should a playwright expose his own marriage issues onstage?

North Shore humor columnist Doug Brendel took a chance and did it — for laughs.

Now his daughter, theater professional Lydia Charlotte Brendel, is directing her father's new comedy, *Things Get Ugly*, at the Firehouse Center for the Arts in Newburyport.

"My wife Kristina read the

first draft and said, 'I can't even comment on this objectively; it's a transcript of our marriage,'" Brendel said.

But their daughter read it and fell in love with it.

"This play zeroes in on the hilarious communication problems that spouses and partners have all the time," the director said.

The younger Brendel launched a series of workshops to refine the script and heighten the comedy, and produced a free public staged reading with

an audience talkback.

Brendel took all the feedback, revised the script, and finally turned it back over to his daughter.

"It's hers now," he said. "Casting, staging, directing. I'm just hoping for the best — theatrically and maritally."

According to early reviews, *Things Get Ugly* features "banter sparkling with Noel Coward-style wit ... playful in form and daring in content ... a bracing look at beauty, betrayal, and the

bargains couples make to stay together."

The play, starring beloved New England actors Justin Demers and Tara Johns, finds a married couple, professional actors, cast in the same show. In the theatre's dressing room, we watch as one dons a grotesquely ugly costume and hideous makeup to become a troll, while the other becomes fabulously beautiful.

In a challenging twist, the real-life actors will swap roles with each performance.

But the couple's clever banter reveals trouble under the surface ... and then — out slips a whopper of a secret.

Throwing her hands in the air, the playwright's wife, Kristina said, "you marry a writer, this is the risk you take."

Brendel, an Ipswich resident, shares his perspective and wit at Outsidah.com and with readers at [The Salem News](http://TheSalemNews.com), a North of Boston Media Group publication. He can be contacted at Unconventional@DougBrendel.com.



Columnist Doug Brendel and his wife, Kristina, will have the humor and truth of their marriage on stage in "Things Get Ugly," May 13-17 at The Firehouse Center for the Arts, 1 Market Square, Newburyport.

Singled out for service

Local residents recognized by KofC

By Stephen Hagan
Staff Writer

MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA — Three local residents were recently recognized by the Masconomo Council 1232 Knights of Columbus for contributions to a number of worthy causes in the community.

The three chosen were honored for service to the council, fidelity to the organization's founding principal of charity and their support for the faith community. They are:

— Deputy Grand Knight Fred Johnson, named Masconomo Council 1232 Knights of Columbus "Knight of the Year."

— Tom and Lyn Shields, recognized as the organization's "Family of the Year." The Shields now live in Manchester, but had lived in Beverly Farms.

Grand Knight Steven Kuhn of Gloucester announced the award recipients.

He cited Johnson's dedication to service at Visitation Parish and Sacred Heart Church in Manchester, his service with his brother Knights and his volunteerism at The Open Door food pantry.

"Fred became a member of the Knights of Columbus 25 years ago and joined Blessed Damien of Molokai Council 11411 in Rochester, N.Y.," Kuhn said. "He held several positions in the council including being Grand Knight for two years."

Kuhn said Johnson eventually transferred to Masconomo Council 1232 after his move with his wife Valerie to Manchester in May 2017.

"Early on, he volunteered to deliver the food collected



Former Beverly residents Tom and Lyn Shields, who now live in Manchester-by-the-Sea, have been recognized as Masconomo Council 1232 Knights of Columbus "Family of the Year."

at Sacred Heart and St. John's parishes to The Open Door food pantry where he and his wife volunteer," Kuhn said.

Johnson said he was grateful to receive the award.

"It is a pleasure working with the Knights of 1232 because our

activities are focused on charity and extending goodwill throughout the Cape Ann community," he said.

Kuhn said Tom and Lyn Shields were obvious choices for the recognition "Family of the Year" — having long been

focused on "giving for the good of others."

"Tom and Lyn personify the familiar saying, 'Do what you can, where you are, with what you have,'" said Kuhn. "Tom

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State defends Medicaid anti-fraud protections

By Christian M. Wade
Statehouse Reporter

BOSTON — Gov. Maura Healey's administration is defending its efforts to crack down on fraud and waste in its federally funded Medicaid programs amid a congressional investigation fueled by claims of widespread abuse.

Two weeks ago, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce launched a probe into Medicaid fraud in 10 states — including Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine — demanding records from the governors and state health agencies to "ensure program integrity" in the state's administration of the program.

The Republican-led committee cited recent prosecutions of fraudsters targeting MassHealth, the state's Medicaid program that serves more than 1.6 million people, which the panel said has exposed "rampant waste, fraud, and abuse" in the taxpayer-funded program.

But Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary Kiame J. Mahaniah pushed back against those claims and defended the state's anti-fraud efforts and integrity programs in a formal response to the committee's allegations.

He cited "robust" anti-fraud procedures and regular reviews of providers that have saved taxpayers more than \$600 million in the past three years.

"MassHealth is proud to operate a robust integrity program, which has been shaped by our close and ongoing collaboration with our partners at U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and law enforcement," Mahaniah wrote Tuesday in the 25-page letter responding to the committee's investigation.

The secretary's response highlighted

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Lessons learned in the shadow of Seabrook

As region eyes new nuclear, one plant's neighbors offer insight formed over decades

By Molly Rains
New Hampshire Bulletin

In the late 1970s, when Seabrook resident David Wright was about 9 years old, his father began bringing him along to protest the construction of a nuclear power plant across the marsh from their family home.

Some locals were fired up. "They didn't want a reactor in their backyard," Wright said.

Thousands who shared that sentiment turned out in the Seabrook area for a series of acts of civil disobedience during the plant's construction, culminating in the May 1, 1977, detention of more than 1,400 protesters. At the time, Rolling Stone reported, the event ranked among the largest mass-arrests in American history. (Wright said he and his father were not in attendance that day.)

Nevertheless, in 1990, after a series of delays and cost overruns, Seabrook Station came online. Within a 180-foot-tall and more than 3-foot-thick concrete dome,

it has contributed 1,244 megawatts of power to New England's grid for 36 years.

Nuclear energy, on the decline in the United States as plants built in the 20th century begin to close, is now the subject of renewed focus for politicians who paint it as a clean and reliable source of energy.

In her State of the State address in February, New Hampshire Gov. Kelly Ayotte directed state officials to chart a path for the state to adopt more advanced nuclear resources, possibly through adoption of emerging technology like small modular reactors.

Nearby, Mass. Gov. Maura Healey has taken similar steps, and both the Biden and Trump administrations have championed the nuclear industry.

Coexisting with nuclear power

In the Seacoast region, where residents have coexisted with a nuclear power plant for decades, the technology feels familiar. Neighbors



Seabrook Station nuclear power plant, as seen from across the Blackwater River.

of Seabrook Station and local officials said they understand the draw of nuclear power.

But some also voiced concerns about the industry and its effects, including fears about potential health impacts, transparency, and emergency planning at Seabrook — and they want those concerns addressed before New England takes further steps toward a nuclear future.

"Everyone who dies on this street dies of cancer," said Marie Souther, a lifelong resident of Seabrook's River Street. With a few dozen

houses and cottages clustered on either side, the road juts off Ocean Boulevard into the tidal Blackwater River.

Just to the west, across the marsh, is Seabrook Station, though Souther remembers a time before it came online — and before much of the development that now crowds the marsh. The river, clearer then, was home to starfish and sea urchins. It has lost much of its biodiversity over the years, Souther said.

As time has passed, she has also lost several of her

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ARAN T. MOONEY/Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

This photo provided by the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution shows a whale on Feb. 24, 2009, near Maui, Hawaii.

Oldest known whale recording could unlock mysteries of the ocean

By Patrick Whittle
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — A haunting whale song discovered on decades-old audio equipment could open up a new understanding of how the huge animals communicate, according to researchers who say it's the oldest such recording known.

The song is that of a humpback whale, a marine giant beloved by whale watchers for its docile nature and

spectacular leaps from the water, and was recorded by scientists in March 1949 in Bermuda, said researchers at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

Just as significant is the sound of the surrounding ocean itself, said Peter Tyack, a marine bioacoustician and emeritus research scholar at

Woods Hole. The ocean of the late 1940s was much quieter

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