



**STRONG
OPENING**
FOR SCHOOLS



**SCHOOL
UPGRADES**
DISCUSSED



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MIDDLETOWN TODAY

Public Affairs Celebrates Year 1

Showing Middletown Is A Great Place To Live, Work & Play

The Town of Middletown’s public affairs program is officially one year old and what a year it was.

In the past 12 months, the program led by Public Affairs Officer Matt Sheley has helped create an even more positive view of Middletown, both locally and across the region.

From Day 1, the program sought to affirm all the good in Middletown, whether it’s the work of our residents, the business community and everything else the Town has to offer.

When the final count was done, Public Affairs pushed out more than 800 pieces of original content in the past year. Removing weekends, that accounts to more than three stories, videos,

graphics and more a day specifically about Middletown.

“I think the program really showed its worth from the first day,” Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown said.

“The first assignment was a ceremony about Sept. 11 at the fire station that was organized by the

firefighters. That’s something important that everyone in Middletown should be aware of, but without Public Affairs, it probably would have gone past unnoticed. It was like that time and again and I am very, very proud

of what we were able to accomplish.”



Among the priorities and projects completed in the past year, none were bigger than a total overhaul of the MiddletownRI.com website. The prior site was stale, outdated, unfriendly and didn't really convey what a dynamic, beautiful place Middletown is to live, work and play.

To help achieve its goals, the Town contracted with CivicPlus to handle the backbone of the website while Public Affairs was responsible for overseeing the layout, content and daily maintenance of the site.

After a lengthy design and review process by a group of Town employees, the new site went live on March 31. It's drawn rave reviews both from the community and across the country. CivicPlus staff have also told the Town they use MiddletownRI.com with other clients as a leading example of what their websites should and can be.

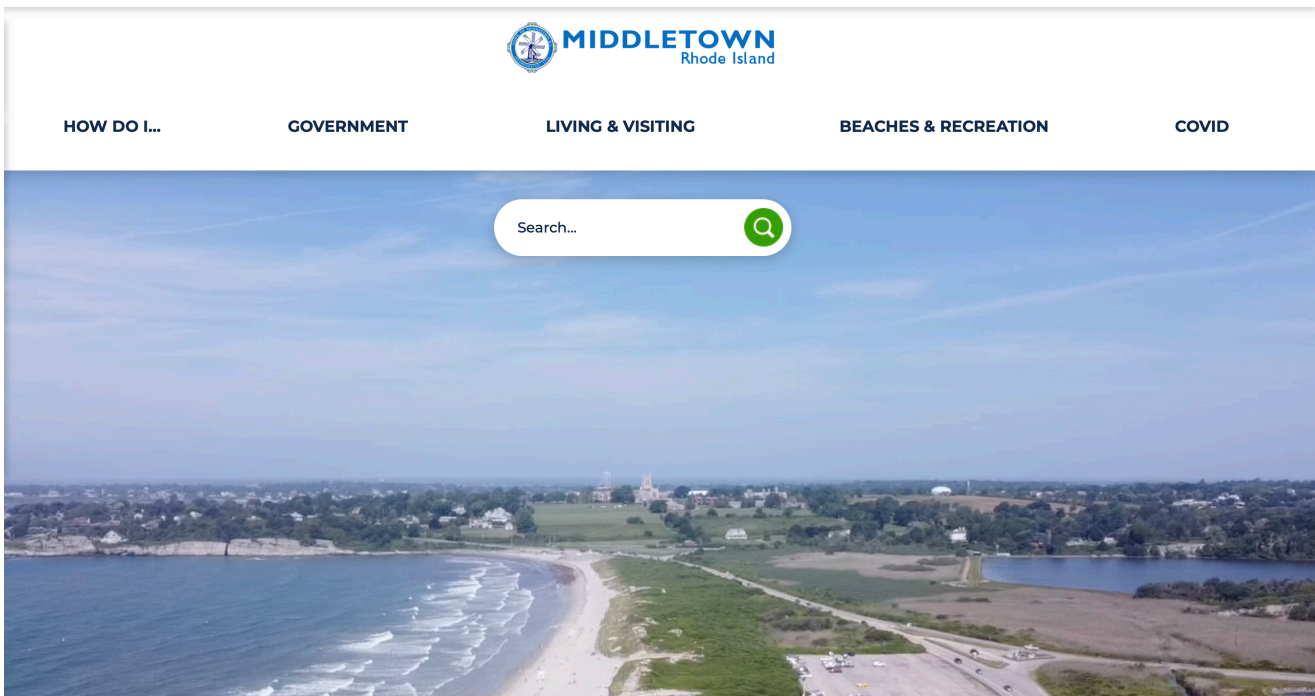
The new website includes a calendar dedicated to municipal and community events, the Middletown news of the day, a "Middletown Shares" space that acts as

a clearinghouse for major local events, meeting videos and so much more.

The Town also ramped up its usage of social media to help push out important messaging live as it was happening. The Town actively employs Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to proactively inform the public about the latest around Town, whether it's good news with the budget or photos from the first day of school.

Importantly, the Town also launched its "Middletown Today" newsletter, which was published for the first time ever in October 2020. The goal of the monthly mailer was to keep those who might not use social media or the website connected to the community.

Wrapped around all this work is the idea of "branding" Middletown better. The goal is to show all that's happening across the town, items that might not get coverage elsewhere. Anecdotally, this messaging is paying dividends and helping enhance the overall perspective of Middletown.



There’s also a media engagement function that is integral to the Public Affairs post. For any good public affairs officer, the goal is always to manage the news rather than letting the news manage us.

Over the past 12 months, the Public Affairs office was largely successful with these efforts, casting Middletown in as positive a light as possible. There were also several opportunities to broaden Middletown’s typical reach, including pieces in the “Boston Globe,” “The Providence Business News” and “National Public Radio,” among others.

“Looking back, I think we accomplished quite a bit,” Sheley said. “Middletown truly is a special, dynamic place and I feel really good about helping our residents, businesspeople and visitors learn more about the community. It’s especially rewarding, living here and playing an active role in the evolution and development of Middletown.”

Strong Opening For Middletown Schools

Sept. 8 Was The First Day Of The 2021-2022 Year

Schools are back from summer in Middletown.

This morning, students and educators returned to in person classes across the district, with a warm, welcoming message hailing everyone.

At Middletown High, tenth graders Owen Hawkins and Kelsey Welby were in the middle of an “icebreaker” activity in Lee-Ann Wells’ English class.



“It was a good summer,” Owen said. “I spent a lot of time at the (Second) Beach. It’s good to be back.”

“I played a lot of sports this summer, softball and volleyball,” Kelsey said, the president of the sophomore class. “It’s nice to see everyone again and there’s something very special about having everyone here in classes again. I’m looking forward to it.”

“It’s great to have everyone back in the building,” Wells said, drawing on a dry-erase board in the front of the class. “It’s a lot easier to develop a rapport with students when you’re with them in person every day.”

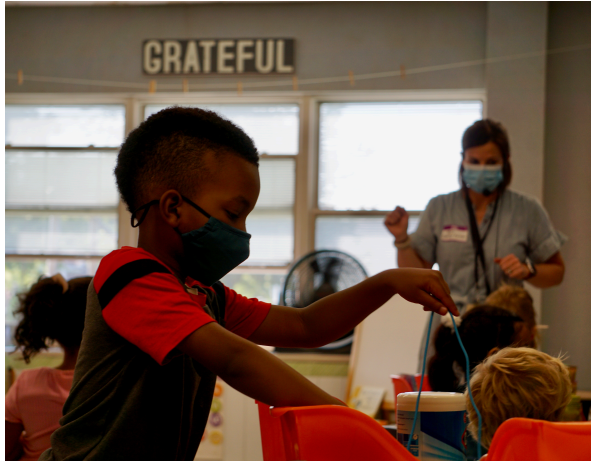
Downstairs by the front office, juniors Julissa Hunter and Brittany Nogueira said they forgot how many students went to the Valley Road school with COVID-19 restrictions in place last year.

“I can’t wait to get rid of these masks,” Julissa said, laughing. “I know why we have them, but I think everyone feels the same way.”

“What am I looking forward to most? Prom, definitely,” Brittany said. “That’s going to be a good night.”

Around the corner at Gaudet Middle School and the Gaudet Learning Academy, teachers and staff cheered students at every entrance with heartfelt

personal greetings, high-fives and fist bumps.



“It great finally meeting the students and getting to know them and the staff better,” Gaudet Principal William Niemeyer said. “I know the focus here at Gaudet is getting things back on track from last year with all the interruptions from COVID. There’s a lot of learning to do and last year was tough on everyone. We’re looking to restore some normalcy and do a double step with our instruction.”

Gaudet Behavior Specialist Keith Edwards said it was great to catch up with students and colleagues.

“It’s nice to be back and see everyone,” Edwards said, saying hello to students in an upstairs hallway. “I know the thing I’m looking forward to is getting these masks off, just like everyone else.”

Down the road at Aquidneck Elementary School, first grade students got off buses in one spot and then second and third graders were dropped in another outside the Aquidneck Avenue building.

As they stepped from the bus, each student got a squirt of hand sanitizer and a kindhearted welcoming. Those who were unsure where to go were

helped by teachers and staff with whatever was needed.

Principal Erica Bulk said it was a strong opening and she and the rest of the staff were thrilled to have students back in the class.

“If you look around, everyone here is happy,” Bulk said. “Obviously, we are focused on education, but making sure our students feel welcome here is a huge, huge priority.”

Others like first grade teacher Tara Mellow agreed.

“Honestly, I can’t wait to get all my students reading and holding books in their hands, not on the computer,” Mellow said, smiling. “We’re so happy to be back.”



Wearing a shirt with a majestic unicorn, first grader Livia Sofia Erculano said she felt good about her first day at school.

“I know it’s going to be better than last year,” Livia said. “I can’t wait.”

Across town, Forest Avenue Principal Lisa Birkett was welcoming students and parents as they walked into the main office of the elementary school.

“For months, I’ve been learning their names on paper and it’s nice to be able to start putting faces to names,” Birkett said. “Today has been really great for our

Forest Avenue community and I can't wait to get into the classrooms and see the outstanding work our teachers do here every day."

Third grade teacher Toni Cawley said there was so much positive energy in the building, both from students and educators.

"My goal here is to create an environment where kids feel safe, valued and appreciated," Cawley said. "It's great that all the kids are back. The school is full again and there's a buzz in the hallways and our classrooms. That's good to see and hear again."



Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger concurred, saying she had heard nothing but positive reports across the district on Day 1.

"Across the district, it was a strong, healthy opening," Kraeger said. "Everyone seemed to be very happy and excited to be back and we're looking forward to a strong, exciting year where education and safety are our No. 1 priorities in each of our schools."

Town Council Okays First Step In Potential School Building Upgrades Leaders Say Improvements Needed

The Town Council is officially on board with early plans from the schools to pursue improvements to their buildings and grounds.

At a recent meeting in Town Hall, local leaders agreed to support a "Letter of Intent" from the schools to submit a Stage 1 application to the Rhode Island Department of Education.

The move came after a Town-school summit, where education leaders lobbied for the council's support, especially when Middletown was in line for at least a 35 percent reimbursement from the state and potentially more than 50 percent for any work.

Council members reminded people the move tonight committed the Town to no plans or bonds long term. Rather, they said it should be seen as the first step of a lengthy public process to determine the future of the school buildings, which are on average more than 61 years old.

"This is non-binding..." council President Paul M. Rodrigues said. "This just allows us to go to the state and say 'We're interested.'"

Earlier in the evening, the School Committee okayed a similar intent letter, which are expected to be submitted to the state by Sept. 15. From there, it will be up to the schools to file a much more detailed Phase 2 package with the state

in February. That would include a set of plans from the schools about specifically what was needed. From there, if the will was there with the council and community, a bond would go on the November 2022 ballot before voters.

Over the past decade plus, there’s been no shortage of talk in Middletown about what to do with the school buildings.

Facing older buildings and calls from some for better 21st century learning spaces, the Town has investigated several options. Through those processes, the Town always comes back to the “fix what we have model,” where the existing buildings are repaired and renovated instead of building new.

Last week, Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger said based on what’s been discussed so far, the schools wouldn’t be straying from that proven model and no new buildings were being considered. Although it was still early in the process, she said some concepts discussed include:

- Creating new “Learning Centers” in each of the four schools.
- Remodeling science labs at Middletown High and Gaudet Middle schools.
- Renovating the library at Middletown High.
- Adding space for an additional career pathway program at Middletown High.

Previously, local voters have been supportive of improving the schools the Town already has. In November 2016, voters okayed a \$10 million bond to do security and building improvement work. That included everything from new roofs on each of the schools to secure entrances to new boilers at Forest Avenue School.

Positive For Piping Plovers

“Threatened” Shorebirds Making A Comeback

It was a strong year for piping plovers in Middletown.

According to a recent report from Maureen Durkin, four plover pairs fledged a total of eight chicks while nesting earlier this summer at Second and Third beaches. She said another pair were at Third Beach, but never nested. Durkin is a wildlife biologist working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service overseeing the shorebird program.

Overall, Durkin said plovers seemed to have a solid year across Rhode Island.

She said there were 99 pairs of plovers nesting across the Ocean State, up from 85 pairs in 2020. The 99 pairs nesting tied the prior high in Rhode Island in 2015.

Middletown’s Facility & Operations Manager Will Cronin said good news with plovers was a positive for the Town

“When you step back and think about it, it’s pretty cool that plovers are nesting on our beaches,” Cronin said. “It shows the beach is able to provide a habitat that aids in the comeback of a threatened species.”

This was the 20th consecutive summer plovers nested in the Middletown beach area.



“I think the Town’s relationship with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and particularly our Public Works Department, deserve a lot of credit for making the plovers a priority,” Cronin said. “The plovers are here every year.”

In mid-May, Durkin reported three pairs were at Second Beach, two on U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service property at the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge, the other on the Town’s portion of the Sacuhest Point Road beach. She also said one pair was nesting on the Town’s portion of Third Beach and the other on the federal refuge side.

“The total of five pairs... is a high for the Sachuest area since they returned in 2002, so we’re very encouraged to see them doing so well...”

Durkin said at the time. “Rhode Island dipped to only 10 pairs of plovers in the entire state around when the birds were listed as ‘threatened’ under the Endangered Species Act in the mid-1980s, and they were gone entirely from Middletown. Now, we’re on the road to recovery and have around 80 pairs in the state and five in Middletown. This wouldn’t have been possible without the help of many different organizations and support of the public.”

After almost being hunted out of existence, plovers are making a comeback in Rhode Island thanks to

conservation efforts by Fish & Wildlife, the Town and partners like the Norman Bird Sanctuary and others. Previous news reports indicated plovers hadn’t been seen locally in decades before the confirmed 2002 nesting.

They’ve returned to the Town’s beaches every year since, with varying success. The male scratches the sand in several areas before the female picks a spot to lay her eggs. The nests are often lined with shell fragments and pebbles and are camouflaged, making them

tough to see. “The best thing people can do to help the plovers is to share the beach with them -- by respecting posted areas, following dog rules and giving them a little



space if you come upon them feeding,” Durkin said. “People can also talk to their friends, neighbors, and fellow beachgoers about them and help generate support. Many people may not know about them, or only see the closed-off areas and not realize that Middletown beaches are home to a rare species.”

“We can successfully use the beaches and enjoy our summer while also giving the birds some space to raise their families for a few months out of the year -- it just takes support from the community,” Durkin said.



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Stormdrain



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To Our
Water Supply



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What Goes
Into The System



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Begin Friday, Sept. 10**

Forms Available In Town Hall Weekdays 8 AM-4 PM
& <https://mdl.town/Appeals> Online

Appeal Deadline Dec. 10

