

Go Where the Rail May Run

BY PATTY ROY

Old Sturbridge Village is currently alive with thousands of lights – sparkling on trees and fences outside the early American homes of the 1830s. It's a special celebration called "Christmas by Candlelight" and a walk around the village is spectacular.

As the dwellings, shops and Meeting House are sourced from New England, they will look familiar to Worcester County residents, though the Christmas decorations they sport would have seemed strange to those who lived during this era. The region had everything

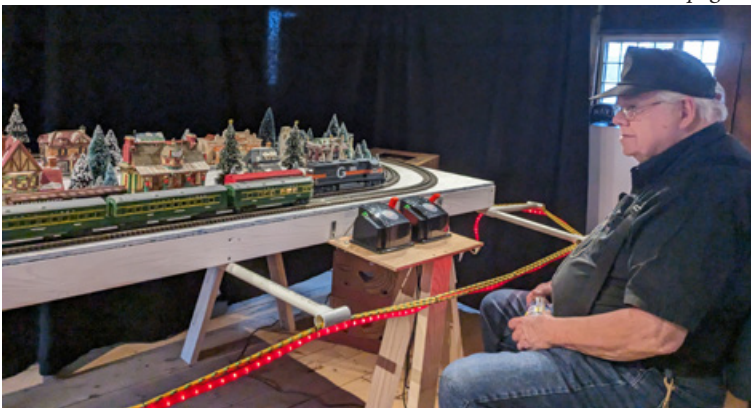
present day holiday makers like to see during this joyful season - plenty of greenery and red winterberries, wood to stoke roaring fires and a knack for pie-making and mulling cider.

But Christmas didn't really become a big deal until the mid-1800s when the Puritan hold on the population (and the holiday) finally loosened.

As OSV relaxed some of the strictures on Christmas, there are a few anachronistic touches around the village that are magical, anyway.

RAILROAD

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Charles Tatsis of the Worcester Model Railroaders Club at Old Sturbridge Village where his Christmas Town train layout is on display.



BVT town leaders meet to discuss budgeting

Member towns discuss concerns related to mandatory contributions, admissions, charter relevance

BY THERESA KNAPP

On Oct. 26, the Hopedale Select Board hosted representatives from the 13 towns that make up the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School district.

Member towns include Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon,

Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge.

In the invitation to the member towns, Town Administrator Mitch Ruscitti said, "The intent of this summit is to engage in a district-wide conversation about our individual and collective community needs, the role that the vocational school plays in

meeting those needs, and the overall impact of bonded capital investments on our other public-school districts/systems. More succinctly put, there have been concerns expressed by constituents, boards, and committees across town boundaries regarding tough decisions about the use of funding sources."

The 1.5-hour meeting was held at the Hopedale Community House.

As she welcomed the group, Hopedale Select Board Chair Glenda Hazard said, "Over the years I've heard it said that the 13 towns in the BVT district don't really care how the rest of the towns in the district feel, and I called this meeting because I don't really believe that's true. There've been many times I've wondered how you all respond to financial constraints the majority of us are facing, and if there are other related concerns that we all share. To that end, I'm hoping that this is the beginning of a meaningful collaboration between all of us."

"Tonight's summit is a result of us having heard from many surrounding communities with a desire to discuss budgetary issues related to our vocational school. We feel this is absolutely in the spirit of the [BVT] charter."

Hazard said that "BVT is a tremendous institution and one of best technical schools in the

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RAILROAD

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You can ride in a carryall drawn by two American Belgian horses, a precursor to the group transportation of modern buses – definitely not out of place and time. Or, you can visit the more modern Christmas Express Model Trains set up by the Worcester Model Railroaders Club of Webster with miniature seasonally appropriate scenery, taste of transportation models to come.

The connection between railroads and Old Sturbridge Village? Railroad-ing was just arriving on the scene in the 1830s and 1840s.

Charles Tatsis built his model railroad with a love that he has held for trains since he received his first set of Lionel's many Christmases ago.

"I've been in this since I was four or five," he said about his hobby. "When I was a kid you hoped for one of these or an Erector set. I got the Lionel trains and my brother got an Erector set. We built a lot of stuff with that."

Model train tracks are scaled to various sizes with O Scale (1:48) being one of the most popular and oldest scales in the model railroading world.

"What it means is a quarter inch to the foot," he said. "A G gauge is a little bit bigger; it's a half inch to the foot. HO scale is called that because it stands for Half O Scale, so it's about an eighth of an inch to the foot."

The Worcester Model Railroaders Club has a 40' by 50' HO layout. A second layout is 10' by 37' O gauge.

Some folks bring their own trains, but there are also club trains and cars that are free to try.

"Anybody's welcome," Tatsis said. "I'll be glad to show them around."

Tatsis enjoys creating his own little world on train set-ups. But it can be an

expensive hobby if you let it, said with a smile.

Tatsis' experience with trains is first hand on the Boston to Albany route. He was an engineer for Conrail, a freight carrier, for about five years, he said, after training for about five months in New Haven.

"I did a little bit of that and once in a while they'd call us from Amtrak (passenger trains) to engineer," Tatsis related.

It was the fulfillment of a childhood dream, he admitted.

The schedule he followed was leaving home on Saturdays at 10:31 a.m. and didn't return until about 5 p.m. the next day. Then the crews were home again for a day or two according to national safety rules. There were occasional overnight stays in Albany.

When Tatsis was with Conrail the train crew consisted of an engineer, a fireman and a conductor, along with a head end brakeman and a rear end brakeman. Trains also had a caboose in those days.

"But they don't have that anymore. Not like it used to be," he said with a tinge of sadness. "I caught the tail end of it."

An admitted train spotter, Tatsis remembers when you could set your watch by the appearance of trains at certain crossings. "They were that on time," he said.

He also appreciates the romance of train travel.

"Years ago you could just about go anywhere by train, he said. "You could get around easier than you can now."

The Worcester Model Railroaders Club is located at 14 Rail Road Ave., Unit 54 Webster, just over the tracks and to the right. Meetings are held Tuesdays 6-9 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Meetings can go over-time if there's a good crowd.

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Commonwealth,” but noted that, like many other member towns, Hopedale “operates under a tight budget” and “must be responsible for every dollar we spend.” She said that, because of the nature of the state assessment process and the town’s resulting mandatory contribution, “we find ourselves forced to cut local programs and services in response to costs such as those related to BVT that we can’t control. This scenario makes it difficult, if not impossible, to invest in our own public school students, facilities, and operating and capital improvements without asking for additional revenues from taxpayers in the form of overrides.”

She said that, because of the timing of BVT’s budget-setting timeline and Hopedale’s fiscal process, “Historically, by the time our annual town meeting comes around, we’re told that BVT already has enough votes in the other communities to pass [its budget], effectively negating our vote. Generally, we are presented with a figure that would be Hopedale’s share without input from [the] local finance committee or Select Board and whether or not we feel we can afford it. This has been deeply concerning for both our local boards and our residents who tell us that they feel they are cut out of the process. We’ve heard that several of your towns feel the same way.”

Hazard said, “In Hopedale, we think that as towns included in the charter, we should all be able to determine what costs we can afford so that all students that reside in our towns are equitably supported. We often feel that

Hopedale Public Schools are forced to cut, yet BVT hasn’t had to make the same kinds of sacrifices,” adding that Hopedale had to ask residents for an override for FY24 but still had to make cuts to the school budget while BVT’s budget increased.

“As an institution, we [Hopedale] believe that BVT should have to operate within the same financial constraints that each municipal budget does... We think it should be clear that the goal is to provide a great education for all students in our communities, whether they go to BVT or stay in our local schools. We want to be able to invest in programs and facilities locally at the same level that we invest at BVT.”

Bellingham Selectboard Chairman Michael Connor thanked Hopedale for calling the summit. “I think it’s an exceptional opportunity... This is one of the best ideas that’s come along.”

Connor said their per student costs for BVT students “are dramatically higher” than they are within the Bellingham Public Schools. He, in addition to other attendees, expressed frustration that local town budgets go through detailed scrutiny from town boards and taxpayers, yet the BVT budget does not.

“The budget process is what has really skewed me the most over the last 15 years. When the Superintendent of BVT comes into our town meeting, the votes are ‘locked up’ - the process to speak up has long passed... [and] it’s simply ‘pay up’ and I think we, as the communities of BVT, need to vet that process.”

As a possible solution for future consideration, Connor suggested each member town would calculate its own public school

budget increase from one year to the next, and the average budget increase among the 13 member towns would be the increase BVT would also receive.

Connor said, “We’ve never had a choice as to what the BVT budget would be” and said Bellingham has some ideas for future forum topics.

Millbury Select Board Chairman Chris Naff told the story of a Millbury student who was interested in attending BVT and would have been well-served there but their academic record was not strong enough to be admitted into BVT.

“That story can be told again and again. And I think the problem we all face today is the very students that BVT was founded for no longer have the opportunity to go. That, to me, is a very big problem.”

“Our gracious host [Hazard] asked us not to disparage anyone tonight, but it’s a matter of fact that one administrator told the Town of Millbury to no longer send its ‘riff raff,’” said Naff, adding “That ‘riff raff’ are the very students BVT was founded for, and those students are being denied the opportunity they should have today.”

“Until some reform is done, which I believe has to take place at the state level, and that reform is much needed and would be heavy-handed, until that is done, the conversation at the municipal level is only going to become more and more difficult each year because I know as a fact that Millbury, and I think a lot of the communities like us, are

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becoming more and more tired of providing significant funding for what we believe to be a very significantly flawed system," he said.

BVT Superintendent-Director Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, who has held the position for 31 years, was invited to respond. He

pointed out he recognized many faces in the room "because I do make appearances at the finance committees, the public hearings, and the town meetings."

Each year, BVT makes "a modest budgetary request which is inclusive of all expenses," Fitzpatrick said. He detailed the items that go into the BVT school budget, reiterated his frequent offers for town officials to visit the school, and said the BVT

building is a model that other vocational technical schools hope to replicate.

Fitzpatrick said, "The state doesn't allow us to ask for equalized costs or assessments in order to comply with the 1993 Ed Reform Bill;" acknowledging that Hopedale and Bellingham have been at the latter part of the budgetary process; and said that, if two-thirds of the towns vote to support, then all towns are directed to honor the budget.

He said the BVT process is "very transparent;" the district is committed to collaborating with member towns; and said "it's embarrassing to think" any of their students are considered "riff raff."

Among the issues raised during the public comment segment were: revisiting the BVT charter which has not been reviewed since it was created in 1962; possible implementation of an admissions lottery; review of administrator and superintendent staffing levels, compensations, and benefits plans for BVT and the feeder districts; review of expenses related to extracurricular activities, campus amenities and student services for each district of BVT; review of admissions process; review of proposed capital projects; and agreement to a joint finance committee each year at which BVT makes one

presentation to all member towns at one time.

Scott Savage of Hopedale, speaking as a resident and not a selectman, said, "It is my hope that the towns will reject the majority of the capital requests that BVT has put forward for next fiscal year. The town needs more time to review the need of these improvements and weigh the financial burden it will place on our own schools and town services."

Neal Sherman, a public school teacher in Milford, said, "I am concerned that [BVT] is not serving the needs of the sending towns. I see students in the hallways every day who would be well-served by access to a technical education but right now 75% of the graduates from BVT are college-bound...I think that it should be revisited to consider whether or not the school is serving its mission and allowing access to a high-quality education to all students from its sending towns."

Chris Naff of Millbury asked Supt. Fitzpatrick if BVT uses a blind-lottery admission system. Fitzpatrick said they do not. "We've examined the merits of that along with colleagues throughout the Commonwealth and did not feel it represented the best way to recruit."

Naff noted that Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School uses a lottery. Fitzpatrick said Assabet is the only district in the state that uses a lottery, adding, "We've seen no results. We've seen nothing but turmoil. You're not speaking to the staff of the system," he said with a chuckle. "I don't want to badmouth any other system, but we would hardly follow the example that we've seen there."

Matt Wojcik, Town Administrator in Douglas, said he was reluctant to make a comment earlier in the evening because "our frustration level with BVT in the past has been very, very high and it has not necessarily simmered down completely as we sit here," but did note the agreement dates back to 1962 and can only be amended by unanimous vote of the member communities.

"If there's anything we need to reopen in this governance agreement, it is that each individual town needs to have its own voice, elected by its own people. We live in America, we have a representative democracy, and it is only fair that it be done that way. This governance model has outlived its useful life. Period. It can't continue like this."

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Here are some of the most common investment mistakes:

- **Too much buying and selling** — Some people find it exciting to constantly buy and

sell investments in the pursuit of big gains. Yet, frequent trading can work against you in a couple of ways. First, it can be expensive — if you're always buying and selling investments, you could rack up taxes, fees and commissions. Perhaps even more important, though, excessive purchases and sales can make it difficult to follow a unified, cohesive investment strategy. Such a strategy requires, among other things, careful construction and management of an investment portfolio that's appropriate for your goals, risk tolerance and time horizon. Heavy trading can disrupt this strategy.

- **Failing to diversify** — If you only owned one type of asset, such as growth-oriented stocks, your portfolio could take a hit when the financial markets go through a downturn. But not all investments will respond the same way to the same forces — for example, stocks and bonds

can move in different directions at any given time. And that's why it's usually a good idea to own a mix of investments, which can include domestic and foreign stocks, bonds, certificates of deposit (CDs) and government securities. Keep in mind, though, that while diversification can help reduce the impact of market volatility, it can't guarantee profits or protect against losses in a declining market.

- **Trying to "time" the market** — "Buy low and sell high" might be the original piece of investment advice, but it's pretty hard to follow — because no one can really predict when an investment will reach "low" or "high" points. Also, trying to "time" the market in this way can lead to bad decisions, such as selling investments whose price has dropped, even if these same investments still have good business fundamentals and strong prospects.

- **Not understanding what you're investing in** — If you don't know the nature of investments when you buy them, you could set yourself up for unpleasant surprises. For example, some companies, by the very nature of their business and the type of industry they're in, may consistently pay dividends to their investors even though their stock prices may only show relatively modest price gains over time. If you bought shares of this stock, thinking it had the potential to achieve quite substantial appreciation, you might end up disappointed.
- **Making the wrong comparisons** — You're no doubt familiar with some of the most well-known investment benchmarks — the S&P 500, Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nasdaq Composite. But it might be counterproductive to compare your results against these indexes. If you have a diversified port-

folio, you'll own an array of investments that won't fit into any single index or benchmark, so you won't get an apples-to-apples comparison. You're better off comparing your portfolio's performance against the only benchmark that really matters — the progress you need to make to help achieve your goals.

Investing will always have its challenges — but you can help make it easier on yourself by staying away from as many mistakes as possible.

If you would like to discuss your personal situation with a financial advisor contact:

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Applications for home energy assistance are currently being accepted online at toapply.org/massliheap, and income-eligible households may receive financial help to offset heating bills from November

1, 2023, through April 30, 2024.

Both homeowners and renters can apply online or through local administering agencies for LIHEAP assistance. Households must meet specific eligibility requirements to qualify for aid, which will be paid directly to their heating vendor.

Eligibility is based on several factors, including household size and combined gross annual income of residents 18 and older. Qualifying households – including those with the cost of heat included in the rent – can receive assistance for all sources of heat, including oil, electricity, natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood and coal.

“The Massachusetts home energy assistance program is free, because no resident should have to worry about heating their home during the wintertime,” said Ed Augustus Jr., Secretary of Housing

and Livable Communities. “High fuel costs can have a devastating effect on household budgets and can even endanger Massachusetts’ most vulnerable residents. We encour-

age anyone who needs heating assistance to explore their eligibility by applying online or visiting the nearest administering agency. And to please share the information with

loved ones or neighbors who could benefit from this free resource.”

For more information, or to find your local LIHEAP agency, visit www.toapply.org/MassLIHEAP.



A gingerbread ski chalet created by Charlotte Supernor of Northbridge is exhibited in the Old Sturbridge Village gingerbread house contest, junior category.



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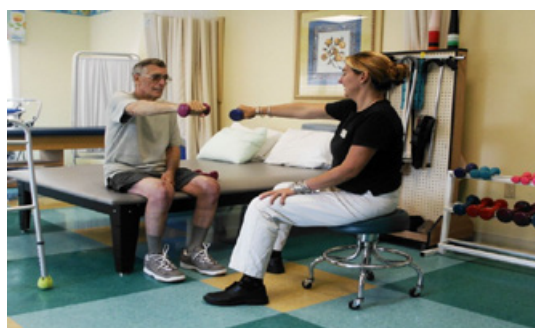
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Sturbridge Village at Christmas

Old Sturbridge Village is currently alive with thousands of lights – sparkling on trees and fences outside the early American homes of the 1830s. It's a special celebration called "Christmas by Candlelight" and a walk around the village is spectacular.

As the dwellings, shops and Meeting House are sourced from New England, they will look familiar to Worcester County residents, though the Christmas decorations they sport would have seemed strange to those who lived during this era. The region then had everything present day holiday makers like to see during this joyful season – plenty of greenery and red winterberries, wood to stoke roaring fires and a knack for pie-making and mulling cider.

But Christmas didn't really



Left, OSV blacksmith Ethan Choiniere points out the irregularities in an early iron kitchen tool.



Right, Blacksmiths Alan Curboy and Jake Terrenden man the bellows and hammer out iron on anvils at the Bixby forge.

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PROUD TO BE LOCALLY OWNED AND OPERATED

become a big deal until the mid-1800s when the Puritan hold on the population (and the holiday) finally loosened.

As OSV relaxed some of the strictures on Christmas, there are a few anachronistic touches around the village that are magical, anyway.

Try a stop at the blacksmith's shop where presents can be created if your wish list includes horse-shoes, kitchen utensils and tool repairs.

Neighborhood blacksmiths undertook several different kinds of work in rural New England, and most towns had several blacksmiths. Some specialized in producing edge tools or machinery. Others turned to wheelwrighting and repairing vehicles. Many did general iron work, repairing manufactured and imported tools, shoeing horses and oxen besides making hardware and other metal items needed in the community.

"Your market would depend on whether you were set up on a busy road with with out-of-town business coming through or maybe it's just my neighbors," said Ethan Choiniere, the blacksmith at OSV. "But either way, I look to them; if I had mills down the road and farms up that way, I work on mill parts and farming equipment. It's whatever the community needs them to do."

For a location like Sturbridge, it would basically be shoeing, metal repairs and the fabrication of household things, like spatulas and mulling irons.

The first thing you notice about the blacksmith shop is it's made of quarried stone rather than wood, – a wise decision since it has two very hot fires with bellows designed to crank up heat on the coals.

When the Blackstone Canal was

See Me, Hear Me at Booklovers' Gourmet

Nature & Wildlife Photography by Janet L. McDonald will be on display and for sale at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 East Main Street, Webster, through December 30 in the cafe gallery during regular business hours. Free and open to the public. For more information call 508-949-6232 or email deb@bookloversgourmet.com. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Wednesday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Special holiday hours: Sundays, December 10 and 17, 12-4 p.m.; Mondays, December 4, 11, and 18, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and December 24 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Closed December 25.

Janet McDonald is an artist, a creator, and nature lover. She received a BFA from UMass Dartmouth and later earned a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Eastern Connecticut State University. Janet worked for over a decade as a textile graphic designer before pursuing a completely different creative outlet as a Pre-K teacher. Now in retirement, Janet walks dogs, pet sits and enjoys taking pictures while canoeing or hiking with her partner Tom.

Janet's photography has been exhibited at the Sprinkler Factory Gallery, The Vanilla Bean Café, The Rose Room, Booklovers' Gourmet, Attleboro Art Museum, the Sherill Library in Cambridge

built in the 1830s it was a boon to farmers who could cheaply ship their goods towards cities as well as a boost to blacksmiths.

It was a two-day trip for the canal boats from Worcester to Providence and another two-day trip to return to Worcester. The overnight stopping point was in Uxbridge, where farm goods or metal from ironworks to deliver to blacksmiths were on or off-loaded.

Blacksmith apprentices usually worked for free or food and lodging, unlike a paid internship of today. The apprenticeship period was a rigorous one taking about 5 to 7 years to complete. Choiniere works with two fellow blacksmiths – Alan Curbooy and Jake Terrensen.

The blacksmith shop was once the domain of a man named Emerson Bixby, who owned a white Cape style house across the way from his forge.

The shop gives off a pleasant heat on a chill December day, but must be near suffocating in the height of the summer.

The many tools of blacksmith's trade are on hand along with the forge, anvil, and bellows. All about the shop are tongs and hammers, wedges and chisels. In the 1830s, blacksmiths mostly used iron because it was cheap and easy to work, Choiniere said.

as well as many other libraries in the Northeast. The Brookside Chalet holds a permanent display of Janet's photographs, inspiring visitors to explore the beauty, history and serenity of the Quiet Corner of Connecticut whether it be a whimsical look into the Thompson Dam or a striking view of Cargill Falls.

Janet says: "I often find wonder and beauty in the world around me. Whether I'm walking through the woods or even spending time in my own neighborhood, I always see magic in the ordinary. I am compelled to capture those scenes through my eyes so I can not only relive the joy I felt in that moment but share these portraits into my perspective and experience with others."

For more information on Janet and her work, visit her Instagram accounts

@janetmcdonaldphotography or @frenchcatdrawings.

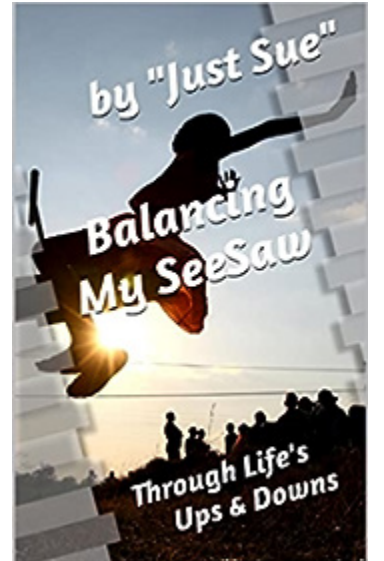
On Saturday, December 16, visit Booklovers' Gourmet as Sue Sheperd discusses and signs copies of her latest book "Balancing My Seesaw :Through Life's Ups and Downs." Free and open to the public. (Rescheduled from an earlier date). Signed copies will be available for purchase.

Diagnosed with a chronic condition, over 29 years ago,

As the metal glows orange to orange-yellow, it becomes most malleable when it's red. In its hottest state, the metal can be welded together when it is hit.

"That's the magic of the blacksmith trade, I think is all in the ability to stick two pieces of metal together," said Choiniere.

Bixby had to give up his work and toil for others twice in his career – once at the beginning and again towards the end – because there wasn't enough business for him in the neighborhood to make a living.



Above, Janet McDonald is an artist, a creator, and nature lover. Her photography has been exhibited at the Sprinkler Factory Gallery, The Vanilla Bean Café, The Rose Room, Booklovers' Gourmet and Attleboro Art Museum. Sue Shepherd has penned a book outlining some of the secrets she has learned on her "SeeSaw," and how to hold on when the ride gets too rough.

Sue has learned how to live with life's ups and downs. Even so, she has navigated her way through divorce from an abusive marriage, homelessness, loss, and times of loneliness. And now she would like to share some of the secrets she has learned on her "SeeSaw", and how to hold on when the ride gets too rough.

Through short stories and

poems, Sue has found her voice and wants to share the hope and inspiration she has discovered so that others can also find ways to balance their own "SeeSaw" of Life. She wants everyone to know the excitement of following Jesus and wants to show how involved He is in our lives. With God in the middle of it all, He helps to keep us balanced when life's circum-

stances are trying to bring us down or throw us off.

Sue is a life-long New Englander, and has been blessed with three adult children, two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren (and we can't forget the five grand-dogs). You are welcome to contact her via email at: JustSue4@gmail.com.



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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Luke's Christmas Gift

BY AMY LECLAIRE

“Are you coming to see me?”
When it comes to the sights and sounds of the season, Luke is not shy to the joy of Christmas. He’s an avid watcher. He’s aware of the reason for the season.

“Amazon!!”

He stares across the front lawn. Another blue truck screeches to a halt and states the obvious. “A person is inside! He’s coming, he’s coming, he’s coming. I can feel it in my bones.” Luke quivers and smiles. His mouth opens and shuts. “He’s coming. He’s not. He’s texting. He’s just about ready!”

Luke stares some more, turns around like an oversized ballerina, then snaps out of delirium to concentrate. He doesn’t want to miss out on a single clue that, indeed, a person will carry a pizza or a pres-



ent to his front lawn.

“I wonder if he’s bringing me

something?” He stalks to the middle of the lawn and crouches down



to submission. “I’m going to show the driver that my big head has nothing to do with my personality. I’m going to show him how gentle I truly am.” He remains down for as long as he can bear it. Given his age (not yet two) I find Luke’s patience to be remarkable. Still, my pup is about to learn a lesson—that not everyone likes dogs. The Amazon driver is no exception.

He appears stiff and serious, a cautious elf. Sensing his ambivalence, Luke attempts to compromise the awkward moment. He sits up straight and smiles proudly. “My name is Luke Valentino and I have my own column and website. You can find me at---”

Cautious Elf is unimpressed. He recoils. I eye him through the bubble glass of the front door like Mama in her kerchief, though I’m unable to settle down for any kind of nap. A Christmas package is in jeopardy.

“Hi there!” I pull open the front door.

Luke takes my sudden appearance as a clue that a front yard social is in order. He gallops closer to Cautious Elf. “Momma, look – the elf with a vest on has a present for

me!” Then he resumes a clownish habit he’s recently adopted during new transitions. He chases his tail foolishly, spinning around like a top with a fur coat. My gaze rests on my crazy, spinning dog. Fearing him seems superfluous. Nevertheless, the driver has a right to be afraid. The journalist in me longs to better understand him. (More-over, I want that package).

“Luke is just shy of two. He still has some puppy in him. I’m sorry.”

Not sorry, Luke finishes one final spin and hedges closer to our guest.

“It’s just that—” Cautious Elf takes a deep breath. The cloud of his exhale falls heavily in the space between us.

“You’ve been bit?” I read his mind.

“Yeah. I had a bad experience.”

The Valentino in Luke flares. “Give me a name.” He tilts a curious head to the victim holding a present and inquires. “No one messes with my people.” I make a fair decision to grab Luke’s collar and collect more information.

“That must have been terrible. Was it a Pitbull, by chance?”

He places his free finger on his chin, a detective with a new clue. “Actually, it was a dog that looked like yours.”

Luke looks up at me. He appears curious, a bear cub who’s just finished the last of his honey. “Wasn’t me?”

The thought of a Golden Retriever attacking a person seems inconceivable, but the truth is grim. Any dog can bite. We don’t know exactly what passes through a dog’s mind pre-attack, though we do know that temperament, a dog’s upbringing, territorial or food aggression, and fear play a role. I pet Luke’s big head. He, too, seems to understand.

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REAL ESTATE

The Perks of Selling Your House When Inventory Is Low

When it comes to selling your house, you're probably trying to juggle the current market conditions and your own needs as you plan your move. One thing that may be working in your favor is how few homes there are for sale right now.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

The Supply of Homes for Sale Is Far Below the Norm. When you're selling something, it helps if

what you're selling is in demand, but is also in low supply. Why? That makes it even more desirable since there's not enough to go around. That's exactly what's happening in the housing market today. There are more buyers looking to buy than there are homes for sale.

To tell the story of just how low inventory is, here's the latest information on active listings, or homes available for sale. The data from Realtor.com shows how many active listings there were in September of this year compared to what's more typical in the market. Monthly listings in September, 2017 were 1.3 million, same in 2018. In 2019 there were 1.2 million and in September, 2023 there were only 700k

As you can see, if you look at the last normal years for the market versus the latest numbers

for this year, it's clear inventory is still far lower than the norm.

What That Means for You. Buyers have fewer choices now than they did in more typical years. And that's why you could still see some great perks if you sell today. Because there aren't enough homes to go around, homes that are priced right are still selling fast and the average seller is getting multiple offers from eager buyers. Based on the latest data from the Confidence Index from the National Association of Realtors (NAR):

69% of homes sold in less than a month.

2.6 offers: the average number of offers on recently sold homes.

An article from Realtor.com also explains how the limited number of houses for sale benefits you if you're selling: "... homes spent two weeks less on

the market this past month than they did in the average September from 2017 to 2019 ... as still-limited supply spurs homebuyers to act quickly ..."

Bottom line, because the supply of homes for sale is so low, buyers desperately want more options – and your house may be just what they're looking for.

If you work with The Marzeotti Group or a trusted local agent to get your house listed at the right price for today's market. You could still see it sell quickly and potentially get multiple offers.

LUKE

continued from page 10

"Can I still have the present?"

The Amazon gift bag dangles lifelessly in the hand of Cautious Elf, an employee I place at the age of 25. He has a whole life ahead of him to experience the joy of dogs, yet he's been traumatized by one that looks like a bear cub. I remember the day Luke was attacked by a shepherd at the dog park. I haven't been able to return to that very park. Despite my perplex with the situation, I do understand this young man. "I'll go put Luke in the house," I say, and proceed to tug Luke by the collar, back towards the front door.

"I didn't do anything, Momma!" Luke shuffles against my side with a heavy heart. I feel badly, but it's the right thing to do.

"Wait."

Little did I know we were all about to witness the kind of gift that can't be wrapped.

Luke and I pause.

"Your dog seems pretty cool."

Luke tugs me back to the elf's voice. "He said I'm cool!"

"Are you sure you want to meet Luke?" I don't want to exacerbate his trauma, yet deep down, I'm proud of the decision to face his dog demon. Luke is equally as proud. He wiggles joyfully. "Aw. That driver had me at Park."

Cautious Elf approaches Luke then kneels to his level. Roles shift. A Man Bitten and A Dog Loved form a match made on my frosty lawn. "He's so soft," he says, massaging Luke's big head. "Your vest smells like popcorn." Luke sniffs the man's pocket.

"Luke, be easy," I command, partially fearing the worst, that my dog bites the hand that feeds us somebody's Christmas gift. However valid, my fear is short-lived. Luke licks the scruff of the man's chin, boasting a relationship that works. "Hey, you can't have that." Happy Elf chuckles while Luke gnaws playfully at the corner of a package that's taken far too long to be delivered.

"I'll take that," I say with a snatch and a smile. Happy Elf hands it over but deep down I know the truth. Once again, my dog, a healer, has delivered a gift that can't be wrapped.

Follow Luke on IG @livingwithlukevalentino

Write to Amy – amyclair@hotmail.com



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The Spectre Leaguers: Part II

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

If you missed Part I, go to www.theblackstonevalleyxpress.com

On July 14, the whole garrison spied a half dozen men who were now in gunshot range of them. Babson and his fellow townsmen set out in hot pursuit of the strangers. Babson saw two and took aim, pulling the trigger of his gun but it would not fire, thus allowing the two to get away. He then saw three more exiting the swamp where he then shouldered his rifle and fired at them. All three fell at once. Babson yelled to his companions that he had shot all three, but when he approached

them, the three dead men rose and stole away into the night. One of them returned a volley that hissed by Babson's ear, implanting the bullet into a tree.

Babson and his comrades took cover and plotted another attack upon where the spectres were now concealed. Once again, the strange beings rose and retreated but not before one could be hit by a shot from Babson's rifle. As they closed in on the casualty, they were taken by a sudden horror; the place where the enemy had fallen was void of a body. It was clear to the exhausted men that neither lead nor iron was useful against whatever demons had come to torture them. No sooner had they reached

the garrison when more were spotted roaming about the brush just out of gunshot reach.

The next day, Babson went out to the harbor to warn of the visitors and the danger that may follow. As Drake puts it,

"While on his way thither he was waylaid and fired at by the 'unnaccountable troublers,' who, strange to say, loaded their guns with real bullets, as poor Babson was near finding out to his cost. Having procured help, the neighborhood was scoured for traces of the attacking party, two of whom were seen, but not being of mortal flesh and blood, could not be harmed by lead or steel."

For several days, scouts combed the vicinity of the garrison in search of the spectres. One day the scouting party spied eleven men departing an orchard where they were performing strange incantations. Richard Dolliver fired into the assemblage but, as before, the bullets did nothing but make them scatter. It now became more evident than before, in Drake's words that the "strange visitors bore a charmed life, and that the cape was in great peril from this diabolical invasion..."

A regiment of sixty men from Ipswich were called in to assist in the fight against the unearthly visitors who for a fortnight had continually appeared in various places, harassing the people of Gloucester. Though repeatedly shot at, not one was killed or injured. The assailants beat on barns with clubs, threw stones, whooped and made various noises much to the resemblance of a poltergeist more than a foe wishing to annihilate an enemy. To make matters more supernatural, they left no footprints in the sands or swamps where they were seen and chased.

It was a matter of time before the spectres began confronting the soldiers of the garrison. Three of them were seen one morning by Babson walking toward him with no fear or apprehension. Babson quickly hid and waited until they were within stones reach. He then shouldered his rifle and fired at them. The powder flashed in the pan, but no shot projected from the barrel. He tried repeatedly to shoot them with no success as the phantoms passed by without as much as flinching. He later was able to fire the gun several times in succession without fail. There was only one

explanation Bason could come up with; the wraiths had charmed his rifle so it would not harm them.

In time, the visitors either grew weary of their diabolical pranks or had better things to do somewhere else. The odd happenings ceased as quick as they had started. One account states that it was not just the spectres going away but divine intervention that played a role in their retreat.

It was decided that if mortal tools could not harm the spectres, then the only answer was to pray to their savior for redemption from the evil. The people of the garrison converged and began praying for salvation. Their plan seemed to have worked, for it was not very long before the spectres were gone for good and the people of Cape Ann were relieved of the devil's minions that had for some time kept them in fear of being taken by the evils that prevailed at the time.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote of the phenomenon that beleaguered the people of Gloucester in his poem, *The Garrison Of Cape Ann*.

Prayer



Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (intention), Amen.

If you pray three times a day, three consecutive days, you will receive your intention, no matter how impossible it may seem. Praise and Thanksgiving please the Heart of God. **Believer**

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12 - 9 AM

SHINE Appointments available for health insurance questions with Pat Nectow. Please call 508-278-8622 to schedule.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7 - 10:30 AM

Veterans' Services with Carl Bradshaw by appointment only. Call 508-278-8622 to sign up.

THURSDAYS, DECEMBER 14 & 21 - 1:30 PM

Come play Scrabble! If you'd like to join us for lunch and have a relaxing afternoon playing Scrabble, give us a call to sign up!

Zumba class on Thursday, December 14th & Low Impact Exercise Classes on December 7th and the last class will be on December 14th. New sessions will start up towards springtime.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 - 11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

"PopUp Library". Books will be on display to check out, library card sign-ups, book hold pick-ups, etc. This program is being offered by the Uxbridge Free Public Library.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12 - 1 PM

Uxbridge Library Book Club. They will be discussing "Evie Drake Starts Over" by Linda Holmes. You are welcome to join us for lunch on this day, just be sure to call ahead to "book" yours!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12 - 1 PM

Benefit Enrollment Specialist – Tri-Valley, Inc. Call the senior center to book an appointment with Katelynn Wackell. Next date will be January 9, 2024.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14 - 12 PM

Annual Christmas Celebration w/Tommy Rull. Meal is sponsored by the Uxbridge Elderly Connection Inc. Call ahead to RSVP!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15 - 12 PM

Uxbridge Fire Department Quarterly Lunch on Cooking & Electrical Safety. Call ahead to RSVP.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18 - 1:30 PM

"Ask the Attorney" with Attorney Ralph Tepper by appointment only. Please Call 508-278-8622 to schedule your appointment.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19 - 11 AM

Uxbridge High School "Prism" Musical. This is a 365 immersive musical experience! Lunch will follow the show at the Uxbridge High School. Please call ahead to RSVP.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22 &

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29

The senior center will be closing at 11:30 am.

Monday, December 25th the senior center will be closed in observance of Christmas and re-open on Tuesday, December 26th.

Monday, January 1, 2024, the senior center will be closed in observance of New Year's Day and will re-open on Tuesday, January 2nd.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26 - 11AM – 12 PM

Ask the Nurse Free Blood Pressure Clinic with Nancy Favulli, Salmon Health VNA. RSVP to participate and to join us for lunch.

Thursday, December 28th – 12:00 pm – Annual New Years Eve at Noon Celebration! We will have Storyteller/Musician John Porcino here presenting Celebrations of Light! This is funded by a grant from the Uxbridge Cultural Council. Come ring in the New Year with us! Call ahead to RSVP. "This program is supported in part by a grant from the (name of local cultural council), a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28TH – 12 NOON

December Birthday Cake Celebration at noontime.

Card Game played during lunch on Mondays ~ No Card Game on 12/25.

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EVERY TUESDAY - 1:30 PM

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Every Wednesday – 9 am – 3 pm – The Uxbridge Senior Center

Transportation Program Community Shuttle. This shuttle is for seniors and individuals with disabilities to destinations such as post office, pet care appointments, hair salon or barber, bank, pharmacy & shopping anywhere in the Uxbridge/Northbridge area. Note: this replaces the weekly bank/pharmacy and Shaw's Ocean State rides. Call 508-278-8622 for more information and to book your ride. Requests require 48-hour notice.

Wednesdays - "Canasta" Hand, Knee & Foot Card Game – 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm.

EVERY THURSDAY – PLAY SCRABBLE! – 1:30 PM

Come by for an afternoon playing Scrabble. Boards are supplied

by the senior center.

Medical Transportation is accepting appointments. Call 508-278-8622 to schedule your rides.

The senior center is in need of the following donations: Lysol wipes, newly packaged napkins, paper towels, tissues, toilet paper, ground regular & decaf coffee. We thank you for your support!

Feel free to contact us at 508-278-8622 or visit us on our web page at Uxbridge-ma.gov/coa or like us on our FB page or by googling Uxbridge Senior Center and our new YouTube Channel or even dropping by.

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SPORTS

Nummela Looking to Follow Teammate into the ECHL

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Although only a senior from Uxbridge playing high school co-op hockey for Northbridge, Jack Nummela is hoping to follow Derek Lewis, his last year's team-

mate, into the East Coast Hockey League once he graduates.

Nummela, who has been playing hockey with his linemates Joe Sullivan and Brett Flanders (both from Nipmuc High School) for some time now, have all been talking and practicing with the Worcester Railers, a New York Islanders affiliate. And although he is not sure about his two friends, Nummela is certain that he wants to give the Railers a shot once his high school playing days are over.

The ECHL is a premier AA hockey team where 676 players have gone on to play in the National Hockey League after beginning their careers in the league.

Growing up, Nummela believes that he first laced up his skates at the age of two when his dad, who has been a hockey coach, built the family a rink in the backyard. It was about four years later when he had to venture outside of his hometown to play youth hockey for Tri Valley, as Uxbridge didn't have any hockey programs.

Throughout his early years, the Uxbridge resident found himself playing center and left wing for his youth teams, but once he joined his last club team, the Minutemen



Jack Nummela, Uxbridge native playing Co-op hock for northbridge high school is aiming for the Worcester Railers hockey team, part of the prestigious AA East Coast Hockey League.

Flames, he found himself on the defensive side of the ice. As he enters his final season with the Northbridge co-op team he may find himself back on the blueline for the first time in his high school career.

"The last few years I have been playing left wing for Northbridge, but with four senior defenders graduating there is going to be a big hole on defense this year," Nummela said. "I don't mind playing defense; in fact, I feel like I am built to play there. While the coach hasn't actually said I'll be playing there just yet, I have been getting ready to take on the role this season."

When Nummela was set to enter high school, he found out that the Spartans didn't have a hockey team of their own, instead they were part of a five-school co-op team where Northbridge was the home team under Coach Ryan Neville. Needless to say, when it came time to try out for the team, the Uxbridge native found that he really didn't know all that much about the team. Once thing he did know was that Northbridge was coming off a State Championship season.

"I really didn't know what to expect, the only good thing was that my two buddies (Sullivan and Flan-

ders) who I've played with pretty much my entire hockey life were there also," Nummela said. "Making the varsity team as a left winger was great and the boys welcomed us to the team and helped us a bunch. It was an easy fit."

Although he went into the season somewhat skeptical and timid he had fun during his first campaign and came away learning a lot. The team struggled at times that season, but over the past two years they have steadily improved and the now senior believes the team has what it takes to put together their best season on the ice.

"I consider myself to be a physical player, not as flashy as Joe and Brett, but I can hold my own on the ice," he said. "The three of us have played on the same line and have a really good chemistry together, I really expect a successful season this year."

As the season gets closer to starting the senior has high hopes that Northbridge will put together a better record than last year's while working more as a unit instead of individually.

As a captain he has been part of running the practices during the early months and is trying to get the team to get together outside of the rink to form a bond between the players as well as building a better team chemistry. Nummela is also looking forward to getting the team to work hard on the ice and focus on the game at hand and not worrying about the tournament until the time comes.

Along with Flanders and Sullivan, he is hoping that all three can be in the upper echelon of the league when it comes to scoring. The trio each posted 20-25 points last winter and Nummela is hoping that they can all add to their totals this year.

If the captains' practices continue to go well the Northbridge hockey team has the capability to have a good season if they continue to play as a whole.

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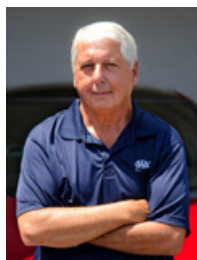


THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Lexus tank not easy to fill – what’s the deal?

Q. I have a Lexus ES 350 which I bought new in 2019. The car has a 16-gallon fuel tank but will stop at approximately 13.5 gallons and will only fill fully if the pump is on the slowest setting. If the



BY JOHN PAUL

pump is full pressure it never completely fills with gas. I complained to the dealership several times, but the say nothing can be done about this situa-

tion. I also had a 2012 Lexus ES 350, but I never had this problem. After I fill up, I can check the computer monitor on the dashboard and because the tank isn't full, I basically get 75 less miles per tankful. Now I realize that you are not to top the fuel tank off, but 2.5 gallons, that's crazy. Have you ever heard of this problem before and what can be done about it? I travel a lot and on long distances it makes for more frequent stops.

A. I suspect the dealer is correct, there is nothing you can do. The only real way to tell is to start with a completely empty tank (dry) and see what is going on. The tank empty has a capacity of 15.9 gallons. Even when you run out of gas there is always at least a gallon of gas in the tank. This car, like many, uses available gasoline to cool the fuel pump. Perhaps Lexus to maintain the life of the fuel pump and keeps the fuel level higher by signaling gallons/miles to empty early. Normally when the low fuel light comes on with most cars there is usually two gallons of gas left in the tank, about a 50-mile range and then it still never completely empties out the tank. The issue could be that the indicator is wrong, or the tank could be damaged preventing a complete fill. Although

I suspect if you drove this car until it ran out of gas and stalled there would still be 1/2 to maybe as much as 1 gallon of fuel still in the tank. You are also correct that overfilling the tank trying to fill it completely is detrimental to the evaporative emission system.

Q. I own a 2007 Ford Shelby GT 500 with a Shaker 500 audio system. When my battery went dead I changed it with the identical battery from Ford. Since then, I cannot retrieve or insert CDs into the unit. The radio says it is off, but it constantly makes a ratcheting noise and drains the battery down after a few days. Have you heard of this or know of a fix that can be done?

A. Unfortunately, this is a common problem with the Shaker 500 audio system with the six-CD changer. It appears the only fix is to replace or send the unit out for repair. Some people have taken the radio apart and disconnected the CD tray power supply and live without the CD changer. On the Mustang forums this also pops up as a common issue. Still before I gave up and purchased a new radio, I would try disconnecting the radio power supply and re-connecting and see if the CD changer cycles off.

Q. Several years ago, my Honda dealer recommended changing the timing belt even though my Accord had only 65,000 miles on it. I now have 127,000 miles on the car. Should I replace the timing belt again or can I wait a little longer? What is ideal for timing belts?

A. Depending on the engine and year, but as a general rule Honda recommends, under normal conditions, replacing the timing belt at intervals of 105,000 miles or every 84 months whichever comes first.

So, depending on how long ago it was replaced you likely have quite some time left before you need to do it again. The general rule of five years or 60,000 miles that was considered normal years back has been extended quite a bit. The dealer may have been a bit aggressive in the first timing belt replacement. When in doubt, check the owner's manual.

Q. Can you recommend a shop where I can get my transmission repairs done for a 2008 Subaru Tribeca? I tried the dealer, and they didn't seem very interested in helping me out.

A. I would start with a check of AAA Approved Auto repair network. Go to aaa.com/repair, enter your zip code to find a AAA Approved shop near you. The local shop may not do transmission repairs since it is a specialty, but they may have a transmission shop they work with on a regular basis that provides quality service that they could recommend.

Q. I am looking for a small affordable SUV. I want all-wheel-drive and it still needs to be fun to drive. Does anything come to mind?

A. I recently spent some time in the Mazda CX-30, it is a compact SUV, that can seat four adults and with the rear seats folded has decent cargo space. If you want fun to drive, you will need to step up to the turbo-charged engine. With up to 250 horsepower (premium fuel is not required but does boost horsepower) and the better than average handling, this little SUV is fun to drive. Like many of Mazda's models there seems to be

a little Miata DNA in this SUV. On the downside, fuel economy is just okay, and the infotainment system can be a bit frustrating.

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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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 news@theyankeeexpress.com.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

• Auburn Recreation and Culture is hosting its 10th Annual Holiday Craft Fair from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 9 (snow date Dec. 10) at Auburn High School, 99 Auburn Street, Auburn.
150+ Craft Vendors will help you get into the spirit of the holiday season. Santa will be making an appearance from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., so bring the kids. There will be activities, food, drawing, face painting and much more. For more information

please Contact the Recreation & Culture Division or call 508-832-7736.

- Annual Holiday Bazaar 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Webster Town Hall Auditorium, 350 Main Street
- Light It Up: A Christmas Concert with Whitinsville Christian School alumnus and Nashville star Jay Bragg Basiner, 7:30-9 p.m. at 279 Linwood Avenue. Tickets \$17.
- Celebrate with a traditional Christmas stroll in Sutton's historic village of Manchaug. The free community event incorporates food, history, shopping and holiday merriment from 4- 8 p.m.
- Light It Up: A Christmas Concert with Whitinsville Christian School Alumnus Jay Bragg Basiner. 7:30 – 9 p.m. Whitinsville Christian School, Nehemiah Center for the Arts and Worship, 279 Linwood Avenue Northbridge, Tickets \$17. From Whitinsville Christian School alumnus to Nashville star. Stories, songs and a whole lot of Christmas cheer from a career musician, songwriter and '99 WCS alumnus.
- Christmas Party at the Polish American Club, 167 Mendon Street, Uxbridge. Music, food, Ugly Christmas outfit contest. From 6-11 p.m., \$20 at the door.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

- Free holiday concert by The Blue Shades Clarinets at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 446 Hamilton Street, Southbridge. Free-will offering to be given to Rosilda's Kitchen at the First Methodist Church. Refreshments to follow the concert. For more information, contact holytrinity-outhbridge@gmail.com, 508-765-9559.
- Music at the Farm at 2 p.m. Grace Note Farm, 969 Jackson Schoolhouse Road, Pascoag, Rhode Island. Soprano Emma Robertson, tenor David Rivera Bozon and Pianist Elia Dagher will perform a combination of Italian and Colombian Art song, traditional folk songs, Bach solo piano pieces, Bach Christmas Oratorio, Handel's Messiah and European Christmas carols. Call 401-567-0354 to reserve a seat, \$30 for adults, children \$15.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

• Wreaths Across America will make a stop for a short ceremony at 1:15 p.m. Chester P. Tuttle Post 279, at 88 Bancroft Street, Auburn. There will be a convoy of trailer trucks carrying the wreaths that will be placed on veterans graves at Arlington National Cemetery and buses carrying

Gold Star families and volunteers. All are welcome to attend.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

• Story Time at the Willard House and Clock Museum, 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. for preschoolers and siblings. Children will hear a few stories, take a short museum tour and make a craft, 11 Willard Street, North Grafton.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

• Spirit of Christmas Past presentation by Tufts University faculty member will explore the development of Christmas in New England from 1600 – 1900 at 6:30 p.m. at Northbridge Memorial Town Hall. Light refreshments.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

• Birch Alley Brass Ensemble, Valley Chapel Uxbridge. Thirty-five student and professional musicians from Uxbridge, Hopedale, Mendon, Northbridge and Milford in their 12th annual performance of carols from around the world. At 7 p.m. at Valley Chapel, Uxbridge.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

• For over 65 years the Auburn Fire Rescue Department has brought Santa around town in the Fire Truck to visit children and adults throughout the community. It has become a tradition shared in families for generations. The route will start at approximately 11 a.m. from the Drury Square Fire Station on Auburn Street. Times are approximate when listed. Please be patient as this is all dependent upon traffic and times are subject to change.
• A Christmas floral arrangement class will take place at the millbury first congregational church, 148 West Main Street, Millbury. Sandy michalak of herbert e. Berg florist will teach participants how to complete their own christmas floral arrangement on Saturday, December 16,

2023 at 1:00 pm in fellowship hall. Beginners are welcome. Advance registration required . Payment of \$25.00, Due by Saturday, December 9th to Janice Fortin, 508-826-6381.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

• Baptist Church of Grafton will present the Christmas Story in Song during their regular worship at 10 a.m. A special service to sing and learn about the most inspirational Christmas carols.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

• Midnight, Last Night Cannon firing, M.M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop, 6 Singletary Ave., Sutton.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9 2024

• Coffee Break Bible Study for Women will explore The Power of Forgiveness: Finding Freedom in Forgiveness. Childcare and refreshments provided. 9:30-11 p.m. Pleasant Street Church, 25 Cross Street, Whitinsville. For more information, contact Anna t 508-234-4902; email churchoffice@psvcv.org or visit pscrc.org/adults.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2024

• Bethel Lutheran Church, Auburn Centennial Celebration February 18, 2024. Festive Eucharist Service at 10:30 AM in the church, 90 Bryn Mawr Ave followed by Banquet at the Auburn Elks at 12:30. Centennial Committee reaching out for information on anyone who has attended or whose family has a history with Bethel to share in this event. Please contact Judy Sampson at jas2155@charter.net; Jackie Walsh at jackmae@charter.net or Bethel Facebook page Bethel Lutheran-Auburn MA Centennial. A series of special events will follow throughout 2024.

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Questions? Email info@gscwm.org or call 508-365-0115.

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Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park Events

Walk along the historic canal, which was once used for trade in the 1800s

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

Hike to Little Purgatory, 2-3 p.m.

Purgatory Chasm State Reservation

Meet at the Visitor Center and head south on Charley's Loop until you reach Little Purgatory, a miniature version of the park's iconic chasm.

Then continue on Charley's Loop back to the VC. ~1.25 miles over moderate terrain.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

Tri-State Marker Hike, 1-4 p.m. Douglas State Forest

Meet at the parking area by the Wallum Lake Boat Launch and head west on the Coffeehouse Trail to the Mid State Trail. When the Mid

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UniBank Annual Holiday Giving Program Runs Through Mid-December

UniBank recently announced that the bank kicked off its annual Holiday Giving Tree Program on November 24th to make the season brighter for individuals and families throughout the community. The program is part of the bank's dedication to improving life for the communities it serves.

Each UniBank branch has chosen an organization that fills a need in their community and supports the program by making and purchasing items, and accepting donations from customers and the general public. Many local residents face difficult times around the holiday season and UniBank is pleased to work with local charitable organizations in support

of this effort to help its neighbors. Branch collections are as follows:

Blackstone: Requesting items to be distributed by the Divine Mercy Parish for individuals in Blackstone.

Douglas: Collecting non-perishable food items for the Douglas Food Pantry located at St. Denis Church.

Hopkinton: Requesting items that will be distributed to families in need by Project Just Because.

Milford: Requesting items that will be given to individuals and families in need in the Milford Community. Donations will be distributed by the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Mary of the Assumption Church.

North Grafton: Requesting items needed by senior citizens that will be distributed by the Grafton Senior Center.

Shrewsbury: Requesting food donations that will be distributed by St. Anne's Human Services.

Sutton: Items for senior citizens to be distributed by the Sutton

Senior Center.

Upton: Items needed by senior citizens to be handed out by the Upton Senior Center.

Uxbridge: Requesting specific items for individuals in Uxbridge to be distributed by the People First Food Pantry.

Whitinsville Main: Requesting items that will be distributed by the Friends of Northbridge Elders to individuals in Northbridge.

Whitinsville Plaza: Requesting items to be distributed by the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families to benefit local children.

Worcester: Tags requesting specific items needed by women and children to be distributed by the YWCA.

Donated items may be dropped off during regular banking hours through mid-December. Check with your local branch for specific details and deadlines. Visit www.unibank.com for a listing of branch locations and hours.

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Dean's List

Local residents make Dean's List at Wentworth Institute of Technology for the Summer 2023 semester,

- Anna Pyche of Auburn, Mass.
- Aidan Gordon of Douglas, Mass.
- Madeline Davis of Dudley, Mass.
- Karina LeBlanc of Sutton, Mass.
- Robert Whiton of Uxbridge, Mass.

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Thanksgiving Food Drive Collects Over 200 Canned Meals for Veterans and Families

Centerline Mechanical LLC partnership with Project New Hope Worcester

Centerline Mechanical LLC, a leading name in the HVAC industry and trusted partner of the Mass Save Program, hosted a Thanksgiving Food Drive on Wednesday, November 1 until Wednesday, November 15. Centerline Mechanical LLC and Project New Hope Worcester collected over 200 nonperishable food items to provide Thanksgiving meals to Veterans and their families.

Project New Hope Inc. in Worcester is a charitable organization with a steadfast commitment to providing veterans and their families with the resources they need. Project New Hope Inc. salutes and proudly serves veterans and service members in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Guard and Reserve, and their families. Centerline Mechanical LLC teamed up with

Project New Hope Inc. to collect specific donations to ensure that Veterans and families are fed with a delicious Thanksgiving meal.

"I am so thankful for all donations that CLM was able to collect and provide to Project New Hope Inc.," said Centerline Mechanical LLC owner Julian Picard. "This direct-to-consumer organization is a true blessing to people in need, especially those who sacrificed so much."

The community dropped off canned seasonal foods for Thanksgiving meals at the Centerline Mechanical LLC office located at 5 Charlesview Road, Hopedale. Over 200 donated canned meals were collected in labeled containers, then transported to Project New Hope Inc. in Worcester. Items that were donated include instant potato, cranberry sauce, stuffing, canned

vegetables, raisins, Pop Tarts, oatmeal, apple juice, spam, and gravy. Project New Hope Inc. received \$20 grocery store gift cards, so Veterans could choose a turkey, ham, fish and other items that completed a delicious Thanksgiving dinner.

"It is in giving that we receive," Project New Hope Inc. President Bill Moore quotes St. Francis. He adds, "Such selfless acts of kindness not only brings joy to others but also Enriches our own lives with a deeper sense of purpose and happiness."

For more information on Centerline Mechanical LLC, please visit centerlinemech.com or call 508-310-0955. To learn more about Project New Hope Inc., visit projectnewhopema.org.

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