

# She's a minute-taker, just for starters

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City Council committee meetings and planning board meetings throughout the year.

She sits at a table on the side of the Council chambers, clicking away quietly at a laptop as Keene officials conduct the business of keeping the city running.

After over a decade on the job, Pahl, 47, knows pretty much everything there is to know about the planning board and City Council's finance and planning committees.

She's had to keep her calm during meetings that have drawn emotional Keene residents and arguing councilors, including last year's session at which the councilors decided to approve a grant for an armored vehicle for the city.

Then, she said, there was the proposal to ban chalking on city property this summer.

"That got a little bit ugly," she said.

She's seen it all — but she won't tell you what she thinks about it.

"I can't give my opinion on anything," she said. "I'm a city employee — I can't comment on city business."

Anyway, she said, she'd rather just watch.

Pahl was, as far as assistant city clerk Terri M. Hood can remember, the first person hired to take minutes for department meetings. Before the city decided to hire her 11 years ago, Hood said, department heads had to record and transcribe the meetings themselves.

"It wasn't a very easy way for the department heads to spend their time," she said.

Now, the audio and video recordings of most minutes are uploaded directly to the city's website.

"Everything is online," Pahl said. The written minutes go on the website, too, and in the case of the planning board, the minutes might be necessary if a



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Krishni Pahl serves as an administrative assistant at Antioch University New England. She's also a minute-taker for the city, and works at the front desk at MoCo Arts.

board decision becomes part of a court case.

That's where the pressure to get everything recorded as accurately as possible comes in, Pahl said.

Hood said Pahl's long track record with the city has been a helpful resource since the clerk's office took control of the minute-taking staff in 2007.

"That's the thing about having someone who's been doing this so long, you have that perspective."

Pahl moved to Keene to attend Keene State College in 1988, graduating in 1992 with a business degree. She met her husband, Ed, while she was a student, and has lived in Keene ever since.

She found the job taking minutes at city department meetings through a listing in the newspaper.

"I applied, interviewed, and got the job," she said. "That's pretty much the extent of it."

When Pahl started taking the minutes at board and committee meetings, she would use a cassette recorder and take notes in shorthand. Her husband bought her a machine at the time that allowed her to pause and play the tape player with her foot as she transcribed on a desktop computer at their house in Keene.

Pahl learned to write

shorthand as a student in her native Sri Lanka, a skill that has become rarer as time goes on, she said. She doesn't personally know of anyone else who can still do it.

"I think it's a pretty dying art," she said.

Pahl now recognizes most of the people who come in and out of City Hall.

"The same developers, the same attorneys. After 11 years you pretty much see the same people," she said.

Of course, they recognize her, too. Pahl is a mainstay at meetings that often consist of fewer than a dozen people sitting in a room for hours on end. Plus, she said, she stands out in a fairly homogenous city like Keene.

"There's not too many people who look like me walking the streets," she said.

But City Hall isn't the only place Pahl gets recognized. Minute-taker is one of three jobs she has in the city, and she's made an impression at them all.

She works full-time as an administrative assistant in the education department at Antioch University New England. There, she has made waves by organizing a food collection program, storing and sending more than 1,400 pounds of donated food from Antioch staff, faculty and students to the Keene Community Kitchen since 2012.

The collection started out as a way to help the food kitchen with donations during Thanksgiving and the winter holiday season. Later Pahl expanded it to run all year with the help of her daughter, Angeline.

"The thing is, people are not only hungry during the holidays, they're hungry all year round," Pahl said. In the past couple of months, they have also begun accepting pet food to feed hungry cats and dogs.

"It's been a really rewarding program in the end," she said.

This year, the collection won her a Good Steward Award from Antioch President Stephen Jones. The award hangs inconspicuously on a corner wall of her office in Antioch's Keene campus, facing pictures of

Angeline as a toddler.

Angeline, now 15, got Pahl interested in her third job, working at the front desk of the Keene performing arts nonprofit organization MoCo Arts.

When her daughter started taking dance and theater courses there, Pahl took on a part-time position and began volunteering backstage at shows.

Angeline "lives and breathes MoCo," Pahl said. "That's a really good community organization for children and I feel really passionate about that."

Volunteering backstage, Pahl keeps the same composure under pressure she needs during city government meetings.

"I do everything," she said. "Making sure the kids get dressed, getting them on stage, anything they need."

If local residents don't know Pahl from any of her jobs and volunteer work in the city, they might know her husband.

Ed Pahl, she said, is Batman.

Or rather, he's the guy with the Batmobile, a black car with the superhero's logo on the side that passersby in downtown Keene could mistake for the real thing. He'll be at the Keene Pumpkin Festival this year with his car and a Batman costume.

"He stands there, and people flock to see him," she said.

Pahl is happy to stay out of the limelight backstage, whether she's behind the scenes at a MoCo Arts production, a food drive or a planning board meeting. And she has no plans to slow down anytime soon.

"I like all three of my jobs," she said. "I work with great people. As long as I'm in Keene, I think I'll keep doing it."

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## Monadnock Profile



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Krishni Pahl

## Being Keene's minute-taker is just one of her passions

By MARTHA SHANAHAN  
Sentinel Staff

Attendance at Keene Planning Board meetings is something of a crapshoot — if there's a contentious proposal on the agenda, the meetings can draw a crowd. More often than not, the members are speaking to an almost empty room.

But there's one woman who is always there, at every meeting, paying close attention. Her name is Krishni Pahl, and she has worked for the past 11 years as a part-time minute-taker for the city clerk's office, recording and typing up everything that happens at various

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## At a glance

**Name:** Krishni D. Pahl

**Age:** 47

**Hometown:** Kandy, Sri Lanka

**Residence:** Has lived in Keene for 25 years.

**Family:** Husband, Ed; one daughter, and one stepdaughter.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Keene State College, business.

**Employment:** Administrative assistant, Antioch University of New England; administrative assistant, MoCo Arts; minute-taker, City of Keene.

**Volunteer work:** Organizes food donation program to The Community Kitchen in Keene; backstage work at MoCo Arts performances.

**Question:** "As someone who sees a lot of the day-to-day business of city government, do people ever ask you your opinions about Keene politics?"

**Answer:** "Sometimes, but I quickly don't answer because I can't anyway. I'd rather watch."

**Question:** "What do you like about working for the city?"

**Answer:** "They're good to me, I like them, I've made a lot of friends there."