

Business news

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Business

The Hour

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IN BRIEF**Westport Chamber sets After Hours**

WESTPORT — The Westport/Weston Chamber of Commerce will hold a Business After Hours networking event from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 19 at Pinnacle Health and Fitness, located at 1849 Post Road East.

Refreshments will be available. To register, call the Westport/Weston Chamber of Commerce at (203) 227-9234, or email info@westportchamber.com. Registration in advance is requested.

Forum on Energy set in Norwalk

NORWALK — Local social service providers from hospitals, senior centers, town governments, local assistance programs and religious organizations are invited to attend the 2006 Social Agency Forum on Energy at 8 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 19, at the Continental Manor, 112 Main St. in Norwalk.

Sponsored by The Connecticut Light and Power Company, or CL&P and Yankee Gas Services Company, the forum will provide social service agencies, community-based organizations and public officials with updated information about utility payment plans, services and assistance, including the CL&P and Yankee Gas Matching Payment Programs, credit practices, energy assistance, educational programs, and weatherization programs.

Representatives from social service agencies can register free of charge by calling (860) 665-3536 in the Hartford and Meriden calling areas, or (800) 286-5000, ext. (203) 701-3536, in all other areas.

Glastonbury company to be sold for \$1.3B

GLASTONBURY — Open Solutions Inc., a software company specializing in products for banks, credit unions and other financial institutions, announced Monday it is being sold to private investors for \$1.3 billion.

The company announced it had signed an agreement to be acquired by Providence Equity Partners, a private investment firm, and The Carlyle Group, a private equity firm.

Open Solutions provides wide-ranging suites of software that include financial accounting, banking and cash management programs as well as Web hosting and design services for financial institutions.

Open Solutions, founded in 1992, has approximately 1,700 employees in nearly two dozen offices around the country as well as in Canada and India, according to its Web site.

Dryer fire prevention**day set at Aitoro**

NORWALK — Aitoro, an appliance store at 401 Westport Ave., will hold a Fire Prevention Dryer Safety Day from noon to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 21. The event is sponsored by Aitoro and Frigidaire.

The Norwalk Fire Department will be on hand with a fire truck and will be giving away fire extinguishers. There will be free giveaways every hour and Aitoro will raffle off a Frigidaire front-load washer/dryer. Professionals from "Ultra Clean Air" will be giving demonstrations on how to clean dryer ducts. There will also be cooking demonstrations and food.



Hour photo/MATTHEW VINCI
Anthony Ancona, left, and Massimo Tullio sit in their wine shop Fountainhead Wines and Distillations in Norwalk.

Fostering a community

Fat Cat City — a community of like-minded businesses — has blossomed on Wall Street.

By **CHRIS BOSAK**
Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK — The Fat Cat community is strong and growing.

The community — aka Fat Cat City — already includes Fountainhead Wines and Distillations, Fat Cat Pie Co., and Fat Cat Joe. The extended community embraces a yoga studio, massage therapist, and designer clothes boutique. The Fat Cat community will soon include an Internet radio station, large basement level to Fat Cat Pie Co., and an extension into Bridgeport.

The near future also calls for ownership of the Wall Street buildings in which the community is centered.

"We're of the earth. Regular people," said Anthony Ancona, one of the owners of the Fat Cat City businesses. "We're free market economists. We believe if you do something right, people will come."

It seems to be working as Ancona estimates close to 600



Hour photo/MATTHEW VINCI
This portion of Wall Street in Norwalk is home to Fat Cat Pie Co., Fat Cat Joe, Fashion DNA, Saraswati's Yoga Joint and The Magdalene. Fat Cat City is how the owners refer to their community.

people walk through the doors of Fat Cat Pie Co. on Friday and Saturday evenings.

What's more important to Ancona and the community is how they go about doing their business. Fearing that big corporations are taking over, they take a different approach to business. The Fat Cat guys use organic food for their pizzas, hand-picked beans for their coffee, a "quality to price ratio" for the small production wines they offer, and hold frequent fund-raisers for

various causes. They also offer free rent and advice to tenants who have a product and philosophy they believe in.

"People are starved for community," Ancona said. "This is how all neighborhoods evolved."

Ancona is joined in the venture by Massimo Tullio, Mark Ancona, Michael Pelletier, Morgan McClaren, Tim Malone and Davide Tullio. The Fountainhead business cards feature all seven names; the Fat Cat Pie business cards

"What they have done is create a sense of place."

Lorraine Gengo
Owner of The Magdalene

do not have any names. It's about community, not standing out, according to Ancona.

"We're small guys trying to bring something different to town," said Massimo Tullio. "Everything we do is organic. Slowly awareness comes to it and people think about what they're drinking."

The business philosophy is portrayed at 1 Wall St., where two former Gibbs College classmates recently opened Fashion DNA, a clothing boutique that features their own designs. Ancona and Tullio give the designers the storefront rent-free. A previous business at 1 Wall St., Culture Factory, was also offered rent-free.

"We believe in them and what they do," Massimo Tullio said. "It's about friends and family and a philosophy. That's more important than money."

The Magdalene is located upstairs at 5 Wall St. Owner

See **FAT CAT, D2**

Wilton landscape firm honored with a 'PLANET'

Staff Report

WILTON — Hoffman Landscapes was named Grand Award winner by the Professional Landcare Network, or PLANET, in the 37th Annual Environmental Improvement Awards Program, it was announced recently. It is the third PLANET award for the Wilton-based landscaper.

Hoffman's winning design/build plan for a back-country Greenwich property was one of more than 200 entries into the national judging competition. The awards program recognizes professionals in the landscape and lawn care industries who execute superior projects and consistently use quality materials and workmanship.

"Receiving a national honor like this for the third time is extremely gratifying," said Mike Hoffman, president of Hoffman Landscapes. "While the award was given for just one of our projects, we consider this as recognition for the highly creative and professional work we do every day."

The award-winning project mixed traditional and modern techniques to transform a

wooded estate into a design that complemented the old world European charm of the home, according to lead landscape designer Neil Brunetti. The projects included a series of multi-level terraces that created a courtyard effect that could play host to more than 100 guests.

"The owner had a distinct vision for his property," he said. "His directive was straightforward: 'Make it great.'"

Hoffman brought in its on-staff arborists to carefully preserve the root systems of mature trees on the property. Masses of flowering shrubs and perennial borders are prominent throughout the design, including specimen varieties that were hand-dug from a property 200 miles away. New stone walls were constructed without visible mortar. In addition, moss covered stones that were salvaged from the old masonry were incorporated into the new walls.

The original design for the pool included a planting bed that would appear to be an island at the edge of the pool. During excavation, however, a



Contributed photo
Multi-level terraces create a courtyard effect and can play host to more than 100 guests for either formal or casual entertaining.

5,000 pound flat rock was unearthed. The landscape designer and the homeowner took the opportunity to substitute the rock for the planting bed. By pouring a concrete pillar to balance the stone near the pool's infinity edge, Hoffman was able to create the illusion that the stone is about

float off the top of the pool.

Hoffman also moved other rocks weighing up to 25,000 pounds and placed them strategically as visual accents.

This was the third PLANET award for the Wilton-based landscaper, having won its first Grand Award in 2002, and a Merit Award in 2001.

Voters favor Dem's economy

By **JEANNINE AVERSA**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation's economy has encountered its shares of bumps this year, and voters are uneasy.

"They've seen the value of their homes drop and surging prices for energy and other goods take a big cut out of their paychecks.

In the face of these uncertain economic times, they think Democrats can do a better job handling the economy.

Never mind that gasoline prices have started dropping, that the value of their 401(k)s rise with each new Dow Jones industrial average record, and that the interest rates on their credit cards and adjustable mortgages have leveled off for now.

"Even though the economy is doing well by some indicators, voters are still nervous about the economy," said Costas Panagopoulos, a political science professor at Fordham University.

"They watched gas prices come down but watched them go up just as precipitously not too long ago. The stock market is doing well but that doesn't mean it can't come crashing down in days. Voters are reluctant to be overly confident about economic trends," he said.

America's voters care deeply about pocketbook issues. Eighty-eight percent of likely voters say the economy is an important issue — on par with the percentage of people who view the situation in Iraq and terrorism as crucial matters, according to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll.

With the Nov. 7 elections looming, 59 percent of voters believe Democrats would do a better job handling the economy, while 39 percent prefer Republicans — the party that controls Congress and the White House.

"One of the more remarkable things about the economy and politics, the party in power is punished when the economy is bad, but not necessarily rewarded when economic conditions are good," said Ross Baker, a political science professor at Rutgers University.

Over the past year, Americans have become less likely to see the economy as the most pressing problem in the United States.

Just 9 percent viewed economic matters as the top problem, the AP-Ipsos poll says. That's down considerably from a year ago when 24 percent said the economy was the biggest problem as the country was still reeling from the blows of the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Although economic growth has slowed sharply from the start of the year, the expansion, which began in late 2001, is still firmly rooted and isn't in danger of fizzling out.

Around 60 percent of likely voters say their local economies and their own personal finances are strong, according to an Ipsos poll conducted for RBC Financial Group. Some parts of the country are struggling, though. Unemployment in Ohio, Michigan and Mississippi, for instance, is much higher than the national figure, which dipped to 4.6 percent in September.

There's reason to be cautious about the national economic outlook, though. Energy prices could spike up again. And, the housing slump could turn out to be deeper than anticipated.

The economy in the first three months of this year grew

See **POLL, D2**