



Welcome to Webster

BY PATTY ROY

Dave Laabs is a local guy who has always been good with his hands. A 13 year veteran of Ethan Allen Furniture, he began his art career in the three dimensional sphere, crafting fine wood furniture. When the company began trimming its sawmill operations in 2003, Laabs was laid off.

That same year, the self-taught artist decided to open his own shop called The Airbrush Shack, at his home in Thompson Connecticut. Besides screen printed apparel, and lettering for signs and vehicles, Laabs is also a mural artist, having created many of the oversized paintings for restaurants, churches, homes and businesses.

His latest work is viewable from street side – 195 Thompson Road, Webster to be exact. Its subject is one that is close to Laabs’ heart – Webster Lake. Or, as the purists may prefer, Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg.

It is the longest geographic place name on record for the Department of the Interior and exists in other, abbreviated forms.

The lake was a cherished part of Laabs’ childhood years spent at his grandparents’ home in Reid Smith Cove.

“There were many seasons boating, fishing, ice skating,” he said, describing what sounds like a year-round idyll.

Laabs refers to the building the mural was painted on as his

“48’ x 11’ canvas,” and covers the entire side of a shop owned by Amber and Wayne Stewart and where Amber operates The Water Lily, a small women’s boutique.

Amber approached Laabs with the idea of a mural (he had already completed one on another wall of the building), but said she couldn’t afford to pay him.

“That’s okay, I’ll do some fund raising,” was Laabs’s cheerful reply. Though he didn’t reach his fundraising goal, he got enough donations to enable him to start and complete the mural about two weeks ago, assisted by Scott Ciprari.

The mural depicts a “Welcome

MURAL

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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.

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.



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

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

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

You can ride in a carryall drawn

RAILROAD

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MURAL

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to Webster” sign along with the lake’s lengthy Eastern Algonquin name.

From left to right, the first illustration portrays folks enjoying a ride on a vintage wooden speedboat. The center portion of the mural is a giant map of the lake with points of interest, listing the three ponds that combine to create the lake and also shows

said Laabs. “My intent was to help bring community together to bring some art to a very noticeable building for all who pass by not far from the Massachusetts-Connecticut line and welcoming all to Webster.”

The projected was funded by Amber and Wayne Stewart, Indian Ranch, Samuel Slater’s Restaurant, Webster Five Bank, Webster First Federal Credit Union, Lake Shore Legal, Webster Lake Gifts, Sandi Grzyb of



its islands, shoals and coves.

On the far right, is a tribute to the original Nipmuc inhabitants. Some small text lists John Eliot and Daniel Gookin who established the town of Chaubunagungamaug in 1674, site of the Praying Indian.

“This mural was a public art project involving many generous donors who all contributed in some way to funding the project,”

Avenue Real Estate, Maureen Cimoch of Lake Realty, Hickey Fleet Service, Lakeview Marine, State Line Builders, Body by Tabitha, Crossfit Clean Slate, Doc Stop, Quinebaug Valley Broadcasting-WQVR 99.3, Glenn and Shelby Melia. There were also anonymous donors, Laab said.

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RAILROAD

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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 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 Lionels 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 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 Totsis 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 then 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 overtime if there’s a good crowd.

Nursing Students earn a perfect score on Medication Calculation Test

Vanessa Agyare of Jefferson, Julie Dodson of West Brookfield, Tracy Nakya-gaba of Charlton, Samuel Njenga, and Christian Sochiletey both of Worcester and Ashley Urbain of Paxton all practical nursing students at Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy and members of the Practical Nursing Class of 2024 has earned a perfect score on their Medication Calculation test.

According to the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy Student Handbook, under Clinical Policies, the “Students must demonstrate a level of medication calculation competence before administering medications to patients in the clinical setting. Students must pass the Medication Calculation Test (MCT) with a 90% or higher before passing medication in the clinical setting. Students will have three (3) opportunities to pass the MCT.”

Agyare, Dodson, Nakyagaba,

Njenga, Sochiletey and Urbain passed the MCT with a score of 100% on their first attempt.

Further, as stated in the Student Handbook, “Students will receive a different version of the test each time they take it. After each unsuccessful attempt, the student MUST see an instructor for remediation before attempting to take the MCT again. If a student does not pass the MCT after the second (2nd) attempt, a performance notification will be issued. Students who do not pass the MCT after the third (3rd) attempt will be unable to pass medications and therefore be unable to meet the clinical objectives and ultimately unable to continue in the PN Academy.”

According to Gretheline Bolandrina, DHA, MSN Ed, RN, CRRN Academy Director, “I have always believed that student engagement and collaboration is a huge part of student success. It helps that we have amazing faculty at Bay Path.

Dr. Ana Olivar who teaches Pharmacology is intentional in making sure our PN students are successful in doing what they love to do.”

About Bay Path RVTHS Practical Nursing Academy: Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy offers a 40-week, (10-month), full-time, Monday through Friday, evening program. The program begins in mid-August and is completed in late June. Graduates receive a Practical Nursing Certificate and are eligible to take the NCLEX-PN licensure exam. The Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy is fully approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services Department of Public Health Board of Registration in Nursing (www.mass.gov/dph/boards/rn) and is accredited by the Commission on Occupational Education (www.council.org). For more information visit www.baypath.net



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Bartlett High School's MASHuP Day a Great Success

BY JANET STOICA

With the dedicated staff and administration in the Webster School System, all students are in the right place at the right time. Shooting for the stars seems like it's there for the taking!

Bartlett High School introduced the Pathways Program to its student population two years ago and the momentum this program has shown is truly exciting and rewarding to the students and their instructors. Pathways Program students have exclusive access to a variety of recognition opportunities including college credit, scholarships, preferred admission at colleges and universities, internships, apprenticeships, and other

avenues to highlight their unique skills according to the Program Coordinator Michele Bigelow. Courses offered include Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Marketing, Engineering, and Biomedical Sciences.

On November 2, Bartlett student tour guides who are in the Pathways Program introduced 150 Webster Middle School students to the Pathways Program courses holding a MASHuP Day according to Ms. Bigelow. BHS tour guides led six groups of 25 students from the 8th grade to different stations. "The students were able to participate in hands-on activities that included Marketing Challenges, Virtual Reality Experiences presented by their partner BV Hub, Clawbot Challenges, and Microscope Tasks.



Tour guides included Joe Owusu, Htwa Peh, Natalee Kelly, Lilian Grenier, Isabelle Rodrigues, and Isaiah Zayas. The guides were excellent in their presentation skills," stated Ms. Bigelow.

Student Facilitators were Ayden Heenan, Peter Lavache, Muhammad Aslam, Haideeliz Martinez, Adam Phillips, Kwadwo Agyemang, Aarilyn Artey, Anthony Lopez, Angel Marin Caceres, Hung Tran, Talyn Inthavongsa, Nathan

Cole, Eryk Piwowarczyk, Wynter Cady, Tiffany Oppong, Hope Cooper, Dakota Vandreuil, Savannah Bjork, Georgia LaPierre, Leximee Phanthavong, Cayleb Mercure, Reece LeBeau, Dylan Polen, Neil Duszlak, Dan Mchirgery, Desirae Boma, Jared Fallas, Naomie Orellien, Isabella Richards, and Deijah Delgado.

Teacher Facilitators consisted of Dane Laboissonniere, Ben Jenness, Michele Bigelow, Jocelyn Young

(BV Hub), Jessica Burokas, Artur Duque, and Matt Traina.

"It was our best MASHuP yet!" said Ms. Bigelow, "everyone was geared up for learning what the new courses were about and our facilitators and tour guides were just the best. It's exciting to see the level of enthusiasm for these advanced learning courses. We are very proud of all our participants."

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Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program's Winter Heating Season

Applications are now open for eligible Massachusetts households to apply for financial assistance this heating season through April 30, 2024.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) is pleased to announce November 1 as the start of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) 2023-2024 winter heating season. LIHEAP is a free, statewide service funded by the federal program of the same name that helps eligible households stay warm during the winter months by paying a portion of winter heating bills.

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 encourage 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/MassLI-HEAP.

Samuel Slater staff thanks Webster EMS

Webster Emergency Medical Services (Webster EMS) made Giving

wanted to make sure the museum has a top-of-the-line model that is easy to use.



An automated external defibrillator, is a sophisticated yet easy to use device to help those experiencing sudden cardiac arrest.

Tuesday a very special day for the Samuel Slater Experience museum with the donation of an AED (Automated External Defibrillator).

Chief Gary Milliard noted that “AEDs save a lot of lives.”

The donated device is a LIFEPAK CR2 model, made by Physio Control. Milliard said he

Webster EMS staff will train museum staff and volunteers on its use.

Thank you so much, Webster EMS. We're thrilled to have this potentially life-saving device available for our visitors.

– Signed by Samuel Slater Experience staff

Select board approves single tax rate

FY 24 tax rate finalized by state DOR

Based on the recommendation of the Board of Assessors to maintain a Residential Factor of 1.00, the Dudley Board of Selectmen voted on November 27 to retain a single rate of taxation for residential and commercial/industrial/personal property classes. The vote followed the annual tax classification hearing conducted by Principal Assessor Lisa Berg. The full Tax Classification presentation is available at: <https://www.dudleyma.gov/assessors>

Subsequently, the state Department of Revenue on November 29 certified the town's Fiscal Year

'24 tax rate to be set at \$10.48 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, which is a 32-cent increase over FY23.

Ms. Berg reported the average single-family home valued at \$360,942 will see an annual tax bill increase of \$454.89.

Selectmen noted the three Proposition 2 1/2 Override questions voters approved on the August 17 special election ballot were said to add \$1.21 to the tax rate. At the time of the election, Treasurer/Collector Richard Carmignani Jr. reported that 24 cents would drop from the FY24 tax rate due to retiring debt. That retiring debt was to

drop the expected \$1.21 increase to 97 cents. When selectmen asked Carmignani to comment on the 65-cent discrepancy, he said, “It's a moving target.”

The town's new growth, Ms. Berg reported to selectmen, is \$177,065. Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda said the Town Accountant has reported that local revenue for FY24 is a 1 percent decrease from FY23.

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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 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



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.



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, 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 circumstances 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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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 become a big deal until the mid-



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

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



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 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 Curboy and Jake Terrenden.

The blacksmith shop was once the domain of a man named Em-

erson 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 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.

Blacksmithing in those days was more like being a solo practitioner, not turning out things at a factory rate.

There were places that could produce at that rate, Choiniere said.

"In East Douglas, they produced 90,000 axes in 1832," he said.

Old Sturbridge Village hours:
OPEN Friday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 8:30 p.m.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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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 present 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

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



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.

The journalist in me longs to better understand him. (Moreover, 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.

"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

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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

LUKE

continued on page 9

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. Here's what you need to know about the current inventory situation and what it means for you.

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 number-

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.

bers 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



LUKE

continued from page 8

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

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Know the key benefits of a Roth IRA

As you save for retirement, you'll want to take full advantage of the investment vehicles available to you — and one



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

of the best is a Roth IRA. But what sets it apart from other accounts? Three key factors distinguish the Roth IRA:

- Tax-free earnings — When you invest in a Roth IRA, your earnings can grow tax free, provided you don't begin taking withdrawals until you're 59½ and you've had your account at least five years. If you don't meet these criteria, withdrawals of earnings will be subject to taxes and a possible 10% penalty.
- No penalties on withdrawals of contributions — You fund a Roth IRA with after-tax dollars, which means you can withdraw your con-

tributions — not the earnings — at any time for any reason, without facing taxes or penalties. So, you could use some of your Roth IRA money for non-retirement purposes, such as helping pay for a child's college education.

- No required withdrawals at age 73 — With a traditional IRA or a 401(k), you must start taking minimum distributions, or RMDs — once you reach 73. But this rule doesn't apply to a Roth IRA — you can keep it intact as long as you like. You may need to tap into it for some of your retirement income, but if you don't use it all, the remainder could benefit your beneficiaries.

A Roth IRA does share one similarity to a traditional IRA: It can be funded with virtually any type of investment, including stocks, bonds, mutual funds, certificates of deposit (CDs) and so on.

However, unlike a traditional IRA, a Roth IRA does have income limits.

For the 2023 tax year, if your modified adjusted gross income was less than \$138,000 (for a single filer) or \$218,000 (married filing jointly), you can put in the full amount of \$6,500 and an additional \$1,000 catch-up contribution if you're 50 or older. The amounts you can contribute will gradually decline at higher income levels and are phased out entirely at \$153,000 for single filers and \$228,000 if you're married and file jointly. These income ranges will likely

change for the 2024 tax year, so you'll want to consult with your tax advisor for details.

Still, even if you've contributed to a traditional IRA or a 401(k) for many years, you may have a chance to eventually "convert" some, or all, of these funds to a Roth IRA and gain its benefits. It's not hard to do this conversion — it involves minimal paperwork from your traditional IRA or 401(k) provider — but it does come with tax issues. Any money that's converted from a traditional IRA or 401(k) to a Roth IRA will be treated as ordinary taxable income. This can trigger a large tax bill, so, unless you have the money available from other accounts to pay the taxes, the conversion may or may not make sense for you. But you don't have to convert all the funds at once.

By spreading the conversion over several years, you could reduce the effect of a large tax hit in any single year. You may want to consult with your tax advisor before converting any funds to a Roth IRA.

If you can find a way to contribute to a Roth IRA, either directly or through a conversion, consider it carefully — you'll find a lot of upside to this investment account.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Please contact Dennis Antonopoulos, your local Edward Jones Advisor at 5 Albert Street, Auburn, MA 01501 Tel: 508-832-5385 or dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com. Edward Jones Member SIPC



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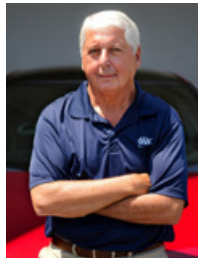
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THE CAR DOCTOR

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



BY JOHN PAUL

done about this situation. 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.

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TALES FROM BEYOND tomdagostino.com

The Spectre Leaguers: Part II

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

If you missed Part I, go to www.theyankeeexpress.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.

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SPORTS

Running To Get Into College

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Shepherd Hill's Anthony Graves had never really thought about running track until his freshman season. Prioritizing football as his number one sport, he was looking for something to do to keep himself ready for football season. With a lot of his football family participating in track following the season he was encouraged to try

and like most athletes who excel, he pays attention to detail by doing drills the right way, studying and executing proper sprint technique and mechanics, while also working on overlooked aspects of sprinting such as balance, stability and power."

In addition to running the 300 and 400 during the winter season, Graves will also take part in the 4x200 relay team for Shepherd Hill. It was the 300 that allowed the then freshman to take

man earned himself a spot in the Nike Nationals at the Armory in New York were running in the 400 his time put him fourth on the all-time indoor list. It was here in New York that Graves realized that track could give him a foot in the door at going to college.

"Last year having the opportunity to qualify for the Nike Nationals in NY opened my eyes and I realized that I could actually go places with track," Graves said. "Following the winter season, it came to me that if I wanted to pursue college, track could be the sport that got me in. To be able to run at different colleges throughout the country would be amazing."

Harmon noted that the freshman struggled a bit with some nagging pain in his hip flexor, but instead of using it as a crutch he was able to go to physical therapy and make some adjustments to his mechanics and was ready to go for the spring season. Performances continued to grow as Graves was part of Shepherd Hill's 4 x 100 team that won the Central Mass Invitational, was third in the District E Relay Meet and finished first in the MidWach A League Championship Meet.

Graves also stepped up in the League Championship Meet when the Ram's senior captain suffered a hamstring injury. The freshman took on the 200-meter dash and although not even ranked in the top eight heading into the meet was able to grab second place and finished a mere 1/10th of a second way from first place. He also finished seventh in the 400 at the statewide large school Freshman / Sophomore Meet, which ranks him as the number two freshman in the event in school history.

Much like the indoor season, the newcomer to running continued to show everyone that running was indeed his passion.

"His performances in outdoor track qualified him for a trip to Oregon to compete in the Nike Nationals in the 100 meter," the Coach said. "The facility on the campus of the University of Oregon is one of the premiere facilities in the world and has hosted National, International, Olympic Trials and Collegiate national Championships. At the Nationals Tony finished 25th in the nation, running a personal best time of 11.66 which ranks in the top 15 all time in school



Anthony Graves of Shepherd Hill Regional High School in Charlton (yellow running shoes) started his high school athletic career in football, but quickly evolved into a top runner

it out and once he stepped onto that track he would never be the same.

"I had never run track until last winter, football was always my main focus," Graves said. "I was quick on the football field, but I found a whole new level on the track. I found a passion running track, it's all about myself and I was locked in."

Although a first-time runner last winter for the Rams, when Graves took to the track he looked like a veteran runner. During the indoor season he posted a personal best of 38.89 (breaking the school's freshman record) in the 300 and a 56.47 running the 400.

"He joined the team as a freshman and relatively quickly made an impact contributing to the team's success," Coach Len Harmon said. "He is very disciplined

his running to the next level.

"I just fell in love with the 300 during that winter season," he said. "I medaled in the event during the Freshman / Sophomore Meet and as a sophomore this year my goal is to get back there and to be in the top three."

By the time that Graves' first indoor season came to a close, according to Harmon, the Shepherd Hill athlete recorded the top freshman time in the 300 and 400 and posted the second fastest time in the 600, while also becoming the 6th fastest runner in the 55-meter dash in Rams history. Graves also participated as the lead leg of the 4 x 200 relay team that was one of the best in Central Massachusetts, while positing the fourth fastest time in school history.

With all his accolades on the track that first season, the fresh-



history and is number two for freshman all time in the event."

As a first-time runner with Shepherd Hill, Graves took home Rookie of the Year honors in both the indoor and outdoor track seasons, so needless to say Coach Harmon is very excited about the upcoming indoor season to see what he can do as a second-year runner. According to the Coach, Graves has already assumed a leadership role and has been independently working with two other sophomores during the off season to prepare for the upcoming indoor season.

As he gets ready for his sophomore season, Graves is hoping

that he can shave as much time as possible off his times as well as continuing with his nutrition program.

"It used to be whatever I could find I put into my body," he said. "I'm more disciplined now and have much more energy and my focus in school has improved. I want to do better in the indoor season and when spring comes I'm going to be shooting for that number one spot in the 200, where I finished second last year."



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DECEMBER EVENTS:

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CRAWFORD LIBRARY BOOK GROUP

Monday, Dec. 18; 6-7:30 p.m.

Book being read is "Horse" by Geraldine Brooks

Books are available at the circulation desk for check-out one month prior to discussion. No registration required.

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Thursdays; 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

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This is an interactive program featuring singing, guitar music, dancing, rhythm instruments, stories and variety of fun props, including a parachute, beanbags, scarves, and pom poms. These programs are theme-based, and cover everything from holidays and seasons to dinosaurs and bugs!

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Artists Wanted

Booklovers' Gourmet, located at 72 East Main Street in Webster, is continuing their mission to offer space in their cafe gallery to showcase the talent of local artists through monthly exhibits. To consider applying for a month in 2024, please read the guidelines below.

- Original artwork in any media including photography, painting, drawing, collage, fabric, etc. 3-D work is allowed as long as it hangs on the wall.

- Expect to show 12-20 pieces, depending on size.

- All work must be framed, ready to hang.

- Not all work need be for sale, but is highly encouraged.

- Pricing is at the sole discretion of the artist.

- A 30% commission will be taken on any sales during or as a result of the show.

- An artist's reception is offered during the month of display, usually on a Saturday afternoon.

- Artists are responsible for delivering and picking up work as well as providing a list of titles and prices with corresponding labels of the back of each piece.

- Upon acceptance, a brief artist bio, show description and title as well as an image representing the work in jpg format should be emailed to the store for promotional purposes.

- Booklovers' Gourmet will

promote the show widely through its website, email newsletter, local press releases and social media. Artists are strongly encouraged to do the same and invite their friends and family to see the show.

- Previous artists may apply again as long as they will be showing new work.

Review of work may be done in person or via email. Send samples in jpg format to deb@booklovers-gourmet.com along with your requested month or make an appointment to come in Tuesday-Friday 10am-5pm. Months are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. For any questions, please call 508-949-6232.

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Christmas Messages and Reflections from Area Houses of Worship

BY JANET STOICA

As Christmas 2023 approaches bringing with it the commercialism and stress that has now become our Christmas season, it seems most appropriate to reflect on what Christmas was truly meant to be. The unfortunate mania of scurrying about buying sometimes meaningless holiday gifts appears to have taken away what the deep and thoughtful message of sincere Christianity is all about – that is, peace among mankind and the joy that the Christ Child brought to the world over two thousand years ago. In years past, several parish communities in our area offered the following words for many of us to reflect upon and we sincerely thank them for their contributions as they still resonate in the current year.

At The Charlton Baptist Church, Pastor Stephen Nordbye cited a Washington Post columnist, Gene Weingarten, who described the following event in his writing: “During morning commute in Washington DC, no one paid much attention to the man who entered the subway station, took out a violin, and began playing. Hundreds passed by. Some stopped to listen; a few threw change into his violin case. Total take – \$37. Unbeknownst to all, the man was virtuoso Joshua Bell, playing a \$3 million dollar Stradivarius violin. Earlier, people had paid over \$100 to hear him in concert. This was set up by a reporter conducting an experiment -- ‘in an ordinary place and at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?’” Using this most relevant example, Pastor Nordbye mentioned that “2000 years ago Divine Beauty transcended ‘an ordinary place’ at just the right time. God slipped incognito into human existence as a baby born in Bethlehem. Few realized this child was in fact, “Emmanuel” (God with us); Jesus, savior of the world. This Christmas, will you

pass him by?”

According to the church’s web page, current Interim Pastor is George Kohl and Associate Pastor is Trevor Berg. Charlton Baptist Church, 50 Hammond Hill Road, Charlton MA 01507. Phone: (508) 248-4488. To learn more about their Mass schedules, please visit their website: www.charltonbaptist.org

Reverend (Chris) Krzysztof Korcz, Pastor of St. Andrew Bobola Parish in Dudley spoke about how another Christmas is upon us. “Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,” said the letter to the Hebrews. God sends His Son to be cared for, protected, and listened to by us. Mary and Joseph accepted God’s hope by accepting the responsibility of being earthly parents for a baby sent from God. They held him and cared for him, listened to his cries, and learned to understand what was in his mind and his heart. They cared for this child and raised him in love. They gave the child a home, and found new life in their relationship with Jesus. The glory of God lives among us; the story of Christmas is told and retold day after day as God invites us to share in the kingdom He has prepared for us through His son. The story of Christmas is the story of how God’s Kingdom enters our lives. We tell the story not only in words, but in the language that is beyond words: by how we live. In our baptismal promises we covenant to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ. And our example, how we live, is part of telling the story. We are called to tell the story all the time, but it is most urgent not in times of comfort and power, but in times of need; not in moments of glory, but rather in calls for help. And we can experience Christmas throughout the year as we learn to hear and understand the cries of children and adults who live

in need, who ask for help. The world associates Christmas with children and not just because of the birth of the baby Jesus. I think one reason we associate Christmas with children is that children are quick to identify what they want and ask for it -- sometimes loudly and insistently! And children are just as quick to show their joy when they get what they need, and their dismay when they don’t get what they asked for specially. Both the world and the church associate Christmas with the poor and the outcast and not just because the story tells us of the traveling family forced to bed down in a stable. People who are poor and openly display their needs. We can tell what they need, because we see so clearly what they don’t have. Christmas is a story about all of us receiving that which we most want and need: love -- a strong, unconditional love. The Christmas story is about how God loves us and that he asks us to be partners in loving people with whom we live in this world. God asks us, like Joseph and Mary, to learn to hear and understand the cries of children, older people, people who are sick, poor, and needy. The Word became flesh and lives among us. May each day be Christmas, and may we tell the story by our lives each day: the story of how we cared for the presence of Christ entrusted to us, by caring for each other and for ourselves, and love as we have been loved. Christmas day is a special time of the year. It is a time when our spirits, bursting with joy, are uplifted towards God. It is a day when the glory of God manifests itself very clearly in each and every one of us who are celebrating the coming of Jesus into the world. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas! May God bless

you and your family.” St. Andrew Bobola Church, 54 West Main Street, Dudley MA 01571. Phone: (508) 943-5633. Mass schedules can be found on their website: standrewbobola.com

Reverend Charles Borowski of St. Joseph Basilica in Webster (who has since passed on) said “each one of us has various memories and thoughts about the celebration of Christmas. Memories and thoughts change as we advance in years. In our younger years, most of us I am sure, have fond memories of writing a letter to Santa and expecting our requests to be answered on Christmas Day. For those of us growing older, family, friends, visits, food, and perhaps Church services bring about pleasant thoughts and memories and all of us anticipate the snowfall before Christmas Eve. Snow made the special season complete. As my Christmas message, I would like to share with you some special thoughts and memories which I thought about when I was younger. I remember getting the Christmas tree, decorating it and decorating our outside front door. My special job was to set up the nativity scene. But what if these nativity scene figures came to life? What questions would I ask them? To Joseph: How come you never said a word in scripture? You were always obedient to God’s will and took care of the Holy Family. To Mary: Were you tired after the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and were you disappointed with the place you gave birth to Jesus? To the angels: Were you always the faithful messengers of God in the Old and New Testaments and did people always listen to you or did they disregard your messages like some of us do today

with our Guardian Angels? To the shepherds and Magi (Kings): Why did you go in haste to see the Christ Child? Your journeys were long and the scriptures say ‘the Magi paid Him homage and offered Him gifts.’ What about the animals in the stable? They offered their manger. The sheep came to meet their Shepherd. And the donkey, which people make fun of, had the very important job of carrying Mary and Jesus to Bethlehem. What kind of town was Bethlehem like? The name means ‘House of Bread.’ It was the place where Jesus ‘The Bread’ from heaven chose to be born. Why wasn’t there any room for the Holy Family? Couldn’t anyone care enough to invite a woman who was about to give birth into their home? Surely someone had some room besides an empty manger. As for us? If you had the chance, how would you change the Nativity scene? If given the chance, what figure would you like to become? Maybe we have become lifeless figures during the past year and maybe we can come to life at Christmastime and begin to experience a new life of caring and sharing and giving – not only for gifts but of ourselves in helping to make this a better world, community, and family. The above questions can be answered by you. If you ask Jesus what gift you can give Him, I’m sure his answer would be ‘Love God and your neighbor as yourself.’ To learn the schedule of Masses, please visit their website: parish.stjosephwebster.com Pastor, Rev. Grzegorz Chodkowski. St. Joseph Basilica, 47 Whitcomb Street, Webster MA 01570. Phone: (508) 943-0467.



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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.

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 pre-schoolers 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

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 holytrinityouthbridge@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.

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HAPPENINGS!
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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

State turns south, stay straight on the SNETT trail and follow it to the Tri State Trail and then on to where three states meet!

Webster Senior Center

5 Church Street
508-949-3845

The Senior Center will close at 12:30 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 22 (lunch will be served) and will stay closed until Friday, Dec. 29. It will be closed again on Monday, Jan. 1 in observance of New Year's Day.

SHINE counselor is available at the Senior Center to help with your health insurance needs, Call 508-949-3845.

Mass Health Application Assistance: Tri-Valley Inc. has certified application counselors available to assist you. Appointments are available Tuesdays and Thursdays 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. and Wednesdays 1 – 4 p.m. at the Tri-Valley office in Dudley. Call 508-949-6640 to schedule an appointment.

Appointments are also available 9 – 11 a.m. at the Webster Senior Center. Call 508-949-3845

to schedule an interview at the Senior Center.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office House Numbering Program will create a custom wooden sign with your house number free of charge. One sign per senior household. Please stop by the Webster Senior Center or give us a call if you are interested in having a house number sign made for you. (508) 949-3845.

Weekly activities
CHAIR DANCING WITH FORTY ARROYO RETURNS Mondays, Dec.13! Chair dancing is the perfect workout for any fitness ability! Come join us on Mondays 9:30 - 10:30 am \$3.00 per class.

Knit/Crochet Mondays 10 a.m.
Bingo Tuesdays, 12:30 p.m.
Bingo sheets are not sold after 12:45 p.m.

Progressive Pitch Wednesdays, 1 p.m.
13-card Pitch Thursdays 1 p.m.
Cribbage 1 p.m. Thursdays

Mahjongg 1 p.m. Fridays
Coloring Workshop with Stacey. Friday, Dec. 15 – 10 a.m. \$5 per class. Sign up at front desk.

Lunch is served Tuesday – Thursday at 11:30 a.m. \$3 donation appreciated. Call 48 hours in advance.

Monday, Dec. 18 at 1 p.m. Movie matinee "Nyad." The true story of athlete Diana Nyad who at 60 years old achieved her life-long dream of of a 110 mile open ocean swim from Cuba to Florida.

Ice Cream Social Thursday, Dec. 21 at 12 p.m. Sponsored by Webster Manor, Sign up at the Senior Center front desk.

Very Merry Dickens Carolers come to Samuel Slater Experience Dec. 10

The Very Merry Dickens Carolers will bring the music of the holiday season to the Samuel Slater Experience museum on Sunday, December 10, at 5 p.m.

A professional group of a cappella singers, the Very Merry Dickens Carolers look the part in period costumes. Their repertoire of 4-part

Come spent a little time indulging in the holiday spirit on Webster's recreated "Main Street" at the Samuel Slater Experience museum, 31 Ray Street, Webster.

This event is sponsored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council as part of its festival grant program.

About Samuel Slater Experience

Samuel Slater Experience opened last year to tell the story of Samuel Slater, the beginnings of the American



harmony features a variety of styles, including traditional, swing, and jazz.

Holiday refreshments are included in the price of admission.

Tickets can be purchased online at <https://samuel Slater Experience>.org, by phone at 508-461-2911, or at the box office during regular open hours. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children 12 and under.

Industrial Revolution, and Slater's impact on mill towns such as Webster, Massachusetts. The museum employs advanced digital technology with immersive video and interactive exhibits to recreate two time periods: the early 1800s and the early 1900s. For more information and tickets, visit www.samuel Slater Experience.org.

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November

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Timeless gifts from the good old days

If you are longing for a traditional, less harried Christmas season, you won't want to miss Christmas by Candlelight at Old Sturbridge Village. This popular holiday event kicked off on November 24 and is open select Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through December 30.

The malls aren't the only place you can shop for gifts. Unique, Village-made holiday items are available at the Sturbridge Village Miner Grant Store during this shopping event and the Ox & Yoke Mercantile which opens daily at 10 a.m. and does not require admission to the Village.

Visitors who would like to give the gift of something handmade, can learn about crafts made throughout the Village, purchase craft kits for gift giving, or try their skill at hand dipping candles.

Your family, friends and out-of-town visitors will find themselves enchanted as they step back in time to celebrate a New England Christmas in the 19th Century. Enter Village households to watch traditional craft making demonstrations, stroll through The Christmas Tree Trail featuring over 80 cut trees, and be astounded by over 4,000 candles and lanterns and over 2,000 yards of garland dressing up the Village in its holiday finest. And don't miss the nightly lighting ceremony at 4:30 p.m.

And yes, Santa Claus himself makes a nightly appearance allowing the little ones to tell him their special Christmas wishes.

Purchase tickets in advance for savings at www.osv.org/event/christmas-by-candlelight/.



DA Urges Participation in Worcester County Gun Buyback

Worcester County District Attorney Joseph D. Early Jr. is urging people to take advantage of the 22nd annual Guns to Gardens program by turning in unwanted firearms on Saturday at participating police departments.

More than 4,000 guns have been turned in since 2002, when the program started in the City of Worcester. The program welcomes citizens of all Worcester County communities to voluntarily turn in unwanted firearms to participating police departments in Charlton, Fitchburg, Northborough, Milford, Worcester or City Welding & Fabrication located at 10 Ararat St. in Worcester where owners can watch their weapon be destroyed.

Those who turn in firearms will receive gift cards in the amount of \$50 for a rifle, \$100 for a pistol, and \$150 for an automatic or semi-automatic weapon. Free trigger locks are also available, and replica guns will be accepted.

"Our goal is, and always has been, getting unwanted and unsecured guns out of the house," Mr. Early said. "We want to reduce the tragic loss of life that can occur because of these unwanted guns. This

buyback program helps to avoid such devastating casualties and the high public cost that comes from treating gunshot victims. Reducing accidents and tragedies in Worcester County benefits us all."

Mr. Early praised Dr. Michael Hirsh, medical director of Worcester's Division of Public Health, for his continued gun safety advocacy and for starting the gun buyback program.

"An unsecured weapon in the home is a public health danger that leads to more frequent homicides, burglaries, lethal domestic violence, accidental shootings, and suicide in the home," Dr. Hirsh said. "Please honor the memories of all our citizens, young and old, harmed by gun violence by bringing in your unwanted/unsecured weapon(s)."

In recent years, Dr. Hirsh spearheaded a program to turn the destroyed weapons from the buyback program into garden tools to be used in the UMass community garden. The garden is maintained by members of the UMass community and the produce is donated to those in need.

As in the past, Mr. Early will

relax enforcement of the law prohibiting the carrying of firearms for people participating in the program. Residents should bring unloaded weapons wrapped or in a bag. Ammunition will also be accepted, but should be separately bagged. Participants are reminded to treat all firearms as though they are loaded and dangerous.

Firearms can be turned in at the following locations during the specified hours:

Charlton Police Department: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Fitchburg Police Department: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Northborough Police Department: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Milford Police Department: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Worcester Police Department: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

City Welding & Fabrication: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Guns to Gardens is sponsored by the Worcester County District Attorney's Office, UMass Memorial Medical Center, the City of Worcester, the Worcester Police Department and the Worcester Department of Public Health.



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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.

Wings of Song Christmas Concert

Celtic Noëls

*At Nazareth, in Galilee,
Hear now the angel's voice:
"Hail Mary, thou Mother of God,
The Lord has made his choice."*

Sung by a single soprano, these lines are like a trumpet call. They signal the news that Archangel Gabriel brings to the young virgin Mary of Nazareth; they also signal the start of the Celtic Noëls.

This group of pieces was recorded by the community chorus Ensemble Choral du Bout du Monde (Choral Ensemble from the Edge of the Earth) partly in a studio and partly in the Abbaye (Abbey) Saint-Guénolé de Landévennec in far western Brittany, France, in 1997. They were released on the CD Noëls Celtiques (Green Linnet Records) in 1998; the

disc has since won several awards.

"From the rich cultural heritage of the Celts in Brittany, a stunning collection of traditional and contemporary vocal music for the holidays, sung in Breton by this world-class choral ensemble from France" is how the Celtic Noëls are described on the CD. They are indeed stunning: deeply devotional, charmingly melodic, a winning blend of folk, popular, classical, and church-hymn influences.

Nym Cooke, Music Director of the Quinebaug Valley Singers (now Wings of Song), heard this music in 2004 and was bowled over. He and his daughter Thalia Slocombe soon set to work making English "singing versions" (rhymed and metered) of the texts. That Christmas, QVS and a Barre, Mass. chorus, the Band of Voices, presented the world

premiere of the English-language Celtic Noëls.

The Quinebaug Valley Singers performed the Celtic Noëls two more times, partnering with the Band of Voices again (along with Nym's school chorus) in 2008 and combining with the Quaboag Choral Society in 2015. This year, Wings of Song is pleased to offer this gorgeous music once again to audiences in south-central Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut.

The Celtic Noëls are not only a celebration of Christmas from a Christian perspective; they are an affirmation of Brittany's own culture, and of Celtic culture in general. The particular flavor of Celtic music comes across strongly here: sometimes a little wild, often with a feeling of closeness to large, untamable, natural forces. Thunder, wind,

even bird-cries are in this music, and instruments other than voices are crucial here: the Noëls call for a band comprised of high sopranino recorder, acoustic guitar, piano, and church organ, as well as a gigantic drum and an equally colossal gong.

In recognition of Brittany's own language, which is much closer to other Celtic tongues such as Welsh than it is to French, and which is also a badge of cultural identity for the Breton people, the chorus will sing verses in several songs in Breton. The first half of the concert will be comprised of French pieces for Christmas from several centuries—again, largely sung in English. The concert as a whole promises a deep dive into a hauntingly beautiful repertory of music for the season.

These concerts are simply not to be missed. It is suggested that you

put them on your calendar now: Saturday, December 9th at 7:30pm at St. Joachim Chapel, part of St. Anne/St. Patrick Parish, 16 Church Street, Fiskdale, Mass.; and/or Sunday, December 10th at 3pm at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, 18 East Main Street, Webster, Mass. Wings of Song concerts are always free, with a freewill offering collected at intermission. Complimentary refreshments—i.e., yummy eats and beverages!—are served in a jolly social hour after each performance. Allvenues are handicap accessible.

For more information about Wings of Song or the Celtic Noëls concerts, contact Music Director Nym Cooke at nymcooke@gmail.com, or President Carol Curtin at carolcurtin77@gmail.com.

HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 16

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 Singletery Ave., Sutton.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9 2024

• Coffee Break Bible Study for Women will explore The Power of Forgiveness: Finding Freedom in Forgiveness. Childcare and re-

freshments provided. 9:30-11 p.m. Pleasant Street Church, 25 Cross Street, Whitinsville. For more information, contact Anna t 508-234-4902; email churchoffice@pscvc.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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