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January 20 - February 24, 2023

Callahan stresses teamwork as Oxford town positives

BY JANET STOICA

When Oxford Town Manager Jennifer Callahan was asked what the town's major accomplishments have been, the overview she gave was quite remarkable. She was quick to mention the teamwork and achievements of all town employees.

"Oxford is very fortunate to have exceptional employees who work for the benefit of all of us. Our town employees come to work each day and do the best job they can. This is why at our town meetings we vote for the best benefits we can for our town workers," she said. "Teamwork is essential for our town's success."

"Last year we had a lot of great success coming out of the pandemic and trying to pick up our normal business routine," said Ms. Callahan, "but I can't be more thrilled about our master plan and the well-measured spending of our resources for capital projects and community planning. Our financials were addressed in a very positive way. The success of our accomplishments is reflected in the \$6 million in grants we received." Examples are the \$2.8 million MassWorks grant received to provide sewer access across Route 20; a \$200,000 Green Communities grant; \$302,000 street grant; and an ADA grant of \$182,000 to increase ADA access.

"These are huge opportunities," said Ms. Callahan said. "We also have the Leicester Street bridge project which will make over that structure using multi-million dollar state funding. We have many other grants that will help Oxford like the Open Space Recreation Grant. I'm proud of all our departments working together to obtain this funding. An example is the Lowe's Pond Dam that will



Oxford Town Manager Jen Callahan, a former Massachusetts state representative.

be replaced with assistance from the Department of Conservation which is a significant infrastructure project. Another great asset to our town has been the appointment of Laura Wilson as our Senior Center director. We have seen a very positive response from our town's celebrated senior population to her appointment. Her hard work and dedication has been a great success for all of us."

The Mass. School Building Authority has recently granted funding for new roof replacements in the town's two elementary schools and the town has also recently begun a feasibility study for its Community Center. "The building needs upgrades and a final report is due in February," said Ms. Callahan. "We realize this building is a valuable asset to our town and we want to ensure it

remains that way."

Successful town activities launched and well-attended by townspeople include the Winter Festival, Movies-on-Main, Teddy Bear Picnics, Carbundle Pond activities, and the Holiday Parade. "Our master plan and publicity has attracted people to come downtown and enjoy the camaraderie of their fellow neighbors. It brings people closer together. It's so positive," said Town Manager Callahan.

"We have been so very successful working together in all our town departments," said Ms. Callahan. "Our employees have been great. Other projects that we're looking forward to

TOWN MANAGER

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Motorists entering the town of Webster will encounter a number of road construction projects that are due to be completed soon.

Highway superintendent gives update on Webster road work

BY JANET STOICA

According to the town of Webster's website, the following roads are scheduled for utility updates beginning in January and running through March. The National Grid Gas Division has scheduled the roadwork in order to install new gas main replacements. Residents and drivers are asked to exercise caution when negotiating the following byways of town:

- East Main Street/Route 12 (Worcester Road)
 - Thompson Road Intersection - East Main Street to Second Island Road
 - Thompson Road/Kosmas Street
 - Lake Street/Thompson Road Intersection
 - Racicot Avenue
- As many residents are aware,

there has been much water and sewer main road construction in the Lake Street area as well and Highway Superintendent Ken Pizzetti stated that due to road construction supply hold-ups it will be a few more months before completion of the project. The backup in construction is expected to last until April of this year.

"By the time road settlement occurs in a 60-day period, the road should be finished and striped by August," he said, "and if all goes well, the road may be finished earlier but with supplies being delivered later than expected, we are being cautious with our completion dates. We have no control over the manufactur-

ROAD WORK

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TOWN MANAGER

continued from page 1

include grant funding for the French River Bike Trail by having discussions with adjoining towns, our Visitor Center on Charlton Street, and our Store Front Enhancement Program that will offer assistance to our local businesses for their façade improvements in the areas of signage and landscaping. We hope to work on unique storefront enhancements. We are also looking forward to the Orchard Hill improvement and expansion project. This looks like it could be several hundred million dollars of new investment in Oxford that includes beautiful townhouses. I am very excited about the work we do

here. I said when I came to Oxford four years ago that I wanted to make sure we improved the town for all residents and I believe with the hard work and great accomplishments of all our town employees we are well on our way to achieving our goals.”

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results”

– Andrew Carnegie

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

ROAD WORK

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ers. So much depends upon the winter weather which is so unpredictable. Temperatures could be 30 degrees for three days and then 50 degrees for the next three days delaying the supplier’s manufacturing process.”

National Grid’s nine-year new gas main project is nearing its end in the Webster area. Webster’s gas main replacement project is most likely in its seventh year. “National Grid has the capability to dig and complete their projects through the winter,” Mr. Pizzetti said. “This will allow us to pave in the spring and summer. With a decent winter, we might

have three of their street projects finished soon. We have to allow the road to settle first and then paving can begin. We’re definitely ahead of the curve based on their timeline. The rest of Granite Street is on the schedule too. We hope to begin the remainder of the Granite Street project by April 1st.”

The old steel gas pipes were more susceptible to leakage. The new gas main material is rated to have a 100-year life and is manufactured using a high performance, bi-modal, medium density polyethylene resin which exceeds industry standards and provides excellent environmental stress crack resistance and outstanding long-term stress rupture performance and the trenching is cleaned and packed well once the new mains are installed.

When asked about how the highway depart-



Signage tells the story of ongoing road work in the town of Webster.

ment treats the local roads in winter, Mr. Pizzetti explained that pre-treated salt is used. “All road salt is EPA-rated,” he said, “it’s safer for the environment and is just a better product. Road materials are much better too. When treating the roads during the winter you just don’t put a cost on the material used as it’s a public safety issue. Webster was one of the first

towns in the area to use pre-treated salt resulting in neighboring town highway departments visiting us and observing the product usage and its better results. It saves us money in the long run and is much better for road cleaning too. There’s no use for sand anymore which also saves money on road cleaning. There’s a lot of planning that goes into the clearing of our roads when snow and ice hits. We keep our snowplows in great shape and are well organized with a great crew. They are a very talented group. We hold monthly meetings for updates and for obtaining feedback from our staff.”

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

The Oxford Free Public Library and bank robbers?



Dan Prouty of the Oxford Business Association and the new “Gateway Park” in town is one of those people any journalist would appreciate for the tips they pass along that turn into good story material. Recently, Mr. Prouty sent me this email.

“Try to read this about Oxford bank robbers from the 19th Century. When I was a kid, old-timers told me that the \$\$\$ for the library came from the Larneds who were infamous bank robbers. Thus the Larned library in Oxford. Several years ago I came across a short story about an 1850 bank robbery in Charlestown, NH (boyhood home of Carleton Fisk). The Larneds were supposedly tied to other robberies in NH, VT and NY State. Clara Barton’s brother Stephen was an accomplice and a biography about Clara included in her correspondence about Clara having to reimburse an insurance company after the Larneds and her brother were accused of burning down a textile mill... They were evidently great entrepreneurs...”

A separate email, forwarded to me by Mr. Prouty and headed “Monadnock Moments No. 34: The Bungling Bank Rob-

bers—Historical Society of Cheshire County,” describes an incident that occurred the evening of June 11, 1850, when “Abijah Larned and an accomplice broke into the bank at Charlestown, New Hampshire. By midnight they had loaded nearly \$12,000 in gold, silver and bills into their carriage and drove peacefully out of town.” The report goes on to say that eleven miles to the south they came to a long hill between Drewsville and Marlow and got out of the carriage so their horse would have less weight to carry. They somehow managed to lose the horse and the carriage, which were discovered by Horace Gee of Marlow, who returned the money to claim a reward.

“Abijah Larned was later arrested and agreed to return to Charlestown to stand trial, probably in part so that he could learn what happened to his carriage of riches. He asked to be taken before the bank officers where he confessed to the crime and apologized for the trouble he had caused. It was also discovered that the horse had turned off on a side road halfway up the hill and wound up at Mr. Gee’s house.

“Larned’s apology so impressed the local officials that they returned his burglar’s tools and allowed him to leave Charlestown after posting a small bail. Needless to say, Larned jumped bail and never returned to stand trial. He did continue to use his burglar’s tools, however, and was later arrested and jailed for robbing the bank at Cooperstown, New York.”

In trying to pin this down,

and Clara Barton’s brother’s actual role, I could find no mention of the Larned family in a “Centennial Celebration” report written by Gilbert Asa Davis for Windsor County, Vermont. The information was voluminous, however, so I might have missed it.

In an effort to clear the matter up, Mr. Prouty sent me another email with a photo of the cover of a biography of Clara Barton entitled “Clara Barton/Professional Angel,” written by Elziabeth Brown Pryor.

Mr. Prouty wrote: “This is the book that I learned of the Larned Bros. and Stephen Barton’s involvement in arson fraud. Also the first source that I came across (about) the Charlestown bank [robbery] was from a book of short stories, ‘It Happened in New Hampshire,’ published by the Pequot Press. In that story, the authorities found a coat with an owner’s tag on the inside that said Stephen Barton, North Oxford. Oxford authorities told their NH counterparts that Barton was at a public function that weekend but he ‘runs with the Larned Brothers!’” That was the connection and of course one of them landed in Sing Sing for the Cooperstown job. He died in prison according to the NH story.”

The only reference to the Larned family I initially found came from The Oxford Free Public Library’s own website, which states that Charles Larned, a former resident, donated money in memory of his mother, Clarissa Larned, for construc-

tion of what was called the Larned Memorial Library “on the former Hyde lot.” The building opened in 1903 and featured a stained glass window at the top of the stairs in the front foyer, depicting the arrival of the Pilgrims with a caption “Let there be light.”

Jacob Lotter (I misidentified him in a previous column) was good enough to send me information he obtained that corroborates much of what Dan Prouty has discovered. Brittany McDougal Bialy, director of the Oxford Free Public Library, describes Jacob Lotter as “a history buff” and said he “knows a good amount of Oxford history.” Mr. Lotter is the library’s cataloging and technology person.

Mr. Lotter sent me clips from “Oxford, Massachusetts: 300 years of history

1713-2013” published by the Oxford Business Association. Included in this book is an item entitled “1859 How Not To Rob A Bank” and a reference to Governor Henry Hubbard (who served as the Charlestown bank’s president) dispatching lawmen to “Oxford, Massachusetts when it was discovered that the ‘S. Barton Jr.’ who owned a buffalo robe that was among clothing discarded after the robbery was “a well-known bank robber who lived there. Barton had a good alibi for the time, but the two Larned brothers, who also lived in town and who were known for their criminal activity,” were both missing.”

Given Clara Barton’s sterling reputation, which is enshrined at the Clara Barton Birthplace Museum in

Oxford, it is hard to believe she had a brother who was up to such no good. The museum’s website lists as family members her father, Capt. Stephen Barton (1774-1862), “a prosperous businessman, captain of the local militia and a selectman in Oxford;” her mother, Sarah Stone Barton (1783-1851), “an independent woman who was known for her thrift, eccentricity and volatile temper;” and siblings Dorothea Barton (1804-1846), Stephen Barton (1806-1865); Capt. David Barton (1808-1888); and Sarah “Sally” Barton Vassall (1811-1874).

Which leaves Stephen Barton as something of a mystery man, in the scheme of things.

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

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Webster's Anglo Fabrics area to undergo redevelopment

BY JANET STOICA

Yes, it's really happening. The former Anglo Fabrics mill buildings are on the verge of a renaissance right here in Webster. After a major clean-up effort by former owner, Chris Robert, the properties were

recently sold to an investment firm of local business partners from the greater Worcester area. The plans sound fascinating and will be a definite positive for the North Village section of the town.

Rita Flagg of Meadow View Realty in Harvard

brokered the transaction and is also scheduled to present the upcoming construction facts to the Webster/Dudley/Oxford Chamber of Commerce at the organization's January meeting.

"It will be a four-phase development project," said



The former Anglo Fabrics buildings in Webster are soon to become the focus on a major redevelopment project.

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Ms. Flagg, “the buyers who were interested in the area are developers who saw the future for the former Anglo Fabrics property. Mr. Chris Robert of Webster had done a major clean-up of the area and upgraded the buildings to make them suitable for development.”

“In the 1980’s I had lived at 13 Pearl Street with my mom,” said Rita, “I had an affection for the area and when this parcel fell into my lap I was only too eager to see it brought to a great opportunity for the town of Webster. The buyers have a long-term commitment to see this project come to a great conclusion.”

The new owners worked with Edgewater Construction, a design/build corporation that caters to the needs of developers. Their strengths are in the areas of conversion of older buildings. Epsilon Consulting also plays a role in assisting to qualify the buildings for state and federal tax credits that then allow these monies to be re-used for refurbishing the projects they are involved with. Epsilon will help with loans and other needs as the project moves forward.

Phase One of the project is quite simple, a walking path that will take a route along the French River and around two sides of the development. The path will be animal friendly and offer the use of clean-up bags for those who choose to walk their furry friends. The walkway will wind along with river views and present a relaxing environment for all walkers. There will be beautiful landscap-

ing and shade structures like pergolas for a peaceful respite.

Phase Two will consist of the major construction of 46 apartments to be leased at market rates. Two-bedroom apartments will encompass 70% of the construction, 20% will be one-bedroom apartments, and 10% will be three-bedroom. “Hopefully, a bakery will be a major part of the project,” said Ms. Flagg, “I want to bring the aromas of what I knew in my childhood. A bakery would be a wonderful addition to the neighborhood. We are looking forward to seeing a few attractive and appealing cafes and restaurants pop up along the riverfront.”

“In Phase Three there is discussion of a small hotel to cater to the local area of Webster, Dudley, and Oxford. It’s very exciting to have such a project in this area. It will be a great asset to Webster and the local towns.

Phase Four, which involves a cluster of smaller buildings, will include shops and, hopefully, more apartments. Perhaps a small shopping district. These buildings will be no more than two stories with apartments above the shops.”

The general public will surely get a good review of the new Webster development plans at the next Webster/Dudley/Oxford Chamber of Commerce meeting this month when Rita Flagg will be the keynote speaker.

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

SSE to host Open House for Dudley residents

Samuel Slater Experience, Webster’s museum dedicated to the “Father of the American Industrial Revolution,” will host an Open House for residents of neighboring Dudley on Sunday, January 29, from noon to 4 p.m.

“We have been open for nearly a year and have had many visitors from Dudley. We now want to invite our neighbors who have not had a chance to tour the museum to come to our Dudley Open House Day with free admission for two people,” said Barbara Van Reed, museum director. Proof of residency is required.

Described as “Disney-like,” the Samuel Slater Experience employs state-of-the-art 4-D digital technology to tell the story of Samuel Slater and covers

two time periods: the early 1800s and the early 1900s.

The museum is both educational and entertaining, encouraging visitors to experience history in a new, immersive way as they climb aboard the ship that carried Samuel Slater to America, learn about life in the early 1800s with interactive exhibits and ride a trolley through downtown Webster a century later.

Visitors should plan for an hour to an hour-and-a-half to tour the museum. Self-guided tours begin every eight minutes. The last admission is at 3:00 p.m.

Samuel Slater Experience is located in the former National Guard Armory at 31 Ray Street, Webster, Massachusetts, and open to the public year-round. Year-round daily schedule: Fridays & Saturdays: 10 a.m. to



Visitors to the Samuel Slater Experience in Webster enjoy a tour of the museum, which is open Friday and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 4:00 p.m. Private tours and events are also available.

4 p.m. and Sunday: Noon to 4 p.m. The museum is also available for group tours and events.

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BY JANET STOICA

You just love your haircut and style you say? Did you ever think about all the training and schooling it took your hair fashionista to reach that level of their professional cutting and styling? Whether it's barbering or hair styling or any other tonsorial name, your hair designer has spent many hours fluffing and buzzing manes and pates. Do you think you can cut like they do? Well then, you missed your calling.

As I sit in my hair stylist's chair studying my hair and what other style it might be trimmed in, my hair fashionista, Nanette Tetreault of Elite Hair Design in Thompson CT, gets to work snipping and clipping my multi-colored locks. I watch her intently in the mirror as she measures and cuts each section of my hair by holding each portion and then using her wicked sharp scissors to cut across those sections. "How does the front section look to you," says Nanette, "do you want it trimmed more or less?" I tell her the length is just

right and there's no need for an extra shortening. The end result is always just right and in two weeks my style always seems to receive the most compliments from people I know. You know, that "just right" look in between regular trims. Ms. Tetreault has been a stylist for many years and I've been visiting her every four weeks for quite some time. Her training must've been excellent as she truly is a perfectionist. Not too many perfectionists around these days!

If you've ever had plumbing services then you know it's a craftsman who has visited your home. Who could even think of doing their own plumbing with all the new and innovative products out there now to save time, trouble, and headaches? One of the latest money-saving technologies is a combination heat pump and air-conditioning unit made by a leader in that technology area: Mitsubishi. According to Vic Waskiewicz of J.V. Mechanical of Webster, these reliable and energy-efficient units are becoming one of the most-requested

installation products for his company. "Mitsubishi is definitely the leader in this area," says Mr. Waskiewicz, "we've installed hundreds of these wall-mounted ductless units that not only provide air-conditioning but heat as well. The units are 36" wide by 12" high and come in white, stainless steel, and black. Their outside compressor is the heat pump which reverses its function for cooling."

J.V. Mechanical employs a crew of fifteen plumbers who are graduates of local trade schools like Bay Path Regional Vocational. "We actively recruit, train, and continuously educate our employees," Vic said. "Currently, we have two of our plumbers in classes learning the latest technologies. We also have a new young lady who is a recent graduate of plumbing trade school who is honing her plumbing skills with us. We are proud of the fact that our employees are well-versed in their trade and courteous to our customers." Vic's father, Joseph Waskiewicz, was a plumber and took Vic on many jobs with him to learn the trade.

"Although I didn't go to trade school, I appreciated the work that I saw my father do," Vic said. "My dad taught me to diversify. We do basic plumbing, both commercial and residential, and have also advanced to higher levels for all heating systems like oil, electric, and gas. Even the lost art of steam heating systems is part of our skill set."

Masonry. A tough and very physical job that is likened to all the famous sculptors of history: Rodin, Michelangelo, Bernini, Bourgeois. If you've ever watched a mason at work perhaps building a brick wall, you may observe their repetitious movements slapping the mortar onto the brick layer and then gently pushing each brick into the muck. It's an art, a science, a well-honed skill to ensure each brick is aligned to the previous brick. To me, watching their craftsmanship is mesmerizing. From brick to stone, block, veneer, gabion to composite and reinforced masonry, the true artist of these various forms of creativity has learned skills that cannot

be measured but for their finished beauty. If you've ever needed a mason, you know darn well how difficult it is to find someone who works with the highest degree of finesse.

Don't touch that circuit breaker board for Pete's sake! Dealing with electricity is dangerous and I'm sure you don't want to suffer the consequences of being electrocuted and lighting up like a cartoon skeleton. That's when you call in an electrical expert. Brian Wood of Brian Wood Electrical has been honing his skills for many years and recently has completed extensive training in solar panel installations with SunRun, one of the largest solar panel distributors and installers in the United States. "I'm a graduate of Bay Path Regional Vocational High School," says Mr. Wood proudly, "and I owe my trade choice to the advice of my grandfather, Hiram Wood. He was an electrical engineer at Heald Machinery in Worcester. I was very close to him and when I was exploring the different trades at Bay Path, he advised me to

take the electrical courses and I haven't looked back except to think about how right my grandfather was in steering me in this direction.

"I've always had my own business after completing my apprenticeship on Nantucket then I spent twenty-eight years in Worcester learning even more."

Mr. Wood worked as the head electrician for a large swimming pool installer for fifteen years and presently works for American Custom Builders. Additionally, he has done electrical work for the Samuel Slater Restaurant in Webster as well as phase one work at the new Samuel Slater Museum in Webster. His specialties are in the residential and light commercial areas. Accent lighting, backup generator installation, EV charging stations, circuit breaker installations, electrical panel upgrades, and outdoor lighting installations are just some of Mr. Wood's many areas of expertise.

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



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Webster Five steps up for African Community Education

Webster Five recently donated \$25,000 to African Community Education (ACE), a Worcester organization dedicated to assisting African refugees and immigrant youth and families in achieving educational and social stability. The donation will go towards ACE's campaign to renovate the new ACE Center and expand program access.

ACE's programs include after-school and family education programs, mentorship opportunities, community outreach and more. ACE currently serves 6.3% of African-born immigrants and their children living in Worcester within 200% of the poverty line. With their 2022 move to a larger headquarters, ACE looks to expand its programs and grow its reach to serve even more families.

"Webster Five is proud to support the important work African Community Education is doing to increase access to resources promoting personal growth and stability in our community," Don Doyle, president and CEO of Webster Five, said.

"African Community Education is extremely



Pictured in front of ACE's new building are Biodun Akande, board chairperson, and Kaska Yawo, executive director and co-founder of ACE. (Photo courtesy of the organization).

grateful for Webster Five's generous contribution to our organization," Kaska Yawo, executive director and co-founder of ACE, said. "This gift will have a tremendous impact as

we renovate the new ACE Center and expand access to education, outreach and workforce development programs for thousands of African refugees and immigrants in Central Mas-

sachusetts. We are thankful Mr. Doyle and the Webster Five leadership team recognize the important role this project has in our local community and believe in our work at ACE enough

to be an early supporter of these efforts."

To learn more about ACE's mission and programs, visit <https://www.africancommunityeducation.org>.

To learn more about Webster Five's charitable giving, visit <https://www.web5.com/about-us/our-story/our-news/>.

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YANKEE

Samuel Slater Experience to host a basic weaving workshop in February

The Samuel Slater Experience museum will host a three-session rigid heddle loom weaving workshop in Webster on Saturday, February 4, 11 and 18, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Local fiber artist Sharon Geyer will lead the workshop, which is structured for beginners and those who need a refresher course. In the first session students will warp their loom and start weaving a table runner. In the next session, they will plan another project and warp the looms again. In the last session, students will design their

own weaving project.

Students will learn all basic weaving skills: how to do a project planning sheet to calculate yarn requirements, how to use a warping peg, how to use the direct warping method, and weaving tips and techniques that will lead to success.

Fee for the course is \$150, payable in advance. The fee includes yarn for the first project. For more details and to register, email admin@samuel Slater Experience.org or call 508-461-2955.

Ready to go for 2023

The Webster-Dudley Veterans Council held its installation of officers for 2023 on January 4th. Pictured in front from the left are Senior Vice Commander Ronald Prest, Commander Victor Jankowski and Junior Vice Commander Randy Snow. Standing are Meeting Chaplain Kevin Kozdzal, Funeral Chaplain Joseph Sendrowski, Sergeant at Arms James Brinker, Adjutant Andrew Kozlowski and Treasurer Robert Guenther.



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Booklovers' Gourmet calls artists for Winter Light show

Deb Horan of Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster, has issued a "Call to Artists" for the store's February group show "Winter Light."

Work must be submitted by Thursday, January 26th to be considered. Entries must include the following details:

January 31st between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

Show dates are February 1-28, on view during regular business hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10-5, Wednesday, 10-6. The reception date is Saturday, February 4 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Work must be original

preferably with a wire.

Each artist may submit one to three pieces.

There is a \$10 submission fee due at drop off of accepted work.

PEOPLE CHOICE AWARDS RETURN

Booklovers' People Choice Awards are back. Money prizes will be awarded for the top three

picks voted on by viewers during the month.

All work must be for sale. Price is at the sole discretion of the artist. A 30% commission will be taken on any

sales during or as a result of the show.

Artists will be notified of acceptance via email by Friday, January 27th.



Webster Lake "Winter Mist" photograph by Deb Horan.

- Artist's name
 - Work title
 - Medium
 - Price
 - Size (including frame).
- Submission information is available via a link on the store's website, booklovers-gourmet.com.

Accepted work can be dropped off on Saturday, January 28th or Tuesday,

and reflect the theme of the show. Think winter sunrise/sunsets; long shadows on snow; glittering ice; light behind bare trees, etc. Media may include painting, photography, drawing, fiber, collage or other mixed media that can hang on the wall. Work must not exceed 16"x20" and should be framed and ready to hang,




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What happened? Did you break your hand?

BY JANET STOICA

I had no idea what was happening as I flew through the air on my way down onto the floor. It was the fastest of milliseconds as my head bounced off the floor (thank goodness for a nice thick carpet to cushion my recoil-

ing tete). Then, to add insult to injury, the ladder upon which I had stood moments before crashed down on top of me. It was a comedy, right? At first, I laughed to myself about my unfortunate and truly ridiculous situation but then, the pain came racing in to laugh back at me. There

was no way I could even un-crumple myself as I lay there on the attic floor in shock. I thought "I should've taken my cellphone with me like I'd planned in case I needed it for an emergency." Then, I groaned, cried, and yelped with pain. Just awful. I'd never broken any bones

before and wondered if I was going to experience my first such event at my now mature age.

After chastising myself and trying to analyze what had just happened, I managed to sit up and scoot over to one of my grandmother's antique chairs that lived in the attic. The high-back chair was stately and beautiful and made with some sort of seat styling that looked like it would collapse as soon as I put any pressure on it with my elbow to help me stand up. However, that 100-year-old chair kept its testament to the strength and durability of things made well from days gone by. I was able to rise and un-shine myself to walk gingerly towards the attic stairs and to make my way down to my own living quarters. Things seemed just fine. Didn't feel as if I had any broken bones, just broken pride.

Within 15 minutes I saw and felt that I was sorely mistaken to think that I had escaped my acrobatic maneuver unscathed. The back of my left leg was sore and turning a lovely shade of purple as was my left hand and wrist. My hand was shading purple on both the top and on my palm. Ice packs to the rescue. They helped to numb the pain. Tylenol seemed to help

a little too. I retired early that night but woke at midnight to excruciating pain in my left hand and wrist. I rolled from one side of the bed to the other thinking the pain was temporary. It was not.

Early the next morning I decided to drive myself to the local ER but then a friend volunteered. As we all know, whether you go to the ER for a hang-nail or a heart attack, you will be there for a good part of your day and I was. My head was CAT-scanned, even though I saw not one cat in the radiology department, and my hand was x-rayed, very painfully I might add. "Here, hold your hand like you're making the letter C," said the technician. "Easy for you to say," I muttered to myself trying to keep my fingers fanned out per his request. After watching daytime TV for several hours back in my ER cubicle, something that I rarely do and now I know why more than ever, I began to receive dribs and drabs of info from the ER doctor regarding my wrist and hand's x-ray results. "Well you don't have anything broken in your wrist or hand," he said, "we're still waiting on the CAT-scan results." (Dang those cats, I thought.)

More time passed and then the nurse came into my room with a splint, an ace bandage,

and an arm sling. "We're going to fix your hand and arm up right now," she said, "then once you get your CAT-scan readings, you'll be good to go." The brace immediately brought a little relief to my hand as it became stabilized. "Your head and neck scans are fine," the ER doctor said as he briefly popped into my ER room and then breezed right out. I phoned my friend who arrived to drive me home.

I visited my primary care doctor a week after my accident as my hand was still swollen like a blown-up surgical glove. She gave me instructions to ice my hand all weekend and to keep it in an upright position as much as possible while still wearing my brace. I was to phone her on Monday to advise her if my hand swelling and pain had decreased. When Monday arrived, I phoned my doctor's office with the message that my hand was still swollen, my pain was still horrific, and none of my knuckles were visible.

I now await my radiology appointment for a CAT-scan of my hand and wrist. What news will I receive? To be continued.....

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



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CHIEF'S CORNER

New Adventures Ahead

BY CHIEF STEVEN J. WOJNAR DUDLEY POLICE DEPARTMENT

This is one column I never anticipated I would be writing. After 34 years with the Dudley Police Department, including 20 of them as the Chief, my time has come to retire and move on to new adventures in life. Change is never easy; however, I have the good fortune of being surrounded by great people, both personally and professionally, and I am looking forward to what lies ahead. Since this is my last official "Chiefs Corner," I wanted to take the time to simply say thank you.

In the spring of 2003, a new Police Chief approached two local newspapers, The Webster Times and The Patriot, and presented an idea of a weekly question and answer column. Both papers took a chance on a young police chief and embraced this new idea. Social media and on-line services were

in their infancy. Most people got their news from the print media. Articles were faxed in each week and the staff members did a great job re-typing them and putting the entire paper together. When my first column appeared in the Patriot, a typo got the article off to a hilarious start. When my opening line said, "Hello to citizens of Dudley," one missing letter wished them "Hell" by mistake. This certainly got everyone's attention and got the column off to a flying start. Early on, getting questions, finding the time to research the answers, and putting it together each week was a bit of a challenge. It quickly became popular and part of my weekly routine. Twenty years later, it is still hard for me to believe the impact this column had on so many people. I hear from many, and I truly appreciate the positive feedback I have received over the years. I am approached at places such as the grocery store, with comments from many who look forward to

reading this column. Probably most satisfying was providing people who were not comfortable speaking to a police officer, the opportunity to do so without being a "bother." Many have wondered about a particular issue, and they were pleased to receive some information that was helpful. It gives me great satisfaction knowing they saw me as someone approachable to speak with.

Never hesitate as a citizen to reach out to your local police department. We have all taken an oath to protect and serve. The job is certainly more challenging than ever with outside factors and the demands placed upon the profession. Good people have stepped up to take on this difficult job and I have the greatest respect for those who choose the profession that has been so good to me. Knowing we have the support of the community is crucial. Dudley is very fortunate to have some great men and women working for the department and I know the community

is in good hands moving forward with Chief Marek Karłowicz. He is a great person and police officer and I have full confidence he will do well moving the department into the future. He will be introducing his own style of community awareness soon.

Thank you to the many people who have contributed to my career and the success of this column. I have been very fortunate. First and foremost is my wife Christine, who has been a tremendous supporter and asset in my life. My children, the rest of my family, friends, and community members have constantly been there to help whenever needed. The community has always been supportive of the department and me. Whether it was early on in my tenure as chief when certain individuals were trying to fire me for their own personal gain or when I faced the challenge of cancer, the outpouring of support that I received was beyond anything I could have possibly imag-

ined. You will never know the impact this had on my life and career. Everyone from the children, schools, community groups, seniors, and people from all walks of life have in some way made my job easier.

I thank you all for being there for these many years. It has been quite a ride and certainly has been a privilege and honor to have served as the Dudley Police Chief.

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NE Steak and Seafood evolves and grows with the times

BY ROD LEE

Today, more than ever, the Quirk family's New England Steak and Seafood in Mendon is not just about the fare in its name by which the restaurant has thrived for almost sixty years. Famous for its old-fashioned atmosphere, New England Steak and Seafood is also becoming known for

such things as partnering with the Mendon Police Department on a "stuff the cruiser" campaign to benefit struggling families in the Blackstone Valley. And, recently, "Christmas dinner to go," featuring Roast Prime Rib of Beef, pumpkin bread, cinnamon rolls and onion rolls. Whitinsville Realtor Jack Walker is among those who regularly frequent New England Steak and Seafood for lunch or din-

ner. Strong patronage is not uncommon!

- Anticipation continues to build for the opening of **Reunion Tap & Table's** second location, in the Whitinsville Plaza, in a spot formerly occupied by Jube's. Described by the Phantom Gourmet as "a big, fun eatery," Reunion's first restaurant in North Grafton was started by brothers Josh and Sean Briggs, Sargon Hanna



New England Steak and Seafood has become a go-to source for holiday takeout meals.

and "lots of family and friends." The new Reunion site will be a smaller ver-

sion of the first store but with many of the signature elements including the popular Pork Belly Poutine, Grilled Chicken Wings tossed in a house-made garlic parmesan sauce and French Onion Soup. Look for a launch this month or next; hiring for staff positions is ongoing.

- The Villatico family has a good thing going at **J Anthony's Italian Grill** in North Oxford and part of the reason for that is the lounge where "Game Day" including the Patriots' regular season-ending game in Buffalo on January 8 will attract a throng—as will Red Sox games just around the corner. With a Garden Room, a Deck Room and a Terrace Room, J Anthony's is a popular choice for private events.

- Many area residents may not be aware that in

addition to such staples as Fried Chicken and Short Rib Shepherd's Pie, **Samuel Slater's Restaurant** at Indian Ranch in Webster also plays host to events, like a celebration of Elvis Presley's 88th birthday on January 7th—and Comedy Night fun, which will resume the evening of January 26th.

- Nowhere is "Yankee hospitality" on better display than at the **Publick House Historic Inn** in Sturbridge, where outstanding cuisine can be accompanied by an overnight stay. The Publick House is also a favorite jumping off point for sightseeing, shopping for antiques, golf and skiing.

Restaurant and food-industry news is welcome for this column. Please submit material to rodlee.1963@gmail.com, or call 774-232-2999.

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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.

will be on display and for sale at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster, during regular business hours, Tues.-Sat., 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the café gallery. Artist's Statement: "I have been



Standing tall at Shop Small... Joan Nydam, Kathy Tonry, Keegan Tonry and Lauri Young represented Ms. Tonry's Katalina's Boutique at this year's edition of Shop Small 01588 in downtown Whitinsville. "We are the shop for every beautiful woman there is..." Ms. Tonry says of her store, which recently celebrated another anniversary.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24
 • ValleyCAST, the arts and culture arm of Open Sky Community Services, is partnering with the New England Sculptors Association for the second annual Inside and Out Exhibition. Seventeen sculptors from around New England have created over thirty works that will be on display in the Spaulding R. Aldrich Heritage Gallery, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville, and outside on the grounds of the Whitin Mill complex at the same address. The inside exhibit opened with a wine and cheese reception on Friday, January 13th. The public is encouraged to attend the closing reception, which will include announcement of three People's Choice Awards, on Friday, February 24th from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Voting ends at the end of the day on Friday, February 17th and the exhibit will end right after the closing ceremony on February 24th. For more information visit opensky.org. To schedule a visit to the gallery, call 508-234-6232 or email Cristi.Collari@opensky.com.

THROUGH JANUARY 31
 • "Lights and Icons: A Study in Acrylics," paintings by Jim Wilton,

photographing and painting for years, in fact all my life. I'm mostly self-taught. I have photographed lighthouses as well as other subjects for inspiration for my art. I spent many years painting portraits but have switched it up to trying lighthouses after a hiatus to raise children but also found myself return to portraits. I began photography of outdoor scenes and wildlife in 2008 after finding digital photography, making it more accessible. A few years ago I began painting again after a friend painted from one of my photos, thus inspiring me to try again. I haven't stopped but also got into crafts such as seashell jewelry boxes, Christmas trees and light-houses. I hope folks enjoy my work as much as I enjoyed painting it."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20
 • Comedy Night at Samuel Slater's Restaurant, 200 Gore Road, will feature Frank Santorelli from "The Sopranos" with special guests Chris Zito and Mitch Stinson. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. This is a 21+ event.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22
 • The New England Country Music

Club presents the Rhode Island Rednecks at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 with dancing and live entertainment from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

JANUARY 24 & FEBRUARY 21
 • "Take a Hike" with the Plummer Place Walking Club, 10:00 a.m., weather permitting, call the Northbridge Senior Center at 508-234-2002 for locations.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25
 • A Blackstone Valley Partnership Open House will be held at the shared offices of the Blackstone Valley Education Foundation, the Hub, and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, 670 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville, at 5:00 p.m. RSVP to kkearnan@blackstonevalley.org.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26
 • An "Alzheimer's Association Lunch & Learn" program will take place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. "The 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's & Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia" will be discussed. Sandwiches and salad will be served. Sign up in the main office.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29
 The Samuel Slater Experience, 31 Ray St., Webster, will host an Open House for residents of Dudley with free admission for up to two people from noon to 4:00 p.m. Proof of residency is required.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2
 • "Taxes and Retirement," how to optimize your tax strategy and gain control of your taxes in retirement, a seminar, will be presented by Greg Lavelle, CEO of Retirement Advisors, at the Northbridge

Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Coffee, tea and light refreshments will be available. Sign up in the main office.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5
 • A New England Country Music Club dance will be held at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge, featuring the band "Crossfire." Doors open at 12:15

p.m. with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9
 • "Going for the Goal," a Super Bowl party and luncheon, will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from noon to 2:00 p.m. Come hear about the historic first Super Bowl from Philip Vandersea, a

former Northbridge High football player who played in the inaugural AFL-NFL championship game as a member of the Green Bay Packers. A welcome and introduction will be offered by Ken LaChapelle, current head football coach of the Northbridge High Rams. This event is sponsored by FINE and the

HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 14

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| | |
|---|---|
| <p>COMEDY NIGHT AT SLATER'S FEATURING FRANK SANTORELLI PLUS GUESTS CHRIS ZITO AND MITCH STINSON JANUARY 20 • 7:30PM</p> <p>WINTER LANTERN PAINT & SIP JANUARY 25 • 6PM - 8PM</p> <p>THE DELOREANS: 7 PIECES OF BRASS KICKIN' 70'S & 80'S FEBRUARY 11 • 8:30PM</p> <p>COMEDY NIGHT AT SLATER'S WITH STEVE SWEENEY PLUS GUESTS GRAIG MURPHY AND CHRIS D FEBRUARY 17 • 7:30PM</p> | <p>JON STETSON: PSYCHIC MIND-BLOWING COMEDY SHOW WITH AMERICA'S MASTER MENTALIST FEBRUARY 25 • 7:30PM</p> <p>MUSIC WITH CROSSFIRE MARCH 11 • 8:30PM</p> <p>ST. PADDY'S DAY O'STRAVAGANZA COMEDY NIGHT FEATURING MIKE DONOVAN PLUS GUEST SEAN SULLIVAN HOSTED BY DAVE RATTIGAN MARCH 17 • 7:30PM</p> <p>JOANNA THE PSYCHIC MEDIUM MARCH 31 • 7:00PM</p> |
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SUNDAY
 March 19, 2023
 2:00pm

HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 13

Northbridge Police Association. Cost is \$10 per ticket, two-ticket limit. FINE will be raffling off a 65" TV during this program. Obtain raffle tickets upon signing up at the main office, or at the luncheon.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

• Enjoy a BVT buffet breakfast that includes waffles, pancakes, bacon, sausage, home friends, scrambled eggs and toast, 65 Pleasant St., Upton. Cost is \$7.50 per person plus gratuity. Doors open at 8:30 p.m. Sign up on the main office no later than February 1st. This is a self-drive, self-pay program.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16

• A "Women's Health Forum

with Dr. Maggie Lunch & Learn" program will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. Lifestyle choices impact the aging process. Come and learn about diet, nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity and social engagement for older adults. Space is limited. Priority will be given to those who have not yet attended one of Dr. Maggie's health forums.

Sign up with Amy Wednesday-Friday to attend.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

• "The Violin Kat," music by Violinist Kathryn Haddad, will be presented at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Kat is an eclectic freelance violinist based in the Worcester area. She has performed to many crowds. Light refresh-



Java King... Jim Hogan of Hogan Brothers Coffee Roasters addresses a meeting of the Webster Dudley Business Alliance at Booklovers' Gourmet in Webster on December 6th. Mr. Hogan has been Store Owner Deb Horan's coffee provider for years and once operated out of a location at 55 E. Main St. in Webster. He has been in business since 1995.

ments will be served. Sign up at the main office.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

• A CPR, AED and Epipen Training Class will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Instructor Scott

Celikbas from the Northbridge Fire Department will train participants in these important lifesaving techniques. A heart-saver certification will be awarded at the end of the course. The cost is \$55 per person, check or cash due to the instructor on the day of training. Sign up at the main office.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Peter Rugg's eternal search—Part II

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The stage made it to Polly's Inn just as the storm hit and soon a wet peddler entered and sat by the fire. When conversation turned to the phantom chaise, he admitted that he had seen the spectral carriage and its occupants four times in four different states in the last few weeks. Each time, a serious storm followed the sighting. He then, half jesting, remarked how he needed to take out marine insurance on his merchandise if this was going to keep up. Dunwell would encounter the wraith one more time some years later in Hartford, Connecticut while on a business trip. He immediately recognized the glowing countenance, commenting to the alarmed throng that the ghost was further from Boston than ever.

A toll operator on the Charles Street Bridge in Boston had many run-ins with the ethereal carriage. On several occasions, around midnight, the wagon raced through the booth never even slowing to pay the crossing fee. At one point the operator got so angry he threw his stool at the speeding rig. Imagine the look on his face when the stool passed right through the manifestation and bounced off of the guard-rail on the other side of the road.

Mrs. Betsey Croft, who later owned the Rugg home, claimed that a man once came to her door soaking wet with a scared, pale looking child by his side. The sight gave her a start, as she knew he was not of the present. His clothes were at least a century old and he spoke in an old English dialect. As she glanced over his shoulder in the

moonlight, she saw a decrepit antique carriage at the curb with a massive black horse harnessed to it. When the man asked for Mrs. Rugg she told him Mrs. Rugg died many years ago at a very old age, and that she has owned the house for a half a century. The odd-looking man told her he was in haste and needed to get to Boston. She told him that he was in Boston, but he did not acknowledge her insistence on the matter. He spoke of roads and people from years past and maintained his need to get home. As she looked them over intensely she knew beyond any doubt by their eerie shade that they were not of this world, but instead, ghosts of the past revisiting their former home.

William Austin wrote the accounts of Peter Rugg from 1824 to 1826 and claimed to have met the ghost himself when Rugg flagged down his carriage. The man identified himself as Peter Rugg and asked for directions to Middle Street in Boston. When told he was near Hartford, Connecticut, Rugg became irritated and argued with Austin before speeding off in furious skepticism at Austin's statement. The rig, horse and riders all vanished before the road turned.

Solid proof of Rugg's eternal journey exists in North Kingstown, RI where Route 1 crosses over Route 403, also known as Devil's Foot Road. It is there where Reverend Samuel Nickles encountered the wraith of Peter Rugg while returning to Providence from the village of Wickford. Near dusk, the preacher and his old nearsighted nag, Romeo, were caught in a sudden thunderstorm as they rode through

Quonset. As they entered a narrow passage between a steep hill and a rock ledge, he heard the thunderous sound of hooves in front of him. He looked up and saw a man frantically pulling at the reins of an immense horse and a frightened child gripping his arm for dear life. The horse drawing the speeding chaise had eyes glowing red like coals from a blacksmith's fire.

The reverend's nag became spooked and threw him from his saddle onto the great ghost bay. The preacher let out a scream of mercy and the horse bolted up the rock ledge in a flash of lightning, throwing the priest to the ground, unconscious.

When the preacher awoke, the sun was shining and Romeo was grazing in the grass nearby. As he glared at the rock, he saw cloven hoof

prints embedded into the edifice. He sped from the sight but for years to come, people from all over flocked to see the rock with its footprints that still sits behind a row of trees near a gravel parking lot immediately after the bridge on Route 1 South.

What holds Rugg eternally bound to wander the earth? A tavern keeper once suggested that Heaven has a way

of setting trial or judgment on a man for his actions or words. Peter Rugg, when he failed to fulfill his oath, cursed himself and his daughter to eternally ride the New England roads searching in vain for home.



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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Luke finds the Merry in Grinchmas

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Christmas shopping 2022 has been interesting, especially alongside a puppy named Luke Valentino. The retail industry is short staffed, short fused, and short on certain sizes. Not enough help. Not enough patience. Not enough hours in the day to curb long lines of shoppers who sneeze into their elbows, yet still leave us suspicious. Which variant might she be carrying? This the season to stay home, I thought to myself one Tuesday, December afternoon, despite managing a To Do list that seemed do-able.

1. Return an oversized rug purchased at Amazon at Kohl's.
2. Shop for a few Christmas gifts.
3. Vacuum my car. (I've found the process of sucking up dirt and washing windows to cleanse my attitude as well).

Like most zealous Christmas shoppers, I wanted to Get Things Done. Little did I know that a series of unfortunate events were about to foil a well-laid plan.

"We can't take that rug back. You'll need to bring it to Michael's for the return. The label is for UPS." The

Kohl's Sales Associate wore a nametag claiming her title. She stated the rule with knowledge, though I couldn't help but notice the glimmer of smile at her lips. Perhaps, she secretly didn't want to help me. Truthfully, who could blame her? My fixation with area rugs (buying and changing) was becoming a problem.

"Okay," I sighed. The rug sagged heavily on my shoulder, compromising a reserve of energy I typically have for shopping mayhem. I felt like a scrawny Santa carrying a sack, and who was soon to ride in a dirty sleigh. Others waiting in line gazed up from their phones to eavesdrop. Their concern, I knew, lay in being first in line.

I hauled the rug back to the car, popped the trunk and stuffed it back in. Luke popped his head out of the sunroof and smiled. "I'm so glad you're back!" My puppy found joy simply upon seeing me. "We have to go to Michael's now, Luke."

Keys in ignition; I backed up and made my way to Michael's. Slow-moving pedestrians crossed the street. I waved them by and found a snug parking spot.

The 6' x 9' sack hung tiredly over a weakened shoulder. "I was just sent here from Kohl's," I huffed. "Apparently you're able to take returns with UPS labels?"

The employee, as one might guess, did not come with the softness of her store's silk flowers. "We can't

take a rug without a box."

My eyes settled on her grey roots. My upper body slouched to the dead weight of an unwanted rug. More productively, my mind wandered to the Michael's storage room, where I imagined castles and castles of cardboard boxes stacked wide and high amongst spools of satin ribbon. The sales associate did not read my mind. Instead, she said, "I can't take that."

"You don't have one cardboard box to spare in this entire store?" With my free arm, I gestured to the store's abundant decorations. Hadn't these items been delivered to the store in boxes?

"Unfortunately we don't," she spat back. "You need to bring it to UPS and have it fully taped up. There's a UPS in Auburn," she added, as though traveling to a third location was helpful. I contemplated a third trip. Then I was struck by an ironic memory—that of my puppy attacking the missing box as would a lion his prey. He enjoyed every moment of dominating that box as it popped and bounced about the floor like a geometric cartoon. Back then it was funny, but now—

"Thank you," I said, and hauled the rug back to the car. Luke popped his head out of his box and smiled. "Hi there! It's such a nice day outside! Love you, Momma!"

It still was funny. "Guess where we're going, Luke?" I needed to

align my attitude with my puppy's optimism. His head squared. He smiled and listened intently.

"We're going to get Luke a present!"

"No way!" He did a puppy dance on the floor of his crate. He understood the majority of my message. "We're going to get Luke" was a phrase he knew, as was "going to get." Lastly, he knew his baby name. "I can't believe this is happen-



Luke Valentino is perfectly fine with a photo op; here he poses for the camera while on a Christmas shopping spree.

ing!"

I drove to the opposite side of the Mall, parked, and walked my puppy to the Mall's sidewalk. The Cookie Crumb'l storefront sign sailed into view. We followed the warm aroma of freshly baked cookies to an outdoor bench and sat down.

"What's your puppy's name? Can I pet him? Oh my gosh, this puppy just made my day!" Person after person came over to

pet Luke. I broke off warm pieces of a peanut butter cookie to share with my social pup. We told dog stories and laughed. Holiday music filled the air. Luke listened to every person, and lifted his paw. He understood. He validated. He loved unconditionally. The bitter edges of shopping turmoil crumbled away like pieces of cookie. Luke Valentino had offered the public a special dog's gift, that of Presence.

Then came a Christmas miracle.

There, across the street, in front of Longhorn Steakhouse to be exact, I saw it with my very own eyes—a massive, brown UPS truck. My legs wobbled as I grabbed Luke's leash. Within seconds, the two of us floated towards the truck. The UPS driver, amused by us, rolled down his window. "That is the cutest pup I've ever seen."

"Thank you." I struggled to breathe. "I'm so happy to have found you." Luke looked up at me, then at the driver. "We're so happy to have found you!"

"I have a rug," I huffed. "In my car. That way," I gestured. "We have a rug!" Luke said, sitting proudly at my heels. "I brought it to Kohl's, then to Michael's," I went on. "Wrong size. I was told I'll need a box in order to return it to you." My

problem spilled from me.

He nodded to the back of his truck. "I don't have a ton of room back here."

My heart sank.

"Wanna' play chase?"

Then the driver chuckled like Saint Nick and his cheeks became rosy. "I can make room for your rug. Where are you parked?"

"Seriously? That is so kind of you!" I said. "I have a stuffed cherry pie in the car!" Luke added, trying to keep up.

Minutes later, the three of us congregated at the trunk of my car, where we fumbled to squish the rug into a well-behaved square and seal the deal. "You know what? I can do this in my truck." The driver seemed skeptical of my packing ability. Nonetheless, the Saint Nick of UPS hopped back up into a tall seat and waved good-bye.

Meanwhile, Luke and I made one last stop. Shopping wouldn't be the same without a present for Luke Valentino.

The PetSmart sweater fit him perfectly, and the inscription said it best.

"Merry Grinchmas!"

Thanks to my puppy, I was able to put the Merry back in Christmas that day.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Find Luke on Instagram @livingwithlukevalentino

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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Timing chain in VW engine should last the life of the car



BY JOHN PAUL

cap, rotor and spark plugs. Although, that did not fix the running condition, it has a high idle, and bad fuel mileage.

A. These cars had pretty good on-board diagnostics that didn't require a scan tool. Cycle the ignition key ON-OFF-ON-OFF-ON within five seconds. Then count the number of times the "check engine" lamp flashes on and off. The number of flashes represents the code. A code of 55 is the end of the code string. If you only get a code 55 there are no hard error codes stored in the computer. It has been my experience that if there are no vacuum leaks and the idle speed control motor is operating normally, the issue is a poor electrical ground. The main grounding point is near the thermostat housing and over time these connections get corroded and cause a host of drivability problems.

Q. After reading your recent article, I was wondering whether my car has a timing belt or a timing chain. I own a 2017 Volkswagen Passat SEL Premium with a 1.8 Liter Turbo. It is an absolutely great vehicle and has been a joy to own.

A. Over the years Volkswagen has gone back and forth between timing belts and timing chains. In your vehicle with the 1.8-liter engine it uses a timing chain. Volkswagen did have some issues with timing chain failure in earlier years due to the timing chain guides. With your car if the engine is well maintained, there is no reason to think the timing chain shouldn't last the life of the car.

Q. I have 1986 Dodge Aries that is running poorly. I am trying to get a scan tool for this engine, but all I find is the OBD 1 (on-board-diagnostics) to OBD 2 adapter wire. Can use that with the OBD2 scanner for 1996-2022 cars on my Dodge? My mechanic already changed the computer and

Q. I'm looking for a big SUV for my growing family, not something quite as big as a Chevrolet Suburban or Ford Expedition XL. I have narrowed my choices to the Nissan Armada, GMC Yukon or Tahoe and Toyota Sequoia, any thoughts on these?

A. They are all good choices if a large SUV is what you are looking for. In the spirit of full disclosure, I only have driven the 2023 Sequoia a short distance, the hybrid drive seemed to work smoothly but I found the ride a bit stiff. The Armada is a good choice and a bit

cheaper than the competition. Recently I evaluated the 2023 Chevy Tahoe which is very similar to the GMC Yukon. I found the performance from the big V-8 engine impressive and 10-speed transmission was a great match to the engine. There is seating for up to eight and even in the third-row adults can be comfortable. The second and third rows fold flat, and the cargo space is cavernous. Fuel economy was with the 6.2-liter V-8 was according to the EPA 14 MPG in the city and 18 MPG on the highway. My road test was mostly city driving and I averaged 15.2 MPG according to the on-board computer and premium fuel is recommended. Like all new vehicles it is important to road test the tech and I found all of the controls simple and easy to use. Of the vehicles you are looking at I would put the Chevy Tahoe/Yukon, first, Toyota Sequoia second and Nissan Armada in third place.

Q. I own a 1991 Ford Mustang ragtop, with only 91,000 miles on it which is garaged in my winter home in Florida. I installed four new Cooper Cobra tires about 3000 miles ago. I returned once in summer and once in Fall to check on things. When I got there two tires were flat. I went to two different tire shops to check for leak and nothing was found. Could the original rims be the problem. Can I add a sealant to stop the leak?

A. Although tire sealant may work it would be my last

resort. I would rather the tires were removed from the wheels, then the wheels cleaned, and a bead sealer used to get a better seal. Corrosion on the wheels can over time can be the problem and sometimes the cleaning and sealing solves the problem. But yes at 32 years old the wheels could even be starting to get porous or are beyond the point of sealing and may need replacement.

Q. I brought my car into the garage, and they replaced the two front wheel bearings and hub assemblies. When I picked the car up it seemed okay then I started hearing a slight whistling sound, didn't think much of it so I just shut my window and continue to drive within 10 minutes I was slowing to a stop to take a right hand turn I was going very slow as a residential neighborhood I slightly pressed on the brake as I

was taking my right hand turn and it just started clanging and rocking really loud with the lightest pressure on the brakes I never had any issues of that nature prior to bring my car into the garage. What should I do?

A. Don't drive the car and have it towed back to the garage to be inspected. From your description it sounds as if the mechanic may have not secured a brake caliper. When the brakes are applied the caliper may be jumping off its mount and

hitting the inside of the wheel.

John Paul is an 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, jrjohnfpaul.

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Watch out for tax-season scams



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

It's that time of year when we do our taxes — but it's also the same time that tax scammers go to work. What scams should you watch for — and how can you avoid being victimized? Sadly, the list of scams is pretty long, including demands for payment or requests for "additional information" pertaining to your tax refund, in which the sender asks for your Social Security number and other personal information. These scam emails can look quite official, often incorporating the IRS logo. You might also receive scam text messages

containing bogus links claiming to be the IRS website or an online "tool" that can help process your refund faster. But keep these points in mind:

- The IRS generally won't contact you by phone and won't contact you by email, text messages or social media channels to ask for personal or financial information. The IRS begins most correspondence to taxpayers through regular mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service.
- The IRS won't call to demand you make an immediate payment through a prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If you owe taxes, the IRS generally will mail you a bill. And the IRS won't threaten to bring in the police or another law enforcement group to arrest you for not paying your taxes.

In general, be extremely skeptical about any type of communication purporting to be from the IRS

that sounds bullying or over-inquisitive — and certainly don't give out any personal or financial information. But these fake messages aren't the only tax-season scams out there. You might even receive a direct deposit from what appears to be the U.S. Treasury Department — but if you weren't expecting it, something's likely not right. This payment could be a sign that a fraudulent tax return was filed in your name, and it might be followed by a communication from a supposed IRS agent requesting this overpayment be sent to them. If this happens to you, you'll want to contact the IRS right away, and you could also ask your bank to return the deposit to the government.

Other scams don't claim to originate directly from the IRS, as scammers pretend to be from real or imaginary tax organizations. For example, you could get a message from the Taxpayer Advocate Service, an independent

organization within the IRS, but this agency won't contact you without a legitimate reason. Or you could receive a message from the nonexistent "Bureau of Tax Enforcement." Your best bet is to delete these messages immediately or send them to your spam folder.

Not all tax season scams originate from fraudulent IRS representatives or fake agencies. You also need to be careful about whom you hire to prepare your taxes. If possible, get a recommendation from a trusted friend or family member. And keep in mind that a legitimate tax preparer must have a valid Preparer Tax Identification Number and must sign your tax return. If someone doesn't have this number or is reluctant to sign your return, it may well be a sign that this individual is a "ghost preparer" who only wants to pocket your fee.

Tax scammers are, unfortunately, here to stay — but remaining vigilant can help you keep them from causing problems for you

in this tax season and all the ones in the future.

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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REAL ESTATE

Planning to retire? It could be time to make a move



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

If you're thinking about retirement or have already retired this year, you may be planning your next steps. One of your goals could be selling your house and finding a home that more closely fits your needs.

Fortunately, you may be in a better position to make a move than you realize. Here are a few things to think about when making that decision.

Consider how long you've been in your home. From 1985 to 2008, the average length of time homeowners typically stayed in their homes was only six years. But according to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), that number is rising today, meaning many homeowners are living in their houses even longer.

When you live in a home for a significant period of time, it's natural for you to experience a number of changes in your life while you're in that house. As those life changes

happen, your needs may change. And if your current home no longer meets them, you may have better options waiting for you.

Consider the equity you've gained. Also, if you've been in your home for more than a few years, you've likely built up significant equity that can fuel your next move. That's because the longer you've been in your home, the more likely it's grown in value due to home price appreciation.

While home price growth varies by state and local area, the national average shows the typical homeowner who's been in their house for five years saw it increase in value by over 50%. And the average

homeowner who's owned their home for 30 years saw it almost triple in value over that time.

Consider your retirement goals. Whether you're looking to downsize, relocate to a dream destination, or move so you live closer to loved ones, that equity can help you achieve your homeownership goals. NAR shares that for recent home sellers, the primary reason to move was to be closer to loved ones. Plus, retirement played a large role for those moving greater distances. Did you know that Marzeotti Group was licensed in Florida!

Whatever your home goals are, The Marzeotti Group

or a trusted REALTOR can work with you to find the best option. They'll help you sell your current house and guide you as you buy the home that's right for you and your lifestyle today.

Retirement can bring about major changes in your life, including what you need from your home. Connect with us or a trusted REALTOR to explore the opportunities.

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Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (intention), Amen.

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

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