

## Tax collection angers banks

By BILL CUMMINGS  
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### Bridgeport goes after private accounts to gather unpaid funds

BRIDGEPORT — The city is the first in Connecticut to attempt to collect unpaid car taxes by seizing money from private checking and savings

accounts, a move that is angering banks and their customers.

The latest tactic to recoup \$20 million in back taxes is be-

ing met with mixed results, as some banks are complying with city-issued tax warrants while others are not.

Those warrants instruct the

bank to sift through a list of 120,499 delinquent taxpayers to see whether they have accounts. If so, the bank must freeze an amount equal to the

city's back tax bill and, after a review process, the money is sent to the city.

The effort has succeeded in netting the city about \$103,000.

"It's a fishing expedition at our expense," said Cheryl Ernst, manager of the Bridgeport Post Office Federal Credit Union, which is freezing funds in customer accounts.

"We have two employees. ▶ Please see CITY on A3

## THEY ALL SCREAM FOR ICE CREAM



Pete Brake, better known as Polar Pete, reaches into his Good Humor truck for menus to give to his customers in Trumbull. Annie Giammettei waits with her children, Adam and Ben, as Alison Zajac and Erin Whitmeyer come down the street with their children.

Autumn Pinette/Connecticut Post

## Familiar clanging of bells brings joy to Trumbull neighborhoods

By FELICIA HUNTER  
Correspondent

By day, Pete Brake is a not-so-mild-mannered attorney, handling complex legal cases with staid expertise.

But in the evening, Brake sheds his suit and puts on the crisp, white uniform of a summertime neighborhood hero — Polar Pete, the mobile ice cream man.

"Not everybody is happy to see a lawyer. But everybody's happy to see the ice cream man," Brake said.

The 33-year-old Trumbull resident cruises through town weekdays between 6 p.m. and dusk, and Saturday afternoons. He also doles out frozen treats at parties and children's events.

"I go to all parts of town and see people in all walks of life," he said, adding his business involves more than ice cream; it's also a portable social center.

"Everybody comes out and people interact together, play together. It brings a sense of community," he said. "I sell fun, I sell nostalgia, the experience of a social time."

Madeline Fromageot and her four children, ages 3 through 9, patronized Brake when he started coming to their Golden Hill Street community, and her family continues to be a loyal cus-



Three-month-old Daniel Christensen looks cool in his Polar Pete outfit. Pete Brake's wife made the promotional pieces with their home computer and gave them out to some steady customers.

tom.

Fromageot, 45, fondly remembers how as a child she delighted in hearing the clanging bell announcing the arrival of her neighborhood's ice cream man. Her youngsters take similar pleasure in visits from Polar Pete, she said.

"Every time he comes, they want to try something," she said, but the basis for their enjoyment is more than just ice cream.

"It's him — Polar Pete. He just brings something special back to the neighborhood. He's just not there selling ice cream, he wants to make conversation. He's really a genuinely nice person and engages my children in conversa-

tion.

"He just makes it feel like a neighborhood," Fromageot said. "He wants to make a difference in the community."

The business also is a welcome contrast to Brake's work at the Bridgeport law firm of Willinger, Willinger & Buccini.

"It's totally flexible. That's one of the things I like about it," Brake said.

Inspired by his business-owner father, Roger Brake Jr., Brake wanted to experience "the American dream" of having his own company.

"I think it's great," said Brake's wife, Allison, who helps with bookkeeping and other op-

erational needs. "My mom owned a clothing store, so we both kind of come from entrepreneurial backgrounds."

Brake started Polar Pete's Ice Cream last summer, forming the LLC while becoming an authorized Good Humor ice cream distributor and refurbishing two purchased vehicles. One is a classic 1966 Good Humor truck with open cab; the other is a 1963 Chevy box truck.

"Both of them didn't run when I bought them," Brake said.

He got the trucks up and running and began local rounds. At year's end, he took a truck to Westfield Shoppingtown Trumbull mall, where it became a popular holiday-season fixture.

"I actually had people take my picture instead of Santa," Brake recalled.

A recently promoted captain in the U.S. Army Reserve, he briefly halted his ice cream business while stationed in Mannheim, Germany, earlier this year. Brake, a member of the JAG Corps' 4th Legal Support Organization, enlisted after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"I decided I needed to do something. I wanted to give back to the community," said the Bridgeport native.

The business will be in good hands if he is redeployed. Aside from Allison, known to customers as "Arctic Alli," assistance comes from Brake's uncle and aunt, "Frosty" Fred and "Toasted Almond" Tina Koenig of Shelton, and driver Jack "Frost" Krekoska of Stratford.

The extra help also will come in handy after the Brakes have their first child, due Aug. 31.

"We're excited about it," Brake said, adding he plans to continue his small business for the foreseeable future. He enjoys adopting the persona and the look of recognition and delight on children's faces when they see him, he said.

"I think Polar Pete is here to stay," he said. "I'm having a great time. I would do it no matter what."

For more information, email [Pete@polarpetes.com](mailto:Pete@polarpetes.com) or call 520-8580.

## Doubts on killing increase

### Expert disputes confession

By MARIAN GAIL BROWN  
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An internationally renowned forensic scientist in Connecticut who analyzed evidence from JonBenet Ramsey's slaying and described it as a jigsaw puzzle with pieces that don't fit says the same assessment applies to an expatriate suspect's confession.

Dr. Henry C. Lee, an expert in patterns of blood splatter who has testified in a number of high-profile and celebrity murder cases — from O.J. Simpson's to Kennedy cousin Michael Skakel's — said Friday his initial elation that someone had confessed to the decade-old killing of JonBenet has turned to skepticism.



LEE

"When I first heard that someone came forward as a confessor, I was very happy for the Ramsey family, the community and for all of the law-enforcement people that worked so hard and for so long," Lee said from his office at the University of New Haven, where a forensic lab bears his name.

■ Suspect's e-mails show obsession with victim. A8

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## Stratford death said 'suspicious'

### Woman was monitor at Sikorsky

By RICHARD WEIZEL  
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STRATFORD — The Bridgeport woman whose naked body was found floating in the Housatonic River worked for a federal agency that monitors production at Sikorsky Aircraft, a short distance upriver from where her body was discovered Tuesday.

The death of 64-year-old Mary Somohano was characterized Friday as "highly suspicious" by police investigating the incident.

Police said it is increasingly likely she was a victim of foul play, possibly a homicide, although suicide or an accident have not been ruled out.

Somohano worked the past 25 years as a quality-assurance specialist for a Defense Department agency at Sikorsky Aircraft. Her job required her to inspect weapons systems for the government, a spokeswoman for the agency said.

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Pete Brake, better known as Polar Pete, hands an ice cream bar to Dominic Christensen, 5. Polar Pete is well-known for his ice cream deliveries around Trumbull.

Autumn Pinette/Connecticut Post