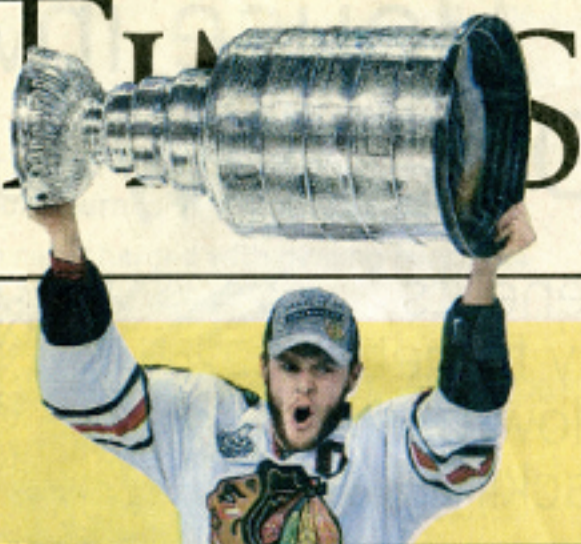


## CAPE COD TIMES

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STUNNED!

LATE GOALS SINK BRUINS'  
STANLEY CUP HOPES SPORTS/B1

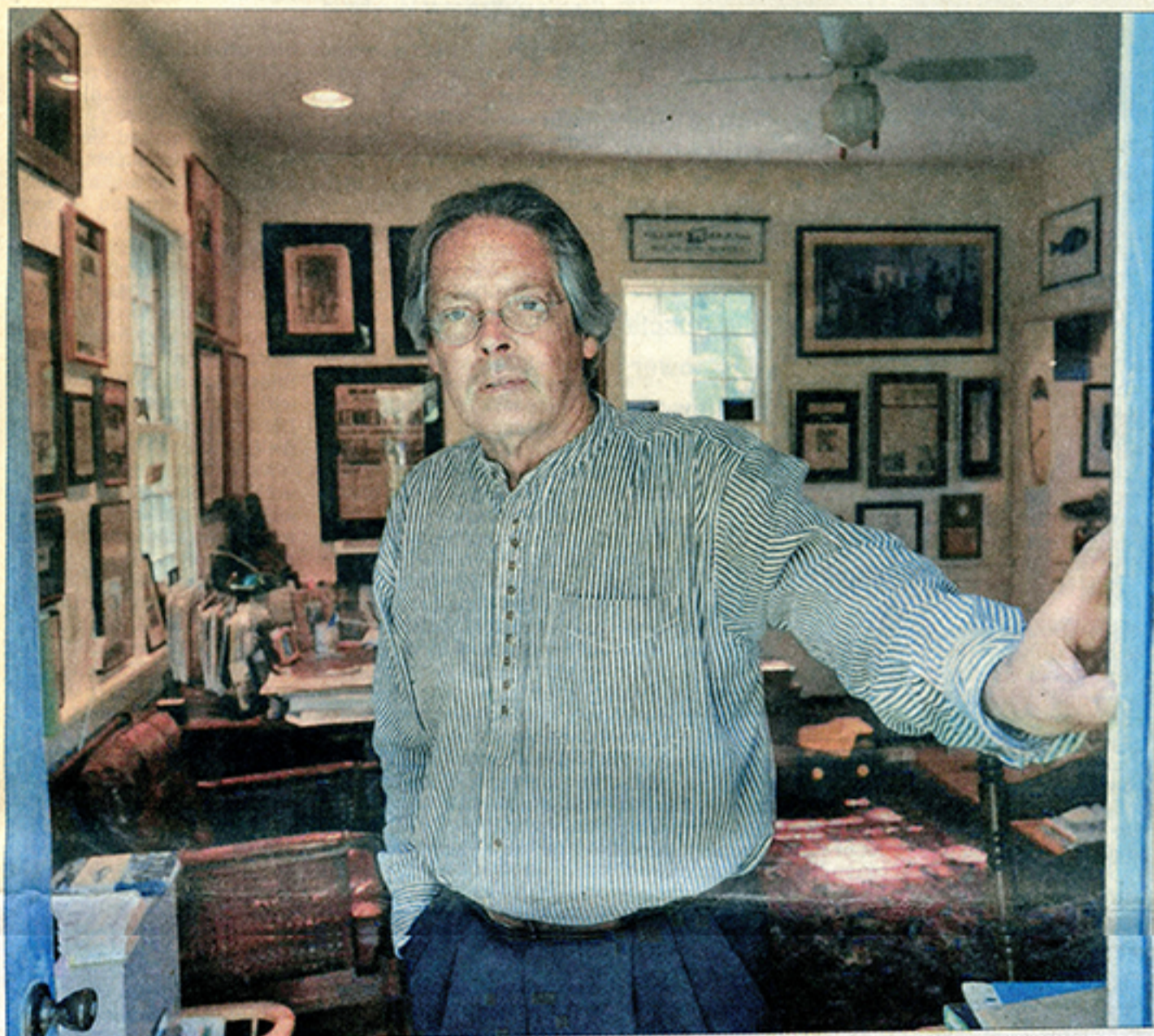
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TUESDAY, JUNE 25, 2013

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## HEALTH CARE

## Welcome to my world



Greg O'Brien opens the door to his Brewster office, where he is surrounded by memories from his long career. Before those memories recede, the award-winning journalist is writing a book about his Alzheimer's disease.

RON SCHLOERB/CAPE COD TIMES

## Former Cape Codder publisher writes book to share the trials and tribulations of early-onset Alzheimer's

By CYNTHIA McCORMICK  
cmccormick@capecodonline.com

The photos of Sen. Edward Kennedy, Arizona Rep. Morris "Mo" Udall and other personalities that line the walls of Greg O'Brien's Brewster barn-turned-office testify to his decades in journalism.

Framed newspaper articles — "Americans Walk on the Moon" — and sports memorabilia jostle for space with family photographs, including one of O'Brien as an altar boy.

"It's kind of a time capsule," says O'Brien, the former editor and publisher of the Cape Codder and an award-win-

"Something inside me said there's something seriously wrong."

GREG O'BRIEN

upon noticing the early signs of Alzheimer's

ning political writer and investigative reporter.

"It's my memory," he says.

But O'Brien says the biggest story of his life can be found in a 1940s-era photograph of a woman with hair curling softly

on her shoulders.

The woman is Virginia B. O'Brien, his mother. She worked as a banker and raised 10 children, and in 2008 she died at age 83 of Alzheimer's disease — but not before passing on a genetic predisposition to her eldest son, O'Brien said.

Diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's disease four years ago, O'Brien says he started noticing symptoms as far back as 2001.

He fished for the right words and sometimes had problems recognizing people. "Something inside me said there's some-

see O'BRIEN, page 10

## Senate hopefuls face off

Record-low turnout predicted at today's polls

By C. RYAN BARBER  
crbarber23@gmail.com

HYANNIS — As Republican Senate candidate Gabriel Gomez strolled into The Original Gourmet Brunch for a last bit of retail politics before today's special election, former state legislator Jo Ann Sprague sprang from her seat Monday to greet him with a kiss on the cheek.



ELECTION 2013

"Our candidate, it's a pleasure to see you," said Sprague, a Republican former state representative and senator, joining prominent Cape Cod Republicans at the Main Street restaurant. "And you're going to win tomorrow."

In spite of recent polls indicating otherwise, the GOP newcomer projected similar confidence as he shook hands and moved on to make calls at his Park Street campaign office, even predicting a "double-digit" margin over U.S. Rep. Edward Markey, his Democratic opponent, on the Cape and Islands.

"We absolutely expect to do very well in Cape Cod," said Gomez, a Cohasset private equity investor and former Navy SEAL. "We've got a great team here of people who have been helping out from the very beginning."

Although comforted by the polls, local Democrats —

see ELECTION, page 4



GABRIEL GOMEZ



EDWARD MARKEY

capecodonline.com

For polling places and more on the special Senate election, go to [capecodonline.com/elections](http://capecodonline.com/elections)

## Orleans to vote again on sewers

With the \$3.5M plan losing by 6 votes, it's back for another try.

By K.C. MYERS  
kcmeyers@capecodonline.com

ORLEANS — Voters are invited back for round two Thursday to decide whether to pay for a \$3.5 million sewer design for downtown and a preliminary plan for a treatment system around Meetinghouse Pond.

If this sounds familiar, it's because town meeting voted on the same article on May 13. It won support from a majority of voters but came up six votes short of gaining the two-thirds margin required for bonded projects.

see ORLEANS, page 4

## ORLEANS SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

When: 6:30 p.m. Thursday

Where: Nauset Regional Middle School, Route 28, Orleans

At issue: a single article on raising \$3.5 million for wastewater infrastructure design

capecodonline.com

To read recent stories on the region's wastewater issues, go to [capecodonline.com/wastewater](http://capecodonline.com/wastewater)

## Overcrowded house shuttered

Hyannis officials say 24 people were living in a 6-person home

By PATRICK CASSIDY  
pcassidy@capecodonline.com

HYANNIS — When Hyannis firefighters responded to a medical call at 1037 Pitcher's Way on Saturday they uncovered a potential death trap.

Inside they found as many as two dozen people living in the small, four-bedroom home, with some in a basement with only one way out, according to town officials who visited the property.

"We had to call the building inspector," Hyannis Fire Capt. William Rex Jr. said.

The overcrowding was only part of the problem, Barnstable wiring inspector

William Amara said Monday.

Electrical wiring designed for interior use is run along the outside of the home and beneath shingles, creating a potential fire hazard, he said. Other wiring in the basement of the home is exposed or was installed incorrectly by the homeowner, Amara said.

see HOUSE, page 4

INDEX	
Advice	B7
Arts & Entertainment	B6
Business	C1
Cape & Islands	A3
Comics	B5
Crossword	C8
Massachusetts	A5
Nation & World	A6
Obituaries	A7
Opinion	A8
Television	B7

## WEATHER

Partly cloudy with a chance of thunderstorms; highs in the mid-80s. B8



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# O'Brien: Writer sharing tale of life, loss, grief

from A1

thing seriously wrong," O'Brien said.

He said he believes a head injury he suffered in a bicycle accident about nine years ago accelerated the disease process.

Testing showed that he was at genetic risk, since he had the APOE-e4 gene that is present in about 40 percent of all people with late-onset Alzheimer's and is implicated in the development of early-onset Alzheimer's.

Brain scans and an MRI also confirmed the presence of the brain-wasting disease, O'Brien said.

## A GENERATION'S STORY

He has responded the way he knows best: by sharing his experience and writing about it, in a new book tentatively titled "On Pluto: Inside the Mind of Alzheimer's."

"As a reporter, shame on me if I don't tell the story," O'Brien said during an interview in his office.

"I find myself, at 63, with a brain disease for which there is no cure, writing the most important story of my life," he said.

It's also the story of his generation, O'Brien said.

An article in the journal *Neurology* earlier this year estimated that the number of Americans 65 and older with Alzheimer's will climb to 13.8 million by the year 2050.

According to a RAND report, 4.1 million Americans currently suffer from Alzheimer's or other types of dementias.

Doctors say about 5 percent of the cases are considered early onset, meaning they occur in people younger than 65.

## MANY PATIENTS FUNCTIONAL

"There is a visual that somebody with Alzheimer's is in a johnny in a corner drooling," said Patricia Collins, director of family and community outreach for HopeHealth Dementia and Alzheimer's Services.

"You'd be amazed at how functional these folks are," she said. Collins said the youngest Alzheimer's patient she's

"I find myself, at 63, with a brain disease for which there is no cure, writing the most important story of my life."

GREG O'BRIEN

worked with was 50.

"A lot of people are still working," said Molly Perdue, director of family services for Hope Dementia. They may have children in college and are wondering how to pay for retirement, she said.

O'Brien's youngest child, Conor, is still at home with him and his wife, Mary Catherine, and commutes to Johnson & Wales University in Providence, R.I.

His older children, Colleen and Brendan, live in Washington, D.C., and Brighton.

O'Brien said he wants to do his part to encourage funding of Alzheimer's research so his children don't face the fear and loneliness of a diagnosis.

"Part of what I'm doing is to raise awareness," O'Brien said. "Nobody likes to pull their pants down in public. But if that's what it takes to tell the story of Alzheimer's, that's what it takes."

## DISEASE INCIDENCE RISING

Alzheimer's disease as a cause of death increased by 68 percent between 2000 and 2010, according to the Alzheimer's Association, which said death rates for stroke, prostate cancer, breast cancer and HIV declined in that same period.

Drugs can help Alzheimer's sufferers manage symptoms, but so far they don't slow the progression of the disease.

O'Brien takes Aricept, which helps with memory, and Namenda, which can help slow the rate of decline in thinking.

He also takes the antidepressant Celexa and, when he needs

help sleeping, Trazodone.

Daily runs on the treadmill help him "restart the brain," O'Brien said.

His faith in God and sense of humor help, too.

When a reporter apologizes for forgetting a question, O'Brien quips, "I have pills for that if you want."

O'Brien says he's working off a "cognitive reserve" of brain power. With wavy gray hair and wire-rimmed glasses, he is the picture of a Cape Cod intellectual.

"Writing is muscle memory," O'Brien said.

He said his doctors told him that he should be able to write and communicate until he "lets go," which is a code phrase for the point at which the brain and body shut down almost simultaneously.

## NOT LETTING GO

O'Brien doesn't have plans to let go anytime soon. He still works as a political communications strategist and will be featured in a Peaty Films project on Alzheimer's, to be released later this summer or fall.

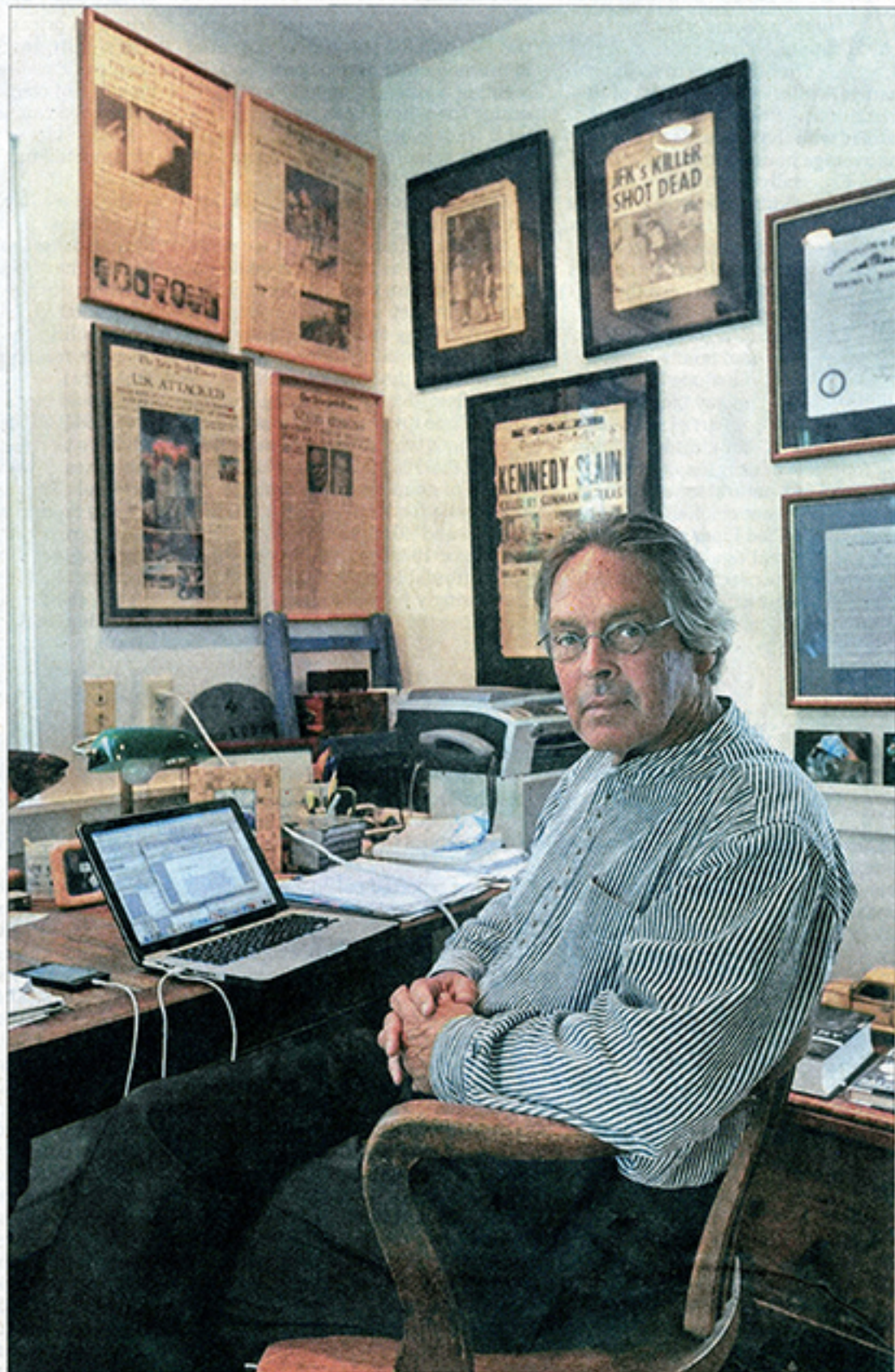
On July 22, he is scheduled to speak about Alzheimer's at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History with novelist Lisa Genova, the author of "Still Alice." The book is considered a realistic portrait of early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

Most early-onset patients decline quickly, but O'Brien has been able to buck those odds with determination, smarts and exercise, said Alisa Galazzi of Orleans, former head of Alzheimer's Services.

His book "will be a gift," she said. "He's able to tell the story from an insider's perspective. It's not about the disease. It's about life, loss and grief."

"My mother taught me how to live with it. She's my hero. She wouldn't give in to it," said O'Brien, who was editor and publisher of the Cape Codder until 1993.

"One of the symptoms of the disease is feeling alone," O'Brien said. "There's help and there's love and there's hope out there."



RON SCHLOERB/CAPE COD TIMES  
"As a reporter, shame on me if I don't tell the story," says Greg O'Brien, seated in the Brewster office that bears the many emblems of his long journalism career. His forthcoming book is tentatively titled "On Pluto: Inside the Mind of Alzheimer's."