

# Progressive Charlestown

a fresh, sharp look at news, life and politics in Charlestown, Rhode Island

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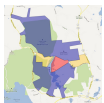
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[Charlestown and the Narragansett Indian Tribe](#)

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2013

## Copar Quarry dirty deals

### The story so far

By Christina Holden Shea



One of Copar's dust piles

In Bradford RI, there is a Connecticut based business called Copar that is operating a quarry under an illegal permit issued by the zoning board of Westerly. This quarry had been abandoned for more than 40 years only to be started up in 2009.

Westerly Granite, owner of the quarry site, checked off "existing" when asked on the permit if the business at the quarry was ongoing. It was not. Many of us who live near the Old Sullivan quarry can testify to that.

Since Copar came to town, we are subjected to constant noise from excavation and rock crushing, silica dust on our homes, trucks full of gravel, sometimes uncovered, barreling through the neighborhood all day and explosions from Maine Blasting and Drilling damaging our homes whenever Copar needs to free up more rock for crushing.

As residents of Bradford and nearby Charlestown, we formed [Concerned Citizens of Bradford-Charlestown](#) to raise community awareness and to challenge the assumption that Copar is a good business that is good for the local economy.

In fact, nearly all of the employees of Copar Quarry are from Connecticut. All of their trucks are registered in Connecticut. They park them in Bradford every night. The owners are all from Connecticut and that's where the profits go, all except for the lease payments Copar makes to the politically well-connected Comolli family.



Now Copar has taken over the Morrone Quarry in Charlestown without even bothering to get a business license with Charlestown until three months after starting its operations. To add to our fears, another abandoned quarry, this time on Klondike Road and owned by South County Sand and Gravel, is being leased out. We don't have confirmation about who the new operators are, but it sure looks like our neighborhood is being surrounded.

Three neighboring families (Dubois, Pucci and Balbat) started the fight by suing Copar and the town and they are now in mediation with the quarry. Judge Brian Stern is presiding over this case. Attorney Michael Lynch is representing the three families. Things didn't go very well for Copar at first and, at one point, the [judge actually threatened to jail some of the owners for contempt](#). He placed them under court supervision.

Judge Stern appointed Attorney John Deacon to oversee the

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

**If you want to see sunshine, you'll have to weather the storm.**

Frank Lane

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- ▶ 2016 (120)
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From Copar's website - this is what we listen to, all day, day after day

quarry and he picked Ronald Gwaltney as the on-site monitor at the quarry. That didn't work out because Gwaltney was compromised when George Comolli, lawyer to and member of the family that owns Westerly Granite, took him on a golfing trip to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

When the Westerly Sun revealed this, our neighbors with the on-going lawsuit went to Judge Stern to complain that Comolli had compromised Gwaltney. The judge agreed and ordered Gwaltney removed as Copar's

court-appointed monitor.

George Comolli is a prominent lawyer in the town of Westerly and also holds the position of counsel for the Westerly Housing Authority. He's a man who wears many hats and sometimes it seems like those hats have him confused. Is he representing his family's interests in Copar? Is he representing the town's interests as solicitor to the WHA? Is he representing the interests of some other one of his many business clients?

For example, as Housing Authority lawyer, he offered the job of Executive Director to Robert Ritacco. Ritacco has been chairing the Westerly Zoning Board while it has been trying to figure out what to do with the cease-and-desist order Westerly's Zoning Officer issued against Copar.

If the Zoning Board upholds the two cease-and-desist orders the Town of Westerly has issued, Copar is shut down. If Copar is shut down, Comolli's family loses money. But if Bob Ritacco does not allow the Zoning Board to actually hear Copar's appeal and delays action for months, as has been the case, Copar stays open while on appeal and the money keeps flowing.

Again, thanks to [great reporting by Dale Faulkner](#) at the Westerly Sun, the story came out about Comolli offering Ritacco the job...and Ritacco almost accepting. Once the story came out, Ritacco went into full damage control and Comolli would have no comment. [Ritacco's promised job as head of the Westerly Housing Authority went away.](#)

But there still has not been a Zoning Board hearing on Copar's appeal of the cease-and-desist orders, Copar stays open, and the money keeps flowing.

But as they say in the cheesy TV commercials, "but WAIT, there's MORE! The first cease-and-desist order was issued by Zoning Officer Elizabeth Burdick. During the weeks and months of stalling by the Zoning Board in hearing Copar's appeal of Burdick's order, Burdick became less and less visible. Then it was announced that Westerly was bringing in Charlestown assistant town solicitor Bob Craven as a temporary zoning official.



Bob Craven - brought in by Westerly after Liz Burdick was removed from the Copar case

Once more, Sun reporter Dale Faulkner [dug out the story that Burdick had been offered a job by Copar](#) to work for them at one of their Connecticut trash facilities (that's one of their main businesses in Connecticut) **while she was Zoning Officer and on the Copar case!**

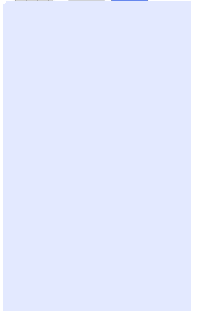
She left the job at the end of February, claiming that she had been subjected to a hostile work environment and singled out Bob Ritacco as one of the bad guys. She started working for Copar almost immediately after leaving her Westerly job.

You never know when you'll need a friend. [Mark Russo, the lawyer who served as Westerly Hospital's special master, was treated by George Comolli to a load of free gravel. Comolli allowed Russo to take a backhoe and load up a truck with stone for his own personal use. This too made it into the Westerly Sun and even rated another scathing editorial.](#)

Meanwhile, back in Superior Court, [Judge Stern finally ruled on the case](#) brought by the litigating families. While he ruled that Copar was indeed causing a personal nuisance to the families with its dust and noise, he allowed Copar to continue its operations, subject to good behavior, monitored by the court.

After monitor Ronald Gwaltney was removed for lacking the common sense to turn down George Comolli's offer of a golfing trip to South Carolina, no one has been named to replace him. Instead, on May 16, court-appointed special master John Deacon made a "surprise" inspection, but not without first calling Ron Gwaltney. Deacon took a quick look around and felt everything was running fine. He reported back to the judge that Copar was behaving itself.

Here's what I know about Deacon's "surprise" May 16 inspection of the quarry. Of course it wasn't really much of a surprise since he called Ron Gwaltney first.



## Charlesto

[Weather Rain Tides](#)  
28°F

Chance Snow

N Wind 4.3 knots

- 23°F
- 21°F

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- Town of Charlestown
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#### SUGGESTED WEBSITES

- ecoRI News
- Rhode Island's Future
- TraceyC\_Online
- Rhode Island Democrac
- Grist environmental nev
- Dave Barry's Blog
- EcoPressed
- Macaroni Kid - South C

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Copar invades Charlestown (continued)

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Come on out when you hear the bell

Don't Squat in Your Spurs or Be an Idiot

The quarry is supposed to spray water on their rock crushers while in use to cut down airborne sand and silica particles flying through the neighborhood. That day, the water truck had broken down. Water was not being used. Deacon claimed he didn't see the dust as leaving the plant, but he reported that he had grit in his teeth.

Bob Craven, the attorney hired by the town after Liz Burdick was removed from the case, told me about his own surprise inspection. Craven said Copar owner Sam Cocopard cursed and threatened him.

Cocopard's behavior toward Bob Craven is ironic, given that Copar filed a \$10,000,000 lawsuit against the town of Westerly claiming that the town was picking on them. Copar claims it is the victim of a conspiracy and that its Constitutional rights have been violated.



If I wasn't so worn out by the way Copar has ruined my family's life, and the lives of my friends and neighbors with its daily noise, dust, truck traffic and from time to time, blasts that sound like a war has started, I would have to laugh at the idea that Copar is the victim here.

As tired as we all are, and as frustrated as we are with the legal system and our good ole boy style of politics in Westerly, we're not giving up. Concerned Citizens of Bradford-Charlestown is really just getting started to fight back; they have left us no other option. And Copar is going to find out that we're harder to crush than granite.

Now that Copar has expanded its operations into Charlestown, there are even more people who are directly affected. If Copar takes on yet another operation, the one on Klondike Road, they may

think they'll make more money, but they're really just increasing the number of people who will stand up to fight them.

If you want to help, and especially if you want to fight back, [click here](#) to contact us.

*Tina lives in Charlestown and is on the Steering Committee for Concerned Citizens of Bradford-Charlestown*

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Copar Quarry invades Charlestown



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Meet the new neighbors, Copar Quarries, Part 5



Copar gets its third local quarry site

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