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WESTERLY SECURES \$680K IN FED FUNDS FOR UPGRADES / A3

# WESTERLY THE SUN

Thursday, January 15, 2026 | [thewesterlysun.com](http://thewesterlysun.com)

## SOUNDING IT OUT



Vito Geroulo was one of the 23 student spellers who participated in the Scripps National Spelling Bee held Wednesday in the gym at Stonington Middle School. The winning speller, Aarav Kamath, advanced to the Connecticut Spelling Bee on Sunday, March 8, at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford.

## Students put word power to the test

Stonington Middle School hosts its first spelling bee since 2020

By Joseph Volpe  
Sun staff writer

STONINGTON — Twenty-three Stonington Middle School students lined the bleachers in the gymnasium on Wednesday morning and took to the microphone to compete in the Stonington Middle School Spelling Bee.

Aarav Kamath, a 7th grader, was the champion of the spelling bee. Eighth grader Callie Ma finished second in a close final three-round competition between the two students. The word Kamath won on was "ballistics."

The spelling bee in total lasted 15 rounds.

The Grade 6 participants were Trevor Harley, Talon Fletcher, Finley Nowakowski, Layla



Talon Fletcher, left, and Trevor Harley wait their turn.

Tavarez, Milo King, Anna Laughridge, Norah Kroemer, and Werner Ebert.

Grade 7 spellers were Dylan Allanach, Joe Houle, Nevin

Schultz, Colette Bradley, Maya Cruz, Molly Dzurec, and Aarav Kamath.

The Grade 8 students in the bee were Colton Jenkins, Callie Ma,

Lucy Liddon, William Geroulo, Vito Geroulo, Audriana Allanach, and Elizabeth Baldwin.

Before the students competed in the schoolwide spelling bee, they competed in their own individual grade spelling bees. Students with the highest scores advanced to the main event.

Stonington Middle School's spelling bee follows all of the rules and procedures of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, which is also where the school draws the word list from. The winner of the middle school's spelling bee will advance to compete at the state level in the Connecticut Spelling Bee, which will be held on Sunday, March 8, at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford.

If a student wins at the state level, they then have the opportunity to compete nationally in Washington D.C., where they must first complete a preliminary test to qualify. From here,

See Bee, A5

## Outreach brings in tons of food for nonprofit

Chariho community helps RICAN weather last year's federal SNAP stoppage

By Joseph Volpe  
Sun staff writer

CHARLESTOWN — The Chariho community has stepped up in recent months to fill the gap left by reductions in SNAP food assistance that came about as a result of the prolonged federal government shutdown last year.

Rhode Island Center Assisting those in Need (RICAN) is still receiving donations and has some exciting ideas coming up for 2026.

While RICAN was not able to provide specific statistics on how much each town individually provided, the nonprofit food pantry said the entire Chariho District donated a total of three tons of food, roughly the same weight as two average sedan cars, which typically weigh about 3,000 to 3,500 lbs. each.

"Over the span of three months, October, November, and December, we had received around three tons of food that had been donated throughout the Chariho community, and that was between the Boy Scouts, the Fire Departments, the Chariho School District, and a number of personal community drives," RICAN's Executive Director Rachael LaPorte said. "It was extraordinarily successful, and we cannot thank our community enough for the outpouring of support."

LaPorte further expressed how appreciative RICAN was that the donated food was mostly non-perishable, high quality canned proteins. She said the donations from this outreach are still coming in, which stands as a testament to what can happen when a community steps up and collaborates to support those who have fallen on hard times.

Additionally, the tri-community outreach provided more than just food, as RICAN saw an increase of 20% in monetary donations since it was announced.

"The donations are still coming in, it hasn't stopped: usually after Christmas time, things tend to die down a little bit as people go back to their regular lives, but we have not seen that this year - it was incredible," Laporte said.

The Chariho School District also reached

See RICAN, A5

## 'Arts Explorer Day' at the United attracts hundreds to free event

By Nancy Burns-Fusaro  
Sun staff writer

WESTERLY — An estimated 400 people — children with family members in tow — dropped by the United Sunday to explore music, visual arts, filmmaking, songwriting and the culinary arts at the inaugural "Arts Explorer Day."

The free event was held in the United's Black Box Theater which was transformed into a "lively,"

"hands-on creative hub," with stations and pods, according to United Executive Director Carly Callahan, and the space was organized as a "multi-station arts playground."

Every pod was staffed by one of the United's teaching artists who guided the youngsters in simple make-and-try activities, while families were entertained by a roster of performances by United Music School faculty. There was even an instrument "petting zoo"

organized by the music school staffers that included woodwinds, brass, strings, guitar and piano.

A floor-sized "walk-on keyboard," drew a constant crowd, Callahan said.

United Artist in Residence John Tedeschi and After School Arts Associate Ace Muccio led the "Visual Arts Pod" and offered drawing and stamping projects for children to take home, while

See United, A5



UMS instructor Craig Edwards instructs a youngster on the fine points of playing the violin during the Arts Explorer Day at the United on Sunday.

Harold Hanka,  
Special to The Sun

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Providence drops third straight Big East game. B1

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