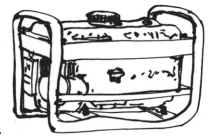


# CORNWALL CHRONICLE



VOLUME 22 : NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2012

## Man and Beaver

Since 1914, when beavers were reintroduced to Connecticut as native animals, they have returned with a vengeance, expanding fast and competing for our habitat. No one knows how many dams there are in town. Young beavers migrate upstream to settle, and new dams regularly emerge in unexpected places.

Peaceful coexistence of man and creature is not always successful. Beavers work to keep their ponds deep so as to grow and store food supplies (swamp woods and aquatic plants) and to guard against predators, while town officials have an obligation to minimize flood damage. The ponds can impound millions of gallons of water, and under flood conditions beaver dams may not hold. A sudden release of this water during a storm can wash out adjacent roads and damage properties.

Some property owners have hired licensed trappers (*Castor canadensis* is not an endangered species) and the town has no plans to remove nuisance beavers. Instead, it tries to deal with the problems they cause by lowering the water level in the ponds. This requires installing a drainpipe, or even pulling a dam apart. But beavers work 24/7 and can rebuild a dam overnight. (Not all their jobs are so urgent: by the pond on Todd Hill Road they are

methodically gnawing through a tree 7 feet 3 inches around the base.)

Beavers are remarkable creatures, ingenious architects, and, overall, beneficial to the environment. Some residents are concerned that the town might permanently destroy dams to keep our roads safe, and are committed to preserving the beavers and their ponds.

Who will prevail in this showdown between man and beaver? One answer may come from the contest waged at the big pond on state land along Great Hill Road. Around 1990, the concrete pipe where the water ran under the road had settled and town crew members replaced it with a 33-inch aluminum pipe. They also demolished the beaver dam a short distance from the roadside. That was a declaration of war. Since then the beavers have treated the roadbed like a dam, tirelessly plugging up the pipe, while the crew regularly pries out piles of debris to keep it open. But it's a losing battle. In heavy rains, sheets of water up to a foot deep pour across the road and erode it; in winter, overrun turns to ice. Now the town intends to install a second

pipe of the same size for double the drainage and put down some kind of foundation to encourage the building of a new dam away from the roadbed. If this stratagem works, it may help to keep the peace.

—Ann Schillinger

## Ghost Cat

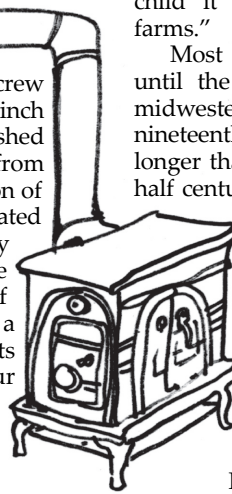
My mother, who turned 100 last summer, has been coming to Cornwall her whole life. She says it hasn't changed much, except for the return of the forests. "When I was a child it was all open," she says. "All farms."

Most of the Northeast was farmland until the railways opened up the great midwestern grain fields in the mid-nineteenth century. Cornwall farms lasted longer than most, but here too, in the last half century, open pastureland reverted to woods and brush. Which is not good habitat for cows, but great for mountain lions. The lions were here long before we arrived, but around a century ago they were hunted out, the species extirpated and the habitat destroyed.

Now the habitat is back, and it seems the lion is too.

It's a fabulous animal: our native

(continued on page 2)



## FEBRUARY 2012

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 ♦ Parent-Child Book Club 6:15 pm Library	2	3	4 ♦ Motherhouse Contra Dance 4 pm
5	6 ♦ Child Center Enrichment 2:55–5:30 pm CCS ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall ♦ Park & Rec 7:30 pm Town Hall	7 ♦ Child Center Enrichment 2:55–5:30 pm CCS ♦ Inland Wetlands 7:30 pm Town Hall	8 ♦ Child Center Enrichment 2:55–5:30 pm CCS ♦ Hot Chocolate Hour 3 pm Library	9 ♦ Child Center Enrichment 2:55–5:30 pm CCS	10 ♦ Story Hour 1:30 pm Library ♦ Child Center Enrichment 2:55–5:30 pm CCS	11 ♦ Cornwall Assoc. Talk 10 am Town Hall ♦ Children's Valentine Card Workshop 1–3 pm Library ♦ Park and Rec Trip 1:30 pm CCS ♦ The Pirate 7:30 pm Library
12	13	14 ♦ P & Z 7 pm Library ♦ Senior Lunch Noon Cornwall Inn	15 ♦ Hot Chocolate Hour 3 pm Library ♦ Deadline: March Chronicle Copy	16 ♦ Cornwall Conservation Commission 7 pm Town Hall ♦ Board of Finance 7:30 pm CCS Library	17 ♦ CCS Early Dismissal 1 pm	18 ♦ Motherhouse Cow Forum 10 am UCC
19 ♦ Open Poetry Readings 2:30–3:30 pm Library	20 ♦ CCS Closed	21 ♦ CCS Early Dismissal 1 pm ♦ Board of Education 3:30 pm CCS Library ♦ Pancake Supper 5:30 UCC ♦ Board of Selectmen 7:30 pm Town Hall	22 ♦ Hot Chocolate Hour 3 pm Library ♦ Republican Town Comm 8 pm Town Hall	23	24 ♦ Story Hour 1:30 pm Library	25 ♦ Chili Fest 5 pm UCC ♦ Beyond Hate 7:30 pm Library
26	27 ♦ ZBA* 7:30 pm Town Hall	28 ♦ Committee for Cornwall Seniors 7 pm Town Hall	29 ♦ Hot Chocolate Hour 3 pm Library	Every Week This Month: Tuesdays: Adult Volleyball, 7:30 pm CCS gym Wednesdays: Tai Chi, 6–9 pm CCS; Karate 6:30–7:30 pm CCS; Women's Basketball, 7:30 pm CCS gym Saturdays: Ice Skating, 7–8 pm Schmidt Rink, Hotchkiss Sundays: Meditation, 1–2 pm, call Debra for location, 672–0229		

\*Check with Zoning Office—672-4957

(continued from page 1)

mountain lion is the fourth largest cat in the world. He has more than 40 names: cougar and puma; panther, catamount and painter, mountain screamer. (His scream is something you never want to hear.) He's big, around 120 pounds and 8 feet long, and he's beautiful, lean and supple, with a tawny pelt and a level green stare. He's powerful: no other species preys on the mountain lion; it takes a whole pack of wolves to overcome him. He's shy, elusive and solitary, with crepuscular habits. His primary prey is deer, though he'll eat rodents. He's rarely aggressive to humans.

But is he here in Cornwall? Last year the DEEP declared the eastern mountain lion officially extinct. However, this doesn't include its very close western cousin, who has officially appeared in Connecticut. The animal killed last summer on a highway near Greenwich was a western mountain lion from North Dakota. Mountain lions are fabled roamers, and the western ones seem to be reclaiming the East. I asked the Fish and Wildlife Department about this. "Why wouldn't mountain lions be back?" a representative said. "All the other big predators are back in the Northeast—black bears, bobcats, coyotes."

Certainly Cornwall has these. And we've had a lot of mountain lion sightings. My friend Jane saw one on Cream Hill Road. My friend Julia saw one carrying a cub in her mouth. And my cousin Martha, sitting on her glassed-in porch one evening, watched a mountain lion slide quietly along the outside, two feet away, stalking something, maybe a field mouse.

It's a gorgeous notion, that if we loosen our grip on the landscape it will revert, sliding silently back into its own deep current, filling up again with the beautiful wild creatures that walked so lightly on it once. My mother would like it.

—Roxana Robinson

To hear the scream visit: <http://wshu.org/news/story.php?ID=9232>

*Editors' Note: In recent months Cornwall lost two notable citizens of longstanding, Fred Bate and Ralph Scoville. The following articles recall aspects of their impact on the town.*

## The Butcher's Business

Growing up in Cornwall half a century ago, I don't think there was anyone who exemplified the town more for me than Fred Bate. I would go into the cool of Bate's Meat Market, built right over Mill Brook, and listen while Fred conversed with each of his customers/cronies who gathered there in the heat of the day. It was an education in the lore of the old Cornwall.

Sometimes the fire alarm would sound and Fred would run out of the market and open up the firehouse right up the hill next

door. Dozens of others would rush from their shops and homes, hop on the fire engine, and take off like a lumbering bat out of hell. It was like a fairy tale vision of a village rising to meet an emergency. That experience has affected my view of what it means for people to cooperate to deal with problems—even people who are independent to the point of orneriness.

I learned that it was not all fairy tale, however. I remember my parents driving me to a terrible fire in Cornwall Plains in the middle of winter. It was late at night, but Fred and the other firemen had been battling the fire for hours, trying to make sure it didn't spread to the neighboring houses in the village. I believe Fred carried the effects of standing in freezing water in the bitter cold for the rest of his life.

I remember Fred working day and night with the fire department trying to limit the devastation from the 1955 flood. They managed to save the Covered Bridge from the huge timbers racing down the rapids of the Housatonic, but finally the raging waters of Mill Brook washed away Bate's Market. I was only nine at the time, but I vividly remember someone saying, "Fred, aren't you going to cry?" and Fred answering, "I figure there's enough water already" and going back to work saving whatever could be saved.

When my family first moved to Cornwall, the town had about three Republicans registered for every one Democrat. Fred was the stalwart of the Democratic minority. Being a smart-assed kid, I asked Fred why he was a Democrat, seeing as how he was a businessman. His answer was "The Republican party is for big businessmen. I'm a little businessman."

Many years later I had the opportunity to interview Fred about the history of the meat business in Cornwall. He described how he had started out working with his father. They would put a quarter of a cow or whatever other animal they had in the back of a truck and drive up to each house and ask the housewife what she wanted. Then they would just hack off the piece that she asked for. "In those days it was pretty crude."

I asked Fred how it changed. He got that special look he got when a historical explanation clicked into place in his mind. "After Julia Child started coming to town it became more sophisticated. She used to come down to the shop and teach me. I really learned the art of butchering from her."

While he appreciated the education he got from Julia Child, Fred also found her expectations a bit over the top at times. When she advised her readers to "Have your butcher bone a duck," Fred snorted, "Bone a duck? That's cook's business!"

I once asked Fred why he devoted so much of his time contributing to the civic life of Cornwall. He thought for a moment and replied, "Well, my father used to say, you've got to do more than sleep in a town and pay your taxes." That seemed a sufficient answer to me at the time, and it still does.

—Jeremy Brecher

## Welcome

Nikos Schuyler Pappas  
to Jess Clark Meyer and Tim Pappas

## Congratulations

Pamela D. Crawford and Walter E. Irving

## Good-bye to Friends

Harry R. dePolo

Anna Patricia Goodnow

Kenneth E. Keskinen

## Land Transfers

Catherine Guilsher, Trustee, to Cornwall Limited Liability Company, 30.107 acres on Cogswell Road, for \$200,000.

Federal National Mortgage Association to Dubray Construction & Maintenance, LLC, land with improvements at 126 Kent Road, for \$185,000.

Kelly Futerer to David Meharg and Luisa Meharg, land together with buildings and improvements thereon at 131 Kent Road, for \$250,000.

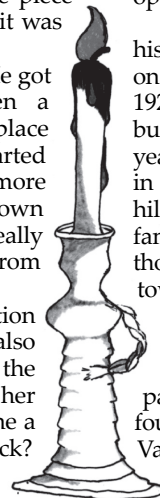
Whitcomb Hill Associates to Barlas Baylar, 80.512 acres on Whitcomb Hill Road, for \$687,500.

## Still Farming

With centuries of farming history and three generations of farmers still on premises, Scoville Farm on Town Street forms an essential part of Cornwall's farm town identity. So it surprised me to learn that patriarch Ralph knew very little about agriculture when he took over the dairy operation.

Ralph grew up in West Cornwall, where his father worked at Cartwright's Garage on Route 7. When his uncle Sam died in 1927, Ralph's father inherited the property, but farming did not suit him. For many years he leased to tenant farmers who lived in a new house built at the bottom of the hill. In the '30s, Ralph's mother died and his family moved into the main farmhouse, though they continued to winter "in town."

When Ralph returned from World War II and met and married Thalia, they decided to make a go of the farm. As part of his veteran benefits Ralph attended four years of evening classes at Housatonic Valley Regional High School. Here, besides a lot of what he called "fun and games,"



he learned about crop production, feeds and feeding, and welding, a skill that would prove invaluable in maintaining the machinery essential to running a modern dairy.

Modernity was not the hallmark of the early days, though. Ralph and Thalia started with two teams of horses and a single bottom plow which, since it didn't go so deep, could "skid over a lot of rocks." Their first tractor was a Ford, the next a Farmall that is still operating on its second set of tires some 60 years later. The cows came from Canada through a Torrington cattle dealer whose joke name was Raid-em & Take-em: mostly Holsteins that "milked good but didn't test" (came in shy of the preferred 3.5 percent milk fat level).

The woodshed and icehouse right outside their kitchen door were soon dismantled, but refrigeration was expensive and the dairy continued to rely on a milkshed pit with block ice until the flood of '55. That catastrophe put an end to Waterbury's Brookside Dairy and forced the local farmers who supplied it to switch from milk cans to refrigerated tanks.

Besides running the farm, Ralph and Thalia raised a family of five kids while Thalia worked nights as a nurse and Ralph graduated from hired truck driver to selectman and town road foreman. The long hours were pushing Ralph near to exhaustion, and he credits the town doctor, Brad Walker, with pushing him to make a necessary choice between truck driving or the farm.

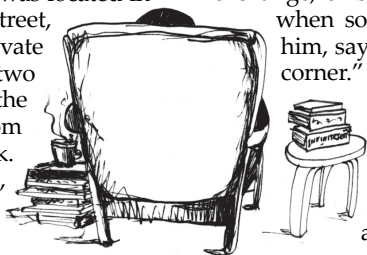
With his love for animals and machinery, his patience and impish wit, Ralph passed along to many both farming skills and a dose of earthly wisdom. He not only brought his ancestors' farmstead into the modern age. By quiet example, Ralph also helped hold Cornwall true to its roots.

—Paul De Angelis

## Overheard in Cornwall

Nowadays we are bombarded with more than we care to know about people's lives, from reality TV to loudmouthed cellphone users. But in the old days, it was the phone system with its operators and party lines that supplied everyone's information about life in town—the good, the bad, and the none-of-your-business.

The first telephone exchange in Cornwall was installed in 1912. Pat Blakey's grandmother Dessie Borland was one of the first operators, and her aunt, Florence Benedict, was chief operator in the 1930s and '40s. The switchboard was located in a little house at 14 Pine Street, since expanded into a private home. The office had two rooms, the switchboard in the front, and a small bedroom and bathroom in the back. There were three operators, each on eight-hour shifts, and whoever had overnight



# Letter to the Chronicle

## THE WORLD OF MARC SIMONT

The Cornwall Library plans a celebration of Marc Simont's life and work. Anyone who has any "ephemera" of Marc's—such as a card, illustrated letter, drawing, painting or poster—and would like to contribute a color Xerox for possible inclusion in a montage or album, please

duty could usually get some sleep. Pat loved to play there as a child pretending to plug in lines that weren't in use. She still has a photo of the operators standing on the front porch, dressed to the nines despite the invisibility of their work.

Party lines came in when the phone company couldn't keep pace with the number of people moving into town. Anywhere from two to five families might share a line, with each household given its own special ring. Marc Simont's Spanish/French mother never got the hang of the English language or the party line. Home alone, she would pick up on any ring tone and say, "Marc no home! Me no speaking English!" and hang up.

Did people listen in? You bet! People took it for granted and spoke accordingly. Steve Foote remembers his grandmother Muzz interrupting a phone conversation with his mother to ask the operator a favor. Pat Blakey's whole family had private lines—perhaps a perk for operators—but young Pat wished they had a party line so she could listen in. Two sources recalled a rumor that at one time the switchboard office was the scene of some "midnight trysts," but those secrets are better left buried alongside their owners.

Pat remembers Aunt Florence admonishing the operators not to eavesdrop, but they all knew everything. Tim Prentice's mother, Dody, once placed calls to the Frosts and Walkers inviting them to a dinner party, but when she got to the Calhouns, Florence said, "Oh, they can't come, they're going to the Potters." One evening, when Bee Simont tried to reach Rose Algrant, operator Lil Swanson told her that Rose had gone out to dinner at the McLeans.

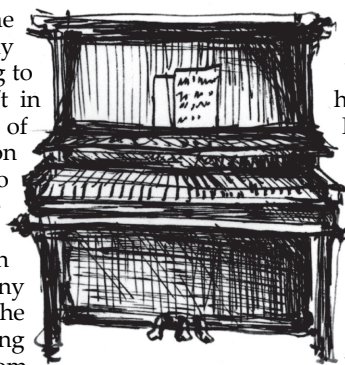
In emergencies, however, the operator could be a lifesaver. Several people recalled Florence Benedict running into the street to intercept Dr. Walker as he passed the exchange, or breaking into a conversation when someone was trying to reach him, saying, "He's just rounding the corner."

There were the inevitable irritants. Earl Brecher's parents shared a party line with four other families, and most Sundays they were all awakened at 5 A.M. when

bring it to the Library by February 15, attn: Roxana Laughlin. Questions? Call her at 672-6430.

Note: Please, no originals and no Memorial Day portraits of your children, wonderful as they are. There are too many (portraits and children).

—Honora Horan and Roxana Laughlin



equestrienne Ruth Adams called Yelping Hill caretaker Bert Blakey to help saddle her horse Beowulf. When John Miller was working odd hours at a New York newspaper he

sometimes came up to Cornwall weekdays to catch up on rest, but his phone would ring every morning before dawn. It was driving him crazy. One day in frustration he picked it up and heard someone say "Are you

awake?" and the answer, "Yes," at which point both parties hung up. Some nerve: a party line alarm clock!

ASNET history reports that Cornwall's was "the first large Bell system to make the switch completely" to dial service, and in 1953 Florence placed the last call from the little house. The phone company eventually caught up with the wiring, and the party lines disappeared. Gossip addicts had to resort to listening in on their own families' phone calls, following fire department dispatches on scanners or ham radios, or the earliest gossip source of all: personal contact (fast disappearing in this digital age).

—Carol Schneider

## Cornwall Briefs

•**Stolen Signs:** It's a fact. Road signs are apparently something of a collector's item and their theft has become a chronic problem. And so it seems that, in Salisbury a few weeks back, a man got into an accident with his truck. Luckily a member of that town's volunteer fire department was on the scene. He happened to look in the back of the truck and saw a bunch of road signs: Popple Swamp, Dibble Hill, Pierce Lane. The names sounded familiar to him. They should have. After all, he had once been the Cornwall road foreman. So he ups and calls the state police who arrive and promptly arrest the truck driver for theft of road signs. There was a court settlement and a check arrived in January for \$431 covering our town's expenses. Ah, happy ending!

•**Money Saved:** The Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority or CRRRA incinerates the garbage collected at the town Transfer Station, for a price. We recently negotiated a new 15-year contract with CRRRA and got a 5 percent rate decrease because, we learned, the garbage business has become

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

increasingly competitive. Another happy ending!

•**Bank Lien:** I ask you when will it end? Dare I mention the formerly handsome school building where the venerable Tim Prentice was once a schoolboy? You know the story. It was allowed to crumble and finally the state said it had to come down. The owner said he couldn't afford the price of demolition so Cornwall paid around \$50,000 and went after Chase Bank, which holds the mortgage on the property. Several times Chase said a check was in the mail. But, alas, the debt is still outstanding and Cornwall has started a foreclosure process on the property, better known as Rumsey Hall—worth a lot more than \$50,000.

•**Budget Time:** We start discussing it in midwinter and usually have it done before the narcissus bloom. Here then are some key dates: on February 16 the Board of Selectmen (BOS) presents its proposed budget to the Board of Finance (BOF). On March 8 the Board of Education (BOE) presents its budget. One week later the BOE and BOS get to hear the BOF's reaction. In April and May the budget will be finalized. All meetings take place in the CCS library.

—John Miller

**Events & Announcements**

**Art in Cornwall:** Erica Prud'homme's show of paintings continues at the Library through February.

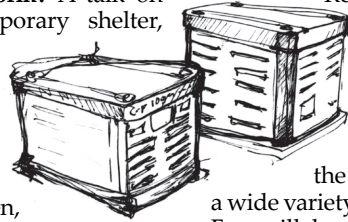
**The Child Center After-School Enrichment Program** will offer "Around the World" February 6 to 10, from 2:55 to 5:30 P.M., at CCS. Students will cook, play, and create their way around the globe. Register at [cornwallchildcenter@yahoo.com](mailto:cornwallchildcenter@yahoo.com) or call 672-6989.

**Come watch UCONN Women's Basketball game** vs. Georgetown at Gampel Pavilion, Saturday, February 11. Leave CCS by bus at 1:30 P.M., return at 8 P.M. Tickets (\$22) limited. Please reserve with Becky by calling 672-4071 or email [prcornwall@gmail.com](mailto:prcornwall@gmail.com).

**Leap Year**

Every four years the cosmic timekeeper hiccups and gives us an extra day in February, proof that the dear earth we inhabit is still mysterious to us as she courses on through the void of space. Make a special note to write us a check on February 29 to celebrate the timekeeper's recalibration. Thank you!

**Are you ready for the storm?** A talk on storm preparedness, temporary shelter, and generator use/maintenance will be given on Saturday, February 11, 10 A.M. to noon at the Town Hall. Panelists include Gordon Ridgway, Dave Williamson, Brad Hedden, and Steve Saccardi. Sponsored by the Cornwall Association.



Reservation. For information or to volunteer to flip flapjacks contact Pam Longwell at 672-6175.

**A Chili Fest** on Saturday, February 25, from 5 to 7 P.M. at the UCC Parish House will offer a wide variety of chili, including vegetarian. Free will donations benefit the UCC Church School's Heifer Project. No reservations needed—bring family and friends! For information call the church at 672-6840.

**Motherhouse Events**

A Round Sing will be held on Saturday, February 11, at the Hughes Memorial Library, starting at 7.30 P.M.

Family Contra Dance Saturday, February 4, at the Town Hall, with Still, the Homegrown Band. Dances for the younger crowd take place from 4 to 5 P.M., called by Tom Hanford, with music students reinforcing the band (call 860-824-8404 for more information). A potluck supper follows. Jeff Walker will call the dances from 7 to 10 P.M. Suggested donations: \$3/child and \$5/adult. Call 672-6101 for information.

A Free Family Cow Forum will be held on Saturday, February 18, from 10 A.M. to 2 P.M. at the UCC Parish House (prior refreshments at 9.30 A.M.) Please RSVP at [Debra@Motherhouse.us](mailto:Debra@Motherhouse.us) or 672-0229.



**A Red Cross Blood Drive** will be held on March 1 from 1 to 6 P.M. at the UCC Parish House. Please schedule an appointment by calling 1-800-RED CROSS.

**Applications for a Hearing** before the Board of Assessment Appeals must be received or postmarked by February 21. Hearings will be scheduled during March.

**CORNWALL CHRONICLE**

**FEBRUARY ISSUE**

Carl D'Alvia, Jackie Saccoccio and Anna D'Alvia, Illustrations  
Paul De Angelis and Elisabeth Kaestner, Editors

**MARCH ISSUE**

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**At the Library**

The Winter Film Series kicks off Saturday, February 11, 7:30 P.M. with Vincente Minelli's *The Pirate* starring Judy Garland and Gene Kelly, music by Cole Porter. Sweet treats for all. On Saturday, February 25, 7:30 P.M., Catherine Tatge and Dominique Lasseur introduce their documentary film, *Beyond Hate* with Bill Moyers. Suggested donation for each film: \$6 per person; \$10 per couple.

An Open Poetry Reading will take place on Sunday, February 19, from 2:30 to 3:30 P.M. Read your own original work for up to three minutes or come and listen. Hear emerging talents and established writers.

The Parent/Child Book Group for fifth and sixth graders will meet Wednesday, February 1, at 6:15 P.M. to discuss *Okay for Now*. Call Amy Buck to find out next month's book.

Hot Chocolate Hour for third- and fourth-graders starts February 8 at 3 P.M. and runs for six weeks. Fliers and sign-up at school; space limited to the first 12 students.

Story Hour for ages 4 to 7 will take place on Friday, February 10, and Friday, February 24, at 1:30 P.M. Students will be bussed from CCS. Preschoolers are also welcome.

A Valentine card-making workshop will be held on Saturday, February 11, from 1 to 3 P.M. Please sign up so we have enough supplies. Children under 8 should come with an adult.

**All Cornwall Seniors** are invited to a free Valentine's Day lunch at the Cornwall Inn on Tuesday, February 14, noon to 2:30 P.M. Buffet lunch, music, chocolate ... Bring your sweetheart, or meet one there. Hosted and paid for by Cornwall Park & Rec. Must RSVP Becky by February 4 at 672-4071 or [prcornwall@gmail.com](mailto:prcornwall@gmail.com)

**Fat Tuesday Pancake Supper:** Come celebrate Mardi Gras with New Orleans jazz at the UCC Parish House on February 21 from 5:30 to 7:30 P.M. Free will donations benefit the 2012 Mission Trip to Pine Ridge

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