

June 9 - July 14, 2023

Navy vet Mike DeFazio's service continues with nonprofit AOATG

BY ROD LEE

With determination and grit, and in a short amount of time, Michael DeFazio of Northbridge has grown his business—An Officer and Two Gentlemen—into a vital resource for veterans and first responders.

Mr. DeFazio is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, as was his father Frank; his sister Nicole is currently on active duty with the Navy.

The name he chose for his nonprofit venture, An Officer and Two Gentlemen—or AOATG—is an interesting one, and apropos.

Mike DeFazio's last deployment was to Somalia in 2019. He returned home from that tour as a self-described "desert sailor," tired and suffering from PTSD. But also with a desire to help people in the military—or in law enforcement or fire safety work.

Founder and executive director of his organization, Mr. DeFazio is "unpaid," as he told Harry Berkowitz during an appearance on May 11th on NCTV's "About the Valley" program.

He relies heavily on donations to underwrite his outreach efforts, and is pleased to include first respond-



Mike DeFazio is founder and executive director of An Officer and Two Gentlemen, or AOATG, "veterans helping vets and first responders."

ers in that initiative.

"There are not a lot of organizations for first responders," he told Mr. Berkowitz.

There is also always a need for more services for retired and active-

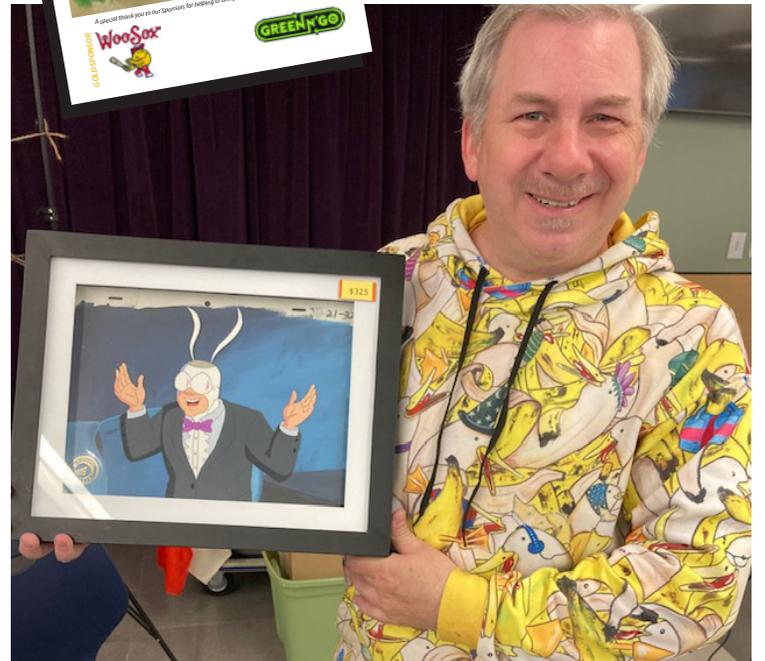
duty military personnel.

"We are vets helping vets, from as far south as Texas and as first

NONPROFIT
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Steve Gagliastro's collection of "cells" drew people to his table, at Arts in the Valley.

BVEF-Green Bean Project's Arts in the Valley a showstopper

BY ROD LEE

The Blackstone Valley Education Foundation (BVEF) in collaboration with the Green Bean Project could not have capped its 2022-23 year in a more splendid fashion than by hosting "Arts in the Valley," a free family event held at Sutton Middle-Senior High School on May 20th.

The production, with ran from mid-morning to early afternoon, was packed with such ingredients as a fine arts show, a chance to "paint the community canvas with Mrs. Hehir," "crafts with Mrs. Hutchinson," virtual reality arts experiences, vendor booths and workshops including "Arts Integration for ALL! With Lisa Donovan," a panel discussion featuring arts professionals and a "Green Bean Kids Fashion Show."

Among those in attendance was Vikrant B. Rana of Quincy, owner of Everest Wings and Boston Vibrations.

Mr. Rana is a sound bath therapist and Kundalini yoga practitioner whose business involves

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west as Chicago," he says.

Mr. DeFazio says "we do a lot of fundraising." One of the current examples of this is a "No One Rides Alone Motorcycle Rally" planned for Saturday, June 17, with a rain date of June 18.

"The rally will be at NCTV and the American Legion Post (in Rockdale) and is open to not just motorcycles but classic cars, anyone who wants to get involved," he said on May 31st. "Registration is at 9:00 a.m. and the ride will start at about 10:00. There will also be a band and a barbecue."

Members of the American Legion are stepping up to assist AOATG in other ways, too.

Mr. DeFazio is keenly aware of the problems men and women returning from tours of duty face;

including suicide.

"Many people locally don't think it affects them, but it does," he says.

"We have single-handedly saved lives," he told Mr. Berkowitz. "We have a big suicide issue in this country. The '3 % serving'" out of a population of millions are saddled with a suicide rate of "twenty-two a day," he said.

AOATG "was just an idea" when he came out of the service but "having PTSD myself it seemed like a healthier job choice and I have always been about helping others. I know we are making an impact. I am also working with Phil Cyr and Wally Smith in getting markers for unmarked veterans' graves here in town. There are more than people realize and some date back to the Civil War."

Mr. DeFazio's team at AOATG's includes his dad Frank, honorary co-founder, disabled U.S. Navy vet

and guide; Michael Elkin, disabled firefighter, "our parts and oil guy," and guide; and Charlie Jackman, disabled U.S. Navy vet, firefighter, lead mechanic and guide.

Programs AOATG offers enable veterans to "experience reintegration" with, for instance, a trip to AOATG's lodge and vast snowmobile trails and system in the area of Pittsburg, New Hampshire, and a deep sea fishing adventure.

The organization also has a retail component, providing such merchandise to consumers by way of its website and a trailer as No One Rides Alone shirts and caps, patches, heavy-duty flannels, masks, neck gaiters and thermal boot socks.

The objective, Mr. DeFazio says, is to work with active-duty military, veterans and first responders with rehabilitation; to "help others."

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

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handmade hemp products from Nepal, women-made fair trade items, retail/wholesale, sound bath therapy, energy healing, Chakra balancing and "authentic singing bowls."

"I want to introduce my culture of peace, happiness and humanity,"

of Dudley, who has been doing professional photography for "more than five years." High school seniors, maternity, family, couples and engagement pictures are a specialty of Ms. Bonahan's, who was told about the event by actress, director and marketing consultant Annie Kerins "and I said yes."

Ms. Kerins's husband Steve Gagliastro's display of celluloids, or "cells," was one of the more inter-



Vikrant Rana shows a young visitor to his booth how to use a singing bowl, at the Arts in the Valley event on May 20th.

Mr. Rana said. He described the spot he was assigned on the floor as "very open" and welcoming.

"I am happy with the people," he added, of event organizers and individuals frequenting his table.

Mr. Rana took a moment to tout services offered by a fellow health advocate, Sarah Coyne of Millbury, a Reiki practitioner whose focus is on fostering wellness in her clientele.

Also present and pleased to be represented was Mia Bonahan

esting exhibits of those available to patrons of the event. Mr. Gagliastro is an actor and musician who also teaches at Worcester State.

"I obtain these from auctions and collectors who are downsizing," Mr. Gagliastro said, of his cells. "I'm a little bit curator, a little bit museum. Stick figures are

BVEF

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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

No such thing as bad blood among local legislators

Greeting them just before a ceremony marking the naming of a bridge for local World War II hero Robert



BY ROD LEE

over Michael Moore.

Maybe it was the ensemble Mr. Frost had put together: blue

jacket, blue tie checkered with white markings, blue shirt of a slightly softer shade, khaki slacks, black shoes.

Color coordinated and quite impressive.

Of course, there was no competition for the honor of Best Dressed involved—and Mr. Moore looked dapper in his own right for the start of the Memorial Day weekend.

Nor is there any friction or animosity between Mr. Frost, a Republican, and Mr. Moore, a Democrat. None of the backbiting and vitriol that can regularly be witnessed between members

of opposite political parties in Washington, or at some state houses and town halls across the country.

That is the thing about the Central Massachusetts and Blackstone Valley legislative delegations. An unmistakable rapport and common sense of purpose exists within their ranks.

Rep. Frost and Sen. Moore are evidence of this. Paul Frost, who lives in Auburn, has served the 7th Worcester District since being elected at the age of twenty-six in 1996. Mike Moore, a lifelong resident of Millbury,



Rep. Paul Frost and Sen. Michael Moore speak at a ceremony signaling the naming of a bridge in Auburn in honor of World War II hero Robert Conroy.

won his seat in the 2nd Worcester District in 2008.

Those who disparage “career politicians” often overlook the large swath of territory these officials are responsible for, on Beacon Hill; areas that demand much of their time and effort—including after-hours’ commitments. Rep. Frost’s district includes all or parts of Auburn, Charlton, Leicester, Millbury and Oxford. Sen. Moore’s district includes all or parts of Auburn, Grafton, Millbury, Shrewsbury, Westborough and Worcester.

When it was their turn to offer brief remarks, Mr. Frost had high praise for the assistance Mr. Moore provided in shepherding a bill Mr. Frost sponsored through to an affirmative vote,

on Robert Conroy’s family’s behalf.

“It took some time, these bills are not so simple and easy to do, to name bridges after people who in their lives and actions have earned it and that’s what Robert Conroy did,” Rep. Frost said.

For his part, Sen. Moore noted that Robert Conroy, who was killed in action in Italy along with his service dog, “made the sacrifice for others.”

Sen. Moore might have been speaking for both Rep. Frost and himself when he said “having an opportunity like this is one of the best parts of the job.”

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Mark Freeman

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could double in about 25 years — and your retirement could easily last that long. So, if you're going to rely on your investment portfolio for a sizable part of your retirement income, you will need to own a reasonable number of growth-oriented investments, such as stocks or stock-based funds, whose potential returns can equal or exceed the inflation rate.

- **Excessive withdrawals** – Once you retire, you should establish a withdrawal rate for your portfolio — an amount you can take out each year and still feel secure that you won't run out of money. Some people make the mistake of withdrawing too much, too soon, once they're retired. Your withdrawal rate should be based on several factors, including your age at retirement, the size of your portfolio and the amount of income you receive from other sources, such as Social Security. A fi-

nancial professional can help you determine a withdrawal rate that's appropriate for your needs.

- **Market volatility** – The financial markets will always fluctuate. When you're still working, this volatility may not be such a problem, as you have years or decades to recover from short-term downturns. But when you retire, you don't want to have to sell investments when their price is down. To help prevent this, you can tap into the cash in your portfolio, assuming you have enough to cover several months' worth of living expenses. You could also draw on a CD "ladder" — a group of CDs that mature at different times — to provide you with resources for the next few years and allow your equity investments time to recover their value.
- **Unexpected costs** – You had them when you were working, and you'll probably

have them when you're retired: the furnace that breaks down, the car that needs a major repair, and so on. But if you've established an emergency fund containing a year's worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid account, you may be able to "ride out" these costs without jeopardizing your investment portfolio. Be sure to keep these reserves separate from your typical day-to-day accounts to avoid the temptation of spending your emergency money.

- **Health** – Retirees may face more health concerns than younger people, and those concerns often come with larger medical bills. That's why it's important to maximize the benefits from Medicare or your Medicare Advantage plan. Also, if you contributed to a Health Savings Account (HSA) while you were working, and you haven't depleted it, you can use the money in retirement.

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Manchaug Mills a magnet for business, including retail

BY ROD LEE

Manchaug Mills will celebrate a 200th birthday in 2026.

Constructed of granite from a quarry in neighboring Douglas, the building was initially a cotton mill and the place where the Fruit of the Loom brand got its start.

Manchaug Mills is the only remaining mill of three manufacturing facilities that once operated in the quiet village of Manchaug. Its story as told by the management team of Mark and Debra Dunleavy is one of impressive durability, inspired renovation—and successful adaptation.

Talking about the current status of Manchaug Mills on the morning of May 10th, the Dunleavy's said there has "definitely been a shift, post-Covid," with "more hobbyists and more

retail" having taken up residence.

They join a mixed bag of other businesses including world-renowned Vaillancourt Folk Art, which has been an anchor tenant on the first floor for years.

"We're lucky to have Vaillancourt," the Dunleavy's said.

In an age when many old mills are being repurposed as housing, Manchaug Mills is somewhat of an anomaly, with its continuing concentration on providing space for commercial activity. Manchaug Mills also offers a warehousing component.

Artisans like Abbie Lawrence of Bad-Bisque Ceramics are taking full advantage of the opportunity to set up shop at Manchaug Mills.

"It's great," Ms. Lawrence said of her new address. "Before I had a studio in my apartment, so this is a

big step up."

She was working on a beer mug for a brewery in Rhode Island as we spoke.

On the website for Bad-Bisque Ceramics, Ms. Lawrence describes herself as "primarily a literacy tutor in the Worcester Public Schools and a restaurant server." Her passion, however, is working with clay. Her artistic exploration was inspired



Abbie Lawrence at work in her Bad-Bisque Ceramics studio at Manchaug Mills.

"by my dad, who is a potter, painter, sculptor, stone mason and teacher. From a young age he taught my sisters and I to get messy at creative, and that even a wacky and 'ruined' piece is a valuable learning experience."

Keith Downer, owner of Blackstone Valley Auctions & Estates, which deals in "art, arms and

antiquities," said the reason he chose Manchaug Mills from which to function is "history and hosts." The building is on the National Historic Register and the Dunleavy's are wonderful to work with.

"What they have done is amazing," Mr. Downer said, of improvements that have been made to the building—inside and out.

"This just works out for both of us."

Mr. Downer is still in the process of moving in, and notes that his wife Tammy, Mark and April Brown and Laura Jette are all essential operatives in the business.

Kelly Weagle, Julia Anderson, Jennifer Gavaletz and Anjelica Gignilliat all feel that Manchaug Mills is a perfect location for their businesses, which, like Asymmetric Training and Assessment Group and Truman Studios, have infused the building with new energy.

"An excellent space, I love it," Ms. Weagle said.

She has been in the fitness industry a long time. "The original boutique gym," REV offers a smorgasbord of ways to get and stay healthy including spin classes, strength training, fitness boot camps, stretch and flex and personal and small group instruction.

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Like Bad-Bisque Ceramics, Julia Anderson's Heirloom Emporium has moved to Manchaug Mills from a residential setting; in Ms. Anderson's case, a studio in her home.

Ms. Anderson specializes in fine woodwork and craft, "self-care for your home at Manchaug Mills" as she says on her business card. Her husband, Kevin Anderson, a physician and a woodworker, is key to the venture.

"When he comes home he puts on his superhero cape and goes to the basement and fires up the equipment," Ms. Anderson said. "He loves the games," as for example creating cribbage boards.

Together, Julia and her husband have populated Heirloom Emporium's location at Manchaug Mills with fine woodcraft and décor, accent furniture, family board games,



Julia Anderson of Heirloom Emporium at Manchaug Mills.

fine writing instruments and more. "We complement each other," she says.

Ms. Gignilliat's Indigo Enchantments is right at home at Manchaug Mills.

"I opened here April 1st, I was downstairs," she said, of her suite, now on the second floor.

Indigo Enchantments' mantra is "Awaken the Power within and Heal Holistically with Magick," with services that include aromatherapy—Ms. Gignilliat's specialty.

"I have a lot of interest in classes," she said. "If people just give this a chance...and there are no bad side effects!"

Ms. Gavaletz's law practice is "flourishing" in space she took over at Manchaug Mills after opening her firm.

Real estate conveyances, mortgage lending and estate planning are her primary focus.

Family-run Vaillancourt Folk Art, of which Gary and Judi Vaillancourt's son Luke is now president, offers dramatic proof that retail can be a good fit at Manchaug Mills.

The Vaillancourt's have continually reinvented their business from its initial concentration on chalkware, Christmas ornaments and Santa's. The store's "34th annual Starlight Santa" is now in pre-order but Vaillancourt also produces a Valentine's Santa, a Nantucket Santa and a Spring Santa—for example.

MILLS

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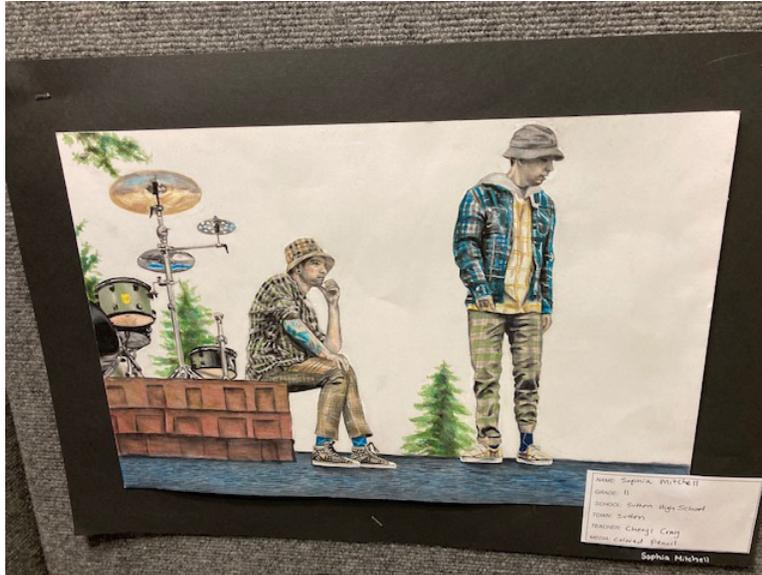
a dream for me. Anything from Warner Bros., MTV; over a couple of years we have grown from nothing to something” with hundreds of cells to choose from.

The BVEF’s Danielle Wence was understandably ecstatic about how things went.

“We were happy to display over 365 pieces of artwork from 10-plus school districts in and around the Blackstone Valley,” Ms. Wence said. “We had 23 art teachers participate/representing students in Grades K through 12. Taking place during the celebration were three interactive workshops—Curriculum in Motion and Make a Story, Make a Play with Kelli Deliso as well as a workshop ARTS Integration for ALL with Dr. Lisa Donovan from Brainworks and MCLA.

“Our career speaker panel included Visual & Performing Artist Keri Anderson, Photographer Mia Bohanan, Actor & Music Director Steve Gagliastro, DJ, Drag Queen and Social Media Director Patrick Allen Joslyn and Actress, Director and Marketing Consultant Annie Kerins.

“Other notable activities included a Community Canvas facilities by Kathy Hehir and sponsored by the Sutton Cultural Council; “Slay the Runway,” a theatrical fashion



Artwork by students Sophia Mitchell of Sutton and Kiersten Bradwin of Uxbridge was able to be viewed at Arts in the Valley. Sophia’s teacher is Cheryl Craig. Kiersten’s teacher is Gail Williams.

show; a virtual reality headset set; yoga with Michele Hutchinson; sound bathing with S.C. Wellness of Millbury; demonstrations by the Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development; bounce houses; the Red Rock Wood Fired Pizza Truck; Sweetwise Ice Cream and so much more!”

Ms. Wence noted that “we were blown away by the talent and enthusiasm of all the participations in our celebration. Our staff loves this event and we are grateful for the opportunity to engage over 700

attendees and participants.

“Our closing ceremony honored Denise Harrison for her efforts in fostering the ARTS programming in Sutton through the partnership with the Green Bean Project. Denise is retiring as the elementary school principal in June.”

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Bloem's Auto Repair: Another day at the office after 30 years

BY ROD LEE

The significance of thirty years in business is not lost on Steve Bloem. Then again, he isn't making a fuss about the anniversary. This will come as no surprise to people who know him.

He is, after all, "a low-key kind of guy."

Bloem's Auto Repair is situated

in a small one-story whitewashed building at 194 N. Main St. in Uxbridge. There are two service bays, out of which Mr. Bloem and his right-hand man Rick Costa operate. Around the walls of the garage are all of the trappings of the trade: tires, air filters, oil guns, air hoses, wrenches, screwdrivers: paraphernalia of every sort, which Mr. Bloem jokingly



Steve Bloem, left, owner of Bloem's Auto Repair, with right-hand man Ricky Costa.

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refers to as "the mess." Mr. Costa's personality seems to reflect that of Steve Bloem: cordial, accommodating, unpretentious, matter-of-fact; and dependable. Several years younger than his boss, Ricky Costa has been with Bloem's since 1995; in other words, for almost the entire time. He is Tonto to Steve's Lone Ranger, Little John to Steve's Robin Hood, Gaga to Steve's Tony Bennett, Dustin Pedroia to Steve's David Ortiz. "I just do my thing," Mr. Bloem says of his unruffled approach to his craft. As for Ricky, "I stay in my corner," he says, with a smile. There must certainly be moments after such a long run working side by side when friction has flared, but this is a case of "what happens here..." and the fact is, customers of Bloem's understand their vehicles are in good hands. Steve Bloem has followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and father while keeping the enterprise "small and manageable. This is a comfortable life," he says. Nevertheless, he has told his two daughters to "stay away from it." His wife Sherri helps out as business manager, handling the financial details that her husband really does not have time in his busy workday to address. He takes unexpected developments in stride. There are always those. "There is always the damsel in distress," he points out—which, he notes, hearkens back to the days when the woman of the house was responsible for dealing with automotive repair shops while her husband was selling encyclopedias or running a drill press. "Last-minute jobs, we strive to work them in," he says. Bloem's services all makes and models of cars and trucks. Steve

Bloem also sells used vehicles, "some years more than others. It complements the repair business." There is no underestimating the value of Ricky Costa to Bloem's. "We get along well and if I put him on a job I know it's done right," Steve Bloem says. As for himself, clients of Bloem's get the impression he would rather be changing out brake pads or installing a new muffler than being stuck at his desk in the office much of the time. When it comes time to take a picture of the two of them, Ricky says, half-seriously, "Steve should have a pen or a telephone in his hand." They keep up with the latest technology and they keep on truckin'. "If you want to be technical about it, we started in '49," he says. He is carrying on a family business.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

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MILLS

continued from page 6

“Our Nantucket Santa is our most successful and selling worldwide,” Gary Vaillancourt said.

“We do all the major holidays now,” he said.

A holiday-themed “outside

by a vineyard in California. And a German “Gluehwein,” a hot spiced “glow wine” that has been received “exceptionally well,” Gary Vaillancourt says.

Vaillancourt Folk Art has been featured on Chronicle “three times in the last ten years.”

Taking the operation outside

The goal now, Gary Vaillancourt said, is “to create a Hallmark movie set.”

That would come as no surprise at all, given what Vaillancourt Folk Art has already accomplished.

Asymmetric Training and Assessment Group LLC—ATAG—has had a presence in the mill since about 2013, Ron Tetreau said. ATAG specializes in training for tactical law enforcement personnel and civilians, providing “the latest tactical techniques and procedures “using your facility, saving your agency logistical costs while offering your personnel the best course of instruction possible.”

ATAG has worked with the Woonsocket Police Department’s Special Rescue Team (SRT) and “our own U.S. Special Operations Forces.”

“I have known Mark Dunleavy all my life,” Mr. Tetreau said. “We were police officers together. The mill is great. Even during Covid when getting classroom space was difficult Mark and Deb allowed us to use hall space on the second floor.”

Accommodation to their tenants’ needs is key to the Dunleavy’s management philosophy, which accounts for the repeated praise they receive from occupants of the building.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.



Kelly Weagle of REV Fitness Center and Keith Downer of Blackstone Valley Auctions & Estates have found a niche for their respective businesses at Manchaug Mills.

market” the Vaillancourt family has instituted with the blessing of Mark and Deb Dunleavy is just one of the latest bright ideas to perpetuate Vaillancourt Folk Art’s incredible run.

There is now, too, a Vaillancourt wine, “a fabulous Cabernet” according to Luke Vaillancourt. It is crafted

and by offering “the best European Christmas” has added a new dimension to the Vaillancourt experience.

Working closely with nearby District V and the Sutton Historical Society, Vaillancourt will host “The Manchaug Stroll” on December 9th, with walking tours.



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An Olympian sendoff for NES 5th graders



Fifth-grade graduation at Northbridge Elementary School was one to remember, as students took part in a variety of field-day Olympic-style events on June 1st. The entire grade also watched a slide show featuring pictures from birth to present day. The Committee organizing the activities started work on the production in January and enlisted the support of the community through fundraising efforts. The Committee was led by Kelly Hird L'Hommedien and Erin LaMonda and a first-ever Olympics theme was chosen for the day. Included were Olympic flags representative of the 5th Grade student population.



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BVCC-WSN's Ladies on the Lake returns

The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Women's Success Network announces the return of Ladies on the Lake on June 22nd, with a rain date of June 29th, aboard the beautiful Indian Princess docked at Indian Ranch in Webster.

This tranquil networking event will begin at 6:00 p.m. and go until 8:00 p.m. with boarding to begin at 5:45pm. Pre-registration is required, and is open to Members and Future Members of the Chamber.

This highly anticipated event features a fabulous evening of networking, quintessential hors d'oeuvres, libations and spectacular views. Docked at Indian Ranch, the Indian Princess is a modern day replica of the river boats once seen cruising the Mississippi River. She is one of the few authentic riverboats left in the United States today, using her stern wheels as her only means of propulsion. Cruise with your crew for a unique voyage not to forget!

"Bring your friends; this one-of-a-kind event is the perfect opportunity for a chance to build new relationships, re-connect with old ones, share resources, and discover new opportunities. Come watch the sun set over



The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Women's Success Network is looking forward to another magical night on Webster Lake, aboard the Indian Princess.

Webster Lake, sit back, relax, and cruise with your crew!" said BVCC President and CEO Jeanie Hebert.

Register online at www.blackstonevalley.org/events. Members \$40, Future Members \$50. Please RSVP by June 15, 2023. For more information, please contact Liz O'Neil at 508.234.9090 ext. 102 or email Liz at loneil@blackstonevalley.org.

The Chamber celebrated a

ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 18th for the new Discern'd Cannabis Purveyors at 130 Worcester Street in North Grafton.

Discern'd's goal is to introduce and educate the Blackstone Valley community about the full spectrum benefits of cannabis. Discern'd seeks to educate, curate and cultivate knowledge of cannabis by building a comfortable, approachable space where the community can learn about the myriad ways cannabis can

be used to enhance people's lives. Discern'd's highly trained staff will take the time to listen to customers' wants, needs and objectives to provide an assortment of product selections that can optimize their lifestyle.

"I enjoy discussing cannabis with my fellow Chamber members because there's much intrigue around the industry, and those conversations with business professionals help to further break down stigmas associated

with the industry," Allan Villatoro, MBA, chief executive officer of Discern'd, said. "I look forward to welcoming Blackstone Valley Chamber members and the public into our store where we strive to continue those conversations with our certified cannabis professionals."



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The month of June at Southwick's Zoo in Mendon swings into high gear on the 11th, a Sunday, with a program called "Passionate About Primates!" from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The day is for people who are "bananas about primates!" Visitors can learn about the many monkeys and apes found at Southwick's, and there will be some fun primate-themed activities.

Father's Day Weekend on June 17th and 18th means a discounted admission purchase at the gate of \$15 for dads. The offer is available only for general admission tickets bought at the entrance those days. Discounts cannot be applied to pre-purchased admission and can-

not be applied to EARTH memberships, Value Passes, birthday party packages, field trip/group rates, and other discounted admission. They cannot be combined with other discounts, coupons, or offers. Discounts will only be applied to the admission of fathers and cannot be used for additional party members.

"Zoo Neighbors Day" occurs on Monday, June 26th from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Admission at the entrance will be \$15 for residents of Mendon, Uxbridge and Millville. An ID must be presented to receive a discount. This also cannot be applied for pre-purchased admission or other discount offers.

July at Southwick's kicks off with "Honor Teachers Day," also from 10:00 to 5:00. Admission will be free for teachers on July 2nd; the same conditions apply as above.

As a July 4th special, admission at the entrance will be just \$15.

This is followed by "Christmas in July" with the zoo decorated and everyone having a chance to meet Santa Claus.

"Zoo Babies Day" on Sunday, July 23rd from 10:00 to 5:00 gives visitors an opportunity to learn about this year's newest arrivals. Birth certificates will be placed round the zoo to highlight the baby animals born within the past year, and the zoo's docents will have educational tables set up around the grounds.

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Daniels Farmstead poised for 13th season of Farmers' Markets

The Daniels Farmstead in Blackstone is gearing up for its 13th season of Farmers' Markets, beginning the first Sunday in July.

The Farmers' Markets will be held every Sunday starting July 2nd through October 1st, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Daniels Farmstead has a number of special events planned for this year too, including on July 2nd when it will host a Fourth at the Farm celebration.

On September 17th there will be an Apple Festival and Pie Contest and on September 24th an Antique Tractor, Truck and Car Show.

In addition to the special events, each Sunday morning the market will feature a local musical artist or group.

Everyone is welcome to visit and enjoy the property; shop from a wonderful selection of vendors offering fresh local produce, dairy products, bakery items, specialty sweets and fudges, handmade candles, soaps, quilts and more.

Doris's Kichen will be open for lunch as well.

House tours are available.

Daniels Farmstead is actively seeking volunteers, docents and



vendors for the 2023 Farmers' Markets season. If you would like to be involved with one of the Blackstone Valley's historic gems, email

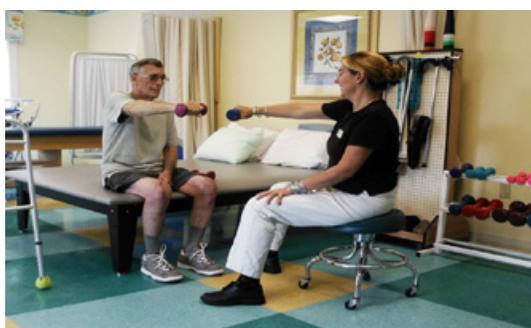
info@danielsfarmstead.org or visit the Daniels Farmstead Foundation website at www.danielsfarmstead.org.

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Harbro Auto Sales celebrating 50 years in business

BY ROD LEE

Mike Hare, who is a principal in Harbro Auto Sales, believes that family and faith are why the dealership has survived and flourished for fifty years now.

Harbro, with locations in Whitinsville and Webster, is operating in typical low-key fashion as the business celebrates its golden anniversary. But this does not mean the milestone is going unrecognized. For brothers Mike and Mark Hare, there is enor-



Harbro Auto Sales is a family-run business, fifty years strong.



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mous satisfaction in carrying on a venture started in 1973 by their father Tim and Tim's brother Dave (recently deceased).

They take pride too in knowing that younger members of the family are now part of Harbro, which is highly respected in the Blackstone Valley and South County.

Mike Hare credits this to his elders' insistence on honesty and integrity. "We want people to have the right moral compass," he says. "I attribute that to my dad and my Uncle Dave; and my grandfather raised them that way."

Mike is three and a half years older than Mark. Both were introduced to the business at a young age. "As soon as I could hold a screwdriver my dad had

me working in the bicycle shop, on pedals and reflectors and then I graduated to helping build bikes, then washing cars, emptying trash. I couldn't reach the roof of the cars, I wasn't tall enough. I literally grew up in the store. I think it was more of a babysitting thing! The conversation, it was interesting for a kid to be around that environment. I chose management, sales and finance. Day-to-day, Mark oversees inventory, mechanical prep, service, reconditioning. I still work most Saturdays. We work hand-in-hand on most management decisions and those areas blend a lot. We are on the phone with each other at all hours of the day."



Harbro brothers Dave and Tim Hare

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With so many loved ones including sons and daughters and nieces and nephews involved, "I think of it as almost a family farm," Mike says.

One aspect of plans to mark the 50th has been a renovation of the building on Providence Road in Whitinsville.

Best of all, "being a small business you can get home to see your family at night," Mike says.

\$200,000 matching grant a boost to AHM's Hanoi Hilton exhibit

The American Heritage Museum in Hudson has been awarded a \$200,000 matching grant as part of the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) admin-

istered by MassDevelopment and the Massachusetts Cultural Council. The American Heritage Museum is one of ninety-four cultural organizations in the Commonwealth that will be receiving portions of the \$7,661,000 total funds distributed. This important funding will enable the AHM to complete the "Hanoi Hilton" Vietnam POW Exhibit expansion that has taken place within the



war during the Southeast Asia era.

The AHM is renowned for its commitment to preserving and showcasing the rich heritage of the armed forces of the United States from the Revolutionary War through modern conflicts, and the addition of the Vietnam POW exhibit represents a significant milestone in this mission. The exhibit will provide visitors with an immersive experience, shedding light on the harrowing ordeal of American prisoners of

war during the Southeast Asia era. "We are deeply grateful to MassDevelopment and the Mass Cultural Council for their recognition and support," Rob Collings, president of the AHM, said. "This matching grant enables us to bring to life an important chapter in our nation's history and pay tribute to the incredible valor displayed by the POWs of the Vietnam War. It is our honor to provide a platform where their stories can be heard, understood and appreciated by present and future generations." The Hanoi Hilton Vietnam War POW exhibit features the reconstruction of an actual cell of the infamous Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi where American POWs were held from 1965 to 1973. From their shutdown and capture into months of interrogation and torture, isolation and inhumane captivity, the fortitude and determination that was shown by these POWs will be on full display for visitors to the AHM. Through the use of cutting-edge technology, multimedia installations and authentic historical

artifacts, the AHM aims to foster a deep understanding of the sacrifices made by these POWs up to their release in 1973. The AHM opened the per-

manent exhibit in February as part of the 50th anniversary commemorations of Operation Homecoming, the return of the POWs.

manent exhibit in February as part of the 50th anniversary commemorations of Operation Homecoming, the return of the POWs.



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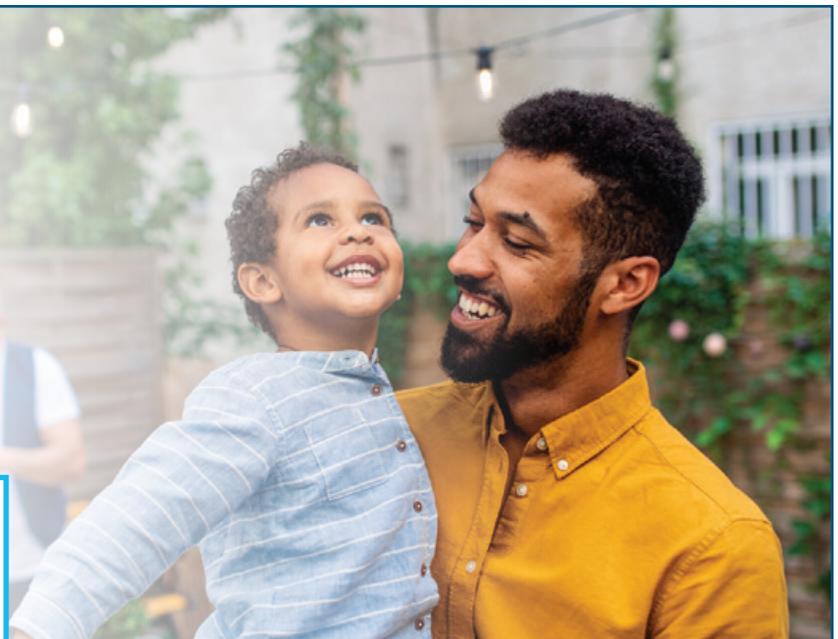
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Hiring headache real at restaurants, including Bentley Pub

BY ROD LEE

Life for restaurateurs like Steve Bingham of Bentley Pub in Auburn is about to get even more difficult in the days ahead, Stephen Clark, president and CEO of the Massachusetts Restaurant Association says.

Recently, Mr. Clark told a gathering of business leaders at the University of Massachusetts Club, as reported by the State House News Service, that profitability for restaurants is down in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the biggest impacts stemming from inflation and labor costs.

Now, there is a move afoot to raise the Commonwealth's minimum wage still again, by another

dollar, from \$15 per hour. This would translate into a \$1000 increase per employee, which would have a "cascading effect" for all workers in the industry.

"I don't have any minimum wage issues," Mr. Bingham told The Feisty Fork on June 1st. "I have no employees working at minimum wage. I do have servers working at \$6.75 per hour."

Bentley Pub's more pressing challenge is on the hiring front.

"Very difficult," Mr. Bingham said, of finding people to work. And it's across the board at Bentley Pub, wait staff, line cooks and so on.

The MRA's Mr. Clark does not believe the minimum wage fight will resurface this year, but it could in 2024.

The Raise Up Massachusetts coalition—a meshing of organized labor and community groups that influenced passage in 2018 of

the "grand bargain" law, setting Massachusetts on the path to a \$15 minimum wage—now has its sights set on another hike. The coalition is backing legislation that would gradually increase the minimum wage to \$20 by 2027 and nearly double the minimum wage for tipped workers to \$12 an hour. The latter move would definitely impact Bentley Pub.

In the interim, Steve Bingham says the minimum wage issue is undoubtedly of more concern to "consumers" in Central Massachusetts. "It doesn't affect me as much as the person who pays \$30 for a meal at McDonald's," he says.

The Raise Up people filed paperwork in March exploring an initiative petition, the goal of which, they say, is "building shared prosperity in the Commonwealth through higher minimum wages and fair and adequate taxation."



A turkey burger plate at Bentley Pub in Auburn.

Small businesses should be forewarned, if this were to advance to become a ballot question in 2024, Steve Clark says.

Ballot questions are "very expensive to defend," he said.

Hiring challenges, inflation, labor costs and steep health-

insurance costs are battering small businesses; on top of this, nearly 60% of Bay Staters support a minimum wage increase to \$20 per hour.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

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NOTE: Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the *Happenings!* section of the *Xpress* newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.

JUNE 1-30

• "Views from a Palace," paintings and

travels he has made throughout Cape Cod, New Hampshire and North Carolina. Primarily self-taught, he has refined his craft under the tutelage of Ed Turner. Mr. Palace's skilled application of scumbling, crosshatching and burnishing can be seen in such works as "Taylor's Crossing" and "Times in the Orchard."

FRIDAY, JUNE 9

• The Sutton Historical Society will host a Brown Bag Picnic Reunion on the Sutton Town Common in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the construction of the General Rufus Putnam Museum building at 4 Uxbridge Road. This Picnic Reunion is for anyone who attended school in the building during its time as both an elementary and



The grand opening of *The Pewter Pot* in Whitinsville will be celebrated with a ribbon cutting on Friday, June 16 at 11:00 a.m.

drawings by Jim Palace, will be on display and for sale throughout the month at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster. A meet-the-artist reception will take place on Saturday, June 10 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Inspired by landscapes across the eastern coast, Mr. Palace's watercolors and colored pencil drawings capture views from the past several years involving

a high school. For more information or to share memories about the many uses to which the building has been put, including as a Masonic Hall, a DAR facility, a public school and a library, email Sutton1704@gmail.com.

• The Millbury Women's Club will host "Under the Tent," a concert with singing sensation Dan the Singing Trooper and his

wife Mary Colarusso a coloratura soprano performing, at 6:00 p.m.. There will be a cash bar, raffles and an evening of "incredibly beautiful and inspirational" entertainment. Contact Jane Cheetham for tickets at jane.cheetham@gmail.com. Space is limited.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10

• Picnic in the Park, the Whitin Community Center's popular event with food trucks, live entertainment, community vendors, a doll and pet parade, a dunk tank and more, returns to Whitin Park, 60 Main St., Whitinsville. Visit www.WhitinCommunityCenter.com for further details.

• St. Patrick's Church's Spring Recycling Event will take place at 7 East St., Whitinsville, from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Profits will benefit upcoming YIA service projects. Accepting gently used books (no encyclopedias), gently used textiles/clothing, electronics for a fee (no propane, batteries, light bulbs), rinsed bottles/cans returnable in MA, paper shredding (\$8 a box, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. only). Please keep items for each station separate. For more information and electronics pricing, call 508-234-5656 or email officesupport@mystpatrick.com.

will host a Yard Sale, 40 South St., Auburn, 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. No Early Birds please.

• Soorp Asdvadzadzin Armenian Church, 315 Church St., Whitinsville, will host its annual Community Yard Sale from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Vendor space is available. For reservations, email Jeff at katama@gmail.com.

• The Douglas Historical Society's Rhubarb Challenge on Main Street is back. Entries will be accepted between 10:00 and 11:00

HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 18

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HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 17

a.m. with judging set to begin at 11:00 a.m.
 • Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster, presents "An Evening of Music with Sam Bowen and Blue Cat Groove," an award-winning blues band based in New England. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. for the 6:30 p.m. show. General admission tickets

are limited and can be purchased in person at Booklovers' Gourmet, by calling 508-949-6232 or online at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/581099784097>.

• Get The Led Out performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 7:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

SUNDAY, JUNE 11

• The New England Country Music Club

hosts the Rustic Country band for entertainment and dancing at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 p.m. with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

• Kip Moore performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

JUNE 11 & JUNE 24

• The Northbridge Historical Commission in partnership with the Northbridge Historical Society and a funding grant from the Massachusetts Cultural Council will present a two-part historical event, "Connecting with Our Community through Culture, History and Architecture." This begins at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 11 in the Northbridge Town Hall Selectmen's Room. Then on Saturday, June 24, an Historical Trolley Tour of Northbridge will roll with four times of 9:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. or 1:00 p.m. offered. Reservations are required. Contact Christine Johnson at 508-395-9761 or email cfulone@verizon.net to register or for more information.

MONDAY, JUNE 12

• Blackstone Valley Tech's 24th annual golf tournament will be held at Highfields Golf & Country Club, 42 Magill Drive, Grafton will proceed benefitting the school's Education Foundation and Athletic Department activities and programs. Registration is



This 1928 Chrysler Model 72 Roadster is part of a stunning collection of classic-era automobiles that will be on display Father's Day weekend at the American Heritage Museum in Hudson.

\$150 for individuals and \$125 per person for a foursome and includes 18 holes on the championship course, golf cart and a buffet dinner. There will be a silent auction and raffles. To register, support the event as a sponsor or donate a raffle item, visit www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/golftournament.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14

• Lifelong Whitinsville resident and Telegram & Gazette writer Bill Ballou will present a history of the Whitin family at Plummer Place (the Northbridge Senior Center) from 9:30 to 10:15 a.m. Sign up in the main office.

THURSDAY, JUNE 15

• The Dudley Grange's annual Strawberry Festival will be held on the Grange's grounds on Dudley Hill at 139 Center Road.
 • The New Sound Assembly Barbershop Chorus will perform at Plummer Place (the Northbridge Senior Center) from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Light refreshments will be served. Sign up in the main office.

FRIDAY, JUNE 16

• The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce will host a grand opening ribbon-

HAPPENINGS!

continued on page 19

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HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 18

cutting ceremony for The Pewter Pot, 670 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville, at 11:00 a.m. The family-owned store is located in the former Linwood Mill Payroll Building and features old-fashioned primitive country and Amish furniture, décor, housewares, gifts, crafts, candles, soaps, natural dog treats, antiques and collectibles and home-

a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Many of the Collings Foundation's astounding classic automobiles will be out in the sunshine in a grandiose automobile presentation at 1:00 p.m. daily called American Elegance. Accompanying color vintage radio broadcast narration will be sure to entertain. Several other exhibitions and surprises will be afoot. Historic aircraft and tanks will be on display. The AHM will be open along with the two additional annex buildings on the

upholstered furniture or clothes. Contact sutton1704@gmail.com to donate.

The Friends of the Sutton Public Library will host a Book Sale from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rain or shine. Donations of books can be made the week prior to the event.

THURSDAY, JUNE 22

• "What's Up Doc," a women's health forum, will be held from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at Plummer Place (the Northbridge Senior Center), 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. This workshop will feature an open discussion with a panel including a female psychologist, a female psychiatrist "and our very own Dr. Maggie,"

a family medicine provider. Bring your questions, drop them off at the Center or email Amy at acowen@northbridgemass.org. Refreshments will be served. Sign up in the main office.

• "The Wonders of Whitinsville" will be presented at 50 Douglas Road in Whitinsville at 6:30 p.m. This program will explore the influence of the Whitin family in financing and managing a community into one of the most successful textile-manufacturing mill villages in New England. Sponsored by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

SUNDAY, JUNE 25

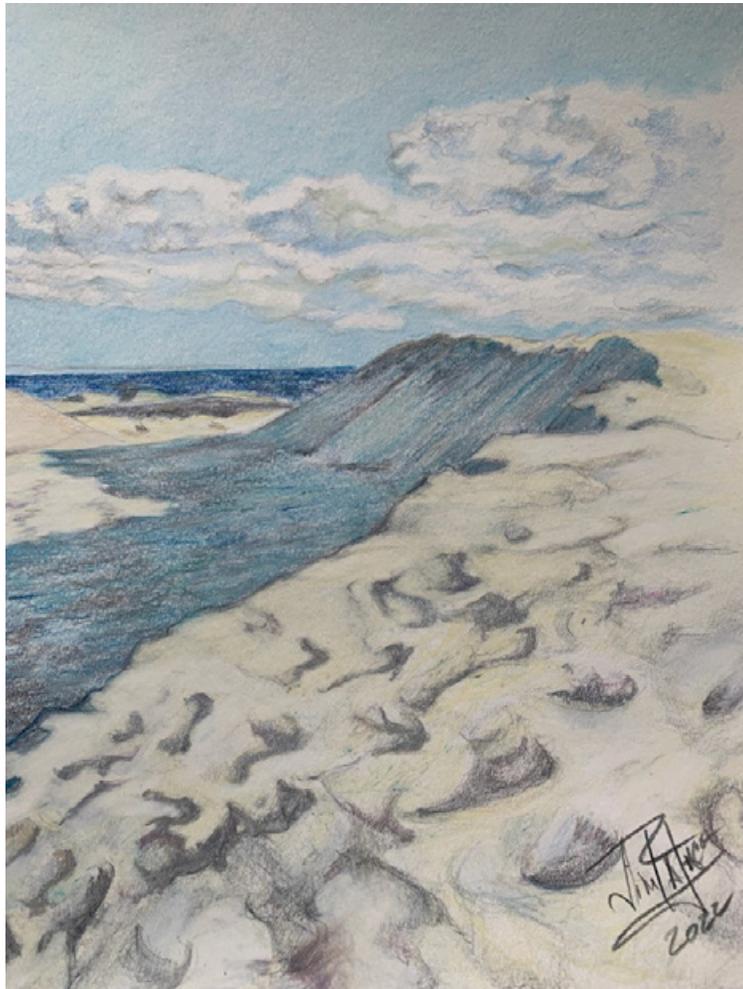
• The New England Country Music Club hosts the Rhode Island Rednecks for entertainment and dancing at the Progressive Club, 18 Whittin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 p.m. with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

THURSDAY, JUNE 29

• Dan Fontaine, an Elvis tribute artist, will

HAPPENINGS!

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A seascape by Jim Palace, whose artwork is on display all month at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster.

town Americana. In heralding the event, which is free and open to the public, BVCC President and CEO Jeannie Hebert said visitors will delight in The Pewter Pot's "warm aromas of fresh wood, burning candles and coffee."

SATURDAY, JUNE 17

• "Tanks, Wings & Wheels—Featuring American Elegance," will highlight Father's Day Weekend at the American Heritage Museum, 568 Main St., Hudson, from 9:00

campus: the AHM aircraft hangar and the AHM automobile collection. Visit american-heritagemuseum.org for further details.

• The Sutton Historical Society will host its Annual Town-Wide Yard Sale from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Participant registration forms can be found at sutton-historicalsocietyinc.org. Cost to take part is \$10. New this year is the option to pay via UNIPAY. The Society accepts yard sale donations; please not items such as TVs, computers, monitors,

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HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 19

return to Plummer Place (the Northbridge Senior Center), 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, for a performance from 12:00 noon to 1:30 p.m. Lunch is a Memphis-themed barbecue. Tickets are \$10 each with a limit of two tickets per person.

SATURDAY, JULY 1

• Chase Rice performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

THURSDAY, JULY 6

• "Architects and Anarchists: who has the power to make big decisions in your community" a program sponsored by the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, will be presented at 6:30 p.m. at 12 Hopedale

St. in Hopedale. This is a walkabout and will include a long history of habitation in the area and continue through the construction of large Draper workers' houses in the late 1800s.

JULY 2-OCTOBER 1

• Daniels Farmstead in Blackstone is open for its 13th season of Farmers' Markets, every Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Email info@danielsfarmstead.org for further details or visit the Daniels Farmstead Foundation website at www.danielsfarmstead.org.

SUNDAY, JULY 9

• Rumours: The Ultimate Fleetwood Mac Tribute Show, takes the stage at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 10

• "Of Farms and Factories:" Tour a history farm and homestead in beautiful Sutton at Waters Farm, 53 Waters Road, at 6:30 p.m. Presented by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, this walkabout

will show the important role local farmers have played in the evolution of industry in New England. The program is being presented in collaboration with Waters Farm Preservation Inc.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 17

• "Adaptive Reuse in Manchaug:" This program is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. at Manchaug Mills, 9 Main St., Sutton, and it will show how the creative adaptation of an old industrial complex can take shape. Attendees will meet local historian Christine Watkins who will discuss the opportunities and challenges of working in a restored mill space. The program is being presented by the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in partnership with Deb Dunleavy of Manchaug Mills Inc.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 24

• The Silver Club of the Uxbridge Senior Center is planning a trip to The Theatre by the Sea to see the show "Jersey Boys." There will be a sit-down lunch at Bravo by the Sea with meal choices of haddock, chicken or pasta. Bus pickups will be at the Millbury

Park and Ride in Millbury and at the Dollar General in Whitinsville. The cost including driver gratuity is \$150. Call Sue at 508-476-5820 for more details about this trip and a five-day trip in September to Penn Dutch to see the brand new show "Daniel" at Sight and Sound Theatre.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 26

• The 2nd Annual Parking Lot Craft Fair sponsored by the Auburn Historical Society & Museum will be held at 41 South St., Auburn, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rain or shine. Vendors are welcome. Contact Helen at auburnmuseum@verizon.net to reserve a space for \$15.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Andrew Noone, author of "Bathsheba Spooner: A Revolutionary Murder Conspiracy," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Mark Savoio of the Thompson Historical Society for the presentation "The Mass 15th of the Civil War and Wilder Holbrook, Sutton," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

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Co-op and careers celebrated at BVT signing-day event

The Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) held its third annual Career Signing Day on May 12th. The ceremony celebrated its senior Co-op and career placement students who announced their career plans and signed a commitment letter to work with their employer after graduation.

Vocational Director Michele Denise welcomed the graduating seniors, their parents, instructors, industry partners, and school administrators before recognizing individual student achievement in their trade areas and the Co-op program, which had 134 seniors participate this year, representing double the number of job placements from the previous two years and illustrating the local demand for skilled employees. These employable young adults have worked 54,500 hours collectively since April 2022, earning an estimated salary of \$874,000 over the past year.

During the ceremony, employment contracts were signed with representatives from local companies.

Douglas residents: Jacob Rinaldi and Sam Yanis. Jacob, a senior in the Plumbing program at BVT, will take his vocational-technical training as a gasfitter to his Co-op employer, Dileo Gas, in Worcester, MA. In addition, Jacob will be working towards a journeyman plumber license, hazmat license, and CDL license.

Sam, a Painting & Design program senior, has worked at Crumbly Cookie in Millbury, MA, and will continue full-time employment as a crew member and baker. In addition, Sam hopes to be a shift leader, manager, and franchisee.

Grafton resident Ashley Waldo, a senior in the Plumbing program at BVT, was one of many who signed a contract. Ashley will take her vocational-technical training as a plumbing apprentice to her Co-op employer, G&C Plumbing, in Franklin, MA. Next, she will work towards a journeyman license with the long-term goal of becoming a licensed master plumber.

Millbury residents: Brianne Lau-

dani and David Perry.

Brianne is a senior in the Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication program at BVT. She has secured a position as a pipe welder after graduation with the Frank Rounds Company, where she hopes to continue learning and growing her welding skills and obtain as many certifications and licenses as possible.

David is a senior in the Plumbing program at BVT. He has accepted an apprentice plumber position with R. Harris Plumbing & Heating, Inc., with a long-term goal of obtaining a master plumber license.

Northbridge resident Luke Scholl, a senior in the Electrical program at BVT, was one of many who signed a contract. Luke will take his vocational-technical training as an electrical apprentice to his Co-op employer, Wayne J. Griffin Electric. Next, he will work towards a journeyman license and becoming a master electrician.

Sutton residents: Ethan Gervais, Jackson Lapointe, Lena Paroulidis, Evan Thebeerge, and Ben Tufts.

Ethan, a senior in the Plumbing program at BVT, will take his vocational-technical training as an apprentice plumber to his Co-op employer R. Harris Plumbing, where he will work to obtain a journeyman plumbers license.

Jackson, a senior in the Electrical program, will take his skilled training as an Electrical Apprentice to his Co-op employer Wayne J. Griffin Electric, whose long-term goal of becoming a Master Electrician with a degree in Electrical Engineering.

Lena, a senior in the Plumbing program at BVT, will take her training as an apprentice plumber to her Co-op employer, Nicolopoulos Plumbing and Heating in Sutton, MA, with a long-term goal of becoming a Master Plumber.

Evan, a senior in the Electronics & Engineering Technology program at BVT, will take his training as a Test Technician 1 to his Co-op employer Columbia Tech.

Ben, a senior in the Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication program at BVT, hopes to continue to master his pipe welder skills and abilities with the Frank Rounds

Company and obtain his pipe fitting license and as many certifications as possible.

With all their energy and enthusiasm, these seniors earning nearly a million dollars in one year of Co-op placements have found their financial footing using their vocational skills and technical training. Of course, they'll continue to gain more experience with full-time employment and on-the-job training. But they've proven to their employers that they're ready to go,

full steam ahead, directly from high school into high-skill, high-wage employment.

While many students signed contracts during the ceremony, several more who could not attend due to work conflicts are also headed directly to industry careers. For more details about the school and this event, please visit www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/careersigningday2023.

About Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT): Blackstone Valley Regional

Vocational Technical High School serves the towns of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge. Located in the heart of the Blackstone Valley, BVT creates a positive learning community that prepares students for personal and professional success in an internationally competitive society through a fusion of rigorous vocational, technical, and academic skills.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Luke becomes a dirt digger, and teaches a lesson

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Spring 2023 has brought forth new growth in Luke's personality. More specifically, he's become a dirt digger. I've watched him swipe dirt with the speed of a texting teen. My lawn, verdant with

fresh grass and deep holes, reflects life with a grown pup. "I need to get to the bottom of this." Head down, tail stiff, his focus is manic. Fresh dirt falls like powdered sugar around new holes. He looks up at me every so often like a lion who's found chocolate pudding in the garbage. "I like to dig."

Dogs, Google tells me, dig because they are bored or to bury prey. Luke Valentino, a current

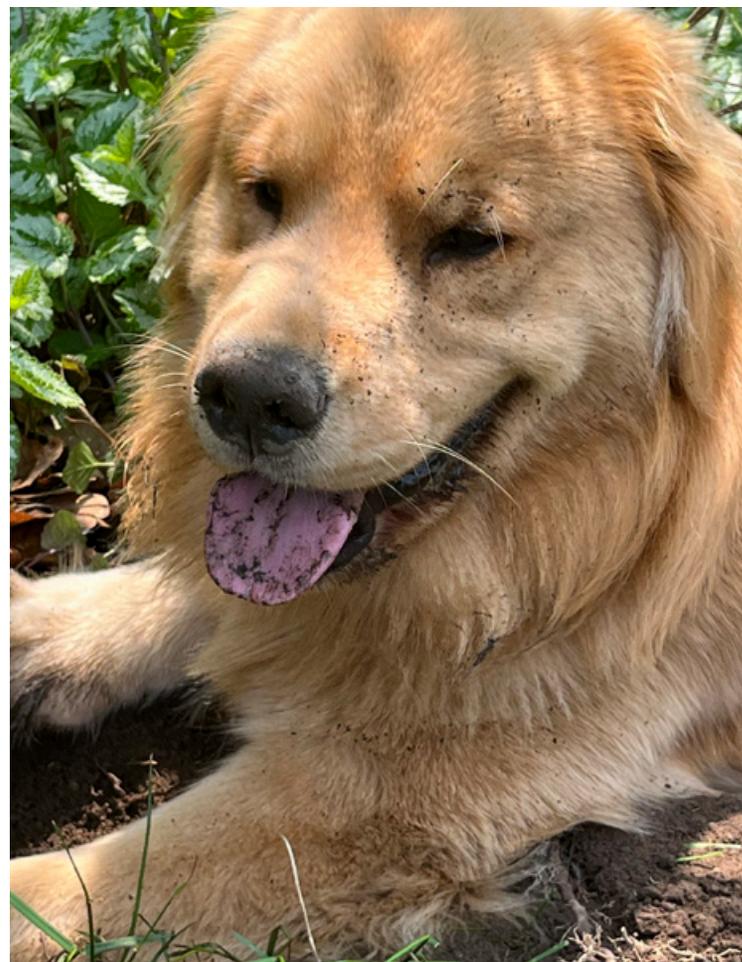
unneutered male, exposes a third reason.

"Luke. Please." I caught him peeing on a worm after sniffing (and digging) him out. "I don't know who you think you are Mr. Slime, but I'm the boss of this yard." Dirty deeds aside, I can't help but appreciate my pup's natural tendency to play in the earth. I've watched him zoom around the yard like a fool falling in love. I've watched him rub his back in the grass as though scratching an itch. I've watched him sniff new blooms.

Spring has sprung. My pup wants a taste of it.

"We need to do something about Luke's digging. He's wrecking the whole yard." My husband is unimpressed by Luke's spring cheer. Keeping up with the Jones's is difficult with a sixteen-month-old digger. He grabs Luke by the collar to (literally) rub his nose in the dirt. "Nooooo."

Luke smiles down at one of numerous holes. "That bitch was my best work yet."



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Never a fan of shame and blame, I've found that applying "natural consequences" works better for my adolescent pup. Imagine scolding a child for building a sandcastle in the sand. "How dare you make that hole in the earth!" The process of digging is natural and playful, an act of innocence and an expression of a dog's personality. Luke is a big kid wearing a fur coat. Besides, Luke Valentino, quite admirably, has not chewed on a single piece of furniture, as many pups do. Granted, he's torn the guts out of a stuffed elephant, but that's about it. "It's just a phase," I tell my husband. "Leave Luke alone. He's just being

a dog." My dog-friendly rationale has led to a rather ironic outcome. I've respected my pup's needs to be a dog and, in turn, he's understood my human side.

"You do yard work, Momma?" Luke watches me use a pitchfork to make final touches to one more dirt-filled hole. He stares up at me with a champion smile. His body is finally catching up to his head. He's a beautiful, curious dog. I read his mind. "My Momma is so good at everything she sets her mind to. She types and dances and does yard work, too. Look at her go!" Dogs love us unconditionally. They have no agenda or expectations for us. They love every part of us.

"Luke, want to go for a walk?" My cheek is smeared with dirt, but Luke doesn't notice.

He translates the offer. I watch his smile close then open again as he thinks about it. "I was thinking the same thing!! I love going for walks!"

"You created a lot of work for Mummy, Luke. You'll have to wait." I emphasize the word wait. He inspects the covered hole and smiles again. I can tell he's thinking about his actions. "Let's go for a walk!" But not for long. Luke is a dog. His

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REAL ESTATE

Why homebuyers need an expert agent by their side

The process of buying a home can feel a bit intimidating, even under normal circumstances. And today's market is not normal. There continues to be a very limited number of homes for sale, and that's creating bidding wars and driving home prices back up as buyers compete over the available homes.

BY MARK MARZEOTTI

Navigating all of this can be difficult if you're trying to do it alone. That's why having a skilled expert to guide you through the home buying process is super important, especially today. Advice and guidance from a professional real estate agent can be invaluable, especially during a hot or unpredictable housing market.

Here are just a few of the ways a REALTOR, or real estate expert, makes a big difference:

Experience. We know the ins and outs of what's happening today, how it impacts buyers, and how to manage any hurdles that may pop up.

Education. Knowledge is power when it comes to buying a home. We will simply and effectively explain market conditions and translate what they mean for you so you can feel confident in your decision.

Negotiations. We advocate for your best interests. Having an expert on your side provides assistance with the written offer and purchase agreement. We also help you negotiate potential seller concessions if the inspection reveals issues with the home.

Contracts. We guide you through the disclosures and contracts necessary in today's heavily regulated environment.

Pricing. Making an offer and negotiating with a seller can be one of the most difficult and stressful

parts of the home-buying process. We will help you understand what similar homes are selling for so you have the full picture of what you may want to offer.

All of these reasons combined may be why 86% of recent buyers used an agent according to the latest Home Buyers and Sellers Generational Trends Report from the National Association of Realtors (NAR). NAR also has this to say about why an agent is so essential today:

"A great real estate agent will guide you through the home search with an unbiased eye, helping you meet your buying objectives while staying within your budget. Agents are also a great source when you have questions about local amenities, utilities, zoning rules, contractors, and more."

What's the key to choosing the right expert? It starts with trust. You'll want to know you can trust the advice they're giving you, so you need to make sure you're connected with a true professional. No one can provide perfect advice

because it's impossible to know exactly what's going to happen at every turn, especially in today's market. But a true professional like the Marzeotti Group can give you the best possible advice based on the information and situation at hand.

We will help advocate for you throughout the process and coach you on the essential knowledge you need to make confident decisions.

That's exactly what you want and deserve. It's critical to have an expert on your side who is skilled in navigating today's housing market. If you're planning to buy a home this year, connect with a member of The Marzeotti Group or another trusted real estate advisor who will give you the best advice and guide you along the way.




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LUKE
continued from page 22

guilt is short-lived. He's moved on three seconds ago. We move away from the hole (pun intended) incident. Boredom strikes a few days later. A young dog's energy is boundless. There aren't enough hours in the day, it seems, to take Luke on the walks, runs, playdates, and dog-friendly adventures which he requires. I gaze down at my yard to see the latest surprise, one that takes my breath away.

"What are you doing, Luke?" Luke is digging another hole, but this one is different. This one is created at the border of my Mother's Day Garden, in a spot naturally "prepped" for a new flower. "What do you think, Momma?" I can barely believe my eyes. He shows me his work with a nose smeared in dirt. My yard is expansive. He could have dug in so

many other areas but, instead, he chose this one. My mind draws up the memory. A few weeks back he sat and watched me plant flowers there.

He lifts his chin while I pet him. "I was thinking you could plant more flowers here, and that way you'll always remember me—Luke Valentino—your favorite Golden Retriever."

I cover the hole, but not completely. I think about all the dogs I've had; good dogs I've loved, missed, and cried for. Someday, I'll wish for one more day to watch Luke Valentino dig one more hole. Dog owners understand the empty holes in our hearts when we lose our pets. What I wouldn't give to have one more day with Lincoln!

"I love you, Luke." I massage the ears of my young dog's big head.

I've since planted marigolds in this garden for my favorite golden, Luke Valentino. There's no need to wait for his passing to

remember him. He's with me now and, together, we're filling the holes.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com
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Sen. Moore hails passage of \$55.9 state budget for FY 24

On May 25 the Massachusetts Senate approved a \$55.9 billion budget for Fiscal Year 2024. Following a robust and engaging debate process, the Senate approved 478 amendments, adding \$82.2 million in spending to the budget. As the Commonwealth continues to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Senate's budget prioritizes upholding fiscal discipline and responsibility, and supports the long-term economic health of the state. The Senate budget delivers historic levels of investment in education, housing, regional transportation, health care, workforce development, climate preparedness, and much more, while centering equity and opportunity as part of a broader, more comprehensive strategy to make Massachusetts more affordable, inclusive, and competitive.

"The single most important thing we can do as legislators is make investments that will pay dividends for years down the road. By choosing to invest in the Commonwealth's people, services, industry, and infrastructure, we are doing exactly that with the passage of the FY24 Senate Budget," Sen. Michael Moore, D-Millbury, said. "I'm pleased that my colleagues and I were able to come together to make smart, targeted, and responsible investments in the

parts of the Commonwealth that need it the most. I'm also thrilled that I was able to secure 14 amendments, including local earmarks for each and every community in the Second Worcester District. I'd like to thank Senate President Karen Spilka, Senate Ways and Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, and my Senate colleagues for their leadership during this budget debate."

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means' budget recommends a total of \$55.8 billion in spending, a \$3.4 billion increase over the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) Budget. This spending recommendation is based on a tax revenue estimate of \$40.41 billion for FY24, representing 1.6 percent growth with an additional \$1 billion from the new Fair Share surtax, as agreed upon during the Consensus Revenue process in January.

Remaining vigilant about the current fiscal environment, the Committee's FY24 budget adheres to sound fiscal discipline and builds up available reserves for the state's Stabilization Fund. The fund has grown to a record high of \$7.16 billion and is projected to close FY24 at \$9.07 billion, ensuring that the Commonwealth continues to have the means to uphold fiscal responsibility during a time of

ongoing economic volatility.

The Senate's FY24 budget also sets aside \$575 million to pay for a progressive tax relief package that will center equity and chip away at the headwinds that threaten Massachusetts competitiveness. This tax package will be discussed and debated following the conclusion of the FY24 budget process.

Amendments secured by Senator Moore include:

STATEWIDE

- Expanding access to contraceptives – authorizes local pharmacists to prescribe hormonal contraceptives when appropriate, based on rules to be determined by the Department of Public Health

- REDO Funding Guardrails – requires at least 75 percent of funding allocated to Regional Economic Development Organizations (REDOs) is used by REDOs themselves, and not for state-directed "special projects"

- Accelerated Repair Program Spending Cap Exemption – exempts the Accelerated Repair Program from the Massachusetts School Building Authority's statutory spending cap

- \$1.526 million to fund Court-Appointed Special Advocate programs across the Commonwealth, including \$430,000 for these

programs in Worcester County

- \$400,000 in additional funding for hate crime prevention programs in elementary and secondary public schools in Massachusetts, bringing the total funding to \$800,000

- \$100,000 for Bottom Line, Inc to support its college transition and retention services for low-income and first-generation college students

- \$200,000 to fund updated sound tests along Massachusetts' highway sound barriers

REGIONAL

- \$500,000 in additional funding for the Massachusetts Academy of Math and Science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, bringing the total funding to \$2 million

- \$83,000 to Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School to remove and replace a 30-year-old underground storage tank; \$25,000 is provided by Senator Ryan Fattman (R-Sutton)

- \$40,000 to the Lake Quinsigamond Commission to manage invasive plants, monitor water quality, provide educational opportunities, and upgrade waterway navigation markers

WORCESTER

- \$100,000 to CENTRO Inc in Worcester for the operation of their Minority Economic Empowerment and Home Ownership Center

- \$60,000 to the City of Worcester to support additional emergency housing for unsheltered families in Worcester

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Committee's budget – in addition to funding traditional accounts like Chapter 70 education aid – further demonstrates the Senate's commitment to state-local partnerships, dedicating meaningful resources that touch all regions

and meet the needs of communities across the Commonwealth. This includes \$1.27 billion in funding for Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA), an increase of \$39.4 million over FY 2023, to support additional resources for cities and towns. In addition to traditional sources of local aid, the Committee's budget increases payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) for state-owned land to \$51.5 million, an increase of \$6.5 million over FY 2023. PILOT funding is a vital source of supplemental local aid for cities and towns working to protect and improve access to essential services and programs during recovery from the pandemic. Other local investments include:

- \$194 million for Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) to support regional public transportation systems, including \$100 million from Fair Share funds to support our RTAs that help to connect all regions of our Commonwealth.

- \$47.3 million for libraries, including \$16.7 million for regional library local aid, after an increase of \$750,000 through the amendment process, \$17.6 million for municipal libraries and \$6.2 million for technology and automated resource networks.

- \$25 million for the Massachusetts Cultural Council to support local arts, culture and creative economy initiatives.

The FY24 Senate Budget will soon be available on the Massachusetts legislature's website: <https://malegislature.gov/Budget/FY2024/SenateBudget>. <https://malegislature.gov/Budget/>

A conference committee will now be appointed to reconcile differences between the versions of the budget passed by the Senate and House of Representatives.



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SPORTS

Uxbridge girls tennis team all in, in bid for a state title

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Two years ago, the Uxbridge girls tennis team lost to Advanced Math and Science Academy in the semifinals of the Central Mass Division 3 State Tournament. Last season the Spartan racketeers, as a 21 seed, took out Mount Greylock Academy (4-1), St John Paul II (3-2) and Monomoy Regional (4-1) to earn themselves a spot in the Division 4 State Tournament. Unfortunately, Uxbridge fell to the number one seed and eventual State Champion Hamilton-Wenham.

As they enter their final season under the guidance of Coach Joe McCourt, the now seniors are looking to make a run for a State Championship before they depart. The squad of all juniors last spring went 16-5 and set the school record for most wins in a season and want to improve upon their legacies before they leave.

Having all seven positions on the tennis courts filled by seniors this year, Coach McCourt sat the

team down prior to the season to ask them which way the team wanted to go.

“At the beginning of the season I gave all the girls an option – does everyone want to play during the season, or do we go for the State Tournament with the seniors,” McCourt said. “They wanted to go for the Championship. So, for the majority of time, we’ll go with the seniors, but will occasionally throw in some of the underclassmen.”

With the entire team all in McCourt said the girls hit the ground running this season, instead of getting off to a slow start like a year prior. Occasionally the coach will have a couple of underclassmen playing second doubles for the team so that they are preparing for next season.

Twins Julie and Sophie Compston will play in the top two singles positions for the Spartans hoping to do the impossible this season. Julie will hold down the number one singles spot once again and at the time of this writing had posted an impressive 7-1 record. According to

McCourt, she had built upon her foundation of a year ago and is continuing to play an all-around great game each time she steps onto the court.

Her twin sister Sophie has been phenomenal and has yet to lose a match thus far this season.

“She has been rock solid,” McCourt said. “She drives her opponents crazy and although she doesn’t have the pace of her sister, she is very knowledgeable and more consistent.”

McCourt went on to say that both girls have mental toughness and always seem to find ways to win. In fact, he recalled the first day they showed up for tryouts.

“I always put the new girls on court six to see what they’ve got,” he said. “Within five minutes I had seen enough and moved them over to work out with the older girls on court one.”

Samantha Hinchcliffe began her tennis career with Uxbridge having no background in the sport whatsoever. However, through the years she has built a reliable and steady game. She continued to work hard at third

singles and now is working with the twins on a daily basis to improve her game. Hinchcliffe is currently 6-2 on the season at third singles.

Slotted as Uxbridge’s first doubles team are best friends Avery Guillette and Bella Nolan. The tandem, which had no tennis experience prior to high school, has been together forever and formed the ideal doubles team.

“They really don’t need to communicate with one another during a match,” the coach said. “They cover the court well and their game has truly developed, they’re coachable and want to get better. Last year they won the Southern Worcester County League (SWCL) Doubles Tournament.”

Rounding out the seniors to take to the court are Abby Sanches and Ella Haker, who play second doubles for the Spartans. According to the coach, the duo has developed a good kinship with one another on the court over the years. While Uxbridge is looking for that elusive title, second doubles is the position where

McCourt can rotate some of the younger girls into the game to get then experience on the court. Doing this allows the coach to get the younger girls prepared for the future without the seven seniors.

Prior to the season McCourt had the entire team set personal goals, but he didn’t allow them to share them with him. As for the team goals the Uxbridge coach is hoping that the team can once again capture the SWCL, it would be their third straight; win the Central Mass Tournament; Get back into the Final 4 and eventually be victorious in the State Finals Championships.

“You need to take steps to get to the ultimate goal,” McCourt said. “This year the girls have been playing a little better than last year and our quality of play has been much better.”

Currently Uxbridge is 8-0 and looking to improve upon last year’s historic 16-win season as they make their way to a potential State Title.

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Faulty ignition switch may require replacement of lock module

Q. I have a 2006 Nissan Murano with keyless intelligent key system. (Not stop/start button) I cannot get the ignition switch to turn on to any position. The steering wheel is locked due to the security system. I tried rocking steering wheel, no help there. I have replaced key fob batteries in both fobs. Also tried to use both Mechanical Keys, but the ignition



BY JOHN PAUL

switch will not turn. I can lock and unlock doors remotely, so some keyless functions are working. Some research I have done seems to point to Keyless Entry Module Part or ignition switch assembly. Any thoughts on what is causing this problem?

A. There was a recall for a faulty ignition switch. Perhaps the switch itself is bad, sometimes if you gently turn the key while tapping on the end of the key it will get the lock tumblers to line up. Other than that, the lock module which is a complete assembly is usually faulty and quite expensive at \$675

plus a couple of hours labor to install it.

Q. This is a problem I am having with my 2021 Honda Ridgeline; I had an accident on the first of September 2022 and my Ridgeline is still in the body shop, and I cannot get the parts to fix it. I have called Honda and we have gotten some of the parts but currently I still need one more part. Honda said they would call me and tell me what was going on, but there has been no return call. What can I do?

A. Unfortunately, I am hearing this issue of body parts availability across the country. I would continue to keep checking with the local dealer or wherever the parts are coming from to try to get to the top of the list-sometimes the squeaky wheel does get the grease. Yes, I would also call Honda customer service (800- 999-1009) to see if they can expedite the parts.

Q. Hope you can provide insight as to what is going on with my 2021 Hyundai Palisade's factory installed navigation system. I do have a repair appointment at the dealer, which is weeks away. Until several days ago, all worked well. The navigation screen loads correctly, the maps are accurate, and I can enter and set the destination information. So far so good. When I press "go" for the actual directions however, the system shows "unsuccessful," and directions will not process. All other car functions (radio, phone, etc.) run well.

A. There can be some issues with Apple CarPlay interfering with GPS commands. There are also at least two software updates for the GPS, I would just let the dealer check for any available updates and go from there.

Q. My 2020 Subaru Forester has about 32,000 miles on it I stopped using Subaru for oil changes at 28,000 because it drove me crazy that they consistently overfilled the crankcase by one-half quart. I know this is common. I use Valvoline 0W-20 Extended full synthetic and Subaru filters. At about 30,000 I took a trip to New Hampshire in February. Overnight temps. dropped to -20F. When I started the car in the morning it turned over reluctantly. About 1,500 miles after the trip, I noticed that the engine had consumed about 1/4 to 1/3 quart of oil. Could the cold start have damaged the engine (rings) and

caused the increased consumption?

A. No, these engines are designed for cold climates and as long as the car is driven reasonably when cold it should be fine. Subaru is a little unique in that they have a blue light that comes on when the engine is cold to remind the driver to take it easy until the engine warms up. Generally, a cold engine will consume a bit more oil until the rings/pistons get up to operating temperature.

Q. Can you remove one battery wire at a time to clean the terminals without disconnecting the battery and losing setting and memory?

A. When you disconnect the battery (negative cable first) you will lose the memory for the radio, clock, and other settings. Some people will use a battery powered memory saver, some of which plug into the under-dash computer port or cigar lighter or 12-volt power point-if powered with the key off. Some technicians simply attach a jump pack to the battery cables, clean the cables and posts and reinstall the cables.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over forty years' experience and is an ASE-certified master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your questions to jpaul@aanortheast.com. Follow John on Twitter @johnfpaul and friend him on Facebook at [mrjohnfpaul](https://www.facebook.com/mrjohnfpaul).



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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Troubled history haunts Smith's Castle in Rhode Island

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The history of Smith's Castle in North Kingstown, Rhode Island goes as far back as 1637 when Roger Williams and Richard Smith established a trading post on the land for local tribes and colonists to swap goods.

Williams, the founder of the Rhode Island colony, felt it important to build a trading post in the area in order to make friends with the local tribes. Richard Smith migrated to present day North Kingstown to build a home there. It was at the time called Smith's Blockhouse, located in what is still known as Cocumcussoc. Being on the water, it seemed perfect for trade until the outbreak of King Philip's War in 1675. There had already been Indian attacks upon the land and fearing for his family, he built tunnels that ran under the house and out to Rabbit Island very close by.

After the Great Swamp skirmish, the English militia hiked through the cold and snow to Smith's home where many were nursed back to health but some, unfortunately, succumbed to their wounds and

rigors of the brutal ordeal. Forty in all were buried in a single grave on the site. The area is well marked and easy to get to.

Another tragedy took place at the home after the fight. Joshua Teft was tried and found guilty of treason for helping the Narragansetts during the confrontation. He was duly hanged, drawn and quartered. Seventy men were ordered to remain behind after the Great Swamp fight, using the blockhouse as a temporary garrison. The day after they left, the Indians burned the house down in retaliation for the Great Swamp massacre. It was rebuilt in 1678 and thrived throughout the ages. In the 18th Century, it became a thriving plantation and is now labeled as the oldest in the nation. The property is also part of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallion program which promotes public awareness in regard to the awareness of former slavery in Rhode Island.

During the Revolutionary War, soldiers stayed at the secluded territory and according to historians of the manor, a few skirmishes on the land resulted in the



Image: www.smithscastle.org/

untimely demise of some soldiers during the war.

Combining the events from King Philip's War, the hanging of Joshua Teft, casualties of the Revolutionary War and the families of the property who died of more natural causes, it is inevitable that there would be ghosts lingering on the property. The ghosts of the castle seem to be trapped in an

eternal struggle to right the negative energy that holds them to the homestead. Phantoms of people in colonial attire are occasionally seen wandering through various rooms. Some appear out of nowhere then vanish into thin air. Various witnesses have seen a soldier in a revolutionary uniform walking along the grounds near the water. Perhaps he was one who met a sad

fate at the house or he is looking out to sea for something. His aeri-form presence is semi-transparent. Noises from inside the house give the curators and other guests a start, as many times the origin of the din is in the room they are in.

Voices and sounds of items falling are also heard by the docents who wear period clothing during tours to capture the mood and perhaps attract a few of the long deceased tenants of the house. There are reports of phantom slaves who died while hiding in the escape tunnels below the house. The tunnels have long been closed due to their dangerously frail condition yet the moans of the past and the apparitions of those who once tenanted there still permeate the walls and air of the ancient building.

Smith's Castle is a very great place to visit even if you don't see the four centuries of the "other" living history.

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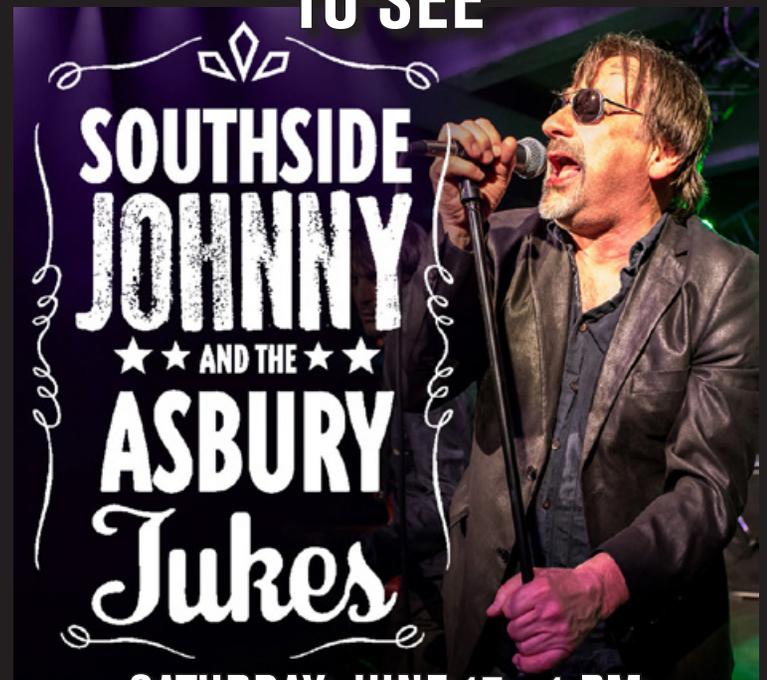
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