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State Police Museum

BY PATTY ROY

The Massachusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center is chockfull of interesting facts and exhibits related to the agency's nearly 160 year old history.

It's housed in an appropriately dignified old building (the Whitinsville Bank Building) and easily found at One Memorial Square on Whitins Road, off Route 146, Whitinsville.

Learning about the inner workings of this state constabulary, is a fun way to spend a couple of hours or even a casual drop-in, cherry-picking what interests you. Mission, weapons, vehicles, technology, canines and uniforms are all there along with a sweet piece of Norman Rockwell nostalgia that makes for a great selfie.

"We believe we are the oldest state police agency in the country," said tour guide MSP Sergeant Paul Belanger. "We argue that the Texas Rangers were formed before us, but they did not have police powers and were



Retired due to its awkward braking system, this Indian motorcycle is still considered a beauty.

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CHP buys barn and land

In December 2023, the Community Harvest Project (CHP) purchased the acreage the organization has farmed for more than two decades. The land was previously leased from Ken Crater and Peg Ferraro who were among the founders of the non-profit farming organization that works

with volunteers to grow fruits and vegetables for hunger relief. CHP Executive Director Tori Buerschaper said.

Over \$600,000 came from grants



with volunteers to grow fruits and vegetables for hunger relief.

The pair offered the property to CHP last year which paid \$800,000 for two parcels at 33 and 37 Wheeler Road.

The land is held under a con-

servational restriction that prevents commercial development. Community Harvest Project (CHP) is a non-profit farm. A total of 15 acres was acquired in a capital campaign without a lot of fanfare and with grants, CHP Executive Director Tori Buerschaper said.

by six foundations and the remainder was fundraised by CHP board members from a dozen donors who wish to remain anonymous. If asking for money sounds like easy work, it isn't. There's more "nose to the grindstone" than you might think.

"There were a number of discussions upfront to make it so we had an invitation, so we don't just out of the blue, just make an application for multiple hundred thousands of dollars. There are many conversations that happen ahead of time," said Buerschaper, attributing the majority fundraising to the CHP board.

Together with the CHP's grant writer, Buerschaper worked to pull together some smaller grants. The fundraising goal was reached in December, the same month they

CHP

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STATE POLICE

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more like a militia.”

The Massachusetts State Legislature passed an act to establish the State Police in 1865.

The head of the state police was originally called a constable, a British-sounding word that crops up often in colonial era records. The first appointed Constable of Massachusetts was William Sterling King, a captain of Company K, Thirty-fifth Massachusetts Regiment which suffered devastating casualties at

South Mountain and Antietam. He suffered seven bullet wounds at Antietam, and garnered several important promotions in the aftermath.

In 1865, the State Police were really a state detective force, Belanger related. “They were not uniformed or armed,” he said.

Most of the first group of employees at the newly established law enforcement agency were typically Civil War veterans with militia training, Belanger said.

“Their first duties were actually enforcing temperance and liquor laws,” he said.

That’s because the towns

were’n doing anything about this, such as no liquor sales on Sundays. This was likely due to a lack of manpower on the part of municipalities, he said.

In 1921 Gov. Calvin Coolidge signed the documents that created the State Patrol that eventually became the State Police in the 1930’s, so the agency was moved from being detectives to the State Police Patrol. The pen used in signing is on display in the museum.

That led to the first recruit training troop. Belanger said he himself was a member of the 60th group training. They are now up



Retired MSP Sergeant Paul Belanger stands behind the counter pictured in Norman Rockwell’s iconic cover illustration “The Runaway.”

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to about the mid-80’s, he said.

Col. Alfred F. Foote, the Commanding General of the 26th Infantry Division was named as the first Commissioner of Public Safety. He retired in 1933 and a gold Badge presented to him by the officers of the department of public safety is on display by his portrait.

Also offered for your consider-

ation is a metal sign announcing “Tattooed Poultry Registered with the Mass. State Police.” During the Great Depression farmers were offered the use of tattoo equipment to identify their birds and prevent theft.

There are uniforms and equip-

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CHP
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closed on the property, she said. There are no plans for changes to the property's uses. It's the security that comes with owning the land that allows for more forward thinking, she said. "So we are undergoing a strategic planning process," Buer-schaper said. A strategic planning group held its first meeting on February 8 and

through that process Community Harvest will consider what changes may be made in the future to its programs. "We are planning to continue farming with volunteers," she reassured. "What is different is that in the past, we had a landlord who was the one managing not all of the building projects, but a number of them. So now that is our responsibility, but also we have a little bit more freedom." What CHP is doing right now is better assessing the cost of barn

maintenance and upkeep, especially now that we are owners, said Buerschaper. They're looking at a roof replacement in the next decade as well as redoing the parking lot. "I'm taking more time understanding the cost and scope of projects like this and then building them into our operating budget and our fundraising plan," she said. More than another type of organization, CHP is extremely reliant on the land on which it sits on to execute its programs, she said.

"That familiarity is a huge asset to us. Especially when it comes to farming, it's not just familiarity, it's our ability to steward year to year and really care for the soil in a way that makes our farming successful and sustainable," she said. "We see this as a huge vote of confidence from our founder Ken that we continue to execute the vision he has had. This is a sign that we are here to stay and continue providing our services and to

do it in a way that we can make those long term plans and adapt as needed." According to its website, CHP produce is distributed to partner organizations like traditional food banks, pantries for medically-tailored meal programs as well as free fridges so fresh produce can reach people where they are. For volunteer opportunities with CHP, visit community-harvest.org/

GHS holds NHS induction

Grafton High School held its National Honor Society Induction Ceremony for 66 Grafton High School students on Monday January 29. In order for students to be eligible for the National Honor Society they must be a student in good academic standing with an average GPA of 3.7 over their years in high school. They must be people of outstanding character, both in and out of school, and they must have completed at least 10 hours of community service prior to being inducted into this group. Inductees included: Mikaela Alex, Ella Alves, Norah Anderson, Owen Belanger, Ella Belton, Cassie Brown, Elizabeth Buonomo, Aubrey Carlson, Brandon Carroll, Kushi Chanumolu, Natalie Charles, Ben Clements, Riley Coonan, Meghan Costello,

Allison Cross, Maeve Croucher, Riya Dalal, Luke Dalan, Abigail Davis, Chase Diamond, Declan Donagher, Paul Flanagan, Jeremy Galvis, Finn Gilmore, Natalie Grass, Leila Gulli, Dina Halloran, Jocelyn Hamilton, Meghan Hogan, Alex Inciong, Robert Johnson, Ishita Kapoor, Cayden Kelly, Paige Kennedy, Sophia Kling, Rebecca Lubitz, Mackenzie Matuzek, Abdul Mohammed, Abby Nadeau, Lynn Nguyen, Ellia Nummela, Riley

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STATE POLICE

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ment from all special services of the state police – dive suits, bomb disposal suits, air wing, tactical operations team and riot gear from the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s. Photos of police cars are arrayed on the walls, while antique methods of getting around include 1920s snowshoes, a life-size model horse topped by an old saddle and an Indian motorcycle that was manufactured in Springfield. Those were all methods of getting around in the 1920s for the force.

It was a time before State Police barracks, where the officers were housed in single family homes across the state.

The State Police also patrolled Boston Harbor in the 20s, a ship's wheel is on display from that time when the force was looking for untaxed alcohol shipments and also some fishery details.

There's information on the work State Troopers are responsi-

ble for with commercial trucking and enforcement of motor carrier safety regulations.

Lots of Baby Boomer nostalgia is also on hand – from photos of popular Saturday morning television cowboy Rex Trailer – his guns and hat are in the museum - to a reconstruction of the iconic Howard Johnson restaurant counter that was the setting for Norman Rockwell's 1958 Saturday Evening Post cover.

Belanger was a fount of information about the creation, process and location of the illustration titled "The Runaway." It depicts State Trooper Richard Clemens sitting beside youngster Ed Locke on the swivel stools typical for counter service with a white-jacketed soda jerk looking on. Ed Locke (who also appears in two other Rockwell paintings) still shows up at the Museum every December when it hosts a "Runaway Day."

The technology available to the State Police Force mirrors that of society. Teletype machines from World War II to portable radios not available until the

1980s and eventually the development of electronic or satellite communications that allowed for transmissions between different sectors of law enforcement, so that everyone was aware of what was going on.

An early version of the breathalyzer, one of the first technological attempts to crack down on drinking and driving reveals a machine that was capable of being manipulated to give a false reading – it's good to know that improvements have been made.

There is a Wall of Remembrance devoted to the State Troopers who died in the line of duty from Patrolman William Mateer who drowned in 1909 while attempting to rescue a man who had fallen through ice to Trooper Tamar Buccini who was killed in 2022 when a tanker truck slammed into her cruiser on I-93 when she was assisting a motorist.

A touching nod to the importance of K-9s to the State Police is the tribute to Frankie, a Belgian Malinois who was shot and killed while apprehending a violent suspect in Fitchburg in 2022.

The State Police is the premiere law enforcement agency in Massachusetts, Belanger said. "There is no competition, there's no other statewide agency. Coming closely is the game wardens, but they only have a very narrow focus."

The State Police have athletics dedicated to their causes – the Boston Marathon is one and they also have a boxing team.

Belanger is especially enthusi-



A recreation of a frock coat worn by the original post Civil War members of the State Constabulary.

astic about the Learning Center part of the Museum.

"A part of our mission is education. We have different levels of programs for different levels of learners," he said.

There are coloring sheets for the smallest kids, microscopes for looking at fingerprint cards or a single strand of hair for the older ones.

"So you can do kind of the CSI kind of stuff and then we'll have an expert come in from the department to talk about crime

scenes, services, show them things and put them to work," Belanger said.

There is an initiative to work with high schools, especially ones with criminal justice programs and put on directed programs for them. These programs can include anything from rudiments of policing to border patrol, he said. The State Police Museum is open Tuesday and Saturday from 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. For more information, call 508-839-0001 or email info@mshpmc.org

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How would you handle forced early retirement?



Mark Freeman

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When you plan to retire at a certain age, you can follow a strategy that incorporates your investment moves, your health insurance and other factors. But what happens if you're forced to retire earlier than you anticipated?

Unfortunately, this situation is not that uncommon. About 40% of Americans say they have been forced into retirement, according to a recent survey from Edward Jones and

Morning Consult, a research firm. If this were to happen to you because of a layoff, company downsizing or a health issue, would you be prepared to maintain your lifestyle today — and in the future?

Everyone's situation is different. If your forced retirement happened only a short time before you actually expected to retire, you might not need to take any steps at all. But if it was a matter of a year or more, you may need to look into the following areas:

- **Cash flow** — Obviously, a sudden, unexpected loss of employment will affect your cash flow. And if yours was the only source of income for your household, the situation could be especially concerning. Still, you may well have options that can help. You might find a part-time job, for one thing — many employers hire seniors for various types of service-oriented work. And if you've built an

emergency fund containing several months' worth of living expenses, now might be the time to tap into it. You also might need to start withdrawing funds from your IRA and 401(k), though, ideally, you'd like to delay this move as long as possible, as these withdrawals may be taxable.

- **Health insurance** — Health insurance can be a major concern if you face an unexpectedly early retirement. Once you're 65, you'll be eligible for Medicare, but what if you haven't reached that age? Through the COBRA legislation, you might be able to remain on your employer-based health insurance for a while — typically 18 months after your job ends. However, COBRA is expensive: If you're qualified, you might have to pay the entire premium for coverage, up to 102% of the cost of the plan, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. If you're

married, you might be able to get on your spouse's health insurance, but if this option isn't available, you could explore a Marketplace plan by visiting the healthcare.gov website.

- **Social Security** — A forced early retirement could affect your decision on when to start taking Social Security. You're eligible to begin collecting payments at 62, but your checks will be considerably bigger if you wait until your full retirement age, which is likely between 66 and 67, depending on when you were born. If your sudden retirement puts you in a real cash crunch, you might have to start taking payments regardless of your age, but if you have enough in savings, or your spouse's income is enough to keep you afloat, you may want to wait as long as possible so you can get the larger checks. Of course, if your retirement comes while you're still several years away

from Social Security eligibility, you won't have to make this now-or-later decision right away.

Being forced to retire before you planned can certainly be challenging. But by looking at the options available to you, in terms of finances and health insurance, you may well find choices that can help you minimize the disruption to your life.

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

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Winter / Spring elections 2024

GRAFTON

Elections and deadlines
Voting will be held at Grafton Middle School Gymnasium, 22 Providence Road, for Precincts 1, 2 and 3. Voting for Precincts 4 and 5 will take place at the Millbury Street Elementary School Gymnasium, 105 Millbury Street.

Presidential primary

The Presidential primary will be held Tuesday, March 5, with voting from 7 a.m. - 8 p.m. Early voting will be from February 24 - March 1. To be eligible to vote in the Presidential Primary, you must register to vote or make any necessary changes to your voter registration by Saturday, February 24, 2024.

Annual Grafton election

The annual town election will be

held Tuesday, May 21, with voting from 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. The last day to register to vote in the town election is Friday, May 3.

Nomination papers are now available for the following elected positions:

One 3 - year seat on the Select Board

Three 3-year terms on the Board of Library Trustees

Two 3-year terms on the Planning Board

Two 3-year terms on the School Committee

One 5-year term on the Housing Authority

Registered Grafton voters may take out nomination papers with the Town Clerk. Contact the Town Clerk's office in advance to make an appointment by emailing clerk@grafton-ma.gov. Papers must be re-

turned to the Registrar of Voters at the Town Clerk's office for certification. The deadline for this action is 5 p.m. on Tuesday, April 2.

Nomination papers must contain the signatures of at least 50 registered Grafton voters. It is recommended that more than the minimum number of signature be collected in the event that some names of signatures cannot be verified.

Candidates have until 5 p.m. Thursday, April 18 to withdraw their nomination papers, if they decide not to run.

Grafton Annual Town Meeting
The Grafton annual town meeting will be held Monday, May 13 at 7 p.m. at the Grafton High School Auditorium, 24 Providence Road. The last day to register to vote at

the town meeting is Friday, May 3.

MILLBURY

Elections and deadlines
Presidential Primary

The Presidential Primary is Tuesday, March 5. To be eligible to vote in the March 5, 2024 Presidential Primary, you must register to vote or make any necessary changes to your voter registration by Saturday, February 24, 2024.

Online registration deadline is 11:59 p.m.

Mail-in registration must be postmarked by Saturday, February 24.

Early voting will begin on February 24 and continue through March 1, excluding Sunday, February 25.

Early voting dates and hours:
Saturday, February 24 : 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Monday, February 26: 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Tuesday, February 27: 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Wednesday, February 28: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Thursday, February 29: 8 a.m. - 4p.m.

Friday, March 1: 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. At Millbury Town Hall
127 Elm Street

Jayne Marie Davolio, Town Clerk

508-865-9110

www.millburyma.gov

Town Hall hours : Monday, Wednesday, Thursday from 8 a.m.

- 4 p.m.

Tuesday: 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Friday: 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Annual town election : Tuesday, April 30 from 7 a.m. - 8 p.m. Voting takes place at Millbury High School gymnasium, 12 Martin Street. Nomination papers are now available for the following elected positions:

Two 3-year seats on the Select Board

One 3-year seats on the Board of Assessors:

Two 3-year seat on the School Committee.

One 1-year seat on the School Committee;

One 3-year seat on the Board of Health

Two 3-year seats on the Planning Board

Two 3-year seats for Library Trustees

Two 5-year seats on the Re-development Authority

One 3-year seat for Town Moderator

Nomination papers must be returned by Tuesday, March 12 at 5 p.m.

Annual town meeting: May 7 at 7 p.m. in the Millbury High School gymnasium

SUTTON

Presidential Primary

The Presidential Primary is Tuesday, March 5. Polling hours for all precincts is
7 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Early in-person voting for the Presidential Primary election will be held at the Municipal Center, 4 Uxbridge Road, during the following hours:

Saturday, Feb. 24 - 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 26 - 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 27 - 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 28 - 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 29 - 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Friday, Mar. 1 - 9 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Voter Registration Deadline: February 24

Vote by Mail Application Deadline: February 27

Polling places
Precinct 1 - Middle School/High School gymnasium, 383 Boston Road

Precinct 2 - Manchaug Fire Station, 343 Manchaug Road

Precinct 3 - Middle School/High School gymnasium, 383 Boston Road

Special State Election District:

6th Worcester Representative District

Voter Registration Deadline: February 24

Vote by Mail Application Deadline: February 27

Polling Hours:
7 a.m. - 8 p.m.

For more information, contact:
Laura Caruso, Town Clerk

4 Uxbridge Road
Sutton, MA 01590

Email: l.caruso@town.sutton.ma.us

Phone: (508) 865-8725

The annual town election is May 28

Nomination papers are now available for the following elected positions:

One 3 -year term for Town Moderator

Two 3 -year terms for the Select Board

Two 3-year terms for School Committee

One 3-year term for Planning Board

One 3-year term for Library Trustee

Nomination papers can be made available by contacting the Town Clerk's office at 508-865-8725 or email Laura Caruso, Town Clerk.

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There are plenty of reasons to call a junk removal service. Maybe walking through your basement has gotten difficult or there is no more room in the attic? Perhaps you are planning to move, and you need to declutter before your open house?

Figuring out who to call can be challenging. If you contact one of the big haulers, they route you to a phone center where they've never even heard of your town, plus their pricing seems vague and full of extra fees. No wonder you've let the stuff pile up—it's too much of a hassle to get rid of it!

Or you can call Affordable Junk Removal and let a local small business with deep community roots take care of everything.

Jay Schadler started his business in 2005. Back then, it was just him and a beat-up pickup truck taking small jobs and working nights and weekends when he could. As the years rolled on, his business grew, but his commitment to customer service never wavered. Now he's got a staff of ten, along with eight trucks, servicing eastern and central Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island.

Affordable Junk Removal specializes in house and estate cleanouts. If your garage, attic, or office is overflowing with stuff, take back your space and let the pros do the heavy lifting.

Jay and his team have handled it all. They've dismantled above-ground pools, hauled away

Business spotlight

ancient hot tubs, taken down old fencing, and stripped away worn carpeting. They'll come for a single item, or they'll clean out an entire house. And they can take almost anything. They can't accept hazardous materials, brush, dirt, or concrete, but everything else is fair game for them to take away.

Not everything ends up in a landfill—not if Jay can help it. He first tries to either recycle or donate items. Only after he tries to repurpose items do they end up at the transfer station.

Working with Affordable Junk Removal is simple. First, you can load stuff yourself if you want by renting a 15-cubic-yard dumpster for a week and chucking up to a ton of your unwanted stuff. If you need to get rid of more weight, then Jay prorates that tonnage—you never pay for what you don't use.

If you don't want to be bothered with the dumpster, they've also got a driveway special where they'll take away a truckload of your unwanted things if you pile it up. Or if you don't want to lift a finger, then you can point at the items, and the team will fill up their truck and haul away your unwanted things. However you do it, you're left with more space and more peace of mind.



Jay and his team beat the big waste haulers on both price and customer service. When you call Affordable Junk Removal, you aren't connected to an anonymous call center. Your phone call goes right to Jay.

And speaking of pricing, Jay is upfront about it. His website shows the truck sizes and prices, so you can save time knowing your costs before you call for an appointment. There aren't any hidden costs or surprise fees with Affordable Junk Removal.

Affordable Junk Removal is fully licensed and fully insured, and they'll treat your property with care and respect.

They also have a thriving commercial business, working with contractors and roofers to clear away debris and keep the job site clean. They can even handle commercial and residential emergencies with same-day service.

Jay and his family are deeply involved in the community. He and his wife, Christine, run the Corner Market restaurant in

Holliston. It's not uncommon for someone to reach Jay at the restaurant, order a sandwich, and then schedule a junk removal appointment. Yes, the local small business really can handle everything!

Contact Affordable Junk Removal and let a local small business take care of everything for you. Call Jay Schadler at (774) 287-1133 or visit us online at www.affordablejunkremoval.com.

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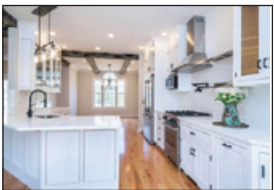
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Gliding and smiling for a special group of youngsters

BY PATTY ROY

Liz Lefrancois of Auburn has been a hockey mom for a couple of years. She's used to the early hours and the cold temperatures. Her eldest daughter Claire, an eighth grader, has been a member of the Worcester White Hawks for a several years and also plays junior varsity in Auburn.

Claire's biggest fan girl, though, may not be her mom, but her younger sister - nine year old Elise who is autistic and suffers from a rare genetic syndrome called Fox P1.

The wonderful thing is, due to her mom's enthusiasm and initiative, Elise now has her own opportunity to participate in ice

hockey. She's on the Worcester Snow Squalls, a team of special needs youngsters who meet up at the Horgan Ice Arena in North Auburn. The Snow Squalls welcome individuals with intellectual, developmental and physical disabilities to the sport of hockey from any town.

It's more fun for the kids to get out on the ice and glide even if it's in a chair or a sled, Liz explained, to enjoy the sensation of skimming over the smooth surface and feel the slight chill on their faces. It's a gentle and mild approximation of the sport of hockey.

"We don't have kids at this point who are even ready to skate," she said. Some of the players are able to put "grippers" on the feet so they can walk on the ice and eventually graduate to skates.

This leads a lot of people ask why not just have the kids do floor hockey?

The main benefit of the program is that the players get peer interaction and support on a one-to one basis, Liz said.

There are even some youngsters who due to sensory needs, need extra time to get used to wearing a helmet. (Practice this first at home, Liz recommends.)

Her mom says Elise has always gotten a kick out of her time at the hockey rink, where she's free to cheer as loud as she wants.

"Nobody shushes you at a hockey game," said Liz.

She was pleased to report that someone who had run a special hockey program out of state got in touch and the Snow Squall parents were very interested in learning how that particular program worked.

Older sister Claire has also been an inspiration because she has brought on board some "really good" junior hockey coaches from her own teams.



Ron, Elise and Liz Lefrancois at the rink

"They're kids that know hockey and they can go out to do one-to-one coaching," Liz said. The young Snow Squalls get a chance to learn something in a different way from these patient and experienced older players.

The junior coaches do things like setting up hockey drills using orange traffic cones that the kids love to be guided through.

The Snow Squalls accept children ages 5 and over and are ready to work with all kids at their own pace. Right now, most of the players are aged 6 - 12 years.

It's not however, your typical special hockey team, like some that are able to travel, Liz said.

"We will work with you individually," she said, but so much is about the opportunity to make connections.

"My daughter has made friends with this one boy and they have so much fun going fast," she said, happily. "Even his mom is smiling at the rink. The Snow Squalls motto is: We meet kids where they're at."

If anyone is interested in coming, but they're not sure it's for their child, Liz Lefrancois extends an open invitation join the Snow Squalls at a practice to see if it's something their child would enjoy.

At this time, there's no payment required since all the team's ice time funding is donated from Wegman's Food Markets. Practice jerseys have been donated by CCM.

Practices sessions are on Saturdays at 4 p.m. Feb. 24; March 9; 16 and 23 at Horgan Ice Arena 403 Oxford Street, North Auburn. This is the first session of the winter, so don't worry, you haven't missed any of the fun!

Worcester Snow Squalls is a Special Hockey Team, partnered with the American Special Hockey Association. Check out the Facebook page at facebook.com/worcesterspecialhockey/. To join the Snow Squalls, registration is required.

The team is also supported by a motivated group of coaches and on and off-ice volunteers.

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Bay Path Nursing Students Volunteer at Show Choir Festival

The Central Massachusetts Show Choir Festival was held at the Shepherd Hill Regional High School, Saturday, February 3, 2024. Faculty and Practical Nursing Student Volunteers from Bay Path RVTHS Practical Nursing Academy provided on site medical emergency care alongside Dudley Police and Fire Department.

The Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy team included Faculty lead Dr. Adelina Healy of Dudley and Practical Nursing student volunteers John Martin Wanjiru, Ashley Urbain, Michael Wairimu, Kaitlin Miliauskas, Evelyn Kiplangat, Catherine Ibrahim and Christiana Sochiletey.

The Practical Nursing student volunteers are all HCP/BLS CPR certified and trained in first aid. Photo shows from left, Michael Wairimu, Christiana Sochiletey, Evelyn Kiplangat, Kaitlin Miliauskas, and Catherine Ibrahim, all from Worcester.



Terry Salonis, Vice President of the Shepherd Hill Music Parents along with Maria "Chet" Perea-Beaulieu coordinated the Bay Path student nurses' participation with Gretheline Bolandrina, DHA, MSN Ed, RN, CRRN Academy Director. According to Salonis, "this enormous event involves over 24 schools from around the country and over 500 student perform-

ers." Bay Path PN volunteers were there to ensure the safety of students and their families with onsite medical care as a compliment to Dudley PD and Fire. Volunteer shifts started at 12 noon through 10 PM.

"This was the second year for PN Volunteers to participate in this capacity, we're glad to assist again and are looking forward to 2025," concluded Bolandrina.

About Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy: Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy offers 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 Human Services of Public Health Board of Registration in Nursing.

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Luke Bucks A Family Rule

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Initially, I thought Luke was being headstrong when he bucked our table manner system, a system he supported early on (two years ago to be exact). The memory of his squat, fluffy body perched at his spot still makes me smile. Luke was a pup with a thirst for learning and he adored our training sessions. “Good boy, Luke!” At nine weeks old, he appeared too little to understand rules. Yet there he sat, a teddy bear with a big head, and even bigger brain. I couldn’t help but brag.

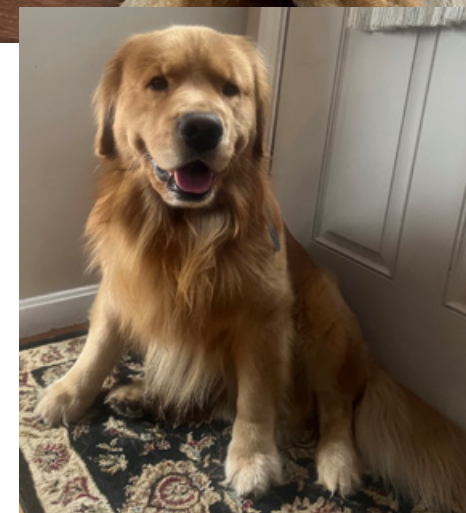
“Not to toot my own horn, but Luke responds so well to my training. I think he’s my smartest puppy yet.” A tiny, pink smile broke free from Luke’s concentration. “Aren’t you so happy you picked me, Momma?”

I truly was.

Time passed, old habits softened, and Luke became a confident young dog who approached his teens with a fair amount of bravado. The blonde hair on his chest grew long and silky, wheat

blowing in the wind, and his body filled out to match his leonine head. He learned the benefits of begging while I handed him pieces of banana from the countertop. Consistency is key when it comes to dog training. Therefore, it’s possible that I’m to blame for the story to come.

“Luke! It’s okay. It’s just your old spot,” I reminded on that peculiar



stared in disbelief at a newly minted Luke. My son, Ben, muscular and brotherly, had grabbed him by the collar to coax him back to his spot. Yet a simple tug some-

how turned into a bizarre power struggle. What was wrong? Luke had put on his brakes and trembled with a fear that makes me shudder, even in retrospect. “I’m-not-going-there.” Tail fastened between legs; he shook as though we had just placed him in solitary confinement with King Kong. What was happening? Was Luke suddenly afraid of his brother?

“What’s the matter, Luke?” We cajoled him with baby-talk. “Look at Luke’s spot! It’s so comfy!” But he wrestled out of Ben’s grip and dashed to his bed in the dining room where he sat, stoic and

determined. “I’m going to choose my own spot from now on.” I stood dumbfounded with a slab of meat, a reward that did nothing to motivate him. Instead, he rested his head over his paws and sulked. “I don’t need to stay at that dumb spot anymore. I’m over it.”

We speculated. Had a kitchen chair inadvertently fallen over on Luke during his puppyhood to traumatize him? Or was his choice to ditch the spot prouder, perhaps even territorial? -- “I’m not answering to my big brother. He thinks he’s the boss. Well, I’m the boss of myself.”

I came to learn that Luke’s decision was rooted in something even more remarkable. Nevertheless, we needed to rule out sibling rivalry. My husband and I encouraged Luke to sit at his spot to see if he would comply with us, and not Ben. “Go ahead,” we gestured. “Sit at your spot, Luke.” The same behavior resumed. He trembled. He retracted. He dashed back to his bed. One time he even popped onto the rug at the front door. “I’m picking my own spot.” Not only did Luke insist on choosing his own spot, but he also refused to participate in any conversations about it.

“Do you think he’s afraid of his spot? Maybe we should try a new spot?” We pondered a solution. Meanwhile, we noticed that each time we uttered the word SPOT, Luke would turn his head away

day in January. The catchphrase “New Year, New Luke” announced itself during a family lunch. I

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and threaten to leave the room, as though to say, “I’m not talking about this.” Clearly, the subject was sore.

Admittedly, his behavior led to some teasing from the boys in the house. “Hey, Luke – did you hang at your spot today? Where’s your spot, Luke?” His ears peeled back like a lamb’s. He hadn’t a proper comeback because he’s a dog. I became his voice. “Don’t push Luke’s buttons. He’s intelligent and he doesn’t appreciate sarcasm.”

Luke had his reasons. He was about to enlighten me on them a few weeks later. My mother, one of Luke’s favorite people, had been eating a dish at the kitchen island. Oblivious to our rules, she complimented Luke, despite that he sat at her heels. Grammy loved Luke unconditionally. He

LUKE

continued on page 11

REAL ESTATE

Are More Homeowners Selling as Mortgage Rates Come Down?

If you're looking to buy a home, the recent downward trend in mortgage rates is good news because it helps with affordability. But there's another way this benefits you, it may inspire more homeowners to put their houses up for sale. Over the past year, one factor that's really limited the options for your move is how few homes were on the market. That's because many homeowners chose to delay their plans to sell once mortgage rates went up.

An article from Freddie Mac explains: The lack of housing supply was partly driven by the

likely lower rate existing homeowners had. These homeowners decided to stay put and keep their current lower mortgage rate (known as rate lock-in), rather than move and take on a higher one on their next home. Early signs show those homeowners are ready to move again. There were more homeowners putting their houses up for sale, known in the industry as new listings, in December 2023 compared to December 2022, up about 9%. Here's why this is so significant. Typically, activity in the housing market cools down in the later months of the year as some sellers choose to delay their moves until January rolls around. This is the first time since 2020 that we've seen an uptick in new listings this time of year. This could be a signal that the rate lock-in effect is easing a bit in response to lower rates.

What this means for you? While there isn't going to suddenly be an influx of options for

your home search, it does mean more sellers may be deciding to list. A reduction in interest rates could alleviate the lock-in effect and help lift homeowner mobility. Interest rates have recently declined, falling by a full percentage point from October to November 2023. Further decreases would reduce the barrier to moving and give homeowners looking to sell a new sense of urgency. And that means you may see more homes come onto the market to give you more fresh options to choose from.

As mortgage rates come down, more sellers may re-enter the market – that gives you an opportunity to find the home you're looking for. Connect with The Marzeotti Group or a real estate agent so you've got a local expert on your side who'll help you stay on top of the latest listings in our area.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

LUKE
continued from page 10

looked up at her dish, then at me, and away, ashamed. Something in his expression struck me. He had learned that begging was socially unacceptable and impolite. Luke had outgrown his spot because he had grown closer to his family. He wanted to be included in our eating

circles. Luke was a contributing family member! The drag away from the family table, then, felt belittling, counterintuitive to his emotional intelligence. Luke understood how we felt about begging but we failed to understand how he felt about being excluded.

From now on, Luke has a place at the family table, and it's right at our feet.

Write to Amy – amyelaire@hotmail.com
Follow Luke on IG – livingwith-lukevalentino
Stay tuned for a story on Luke's 2-year-old birthday, coming soon!



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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**

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New London's Ledge Light

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

New London, Connecticut's Ledge Light, was one of the last lighthouses built in New England. Its distinct French Second Empire style came about at the request of the wealthy homeowners along the shore who wanted the structure to keep in harmony with the elegant appearances of their coastal estates. Unfortunately, many of these fashionable homes were destroyed in the hurricane that swept through New England on September 21, 1938.

The lighthouse was built in 1909 to replace the inefficient New London Harbor Light. It was originally called the Southwest Ledge Light, but the name was changed because a light in New Haven had already claimed that moniker.

The fourth-order Fresnel lens held an incandescent oil vapor

lamp that could be seen up to eighteen miles away and was rotated by a clock mechanism that required winding every four hours. During the Hurricane of 1938, Howard B. Beebe was on duty as keeper. The waves came through the second-floor windows of the three-story building, forcing him and his assistant to take refuge in the cast iron light tower that sits on the mansard roof. After the hurricane, Coast Guard crews were stationed at the light to keep it lit until it was automated on May 1, 1987. The day the light went automated was a monumental event for one of the keepers, who wrote in the log,

"Rock of slow torture. Ernie's domain. Hell on earth—may New London Ledge's light shine on forever because I'm through. I will watch it from afar while drinking a brew."

The ghosts that haunt the light are few, but they make themselves known — especially the ghost of John "Ernie" Randolph. Randolph is said to have lived at the light with his wife.

As the legend goes, Randolph's wife became very depressed about living in the middle of the bay with little contact from the outside world and soon sailed off with the captain of a Block Island ferry. Poor Ernie was so distraught that he climbed to the top of the light, slit his own throat, and dove into the waters below. His body was never found, but from that moment on, Ernie's ghost began haunting the Ledge Light. When the Coast Guard became keepers of the light in 1939, cadets constantly witnessed doors opening and closing on their own, and had their bed covers tugged on or wrenched off



Photo by Beyond My Ken - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0; commons.wikimedia.org

them as they tried to sleep. Televisions would mysteriously come to life without anyone to switch the units on. The foghorn was also prone to ethereal antics. Even on the clearest of days, the horn would begin to wail. When inspected, it was always found to be in perfect working order. When keepers went out to swab the decks around the light, they would find them inexplicably already washed down. Boats docked and tied securely would suddenly break free and start drifting out to sea. The 2009 multi-award-winning WGBY documentary Things That Go Bump in the Night: Tales of Haunted New England tells of an account by Guardsman Bill Rhodes Jr.

Young Mr. Rhodes was stationed at the light from August 1979 to January 1980. One night, while on watch, Bill heard creaking and groaning from the upstairs door to the light room. He was sure he had latched the door, which was part of his duty. When he checked out the noise, he saw the door wide open. It took a lot of force to unlatch the door and thrust it open, as it was designed to withstand hurricane-force winds.

New Hampshire EVP expert Karen Mossey once caught a voice on her recorder that was not

Ernie's.

Karen asked if there was anything she could do for the spirits. When she played back the recorder, she heard a voice loud and clear say, "Help me, I'm cold." She was later told an account of a vessel that crashed on the ledges near the lighthouse. Unfortunately, the father and daughter aboard succumbed to the ravages of the sea before they could be saved.

A keeper heard his name called several times while descending the ladder from the light tower. This was rather disconcerting to the man, as he was the sole occupant of the light at the time.

A woman and her children staying at the light got a visit from the ghost of Ernie. She was suddenly awakened by something at the foot of her bed. As she focused her vision, she distinctly saw a semi-transparent figure of a man in a rain hat and slicker. The gaunt apparition stood over six feet tall and sported a beard. Her children were also witness to the maritime spirit that decided to pay them a visit.

The lighthouse can be seen from shore, or toured through a cooperative program with the University of CT's Project Oceanology Program.

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HEALTHIER BAKING

Healthier Baking in the Blackstone Valley

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE
Cmgaleone15@gmail.com

For the Grafton Business Scene column, which I've written for several years, I sometimes write about the wonderful ways that communities come together to support local businesses, organizations and neighbors in need. And while, sometimes, it may seem trite to extoll the virtues of close-knit communities, the truth is that their incredible value is often underestimated.

The members of these communities are generally of different races, ethnicities, religions, abilities, income levels, political ideologies and lifestyles. But when an unforeseen disaster strikes a small business, a food pantry needs more resources to feed the hungry, or a local family needs support, they come together as one to meet the vital needs and to inspire other communities to do the same.

These community cookies are a combination of three classic ones. Oatmeal cookies are strong, no-nonsense treats that you can rely



on. Jam thumbprint cookies are colorful and more whimsical and child-like. And chocolate-chip cookies are comforting, warm and

sweet. If you bake cookies regularly, you know how many recipes call for an obscene amount of sugar.

And many of them produce a relatively small amount of cookies. It's just not necessary.

These cookies are packed with nutritious ingredients. The oats are healthy for your heart. The dark chocolate chips provide antioxidants. And the cinnamon provides antioxidants as well.

COMMUNITY COOKIES

Ingredients:

- 2 ½ cups of old-fashioned or quick oats
- 1 cup of dark chocolate chips
- 1 ¼ cups of flour
- 1/3 cup of brown sugar
- 1/3 cup of granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tsp. of baking soda
- ½ tsp. of salt (omit if using salted butter)
- 1 tsp. of cinnamon
- 1 tsp. of vanilla extract
- 1 cup (2 sticks) of butter (slightly softened)

Directions:

In a large mixing bowl, mix together the dry ingredients (except the oats and chocolate chips). In a separate large mixing bowl, cream the butter, brown sugar and sugar together.

Add the eggs and vanilla to the butter mixture, and mix well.

Gradually combine the mixed dry ingredients with the mixed wet ingredients. Fold in the oats and chocolate chips. Use a cookie scoop to scoop the cookie dough onto a baking sheet.

Form each scoop of dough into a ball, and press a thumbprint into the center of each one.

Fill the thumbprints with jam.


Bake at 350 degrees for around 12-15 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool for a couple of minutes before transferring to cooling racks or plates. Enjoy!

Makes about 60 cookies

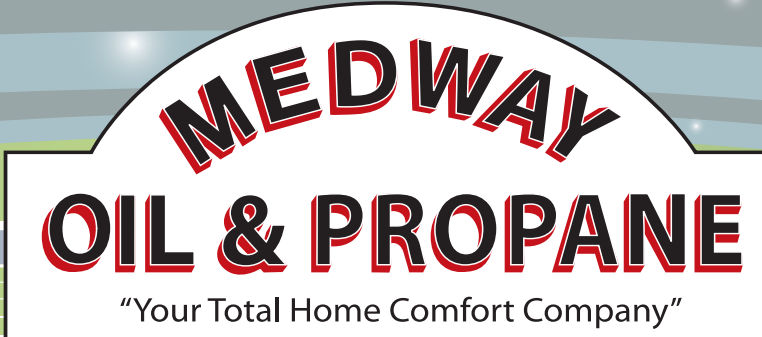
Close-knit communities are nothing short of amazing. When people and organizations, who want to make a positive difference, unite, their accomplishments can be limitless, lifesaving and awe-inspiring. And every community needs cookies – and donuts, but they're not as healthy. Happy (healthier) baking!

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BVT is path to success

Brendan Hawkins, an 18-year-old graduate from Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School in Upton, has made headlines for his exceptional journey into the workforce. Departing from traditional academic routes, Hawkins chose a vocational education to pursue hands-on learning and practical skills. Hawkins graduated from BVT in May 2023 after completing the 4-year HVAC program offered at the school. Hawkins thrived in BVT's environment, a place where

he could work with his hands and expand his learning. While not heavily involved in extracurricular activities, he found his passion through his trade experience.

Centerline Mechanical LLC, a full-service HVAC company that was established in October of 2020, was discovered by Hawkins during a presentation at BVT given by Julian Picard, the company's founder. Intrigued by the prospect of working with the promise of significant growth opportunities, Hawkins joined Centerline

Mechanical LLC during his junior year. Julian Picard's words and demonstration of leadership in the industry is what fueled his interest in working for the company. After graduating high school, Hawkins was promoted to HVAC Installer and Service Technician.

Company founder of Centerline Mechanical LLC and BVT alumni, Julian Picard, appreciates Hawkins' ability to apply skills to hands-on projects.

"Finding help can be hard in the trades. So I reached out to the BVT HVAC program to see what they had for prospects since I knew I had to grow my own help," said Picard. "I have had Hawkins since his final trimester Junior year. After the interview, I knew he would be a good fit, and the rest is history. I want to see him buy his first house soon," Picard adds.

Hawkins acknowledges the transformative impact of working in a small company. He has overcome self-doubt and was able



Brendan Hawkins is in the driver's seat for a successful career.

to successfully apply his technical skills to the work environment.

"I cannot express enough the gratitude I have for this opportunity to work with Centerline Mechanical," Hawkins said. "It's nice to be an asset to a team that is generous and actually care."

The young man's journey serves as a testament to the diverse paths available to technical graduates, challenging the conventional norms of education. His accomplishments at BVT and success at Centerline Mechanical LLC highlights the potential for growth and learning in non-traditional career paths.

BVT is open to students from Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge.

For more information about Centerline Mechanical LLC, please visit www.centerlinemech.com or contact Julian Picard at julianpicard@centerlinemech.com. To learn more about Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School, please visit www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/Page/2.

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Sutton Garden Club Scholarship Guidelines

The Sutton Garden Club is pleased to announce that we will award one scholarship in the amount of \$1000. this year. Consideration will be given to a student who plans to pursue college studies (including college affiliated certificate programs) in horticulture, landscape design, botany, environmental studies or other related natural sciences.

Eligibility: Sutton resident graduating students (public or private high school, tech, etc.) and graduating students of other towns who are related

to a current Garden Club member. The SGC scholarship is contingent upon the student's ability to maintain a grade point average of at least 2.5 during the semester following the granting of the scholarship.

Sutton High School students apply through the Guidance Office. Applicants from other High Schools should submit a 1 page, single-spaced word processed letter by April 30, 2024 mail to Sutton Garden Club Scholarship Committee, 78 West Millbury Rd., Sutton, Ma 01590

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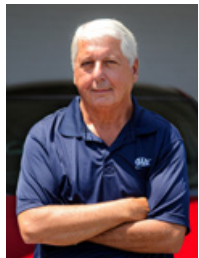
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High mileage engine oil - is it worth it?

Q. My 2014 Mazda CX-9 has 63,000 miles and I faithfully change the full synthetic 5W-20 oil and filter every six months. I never reach 5000 miles during that six months or I would change it at that mileage. I use "regular" synthetic oil. I'm reading that it might be



BY JOHN PAUL

time for the "high mileage" engine oil version. Supposedly it has additives for aging seals. (If that's the case, why not have those additives in all versions?) The Ford 3.7L V-6 Duratek in this SUV is dynamite. No oil leaks and I love its performance. (No towing or heavy loads). What are your thoughts on switching to the high mileage? Pros vs. cons? Also, I am starting to look at the CX-9's replacement, the CX-90, new in model year 2024. Mazda has replaced the recent four-cylinder turbo engine with a six-cylinder engine in 2024. Since it is the first year for this engine, I am watching for feedback. Have you heard any? And yes, I understand Mazda's "joystick" infotainment setup has its detractors.

A. At first, I thought high mileage oil was just marketing, but after some research it does have its benefits. It will help with aging engine seals, the additives condition the seals, not swell them up like some pour in additives do. That being said at ten years old and using good oil, I'm not sure you need it, perhaps switch in the 75,000-100,000-mile range. The only negative of high-mileage oil is it costs a bit more. As for the latest CX-90, a very well-made

vehicle and the new six-cylinder engine performed quite well during my road testing. There are a couple of powertrain choices, plug in hybrid, mild hybrid, and conventional engine. The mild hybrid and PHEV are too new to know how they will do. The conventional inline six-cylinder turbo engine, also new for Mazda, seems very solid. The interior is very comfortable and unlike many bigger SUVs, then handling it quite good. The newest Mazda is not without some problems with at least two recalls since its introduction.

Q. My son is visiting from overseas and borrowed my car to drive to Pittsburgh to visit friends. The car is a 2012 Audi A4 with 90,000 miles, no significant issues to date, though it has been burning a bit more oil of late. The check engine light came on in Pittsburgh. The light is solid, no noticeable issues with driving yet. He did find a parts store and they came up with codes; P2187 and P2279. Am I taking major risks allowing him to drive back home, provided there are no noticeable performance issues, and the light is not flashing? I would of course take the car in for diagnostic to my local trusted mechanics once he is back.

A. The two codes relate to fuel mixture, perhaps a leak in the air intake before the throttle plate, vacuum leak at the intake manifold or even a dried out vacuum hose. The most common issue is with the PCV system, sometimes called an oil separator in VW/Audi engines. This could also explain your engines' increased oil use. Since the car is running normally chances are it is a minor fuel issue and should

be okay. In the worst case, there could be some stalling.

Q. Ford continues to innovate in its quest to make trailering easier and less intimidating for truck owners through its Pro Trailer Assist and in the past year, the ability to automatically hitch your truck to a trailer hitch. While these systems are available on the F-150, SuperDuty trucks, Expedition - I have been following every year for when they would expand these options to the Explorer or Escape. Any rumors that this could happen soon?

A. I asked that question about a year or two ago with engineers from Ford and they said it was in the plans with the next major upgrades to the Explorer but not likely in the Escape. They hinted at that time that budgetary concerns were an issue, focusing more on electric vehicle development.

Q. I am wondering if you can recommend a good steering wheel lock seat belt lock to protect my 2019 Honda CRV? The rash of car thefts has me concerned so I thought a lock of this type would be an effective way to deter auto thefts. The main advantage is, it is easy to use and will not mar any of the surfaces like a bar type of lock would. I have read some of the reviews of this type of lock. My main concern is that I could install it and then cannot get it to unlock, or it could damage the seat belt receptacle, so it will not work either. I have read complaints about both conditions. The other one is the seat belt could be damaged and so the belt alert continues to chime. What do you think?

A. Like all of these devices (cane locks, steering wheel locks and armored ignitions), they are a deterrent, and hopefully a thief would see this and move on. The weakness in this product is the seatbelt. The device that I have seen has a rigid plastic case and strong cable, but it still connects to a fabric seatbelt. Keep in mind than even the steel cable can be cut with battery grinder or hydraulic cutters. Adding additional security is a personal choice and certainly could work, but I would also follow the advice of the police, park in well-lit

areas, remove valuables and lock the 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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SPORTS

Teammates Come First

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Many parents sign their children up to get them on the ice to learn to skate at a very young age. While a lot of those kids enjoy the learn to skate programs just to skate, some gravitate toward ice hockey with their new found skills. In the case of Grafton's Olivia Viens, she was put on the ice by her father to eventually play hockey like her older brother.

The now junior found that she really enjoyed the sport of hockey and had an amazing time with her experience on the ice. Viens soon found herself playing youth hockey for Grafton before moving onto club teams. First she hooked up with the Lady Crusaders out of Worcester and then the Minuteman Lady Flames in Marlboro, a team she still plays for today.

The Grafton native gravitated toward the forward position after trying out all the other positions and although she can play all three positions on the offensive side of the puck she prefers center. Growing up playing the sport, she knew that she wanted to eventually play high school hockey. Unfortunately, Grafton did not have a team of its own.

"I knew going in that Grafton was part of a co-op team in high school and that was ok as long as

I got to play hockey on that level," Viens said. "The opportunity would be there, and I planned on trying out for the team as hockey is my sport."

Viens also plays field hockey for the high school and enjoys it as well, but she has been playing ice hockey longer and has a deep love for the sport. She has tried lacrosse and dance, but just wasn't into either of them. Field hockey is very similar to ice hockey, just played on a different surface and she believes that is why she likes the sport as well.

However, while she enjoys playing the game of hockey she also enjoys doing it with her teammates.

"I think I like the sport because it has a lot to do with my teammates," she said. "The connection that we all have while laying the game is special and I really enjoy it."

Playing hockey for a co-op team can be difficult, especially if the home team is not your home town. Viens plays hockey for Auburn High School and although there were some minor issues in the beginning, it doesn't bother her anymore.

"It is tough having to go to another school for practices and games, but it's only 20 minutes away. The toughest part was not knowing anyone on the team except for the girls that came from



Grafton," she said. "After making the varsity team it was definitely scary not knowing anyone or what to expect, but as the season went on I found that the girls on the team were welcoming and very friendly."

As a freshman Viens found herself playing a considerable amount of time for the Rockets and while she does enjoy the occasional goal she would much rather be setting up her teammates for success.

During her freshman campaign the Grafton hockey player was able to notch 20 points that season and then upped her total to 31 points during her sophomore year. At the time of this writing, which was nine games into the season she already had accumulated 21 points. The pace would most likely put her over the 40-point mark by the end of the year leaving her just short of her ultimate goal.

"When I entered high school I set a goal for myself – to score 100 points before my high school career came to an end," Viens said. "Right now, I'm at 72 and with more than a season and a half still to play; I think that I should be able to accomplish that goal."

Viens went on to say that reaching that milestone would mean a lot to her as she set the goal up some time ago and she has been working extremely hard to achieve it. She knew that the goal wouldn't be easy, but she wanted something that she could challenge herself with. It is rather possible that she could accomplish the feat by the end of her junior season, but most likely the mountain will be climbed in the early part of her senior campaign with Auburn.

Prior to this season getting underway Viens continued to play in the fall with the Lady Flames and found herself going to the gym a lot more, especially during the summer when she had no hockey going on.

In playing both field hockey and ice hockey she feels the two sports help improve her skills. She noted that while on the field they use the stick to toe drag the ball and that in turn has helped her on the ice with

her stick handling.

In addition to eclipsing the 100-point plateau, Viens also wanted to come into the season hoping to lead her team and have a positive impact on them. She would very much like to get this team back into the State Tournament and win.

Over the past two seasons Auburn has been able to punch their ticket to the Division 1 State Tournament only to find themselves heading home after the first round. The Rockets have been the 27th and 26th seeds going into the tournament over the past two years but unfortunately were eliminated by Shrewsbury and Bishop Feehan before they could get anything going. Currently sitting at 4-5 Viens strongly believes that Auburn will advance into the post-season and win a game or two.

Although still having a year and a half to play for the Rockets and many games still ahead on the schedule Viens has been thinking about the future.

"I would eventually really like to play hockey in college," she said. "I like going to college hockey games and have been aspiring to play at that level since about middle school."

When she does get to play on the collegiate level, she knows that there will not be a lot of time left for field hockey. If she does get a chance to continue with that sport, it will most likely be with a club team.

For now, she has her sights set on reaching 100 points and helping to get her teammates into the post-season and winning at a few games.



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bankHometown Commits \$25,000 to Millbury/Sutton Fuel Fund for 2024

In time for this winter's home heating season, bankHometown has contributed an additional \$25,000 to its fuel assistance program for Millbury and Sutton residents. The fund, which is part of the bank's charitable giving program, The Giving Tree, was first established in 2005 to help low-income families pay their home energy costs. This latest commitment brings total contributions to the program to \$480,000.

"For two decades, our fuel fund has helped local families in need meet the high cost of heating their homes," said bankHome-

town President and CEO Robert J. Morton. "We're pleased to offer this assistance to our neighbors in Millbury and Sutton to ensure no family has to go without heat this winter."

The fund provides fuel assistance to households in Millbury and Sutton that meet federal guidelines for low-income individuals. For qualifying applicants, bankHometown will pay \$350 for oil, natural gas, or electric directly to the energy supplier. Last winter, more than 50 local families received assistance.

Eligible properties include owner-occupied, single-family

residences or apartments. Ineligible properties include subsidized housing, multi-family housing producing rental income (even if owner-occupied), and apartments that include heat as part of the rent.

The program will be administered by the Millbury and Sutton Senior Centers and will end March 31. To apply or to determine if you are eligible, contact one of the program's coordinators: Laurie Keefe, Millbury Senior Center, 1 River Street, (508) 865-9247, or Michelle Edelstein, Sutton Senior Center, 19 Hough Road, (508) 234-0703.

Sutton Historical Society Happenings

The Sutton Historical Society's 2024 Membership drive is underway. Membership forms

UNIBANK. Membership dues and additional donations are the Society's main income source and

website.

Mark your calendar for our first speaker presentation on Thursday,

April 18, at 7 pm at Vaillancourt Folk Art, 9 Main Street, Manchaug Village, Sutton. Christine Watkins, Sutton Historical Society, will tell the story of the devastating 1924 Manchaug Village fire on its 100th anniversary which burned over 10 acres, left 25% of the Village population homeless, destroyed the retail section of the village, and made national news. This presentation will



can be found at suttonhistoricalsocietyinc.org. Annual membership dues are \$15 for an individual and \$25 for a family. Dues can be paid by check or through UNIPAY, an online payment option through

help us to maintain our properties and host our many programs. Membership is open to the general public with no requirement for Sutton residency. Check out our 2024 Calendar of Events on our

include photos, newspaper summaries, and eyewitness accounts. Come hear how a small community, with the help of generous neighbors, persevered over a tragedy.



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UniBank Receives Prestigious Award for Healthy Work Culture

UniBank, Central Massachusetts' largest mutual community bank, received a Silver level designation from Cigna Healthcare for its healthy work culture in 2023.

Michael Welch, CEO of UniBank, commented "We are both honored and humbled to receive this award, for the culture we have developed for all at UniBank. While no institution is perfect, we recognize the importance of the "wholeness of being." We care about the whole person, and in so doing help our teammates journey to finding fulfillment in what they do and who they are. There are many positive outcomes of this, both for our internal community, and for the outer community which we serve. So often I

hear from customers, that their interaction with UniBank, is not only financially helpful and beneficial, but is also enjoyable- something that helps set UniBank apart."

The Cigna Healthy Workforce Designation evaluates organizations based on the core components of their well-being program, including leadership and culture, program foundations and execution, policies and fostering of personal self-actualization, and additional areas. Organizations recognized with this designation set the standard of excellence for organizational health and vitality. Cigna Healthcare is proud to honor UniBank with the Silver level designation for having a healthy work culture by establishing

and growing their employee well-being and engagement programs.

UniBank is rooted in the Blackstone Valley with assets of \$2.5 billion as of December 31, 2023. A full-service, mutually owned community bank, UniBank has branches in Central Massachusetts and the MetroWest region of Massachusetts. UniBank is dedicated to contributing to the overall quality of life and economic health of the communities it serves, while maintaining a high level of financial soundness and integrity. UniBank is an Equal Housing Lender and Member FDIC. UniBank NMLS #583135. The company website is www.unibank.com.

Bereavement Group

Your bereavement experience may be recent or not so recent. No matter how long it has

been, this is an opportunity to be around people who understand what you are feeling. If you have experienced the death of a family member or friend, you are invited to attend. Lifesong Church will hold Thursday night sessions for 13 weeks running March 7 to May 30 for persons dealing with grief.

At GriefShare you'll watch a weekly video with counsel and insights from respected grief experts

and relatable personal stories—followed by a time of sharing and support. Session topics include what's normal in grief; how to handle difficult emotions; and what to do with regrets, questions, and worries.

The first meeting is March 7 from 6:30 – 8 p.m. You may join the group at any time. The cost is \$20 that including a workbook. The group will be held in a room off the foyer of the Lifesong Church, 65 Gilmore Street, Sutton.

To learn more or register, please visit: griefshare.org/groups/183083.

19th Annual Wine & Chocolate Tasting Charity Event

A Sweet Affair for a Worthy Cause

Get ready to indulge your senses and make a difference at the 19th Annual Wine & Chocolate Tasting Charity Event, hosted by the Blackstone

Valley Emergency Shelter and the Blackstone Valley Rotary. Scheduled for March 9th at 7:00 PM, this event promises an evening of delight and philanthropy at the picturesque Blissful Meadows Golf Club in Uxbridge, MA. With Live Auctions, Raffles, Prizes, and an array of Vendors, attendees can anticipate an unforgettable experience, all while supporting two significant causes: aiding the homeless in the Blackstone Valley and funding scholarships through the BV Rotary Club.


"The event isn't just about indulgence; it's about coming together as a community to uplift those in need," remarked Leslie Reichert, CEO of the Blackstone Valley Emergency Shelter. Proceeds from the evening will be allocated to the Blackstone Valley Emergency

Shelter, providing essential support to those experiencing homelessness in the Valley.

With an expected turnout of approximately 275 guests, organizers urge community members to participate in various capacities. Whether attending, sponsoring the event, or donating auction items, every contribution is valued and makes a tangible impact.

"We extend our heartfelt gratitude for everyone's generosity and support. Together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of those experiencing homelessness. Together, we can give them HOPE," concluded Reichert, expressing appreciation to the community for its ongoing dedication.

For those interested in participating or contributing, further information can be obtained at www.BVemergencyshelter.org or on Facebook at BVwinetasting. Don't miss out on this opportunity to join in the festivities and make a positive impact in the community.




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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.

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.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

• Bereavement Group meets from 6:30 – 8 p.m. at LifeSong Church, 61 Gilmore Street Sutton.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

• Spring floral arrangement class, 1 p.m. Millbury First Congregational Church 148 West Main St., Millbury. Sandy Michalak of Herbert E. Berg florist will teach participants how to complete their own beautiful, spring, fresh floral arrangement.

ment. \$25.00 For class and all materials. Beginners welcome. Advanced registration required by March 2, 2024 by calling janice fortin at 508-826-6381.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

• Story Time at the Willard House Clock Museum, 11 Willard Street, North Grafton 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. Join us for this free program presented in collaboration with the Grafton Public Library. Preschoolers will enjoy a few stories, a short museum tour and a craft project. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Siblings are welcome.

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 or contact: loneil@blackstonevalley.org
• Corned Beef and Cabbage Dinner St. Peter Parish in Northbridge is having a Corned Beef & Cabbage Dinner on Saturday, March 16th starting at 5:30 pm in the Parish Hall. Bring you family and friends for a wonderful meal and Irish Music by Alto Vista. Tickets are \$17 per dinner and include potatoes, carrots, salad and dessert. To go meals will be available for pick up at 5:00pm and all orders must be purchased in advance. "Pay It Forward" purchase an extra dinner and we will deliver it to someone in need in our local community. Please call the parish office at 508-234-2156 or email parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org to purchase tickets or if you have any questions.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

• From 11 a.m. -3 p.m. at the E.N. Jenckes Store Museum, 283 Main St. Douglas Irish Feast: Corned Beef Delight! The Douglas Historical Society is hosting a St. Patrick's Day celebration featuring a delectable Corned Beef Dinner. Attendees can choose to dine in and savor the festive atmosphere or opt for take-out to enjoy the Irish flavors at home. The dinner is priced at \$15 per person. Community Connection and Gift Shopping: This event is not just about the feast; it's an opportunity for the community to come together. Explore the historic E.N. Jenckes Store Museum and immerse yourself in the charm of 1833. The gift shop will be open to those interested in unique finds and treasures. Get Involved: The Douglas Historical Society

welcomes volunteers to contribute to the success of this event. Those interested in participating can contact Laurie Church at (508)259-7087 or email enjenckes1833@gmail.com for more details.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18

• At 7 pm at Vaillancourt Folk Art, 9 Main Street, Manchaug Village, Sutton. Christine Watkins, Sutton Historical Society, will tell the story of the devastating 1924 Manchaug Village fire on its 100th anniversary which burned over 10 acres, left 25 percent of the Village population homeless, destroyed the retail section of the village, and made national news. This presentation will include photos, newspaper summaries, and eyewitness accounts. Come hear how a small community, with the help of generous neighbors, persevered over a tragedy.

HIKES WITH BLACKSTONE VALLEY HERITAGE CORRIDOR HIKES

The following is a list of hikes in Massachusetts being led by volunteer Trail Ambassador Phil. Phil's hikes begin at 10 a.m.
Saturday, March 9: Cormier Woods Hike, Uxbridge
Saturday, March 23: Midstate Trail Hike – Part 1, Douglas
Saturday, April 6: Midstate Trail Hike – Part 2, Douglas
Saturday, April 20: Castle Hill Farm Hike, Whitinsville
Saturday, May 4: Mendon Town Forest Hike, Mendon
Saturday, May 18: Wallis Pond Loop Hike, Douglas
Saturday, June 15: Douglas State Forest Hike, Douglas

Women's Bible Study: The Fruit of the Spirit

Coffee Break, a community Bible study for women, will continue its winter season with a study of "The Fruit of the Spirit" on March 12. God loves us and has wonderful plans for our lives – no matter what the current events look like. Come join with others in a study of The Fruit of the Spirit as we look at who God is and the power and glory He is about to display in the earth. Our God is so trustworthy. All peace and joy are found in Him. You're only allowed to be a newcomer the first week. After that, we're all friends. We look forward to meeting you.

Refreshments and childcare are provided. There's loving care for your babies and toddlers through age five.

Coffee Break is held each Tuesday from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. and offers women in the Blackstone Valley an opportunity to read and discuss the Bible, share questions and concerns, and develop new friendships. There's no "homework" required, and no

previous Bible knowledge is necessary. Study guides and Bibles are provided free of charge.

Pleasant St. Church is located at 25 Cross Street in Whitinsville. For directions, questions, or to get more information, please call Anna 508-234-4902, email churchoffice@psrc.org or visit psrc.org/adults.

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