

## LEAP YEAR

*Continued from page 1*

n't have a birthday, people went out of their way to make it special," said Alyssa Billings who will be 36 on February 29, although it is only her ninth 'real' birthday. "It really worked to my advantage — the local newspaper would do a story, and it was a big deal."

Billings, who met her husband in a leap year and whose sister had a leap year baby, told a story similar to other leapites, who said their families always held a party for them in the off years so they were not deprived.

"I always had a celebration on the 28th and March 1st. It was like a double everything," she recalled. "My mom would try to make each of the days special. When I was in college I'd get calls that 'somewhere in space it's your birthday,' and now I'm already prepping my husband that this is my birthday week."

Dunton said she pays little attention to her birthdays until the four-year anniversaries roll around. Then, the rules change.

"On leap years, I milk it for all I've got for 12 months and let everybody know about it," she said. "My favorite line is, 'You have birthdays and we have a whole year.'"

"A couple of 'real' birthdays ago we walked across the Brooklyn Bridge for pizza," she added. "That was my idea. It's spur of the moment — the rule is whatever I want. That's my rule."

Leap year rules are another story. It all started when someone noticed that the 365 days of the calendar year did not match the solar year. In a solar year, it takes the earth 365 days, five hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds to orbit the sun. Because those extra days end up reducing the calendar year by a day every four years, which would amount to a loss of 25 days every century, the Egyptians decided to stick in a 366th day every four years to keep the seasons intact. The Romans picked February 29 as the leap day.

Sound reasonable enough? There is more. As it turns out, a solar year is actually 11 minutes and 14 seconds under the approximate 365 1/4-day calculation, so that even with the leap years the numbers between solar and calendar years are off. To fix that problem, it was decided to omit leap years in every century year that cannot be divided by 400, such as 1800 and 1900. It may seem confusing, but this method reduces the difference in calendar and solar years to a half-minute.

"We leap year babies are vital to the balance of the universe," Dunton joked. Lorraine Olson said that when she

was in college she celebrated her non-leap year birthdays one minute before and one minute after midnight. Those celebrations have become lots more fun since she's grown up and had a family.

They all indulge her, such as once hosting her party in a McDonald's kiddie room. This Friday her husband Bob is throwing her a party at the Sea Grille, but on Thursday she intends to give herself a bash she will share with the Congregational Church's Ladies Union Circle. "It's a fun time," she said.

Ryder said when she was growing up she knew of no other leap year kids. After her first real birthday she celebrated on Feb. 28 until another four years passed.

"It's just like a normal birthday except it gives you an extra day every four years. I think it's kind of unique. You don't feel any differently, but it's a fun birthday," she said. "Of course as we get older we think of birthdays differently — it seems they come too soon."

Second-grader Matthew Gardner, who is 8 in solar years, will celebrate his second real birthday Friday. His mother Pam said since her son's event usually falls within school vacation week the family does something special with him then. They hold another party in March when his friends are all here. This leap year day they are taking him to the Cape for bowling, arcade games and a movie.

"He understands the concept that it's not a birthday every year, but I don't think he understands the coolness factor," Pam Gardner said.

Nantucket Elementary School librarian Judith Powers, another leap year baby, understands.

"I loved it. I thought it was a wonderful birthday. I always celebrated on the 28th except for my real birthday," said Powers, who will have her 17th leap birthday. "Usually I just pretend I'm the same age, but then you have to own up to it. People like it when they know your birthday is a leap year. They say, 'Oh, you'll be 13 or 14.' People remember your birthday. You hear from them even on the 28th when it's an off year."

Powers left on Feb. 23 to spend school vacation week with her sister on Long Island. She's looking forward to a great time.

"Everybody knows it's my birthday, so we'll see what happens," she said. "I love leap year as a birthday."

For those who want to carry the leap year celebration and concept a little further, check out Web sites such as the Honor Society of Leap Year Babies; the Worldwide Leap Year Festival and Worldwide Leap Year Birthday Club, which is said to have about 400 members around the globe. ■

Following college he taught at the Deveaux School in Niagra Falls, N.Y. and the Lenox School in Lenox, Mass. before becoming director of the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass.

Mr. Wood, a bachelor, remained with the museum until he retired and moved back to the family homestead on Gardner Street to help care for his mother. But not one to keep to himself, he had a remarkable sense of humor and enjoyed enter-

*See WOOD, page 13*

## e t c e t e r a

1. A number of unspecified additional things;
2. pl. additional items, odds and ends



PETER B. BRACE/The Independent

### DOLPHIN SIGHTING

A pair of common dolphins believed to have become disoriented at sea, are now trapped in Hither Creek on the south side of Millie's Bridge, swimming in circles and unable to find their way back out to open waters. One of the dolphins appears to be ailing. Marine Mammal Stranding Team member Debbie Miller said team members from the Cape Cod Stranding Network were en route to the island Tuesday afternoon to assess the situation.

Members of the Stranding Team are keeping a constant watch over the dolphins to ensure no humans or dogs harass them while awaiting a directive from the New England Aquarium and the National Oceanographic & Atmospheric Administration on how to help the dolphins.

### POINT BREEZE LAYS OUT DEWATERING PLANS

Finally answering the vexing question of construction and long-term dewatering for phase II of the Point Breeze properties redevelopment, Bob Matthews had his team of engineers explain to the Planning Board on Monday how he plans to keep his site dry using his own harbor outflow pipes.

Matthews, who plans to build a second hotel on the corner of Easton and North Beach streets — this one to be 17,235 square feet with 39 rooms, five cottages along Easton Street and three tennis courts over 149 underground parking spaces — needs to keep the soggy site dry, both during and after construction. To do this, one of Matthews' engineers, Dale McKinnon of Nantucket Surveyors, described how steel sheeting will be installed 19 feet into the ground around the perimeter of the property.

During construction, collection wells placed around the property will pump water through a filtration system and aboveground pipes into the harbor via outflow pipes at Children's Beach. For permanent dewatering, when the town upgrades its downtown stormwater collection system this fall, Matthews will run his own pipes to the harbor when the town opens the streets to complete its project.

### BOARD APPROVES NORTH BEACH STREET PLANS

Satisfied that the new uses going into 1 North Beach St., recently purchased by the Great Point Properties real estate firm, would not add more vehicle congestion to Brant Point, the Planning Board approved two modifications to the firm's major commercial development special permit.

The board agreed unanimously Monday night to amend the special permit by eliminating a condition that prohibits high intensity retail uses. In doing so, the Planning Board gives Amber and David Cantella zoning permission to open Epernay, an upscale wine, microbrew and gourmet food shop in one of three retail spaces in the building. The board denied the use of the second retail space by a personal fitness training business. The third space will house the offices of the merging firms Sanford Real Estate and Great Point Properties, which will operate under the latter name.

Great Point Properties also persuaded the Planning Board to allow the business to use the square-footage equivalent of 54 percent commercial space.

### WEEZIE LIBRARY CLOSED MARCH 1-4

The Nantucket Atheneum will close the Weezie Library for Children from Saturday, March 1 through Tuesday, March 4 for the installation of new rugs. The Weezie Library reopens March 5.

### NHA ADDS AMERICANA FROM AUCTION TO COLLECTIONS

About one month ago, the collection of artifacts belonging to the Nantucket Historical Association grew a little bigger. Two important pieces were purchased at a Christie's auction in New York City on Jan. 17 and 18, including a pair of whale ivory and whalebone candlesticks, which are an unusual find in today's market.

Also purchased was an inlaid mahogany work table with scrimshaw detailing and applied ivory strips that formerly belonged to Grace Brown Gardner and was made for her grandfather's wife, Charlotte. Acquisitions such as these are made possible through funds provided by The Friends of the Nantucket Historical Association.

## WOOD

*Continued from page 1*

said he was ahead of her because he received a double grade promotion. Another schoolmate, Francis McGarvey, recalled Mr. Wood's academic ability and said, "He didn't cause any trouble."

After graduation from Nantucket High School in 1939 he majored in English at Middlebury College in Vermont.