



Fire Science Students with Instructor, Jon Belanger

## Oxford Schools Develop Improvement Plan for Students, Parents, and Staff

BY JANET STOICA

“It’s all about our students,” said Michael Lucas, Oxford School Superintendent, “we have met with our parents and staff and our focus is on our kids from Pre-K to Grade 12. We want to make their education here the best possible experience. We’ve created a District Improvement Plan and have decided, as a team, to better publicize our programs. We want kids to stay in our town’s school system.”

The District Improvement Plan states that the Oxford

Public Schools will provide the best quality education for each child by building rapport with all parents, teachers, students, and families including implementing inclusive practices in all Tier 1 classrooms (grade level standards); developing strong student-centered practices to include all learners; and supporting a Pre-K to Fourth Grade Tier 2 and 3 System (more intense education beyond core reading programs for students who did not make adequate progress in the general classroom); and building a 5-12 tiered system

(more focused instruction and intervention).

Teaching staff will use a variety of instructional strategies to improve student engagement, attendance, ninth-grade passing rates, retention, and achievement as evidenced by a self-reported survey and/or observational data. With annual reviews of technology, curriculum, textbooks, and supplies focusing on the results and successes of Oxford students the school system hopes to ad-

**OXFORD**

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## Auburn Historical Museum is Calling You!

BY JANET STOICA

Yes you, you’re the one I’m writing to. When’s the last time you took a bit of your time to relax for an hour or so to visit your local artifacts’ site? This unique find is open to all not just Auburn residents. There are interesting exhibits and well-informed volunteers who will be happy to show you around while

the AHS, stated that “some of the cards were donated from my parents’ collection and some were donated from the Auburn Elementary School teachers, specifically Mary Louise Edgerley of the Boyce Street School. These are very beautiful Valentine’s Day cards, some are the honeycomb variety, more pink than red, and still very impressive. There is one card that must’ve been my



Ryan Levesque, Assistant Curator, and Renee Peace, Curator, with the Valentine's Exhibit

explaining the historical subjects housed at the Auburn Historical Society’s Museum (“AHS”) site on South Street, just a quick ride from where you live really.

First up for your review is their Valentine’s Day Exhibit focused on the years 1930-1960. Sari Bitticks, the President of

mom’s first Valentine’s card after getting married as she signed it ‘Mrs. Carlton Winckler,’ probably a new bride sort of thing to do. There are cute cartoon cards and

**AUBURN**

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## OXFORD

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dress the needs of all students. "This is a team effort," stated

Mr. Lucas, "we want to provide the best quality education for each child. Building rapport with all parents and students is essential to our vision and mission statement."

Mr. Lucas began his career as

Tara Trainor has been the school's Curriculum Director since July 2021. Her background includes being a Special Education Teacher for three years with classroom teaching experience of 18 years. She has also worked for



Certified Nursing Assistant Students with Instructor, Gerri-Lynn Szamocki, School Nurse

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a middle and high school teacher in Sturbridge's school system eventually becoming a school principal. He applied for and accepted his current position in 2021. "Our team has worked really hard for the past few years that I've been here. Last spring, we saw a 3.9% budget increase voted on by our Oxford residents. Recently, the town passed funding for \$8-10 million of repair work for our school building improvements. Our residents see the results of our teamwork and how hard we are trying. Our PTO is incredibly supportive."

the Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education. Her goals are part of the District Improvement Plan which has been showing good results for students, parents, and teachers.

As the school year progresses and results are monitored, additional reports will be provided to parents, students, and staff. Goals are high and results are promising.

# The Yankee Xpress

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## BIG KAHUNA

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**AUBURN**

*continued from page 1*

some are photocopies of mon-strously huge cards like one from my dad to my mom signed ‘Your future husband.’ It’s a two-foot by three-foot card, can you believe it? It’s size was minimized and photocopied for the exhibit.” Valentine’s Day traces its beginnings back to St. Valentine, a priest from the third century. Sounds like a heartfelt exhibit.

For a modest-sized building, the AHS has quite an educational

AHS’s display cabinets were built by the carpentry students of Bay Path Regional Vocational High School of Charlton MA.

If you’re into football, you might be interested in viewing the nearly 100-year-old football uniform from the semi-pro Auburn Cyclones team which was in existence until the 1930’s. The pants are made of canvas and the padding is sewn-in leather all weighing about 11 pounds. The pants were kept up with suspenders! The helmet is leather and the football is made of pigskin. There are several photos from the teams

by a WWII vet and left on the AHS doorstep with a very, very interesting story behind it, and just so much more. Sometimes and unfortunately, however, people do drop their artifacts off at the AHS door without leaving their contact information which is disheartening as full history cannot be properly provided.

The AHS building is a former two-room schoolhouse that later became a visiting nurses’ office and in 2004 became the Society’s site. The AHS began in 1967 and Ms. Sari Bitticks has been a volunteer for about 15 years becoming President in 2011. “I retired on a Friday, visited here

on a Tuesday and heard someone in the office say they needed computer help so I volunteered my assistance and have been here since,” she said. Sari was a database designer who worked for Digital Computer. The staff is all volunteer and the town rents the building to the AHS which receives no town funding. There is a core group of 10-12 members and 5 faithful members who tend to the organization’s needs each day that they are open which is Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. If you have a keen interest in history, please contact them to volunteer. Their funding comes from membership

dues, donations, and fundraisers. They are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that seeks to preserve Auburn’s history while educating the public. All donations are tax-deductible.

Auburn Historical Society Museum, 41 South Street, Auburn MA 01501. Phone: (508) 832-6856 www.auburnhistorical-museum.org Admission is free and they are open year-round on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. or by appointment.

*jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com*



*Helen Poirier, Research Coordinator, and Sari Bitticks, President & Tour Guide*

collection of exhibits. One of the more interesting displays is a 150-year-old shoemaker’s bench complete with all the necessary shoe-making tools. “Old Sturbridge Village’s head shoe-maker visited us a few years ago and told us that our bench was certainly a better example than what OSV displayed,” said Ms. Bitticks. The building also houses a 246-year-old directional sign of Auburn’s original name of “Ward.” Yes, Auburn was not known as Auburn all those many years ago. The Massachusetts’ town of Ware wasn’t too happy about the Ward name as mix-ups with mail and directions were happening much too frequently for Ware’s patience. Since Ware had been established before Ward, Auburn became the new town name. The sign depicts an arrow and a ruffled-shirt-cuffed hand pointing to the town of Ward which was in existence from 1778-1837.

There is a displayed Civil War uniform that belonged to Lt. Joel Prouty who later became a Captain in the Grand Army of the Republic which is similar to the American Legion of today. The jacket is conserved in a museum-quality cabinet. Ms. Bitticks pointed out that almost all of the

of the 1920’s and 1930’s. The team was disbanded by World War II as members were called to duty to serve in the military. A very competitive team.

“The Boston Post Cane which was a 1907 creation by the former Boston Post Newspaper to be given to a town’s oldest resident and passed on to succeeding golden-agers, holds a spot of recognition here too,” said Ms. Bitticks, “Originally there were 700 canes made and there are only 40 left. The AHS displays one of the originals. We still hold a Boston Post Cane ceremony, award a certificate, and take photos of the ceremony. Our current cane holder is Mrs. Phyllis Gallant who is 102 years old, a WWII U.S. Navy veteran, and an active member of our local American Legion.”

With assistance from the local Nipmuc Tribal members, the AHS is able to offer visitors a display of authentic Nipmuc tools and arrowheads including tomahawks, scrapers, and grinders that made corn meal.

There are old tax records from 1862 -1960’s which are great for tracking down family histories, a wedding dress made from parachute silk that was brought home

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# Wreaths Across America

BY PATTY ROY

National Wreaths Across America Day was held at Arlington National Cemetery on December 16, 2023. Though the holidays may seem long past, the meaning attached to the gesture of keeping deceased veterans' memories ever-green is always with us.

For the first time, the week-long convoy that makes more than 4000 stops nationally while delivering wreaths to veterans' cemeteries came to Auburn's American Legion Chester P. Tuttle Post 279 on December 10.

Commander Tom O'Rourke said the Post was honored by the



Above, Flag line by the Patriot Riders

stop, noting that in recent years, the convoy visited Oxford and Northborough.

Fire destroyed the Tuttle Post building in March of 2019 and it was completely rebuilt and opened up in the fall of 2021, he said.

This past June, the Post celebrated the 100th anniversary of the death of Chester P. Tuttle in World War I, the first Auburn resident to die in the war.

"That was the biggest celebration for the Post this year and this is the second biggest one,"

O'Rourke said of the Wreaths Across America visit.

This particular convoy (there are many across the country) began operations in Maine, then moved on to New Hampshire with stops planned for Rhode Island and Connecticut and so on down the eastern seaboard to Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

There were four stops in Washington D.C. for wreath-laying ceremonies: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial and the Pentagon 9/11 Memorial.

There were 14 tractor trailers, 11 cars wrapped in Wreaths Across America graphics, coach buses, and 15 Maine police cars.

At times, local police cars and fire departments joined the convoy to escort the wreaths on parts of the trip, organizers said, so the number of vehicles frequently varied.

"Today's theme is 'Remember and Teach,'" O'Rourke said. "We remember the veterans who have died, honor the ones who are living and teach the next genera-



## WREATHS

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Lender Awards. This recognition highlights Webster Five's commitment to supporting Veterans, as evidenced by the bank's distribution of 16 SBA 7(a) loans totaling over \$3.6 million.

"Receiving this award is a tremendous honor for Webster Five," said Christopher

Watson, SVP Senior Business Lending Officer, Webster Five. "Our team appreciates what U.S. Veterans have done to support our country and the unique challenges that they face. We strive to provide support with tailored financial solutions to help them grow and succeed."

### WREATHS

*continued from page 4*

tion about freedom and the price of it."

"Lots of times at school stops, kids come out and contribute a program to the ceremony of greeting the wreaths," he said.

O'Rourke noted that Legion Post members are also in contact with school children around Memorial Day as part of their charge to teach as well as remember.

Wreaths Across America and the Post started planning the ceremony and its route many

months ago. It was a little bit of serendipity that brought the convoy to town because originally organizers had thought about making the trip through Boston, only to realize there was no chance of keeping the lengthy group together through the city. Auburn was found to be a convenient stop off the Mass Pike.

Outside the Legion building a flag line of Patriot Riders, a veteran and veteran support group, stood ready to make their striking visual contribution to honoring the deceased.

Inside, O'Rourke and Rich Larson, state Legionnaire in 2022

and a past commander of the Tuttle Post prepared to address the crowd. Guest speakers included Drew Pajak, future Department of Massachusetts American Legion Senior Vice President, Lisa Williamson, National President of the American Legion Auxiliary and Monique Connor, President of the Department of Massachusetts American Legion Auxiliary.

Outside, onlookers snapped photos, clapped and waved to folks in the trucks and accompanying vehicles as the impressive sight carrying the tokens of remembrance pulled in to view.



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SPORTS

# Margoupis Hoping to Eclipse 1,000 Points

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,  
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Oxford basketball player Brady Margoupis enters his senior campaign with 799 points scored over his high school career. Barring an injury, the two-time captain should be able to scale that mountain during the eighth or ninth game of the season.

“One thousand points is a big goal and has always been one of our goals,” Pirate head coach David Aldrich said. “With that said, Brady could care less if he never scored another point as long as the team is winning.”

As a sophomore Margoupis averaged 19 points per contest and upped that average to 24.5 last winter. With only 201 points away from the magical number the senior would welcome the milestone,

but as his coach noted he is not about stats.

“To get to 1000 would obviously be cool, but it is not my main focus,” he said. “If it happens, it happens. I’d like it to happen, but I definitely want to win more that accomplish the milestone.”

The senior has always played basketball growing up and loved everything about the sport. He also saw time on the baseball field as well but stopped playing the sport last year to join an AAU team to prepare for his senior season on the court.

Growing up Margoupis found himself playing guard, basically dictated by his size, but according to the Pirate athlete he didn’t mind the position. The now senior noted that he loved the position because it allowed him to control the pace of the game that his team would

play.

Following the eighth grade, he started to focus heavily on his game, so that when he entered high school he’d be ready to make the team. Unfortunately, before his freshman season could even begin, it was over due to the Covid Pandemic.

“Freshman year really sucked. I was so looking forward to that year and playing basketball with the high school, but Covid put a stop to that,” Margoupis said. “There were no games, but I would still practice, either in my driveway or at the gym to stay sharp for when the season did begin.”

Thankfully, Covid did not carry over to his sophomore season and although Margoupis was ready, he found the tryout process to be rather nerve wracking. When he was named to the varsity squad those nerves quickly vanished and he began to find his role on the team.

Following his sophomore year, he knew what his role would continue to be, but he needed to work on his defensive game.

“Defense wins games and if we were going to improve and win as a team I would need to pick it up,” he said. “Not only did I play as much basketball as I could I also played summer league ball and worked on that part of my game.”

Coach Aldrich noted that as a sophomore Margoupis was an offensive player for Oxford, but he has since committed to both ends

Pirates fell to Millbury in the next round. This season they would love to change that scenario.

“Our number one goal is to win.



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of the floor and has become a team player.

“We run a complex system both offensively as well as defensively,” the coach said. “He’s right there and competes every night. He’s as very coachable individual who does so many things right.”

As a second-year captain for the Pirates, Margoupis has the respect of his teammates because he not only leads by example but works hard and always says and does the right things.

Last year Oxford finished the regular season 10-9 and after picking up a win in the first round of the Division 4 State Tournament, the

We have a lot of kids coming back who can score as well as a couple of new kids who are also capable of scoring. “We are a very athletic team and would love to take our game further into the State Tournament than we did last year.”

Individually, the senior, who was named to the SWCL All-Star team last winter, plans on doing whatever his Coach asks of him as long as the team continues to win. When the season comes to an end Margoupis would love to entertain the thought of playing basketball on the next level. At this point in time, he has just started reaching out to schools.

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# Film Director Adam McKay Talks Satire on the Creating Dangerously Podcast

Brought to You by The Shawna Foundation, New Podcast Covers Film, Cult Art & Everything In Between

A new podcast “Creating Dangerously,” recently launched by The Shawna E. Shea Memorial Foundation, riffs on a 1957 lecture by the philosopher Albert Camus four days after he gave his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

What’s this all about? Camus said, “To create today means to create dangerously. Every publication is a deliberate act, and that act makes us vulnerable to the passions of a century that forgives nothing.” And the “Creating Dangerously” podcast gives those words new life with a modern twist.

With hosts Skip Shea, Patrick Bracken and Andrea Wolanin, we explore artists past and present who are doing their part to create dangerously to try to make sense of a world that often doesn’t make sense at all and still forgives nothing.

“It’s not a bleak as it sounds,” said producer Skip Shea. “We have a lot of fun discussing topics like satire or cult art. I think the creative process itself brings some-

thing positive to the world, even if the subject is as bleak as Picasso’s Guernica.”

“We recently interviewed film director and Oscar winning screenwriter Adam McKay (“Don’t Look Up,” “The Big Short,” “Vice”) about the importance of satire and it was a lot of fun. Plus we got to discuss Worcester a little too as Adam grew up there.”

Joined by hosts filmmaker Andrea Wolanin and actor/writer Patrick Bracken, topics and issues up for discussion include women who Create dangerously; cult and outsider art; subversive art forms and much more.

“We also give listeners some bonus episodes like the interview with Adam McKay; and poetry episodes where Tony Brown, the Poet Laureate of the Shawna Foundation, brings poems that reflect the themes of the recent episodes like the one directly related to Camus and his philosophy,” said Shea. “For that Tony chose Andrei Voznesensky’s Darkmotherscream.”

Fresh episodes of “Creating Dangerously” podcast are released at least three times a month and can be found on most of the major podcast platforms—Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeart Radio and Amazon Music.

Shea said, “In a recent interview on 60 Minutes, Little Steven Van Zandt said that ‘... we’re the only country in the world that thinks art is a luxury. Everybody else in the world understands that art is an essential part of the quality of life.’ I tend to agree. We hope ‘Creating Dangerously’ can help shift that.”

The mission of the Shawna E. Shea Memorial Foundation Inc. is to support young people, especially women, in filmmaking, performance arts and other artistic and cultural endeavors through financial assistance, collaborative fellowships, mentoring and educational opportunities. We established the Foundation in memory of Shawna, a creative and artistic young woman from Uxbridge who

lost her life too soon and we strive to sustain her legacy of encouraging young people who live in the margins of society and yet have dreams and aspirations in the fields of film and performance arts.

*apple.com/us/podcast/creating-dangerously/id1716077784*  
*Amazon Music: https://music.amazon.com/podcasts/c90536bc-e148-4a2d-8d2b-bcbbb-3492ba3/creating-dangerously*  
*iHeart Radio: https://www.iheart.com/podcast/269-creating-dangerously-126538860/*  
*RSS.com: https://rss.com/podcasts/creating-dangerously/*

Links:  
*Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/show/1Pg5Z9I2PevPEXG72QopI1*  
*Apple Podcast: https://podcasts.*

## Call for Grant Applications Janet Malser Humanities Trust

Deadline is April 1 for the current grant cycle

The Janet Malser Humanities Trust is now accepting applications for the 2024 grant cycle. Janet Malser set up the charitable Trust in order to support the arts and humanities, community service and conservation in the towns of Dudley, Oxford, and Webster. Trustees make awards annually to verified tax-exempt organizations meeting the charitable purposes of the Trust. Prior recipients are encouraged to apply and are eligible as long as proper follow up status

reports have been filed. The causes for which funding will be considered include: “the restoration and preservation of historic sites; the furtherance of art and music in the schools, both public and private; public concerts with an emphasis on classical music; the improvement and growth of public libraries; the support of church work aiding the indigent, homeless, aging citizens and needy children; beautification through planting and the preservation of park areas and

cemeteries; the improvement of service and equipment at the Hubbard Regional Hospital (now UMASS Memorial), and the environmental protection of Webster Lake.”

Any questions should be addressed to janetmalsertrust@gmail.com.

Applications and additional instructions including filing final reports are available at www.janetmalsertrust.org. All applications must be postmarked by Monday, April 1, 2024.



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# Join the Winter Festivities at the Fun, Frost and Family Festival

Indoor and outdoor activities planned for all ages

The town of Oxford is hosting its 3rd Annual Fun, Frost & Family Festival on Saturday, January 27. The event kicks off at 10:30 a.m. with a Polar Plunge at Carbuncle Pond, 12 Carbuncle Drive, to raise funds for the Special Olympics. Then on to the Pancake Breakfast from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the First Congregational Church, 355 Main Street, where you can take a photo with those iconic stars of winter, Anna and Elsa.

The main events will be held on Oxford Common from 12 - 3 p.m. and will feature something for everyone including music from XLO, food trucks, bonfires, s'mores and games. The Oxford Community Center (also 12-3 p.m.) is the spot for a vendor fair, crafts and games, live music and trying your hand at cookie decorating.

Horse and carriage rides will be provided by Winter Hill Farms from 12-3 p.m. Weather permitting, ice skating will take place on the basketball courts behind the Oxford Community Center.

Also beginning at noon, the Oxford Library, 339 Main Street will host Storytime & Book Bingo.

The Oxford Senior Center will hold an Art Exhibition by local artists and more live music.

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TOWN OF OXFORD'S 3RD ANNUAL  
*Fun, Frost & Family*  
WINTER FESTIVAL  
Saturday January 27, 2024

Polar Plunge 10:30am Start  
Carbuncle Pond  
12 Carbuncle Drive Oxford  
Raise Money for Special Olympics  
Team Takeover Challenge

Pancake Breakfast 11am-1pm  
First Congregational Church  
355 Main Street Oxford  
Photos with Anna & Elsa

Main Events 12pm-3pm  
Oxford Common - XLO Music & Games,  
Food Trucks, Bonfires & S'mores  
OCC - Vendor Fair, Crafts & Games,  
Live Music, Cookie Decorating

Activities 12pm-3pm  
Senior Center 323 Main Street  
Art Exhibition & Live Music  
Oxford Library 339 Main Street  
Storytime & Book Bingo

\*Horse & Carriage Rides by Winter Hill Farms 12-3pm  
\*Ice Skating on OCC Outdoor Basketball Court

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## College Scholarship Opportunities

Greater Worcester Community Foundation has opened applications for its 2024 scholarship program for college-bound students.

As the largest independent scholarship provider in Worcester County, the community foundation has awarded almost 10,000 scholarships to students since the program's inception in 1978, totaling \$14.8 million in awards.

As of today, students seeking fi-

nancial assistance for higher education can conveniently complete one online application to be considered for more than 140 scholarship funds, each with specific criteria including financial need, academic merit, career objectives, and community involvement. The community foundation, with support from dedicated community volunteers, matches applicants with suitable scholarship opportunities.

In 2023, the Foundation awarded \$765,000 in scholarships to 421

students with an average award of \$1,691. This year, the Foundation expects to make at least \$800,000 in awards thanks to newly established scholarship funds, including a \$2 million fund created in honor of Mary T. Cocaine, matriarch of the Table Talk Pies company. This scholarship fund will support the children or grandchildren of an immigrant or refugee in Worcester and its contiguous towns and will be available in the 2024 cycle.

While most Foundation scholarships cater to high school seniors demonstrating financial need within Worcester County, exceptions do exist. Specific funds are earmarked for adult learners, college students, and individuals residing outside the county. Interested applicants are encouraged to visit to determine eligibility criteria and learn about the application process.

Scholarship applications must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, March 1, 2024. Recipients will be announced by July 2024.

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# Winter Safety: 4 Essential Tips from a Physical Therapist on how to Brave a Snowstorm

BY SEAN LORDEN  
Concierge Physical Therapy  
Conciergephysicaltherapy.com

As the winter season blankets the landscape in snow, it brings with it a whimsical charm but also potential hazards. Snowstorms create picturesque scenes but can also pose risks to our physical well-being. As a physical therapist, I've witnessed firsthand the injuries and challenges that arise from navigating through these wintry conditions. Here are four critical tips to stay safe during a snowstorm:

## 1. Be Mindful of your Movement and Posture

Snowstorms often mean shoveling snow to clear pathways, driveways, and sidewalks. Improper shoveling techniques can lead to strained muscles, back injuries, or even falls. It's crucial to maintain proper posture and body mechanics while shoveling.

- Bend with your knees, not your back: Use your legs to lift the snow rather than straining your back. Bend at the knees, keeping your back straight, and lift

small amounts of snow at a time. Do NOT twist with snow on the shovel.

- Use ergonomic tools: Invest in an ergonomic shovel with a curved handle or adjustable length to reduce strain on your back and wrists. Use a snowblower if you are able for larger spaces.

- Take breaks and pace yourself: Shoveling can be physically demanding. Take regular breaks to rest and avoid overexertion, preventing muscle fatigue and potential injuries. If you have a history of stroke or cardiovascular disease spend no more than 15 minutes at once shoveling snow, with the same amount of break in between bouts.

## 2. Proper Footwear and Traction

Navigating through snow and ice requires appropriate footwear to prevent slips and falls. Wearing the right shoes or boots can significantly reduce the risk of injury.

- Choose slip-resistant footwear: Opt for shoes or boots with good traction and slip-resistant soles. Adding ice grips or traction aids can further enhance stability on icy

surfaces. Assess your boots every 2-3 years to make sure they still have adequate slip-resistance and traction.

- Take cautious steps: Walk consciously and take shorter steps to maintain balance. Avoid sudden movements and be aware of black ice, which can be particularly hazardous. Many broken bones are caused each year from an errant slip on the ice.

## 3. Layered Clothing and Stay Hydrated

Staying warm and hydrated is crucial during cold weather. Layering clothing helps regulate body temperature and prevents hypothermia.

- Dress in layers: Wear moisture-wicking fabrics as a base layer, insulating materials in the middle, and a waterproof outer layer to protect against snow and wind. (Pro Tip: More layers also insulate a fall, but you don't have to go as far as Ralphie in A Christmas Story.)

- Stay hydrated: Cold weather may make you less aware of your thirst, but hydration is essential. Drink water regularly, even if you

don't feel thirsty, to prevent dehydration.

## 4. Be Prepared

Adequately preparing for a snowstorm can significantly reduce risks.

- Stay informed and plan ahead: Monitor weather forecasts to anticipate storms and plan activities accordingly. Stock up on supplies like food, water, and medications to avoid unnecessary outings during harsh conditions.

- Practice caution indoors too: Be mindful of slippery floors indoors due to tracked-in snow. Use rugs or mats near entryways to prevent slipping and ensure

adequate lighting to spot potential hazards. Put boots and snow clothing to dry in an area that is not highly trafficked in your household.

Remember, your safety during a snowstorm is paramount. By implementing these tips and exercising caution, you can minimize the risks associated with wintry conditions and enjoy the season to its fullest without compromising your well-being.

Stay safe and embrace the beauty of winter here in New England! If you have any comments or questions on this article I can be reached at [Drlordan@concierge-physicaltherapy.com](mailto:Drlordan@concierge-physicaltherapy.com)

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# McGovern Introduces Legislation Easing Access to Medically Necessary Formulas

Representatives James P. McGovern (D-MA), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee and Co-chair of the Cystic Fibrosis Caucus, and John Rutherford (R-FL), Co-chair of the Crohn's and Colitis caucus, led their colleagues in introducing legislation to remove barriers to access for all Americans who require medically necessary foods to lead healthy lives.

The Medical Nutrition Equity Act would require coverage of specialized formulas, vitamins, individual amino acids, or other medically necessary foods under Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicare, the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program, and private insurance for patients with specific gastrointestinal and inherited metabolic diseases and disorders. It is narrowly drafted to focus on individuals for whom medically necessary nutrition is the treatment for their diseases.

"I've heard devastating stories from constituents struggling to

access medically necessary foods to keep themselves or their child healthy," said Congressman McGovern. "As a dad and husband, I can't imagine not being able to access the food your child or your partner depends on to live. To me this is simple: no one should struggle getting medically necessary food, and insurance companies shouldn't be creating more barriers to receiving proper care. Our bill cuts through the red tape and ensures those with inherited metabolic diseases or gastrointestinal conditions can access the nutrition they need."

"Our health systems must be structured to support innovative treatments," said Congressman Rutherford. "As co-chair of the Crohn's and Colitis Caucus, where I advocate for those living with digestive diseases, I am excited to join Rep. McGovern to introduce this important legislation that would make medically necessary nutrition more easily accessible to patients across our nation."

Approximately 2,000 infants every year are diagnosed with an inherited metabolic disorder. When left untreated, inherited metabolic diseases or gastrointestinal conditions can cause the body to fail to absorb necessary nutrients and food can even become toxic. An inability to access specialty formulas forces patients to go without adequate nutrition or seek hospitalization to maintain nutrition levels. Already, 40 states require coverage of medically necessary nutrition, but coverage is highly variable from state-to-state and does not apply to patients covered by private sector health plans governed by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act.

This bill builds on the precedent of the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act which improved coverage for medical nutrition for military families enrolled in TRICARE, so more Americans can access medically necessary nutrition.

# Pasta for Paws

Dog Orphans Inc will host its 10th Annual Pasta for Paws on Saturday, February 3 from 5-9 p.m. at the Pleasant Valley Country Club, 95 Armsby Road, Sutton. The

Cash bar, raffle baskets, 50/50 and DJ. Tickets are available at Dog Orphans or on our website dogorphans.com.

Pasta Buffet will include salad, pasta with marinara, pasta primavera with vegetables, meatballs and rolls. Desserts provided by friends and Giovanni's Italian Bakery.

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# Nursing Student Earns “Be There Certificate”

**A**shley Breault of Brookfield, a practical nursing student at Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy recently completed training and obtained her Be There Certificate.

The Be There Certificate is a self-paced learning experience designed to increase mental health literacy. The training provides knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to safely support anyone who may be struggling with their mental health. According to [betherecertificate.org/](http://betherecertificate.org/) “It provides a deep understanding of Be There’s Five Golden Rules — a simple but actionable framework on how to recognize when someone might be struggling with their mental health, your role in supporting that

person, and how to connect them to the help they deserve.”

Breault has been a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at Quaboag Rehabilitation and Skilled Care Center since 2021. She was previously honored as Employee of the month at Quaboag and is active with mentorship since 2022. She completed her CNA and Home Health Aide Certification at the Fieldstone School in 2021. Breault is an alumna of Quaboag Regional Middle High School (2019). She is certified in Mental Health First Aid, Dementia Care, Stop the Bleed, HCP/BLS Provider CPR and first aid. She recently participated in her clinical team’s Luminary lighting project for the Alzheimer’s Association’s the Longest Night to

shine a light to diminish the darkness and illuminate a path towards a world where Alzheimer’s and dementia are nothing but a memory.

Breault joins 31 other members of the 2024 cohort progressing to term 2 of the rigorous 10-month practical nursing program at Bay Path. She previously took the leadership in handling Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy merchandise (sweatshirts & hoodies) distribution for the PN Class of 2024 and assisted with stocking the Practical Nursing student food pantry. Photo shows Breault with her Be There Certificate.

According to Greheline Bolandrina, DHA, MSN Ed, RN, CRRN, Academy Director, “At Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy we be-

lieve that student engagement and patient advocacy are contributory to a well-rounded, prudent nurse. Success is intentional. We ensure that our PN students are relevant and actively engaged in empowering themselves, especially when it comes to mental health.”

The Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy program is a 40-week, (10-month), full-time, Monday through Friday, evening program. The program begins 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 [mass.gov/dph/boards/rn](http://mass.gov/dph/boards/rn) and is accredited by the Commission on Occupational Education, [council.org](http://council.org). For more information visit [baypath.net](http://baypath.net).

# Sen. Fattman and Rep. Soter Announce \$6 Million in Funding for The Blackstone River Greenway Project

**O**n December 27th, Senator Ryan Fattman and Representative Michael Soter announced that the Blackstone River Greenway Project has received a \$6 million investment for a 0.5 mile section of the greenway in Blackstone. This funding was made available through a \$24 million investment in the state’s recreational trails by Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, initially received through The American Rescue Plan (ARPA).

The Blackstone River Greenway is a section of a longer 48-mile bikeway that connects Worcester, MA to Providence, RI, along the National Heritage Corridor. The paved trail follows the Blackstone River and Canal wherever possible. Though intended as a bike path, it is also used for walking, jogging, and other recreational activities.

This funding will be used to invest in a 0.5 mile section of the trail from the Canal Street Bridge

in Blackstone to the Rhode Island border, where the greenway joins another existing shared-use path. It will make possible repairs and upgrades to the existing trail.

“I am incredibly excited about the upgrades this funding will allow us to make to our existing recreational infrastructure,” commented State Rep. Michael Soter in response to this funding. “Trails such as the Blackstone River Greenway provide the perfect opportunity for everyone to explore the wonderful natural beauty of our town and state.”

“The expansion of the Blackstone River Greenway trail highlights the importance of outdoor recreational space in my district.” Senator Fattman continues, “I look forward to seeing this project bring more people to the area to enjoy our natural resources.”

Rep. Soter and Sen. Fattman stated that they will continue to advocate for funding that will help towns expand and improve

access to recreational activities.

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## LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

# Luke's NEW YEAR Goals

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

### • THE MORNING WALK

December 2023 ended with peculiar high temps. A muddy ground complicated life with dog. I may have stood alone in my wish for a snowstorm, but I had good reason. Snow is pretty. Snow is quiet. Snow is clean.

“Luke! That hole is crazy big!” Luke’s digging habit continued. He dug deep and wide, as though excavating the area beside our front steps for the benefit of a miniature pool. I tore open the door in horror. A cool gust of wind blended with the sound of my



husband’s cry. “I’ve worked hard on that lawn! Luke is getting a zap next time!”

Indeed, Luke’s Daddy has slaved over that lawn. However, no such zap will occur. “Let’s not be dramatic,” I countered while my pup

faced me, his face mottled like that of a child who’s found the brownie bowl. “Dogs are natural diggers. Imagine zapping a child for building a sandcastle.” I held my ground with the recurrent analogy. “Luke is just bored.” The wheels of Luke’s paws continued to spin in agreement. Once again, I couldn’t help but feel impressed by the depth (no pun intended) of his work. “Besides, we don’t need to keep up with the Joneses.” I brandished the maintenance broom and pushed the pile of fresh dirt back into the



hole. Meanwhile, my pup zoomed around the yard and tore through grass the Jones’ would have approved of, if it weren’t for fresh skid marks “Let’s go for a walk, Luke.” I grabbed his leash and the resolution settled in my mind. Give Luke early morning walks in 2024.

### • BETTER NUTRITION FOR LUKE

Weight problems are both common and problematic in Golden Retrievers. Extra weight is hard to bear on dogs’ joints and can lead to muscular problems, diabetes, digestion, breathing and mobility issues. Luke is a young, active dog with normal weight. Stocky and strong at seventy-three pounds, he’s built like a linebacker who, nevertheless, isn’t above begging for gingerbread cookies. Consistency is crucial when it comes to dog training.

Show your dog that your food is not part of his, and he’ll learn quickly. However, turning down the quiet face of a begging Golden is easier said than done. We know gingerbread cookies are not good for them. Who are we kidding?



Yet their pleading faces somehow manage to sell us.

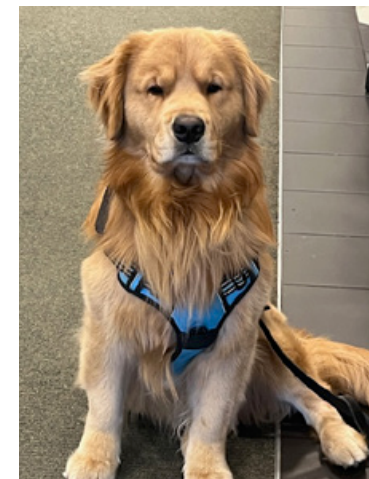
“I was thinking that because I’m such a good boy, you’d be willing to share.” Mesmerized, he stares up at the cookie, a bear cub lifting a paw ever so gently, a dog willing to behave forever—if only his Dog Mom would share. I break the cookie in half. The creases of his head and expression deepen. He reminds me of a pumpkin with a personality. “My Momma is such a good person.”

My goal for 2024 (along with being a good person) is to integrate more foods that a dog truly needs. I’ve since researched the practice of Dr. Marty Goldstein, a Cornell University graduate and veterinarian with over 35 years of experience in helping dogs thrive (he changed the life of one of Oprah Winfrey’s dogs, who had been suffering, along with countless others who were nearly dying). His prescribed diet designed for dogs of all ages to thrive. Organ meats, omega 3, probiotics, flax, carrots, ginger, and blueberries are to name a few additions to Luke’s upcoming Nutrition Plan! I also plan to remain educated on dog foods and treats which are harmful, despite trendy catch phrases such as “All Natural” or “Organic”. Certain fillers, preservatives and grains are detrimental to a dog’s digestive system. Canine cancers have multiplied at an alarmingly fast rate, with some studies showing that one out of two Golden Retrievers will be struck by the disease. My eyes rest on Luke’s kind, pumpkin face. He smiles up at me with love and innocence. I imagine shaking a message from a bottle that reads

this: Luke Valentino is going to live an incredibly long life.

### • MORE PLAYDATES PLEASE

A fellow Dog Person recently said it best. Our dogs used to run free, find other dogs in the woods, and play. They naturally socialized. Now, constrained to short leashes, we find them territorial and pugnacious, almost as though to say, “I’m stronger than you and stay away from my owner.” Unleashed, both of those same (aggressive) dogs would likely rumble and become best pals. Admittedly I’m guilty of the short leash rule, especially given that we live in a neighborhood, but I also appreciate Luke’s needs to play with other dogs.



At almost two, he’s matured. He’s learned that not every dog likes to wrestle. Some like Chase. Some (as Lincoln had) just want to play fetch. He’s learned to submit to signals of other dogs. That said, Luke is a social creature! Forbidding him to play with other dogs is like asking a rugby player to sit down for a thoughtful game of chess. Though I’m reluctant to visit Dog Parks now (after the fight that ensued when he was only six months old) my 2024 goal is to set up more playdates for Luke Valentino.

### • LUKE NEEDS HIS OWN SHOWS

I’ve noticed that Luke is intelligent enough to understand certain television scenes, especially those involving animals. His process for watching the activities of other dogs is a show in and of itself. He’ll smile as though to say, “I love to eat dog food, too.” Or tilt his head curiously. “Are you going to swim in that lake?” He’ll even approach

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# Expert Quotes on the 2024 Housing Market Forecast

If you're thinking about buying or selling a home soon, you probably want to know what you can expect from the housing market in 2024. In 2023, higher mortgage rates, confusion over home prices, and a lack of homes for sale created some challenges for buyers and sellers looking to make a move. But what's on the horizon for the new year?



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

The good news is, many experts are optimistic we've turned a corner and are headed in a positive direction. Recently, mortgage rates have started to come back down. This has offered hope to buyers dealing with affordability challenges. Mark Fleming, Chief Economist at First

American, explains how they may continue to drop: "Mortgage rates have already retreated from recent peaks near 8 percent and may fall further . . ."

Jessica Lautz, Deputy Chief Economist at the National Association of Realtors (NAR), says: "For home buyers who are taking on a mortgage to purchase a home and have been wary of the autumn rise in mortgage rates, the market is turning more favorable, and there should be optimism entering 2024 for a better market."

As rates ease, activity in the housing market should pick up because more buyers and sellers who had been holding off will jump back in. If more sellers list their homes, the supply of homes for sale will grow, a trend we've already started to see this year. It is expected that supply will loosen up in 2024. Even homeowners who currently have a low interest rate on an existing mortgage, will increasingly find that changing family and financial circumstances will lead to more moves and

more new listings over the course of the year, particularly as rates move closer to 6.5%."

Mortgage rates pulling back isn't the only positive sign for affordability. Home price growth is expected to moderate too, as inventory improves but is still low overall. We expect that 2024 will be a better year for the housing market. So, if you're thinking about making a move next year, know that early signs show we're turning a corner. We're going into 2024 with slight home-price gains, more inventory, slightly increasing transaction volume . . . All in all, things are looking up for the U.S. housing market in 2024."

Experts are optimistic about what 2024 holds for the housing market. If you're looking to buy or sell a home in the new year, the best way to ensure you're up to date on the latest forecasts is to partner with The Marzeotti Group or trusted Realtor.

## LUKE

*continued from page 12*

the television screen to get a closer view. "That person is climbing on top of a roof!!" Just as he revels in lighthearted television moments, Luke shows dissatisfaction for

darker scenes. Lord Voldemort, a Harry Potter character, for example, sends chills through Luke's spine. "You do not look like a nice person. I don't trust you." He'll lower his head in suspicion to the actor, Ralph Fiennes. I do my best to placate him. "Don't worry. That's just a man in a costume, Luke." He looks up at me, then back at the

screen. "I don't trust him."

Whether it's through morning walks, playdates, better nutrition, or television shows; Luke Valentino needs the stimulation of new sights, suppers, and stories. 2024 is going to be my pup's year! Stay tuned for the next story, featuring Luke's two-year-old birthday on January 31st!

Follow Luke on IG @livingwith-lukevalentino

Write to Amy - amyleclaire@hotmail.com



## 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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# Still time to "max out" your IRA

You have until April 15, 2024, to contribute to your IRA for the 2023 tax year. But if you can afford it, why not put in the extra money now and



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

get it working for you as soon as possible? For 2023, you can put up to \$6,500 into an IRA, plus an additional \$1,000 catch-up contribution if you're 50 or older. (This limit rises to \$7,000, plus the \$1,000 catch-up amount, in 2024.) If you already have a traditional or Roth IRA, you may know the benefits, but if you don't have either, here's a quick summary:

**Traditional IRA** – When you invest in a traditional IRA, your earnings grow tax deferred and your contributions may qualify

for a tax deduction. If you and your spouse don't participate in a 401(k) or similar employer-sponsored plan, you can deduct the full amount of your IRA contributions, up to the contribution limit. But if you or your spouse invest in an employer-sponsored plan, you may be able to take a full or partial deduction if you are married and filing jointly, with a modified adjusted gross income of \$136,000 or less. For single filers, this figure is \$83,000. (For the 2024 tax year, these figures rise to \$143,000 if you're married and file jointly, and \$87,000 if you're a single filer.)

**Roth IRA** – By investing in a Roth IRA, your contributions are not tax deductible, but your earnings can grow tax free provided you've held your account at least five years and you don't start withdrawing the earnings until you're 59½. And because you're investing with after-tax dollars, you can withdraw contributions — not the earnings — at any time, for any purpose, without taxes or penalties. You may be eligible for a full or partial contribution if your modified adjusted gross income is less than \$228,000 married and filing jointly, or less than \$153,000 if you're a single filer. (For 2024, these figures are less than \$240,000 if you're married and file jointly, and less than \$161,000 if you're a single filer.)

These tax advantages provide a strong incentive to fully fund an IRA each year. Furthermore,

you can put almost any investment — stocks, bonds, mutual funds and so on — into an IRA, so you can create a portfolio that matches your goals and risk tolerance.

You can still fully fund your IRA for the 2023 tax year, but as you continue to save, you might find a more efficient way to reach the maximum, such as setting aside a regular amount each month. To make it as stress-free as possible, you can have the money automatically moved from your savings or checking account to your IRA. If it's still difficult to come up with these amounts every month, you could put in what you can afford and then add other funds, such as a year-end bonus or a tax refund, when you receive them.

Any time you contribute to your IRA is a good time — but if you can do it early, or have a savings strategy throughout the year, you can avoid the last-minute dash to put in the cash.

*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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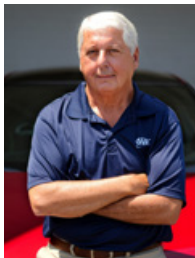


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# When trailer lights are out, check wiring in tow vehicle as well as trailer



BY JOHN PAUL

**Q.** I was working on my boat trailer, which I use only a couple of times per year and noticed the lights are not working.

Some work and some don't, where can I start and what else should I do to this trailer over the winter?

**A.** The first place to start is to see if the trailer or the tow vehicle wiring is an issue. A simple 12-volt test light or an inexpensive trailer light testing tool is about all you need. Depending on the plug (flat four or round seven) the troubleshooting is about the same. Use your test light and see if the wiring will light the test light, if it does move onto the trailer wiring. The most common issues are related to corrosion of the lamp sockets. As for other repairs, check for rust, inspect the rollers or bunks, springs, shackles and remove, clean and repack the wheel bearings.

**Q.** I have a Honda Accord and it was in for an oil change and they said the brake pads on the front were down to 3mm. They were really busy and said they couldn't relace the brakes for a couple of weeks. I like this shop and would like to have them do the work, replacing both the brake pads and brake rotors. Should I wait or find another shop?

**A.** New brakes pads are generally about 10-12 millimeters thick. At 3 millimeters the brakes are just about worn out and should be replaced. Considering you are replacing the rotors, a couple

more weeks of normal driving shouldn't make a difference. If you hear scraping, bring the car in as soon as possible.

**Q.** Recent articles seem to point out that the public has not fallen in love with electric cars. In fact I have seen discounts and electric cars sitting on dealer lots. What is your take on this?

**A.** Electric cars are not for everyone. Buying an electric car depends on charging availability, budget and how far you drive. For my personal use a plug-in hybrid, that can charge on 120-volts, drive in electric or EV mode would suit my needs better than a pure electric car. But as the charging infrastructure changes and recharging becomes quicker, that could change.

**Q.** I have a 2008 Toyota Avalon and it is the best car I have ever owned and want to keep it forever. The problem is the high beam bulbs have shattered or blown twice. My mechanic said Toyota had sent a bulletin to the dealers about the problem. It is my understanding that some 2008-2010 models have a problem with the bulb housing, not the bulbs and the fix is to replace the housing. To me it is a manufacturing or design defective, and the car should be recalled. I haven't gotten anywhere with Toyota or the local dealer. Any suggestions?

**A.** As you stated, there is a technical service bulletin that describes the problem. The repair does in fact require replacing the housing and bulb. My only "guess" is this isn't a recall since the low beam light will still function when the high beam light fails. If you decide to replace the housing, perhaps use an aftermarket part. If you go this

route, look for a CAPA approved part. This certification tells you it is as good as the original or hopefully in the case of your Avalon better.

**Q.** I own a 2001 Lexus RX300 that was recently given to me. Over the six months I have owned it, the engine has gotten noisy. My mechanic says the oil is like sludge. I looked online and found this was a defect. So, do I have any recourse?

**A.** Oil gelling/sludge happens generally from the heating and oxidation of oil due to infrequent oil changes. Since you don't have much invested in the vehicle you could try an oil flush. Over the years mechanics have used transmission fluid rather than oil, kerosene mixed with oil and dedicated oil flush products, such as Seafoam to remove sludge. Sometimes this works and removes accumulated sludge, other times the sludge just moves around and causes other issues. Regarding Toyota standing by their product, I don't see them offering any relief on an 23 year old car.

*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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# Beware of Krampus

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

This is the time of year everyone begins to think about spending the holidays with family

and friends. Shopping, decorating, holiday parties, gatherings and a visit from that magical icon, Santa Claus. Little do people think about the possible visit from Santa's exact

opposite, the creature that makes children shiver at the very thought of. Those who live in our western world may not be so familiar with him, but to the children of the Alpine region around Europe, he is a very real and evil spirit. His name; Krampus.

Krampus is a horned demon from Alpine folklore who, along with Santa visit the children in the night. The well behaved are rewarded with gifts from Old Saint Nick while the bad ones are punished by Krampus with a good swatting from the birch rods he carries with him. The origin of Krampus is not readily known, but there are recollections written of his being around since the 16th century, maybe hundreds of years before that.

Krampus appears in many variations, according to the artist's conception, but is generally accepted to be brown or black haired with cloven hooves, horns like a goat, and a long forked tongue. Basically a monster that is half man and half beast. He is sometimes depicted carrying a large sack which is used for putting the bad children in and taking them away.

Some claim he eats them, drowns them or transports them straight to hell. Krampus is also adorned with various sized odd looking bells and carries chains which he thrashes about. He also has on hand, a wealthy supply of birch branches which he uses to beat the badly behaved children before carting them away. Woe to the child who should talk back to their parents or disregard their rule, for like Santa, Krampus knows all.

During pre-Christain festivals, young men dressed as the horned demon and ran amok, scaring children in the villages and towns. The name is thought to have derived from the Bavarian word "krampn" which means dead or rotten, or from the German kramp/krampen which means claw. Either or both can be used to describe the hideous creature that stalks the children on a certain night in December, searching for those who misbehaved during the year. December 5 is known as Krampusnacht or Krampus Night where either St. Nick rewards the good little children or Krampus doles out his form of punishment to those who have been bad all year.

At one time, any celebrations regarding the existence of Krampus were banned in certain countries, like Austria in the 1930s, for fear it would mentally damage the children by threatening them with such a horrible fate. This idea was later rescinded and today, the legend of Krampus lives in parades and even greeting cards called Krampuskarten. Wooden masks are also made and adorned during the holiday season to pay tribute to the antithesis of St. Nick.

Krampus was very little known or recognized in the western world, but very well known in the Bavarian and Alpine regions of Europe until recently. Somehow, he made his way into our society and has been a growing force since. Krampus has been gaining so much popularity in recent years, one can find a vast number of Christmas ornaments, greeting cards and movies about him. So much so, that even Santa may have a bit of competition on his hands. That is, of course, unless the children are extra good this year.

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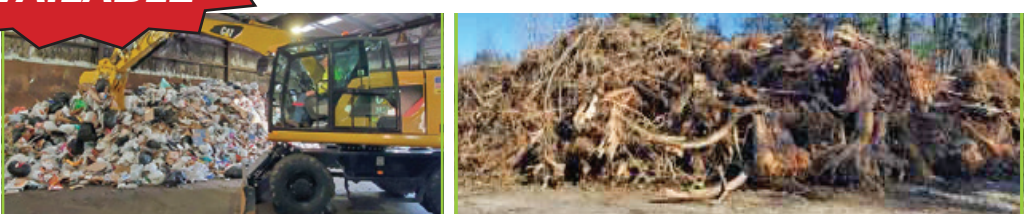
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# Scams and Frauds Are All Around Us

BY JANET STOICA

Since the birth of the internet and the information super-highway, the volume of scams, frauds, and ransomware has risen by many thousands-fold. The old saying “there’s a sucker born every minute” is almost a joke as any one of us reading this article knows that saying has now become “there’s a sucker born every millisecond.” Have you ever been given a compliment and know it’s patronizing but you’d really like to believe it anyway? There goes that old saying again...

While speaking with some bank employees I learned that just a few years ago the banks might have one or two lottery scams to deal with per year but now it’s just about a daily occurrence.

There are ongoing Mystery Shopper Scams where someone is emailed an offer to mystery shop at a local store. This is one of the most well-known scams. People are “hired” to be mystery shoppers and told that their first assignment is to evaluate a money transfer service like Western Union or MoneyGram. The shopper receives a check with instructions to deposit it in their personal bank account, withdraw the amount in cash, and wire it to a third party. Once money is wired, it is gone forever. There is no way to get it back. The check is a fake and by law, banks must make the funds from deposited checks available within days but uncovering a fake check can take weeks. It may seem that the check has cleared and that the money has posted to the account, but when the check turns out to be a fake, the person who deposited the check and wired the money will be responsible for paying back the bank. A sad situation indeed. But there’s that old saying again...

Lottery scams are always out there where a letter is emailed or postal-mailed telling the receiver that they’ve won the lottery but they have to pay a sum of money before receiving their winnings. An old but tired scam that still seems to work. Scammers who contact victims by phone and who reel their victims in tell grandparents that their grandchildren are in need of money and it must be paid immediately via gift cards. The victim must then buy the gift cards and phone the scammer with the serial numbers. Once the numbers are given the cards are useless as the scammer has used them to their advantage.

Many scammers advise their victims not to talk to anyone about their transactions which is a huge

clue that a scam is in progress. The reason they don’t want you talking to your relatives, friends, or police is that their scam will be revealed and they certainly don’t want that to happen. These scammers have full-time jobs scamming the public. Other well-known scams include romance, working from home, and Facebook or Craigslist offers that are too good to be true. If a scammer tells you to wire money to them or buy gift cards, it’s a sure bet it’s a rip-off. Many times emails/letters are received telling you that you have been chosen by an overseas lottery to receive good fortune and all it takes is to wire them some cash before they release your money. What a big clue that one is. Anytime money is required in advance, alarm bells should go off fast and loud.

The two age groups who appear to have the largest susceptibility to fraud are teenagers and senior citizens. Teens are susceptible to gang influences where they are asked to deposit fake checks to their own bank accounts. The teens are told that they will make money by depositing these checks and they are happy to make the extra cash to pay for college textbooks or to have spending money for college break. It turns out that the checks are stolen or fake and the teens are left with nothing. It’s even worse if their checking accounts are tied in with their parents’ accounts as the parent will suffer as well.

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, X, etc. are also breeding grounds for scams. Many of us post way too much information on these sites and it’s just what scammers are looking for. According to the police, your date of birth, your anniversaries, your family member names, your address, the dates you’re going on vacation when no one’s home, etc.—these are all perfect for scammers to get your personal info and use it to open ac-

counts in your name or to ransack your house. Don’t ever post this information on social websites.

Good tips to keep in mind: If it sounds too good to be true, it really IS too good to be true; if the email or letter you receive has plenty of misspellings and run-on sentences, it’s definitely a fraud; credit card skimmers at ATMs and gas pumps are rampant especially with gas stations that are open 24/7 (skimmers are insertable devices used by scammers that are placed in ATM or gas pump credit card slots. These devices use pinhole cameras and Bluetooth transmissions to obtain your PINs); asking for money up-front is a sure sign of scamming; and reverse mortgage scams are very prevalent as well (I, personally, can attest to reverse mortgage scams as close relatives were almost taken in by this before an intervention was made).

Your local insurance agency offers fraud insurance for nominal fees. Individuals and businesses might do well in contacting them for more information. Protect yourself by never, ever hesitating to call your local police for assistance. They are here for you and are your absolute best defense!

*jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com*

# Milford Regional Adopts Patient and Visitor Code of Conduct

Milford Regional Medical Center has adopted a new Patient and Visitor Code of Conduct. The new code is intended to establish an expectation of respectful behavior from patients and visitors in order to provide for a secure, caring and inclusive atmosphere throughout the Milford Regional system.

This measure is in response to the growing number of acts of violence and aggressive behavior toward healthcare workers across the state and throughout the nation.

Milford Regional’s Patient and Visitor Code of Conduct specifies that words or actions that are considered disrespectful, racist, discriminatory, hostile or harassing will not be tolerated. Examples include:

- Offensive comments about others’ race, ethnicity, accent, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other personal traits
- Refusal to see a clinician or other staff member based on these

personal traits

- Aggressive or intimidating behavior, physical or verbal threats and assaults

- Sexual or vulgar words or actions

- Disrupting another patient’s care or experience

“Being clear about expectations for behavior will translate to a stronger culture of respect and a safer environment for all,” said Milford Regional Chief Medical Officer Peter Smulowitz, M.D. “Although acts of aggression or violence are an unfortunate reality in today’s healthcare settings, our Code of Conduct will help reinforce a safe and trusted environment that everyone should continue to expect at Milford Regional.”

Communication promoting the Code of Conduct is visible throughout the Milford Regional system and can be viewed on Milford Regional’s website: [milfordregional.org/patients-visitors/patient-and-visitor-code-of-conduct/](http://milfordregional.org/patients-visitors/patient-and-visitor-code-of-conduct/)

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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.*

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**SATURDAY, JANUARY 27**

• Third Annual Oxford Winter Fest 10:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. To benefit Special Olympics 4 Maple Road, Oxford. Public event.  
10:30am: POLAR PLUNGE at Carbuncle Pond to benefit Special Olympics. 11am: Pancake Breakfast at First Congregational Church with Elsa & Anna! Beginning at NOON: Activities on the Common: Food Trucks, 104.5 XLO, Children's Games, Ice Sculpture Demo, Fire Pits, S'mores, Wishing Trees, Hot Chocolate, Coffee, P&D Pizza, \*Horse-drawn Wagon Rides. Community Center Vendor Fair & Ice-Skating Rink plus family games, crafts & cookie decorating workshop, Senior Center Art Exhibition, Library Book Bingo & StoryTime

**SUNDAYS, FEBRUARY 4, FEBRUARY 18**

• The New England Country Music Club will hold the following dances with live Classic Country Bands at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., N. Uxbridge. Sunday, Feb. 4, "Rustic Country" Sunday, Feb 18, "Jessie Caruso and Ambush" Doors open at 12:15 p.m., music 1-5 p.m., \$11 for non-members, Snacks may be brought in, cash bar. For more information, visit <http://www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub>

**STARTING TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13**

• St. Peter's Parish in Northbridge will offer the ALPHA program on Tuesday evenings starting February 13, 2024 to May 7, 2024

from 6:30PM to 8:00PM. Sessions will be held in the parish hall, 39 Church Avenue, Northbridge. ALPHA is a series of interactive sessions to help people explore the basics of the Christian faith. The goal of ALPHA is to create a warm welcoming, non-threatening, non-pressured and non-judgmental environment where guests are accepted unconditionally. Each session looks at a different question around faith. We start with a light meal, followed by a video and small group discussion. There is no charge to attend ALPHA evenings. There is a good will offering to help cover the cost of the meal. If you would like to join us for ALPHA, please contact Louise Forget, 508-234-6355 or email: [religiouised@stpeterrockdale.org](mailto:religiouised@stpeterrockdale.org) to register or for more information.

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15**

• Storyteller Sari Bittocks will present the Tragic and True 1778 Crime Story of Bathsheba Spooner. Learn about the fascinating scandal that led to her unfortunate demise of Joshua Spooner at the hands of his wife in Brookfield. But why was Bathsheba really silenced and sentenced to death? At Mendon Historical Museum, 15 Hastings Street, Mendon. Snow date February 25.

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18**

• Bethel Lutheran Church, Auburn will hold its Centennial Celebration Festive Eucharist Service at 10:30 a.m. in the church, 90 Bryn Mawr Avenue followed by a banquet at the

Auburn Elks Lodge, 754 Southbridge Street, Auburn 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](mailto:jas2155@charter.net); Jackie Walsh at [jackmae@charter.net](mailto:jackmae@charter.net) or at the Bethel Facebook page, Bethel Lutheran-Auburn MA Centennial. A series of special events will follow throughout 2024.

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25**

• The Greater Worcester Model Train Show will take place from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at the Auburn Elks Lodge, 754 Southbridge Street, Auburn. All are invited to attend. View detailed train set-ups and find out how to get involved in this fascinating hobby. Donation \$6, kids under 12 free with adult. For more information, visit [mrr.org](http://mrr.org).

**SATURDAY, MARCH 16**

• Blackstone Valley Home Expo 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Sponsored by UniBank Northbridge High School Field House, Linwood Avenue, Whitinsville Admission \$3 For more information visit: [blackstonevalley.org](http://blackstonevalley.org) or contact: [loneil@blackstonevalley.org](mailto:loneil@blackstonevalley.org)

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# Blue Cross Blue Shield Of Massachusetts Brings Free Ice Skating To The Oval Ice Skating Rink In Worcester

Central Massachusetts skaters will have the opportunity to skate for free at The Oval Ice Skating Rink in Downtown Worcester on five occasions in January and February, courtesy of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (Blue Cross).

Blue Cross, the presenting sponsor of the 12,000-square-foot rink located at 455 Main Street, announced that free-skating days will take place on:

- Friday, January 26  
5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
- Saturday, January 27  
1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, January 28  
1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Friday, February 16  
5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Complimentary skate rentals will also be available for children 12 and under. As the second year of the sponsorship, the events underscore Blue Cross' commitment to the health and wellness of the greater Worcester community

by encouraging outdoor activity that supports physical and mental well-being.

The Oval Ice Skating Rink, which reopened in December, has welcomed more than 72,000 skaters since 2012. It offers skate rentals, concessions, and a limited number of free parking spaces (on a first-come, first-served basis) in the garage under City Hall.

"We're honored to offer these complimentary events at this exceptional community space, creating lasting memories for numerous families as part of our partnership with The Oval Ice Skating Rink," said Jeff Bellows, Blue Cross Vice President of Corporate Citizenship & Public Affairs. "These five days serve as an added motivation for everyone to embrace the outdoors, and enjoy healthy lifestyles."

Recognized as a highly effective form of exercise, ice skating engages nearly every muscle group in the body, promotes joint flexibility, and supports cardiovascular health. It also helps with improved balance, coordination, and weight

management, while contributing to improved mental health and overall well-being. According to a 2021 Harvard Medical School study, a mere 30 minutes of ice skating can burn between 210-294 calories, making it one of the most beneficial winter activities for fitness.

"We're thankful for the support provided by Blue Cross, including these free-skating events, which significantly contribute to the sense of community that The Oval Ice Skating Rink promotes," said John LaHair, Director of Marketing, for the DCU Center which also manages The Oval Ice Skating Rink. "They have become a true highlight of the winter season in Worcester and we are looking forward to welcoming guests for a day of enjoyment in the outdoors."

For more information, including weather-related closings, please visit the The Oval Ice Skating Rink's Facebook and Instagram pages or call the Cornerstone Bank Oval Hotline at (508) 929-0777.

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