

Oxford's Geoffrey Esper A-OK in dog-eat-dog world

BY ROD LEE

An electronics teacher may be Geoffrey Esper's principal occupation, but increasingly the 47-year-old, 195-pound resident of Oxford is better known as a Major League Eating dynamo.

Mr. Esper's most recent accomplishment was finishing second to the world-famous Joey "Jaws" Chestnut in the Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest at Coney Island over the Fourth of July weekend. He downed forty-three hot dogs and buns to Mr. Chestnut's sixty-three.

Reflecting on what has become a second career for him over the past half dozen or so years, Mr. Esper told The Yankee Xpress on July 7th, as he did CBS News shortly after the competition ("I'm a little bit puffy") that he was still recovering from the exertion involved.

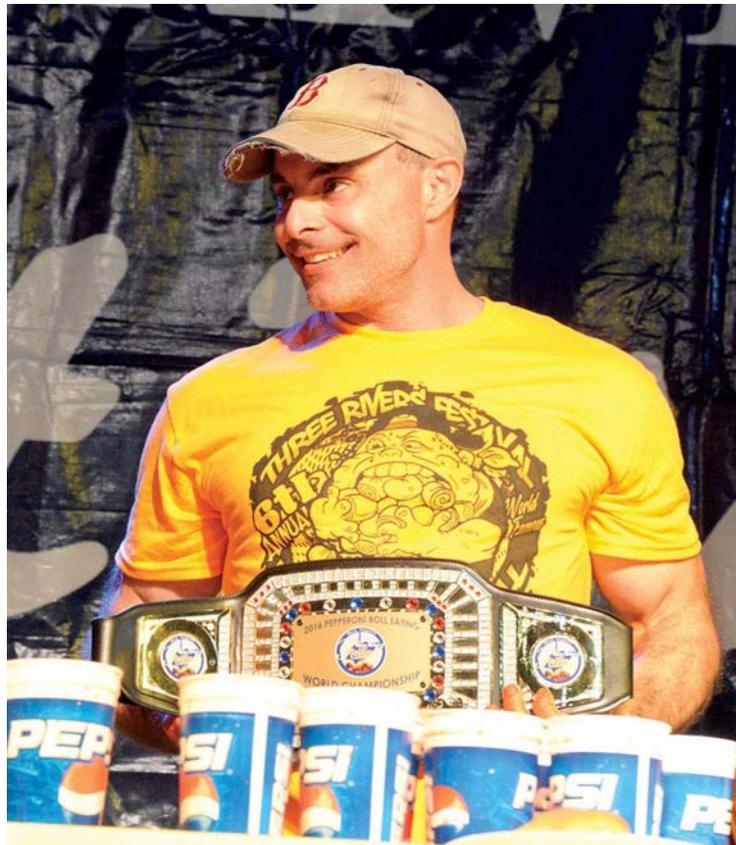
To the irresistible ask "are you familiar with Carl's?" a diner on Main Street in Oxford that is justly celebrated for the enormous portions of food it doles out to patrons for breakfast and lunch, Mr. Esper said "sure. One time I went in there and put in seven orders for pancakes, thirty-some pancakes."

Now a star on the Major League Eating circuit, he says "I always liked watching it on TV, and I could always eat a lot."

Hot dogs are not part of his regular diet, however.

"What I eat is not very glamorous," he said. "Tuna fish, chicken breast and vegetables."

A humble and modest man ("I don't get too busy" with calls of congratulations), he is nevertheless an individual Major League Eating likes to tout. Most of the "positive feedback" he receives



Oxford's Geoffrey Esper, a schoolteacher, is also ranked No. 2 in the world by Major League Eating.

comes from kids who are impressed, and on TikTok.

"He is a true multi-disciplinary eater—as comfortable eating 83 slices of John's Incredible Pizza in 10 minutes as he is eating 281 Hooters wings in the same amount of time," Major League Eating brags of him on its website. "He is the 2017 and 2019 Hooters wing-eating champion and winner of the Fortune Bay Taco and Jack's Donuts Donut Holes contests. As of July 2022, he holds 14 world records."

His forays with Major League Eating take Geoffrey Esper far and wide. Earlier this year, he downed

32 ¼ egg rolls in eight minutes in the inaugural Outlaws Egg Rolls World Egg Roll Eating Championship in Lubbock, Texas. Chomping that many four-ounce fried tubes filled with ground beef and macaroni and cheese was made even harder in 100-degree heat as "the first crunches rang out," the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal reported.

"I've already had eight contests this year, and eight more are coming up," Mr. Esper said, of a season

ESPER

continued on page 2

Webster voters OK Bartlett High renovation funds, 1095 yes to 611 no

BY JANET STOICA

It's official, at the June town meeting and ballot voting thereafter, 1,706 Webster voters came out in full force to vote pro-renovations for Bartlett High School.

At the original May town meeting, the renovation question required a 2/3 majority to pass. When it did not pass, the opportunity to have the Mass. School Building Association ("MSBA") pay 55% of the renovation costs would have folded up completely without another chance to request funds for at least five more years and without any guarantee that any further grant money consideration would even be made.

Bartlett High School had been asking the MSBA for funding for at least five years without success as it must compete with all other schools in the state for the monies available likened to a lottery as each school awaits a decision by the MSBA based on need and funds available. Large repairs like the heating system and roofing had reached the end of their life expectancy and were in need of complete replacement as ongoing upkeep and repairs could no longer sustain their viability.

The MSBA grant along with taxpayer funding will now allow the high school to be brought up to state educational/learning environment standards and fire and safety codes for the benefit of the high school students, faculty, and additional personnel.

Webster's School Superinten-

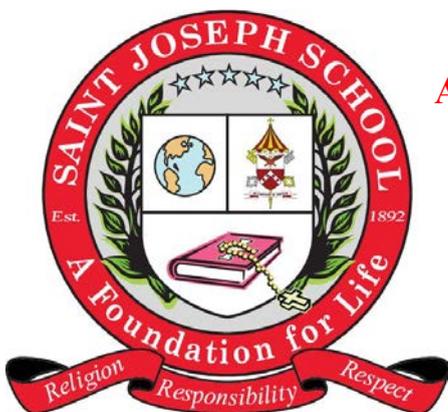


Webster Superintendent of Schools Ruthann Goguen

dent, Ruthann Goguen, stated "I would like to thank the community for sharing their opinions through their votes. I am pleased the Webster community did not lose the \$51 million grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority. This grant took many years to get and it will assist the community with the costs of this renovation project. Through this renovation project we are now able to further advance the educational programming we offer our students. With this redesign of the existing building, students will have access to classrooms and science labs that meet state standards. In addition students will have learning environments where they can become more involved

BARTLETT

continued on page 2



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ESPER

continued from page 1

that runs from April to November. Many of these are conducted out of doors. In the days and weeks ahead he will be taking on banana pudding and ribs.



Mr. Esper and Joey Chestnut are not exactly bosom buddies, but they are respectful of one another's talent.

"I talk to him, I see him at contests," Mr. Esper says. He was standing alongside



Geoffrey Esper of Oxford is a regular contestant at Major League Eating events; here is shown chowing wings, and taking part in a qualifying round for an event.

Mr. Chestnut at Coney Island and got bumped when his archrival put a protester who came on stage into a headlock, while hardly missing a beat chowing down hot dogs. As someone who usually keeps his eyes closed while eating, Mr. Esper opened them only when his concentration was broken by the commotion.

Major League Eating (MLE) stages approximately seventy events a year. MLE developed competitive eating as a sport and includes the sport's governing body, The International Federation of Competitive Eating. Original content from MLE contests has aired on ESPN, MTV, The Travel Channel, Spike TV, Discovery and The Bio Channel.

Geoffrey Esper is considered one of MLE's top stars along with Joey Chestnut, Matt Stonie, Miki Sudo, and Eric "Badlands" Booker.

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BARTLETT

continued from page 1

in hands-on learning. The renovation plans include an Advanced Manufacturing Lab, a Health and Human Service Lab, a Maker Space, and a Media Center. I would like to thank the community for supporting the further advancements of the educational programming and improving the learning spaces for our students!"

Contact Janet: jstoica@theyankeeexpress.com



John DiFusco is joined by Sue DiFusco Dray at a family reunion in Webster hosted by Sister Aileen Lovejoy. They are pictured behind Bartlett High School.

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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

Mark Scamman takes on those supermarket thieves...



BY ROD LEE

Hello, friends, a word about Mark Scamman, who some of you might remember as store manager of the Market Basket in the town of Oxford, until his recent retirement to Cape Cod, where he and his wife Amy are running a B&B.

As he was preparing to bring to a close his forty five-year career in the supermarket business, Mr. Scamman mentioned to me that he was planning to publish a book. I had no idea at the time what the subject matter would be; the assumption being that he would merely be reflecting on the vocation that helped him pay his way through college (the University of Lowell, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Management) and that he then embraced as his chosen method of employment.

Turns out he wanted to write about shoplifting, a crime he was thoroughly familiar with.

With the release of Larceny in the Aisles/Stories from a Supermarket Manager, Mr. Scamman has not only shed new light on an age-old scourge of retailers everywhere, he has done so with the touch of someone who sees the humor in many of the incidents he encountered along the way.

Maybe this was not so true when they occurred; but, as is the case with police departments across the Commonwealth, they can be now, in looking at them in the rear-view mirror.

His book does in fact pay homage to members of the law enforcement community who are dealing with the same kind of misbehavior he saw from customers, day after day, month after month.

The cover of Larceny, designed by Destinee Almeida, and her illustrations inside, capture the hilarity

that so often accompanies attempts to pilfer product. Ms. Almeida's cover artwork depicts a man preparing to stuff a Jack Daniels whiskey bottle into his coat.

I have to admit, I am a sucker for the kind of stories Mr. Scamman shares in Larceny. A typical example comes not from him, but one of his store-manager colleagues.

Entitled "Bloody mess," it reads as follows:

In the late 1970s, this future manager was bagging groceries while his store manager chatted with some regular customers seated on benches in front of the store.

While talking to one, the manager noticed blood was trickling down the side of the man's face. The customer was wearing a fedora hat, and the blood was slowly trickling down.

hundred eighty pages. In Chapter 25, entitled "Pecans for Pie," he describes an encounter with an elderly woman during the holidays—"a tough time of year for many families." A manager, he relates, noticed the woman put a bag of pecans in her purse in the baking aisle. "I was absolutely not going to have her arrested, but I also wanted to speak to her about stealing, even though she was older than me," Mr. Scamman writes. "We did not go to the office, but I pulled her aside to talk. I quietly asked if she forgot to pay for the pecans she had in her purse. [She] started to cry, and said she needed them for her pecan pie she was making for Thanksgiving. She couldn't afford to pay for them. The front-end manager and I were moved nearly to tears.



Mark Scamman, retired from the Market Basket store in Oxford, and now an author.

"Are you okay?"

The customer said yes and wiped the blood from his face. But it continued to trickle.

Concerned for the customer's health, the manager took the hat off the man's head to see where the blood was coming from. A package of steak was concealed under there. Its seal had broken, and the liquid inside (called purge) was the extent of his injury.

Mark Scamman presents fifty largely comedic moments like the aforementioned over the course of approximately one

He was the fastest in offering to pay for the pecans. He opened a register, deposited his money, and handed the pecans to the woman. "God bless you!" was her response. "Happy Thanksgiving," we told her. Her story is one of too many to count.

From "A Carriage Full of Tide Detergent" to "Bubble Gum Theft in a Duffel Bag" to "The Jumper," Mr. Scamman relies on notes he took over the years to address shoplifting in a light-hearted but at the same time serious manner.

His objective, he ex-

plains in the epilogue, "Thou Shalt Not Steal," is to point out that shoplifters should not get off unpunished—as, unfortunately, they so frequently do. "Community restitution" or "community service" should be mandatory penalties, in his opinion.

In the Introduction to Larceny, he says "during my career, I caught nearly one thousand shoplifters."

He knows, however, that there are more where they came from.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

Charlton's Hunter Lavigne saluted as new member of U.S. Space Force

BY ROD LEE

You might say that Hunter Lavigne is literally rocketing toward a meteoric career in the newly formed U.S. Space Force, on the wings of a celebratory sendoff event held for him at the Grange Hall in Charlton on June 25th.

A graduate of Shepherd Hill and more recently Norwich University, where he was commissioned as an officer, Hunter, who is twenty-two years old, received well wishes from family, friends, veterans and USAF Brig. Gen. Sean Collins in a brief, upbeat ceremony on a warm Saturday morning in Charlton Center.

Looking on, and standing to shout "attention!" and offer a salute at one point, was Hunter's great grandfather Howard Seifert Sr., an Army veteran of World War II who, at 104, is still spry and, as Hunter put it, "full of lots of cool stories."

Hunter and his great grandfather enjoy a strong bond. "Making him proud gives me a feeling I can't even describe," Hunter, ramrod straight as he watched people come into the Grange Hall, said.

Like Hunter, Mr. Seifert's loved ones hold him close to their hearts, "first granddaughter" Ginger said, while waiting for the recognition of Hunter to start.

"We drove in from the Vineyard," she said. "Today is going to be a pretty historic day. Grampa is always our first stop, once a month. Hunter's sister Jaqualyn and her husband Rob Flynn are in the Air Force too. They are stationed in Montana.

"Grampa," she said, referring to Mr. Seifert, "was presented with a golden cane" recently. "We have done Sunday dinners at his house here in Charlton forever. Grandma (Dorothy Seifert) died at age eighty-seven, sixteen years ago. They had three children

together, Judy, Stanley and Howard Jr."

Arriving to offer congratulations to Hunter, Brig. Gen. Collins, in meeting him for the first time and shaking his hand, said "you are a tall glass of water I see."

In bestowing praise on Hunter for his choice of the U.S. Air Force and a military career, Brig. Gen. Collins said "I am so pleased to be in the company of greatness. It is privilege to stand on the shoulders of those who went before us. Our veterans are precious. It is an honor and a privilege to be here."

He then gave the freshly minted lieutenant a piece of the "coaching advice" that he in turn received as a young airman; which is, "I found out who gets the work done is the enlisted corps. As a lieutenant," he told his audience, "Hunter already has an awesome responsibility as an officer in the U.S. Space Force, which is only two years



Brig. Gen. Sean Collins, World War II Army veteran Howard Seifert Sr. and Mr. Seifert's great grandson Hunter Lavigne enjoy a moment together in celebration of Hunter's recent graduation from Norwich University.

old. And he has grown up in the shadow of his great grandfather's story."

When it was time to exchange salutes, Hunter

returned the brigadier general's and then said "I messed that up big-time!"

Brig. Gen. Collins laughed the remark off.

"We are all family," he said.

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A memorable 100th birthday for the 'Queen of Our Hearts'

BY ROD LEE

Not everyone who lives to be one hundred years old is treated to the kind of birthday celebration Anne Vajcovec experienced at the Killdeer Island Club in Webster on June 25th.

Then again, in the opinion of Ms. Vajcovec's daughter Susan Hofeller and the rest of the family including Ms. Hofeller's siblings and Anne's grandchildren and great grandchildren, the "Queen of Our Hearts" was worth the weeks of preparation that went into organizing the event. More than one hundred people showed up to offer well wishes to Ms. Vajcovec—an extremely likeable and active centenarian who still cooks for herself (real mashed potatoes and steak with onions are two of her favorites), who also still belongs to the Tuesday Club, and who still attends meetings of the Killdeer Island Club, and listens to audiobooks).

"It was amazing," Ms. Hofeller said. "Everyone hung around. I thought it was going to be come and go, relatives we don't see that often. But people stayed. We talked mom into singing 'I'm tired, and I want to go home.' We went through seventy-two bottles of wine. Before we sang each of mom's four children had something to say about her. There was a special cake, mom looking at the sunset. She rose to the occasion, she was sitting there from one o'clock to four, she talked to every single person."

Much of Anne Louise (Kleya) Vajcovec's story is recounted in the book "Only the Lucky Grow Old: Reflections on Life from Those Over Ninety," written by Kristine Fontaine, who calls Ms. Vajcovec "Auntie Anne."

Ms. Vajcovec was born to immigrant parents in East Douglas.

As Ms. Fontaine writes,



Anne Vajcovec, 100, relaxes in one of her favorite spots, at home, on Webster Lake. Right, Anne on her throne at her birthday party, joined by her children Tom, Susan, John and Mark.



"both of her parents came over from Czechoslovakia and married in the U.S. At present, she is the only surviving sibling. Her brother passed away at age sixty-eight of cancer, but her sister, who was hoping to live a long life, was granted her request. She lived to be one hundred years old."

"When Anne was a child, she remembers having to use an outhouse until the hurricane of 1938 came and blew it down. After that happened, her parents decided to make a bathroom inside the house, which required much renovation. Before having the bathroom, they did not shower, but more or less took sponge baths."

Ms. Vajcovec also told Ms. Fontaine of the time a storm struck. Anne's mother was pumping water when lightning hit the transformer in the yard. She was electrocuted "and fell to the ground." Anne and her sister were in the kitchen with forks in their hands and because of the electricity in the air could not let go of them until they ran to a neighbor's house to call the doctor.

At the time, Ms. Vajcovec told Ms. Fontaine, there

was no paper money, only gold, which Anne's mother kept in her bra. When the bolt hit, the gold in her bra caused burns on her chest and she was hospitalized. Fortunately, she survived.

Still in reasonably good health, Ms. Vajcovec told her niece she is not afraid of dying. "You don't know when it's going to happen, but I am ready whenever my time comes," she said. "I can't wait to go to heaven where I will have nothing to worry about!"

Interviewed for this article on June 8th, Anne expressed gratitude for her daughter Sue, who has provided her with a spacious basement apartment in Sue and Chuck Hofeller's home overlooking North

Pond on Webster Lake. "She has the full downstairs," Ms. Hofeller said.

Everyone who knows Anne Vajcovec is aware too that she had "a wonderful career as a surgical nurse," as Ms. Hofeller puts it. "She was requested by many doctors. They nixed her orders to go overseas during World War II because they wanted her here."

Anne met and married Marty Vajcovec, who saved her from a stormy relationship in California with her former fiancé.

"One day we were out at Watch Hill in Rhode Island sunbathing. That's when Marty asked me to marry him," Anne told Ms. Fontaine. "I thought to myself he will make a good hus-

band, and a good father. So I said okay, and that's how it happened." They were married for fifty-three years before Marty passed away. "It wasn't long enough," she said. "It should have been more."

Sue Hofeller delights in her mom's longevity, and the affection in which she is

held by loved ones.

"Every day at 4:30 the cocktail bell on the porch rings," Ms. Hofeller said. "When the grandchildren are here they say 'grandma, is it time to ring the cocktail bell?'"

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North All-Stars prevail in game at Doyle Field

The Central Mass. North/South All-Star football game was held on Friday, June 17, at Doyle Field in Leominster. The All-Star team included players from South County and the Blackstone Valley.

South players included Tim Visbeek, Briant Johnson, Jon Carlos, John Mimawi, Ryan Boyce, Michael Nadeau, Colin Falconer, Trey Howe, Cam Ayotte, Brian Dillon, Kai Belanger, Matt Wildman, Alexander Siwik, Adam Hillerstrom, Bryce Patterson, Jordan Rivera, Noan

Ostrowski, John Furno, Trout Marnell, Charlie McMahon, Antoine Lacourt, Owen Fitzgerald, Andrew Lavoie, Joe Hennessey, Ricky Leach III, Nolan Legere, Kevin Cunningham, Kevin Paulino and Joe Maxim.

South All-Star coaches included coaches from Oxford: Head Coach Jeff Clarkson,

Assistants James Royster, Jimmy Nolan, James Small and Pete Lewis.

The final score was North 14, South 3. Congratulations to all.

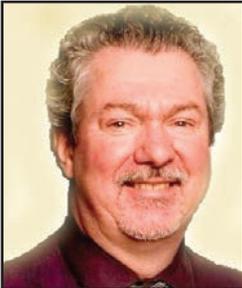
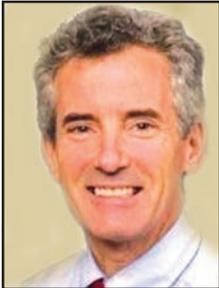
Photos by Sally Patterson. See more photos on our Facebook page.



Clockwise from far left: QB Cam Ayotte of Millbury; Bryce Patterson of Bartlett; Antoine Lacourt of Oxford; the captains at mid-field for the coin toss.

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Clockwise from above: Adam Hillerstrom of Grafton; Jim Himawi of Grafton; Bryce Patterson (#35) of Bartlett; Tim Visbeek of Northbridge; Colin Falconer (#15) of Northbridge; Ryan Boyce (#12) of Northbridge; the coaches.



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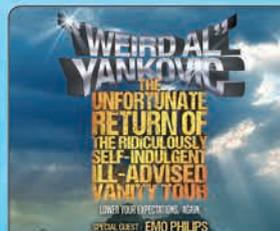
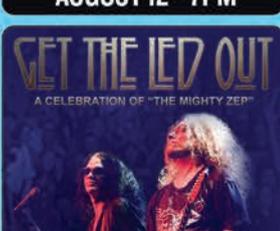


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MARGARITAVILLE CRUISE	AUGUST 4	6:30PM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 6	10AM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 7	10AM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 12	4PM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 13	10AM
THE PIKE "BOOT SCOOTIN BOOGIE CRUISE"	AUGUST 13	6:30PM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 20	10AM
LAKE TOUR	AUGUST 26	4PM
MARGARITAVILLE CRUISE	SEPTEMBER 1	6:30PM
LAKE TOUR	SEPTEMBER 2	4PM
LAKE TOUR	SEPTEMBER 3	10AM
THE PIKE "CHILLIN' IN THE 90'S"	SEPTEMBER 10	6:30PM

FOR FULL CRUISE SCHEDULE AND TICKETS VISIT
WWW.INDIANRANCH.COM/CRUISES

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The Indian Ranch Box Office is open Thursday through Monday, 10AM - 4PM. Tickets are also available by phone: 1-800-514-ETIX (3849). All events are rain or shine. No refunds. For ticketing and group sales, contact tickets@indianranch.com or call 508.943.3871. For event booking, contact banquets@samuelslaters.com. Indian Ranch is less than an hour's drive from Boston, Providence, Hartford and Springfield. Indian Ranch is located at 200 Gore Road in Webster, MA.

Booklovers' Gourmet touts summer reading, events

In wishing one and all a "Happy July," Deb Horan of Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster, recommends as seasonal reading "The Summer Place," by Jennifer Weiner, set on the Outer Cape.

Also new on the Indie charts is "Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow," by Gabrielle Zevin, a gripping novel about friendship.

Booklovers' Gourmet

is calling all Scrabble lovers for two-player teams to compete for prizes on Saturday, July 30 from 10:30 to 12:30 p.m. This is a fun event involving words, hosted by Merriam-Webster. The \$5 entry fee includes a complimentary beverage.

Email deb@booklovers-gourmet.com or call 508-949-6232.

Booklovers' Gourmet's

Evening Book Group meets on Wednesday, July 27th from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. to discuss "The Gown: A Novel of the Royal Wedding," by Jennifer Robson.

The store is currently running a 50% off sale on all comic books starting with the letters "M" or "N," through July 30th.

NOTE: Face masks are required for all in-store events.

Beaches; and how I added to the ocean's sea glass

BY JANET STOICA

When did all the beaches become so crowded? My initial memories of visiting Misquamicut State Beach, Rhode Island with my family was when I was about eight years old and it really didn't seem that the beach was all that crowded then. We'd be packed into the car by 7:00 a.m. with our bathing suits on under our tee shirts and shorts. My dad drove Route 12 south most of the way through CT and then south on Route 49 (now officially designated by the State of CT as a "scenic route" due to its dramatic views of handsome farms, beautiful tree-lined roads bordered by century-old stonewalls and cornfields that go on forever). To my brother and me, it was a very long and meandering way just to get to the ocean. Are we there yet, are we there yet?

Of course, we never knew how mom and dad managed to always pick the sunniest and clearest blue sky day our little eyes could ever imagine. We just thought they must know these things because that's what parents do. (I think, at this time, the TV weather-people used blackboards to draw their clouds and smiley suns along with an isobar or two...you just knew that Don Kent on WBZ-TV wouldn't steer you wrong).

Soon, we could smell the salt air and yes! We could see the ocean...couldn't wait to splash around in that salt water. After parking the car and unloading our beach gear, it was usually the same, no more than five or six families had staked their blanket's boundaries before our own claim to the most heavenly spot on the sandy

shore. Everything had to be laid out just so with mom. Blanket here, beach chairs on the right and left, round metal food cooler with its red plaid décor placed near the top middle of the blanket covered with extra beach towels to keep it cooler. An insulated Coleman gallon jug filled with ice and water mixed with ZaRex grape or orange flavors.

The remainder of our supplies included flip-flops, pails & shovels, individual towels of which my brother and I had our own personalized themes, sunglasses, goofy sun hats, and lots of Coppertone suntan lotion. Come to think of it, those lotions never mentioned anything about sun-blocking qualities, they just touted themselves as helping you get a deep, dark tan. My dad and I were the definite "tanners" in the family and used to compare tans as I became older to determine who had "won the tanning contest" that summer. These days, having a dark tan is considered an extreme health hazard as well as contributing to the worst wrinkles as we age. But I digress....

Another thing I still don't understand after all these years is why does a homemade sandwich taste so awesomely delicious while at the beach? Something about that fresh salt air I guess. My mom was the official sandwich-maker for us and a bologna, tomato, and lettuce sandwich on white bread never tasted so good as when you just returned to your blanket after sandcastle-making and body-surfing for an hour or two! We were exhausted from those waves you know ... I think we could've eaten two of those wonderful sammies. We were also

allowed to have a sandwich bag portion of potato chips, fresh fruit, and, of course, ZaRex. (Hey! Quit hogging all the ZaRex and leave some for me!)

On this one particular Sunday beach trip, I was wearing my first pair of new eyeglasses---oh mgosh, I could see stuff I never knew was there before. It was early morning and not too many other families were on the beach yet, as usual. My brother and I searched for shells, starfish, hermit crabs, unusual stones, and even sea glass. As we both bent down to study some new sea life and after a wave had just retreated back to the ocean, my brother turned around quickly and his elbow hit my specs and out popped one of my eyeglass lenses. Realizing immediately that I could not see clearly, I began to shout that my eyeglasses were broken. (Actually more like screeching bloody murder...). Hearing/seeing that I was in distress, my dad came running over. He began a quick sweep of the immediate area only to come up with nothing. The sea had claimed a new piece of glass. Waves began to reach our feet and soon my tears became mixed with the ocean. Dad consoled my little girl self and carried me back to the blanket where mom became my newest grief counselor. My brother apologized for his behavior and soon the sun shone brightly again if only to be seen clearly enough by my one "good" eye. Off in the not-so-distant future, someone was bound to pick up a nice sea glass souvenir ... I wondered if they'd make good use of it like I had ...

If you enjoyed this story, please let me know if you'd like to see more: jstoica@theyankeeexpress.com



Food Truck Festival in Millbury back with a bang

BY ROD LEE

To say that the Millbury Redevelopment Authority's Food Truck Festival & Craft Fair came back with a bang after a brief hiatus because of Covid-19 would be an understatement.

"Absolutely fantastic, the best festival we've had,"

Leonard Mort of the MRA said. "The weather was incredible, it was almost like being set up on a frying pan! We had the most trucks ever, twenty, and thirty-two craft vendors. Our volunteers were twelve hours in the hot sun."

The event, the fifth annual, was held in the rear parking area of Millbury

High School on Martin St. on May 22nd and it had something for everyone including a variety of American and ethnic fare, entertainment and raffles.

Proceeds from the festival benefit projects the Millbury Redevelopment Authority takes on, like the handsome clock it recently placed in the center of town.

"We have several projects that have been suggested, four or so," Mr. Mort said. These will be discussed at the MRA's next meeting, in August.

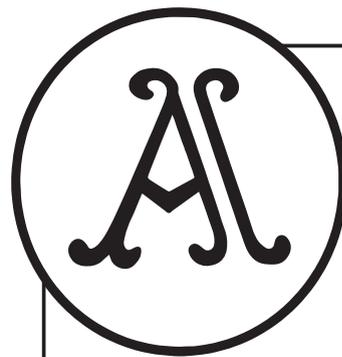
Mr. Mort was especially pleased that "a relative newcomer," Say Cheese, a Shrewsbury-based food truck, emerged as the People's Choice Best Food Truck for 2022.

Consisting of unpaid municipal employees, five members in all, the Millbury Redevelopment Authority was established in 1963 and raises money through donations from businesses and residents for community-betterment initiatives it tackles.

Submit your restaurant news for *The Feisty Fork* column to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.



Len Mort of the Millbury Redevelopment Authority congratulates operators of the Say Cheese food truck, winner of the People's Choice award at the MRA's fifth annual Food Truck Festival & Craft Fair.



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In honor of Slater's contribution to the creation and growth of Webster, the Samuel Slater Experience, 31 Ray St., invites residents by street address to experience the birth of Webster with free admission on scheduled Sundays from noon to 4 p.m.*

Sunday, July 24 - Free admission for residents of:

Aldrich St	Main St	Plasse Ct	Tracy Ct
Church Ct	Market St	Railroad Ave	Upland Ave
Davis St	Mill St	Slater St	Village Way
Day St	North Main St	South Main St	Wakefield St
Frederick St	Pearl Ave	Starzec Dr	Wall St
Hall St	Pearl St	Stoughton Ave	

Sunday, July 31 - Free admission for residents of:

Barnes St	Elm St	Hill St	Park St
Boyden St	Foster St	Joyce St	River Ct
Boyden St Ext	George St	Linwood St	School St
Brook St	George St Ext	Maple St	Snow St
Chase Ave	High St	Mt Pleasant St	Summer St
			Valley St

MORE STREETS/DATES TO BE ANNOUNCED

*Two free admissions per household. Cannot be combined with any other coupon or offer. Address ID required. Samuel Slater Experience closes at 4 p.m. Therefore latest admission time is 3 p.m.

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Happenings!

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 rodlee.1963@gmail.com.

THROUGHOUT JULY

• “Beyond Blooms, Textures in Our Garden,” photography by Don McCallister, will be on display and available for sale all month at Booklovers’ Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster. A meet-the-artist reception will be held on Saturday, July 23, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Viewing hours for the public are Tuesday-Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Call 508-949-6232 or email deb@booklovers-gourmet.com for further info. A statement from the artist: “Look

beyond the blooms and you’ll discover a never-ending variety of shoots and textures. And having a talented gardener, such as my wife, to design the garden helps. I hope this collection will inspire its viewers to look for unexpected scenery in our yards and in the natural world.”

• Classic Cars & Ice Cream. This event occurs every Wednesday from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Nor’easter Blizzard’s Ice Cream, 278 North Main St., Uxbridge, hosted by Top Dog Entertainment.

Upcoming at Indian Ranch in Webster:

July 24, Three Dog Night; July 27, Phoenix Rising, Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddons, 6:00 p.m. July 30, The Pike Hairfest, 12:00 noon; July 31, Let’s Get Real! TES-LA, 1:00 p.m.; August 5, “Weird”

Al Yankovic, 7:30 p.m.; August 6, Collective Soul and Switchfoot, 1:00 p.m.; August 12, ABBA The Concert, 7:00 p.m.; August 13, Badfish Summer Tour, 1:00 p.m.; August 20, Acapella Country Sensations Home Free, 1:00 p.m.; August 26, Get The Led Out, 7:00 p.m. September 2, Extreme, 7:00 p.m. September 3, Aaron Lewis and The Starliners, 1:00 p.m. September 10, The Pike Rok Fest 2023, 12:00 noon. September 11, Local Country Fest, 12:00 noon. October 8, Jamey Johnson Live in Concert, 1:00 p.m.

Tickets are available at www.indianranch.com, by calling 1-800-514-3849 or at the Indian Ranch Box Office.

SATURDAY, JULY 23

• Primitive Goods, 146 Mendon St., Uxbridge, is hosting a Customer Appreciation Day from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Featuring new items arriving weekly: Home & Garden, Antiques to Farmhouse, Village Paint, Primitives & Country, Candles, Handmade Pieces, Patriotic Décor and More.

• Exit 17th Band, a Rock & Roll Band, will perform at part of Douglas Orchard and Farm’s Summer Concert Series, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 per person 16-and-older. Kids get in free, no rain date.

SUNDAY, JULY 24

• The New England Country Music Club will host a dance featuring

The Farm Hands at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:30 p.m., live music 1:00-5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

TUESDAY, JULY 26

• The Auburn Historical Society and Museum is offering free lawn games for kids to play from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Historical Museum, 41 South St. Along with

Highland St., Whitinsville, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. This event is back by popular demand. Light refreshments will be served. Sign up with Amy, 508-234-2002.

• ValleyCast presents Michelle Canning as part of its summer concert series, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

• The Simon Fairfield Public Library in Douglas will host Pumpnickel Puppets’ presentation of Sir George and the Dragons at 10:30 a.m.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4

• The Hip Swayers will perform a summer concert at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm St., Millbury, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Free admission.

• ValleyCast presents Ash & Eric (formerly The Promise is Hope),



“Texture,” by Don McCallister, whose photographic artwork is being exhibited throughout the month of July at Booklovers’ Gourmet in Webster.

playing the games, participants will learn the history of games like croquet, bocci ball, cornhole, graces and more. Tours of the vintage toys and games exhibit inside the museum will be available and are also free to the public. (This event continues on Saturday, July 30).

• The Mendon Lions Club is sponsoring two shows under the Big Top, presented by The Zerbini Family Circus, at 5:00 and 7:30 p.m. in the Fino lot at the intersection of North Ave. and Rt. 16. The shows are a one-ring production featuring performing camels, a liberty horse act and amazing trained dogs and rounded out with clowns, acrobats, aerialists and jugglers. Advance discount tickets are available at Charles River Bank (Mendon branch) and Willow Brook Restaurant.

THURSDAY, JULY 28

• A Summer Sun Hat Concert featuring Diane Pollard singing songs of the 70s will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20

FRIDAY, JULY 29

• The Rockwell Valentine Jazz Trio performs at Andy’s Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, JULY 30

• The Auburn Historical Society and Museum is offering free lawn games for kids to play from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Historical Museum, 41 South St. Along with playing the games, participants will learn the history of games like croquet, bocci ball, cornhole, graces and more. Tours of the vintage toys and games exhibit inside the museum will be available and are also free to the public.

• Douglas Orchard and Farm’s Summer Concert Series continues with a performance by Petty Larceny, a Tom Petty Tribute Band, 5:30-8:00 p.m., 36 Locust St., Douglas. \$10 cash per person, kids are admitted free, no rain date. Visit douglassorchardandfarm.com for more details.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3

6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5

• “New Leaves Duo,” an outdoor concert featuring Cameron and Mary in a first-time appearance, is being presented from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. The duo will entertain with acoustic, classic country and folk cover songs from Bob Dylan, John Denver, Johnny Cash, The Everly Brothers and others. Light breakfast refreshments will be served. Sign up at the front desk to attend.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6

• 4 Ever Fab, a Beatles Tribute Band, will perform as part of Douglas Orchard and Farm’s Summer Concert series, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 per person for those 16-and-older. Kids get in free, no rain date. Go to



The First Congregational Church of Millbury, 148 W. Main St., is hosting a donations drive on Saturday, August 20, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

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The Hip Swayers will deliver a dose of Americana at the Asa Waters Mansion in downtown Millbury on Saturday, July 30.

douglasorchardandfarm.com for more info.

• "Donny and the Coyotes, a seven-piece Rock & Roll band, will perform on the lawn at the Dudley Grange, 139 Center Road, Dudley, at 7:00 p.m. Rain date is August 13th. This event is part of

the Grange's Summer Music Series and is free to the public. Bring a lawn chair. Water and soda will be available along with homemade goodies from the Grange's bake table. This concert is sponsored by the Dudley Cultural Council and the Massachusetts Cultural

Council.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 8

• The New England Country Music Club will host a dance featuring the Rustic Country Band at the

HAPPENINGS!

continued on page 12

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HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 11

Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:30 p.m., live music 1:00-5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountry-MusicClub.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9

• Judy Saves the Day, a puppet

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

• Northbridge Author Mark DerMurditchian will recap his real-life adventure roaming the country on his motorcycle with two friends from September 8, 1976 to May 17, 1977, and the book that resulted from the trip: Four Strokes West, from 12:45 to 1:45 p.m. at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. Sign up

Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

• The Evan Wood Trio performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17

• Taking it to the Streets: The Ultimate Doobie Brothers Tribute Show, will be performed in Plymouth, New Hampshire at the Flying Monkey Theatre—a trip offered by the Northbridge Senior Center. Show and a buffet lunch are included at a cost of \$110 per person. Sign up with Amy at the front desk. Call 508-234-2002 for more info.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18

• ValleyCast presents Le'Mixx Band, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20

• The First Congregational Church of Millbury, 148 W. Main St., invites residents to bring donations of food, personal hygiene items, Gorette's or CVS gift certificates, to the church parking lot from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. All donations will be taken to the Millbury Senior Center. Suggested items include canned tomato macaroni meals, fruit juices, canned has, Mimi hot dogs, jelly or jam, ketchup, mayo, mustard, relish, salad dressing, Pop Tarts, cracker snack packs and paper towels. A long row of tables will be set up for drive-by drop-off, or those donating can stay in their vehicle and pop the trunk or hatch back. Enter from W. Main St. and exit to Beach St. Please join us in celebrating the blessing of helping those in need!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25

• ValleyCast presents Grayson Ty, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.



Michelle Canning will perform at the Whitin Mill complex in Whitinsville on Thursday, July 28 as part of ValleyCast's summer concert series.

Sign up with Amy, 508-234-2002, to attend.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26

• Joe Cicero performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

• The Auburn Historical Society & Museum presents the first annual Parking Lot Craft Fair, 41 South St., Auburn, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rain or shine. For more information or to reserve a spot contact Helen Poirier at auburnmuseum@verizon.net, or stop by the museum Tuesdays or Saturdays between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31

• Amy Cowen, a former resident of the island of Oahu, brings the Hawaiian Islands to Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, for an end-of-the-summer party from noon to 2:00 p.m. Authentic Hawaiian entertainment and a themed luncheon with dessert will be served. Seating is limited.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

• ValleyCast presents The Eagles Experience, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

• The Northbridge Senior Center is offering a "Lake Winnepesaukee Cruise & Castle in the Clouds Estate Tour," including lunch at Harts Turkey Farm, for \$151 per person. Sign up with Amy at the front desk. Call 508-234-2002 for more info.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

• Infinite Groove performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.



The music of Tom Petty will be showcased when the band Petty Larceny performs at Douglas Orchard & Farm on Saturday, July 30.

show, will take place at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm St., Millbury, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Free admission.

with Amy, 508-234-2002.

• ValleyCast presents the Clafin Hill Symphony Orchestras Summer Wind, 6:00 p.m., Whitin

• Upton VFW Post 5594 is hosting a flea market from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Post headquarters, 15 Milford St. (Route 140). Vendors and craftspeople can rent spaces for \$15 each. For more information call 508-529-3314. The Post's flea markets will be held the second Saturday of each month through October. Parking is free.

• Counterfeit Cash, a Johnny Cash Tribute Band, will perform at Douglas Orchard and Farm, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 per person 16-and-older, kids get in free, no rain date. Go to douglasorchardandfarm.com for further details.

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Samuel Slater's to host night of comedy on July 29

Veteran Comedian Jimmy Dunn will be headlining a night of laughs at Samuel Slater's Restaurant in Webster on Friday, July 29th. He will be joined by special guest Karen Morgan. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. for the 8 o'clock show, which is be-



From top: Karen Morgan, Jeff Koen and Jimmy Dunn. Photos submitted.

ing hosted by Jeff Koen.

Tickets are available at www.samuelslaters.com.

Jimmy Dunn is an actor and comedian who is most recognized for the CBS sitcom *The McCarthys*, in which he co-starred as Sean McCarthy. He got his start in comedy performing stand-up at a bar in Gloucester, where he was paid in beer and fried clams. Since then he has gone on to appear at some of the comedy world's biggest venues including Montreal's Just For Laughs Comedy Festival, The Late Show With David Letterman, CONAN, and Comics Come Home with Denis Leary.

Karen Morgan was born and raised in Athens, Georgia but now calls Maine home. A former trial attorney, she began her professional comedy career as a finalist on Nickelodeon Television's "Search for the Funniest Mom in America." Since then she has performed in comedy clubs and theaters from New York to Hollywood.

Jeff Koen is a comedian and actor who stars in the

independent film *Heavy Times*. Released in 2011, the film has earned him fans all over the world, some of whom ask on his Facebook page if they can stay at his house with the visit the U.S.

He performs stand-up

in and around the Boston area and has toured New England theaters as the opening act for Justin McKinney. He has also performed with the themed stand-up comedy show "How Men Think (Or Do They?)."

In 2011 he won the first O'Brien's Comedy Contest in Massachusetts. In 2015 he won \$10,000 on "America's Funniest Home Videos."

Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road in Webster, is home to the Indian Ranch

amphitheater, the Indian Princess paddle wheeler and the Indian Ranch campground.

See the Happenings pages in this issue of the Yankee Xpress for upcoming shows at Indian Ranch.

AUDITIONS

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DIRECTOR: Jeremy Woloski

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AUDITION DATES:
Monday, August 15th
or Tuesday, August 16th

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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Luke's personality emerges; tales from the fox den

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Luke Valentino, at almost five months, is growing up before our eyes. I could write about how nicely he's acclimated to our family's routine or how he's already learned to swim, and walk on a leash. I could write about how he sits and lowers his head to the girls at the bus stop, adopting a child-like gentleness. "You're small and playful just like me. Let's be friends!" I could write about his accomplishments over the past five months, but there's something even more noteworthy about Luke.

His dog personality is second to none! "Who Luke is" is so much more than "what Luke does." Every dog I've owned has had unique traits; special tendencies that have left a tattoo on my heart. Max was my cinnamon colored mongrel who followed me to school every morning. "Go home, Max!" A dog of the 70's, Max did not go home. Duke was my massive German shepherd. He was macho and reserved, a 90's man who carried a log around in the yard. Lincoln was The King, the inspiration for this very column. He was a robust athlete of a dog with paws as big as his heart. After he passed, I couldn't imagine loving another dog again.

I held off for some time, until my heart began to swell with longing. I missed the happy wiggle. I missed walking up the basement stairs to be greeted with the elation of a sibling parted at birth with her twin—to finally reunite. "It's been two hours! You haven't changed a bit! I've missed you so much!" A dog's love is unconditional and constant. They know you. They see you. They love you, no questions asked. I missed all that a dog brings. Never would I have imagined that a puppy named Luke Valentino was about to bring forth a whole new brand of love.

"What's that, Luke?" I follow the path of his gaze while we sit together on the front steps. Luke's latest study happens to be

an ant, one foolishly tiny yet surprisingly quick. The ant seems to sense my puppy's shadowy glare yet—caught in an ironic defense—the creature is too small to be caught.

Luke stretches a slow paw across his moving body, but fails to grip the bug. Even more promising for the ant, Luke is not interested in killing him. Instead, he wants to learn more about him. Professor Luke is the most curious and intelligent puppy I've ever owned.

"How is it possible, Mom, for a living thing to be so small?" He looks up at me for a split second to acknowledge the discovery, the mystery of the ant.

"That's an ant, Luke." The teacher in me points out the obvious while my puppy continues to watch and learn. His calm and curious temperament is a trait I've come to adore. He seems to study the way the world works and, alternately, lets me know when it's not working.

A hanging set of bells designed to teach a pup how to "tap and ring" to go pee outside are no exception. I hung them on the door-knob during early training stages. Luke barked with the fury of a Chihuahua. I went on to explain my reasoning to a pup perhaps too intelligent for his own good. "Look, Luke. If you tap the bells (I demonstrated) you can tell Mommy you have to go pee-pee." My aim to teach a lesson was not lost on Luke. His bark faded to a grumble. He loves to learn. He aims to please. He simply didn't want to do either with the aid of bells. He dug in his puppy heels, and barked some more. "Those clinkers don't belong on a door! You can achieve the same result supervising me more closely!" I took the set off and let them fall to the ground. I took the jingle out of their jangle, hoping to appease my pup. He inspected them with a skeptical nose; poking the bells, backing off, and grumbling with irritation. "Let's put them away, Luke." The bells have long since become a play toy.

Luke has become a star student in our family, seated comfortably "at his spot" with an inquisitive lion cub face. "What's today's lesson going to be about?"



Keeping up with the big guys.

One lesson happened to be about how other dogs walk on a leash. Luke had been sitting outside on the front steps one morning doing what he loves—watching. There were birds, squirrels and, more pertinently, dogs of all shapes and size strolling by to watch. He narrowed his gaze. "The doggies are going for a walk, Luke." I capitalized on another teachable moment. "See how they don't bite their leashes." He broke into a miniature puppy smile. "I think I can manage that." My dog training wheels began to turn.

"Hey! Do you mind if we catch up with you?" Shamelessly, I invited myself to join the 8:00 a.m. dog walking group. My puppy needed friends. He needed to interact with dogs that don't think like him.

The dog moms welcomed us to join an eclectic mix of walkers: There is Oscar, a bashful Dachshund-Chihuahua mix; Lexi, a dainty Rescue who loves to play chase; Maui, a bossy Frenchie who makes her role in the group clear; and Okemo, a regal Husky with ice blue eyes and a territorial stride.

"Hi! My name is Luke Valentino!"

Luke fit right in. He trotted alongside the pack with confidence, boasting his best walking behavior. He even conformed to Maui's

insistence that, ahem, he not accept any treats from her mom. "That is my mother and those are my treats," she snarled. Luke accepted Maui's sense of

safety of my pup. What if little Luke (under twenty pounds back then) had simply wanted to play with pups unmistakably his own size? He had been more and more drawn to the fox den; wandering closer and closer to the forbidden area. His curiosity, I feared, could kill him. What if the parents had come home to find a zooming pup in the family mix? Worse, what if Daddy Fox, clever and wise, tried to lure my pup to his crib for a tenderloin feast?

I hauled the pitchfork out of the shed and set it down with the force of a Stephen King character. I even made eye contact with Daddy Fox. He stood pensive and skinny, standing twenty feet away from me to protect his young while I gave him a piece of my mind. "Go Away."

My measure, even in its grand audacity, proved no comparison to Luke's confrontation with Daddy Fox. The incident, captured through the eyes and care of my son, Ben, has brought life to a family folktale, a story told and retold about the adventures of a curious pup and sly fox.

Luke had been loose in the yard when Daddy Fox dashed across our driveway. All training bets were off for a three-month-old puppy who had already learned to protect his yard. "You don't belong!" He barked and shot across the street after the fox. Ben followed and supervised an interaction that took place atop the hill of my good neighbor's lawn. Both animals, in ruthless opposition, stopped and stared at each other, a mere fifteen feet between them. Daddy Fox hissed. Little Luke barked and barked some more. He refused to back down. He lowered his puppy voice to that of a huskier, older dog. He stood his ground, unaware of his miniature size yet innately set on protecting. He puffed out his puppy mane, and did his job. Had the fox discerned the pup in the puff? Perhaps, but he still ran off, fluffy tail tucked between his legs. Ben was able to catch Luke in a follow-up race, and relieve himself of a gross, alternate scenario: the Choke Out between Fox and Puppy.

A new fox family had just moved into the hood, and built a den beneath the shed of my neighbor's home, then moved to another, as fox families do. Both dens bordered my backyard. Luke sensed their presence and meandered through the yard, nose lifted. Meanwhile, Wildflower Drive neighbors saw glimpses of fox parents dashing through yards and streets, often carrying a rodent. The wild animals became a source of intrigue. Still, they caused a stir. "Did anyone notice the chicken feathers? I think the fox are back. Whose house are they at now?"

My concern lied on the

The incident had me spooked. A few days later, I opened the front door to haul in groceries. I placed them on the counter then went back outside to chase after Luke, who had dashed out when I came in. "Luke!" I called his name, but he didn't come back. This was out of character for a rule-abiding Luke. I ran to the back yard. My heart sank. An eerie quiet surrounded my home. I scanned the fox den area. Nothing. I moved to the other side of the house. Still, nothing.

Visions of Daddy Fox caved in on me. I pictured him slinking beneath the shed to find Luke showing his teeth to the pups. "He just wants to play. He won't hurt them." Crazy enough, I found myself negotiating with the fox. I began to sweat. I cried out my pup's name some more. "Luke, come!" I jogged around my entire house a few more times. Finally, I decided to go back inside and take action. I needed to make a Call Out to the community on social media. "Dear Friends. My puppy, Luke Valentino, is missing. Please contact me if—"

"Luke!!!" There he stood in the kitchen wiggling his puppy body and smiling up at me. He had never left the house! He must have dashed out then snuck back in without me noticing. "Momma, I heard you calling and calling my name! I'm right here!" I knelt down, picked him up and flattened him to my belly like a frog (our signature hug). He licked my entire face as he always does. I felt his little heart pump with pride. "Oh, Luke—I thought you..."

He smiled innocently. "I've been here the whole time, Momma. I heard you calling my name. I tried to find you, but I was door-blocked."

"I thought you—" I closed my eyes, grateful for my mistake, and squeezed him close. "Never mind, Luke." I kissed my puppy's head.

Dear Readers: Thankfully, the fox family has moved on while my own has practiced numerous training measures to keep Luke safe in the yard.

Stay tuned for more on Living with Luke.

Write to me at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aaanortheast.com

The DIY approach to getting car carpets clean



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I have an older rear wheel drive car with a V-8 engine and automatic transmission. The car has only 55,000 miles on it. The issue is, the car has a high-speed vibration at 40 mph and 70 mph. I've had some shops look at this car and they just can't figure it out. The tires were checked and are in balance. In addition, I have had the water pump and fan clutch replaced as well as drive belts and harmonic balancer checked. The engine runs great, and transmission was rebuilt. The driveshaft was replaced with a new one, which did improve the situation, but the vibration is still there.

A. Since the vibration got better after the driveshaft was replaced, I would continue to focus in that area. I would look at drive shaft angle and also put a dial indicator on the drive shaft to see that it is running true. You could also try balancing the drive shaft while it is in the car. This can be accomplished with a couple of large radiator hose clamps using them as balancing weights. If you could find someone with a vibration measuring tool or even an old reed vibration meter it may help pinpoint the vibration. The issue could be an out of balance torque converter or even a poor fit between the engine and transmission.

Q. I recently purchased a Cadillac XT5 and discovered it has no spare or jack. The Cadillac dealer says a full-size tire won't fit in the tire well and

compact tires which used to be an optional purchase are no longer available. I am very uneasy about driving a vehicle without a spare, even if these are run flat tires. Several tire stores I called say they don't deal with compact tires. Even some of the local junk yard, "pull-a-part" places were no help. Am I worrying for nothing? Any suggestions?

A. A run flat tire has a stiff sidewall that allows the car to be driven without air in the tire. True run flat tires will give you the ability to get home, generally 50-100 miles of driving at speed under 50 miles per hour is suggested. Some cars have conventional tires without a spare but include an air compressor and tire sealant. I drive all kinds of new cars, some without spare tires and although I would prefer a spare, knowing that I can at least get to a tire store to fix or replace the tire does make me feel better. Your Cadillac does have mobility kit, air compressor and sealant. This is handy if one of your tires has a slow leak at least you could pump it up to the proper pressure and hopefully get the tire repaired. Still, I would prefer



Don't have a spare tire? A run flat tire has a stiff sidewall that allows the car to be driven without air in the tire. True run flat tires will give you the ability to get home, generally 50-100 miles of driving at speed under 50 miles per hour is suggested.

Q. I hope this isn't a silly question. What is the best way to vacuum the interior of the car? My home vacuum doesn't do a thorough cleaning. The car wash has vacuums, but still I can never get a good cleaning, there always seems to be some sand or dirt left over when I'm done.

A. There are times you need to use a shampooer and extractor to get the carpets clean. Good detail shops will vacuum up the loose dirt and debris and then use a portable carpet cleaner. The soap and water loosen up the dirt and stains and the vacuum extractor pull out the water. As a DIY approach, mix up some water and dish detergent and then use the suds and a scrub brush. You don't want to get the rugs too wet, just damp. Once you are satisfied that the carpets are clean then vacuum with a wet/dry vacuum. If the carpets are still damp, leave the doors open for a bit or even put a fan in the car to dry out the interior. No such thing as a silly question.

a spare tire, in my opinion even a compact spare is better than no spare tire.

Q. I have an unusual problem with my 2012 Mercedes Benz E350 4Matic. The car performs great, rides fine and only has 60,000 miles on it. However, when I am driving and take my foot off the accelerator, and then hit the accelerator to resume my speed, there is a slight growl or vibration that lasts a second or two. This situation is intermittent. It seems to happen at any speed. What might be the cause of this situation? I am afraid to go

to the Mercedes dealership due to potential costs. Am I in for a big repair bill?

A. I suspect an issue with the all-wheel drive system-transfer case which is an integral part of the transmission. The condition is sometimes referred to as a judder and will usually happen as you describe while turning slightly and accelerating. There is no easy or cheaper repair if this is the issue. You have two choices at this point, live with it or repair it. If you can live with it, the transmission may last a very long time. If you opt to

repair it now, or even when it gets worse it will be expensive. Just to verify what I suspected, I called a local Mercedes dealer to try to get a price and was told to expect to pay at least \$5000 for the repairs.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over 40 years' experience in the automotive business and is an ASE-certified master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your car questions to jpaul@aaanortheast.com. Follow John on twitter @johnfpaul and friend on Facebook, mrjohnfpaul.

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The Auburn Historical Society and Museum is offering free lawn games for kids to play on Tuesday and Saturday mornings from 10 -12 at the Historical Museum, 41 South Street.

Along with playing the games, participants will learn about the history of the games like croquet, bocci ball, cornhole, graces and more. Tours of the vintage toys and games exhibit inside the museum will be available and are also free to the public.

The lawn games run through to Saturday, July 30.

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REAL ESTATE

A closer look at what realtors/real estate agents make



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

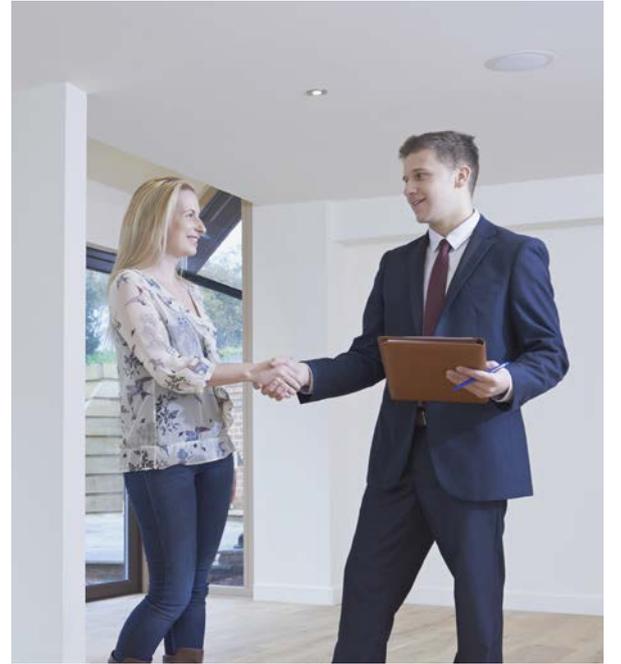
Buying or selling a home is one of the biggest financial transactions that many people make in their entire lives. Realtors/real estate agents work with buyers and sellers during this process by getting their clients the best deal possible. A lot goes into the job, and there are many things to consider when determining how much real estate agents make.

How do realtors/real estate agents make their money? Most real estate agents work on commission

maximize the value of a sale for clients and set the real estate agent apart from their competitors. Furthermore, real estate negotiation skills take on a whole new meaning in understanding the emotional components of both sides during any deal. Effective communication and responsiveness is a realtors/real estate agent's craft when assessing their clients' motivations and those of the other side.

Experience may be one of the best indicators of how much a realtor/real estate agent makes. Anyone can search home listings online, but an experienced realtor/real estate agent will likely know more about local neighborhoods and building codes, making them more marketable to clients.

An experienced real estate agent shouldn't have any issues checking off all the small details and marks on a sale contract, which also maximizes the deal value and, therefore, their commission.



have considerable control over their hours, and their dependence on commission leads to real estate agents having a wide spread of income.

Commissions generally vary from 5% to 6%, and the amount may be split among different parties including the buyer and seller's agent. The median price for home sales in the U.S. for 2021 was \$346,900. That leaves real estate agents with \$17,345 to \$20,814 per home sale. According to that same report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 10% of real estate agents made less than \$28,270. The bottom 25% brought in \$35,880 or less. The median income was \$48,340.

Most people probably agree that location is critical in how much real estate agents make. The top states for real estate agents are:

State, annual mean wage, Massachusetts \$90,390, New York \$81,020, Wyoming \$80,580.

Is being a realtor/real estate agent worth it? Numbers don't lie, and these financial statistics certainly make the profession seem worthwhile. However, there

are additional aspects to look at a little more closely.

Realtors/real estate agents may have a large earning potential, but market fluctuations can directly impact those earnings. Agents only make money when they sell houses, so any housing market crisis could see them out of a job. A prime example of this happened during the 2008 housing market crash, with over 10% of real estate agents losing their positions permanently.

Additionally, upfront costs come with being a real estate agent, such as license and franchise fees, business and home office equipment, marketing material and travel.

A realtor/real estate agent's career can be lucrative, but much depends on how much effort an agent is willing to put in. Successful agents usually match certain skills and personality traits, leading to their success. Agents who do not communicate well, don't display a positive work ethic and fail to relate to their clients and those on the opposite side of the deal probably won't realize all of the financial potential.

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SPORTS

Oxford track and field posts top season

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY, STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Coaching in his sixth season for Oxford, Chris Pietro believes this past season has been the best in terms of numbers for the Pirates boys track and field squad. In the past Oxford has averaged 13 or 14 athletes per season, but this year the team had 26 participate.

“A lot of kids don’t want to attend a three- or four-hour practice when they can be working earning money for college. When they found out that you don’t have to be at the entire practice, I think a lot decided to try it out,” Pietro said. “In track and field, you really just need to take part in your event, work hard and then go what you need to do. It’s a modern type of coaching style.”

The Oxford coach also noted that the spring season is usually a tough one with it being a lot busier than the other seasons. Kids are unsure if they have the time to commit so Pietro believes as a coach, he is working with those would-be athletes.



“This year all came to believe in the true concept of team. Track and field is basically an individual sport, but this year we went at it with a team mentality,” the coach said. “We went about it in the best interest of the team while trying to improve upon our numbers individually.”

When the season got underway some three months earlier Pietro knew

that he had some good athletes who would compete. In the past Millbury had owned the SWCL C, but this spring Oxford was able to top the Woolies and grab the League going 4-1. In the past Oxford has usually finished around fifth place in the SWCL, but this year they came in second behind Auburn.

Senior Darius Richardson went undefeated in



Left, Oxford High track and field standout Will Owusu with Nicholas Pietro. Above, Oxford High's track and field team gathers for the District E Meet. Photos courtesy of Coach Pietro.

both the 100- and 200-meter dash during the season. He continued his success at the SWCL Meet, winning both his events and he won the 200 at the Districts. Running in the states he finished sixth in the 200.

According to his coach, Richardson is a speedster and an all-around leader who is a hard worker individually.

Another key component to the Pirates attack on the field was senior Will Owusu

who participated in the long and triple jumps and also did the hurdles on the track. Triple jump is his best event with his best leap of the year being 41' 11 1/2". Taking part in the Meet of Champions he finished twelfth.

Senior thrower Sam Zostant also had himself a great season in which he threw consistently during each meet. His best throws were 120' in the discus and 37 1/2" in the shot put.

“Sam is a very hard worker, and his teammates look up to him,” Pietro said. “They have come to realize that if you put the work in then you can be that much better.”

Richardson, Owusu and Zostant were also the tri-captains for the boys track and field team this past season.

OXFORD
continued on page 19

TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com

Financial tips for the self-employed



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

Being self-employed has some benefits. You get to choose your own hours, you don't have to count “vacation days,” and you'll never worry about getting downsized.

On the other hand, you're truly on your own—there's no employer-sponsored retirement plan and no benefits package. So, if you've recently started a business or become a “gig worker,” possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, what can you do to get on the road to financial security?

There are several steps you can take, including the following:

■ **Establish a budget.** When you're self-employed—and especially when you are first starting out—you need to keep tight control over where your money is going. So, establish a budget and stick to it.

■ **Open a retirement plan.** As a self-employed individual, you can choose a retirement plan, such as a SEP-IRA, A SIMPLE-IRA, or an “owner-only” 401(k). When your earnings are limited, you can contribute modest amounts to any of these plans, but when your income rises, you can boost your contributions. While these retirement plans have some things in common, including tax-deferred growth of earnings, they differ in other areas, such as contribution limits, and one plan may be more suitable for you than another, depending on whether you have employees. You may want to consult with a financial advisor to determine which plan is best for

your needs.

■ **Build an emergency fund.** When you work for a business or other organization, your income is predictable—but that's usually not the case when you are self-employed. And when your earnings are uneven, you can be vulnerable to financial stress when you face an unexpected expense. To help protect yourself from these threats, try to gradually build an emergency fund containing a few months' worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account.

■ **Pay down your debts.** Some debts, such as loans to help your business, may be unavoidable—and even productive. But other debts, especially those that can't be deducted from your taxes and carry a high interest rate, are far less useful so you may want to set up a repayment plan. With your other expenses, you might not be able to whittle these debts down as fast as you'd

like, but, over time, your efforts can pay off.

■ **Put money aside for taxes.** Because no employer is withholding taxes from your paychecks, you will likely have to make quarterly estimated payments. Plus, you're responsible for all your Social Security taxes, which, if you worked for someone else, would be split between you and your employer. To make sure you've got enough money available to pay your taxes, you might want to set up a special account—one that's not used for any other purpose.

■ **Get proper insurance.** Depending on the nature of your work, you may or may not need some type of business insurance, but if you have a family, you should certainly consider the need for life insurance, and you may also want to consider disability insurance.

Self-employment can be quite fulfilling—and you'll find it even more rewarding when you make the right

financial moves.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones financial advisor. Please contact Dennis Antonopoulos

los, your local Edward Jones financial advisor, at 5 Albert St., Auburn, 508-832-5385, or email dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Gay City State Park Part 2: A ghost wandering in the woods

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

Part One began to tell of the ghosts of Gay City State Park in Hebron, Connecticut. Here is the conclusion for anyone who might want to visit the ghost town and hopefully encounter one of its permanent residents.

The peddler's ghost, as if seeking justice for his

untimely demise, now roams the perimeter of the little hamlet. More than a few visitors have stumbled upon the old charcoal pit, where they have witnessed the ghastly sight of a glowing skeleton hovering just above the ground. The spectral skeleton is not the only permanent phantom of the old village. The spirit of a young man

wanders among the thicket eternally trying to appease his employer centuries after they have both turned to dust.

A teenage boy became apprentice to the local blacksmith in hopes of someday becoming his successor. The blacksmith was a gruff, short-tempered man with not much patience for insubordi-

nation, but he took on the role as teacher to the young man. One day the apprentice decided he was going to take the long way to the shop, stopping and enjoying the morning every chance he could. When he arrived at the forge, the blacksmith, having expected him to arrive at work on time, was steaming with rage.

No one knows what exact words may have been exchanged, but the blacksmith lost his temper and hacked the boy to pieces with a butcher knife. Legend has it that he even lopped the poor soul's head off. The blacksmith was never brought up on charges, and the ghost of the apprentice now wanders among the woods,

hastily making his way to some unknown destination, perhaps for fear of being tardy. Some have seen him running with his bloody head cradled under his arm.

Paranormal investigator and reporter Lauren

TALES

continued on page 19

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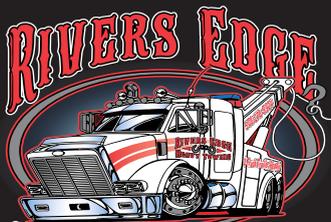


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If you pray three times a day, three consecutive days, you will receive your intention, no matter how impossible it may seem. Praise and Thanksgiving please the Heart of God.

Believer

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OXFORD

continued from page 17

Another senior that had himself a good year was the versatile Myles Craft. The sprinter finished second with an average 100 time of 11.5 seconds just behind Oxford's top 100 runner Richardson, whose average time was 11.3 seconds. Along with Richardson, Craft gave the Pirates a deadly one-two punch in the event.

Craft also qualified to take part in the Districts and States but unfortunately was unable to participate due to a season-ending injury; an injury the doctor said may have been there all year long.

In addition to the seniors Pietro had four underclassmen make a statement with their performances. Sophomore Robbie Fisher mainly threw the javelin, but also ran the 4 x 100; freshman Aidan Van Arsdelan was also a

javelin thrower, who captured the SWCL with an average throw of 128'. Eighth grader Camden Stone ran the mile and 800 while Sophomore Matt Szela ran the 2-mile and 800.

With the increase in numbers this year the Pirate coach believes his team will be back to compete on a high level next spring as well.

"I expect that the team will have similar numbers once again next year and we will continue to be com-

petitive," he said. "A good number of athletes will be returning next year, and I know there are some others already looking to try out for the team."

Pietro, who has been aid-

ed by the help of his father James Pietro in training the team, is looking to continue to make track and field fun for the athletes who want to participate. In doing so he is hoping to install a work

ethic in his athletes that will allow them to improve in their individual events and in turn will breed a winning atmosphere at Oxford.

TALES

continued from page 18

Neslusen paid a visit to Gay City State Park in the winter to see if the legends of the haunts held any weight. Her account is as follows.

"When I was investigating there I saw and heard some very weird things. The strangest thing I saw was a black mist that disappeared quickly off to the side of a trail. The best way to describe it was about four feet off the ground and maybe three feet wide. It was solid in the middle but seemed transparent around the edges. The second weirdest thing was the other investigator and I were exploring the old mill site and rocks and debris kept falling from the top of the wall to the ground. (almost as if someone was standing there.) We went in the middle of winter while the ground was still

frozen so I don't think it could have been the ground thawing or anything. I took some EVPs (electronic voice phenomena, or ghost voice recordings) at the site but nothing came up on the recorder. As we were walking up to the pond though, we did hear distinct voices coming from the mill site. We ran back but found no one. We even called out and no one answered. The last thing I wanted to mention was we did hear something walking in the woods (you could hear crunching in the snow) but we saw no animal and no people; it was just very strange."

A few months after Lauren's encounter, we received an email from an investigator in regard to a visit he and his mother paid to the park. They were wandering the park just before closing, talking about being locked in if the gates closed. When they played their recorder

back, there was a third voice accompanying them as they traversed the trails laden with old home foundations and other remnants of the past.

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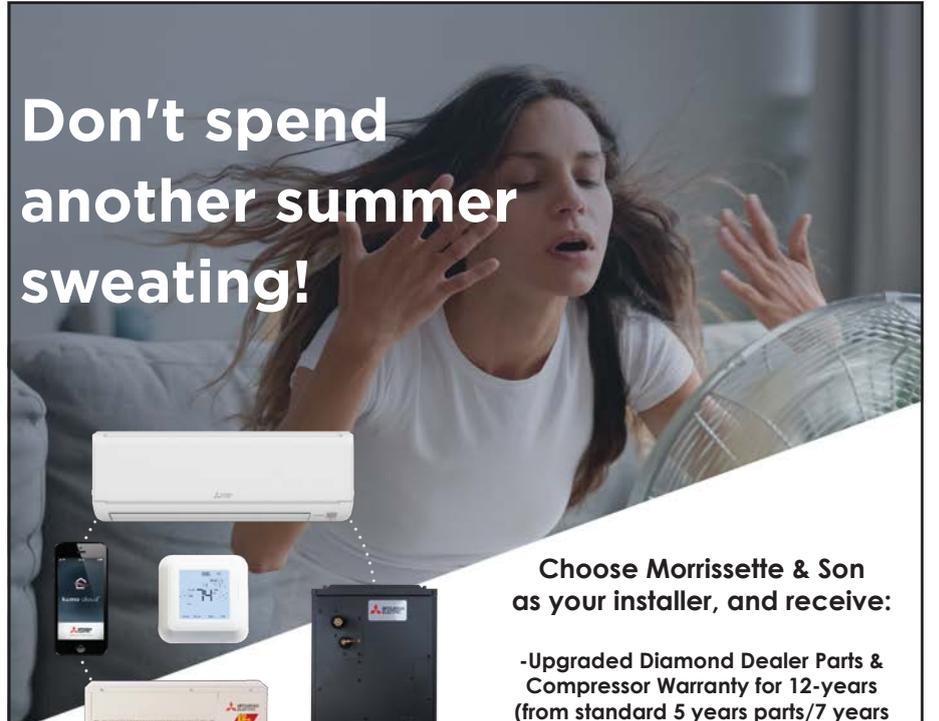
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