

TEMPERATURES

For December 15:

L 37 H 54
A mix of sun and clouds.

Sunrise 7:11 a.m. Sunset 4:25 p.m.

TIDES

Tides at Bridgeport Harbor for December 15-20:

Fri L 1:29pm	H 7:02am	Mon L 3:46pm	H 9:17am
Sat L 2:17pm	H 7:49am	Tue L 4:29pm	H 9:59am
Sun L 3:03pm	H 8:33am	Wed L 5:12pm	H 10:41am

2nd front

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FAIRFIELD CITIZEN-NEWS, Friday, December 15, 2006

Pilot House Has Ambitious Goals

BY HOLLY M. PULLANO

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The Caruso, Jones and Shockey families all have one thing in common: it is their dream to see the materialization of a place where children with special needs can first and foremost be kids.

This dream is exactly the reason why, although the deadline for organizations to submit proposals for potential uses of the John Turner U.S. Army Reserve Center site is long gone, the families are still hard at work to ensure that the newly formed non-profit The Pilot House is chosen to use a portion of the site.

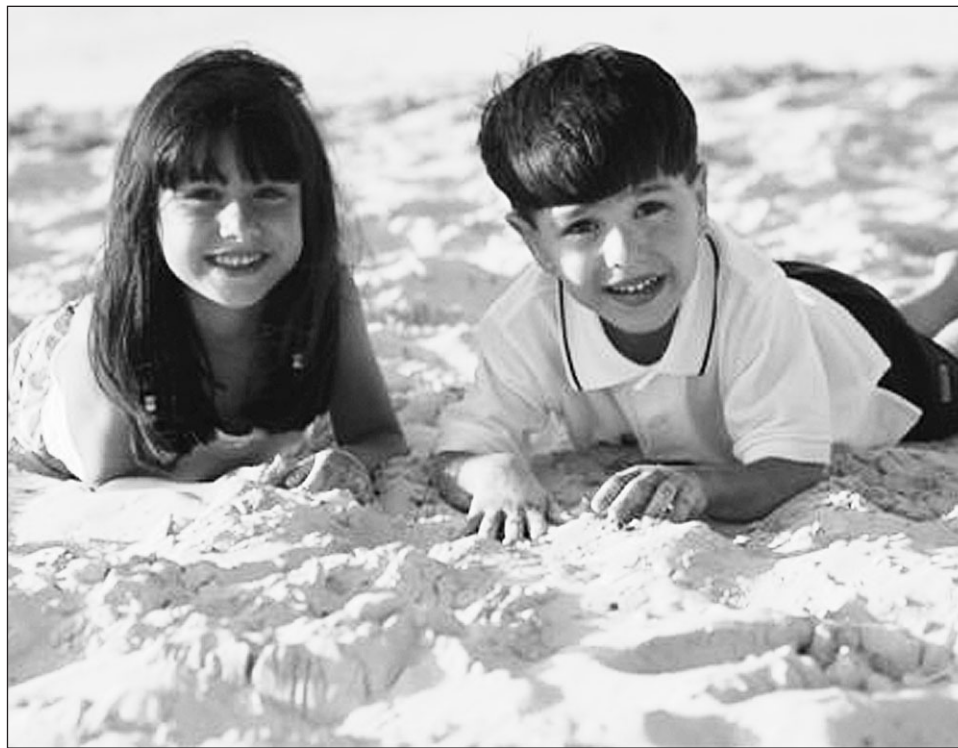
According to Doreen Caruso, once it is fully established, The Pilot House will serve as a resource foundation whose mission is to help enrich, empower and educate families faced with the challenges of raising a child with special needs.

The ultimate goal of The Pilot House, according to Caruso, will be to "broaden the opportunities" for families by offering a variety of after-school programs for children with special needs, as well as workshops and support groups for their parents and siblings.

"This project has been a dream of mine for a very long time," Caruso said. "I want so much not only to help my family, but others facing these challenges. Our kids are kids first and foremost and deserve to be involved in activities after school just like other children do."

Caruso, who serves as the president of the Fairfield Special Education PTA and has a 7-year-old son who has been diagnosed with autism, has teamed up with parents John and Elizabeth Jones and Jennifer and Ralf Shockey, all of whom have sons with autism.

According to Caruso, the benefits of The Pilot House would be far reaching, as there are more than 1,200 special-needs families in Fairfield alone who would benefit from its programs. "By building upon their chil-



Contributed photos

The Caruso, Jones and Shockey families are hoping to use the John Turner U.S. Army Reserve Center site to establish The Pilot House for families with children with special needs. Above are Christopher Caruso with his sister Allie on his favorite vacation to Turks and Caicos. Above right is Alexander Jones with his grandmother Marilyn Jones and at right, Will Shockey with his dad, Ralf.

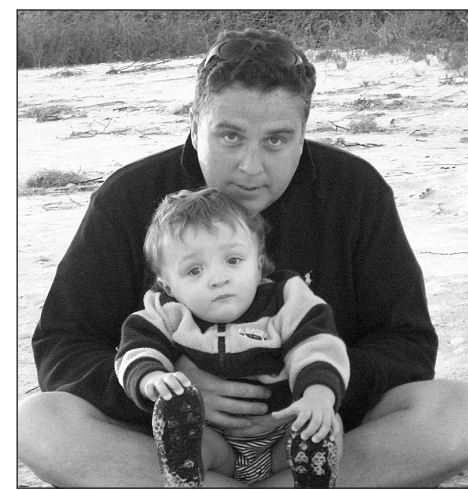
dren's day-to-day experiences in school, we want to bring the focus back on the whole family," Caruso said.

"Children with autism and all special needs totally deserve a place where they can go to grow mentally, socially and physically," Jennifer Shockey added. "I feel incredibly strongly about this project being executed, and I want to do anything I can to be a part of it."

Caruso said she has long envisioned such a program, one that would serve as a safe and comfortable place for children with special needs to develop their skills, but first and foremost to be children.

According to Caruso, there are "very limited, if any" programs in the area for children with mental and physical disabilities, and her goal for The Pilot House program is to directly meet that need by providing a structured environment for children to learn, play and interact with their peers.

"Our goal is to provide the much-needed programming and support for families that are being underserved," Caruso explained. "Until now, programs that have been made available have been designed, implemented and funded by parents themselves. This foundation will finally lift the burden from these families."



According to Caruso, to the best of her knowledge, all of the other organizations also vying for use of the space are already established and have a facility in existence, while The Pilot House does not. "Our families don't have a place to go to feel like they're a part of their community, and parents need that outlet," Caruso said.

But regardless of whether The Pilot

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Former Officer Writes Nautical Novel

BY CASSANDRA HELLER

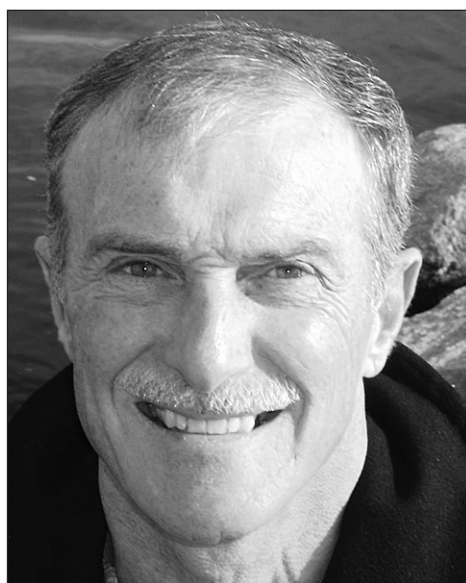
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Longtime Fairfield resident Roger Crossland combines his past experiences as a U.S. Navy officer with the history of the nautical world in early 20th-century Japan in *Jade Rooster*, his new novel published this year.

The book, which is Crossland's first novel after *Red Ice*, is the first of a series of nautical fiction novels to be published. Each book of the series will be taking place during a time that Crossland calls the "Naval Renaissance," a period right after the Great White Fleet followed the USS Connecticut out to sea under Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 and just before the beginning of World War I.

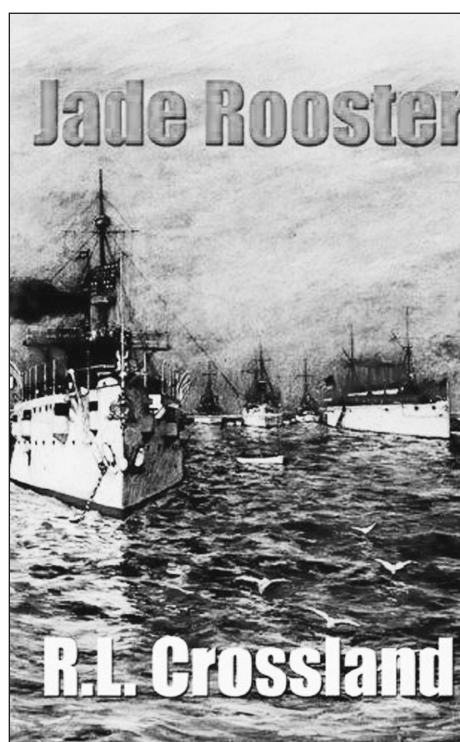
Broadsides Press Publisher of Nautical Fiction contacted Crossland when it heard that he was circulating his novel to publishers.

The journey of the Asiatic Fleet to the Far East in the early 20th century has not been covered by many authors, according to Crossland. Only one novel to Crossland's knowledge has been published on the subject, a book titled *Sand Pebbles*, which was written by Richard McKenna in 1966. But according to Crossland, the time period has gone mostly untouched by mod-

**ROGER CROSSLAND**

ern writers. "No one has explored it, so it makes it more exciting and interesting," said Crossland. "I am in a time machine for other people, and since I have a background in this, I can do it and it's very satisfying."

Although the story takes place in the Far East, the central character, like Crossland himself, has ties to Connecticut, specifically to Bridgeport, which was at



that time the center of the American munitions industry. *Jade Rooster* follows the lives of two Americans who are drawn to 20th-century Japan after discovering three severed human heads adrift in a boat belonging to a missing ship.

The novel is filled with vivid descriptions of Japanese life, which Crossland said comes from his years of experience in the Far East as a naval officer and Navy SEAL. Crossland served throughout the Cold War in Vietnam, Japan and Korea. On his first visit overseas, Crossland was assigned as an adviser for the Republic of Korea's Underwater Demolition Team, which was special units of the U.S. Navy during the Korean War that cooperated with special Marine Corps raider units and attacked inland, blowing up bridges, tunnels, dams, power plants and highways.

It was through writing this novel, he said, that has been able to revisit his naval operations in the Far East over the past 35 years of serving as a U.S. Navy officer and SEAL. His work also depicts the many adventurous stories told to him by other officers and shipmen he met while overseas. "It is sort of a way of keeping touch, since half the part of the joy of writing is living the adventure," he said.

"The novel is placed in 1913, but I've been in similar situations. You take little pieces of what you know and you extrapolate," said Crossland. "You're always drawing on your experiences, you can't help but do that."

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Families Hope to Bring Pilot House to Fruition

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House is awarded use of the High Street facility, both Caruso and the Joneses have ambitious goals for the program and are determined to see them to fruition.

According to Caruso, her immediate plan is to meet with Superintendent of Schools Ann Clark to discuss the possibility of the school district allowing The Pilot House to use space for its programs until a permanent location is established.

In addition, Caruso and her supporters will research available grants to establish funding for the program, and are planning a fundraising event for early 2007.

According to Caruso, the decision to pursue a location for The Pilot House was expedited due to the Department of Defense's closing the Army Reserve Center at 180 High St.

The Fairfield High Street Local Redevelopment Authority was charged with determining the

future use and redevelopment of the site by seeking prospective ideas and obtaining community input. According to Tom Bremer, the chairman of the LRA and First Selectman Ken Flatto's chief of staff, the first step in the process was soliciting interest from any organizations wishing to present proposals for use of the site. All applications were due on Sept. 15. Since then, Bremer and his committee have conducted meetings to hear from individuals and organizations that have proposals. A meeting took place yesterday at the Honorable John J. Sullivan Independence Hall. As is usual procedure during public meetings, community members have the opportunity to comment on and express their support or opposition to any of the proposals, he said.

"Nothing has been decided yet; it's still open to debate," Bremer said. "There's no definitive date for us to make a decision by, but we're hoping that sometime by the

end of January, we'll have made a decision."

Bremer said the LRA has received 14 applications for the site, some of which are requesting use of the entire 5-acre site. Other organizations, including The Pilot House, are only requesting partial use of the site, Bremer said.

"We received a variety of applications," Bremer said. "It will be a complicated decision because there are many facets to consider."

According to the application submitted by Jones and Caruso on behalf of The Pilot House, they feel that their programs "can easily blend and coexist with other organizations that are in line with our mission statement."

In addition, the application stresses the fact that The Pilot House will not require funding from the town and will raise its own money through state and federal grants, fundraising and private donations.

At present, the project has

elicited the support of state Reps. Jack Stone, R-134, and Cathy Tymniak, R-133, as well as other members of the community who see the benefits of the program.

"I am excited to hear of your plans and I wholeheartedly support your efforts," Stone wrote in a letter dated Aug. 30. "It would provide a much needed and long overdue facility for children with special needs and their families."

Tymniak was equally supportive. "There is a great need to develop more resources for families of children with disabilities," she wrote in a letter dated Sept. 27. "For way too long this

segment of the population has been neglected."

Caruso said that in order to continue to emphasize to the town and the LRA the importance of the project, she is asking those in support of The Pilot House to write letters. All letters should be sent to Thomas Bremer, Chairman, Fairfield High Street LRA c/o First Selectman's Office, 725 Old Post Road, Fairfield 06824. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to tbremer@town.fairfield.ct.us.

For more information about the Pilot House, contact Caruso at 319-7452, by e-mail at dornicky@optonline.net or visit www.thepilothouse.org.

Resident Writes Novel

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Although his experiences and imagination make up one half of the novel, the other half is based on historical events. Crossland said that he has always been interested in history and storytelling, so he has kept letters and collected books throughout his life.

"The last three pages in the novel point to historical incidents that parallel the story," said Crossland. "Though the main theme of the story is completely fiction, a good story can't stray too far from reality. I might have had three or four ways of solving a literary problem, but through my research I would find a situation that seems right and I would pick the one that was closest to history."

"People don't just read to follow a plot, they want to learn something too. I'd be cheating them if I had made it all up."

Crossland's extensive experience in the Far East has gotten him widely published on maritime unconventional warfare and naval history since 1976, when his first article was published in *Black Belt Magazine*. He has also written numerous professional articles on naval strategy that became required reading for the students at the U.S. Naval Institute.

Crossland retired from the Navy a year ago and is working as a trial lawyer in Southport. He said he has not left the sea, however, and continues to be a longtime member of Fairfield's Black Rock Yacht Club, to hold a marine captain's license and is a member of the Korean Society and the Explorer's Club in New York.


The novel is available at Amazon.com, Broadsidespress.com and at Barnes & Noble Bookstore for \$17.95.

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