

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 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



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

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 weren't 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

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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



Ron, Elise and Liz Lefrancois at the rink

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.

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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 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 consideration is a metal sign announcing



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

"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 equipment 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

STATE POLICE

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Published on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month. Direct mailed to nearly 65,000 homes and businesses each month and available on news stands in the region.

2nd Friday: The YankeeXpress South: Charlton, Dudley, Webster
2nd Friday: Blackstone Valley South: Douglas, Northbridge & Uxbridge
4th Friday: The YankeeXpress North: Auburn, Oxford
4th Friday: Blackstone Valley North: Grafton, Millbury & Sutton

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The Yankee Xpress/©2024
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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 Po-

sion 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

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 Bucci 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 enthusiastic 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@mspmic.org



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

lice 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 responsible 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 televi-

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

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HOCKEY

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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.

"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



The Snow Squall team of special needs players

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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The Oxford Board of Selectmen announces the availability of Hannah Harwood Fund Scholarship applications. The Hannah Harwood Fund Scholarship provides aid to Oxford students pursuing degrees in medicine and allied health fields.

The Fund was established through the 1902 will of Charles Harwood in memory of his late mother, Hannah.

Applications are available at the Board of Selectmen office, 325 Main Street, Oxford. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.;

Wednesday, 9 a.m. – 7 p.m. and Friday, 9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Application materials will also be available on the Town's website at oxfordma.us/board-selectmen. Submissions are due in the Selectmen's Office this year on Monday, April 1 by 4 p.m.

The Board of Selectmen will select the recipient of the scholarship. To qualify for the scholarship, the student must be a resident of Oxford and entering their undergraduate freshman year, enrolled in the field of medicine or allied health. Economic need and grade

point average or class rank will be considered in the decision. For more information see the complete policy which is contained in the application.



Police K9 Biza and officers from the Auburn Police Department were thanked for their swift response in tracking and locating a missing child last month. On January 31, police were notified at approximately 10:30 p.m. that a 12-year-old child had left home roughly two hours earlier. The child was last seen in the Pakachoag Hill area of town.

"Due to the freezing temperatures and nature of the incident, numerous Auburn Police officers and troopers from the Massachusetts State Police converged on the area in an attempt to locate the child," read a statement released by the Auburn PD. "Detectives from the Auburn Police Department's Detective Bureau responded to assist as well."

APD Officer David Ljunggren and his K9 partner Biza were also deployed, and the dog was able to pick up a scent. After tracking for over two miles, Biza led officers to an area where evidence indicated the child's recent presence.

"Officers converged on this area and located the child a short time later. The child was reunited with their family and is safe," the police department's statement read. "We are proud of the hard work put in by K9 Biza and are happy to report a positive outcome."

Upcoming Elections


The polls are open in Oxford from 8 am to 8 pm for Town Elections and from 7 am to 8 pm for all State and Federal Elections.

The Annual Town Election will be held on May 21, 2024.

Polling locations are as follows: Precinct 1 and Precinct 4 are both located at the Chaffee School, 9 Clover Street, in the gym. Voters should park in the Locust Street parking area and must enter through the doors on Locust Street, not the front doors.

Precinct 2, Precinct 3 and Sub-Precinct 4A are located at the Middle School, 497 Main Street, in the gym. Voters should park on the northerly side of the building and enter through the doors near the gym, not the front doors.

Online voting registration: sec.state.ma.us/OVR/




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SPORTS

Running To Perfection

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Having a mix of talented veterans and a group of up-and-coming youth the Auburn winter track team is flirting with perfection. The Rockets currently find themselves sitting atop of the Southern Worcester County League (SWCL) sporting an unblemished overall record of 10-0.

“You never anticipate being undefeated. I am always nervous about schools like Uxbridge, Millbury, Grafton and Tantasqua,” Coach Steve Quitadamo said. “I’m a superstitious person and tell the kids to just worry about getting better as the year goes on and you’ll be happy by the end of the season.”

Having already secured 10 wins, Auburn has done so by taking out



Uxbridge and Tantasqua, both previously undefeated to leave their record perfect. One of the big reasons the Rockets are having success this winter is their depth, something that they haven’t had too much of in the past.

“The biggest reason this year compared to past seasons is our depth in every event,” the Coach said. “I really don’t have to worry about certain events as I know that we are going to score points.”

What’s behind the influx of athletes flocking to the winter track team this year is mind boggling to the Coach.

“I really don’t know why, but

they all decided to come out this year,” Quitadamo said. “We usually get kids from other sports, but this year we’ve got around 40 kids looking to participate.”

Despite having gratifying success, Quitadamo noted that the team does not have that one real superstar to lead the team.

“It’s a full team effort,” the coach said. “Recently, due to sickness we’ve found ourselves shorthanded, but each meet someone has stepped up for us to help secure the win.”

Junior twins Kyle (hurdles and 300) and Cam (2-mile and 1000) McLaughlin have been some of the athletes that have helped the Rockets to their undefeated season. Dominic Hammond has not lost a single match this season in the shot put, while another tandem of twins Alex (2 mile and 1000) and Evan (mile and 600) Mercadante have also provided wins. Senior Vinny Miles has performed well in the mile and 1000 to help the team as well.

During a recent meet, Auburn had the first five runners cross the finish line in the 600. A performance, that Quitadamo said was unusual, but showed the type of depth that Auburn has had this season.

“The kids have seemed to be really into it this season,” the Auburn

Coach said. “And the newer kids are realizing that track is actually fun.”

As the season continues along the Rocket athletes only need to worry about one person – themselves. The Auburn Coaching staff is there to help them reach their potential and as long as they improve they’ll be happy.

“It’s all about improving, don’t worry about anything else and everything will eventually fall into place,” Quitadamo said. “There is no such thing as a bad day, only good. Lessons are learned that will allow each athlete to find out what they need to work on throughout the year.”

Can they continue to participate at the top of their game and go undefeated, Quitadamo believes it is possible.

“If they continue to do what they have been they’ll be ok,” he said. “I continually tell them just to stay humble and don’t expect anything then things will fall into place. Stay humble and we, as coaches, will push you in the right direction to get to your potential.”

Staying humble and following the Coaches advice may eventually lead the Auburn winter track team to that elusive undefeated season in the long run and hopefully that extends into the post-season.

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Students from Bryn Mawr and Paka-chog Schools donned their Captains of Kindness to make a February visit to the Auburn Police Department extending kindness to the Police officers that help keep them safe. An ensemble of the young superheroes also visited the West Street Fire Station and Auburn Youth and Family Services where they donated toiletries they collected.



The Pike Hairfest Returns To Indian Ranch

The annual Pike Hairfest will return to Indian Ranch in Webster, MA on Saturday, July 20, 2024. The show will feature tributes to all of your favorite 80's bands. This year's lineup includes East Coast Alice (Alice Cooper tribute), Everybody Wants Some (Van Halen tribute), Raise Your Hands (Bon Jovi tribute), Back In Black (AC/DC tribute), Leppard (Def Leppard tribute). Tickets go on sale this Saturday, February 3rd at 10:00 AM at www.indianranch.com.

East Coast Alice, the Ultimate tribute to the Godfather of Shock Rock, Alice Cooper, rolls out all the theatrical suspense and generation spanning music you would expect from one of the Coopers live shows. Circus freaks and hula hoops, electric chairs, guillotines, The Evil Nurse, and Frankenstein's monster, only begin to tell the story that unfolds before your eyes, as East Coast Alice takes you on a musical journey that encompasses all the horror and vaudeville shtick you have come to expect from the Master of Madness.

Everybody Wants Some is a Van Halen tribute band that was formed back in 2016. They have quickly

established themselves as THE premiere classic Van Halen tribute band in Central Massachusetts. The band captures the power and energy that Van Halen brought to the world from 1978 to 1984 - that raw, hard-driving party rock music.

RAISE YOUR HANDS is the premier tribute to the music & spirit of BON JOVI. The band formed in 2018, the same year BON JOVI was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Covering both the hits and deep catalog tracks, this 5-piece professional band has quickly become one of the Northeast's top tribute acts. Entertaining crowds from Mohegan Sun & MGM Casino to theaters, venues and town greens, their live experience is polished and engaging. Consisting of seasoned musicians from the New England music scene, everything heard is performed live without any pre-recorded backing tracks. RAISE YOUR HANDS rocks all the BON JOVI songs you know and love.

BACK IN BLACK is the "True AC/DC Experience." There is no substitute. The band has been touring the United States since 1990, entertaining audiences with AC/DC'S music old and new. Armed

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Leppard - The Def Leppard Experience has stunned audiences all over the world with their amazing recreation of one of the most memorable rock bands and rock songs ever written. The music, the vocals, the harmonies and the screams. Don't worry, it's all there. The band has worked hard to make sure that nothing is left out; and once the show starts, Leppard never slows down. Being called "The Next Best Thing to Def Leppard" is an honor that Leppard, The Def Leppard Experience, doesn't take lightly. Ten years in the making, the band captures the music and the essence of a rock band that has sold over 100 million albums worldwide.

Tickets for The Pike Hairfest on Saturday, July 20, 2024 go on-sale Saturday, February 3, 2024 at 10:00 AM. Gates open at 11:00 AM and showtime is 12:00 PM. Tickets are available online at www.indianranch.com, by calling 1-800-514-ETIX (3849) or at the Indian Ranch

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WCAC's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program opened on January 30th and will run through the tax deadline of April 15th. Requests for free tax preparation by WCAC are accepted for individual taxpayers or households making \$64,000 or less within Worcester and 45 surrounding towns in Central Massachusetts. Through VITA, IRS-certified volunteers prepare taxes and specifically look for tax credits the household may be eligible for, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Circuit Breaker Tax Credit, and others. Utilizing the free tax preparation service allows families to retain

their full refund, avoiding typical preparation fees which can often cost hundreds of dollars.

Appointments for face-to-face tax preparation with IRS-certified volunteers are available to book by preferred time slot and are now open. Appointments will begin the last week of January and be held at WCAC's main office at 18 Chestnut Street, Worcester. New for 2024, additional in-person appointments will also be available in Southbridge, Webster and Leicester.

Visit <https://wcac.net/vita/> to book an appointment or access online tax preparation services.

WCAC's Resiliency Center Director Maydee Morales said, "We look forward to meeting people

where they are and expanding our appointment locations this year to include opportunities in Southbridge, Webster and Leicester. Additionally, we are really focusing on integrating services for VITA clients. We hope to have our Community Navigators on site to assist with other financial services, including accessing SNAP, RAFT and other community resources. VITA sites are a low-cost and high-return activity offering up to 60 to 1 return on investment, bringing \$60 million in tax credits back to taxpayers and their communities."

A fully online tax preparation process is also available again this season should you be unable to come in person or prefer not to.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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

LUKE
continued on page 9

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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



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

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.

LUKE

continued from page 8

spot?" We pondered a solution. Meanwhile, we noticed that each time we uttered the word SPOT, Luke would turn his head away 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 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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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING *dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com*

Avoid tapping into retirement savings early

If you want to make a big purchase, such as a new car or a piece of property, or you were faced with a large, unexpected expense, such as a major home or auto repair, would you have the funds readily available? If not, you might look at what may be your biggest pool of money — your 401(k) or IRA. But should you tap into these accounts well before you retire?



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

Maybe not — and here's why:

- **Less money in retirement** – The more money you invest in your retirement accounts, and the longer you keep it invested, the more you'll probably have when you need it most — when you're retired. Consequently, taking out sizable amounts from these accounts before you retire could be costly, as it would disrupt the benefits of compounding that can be achieved by holding investments for the long term.

- **Possible bump into higher tax bracket** – The money you take out from your traditional IRA and 401(k) is taxable in the year of withdrawal. So, if you withdraw a significant amount of money at once from your traditional IRA or 401(k), you could be pushed into a higher tax bracket, at least for one year.

- **Tax penalties** – If you take money out of a 401(k) or traditional IRA before you turn 59½, you could face a 10% tax penalty, although some exceptions exist. Penalty-free withdrawals can be made for several reasons, including for education and medical expenses, first-time purchase of a home (up to \$10,000), after the birth or adoption of a child (up to \$5,000) and more (see [irs.gov/taxtopics/tc557](https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc557)). With a Roth IRA, which is funded with after-tax dollars, you can withdraw contributions — but not earnings — at any time, for any purpose, without incurring penalties.

Given these issues, how can you avoid dipping into your retirement accounts when you're faced with a financial need?

One possibility is to take out a loan from your 401(k). Unlike a 401(k) withdrawal, a loan is neither taxable nor subject to tax penalties. Also, the interest you pay on a 401(k) loan goes

back into your account. Still, a 401(k) loan has its drawbacks. If you leave your job, you'll likely have to repay the loan in a short period of time and if you don't have all the money to repay it, the loan will be considered in default, so you'll owe taxes and the 10% penalty if you're younger than 59½. But even if you don't leave your job and you do repay the loan, you'll still have taken away money that could have potentially kept growing within your tax-deferred account. As mentioned above, as your money compounds, you'll want to minimize disruptions.

Building an emergency fund is another way to gain access to cash. Such a fund should contain at least six months' worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account. It can take time to build a fund of this size, so it's never too soon to start putting away money for it. To avoid the temptation of dipping into your emergency fund, you'd ideally keep this fund separate from your daily spending accounts.

Explore all your options before tapping into your IRA or 401(k) early. Keeping these accounts intact as long as possible is one of the best moves you can make to help build your future retirement income.

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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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 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.

BY JOHN PAUL

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 that 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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TALES FROM BEYOND

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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 Lon-

don 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



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

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 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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Maple Days at OSV

Old Sturbridge Village is open during the winter months with many seasonal programs and events each weekend with extended hours beginning right at the start of Maple Days!

Included with standard daytime admission on select dates in February and March guests can see the entire sugar-making process, from tapping the trees to "sugaring off," and learn why maple sugar was more commonly used than maple syrup in early New England. Costumed historians will also cook period foods made with maple products and the tinner and cooper will make maple-related items. Maple Days are Friday through Sunday, February 23rd through March 17th from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Guests are encouraged to reserve tickets online and in advance for their date of arrival. Tickets and more information can be found online:



osv.org/event/maple-days/.

On Saturdays and Sundays during Maple Days, Ox & Yoke Café is offering a special Waffle Bar, featuring made-to-order waffles and a variety of scrumptious toppings to

create your own delicious masterpiece! The Waffle Bar is open select days from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

New Theater Group in Town

Oxford Community Theater welcomes you to its first production,

"The Enchanted Bookshop" by Todd Wallinger. The play is produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., Denver, Colorado and made possible by the Janet

Janet Malser Humanities Trust, Taft Charitable Trust, and Oxford and Massachusetts Cultural



Council(s). Directed by Tamara Beland, the play will be performed on Friday, March 16 at the Oxford Middle School, 497 Main Street. There is no charge, but donations will be gratefully accepted.

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3 LBS. BONELESS CHICKEN BREAST
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1-1/2 LB. NY SIRLOIN STEAK
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Sheriff Evangelidis Celebrates Many Milestones at Webster Regional Resource Center

On January 25th, 2024, Sheriff Low Evangelidis and the Worcester County Sheriff's Office Webster Regional Resource Center celebrated the graduation of three students who passed the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET). The event also featured a keynote speech by Chief Probation Officer Nilza Sylvestre, who delivered an impactful message. Moreover, the event marked the retirement of the center's founding Director, Byron Titus, who served for nine years.

Clients become involved with the Regional Resource Center by voluntarily seeking services or through a court order. In addition to educational opportunities, Regional Resource Center Staff assist individuals who have been or are currently involved with the justice system. Various services include assistance with finding employment, housing, and health insurance. The center also offers programs, including addiction recovery and mental health assistance.

Byron Titus, Director of the Webster Regional Resource Center, opened the graduation ceremony by welcoming guests and congratulating the three graduates on completing years of hard work.

Titus reassured the graduates that, "The Regional Resource Center staff will always be here to support you. This center will be here until you are

settled and totally satisfied with whatever you choose to achieve."

Nilza Sylvestre, Chief Probation Officer at the Dudley District Court, was the ceremony's guest speaker. In her remarks, Sylvestre recalled the struggles of her own family growing up. Sylvestre explained to the crowd that she is a first-generation American, the daughter of two immigrants. Sylvestre became the first in her family to not only graduate high school but also to earn a bachelor's and master's degree. Sylvestre concluded her comments by reassuring the graduates that they can achieve their goals as they transition from the Webster Resource Center and on to their next endeavors.

"The staff at the Webster Regional Resource Center can only help those who want to help themselves," commented Sheriff Evangelidis. "You all have proven your dedication to furthering your education and elevating your life. Education is unassailable, and this achievement cannot be taken from you. Today is a milestone and should set the tone for the rest of your lives."

Thursday's graduation was a turning point for the Webster Regional Resource Center. Byron Titus, longtime Director of the center, retired from his role at the Sheriff's Office. After nine years, Titus bid farewell to the last round of clients

who completed the program under his guidance.

Evangelidis referenced Titus' departure during his remarks. The Sheriff recalled a conversation about building such a center in Webster over a decade ago.

"It was Byron who shared my dream of what this center could be," commented Evangelidis. "My goal was to make this center a community center, a true asset to southern Worcester County. We built this place from the ground up. Our team has and will continue to serve the residents of Worcester County."

Over the past decade, Titus has been responsible for the center's expansion. What started as only 12 client referrals from probation, has amounted to over 170 referrals and services provided to hundreds of walk-in clients. Titus has continually advocated for the addition of programs and services. Under his leadership, the Webster Resource Center staff have positively impacted the lives of countless community members.

Titus has handed over the reins of the center to Erica Jajliardo, who previously served as the center's Assistant Director.

To learn more about how the Worcester County Sheriff's Office Webster Center may be able to assist you, please call 508-640-5044.

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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. \$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

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