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OUTHCOAST

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NEW BEDFORD, MA

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The application for a demolition permit is in for 21 Cove St. in New Bedford.

MIKE VALERI/THE STANDARD-TIMES

It's all in the spirit of Warren Buffett

t's not difficult to understand what Roland Letendre is doing with the former Berkshire-Hathaway mill complex in New Bedford's South End. He doesn't return phone calls to talk about it. But what we have here is something called Return on

Investment. Warren Buffet will understand. He's the tycoon who bought the company two generations ago and gave it two in the

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hat, as the saying goes. He bled the company dry and put the money

into a much more

lucrative Return on Investment: an insurance

Buffett never looked back. He left New Bedford a mess, and ignored every plea to come back to set things right, to clean up the brownfields and show a little

Letendre, who bought

Berkshire-Hathaway in 2011, has evidently, like Buffett, decided to show no sentimentality or sense of history when it comes to disposal of the buildings in the complex.

He showed true audacity by demolishing the former company headquarters just days after Mayor Jon Mitchell appeared in a Wall Street Journal story imploring him to find a way of preserving the building as a shrine to American capitalism.

No sooner was Letendre finished than he made yet another application for a demolition permit, this time for the enormous building at 21 Cove St. That's two buildings away from the hurricane barrier, and right across the street from the newly developing South Terminal project for wind energy Mitchell's signature initiative.

Local historian Peggi Medeiros is at her wit's end over this. She says on her blog site (http://blogs. southcoasttoday.com/mansions/) that it's clear that Letendre plans to raze the whole complex to

create a lot of developable land. She is also deeply disappointed with the Historical Commission, which signed off on both demolitions because the buildings were not, in their eyes, important historically.

Whatever the case, consider this: Mitchell's South Terminal project shows such tremendous promise that it has improved the city's bond rating, saving it gobs of interest payments.

It is also shaping up to be a big influence on industrial property values in the Cove Street neighborhood, much the way the national park has been downtown.

Speaking of the neighborhood, the site just west of 21 Cove St., 45 Cove St., was the site of the Dartmouth Finishing Co., already demolished. Matt Morrissey, the city's point man for offshore wind weather has gotten to my heart. energy, said that the Dartmouth Finishing site will soon be used for storage of wind turbine blades.

What capitalist wouldn't want a piece of that action?

But wait, there's more. Act now and double the offer, as they say on TV. The mill building at 11 Cove St., right next to the hurricane barrier, would make terrific condos on the upper floors since they overlook the harbor. But since the mill was put there in an era when people walked to work, there is no parking. That's a show stopper in 2014.

So Morrissey concluded that by razing 21 Cove St., Letendre will make it possible to convert 11 Cove St., saving one building by sacrificing another. And he will also open up a huge piece of property available for the expansion of South Terminal over

I'm not happy to see 21 Cove St. go. But I understand why happening. Maybe the cold

Steve Urbon's column appears in The Standard-Times and SouthCoastToday.com. He can be reached at 508-979-4448 or surbon@s-t.com.

Muggings against Central Americans persist

By SIMÓN RIOS

NEW BEDFORD — Despite increased police response to violence against members of the city's Central American community, muggings continue, and last week the president of a local immigrants rights organization became a victim himself.

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"He wanted to rob me but I didn't give him the chance," said Juan Sam,

39, who heads the board of directors of Centro Comunitario Trabajadores.

Sam said a man pulled a gun on the evening of Jan. 16. The man appeared to be about 20 and to speak Puerto Rican Spanish. According to the police report, the assailant fled when he realized Sam called 911.

"It's concerning because it's not just me it happens to almost everyone," Sam told The Standard-Times in Spanish. "And many are afraid of speaking out, because they don't speak English, they don't speak Spanish. They're afraid."

Sam, a native of Guatemala, has been in New Bedford since 1997. He said practically everyone in the community knows someone who's been jumped but it was the first time it happened to him.

Violence against Central Americans — and particularly Guatemalans, who often don't speak Spanish but Mayan languages — goes back some 15 years, according to Community Economic Development Center Executive Director Corinn Williams.

But Williams said the week of Jan. 13 (when New Bedford saw two homicides and an apparent suicide) was a "wild, wild week" on the Avenue. On Jan. 13, a woman ran into the CEDC office after being accosted by two men, one who jabbed a gun into her ribs and threatened to rob her.

However, "People are afraid to step forward and report to the police," Williams

Activists agree that the police have picked up their game since a high-profile meeting on the issue with the mayor, the police chief and community members in November.

Police Chief David Provencher said there have been efforts within the department to reinforce that everyone "deserves prompt responses and attention to the crimes that they're reporting, no matter what their back ground or where they came from.'

Asked what has changed to boost police efforts in the area, Provencher said it's more about increasing dialogue than making changes to policing.

'The more often and the better dialogue that exists between the community and our officers, the better we're going be able to

respond to these issues,"he said. Adrian Ventura, executive director of Centro Comunitario Trabajadores, said he was the victim of two separate muggings in 2013

and 2012. "It's a state of terror where the darkness has dominated the light," he said in Spanish.

Ventura agreed that the city response has improved, but said there's still a long way to go. He and others, for example, are calling for the city to add bus routes to areas used by fish house workers, many of whom are Central Americans, as well as more patrols in the Acushnet Avenue area.

Juan Sam worked in the fish houses when he first came to New Bedford. He said as a Central American living near the avenue it's important to be alert and to defend oneself, if only with a cellphone.

"I defend myself psychologically," he said. "If I had given him a chance to aim the gun and rob me it could have been different."

Brooks Elementary plans to build community garden

By CAROL KOZMA ckozma@s-t.com

NEW BEDFORD — Two-and-ahalf years ago, Zoe Hansen-DiBello, a Grow Education program coordinator, led a tasting session at the Hayden-McFadden Elementary School with first-graders.

"I was literally doing a taste test. I had brought in arugula Romaine lettuce ... baby spinach," Hansen-DiBello said. "I even brought some dressing, because some of them were all about the dipping."

Some of the children were "so excited" about the baby spinach, she

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"It was out of their normal routine and therefore very exciting."

Local schools are bringing nutrition plans to the next level. The Elizabeth C. Brooks Elementary School in New Bedford is one of two schools along with the John Hannigan Elementary School — that plan on building a community garden this year through Grow Education, a program of the Marion Institute.

At the Brooks School, the hope is that teachers can hold class outdoors and students can develop a green thumb. On Tuesday, the school

is holding the first of two workshops windows. to brainstorm where to place the garden, and what vegetables to grow

"Grow offers teachers the opportunity to engage and collaborate through retreats and workshops focused on enhancing community partnerships, as well as incorporating garden-based learning into curriculum," according to a press

release. The Brooks School sits on a large plot of land, Hansen-DiBello said, and inside some of the classrooms, she estimates 2-by-6-feet copperlined brick planters stand by the

"Hopefully we can breathe some life back into those planters," she said. "But again it's all up to Tuesday, and whoever shows up to have a voice."

Hansen-DiBello said Ward 5 City Councilor Dana Ribeiro and School Committee member Marlene Pollock are expected to attend, as well as families, neighbors and children.

The workshop, which is open to the public, will take place from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday at the Brooks School, 212 Nemasket St.



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