

Samuel Slater Experience enjoys a banner first year

BY ROD LEE

The Samuel Slater Experience on Ray Street in Webster faced the kind of challenges that would confront any startup—any nonprofit—in the first year of its existence, when the museum opened in March of 2022.

The biggest of these being, will the people come? Will patronage justify Chris Robert's efforts to bring the story of pioneering manufacturer Samuel Slater and the history of the town of Webster (and Dudley and Oxford) to life?

For all involved in the venture, the answer is a resounding yes.

"We had more than 4000 visitors, groups of all kinds, schools, organizations, and a lot of private events, corporate and Chamber of Commerce gatherings," SSE's Barbara Van Reed said on March 11th.

Her remarks came a week after an official celebration of the museum's first anniversary, which drew strong backing from local businesses and an appreciated turnout.

"There were a lot of happy raffle winners," she said.

As evidence that the SSE is indeed attracting all sorts of support, a baby shower was taking place in the large meeting room just off the lobby, as Ms. Van Reed spoke.

"That's been our major focus, to let people know we're here," she said. "In some respects the



Jacklyn Bonneau, a guide at the Samuel Slater Experience in Webster, introduces Steve and Kathy Bullock of Medway to the interactive aspects of the museum. "I'm a teacher at heart," Ms. Bonneau told the couple.

first impression people have of a museum is that it's stodgy. People don't think of the museum industry as a growth business. But this is different. It is interactive. This is what museums are going to be like in the future. We have good space and we have Main Street with the ambience."

The Samuel Slater Experience also has the volunteers, who serve as guides and in other capacities. They are the backbone of the operation, she said.

"They are the best people in the world. This couldn't happen without them," Ms. Van Reed said.

Word of mouth—people telling others about the museum—is driving attendance, she noted. Visitors are coming in from near and far.

Plans are afoot to expand on what has already been put in place.

"We are looking at developing an exterior site plan with more parking," she said. This will enable the museum to host concerts and other attractions beyond its doors.

SAMUEL SLATERS

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Immigrants: Kayce Martin's American success story

BY JANET STOICA

This is the first in a series of articles about local immigrants and their lives in the United States, why they came, how they lived, and what their outlook is about this country.

She arrived in the United States from Mexico when she was a teenager. The second of four children, all girls. Her father, who was a military man in Mexico, died young from a very sudden and unexpected heart attack. Her mom was also young, now a widow, and afraid for her four daughters. So she sent her daughter, Kayce, to live with her aunt in California. Kayce's mom wanted the best for her girls. Soon Kayce met her Marine husband while in California and when his tour-of-duty was over, he opted to return to Massachusetts. Kayce went with him to marry and start a new life. The couple had three children who are now young adults. She is no longer married but in a good relationship with an admirable fellow.

"My mom never remarried," said Kayce, "she was all about us, her daughters. She wanted to ensure we would all be okay and make good lives for ourselves and our own families. I was the second oldest and the only daughter to emigrate. It was an interesting beginning for me. My aunt in California ran a children's daycare center so I helped with everything, cooking, cleaning, and minding the children. I met my



future husband through a cousin who knew him. When we decided to move to Massachusetts, my mom became very worried for me. She felt that moving 3,000 more miles away from her was way too far but I took the opportunity."

When she arrived in Massachusetts, she accepted a position in a bakery and enjoyed the work there. She baked, she cleaned, and she washed many, many pots, pans, and dishes. After a year or two baking, Kayce took a job at Nypro (since acquired by and now known as Jabil, Inc.) in northern Worcester County. Nypro is a medical device manufacturer. She stayed for fifteen years working her way up the job ladder. "I began as an inspector/packer,"

KAYCE MARTIN

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SAMUEL SLATERS

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Meanwhile bookings continue. On Saturday, April 15th, Sharon Geyer, a fiber artist who specializes in weaving, will make an appearance as part of a one-day Log Cabin Workshop for intermediate weavers. This occurs from noon to 3:00 p.m.

Ms. Geyer began her weaving career in 1995 as a tapestry weaver (French tapestry technique) under a master artist in Philadelphia. From there, she began to explore patterns and textures on a large eight-harness loom. Her membership in the Yankee Fiber Friend Guild has advanced her prowess over the past two decades.

Her most recent work has been as a rigid heddle weaving instruc-



Old trunks, an old radiator, an old phone booth, silent movies and all kinds of exhibits are housed at the Samuel Slater Experience on Ray Street in Webster.

tor at Woolworks in Putnam. The rigid heddle loom captured her heart from the first project in 2019. The ease of use and portability of these little looms has led to the current weaving workshop



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series she has developed.

On Thursday, April 20th, Richard Hughes returns to the SSE, during School Vacation Week, "and we have discovered that kids love silent movies," which are part of Mr. Hughes' presentation. "You'd be amazed," Ms. Van Reed said.

The Samuel Slater Experience will benefit too from being incorporated into the final segment of a documentary about "Slater-ersville" that has been coming together for some time now.

The museum's hours are 10:00

a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Friday and Saturday and noon to 4:00 on Sundays. Visit <https://samuelslat-erexperience.org> or call 508-461-2955 for information about field trips and tours.

Visitor numbers including those who showed up for private events totaled 4500 in the museum's first year, Sally Patterson of the SSE said.

Another beginner weaving class starts April 22.

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

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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor



BY ROD LEE

Old Navy 'clothed' in excitement for opening of Sturbridge store

Inside the new Old Navy store in the Center at Hobbs Brook on Charlton Road in Sturbridge on the first Saturday in February all of the merchandise was arranged just so and there were tote bags with coupons inside for customers to use at the sales counter.

Jen Laramee who is the store's manager was in an ebullient mood after taking part in a morning ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"You look like a walking advertisement for Old Navy," Ms. Laramee was told, as she took a few minutes to talk about the grand opening.

"Head-to-toe, all the time!" she said.

Ms. Laramee is a veteran with the company, which is part of the Gap Inc. family.

"Twenty years, out of high school," she said. "I worked in Connecticut before. I live in North Brookfield but grew up in Spencer."

She loves being within easy driv-

ing distance of work.

As Deb Compton of Old Navy Communications explained to me in an email prior to February 4th, the Sturbridge store is part of a company strategy focusing on "new stores in smaller markets. Last year the brand opened twenty-five new company-owned stores with approximately twenty-three stores planned in 2023."

The Old Navy store, which is a reincarnation of one that occupied the grounds in the past, adds to the already established mix of businesses at The Blackstone Retail Group's Center at Hobbs Brook. These include Walmart, Marshalls, Michaels, Staples, Petco and Stop & Shop, making the plaza one of the largest open-air retail sites in the Mass Pike-Rt. 20-Rt. 84 area.

Ms. Laramee and her staff are proud of Old Navy's reputation as a provider of quality casual clothing to consumers.

"You can truly be a customer here your whole life, with the Gap family," she said. "When I tell people I work for Old Navy it's 'wow,' never

a 'eww!' To be part of the Sturbridge community" with such attractions as Old Sturbridge Village, shops, restaurants, hotels and tourist destinations in Central Massachusetts "is very exciting."

Construction on the new store began in the late summer of 2022 and personnel moved in during the

month of January.

The culture is "denim and this is where lot of our fashion comes from," she said.

Ms. Compton points out that "we're also the first value retailer to integrate the shopping experience by offering the broadest assortment of women's sizes in stores and

online, with no price difference."

Old Navy thinks of its approach as "democracy of style and service."

"We are creating magical moments and we're happy to execute those moments," Ms. Laramee said.

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Joan Costa's 100th a time for reflection on bowling, dancing

BY ROD LEE

Sitting in the kitchen of her home on Granite Street in Webster the afternoon of February 25th, Joan Costa could not help but wonder what all the fuss was about.

Having almost attained the age of one hundred years old is not that big a deal, in Joan's mind. Her son Richard "Dick" Skrocki and the rest of the family feel the milestone is significant, however,

which is why they are throwing her a birthday party on Saloon No. 6 on Worcester Road on March 12th.

Forty or so people are expected to attend.

Joan Costa is the daughter of Polish immigrants. Her dad, Zygmunt, was a weaver. Her mom, Rose, was a homemaker and mother to nine children. Joan's sister, Sylvia Kozlowski, lives downstairs and "comes up every day to read the paper," Ms.

Costa said.

Ms. Costa has white hair that was done up in a perm. She is an unpretentious woman and seemingly reluctant to share much about her life even though it has been one of hard work with time set aside for candlepin bowling and dancing.

"Guess who Stasia Czernicki feared most" on the lanes? Mr. Skrocki said. Then he turned a



Ms. Costa with her first husband, Henry Skrocki.

COSTA BIRTHDAY

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KAYCE MARTIN

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stated Kayce, "and since I enjoy learning and wanted more education, I was promoted to Group Leader, then Quality Inspector."

Nypro offered classes to its employees and Kayce enrolled immediately. She took as many classes as she could and soon became a Quality Technician in the document control area. She then progressed to Quality Supervisor and managed the entire floor in her department. A true Horatio Alger/American dream story. Kayce speaks with great feeling about Nypro. "It's where I got my start," she says, "the company owner really cared for his employees and we gave him back

what he gave to us. A real opportunity to better ourselves. It was a great place to work with excellent company benefits."

She worked twelve-hour shifts, had three children, and did a lot of homework for promotion. "It was hard but I knew I was making a better life for my family," she said. "I knew I couldn't support myself on the wages I began with so realized that I had to work my way up to get somewhere and get a better paycheck. I always tell my kids that in this country you can always be what you want to be if you work hard enough for it. There's a big difference between being poor in America and being poor in Mexico. In Mexico, you see poor young kids in the streets and there is no help for them. In America at

least the government helps you get on your feet with many wonderful programs. In America you get the government's assistance until you can better yourself. If you apply yourself, you can be whatever you want."

Kayce Martin currently works as the manager of the Quality Assurance Department in a neuro-surgical hardware company. Her position entails ensuring strict adherence to ISO guidelines and processes, personnel training, and FDA compliance. The company sells its products internationally and she is proud to be a part of its success.

"Don't wait for opportunity, create it." George Bernard Shaw

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Fabulous and functional mending class is April 27th

BY JANET STOICA

On Thursday, April 27, an interesting and innovative class will be held at Southbridge's Jacob Edwards Library from 6 – 7:30 p.m. The class is Functional & Fabulous Embroidery

textile industries. When people in these countries purchase or accept our used items that means they don't buy their own country's new manufactured goods. After learning about this, I stopped donating my old clothes and decided to mend them or make them into

Is this what this world has come to? "Fast fashion is so cheap," explained Ms. Shoup, "that sometimes it really is more economical to just buy a new item. But, many of these new items are made in countries where unsafe working conditions are the norm using child labor. The news brings us stories about the tragic loss of life in these Third World garment factories where, in just one case, an unsafe Bangladesh factory collapsed killing over 1,000 workers and injuring 2,500 others. The cost of all those lost lives is immeasurable. So, really, the only remaining local menders in the U.S. are those individuals who might alter suits and/or wedding gowns."

Through her association with

Southbridge's Jacob Edwards Library Director, Margaret Morrissey, Lynda Shoup will be pleased and happy to demonstrate, teach, and expound upon all types of mending techniques, both simple and elaborate, to her fellow learners. Her goal for this class is to have a good group of people who are looking forward to a fun event. "I hope our participants will learn new skills such as attaching a patch, learning some new stitches, and learning mending/embroidery flairs. I'm looking forward to them leaving the class with reasonable skills and an understanding of the mending trends. If there is a strong interest for additional classes, perhaps additional lessons will be held. There is a growing movement of

the mending art. It's people who are becoming much more conscious of our environment."

Ms. Shoup has also taught previous classes at the Jacob Edwards Library, namely Introduction to Art Journaling and Using Historical Images in Mixed Media Art.

If you are interested in attending or if you have any questions, please pre-register with Ms. Shoup by emailing mendingclass@gmail.com. Get ready for a most interesting and educational program! April 27, 2023. 6-7:30 p.m. Jacob Edwards Library, 236 Main Street, Southbridge MA 01550. (508) 764-5426. www.jacobedwardslibrary.org

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Lynda Shoup displays a sample of Embroidery Mending.

dery for Mending with instructor Lynda Shoup from Webster. Using the latest trend of Upcycling or, creative reusing, which transforms unwanted textile items into new and creative materials, participants will embark on an environmentally-friendly cause and are invited to bring along items to mend. Additional mending materials will be provided by Ms. Shoup who will showcase the many ways we can all contribute to our world's sustainable goals.

"I've been sewing since I was about five years old since many of my family members sewed," said Lynda, "but my mother was a 'magic mender' meaning that whatever she mended was invisible to the eye. She really knew how to make an item look new again. This valuable skill has become a lost art as people have gravitated to the world of fast fashion where much of our clothing is discarded and new inexpensive clothing is purchased in its place. In the past few years, however, I've learned and read that many of the Third World countries that our discarded clothing donations were being sent to just don't want our textiles anymore as it ruins their own

something useable like cloth bags, cleaning cloths, etc."

"The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry world-wide," says Lynda, "with the oil industry being the first and many fabrics are made from petroleum. I haven't purchased new clothes in a while since learning about the mending trends. When I researched this development, it's what inspired me to pursue Visible Mending, a mending technique that's meant to be shown and admired vs. the invisible method used by our parents or grandparents which wasn't meant to be seen." By the way, as of November 1, 2022, Massachusetts residents must now recycle their old clothing and textiles instead of throwing them into the trash.

Lynda stated that sewing classes are not taught in school anymore and she gave an example of a young lady she met who had no clue about sewing on a button when it fell from her shirt. Not only did the young lady explain that she did not know how to sew the button back into its place, but she further stated her shirt was quickly replaceable by going online to L.L. Bean or Land's End and ordering a new one. Ouch!

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COSTA BIRTHDAY

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look in Ms. Costa's direction with a smile on his face.

Stasia Miles Czernick was an American professional candlepin bowler from Webster who set the all-time candlepin record in her hometown for ten strings with 1388 pins. She had a series of personal highs, including a 194

single, a 466 triple, and 707 for five strings. She also shares the world record for women's doubles (2382), mixed doubles (2676) and women's five strings (707). She was world champion eight times, singles queen six times, a member of the women's doubles title team three times, mixed doubles team twice and a member of the world's women's title team in 1965.

Ms. Czernick was inducted into the Candlepin Bowling Association Hall of Fame in 1987. She died in 1993.

"Joan was her No. 1 competitor," Dick Skrocki said.

"When I was growing up, that was the thing," Joan said. "Bowling and dancing."

Except for a pacemaker put in about five years ago, and the walker she uses to get around, Joan Costa has no complaints about her health.

She did have a scare a while back.

"I would say my rosary and go get the newspaper when I had a sharp pain and screamed and my sister came up," she said.

Her life now is much quieter than it once was. Reading one to two books a week, including novels by Nora Roberts and Danielle Steele, is a favorite pastime. As is enjoying the company of members of the family. Her grandson Brian and his daughters Olivia and Vivienne arrived as we spoke. She is grandmother to Brian and Andrew and a great grandmother to Olivia, Vivienne and Lena.

Standing by during the conversation, Dick Skrocki was eager to



Joan Costa of Webster, who turns 100 this month, with her grandson Brian, two of her great granddaughters, and her son Dick Skrocki.

share details about his mom, who he describes as "a very hardworking lady. She would go above and beyond."

In high school at Bartlett, his mother had "the best shorthand around," he says. During World War II she wrote letters to a friend's husband.

"He wrote my friend letters and I wrote back for her," she said.

A resident of Webster since

moving to town when she was in the third grade, Ms. Costa has been married twice. She identified her first husband, Henry Skrocki as "the love of my life." Henry worked for the Worcester Soda Co. and then the Webster Times.

Her second husband, Constantin Costa, operated an auto body shop in Southbridge.

Joan worked at Bates Shoe Co. in Webster in a stitching job and after that at American Optical in Southbridge as an inspector.

Asked if the town of Webster or any organization had recognized her longevity, she said "no, no."

She wouldn't have wanted all the fanfare anyway.

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Spring means fun events at Gladys E. Kelly Public Library

BY JANET STOICA

Spring can't arrive a moment too soon for so many of us and our local libraries have plenty of events planned for our enjoyment.

world novel more like a rapturous beginning,' Hig somehow survived the flu pandemic that killed everyone he knows. His gripping story is 'an ode to friendship between two men...the strong bond between a human and a dog, and a remind-

March and April from 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. featuring an uplifting and magical early childhood music class. Sweet and endearing.

Weekly ongoing programs include Craft-Making Mondays, Tuesday Mini-STEM challenges,



Webster's Gladys E. Kelly Public Library has a host of exciting programs and activities sure to please just about everyone.

Assistant Library Director Evan Hale posted on the library's website "Our Library Director, Sondra Murphy, had her second child at the end of February. I will be spending the next three months trying my best to fill her shoes. Fortunately, we have an excellent staff and wonderful patrons who make every day at work enjoyable. We have some really cool stuff in the works for the spring. Keep an eye out next to the parking lot between the library and town hall. We're going to be installing a Community Garden thanks to a generous grant from the Association for Rural & Small Libraries. We will have several raised planting beds for adults and children to help us cultivate. We're also planning some programs to run near harvest time!

"Secondly, The Friends of the Library will be hosting 'Bites, Books and Blooms: A Taste of Webster' on the evening of April 27th. This fundraiser will feature local restaurants, as well as floral decorations related to several books chosen by members of the community. Check the flyer in our newsletter for more information.

"Lastly, we're going to be hosting best-selling author Peter Heller on May 18th. Peter will discuss his novel "The Dog Stars." According to a review in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune: "In this 'end-of-the-

er of what is worth living for.'"

This program is made possible by grants from the Janet Malser Humanities Trust and the Webster Cultural Council. A Mom's/Caregiver's Drop-in Group will be featured on Tuesdays in March, April, and May from 10 a.m. – 12 noon. Moms and caregivers are invited to come by, bring their children, ages 0-5, to a drop-in open play time. In this community-building event, toys are set out for the children to play with as you get to see and know other parents from the area who have children of similar ages. Stop in any time between 10am and 12pm and stay as little or as long as you like.

An additional children's program will be held on Saturdays in

and a Thursday event of STEM programs with special STEM happenings on Fridays. All details can be found on their website or by stopping by the library and checking out their listings. Have fun, use your local library, and enjoy yourself! The library is chockful of fun and exciting events for children, their caregivers, and adults of any age. www.gladyskellylibrary.org @websterpubliclibrary @gladysekellypl 508-949-3880 webstercirculation@gmail.com

"The only thing that you absolutely have to know is the location of your library."

– Albert Einstein

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Jonathan Babcock brings folk songs to the masses

BY JANET STOICA

Recently the Massachusetts' Cultural Council doled out 400 individual grants totaling \$20 million to the artists of our area and Jonathan Babcock was one of the successful recipients.

According to its website, the Mass Cultural Council works to el-



Folk music is in Jonathan Babcock's blood and he loves sharing his songs. He has performed all over, including in Taiwan.

evate our rich cultural life in Massachusetts. The MCC partners with communities across the Commonwealth to expand access, improve education, promote diversity, and encourage excellence in the arts, humanities, and sciences.

Jonathan's discipline is listed as Interdisciplinary which encompasses his musical style and talents. "My grant request showed artistic disciplines from my past," said Mr. Babcock. "My current project demonstrates history through music. A song can be a starting point to speak with children and to tell them about historical events that have happened in their community. A good example would be the Spin Song which focuses on the mills in the area and the stories told by the people who worked in those mills. The songs make it easier to learn through music."

Mr. Babcock has also played his folk songs at local nursing homes for residents' enjoyment using an historical perspective. "It's all acoustic-based with just my guitar which gives a great experience for everyone," said Jonathan. "Just last week I played a Woody Guthrie song and a new resident had her hands up in the air and was clapping along. I thought she might've been someone who had actually been to a Woody Guthrie concert back in the 60's in her younger days. Many of my songs are from the years of 1955-1970. Many pass the test of time--even if you don't know the

title, you remember the song. I sing songs like *Don't Fence Me In*,

Take Me Home Country Roads, and *Good Night, Irene*. Most of

BABCOCK
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Innovation helps The Uxlocale coming out of the pandemic

BY ROD LEE

The need for continuing adjustment as the Commonwealth slowly emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic is not lost on restaurateurs like Chef Elaine Cowan of The Uxlocale on West Hartford Ave. in Uxbridge. Just as it isn't for the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, which is pushing hard for legislators on Beacon Hill to make outdoor dining and cocktails-to-go a permanent fixture here.

Provisions for this allowance,

which was granted to the restaurant industry during the health crisis, are set to end on March 31st.

The Westborough-based MRA notes that while the state's restaurants received strong support from customers when they needed it most, many were still forced to close, or were placed at the edge of bankruptcy. Takeout was a huge help, but close to 5000 restaurants shut their doors. Those that remain are struggling with worker shortages, supply-chain issues, the loss of financial assistance and inflation—as the cost of food soars.

Outdoor dining has helped to save the day, in numerous instances.

"It's played a tremendous role in the recovery of our hospitality industry," State Rep. Manny Cruz, D-Salem, points out. "And it's really been a net benefit for the city. We look like a different community, similar to what you would see in Europe, with respect to outdoor dining."

With the short-term reforms that were enacted during Covid-19 about to disappear, the MRA is asking state legislators to give restaurants the opportunity to sell beer, wine and alcohol with takeout and delivery orders.

Ms. Cowan is known not only for her fresh and flavorful fare with an accent on farm-to-table, but for

her a willingness to think of new ways to increase the appeal of The Uxlocale—like a recent disco dance party she hosted.

This includes a step she took to expand the dining experience for her patrons.

"We are fortunate to have a great enclosed (from the parking lot) patio space," she said. "I also added a 'greenhouse;' people have been eating outside all winter! It's been a saving grace."

Submit restaurant news to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.



'Greenhouse' dining is one way The Uxlocale has dealt with space restrictions



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BABCOCK

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us know these songs and they are easy-going, gentle, and very comforting.

Jonathan states that his retirement mission is singing these songs along with writing a few. He has put together tunes entitled "Four Trains Crash on the Airline Trail" which refers to the Thompson CT train disaster from years ago and The Molasses Flood Song about the great Boston Molasses Flood of 1919 when a 50-foot-tall steel tank filled with 2.3 million gallons of molasses collapsed on Boston's waterfront spilling its contents via a 15-foot-high wave of molasses that traveled at 35 miles an hour. It destroyed everything in its path and the number of deaths wasn't known for days.

"I've always been interested in history," said Mr. Babcock. "My family's history dates back to the early 1800's and they were originally from England." The Dudley Woolen Mill was built by his great-grandfather and was sited at the current Stevens Linen building.

Mr. Babcock is in the middle of producing a new album with 13 tracks of historical and interesting songs in the genre of folk, retro-pop, and love. He is in the mixing process and after he is satisfied with the results a master copy will be made in the next three months. Marco Giovino will be his CD producer and Jonathan was quick to note that Mr. Giovino has played drums for Robert Plant's Band of Joy and has also collaborated with Norah Jones. "I'm very fortunate to have met him and grateful that he has assisted me," Mr. Babcock stated.

"For my type of music, a house concert event is appropriate, when someone invites 15-20 people to their home or venue. I intro the song, give a few historical facts, and then perform. It's a good gathering that people do appreciate."

Writing songs like these is pure poetry according to Jonathan. When he was in college at UMass-Amherst he had the opportunity to be an exchange student in Taiwan at the University of Taiwan. "It was the only public university that

offered Chinese language classes," he said, "and I was interested in learning the Chinese language. It's a character-based language that depends on a pictographic memory. Very different from the alphabetic languages most of us know here in the U.S." While at the University of Taiwan, Jonathan played for 800 students at an open-air concert.

"My goal is to get these songs out for people to hear. These days even with all our internet choices there is no central site to find these types of songs. It's all about the songs so people can listen and learn about where they live and where they came from. Lots of people go along in life without knowing their local history. I hope to have audio liner notes for my published songs to give a brief history of each. I'll have CDs for sure," Jonathan stated.

Jonathan's repertoire includes a few hundred songs from pre-1975 including folk and pop songs plus pure Americana from the likes of John Denver, Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins, Jim Croce (he does a great "Operator"), and Peter, Paul, and Mary. He also plays bass guitar with DW and the Shake Makers Band. To contact Jonathan: jonathanjmusic@protonmail.com

jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



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NOTE: Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the *Happenings!* section of the Xpress newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.

THROUGH MARCH 31

• "Transitions: Winter to Spring," paintings by Anne M. Tisdell, will be featured in the café gallery at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster and can be viewed during normal business hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10-5 and Wednesday 10-6. A Meet-the-Artist reception was held on March 11th. A native of Swampscott on the Massachusetts coast, Ms. Tisdell has dabbled in art all her life with sketching and drawing. She has exhibited in various places in Central Massachusetts and started taking art classes with



American Author Nathaniel Philbrick, an expert on his subject, will discuss the travels of George Washington at the North Main Street Church in Uxbridge at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, March 26.

Bill Griffiths at the Worcester Art Museum "which brought me to a new level as an artist." Booklovers' Gourmet was her first exhibit in 2020 and 2021.

**FRIDAYS DURING LENT
MARCH 24 AND 31**

• Lenten Fish Dinners, dine in or take out, are being offered at St. Denis Church, Douglas, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. (NOT on April

6). Includes baked fish, coleslaw, tartar sauce and your choice of baked potato or white rice. For an additional cost, add a cup of homemade clam chowder. Prices to be determined; order online before 7:00 p.m. the Thursday prior, or tickets will be available at the door on Friday (while supplies last). SaintDenisChurch.com/fish-dinners. Cash, check or Square payments accepted on arrival.

SATURDAY, MARCH 25

• The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Home & Community Expo will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Northbridge High School, 427 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville. This is one of the area's premier events to advertise your business to residents and prospective customers. In addition to single booths, double booths and nonprofit booths, a "golden egg" exhibitor add-on provides for a prime location on the floor with identification as part of the scavenger hunt. Small businesses from all over the Blackstone Valley will showcase their products and services. For more information, contact Liz O'Neil, loneil@blackstonevalley.org or 508-234-9090 Ext. 102.

SUNDAY, MARCH 26

• Author Nathaniel Philbrick will present "Travels with George and the Importance of Local History" at 2:00 p.m. at the North Main Street Church, 23 North Main St., Uxbridge. Mr. Philbrick's latest bestseller, "Travels with George: In Search of Washington and His Legacy," was published in September of 2021. A book signing will follow Mr. Philbrick's remarks and books will be available for purchase by cash or check only, courtesy of the Samuel Slater Experience pop-up shop. This event is sponsored by the Uxbridge Historical Society, the Arthur R. Taft Memorial Trust and the Board of Library Trustees.

MONDAY, MARCH 27

• Ed the Wizard's Alchemy Laboratory hosted by the Gladys E. Kelly Public Library, 2 Lake St., will be presented starting at 3:30 p.m. Mixing real science with magic, patrons will learn and help perform magical transfigurations, vanishes and other amazing feats using everyday household items. This program is supported in part by a grant from the Webster Cultural Council, a local agency supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

ON OR AROUND APRIL 1

• Southwick's Zoo, 2 Southwick St., Mendon,

opens for the season, with such attractions as a 35-acre deer forest, petting zoo, parakeet landing walk-through aviary, EARTH Discovery Center, Skyfari Ride, Woodlands Express Train, Rainforest Conservation Maze, Soaring Eagle Zipline and more. www.southwickszoo.com.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

• The Town of Sutton will host its 2nd Annual Earth Day Cleanup. Anna Wence from the Genius Hour at Sutton Middle School is coordinating the event with friends Caitlyn, Taylor and Teagan. Last year's cleanup resulted in the collection of two tons of litter. Ms. Wence and her colleagues are hoping to expand the initiative this year. Al's Rubbish, the Sutton Police Department,

the Sutton Fire Department, Sutton 4H, the Boy Scouts and the Board of Selectmen have all pledged their support.

Blackstone Valley Children's Place & Beginning Bridges CFCE will present a Free Kids Fair at the Whitin Community Center, 60 Main St., Whitinsville, from 10:00 a.m. to noon. The event includes WCC's "Eggstravaganza"—an egg hunt with prizes.

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

• The Mumford Council #365 Knights of Columbus will host a Palm Sunday Breakfast at Mumford Hall, 77 Prescott Road, Whitinsville, from 8:00 a.m. to noon. The menu will include Omelets to Order, French Toast, Scrambled Eggs, Home Fries, Baked Beans, Sausage, Coffee and more. Cost is

\$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and \$6 for children under 12.

• The New England Country Music Club will host dancing featuring "DJ Felicia" at the Uxbridge Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St. Doors open at 12:15 with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Joe Iamartino of the Thompson Historical Society for a talk, "The Nipmuc Lithic Trail," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Bos-

HAPPENINGS!

continued on page 12

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HAPPENINGS!

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ton Road, Sutton, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

FRIDAY, APRIL 7

• The newly formed Men's Discussion Group meets for coffee, doughnuts and conversation from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. at Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. Call 508-234-2002 Ext. 1305 for more details.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12

• The Massachusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center invites patrons of Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center to explore the facility's new home at Memorial Square in Whitinsville. \$5 cash admission; a pizza luncheon will be served. This is a self-drive, self-pay program. Space

is limited. Sign up with Amy Cowen at Plummer Place.

THURSDAY, APRIL 13

• Celebrate the end of winter and design your own floral arrangements to take home at Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. \$15 per person payable the day of the program. Includes all materials and instruction. Sign up with Amy Cowen. Space is limited.

SUNDAY, APRIL 16

• The New England Country Music Club hosts dancing featuring the "Crossfire" band at the Uxbridge Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St. Doors open at 12:15 p.m. with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19

• Join Rainne Richards and the Plummer Place Pluckers for a ukulele sing-a-long

concert featuring favorite songs from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s at Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, at 2:00 p.m. Lyrics provided. All are welcome. Snacks will be provided. Sign up at the front desk.

SATURDAY, APRIL 22

• Douglas's Silver Club is sponsoring a bus trip to New York City to see the new Titanic exhibit. Cost is \$120. There will be lunch at Ann and Tony's in the Bronx and time on Arthur Avenue (lots of Italian bakeries, butcher shops and delis). For more information call Sue at 508-476-5820.

• A Home Baked Ham & Bean Supper is being offered by the Uxbridge Congregational Church at 5:00 p.m. in the Community House, 8 Court St., behind the Uxbridge Town Common. The menu includes baked ham, home-baked beans, potato salad, coleslaw, brown bread, beverages and dessert. Donation is \$12 per person. Children

under six are admitted free. Raffle tickets will be available. RSVP by calling 508-244-7849. A limited number of tickets will be available at the door. Come enjoy good fellowship and good food.

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

• Come dance the afternoon away to music from the Disco era of the 1970s at Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Costume attire is highly encouraged. \$10 per ticket, limit two tickets per person. Sponsored by AdviniaCare and F.I.N.E. Sign up in the main office.

SUNDAY, APRIL 30

• The Uxbridge PSG 2023 is hosting a Spring Vendor Fair from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Uxbridge High School, 300 Quaker Highway. More than thirty local vendors will be on hand with unique gifts. Raffle items will be available. PSG-raised funds go towards the Uxbridge High School Class of 2023 graduation event to help students celebrate in a safe, alcohol and drug-free environment. Contact Uxbridge PSG FMI: psguxbridge@gmail.com or on Facebook @Uxbridge-PSG2023-Parents for a Safe Graduation.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 3

• Music for seniors by Howie Newman will be presented at The Residences at AdviniaCare, Northbridge, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Howie Newman brings music and laughter through his original songs. This program is sponsored in part by a grant from the Northbridge Cultural Council, a local agency supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

TUESDAY, MAY 9

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Carol Crossed curator of the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, with a talk, "Vintage Tweets: A Book of Suffrage Era Postcards," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

MAY 15-17

• Douglas's Silver Club is sponsoring a three-day trip to Maine (Portland and Kennebunkport) that includes guided tours of

both places, a tour of the Victoria Mansion, a visit to the Seashore Trolley Museum with a trolley ride, two nights lodging, two breakfasts and two dinners (one of them lobster) as well as some free time for shopping. Cost is \$399 per person. Call Sue at 508-476-5820 for further details.

MAY 27-28

• World War II Tank Demonstration Weekend takes place at the American Heritage Museum, 568 Main St., Hudson, featuring the M4 Sherman, the M24 Chaffee, the M5 Stuart, the M18 Hellcat, the M26 Pershing and the first-ever event for the AHM's new M35 Jackson Tank Destroyer. Times are 9:00 a.m. on Saturday and 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. www.americanheritagemuseum.org or call 978-562-9182 for further details.

SATURDAY, JUNE 3

• St. Peter's Parish, 39 Church Ave., Northbridge, is hosting a Yard Sale and Vendor Fair from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Rain date is Saturday, June 10th. Volunteers will be available to pick up donated items. Vendors are welcome. Vendor tables may be secured for \$40. Call 508-234-2156 or email parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org for more information.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10

• Get The Led Out performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 7:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

SUNDAY, JUNE 11

• Kip Moore performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

SATURDAY, JULY 1

• Chase Rice performs at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, Webster, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

SUNDAY, JULY 9

• Rumours: The Ultimate Fleetwood Mac Tribute Show, takes the stage at Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road, 1:00 p.m. www.indianranch.com.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Andrew Noone, author of "Bathsheba Spooner: A Revolutionary Murder Conspiracy," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Mark Savoie of the Thompson Historical Society for the presentation "The Mass 15th of the Civil War and Wilder Holbrook, Sutton," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.



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Lucky Ducks will float again for hospitals' fundraiser

BY JANET STOICA

You know them, you love them, and you've proven over the many years of the Harrington Auxiliary's Lucky Duck fundraiser event that it's a proven winner for

ated (and awarded per department requests) \$10K in 2021-2022 for the Webster and Southbridge campuses. The Webster hospital now has 24 in-patient beds in their Psychiatric Unit along with 16 in Southbridge and room for future

It's one of our most well-attended events and has become very successful."

The Auxiliary has provided financial support for many projects that benefit staff, patients and the local community including \$50,000 for the new Webster Emergency Department, \$25,000 for the Webster Recovery Services Unit, \$50,000 for the Southbridge Emergency Department's renovation project, and seed money for the robotic Rapid Disinfectant.

According to their historical records, the Auxiliary is an organization that began in 1932 and is composed of dedicated men and women who have joined together to volunteer their time and talents to support and enhance hospital services. They work to create interest in their members and the public to volunteer their time and service without financial compensation. Their many fundraisers provide the two hospital campuses with needed money for equipment and programs to enhance patient comfort and care and their continued interaction with the communities provide a vital link between the two hospitals and the 17 towns they serve.

The group has recently welcomed a local church club whose

members chose to begin a new phase of community service. The Auxiliary welcomes and looks forward to meeting and working with new members from all denominations and churches. If there are other groups in the 17-town area who are seeking to offer their volunteerism for this valuable and

worthwhile team, please contact Kelly Hibbard, Manager of Volunteer Services at (508) 765-9771, Ext. 6472. They will welcome you and your greatly appreciated service!

jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



Lucky Ducks as depicted on this shirt are an important fundraising tool for the Harrington Auxiliary, whose members work tirelessly for equipment and services.

raising valuable scholarship funds for students in the towns served by the two campuses of UMass Memorial Health Harrington Hospital.

The event is customarily held at the Southbridge Town Common where the numbered Lucky Duck floating ornaments are available for participants to choose when making a donation. There are cool prizes for those Lucky Ducks that are randomly plucked from the water during this great afternoon outdoor fun event. The Webster and Southbridge hospitals have also been the beneficiaries of additional fundraisers that have been established by the Auxiliary. The group has worked tirelessly and persistently over the many years of their existence, including during the times of COVID, to raise funds for equipment and services at the UMass Memorial Health Harrington Hospital facilities in the two towns.

The Lucky Ducks are certainly not the Auxiliary's only fundraising event as they have recently completed their \$10,000 pledge for the renovation of the Cancer Center Pharmacy in Southbridge in June 2022 as well as their pledge to the Southbridge ER renovation completed in June 2022. They appropri-

expansion.

Barbara Avery, president of the Auxiliary and a member since 2012, stated that the group's mission is to raise funds to support all hospital programs. "Our efforts have benefitted various hospital departments with services and items such as childrens' toys, basic Spanish classes for our Emergency Room personnel to assist patients of Spanish descent, comfort supplies, therapy games, art supplies for the behavioral health departments, and scholarships for students totaling \$15,000. The scholarships are awarded to those students who are pursuing healthcare careers. This year the Auxiliary will award five \$3,000 scholarships.

"We also work with Thompson Speedway every August to hold our Annual Classic Car Show. It's such a great event and we are very grateful for Thompson Speedway's support of this worthy cause. There are close to 100 vehicles in the fields of the Speedway where the cars on display are also judged. We hold 50/50 raffles and trophies are awarded to the winning vehicles. The Speedway graciously opens its grounds to the public all day. We have deejays playing great music with continuous additional raffles.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Lukey V. claims redemption

BY AMY LECLAIRE

In his defense, it had been a harried week. Dog owners understand. We do the best we can to give our pets the attention they need and deserve, but somehow, some way, we fall short.

“Luke, I just need to practice one more time. We’re going to go for a walk. Promise.”

Luke had been so patient with me (and family) all week. Daddy had another conference call. Momma had more dances and revisions. Bro was off to Boston. Again, my heart went out to Luke through all of it. He needed me, but I just couldn’t grab the time to give back. One more SEND. One more POLISH. Luke didn’t deserve such human craziness. Yet still, he waited patiently. He chewed his bone. He walked around the house. He collapsed on the floor and waited by the door. He held onto one thought, a fragile hope that I’d stop what I was doing and think about how it might feel to be a dog who can’t grab his keys and go.

“If I can’t bring my dog, I’m not going.” The motto, a classic

Dog Person quote, sits on the border of a frame, one of a few treasured gifts shared with me. The saying became my mantra. Luke’s been on crowded buses, through fragrant Health & Beauty aisles, and on the cement floors of dog-friendly coffee-shops.

“Your dog is so cute! Do you mind if I pet him?”

“Of course she doesn’t mind!” Luke puts his chin up and smiles like a dolphin for one more person who reciprocates his affection. I’ve developed a friendly observation throughout my dog-owning years. People seem kinder in the presence of pooches.

“Is he a service dog?”

I can’t lie. Even though my dog absolutely “serves” the needs of the community, it’s just not ethical to pretend.

“My name is Luke Valentino. My Momma writes stories about me!” Luke is proud of me, proud of the person he just met, and proud to simply be out in public. His expression, once again, brings out the best in people.

“He’s not a service dog,” I confess. “I’m a columnist. I take him along for story inspiration.” Like jelly from a doughnut, the white lie oozes from my mouth. Writers are not entitled to such special treatment. Nevertheless, I want to keep Luke in the loop.

“Want to take a selfie with

me?” Luke has no idea that most dogs don’t go everywhere with their owners. He very well may think he’s a service dog. “You can follow me on Instagram too!” Luke’s personal web page, found at livingwithlukevalentino, features pieces of our excursions. The content of the posts tend to be light-hearted and humorous. However, the pictures do not tell the full story, I’m afraid. One picture features Luke Valentino playfully galloping along a trail in the forest of Wells State Park, Sturbridge. The date was Saturday, February 18th. Here’s how things went down.

“Luke – Come!”

The command echoed with the stern sound of my teacher’s voice. Luke has responded to this voice since he was an eight-week-old pup. My neighbors have heard the echo through opened bedroom windows, while I’ve watched Luke consider straying from the yard. “LUKE, COME!” I’ve caught him in the act so many times. My voice, aided by an electric collar which corresponds to a remotely charged “beep” sound, has always been effective. Add food rewards to the mix, and the deal is sealed.

His electric collar had been on during that hike pictured so nicely on Instagram. His recall had been stupendous. “Luke,



Luke takes the polar plunge at Wells State Park in Sturbridge



COME!” He heard my voice, then the beep, and ran back to me as though training for a horse race “Don’t worry!! I just wanted to see what the pavement smells like up ahead! I’ll never leave you, Momma!”

Off-the-leash time has proved an exhilarating experience for both of us. Watching my dog gallop amongst verdant pines reminds me of the easy way in which a tropical fish flows with the current of the sea. Dogs naturally need to run. I was about to learn, however, that freedom can also prove dangerous. Lukey V. was about to claim redemption for a week of neglect.

He tiptoed to a charming cove bordering the lake and sniff. No problem there. Then he dipped a paw in to test the waters. Things were getting hairy. My husband sniffed out his next move and approached the shoreline. Before we had a moment’s notice, he did the dirty deed.

“Ahhhhh. So refreshing.” Our pup took the polar plunge. Worse, he was completely unapologetic about the move, and oblivious to our calls. Like a child surrounded by candy spat out of a pinata, he moved freely, biting at the air to catch bubbles. In my mind’s eye, the song “I Feel Good” by James Brown played on.

Lukey V. had seized the moment and wasn’t about to stop, just as his parents had not been to halt their activities a week prior. His paws flapped against the water while he created bubbles and swam like a confused duck.

“Luke!!” Our teaching voices failed us this time. Meanwhile a crowd of onlookers approached.

“Oh my gosh, look at him go!” We tried to lure our one-year-

old pup back with treats.

“He doesn’t need food. He be like, ‘I got water, Man!’”

The teen-ager’s remark dripped with sarcasm. Nevertheless, it was spot on. We watched our pup grab minutes of unadulterated, joy-infused moments. Cliché as it may sound, Luke was in his own world.

We had to wait for him, just as he had for us. We snapped a few pictures (may as well capture the crazy) and, finally, something struck our pup. Perhaps the cold temperature had made its mark. More likely—

“Oooh-weee!” He shook his way to shore and accepted a few treats. “Swimming sure does work up the ol’ appetite.” He came back for food.

He shook off the cold until his fur frizzed out like an afro on a humid day. Then he rubbed himself, shoulder down, on the pavement. Thankfully, the midday sun was hot and full. We took him to a grassy meadow along the trail and let him shake, rub, and absorb the heat. I even surprised myself with a clever survival tool. Though I’m not known to be the G. I. Jane type of girl, the weapon came to me like a dream. “I have a blow-dryer packed in the car!”

We warmed and groomed our pup until he appeared fresh and fluffy. Then we drove home and counted our blessings while he curled asleep in plush blankets lining the floor of his travel crate.

Sometimes a dog needs to take what he needs. Just as we do.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Find Luke Valentino on Instagram: @livingwithlukevalentino



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REAL ESTATE

Wondering what's going on with home prices?

The recent changes in home prices are top of mind for many as the housing market begins gearing up for spring. It can be hard to navigate misleading headlines and confusing data, so here's what you should know about today's



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

home prices.

Local price trends still vary by market. But looking at national data, U.S. house prices were largely unchanged in the last four months and remained near the peak levels reached over the summer of 2022. While higher mortgage rates have impacted demand, low inventories of homes for sale have helped maintain relatively

flat house prices.

This chart shows that the average decrease in the last two quarters is about .47, which is less than half of 1%.

What does this mean for you? If you currently own your house, you may be concerned

about even the smallest decline in prices. But keep in mind how much home values grew over the last few years. Compared to that growth, any declines we're seeing nationally are likely to be minimal. While prices continued to fall from November, the rate of

decline was lower than that seen in the summer and still adds up to only a 3% cumulative drop in prices since last spring's peak.

It's also important to remember that every local market is different. That's why it's essential to lean on experts from The Marzeotti Group or a real estate professional for the latest information

on the home prices in your area if you're planning to make a move this spring.

To understand what's going on with home prices in your market and how they could impact your goals, contact The Marzeotti Group at 617-519-1871 or a local real estate professional today.

U.S. House Prices Largely Unchanged

2022 Month-Over-Month Percent Change in Home Values

Case Shiller											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.1	1.7	2.6	2.1	1.5	0.6	-0.3	-1.1	-1	-0.5	-0.6	N/A
FHFA											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.6	1.9	1.5	1.6	1.2	0.1	-0.6	-0.7	0.1	0	-0.1	N/A
Black Knight											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.3	2.3	2.7	2.5	1.5	0.2	-1.1	-1	-0.5	-0.4	N/A	-0.4
CoreLogic											
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.4	2.2	3.3	2.6	1.8	0.6	-0.3	-0.7	-0.5	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4

Sources: Case Shiller, FHFA, Black Knight, CoreLogic

Booklovers' Gourmet to host Ed Londergan for author talk

Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St. in Webster, welcomes Ed Londergan on Saturday, March 25th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. to talk about his latest novel, "Unlike Any Other," and to sign copies of the book.

Unlike Any Other is a work of historical fiction about Bathsheba Spooner. It is the story of an 18th Century woman from a prominent New England family who went from a life of privilege to the gallows.

Signed copies of Mr. Londergan's book will be available for purchase.

Bathsheba Spooner was the daughter of Timothy Ruggles, a general in the French and Indian War, president of the Stamp Act Congress, chief justice of the Court of Common Pleas and a leading loyalist in Massachusetts during the Revolutionary War. He was the epitome of upper class.

Like her father, Bathsheba was smart, strong-willed and a staunch British loyalist. Force to marry a

man she did not love, she withstood her husband's abuse for years

decisions, and her ultimate demise will show readers that Bathsheba Spooner was in fact, Unlike Any Other.

Ed Londergan is the author of the award-winning books "The Devils' Elbow" and "The Long Journey Home."

Having researched American history for many years, he is a frequent speaker with a focus on colonial Massachusetts.

A graduate of Holy Cross, he lives in Warren.



Mr. Londergan, author of "Unlike Any Other."

until a young Connecticut soldier entered her life. But when this well-heeled mother of three small children discovered that she was pregnant with the soldier's child, her thoughts quickly turned to murder.

Based on a true story, the events that follow Bathsheba's life, her

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Can you count on Social Security?



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

If you're getting closer to retirement, you might be thinking more about Social Security. Specifically, can you

count on it to contribute part of the income you'll need as a retiree?

There's been an increase in alarming language surrounding the solvency of Social Security, but in reality, its prospects are not nearly as gloomy as you might have heard.

Here's the story: Under current law, Social Security is estimated to exhaust its trust funds by 2035, after which benefits could be cut by 20%, according to the 2022 Social Security Trustees report. However, the large cost of living adjustment (COLA) (8.7%) for 2023 could cause the trust funds to use up their resources sooner.

But this outlook may represent a worst-case scenario. For one thing, the cost of the 2023 COLA will be somewhat offset by higher taxes on workers contributing to Social Security. The maximum amount of earnings subject to

the 6.2% Social Security tax jumped from \$147,000 in 2022 to \$160,200 in 2023. And in looking down the road, further increases in this earnings cap may also help reduce the gap in the trust funds. Increasing the payroll tax is another possibility for boosting funding to Social Security.

And here's a political reality: Social Security is a popular program and it's unlikely that any future Congress wants to be blamed for reducing benefits. Of course, there are no guarantees, but it seems fair to say that you can reasonably expect some benefits from Social Security when you retire.

But perhaps the bigger issue is just how much you should depend on Social Security for your retirement income. On average, Social Security benefits will provide about 30% of a beneficiary's preretirement earnings, according to the Social Security Administration. But the higher your earnings before you retire, the lower the percentage that will be replaced by Social Security.

Still, you'll want to maximize the benefits that are available to you—and that means deciding when to start taking Social Security. You can begin as early as 62, but your monthly payments

could be as much as 30% lower than your normal (or "full") retirement age, which will likely be between 66 and 67.

Even if you were to wait until your full retirement age before collecting Social Security, you'll also need to draw on other sources of funding. So, while you are still working, it's a good idea to keep contributing to your IRA and 401(k) or other employer-sponsored retirement plan.

The amount you contribute should depend on your overall financial strategy and your financial needs, so, for example, you probably shouldn't put in so much into your retirement accounts that you feel significant stress in your monthly cash flow. But when you do get a chance to invest more in these accounts, such as when your salary goes up, you may want to take advantage of the opportunity.

Ultimately, you should be able to count on Social Security as part of your retirement income. You may want to consult with a financial professional to determine when taking Social Security makes the most sense for you and how you can also get the most from your other retirement accounts. You'll want a retirement income strategy that's built for the long run.

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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THE CAR DOCTOR

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Infiniti JX35's wheel balance and suspension issue is tricky



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I own a 2013 Infiniti JX35 (today's QX60) and recently have been experiencing a suspension issue: when driving at high speed,

as well when the car goes over a bump or over a pothole, I experience a vibration through the steering column. It feels as if the wheels are vibrating. Have replaced the shocks (Infiniti OEM parts) along with lower control arms and sway bars (also OEM parts). I have gotten the tie-rods checked out by a mechanic. Have also gotten the tires balanced as well as alignment checked. While the ride has improved with the suspension parts replacement (car has 120k miles) the problem has not been fixed. The mechanic has also checked out the steering column itself. Wondering what else could be driving this feeling of wheel vibration through the steering column. Any ideas or suggestions?

The other tip that I have read is the power steering pump may need an insulator (a fancy foam ring) that isolates power steering vibrations and noise.

Q. I ordered a Chevy 2500 extended cargo van on April 30 2021. You read that right, 2021. It has still not been built. After finally contacting the general manager, where I ordered it from, I was told the holdup is that I ordered an 8-cylinder engine. They offered to get me a 6-cylinder engine that they felt reasonably confident they could order through a dealership they own in Florida. However, it would be a GMC Savana. I have no problems with a Savana. (There has been a \$5000 increase in the vans since I ordered mine). I have followed a GMC blog that someone posted that 8 cylinder engines are not being offered in vans anymore, but I cannot find any info stating this. After they showed me the build sheet, I noticed that Bluetooth was not listed. When I questioned this, I was informed that it is only available with the 8-cylinder engine. That doesn't seem right to me as I cannot see what one has to do with the other. My questions to you are: are 8 cylinder engines being offered in vans anymore? Do you have any thoughts on the 6-cylinder engine for an extended cargo van? What, if anything, does Bluetooth have to do with an 8-cylinder? Do you know what the holdup is on building these vehicles after almost 2 years? Have you ever heard of GM price protection?

A. This model Infiniti is very fussy about wheel balance and suspension wear. There are several technical bulletins about proper procedure balancing the wheels. In addition, there are notes about checking the ball joints and control arms (transverse link). Even the slightest movement requires replacement. Since those items have been replaced, the next step is to look at the power steering itself.

of them.

Q. I have a 2011 Chevy traverse, just got a new AAA BATTERY installed by AAA tech. While installing I noticed a black tube and asked what that was used for, and tech said to air vent battery but my battery was missing the elbow air unit to attach and advised I get one ASAP. Do I need one of these air kits and should I get a tech to install it?

A. All batteries give off fumes and when they are under the hood it is not a problem. In your Traverse the battery is located in the car so there is a vent tube to allow gases to escape and prevent corrosion. You should get the vent installed, and any mechanic or DIY'er should be able to put the vent tube assembly back in the car. These vent kits are available at most auto parts stores.

Q. What are your thoughts on using a torque wrench on oil drain plugs. I recently saw a mechanic changing

oil using a battery impact driver. When I asked he said he has it set to the proper torque.

A. You can't accurately tighten any fastener with a power tool, battery or air. Drain plugs have different specifications. On one of my vehicles, the drain plug is tighten to 25-32 foot pounds on the other vehicle (both 4-cylinder engines) the other is 18 foot pounds. When in doubt use a torque wrench.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over forty years' experience and is an ASE-certified master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your questions to jpaul@aanortheast.com. Follow John on Twitter @johnfpaul and friend him on Facebook at mrjohnfpaul.

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SPORTS

Numbers up, future promising for Shepherd Hill wrestlers

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

In the past the Shepherd Hill wrestling program has not been fortunate enough to have a full team. This year some 40 athletes turned up for the initial tryouts, though, leaving Coach Ray Ayotte optimistic as the winter season got under way.

"I really don't know what happened this year, for some reason kids started coming out of the woodwork to try wrestling," the coach said. "We'll be a very young team, but one that will be great for the future. In the past we've had to forfeit a lot of matches because we couldn't fill the weight classes. This year was different."

Ayotte has been with the program for eight years and he cannot remember the last time that he had a full roster.

One of the biggest surprises on the wrestling season for the Fighting Rams was eighth grader Sam Phillion. The middle schooler recorded 20 plus wins this season wrestling in the 106-pound weight

class and qualified for the State Tournament, where he unfortunately went 1-2 and was eliminated. While he may have found a diamond in the rough for this past season, Ayotte believes that he will lose the middle schooler to St. John's next year.

In addition to Phillion, Shepherd Hill also had three other grapplers qualify for the State competition. Advancing into the post-season tournament were Sawyer Ayotte at 138 and alternates Justin Kelly at 113 and Diego Gutierrez in the heavy weight (285) division.

In the Division 1 West Central Sectional Tournament Ayotte finished in second place and then took home fifth place in the State Tournament, allowing him to gain access to the All-State Tournament. Kelly and Gutierrez both finished fifth in their respective weight classes in the Sectionals, giving them that alternate status for the State Tournament.

At the States a wrestler failed to make weight in the 113-pound weight class, allowing Kelly to step up and get his opportunity. Being



Justin Kelly (above) and Sawyer Ayotte (below) are two reasons why Shepherd Hill High School's wrestling program is showing promise.



the alternate, Kelly was ranked as the final wrestler (16th) in the weight class, but the Shepherd Hill wrestler fought his way out of the bottom all the way to finish in fifth place.

"He continued to practice all week and was ready to go when he found out that he would be wrestling in the State Tournament," Coach Ayotte said. "Justin had a bad day at the Sectionals and was a much better wrestler than he showed that day, so he was pumped up and very excited to get the opportunity to wrestle in the States."

According to the coach, the two sophomores finished just about

where they should have finished in the State Tournament. The four athletes in front of both Shepherd Hill wrestlers are unbelievable grapplers.

Overall, Coach Ayotte was able to field a team that participated in each and every weight class this winter and although a relatively young team he is optimistic about the squad's future.

"Sawyer and Justin are only sophomores, and we have a bunch of freshmen and eighth graders on the team," Ayotte said. "They are all on the same track giving us a very solid foundation over the next few years. This year's success is starting to show we are making

our mark and getting more attention coming."

The success that the Shepherd Hill wrestling program has had is giving the coach more hope that more wrestlers will come out for the team next year. He hears the whispers of the reputation that the team is earning and people are talking about the Fighting Rams wrestlers.

Participating in the All-State Tournament Kelly was eliminated on day one, while Ayotte took sixth place and qualified to continue his season at the New England Championships on March 3rd and 4th.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Dudleytown II: The most haunted place in the U.S.?

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The Carter family left Dudleytown for the wilderness of Binghamton, New York. The Dudleytown curse followed them to their new home. Not long after they settled into Binghamton, the entire family was slaughtered by Indians.

Ed and Lorraine Warren mentioned the village in their 1989 book "Ghost Hunters." The Warrens wrote about accounts from the 1930s where local youths would drive up the old roads to the highest point of the hill to make out. The deserted village was also the perfect place to scare their dates. One story pertains to a certain football captain who took his girlfriend up to the ghost town and began to tell her stories of ghosts and demons. He got so into the story, he spooked himself and ran from the vehicle, leaving the girl behind. Was it a prank, did he really see something, or did his imagination overwhelm him?

Many of the stories in regard to the early days of the town, its people, haunts and creatures began circulating around the 1930s. The town is mentioned in 1939 but again, not so much in regard to the horrors, but in the famous people who founded it. In 1960, Fessenden Blanchard wrote about Dudley-

town and mentioned the curse as it was related to him. He described the vanished settlement as, "a few crumbling cellars, massive stone walls and overgrown footpaths which were formerly roads."

The tales of monsters and cursed ground in Dudleytown have drawn people from far and wide and unfortunately, not all of them were harmless ghost hunters. Satanic rituals became a common problem in the woods, and many are certain this may have released negative energy into the air that still lingers to this day. If Dudleytown was never haunted, it most certainly may be now.

In 1971, Joseph Owens wrote about the history of Dudleytown. It was mostly a recount of the events that plagued the villagers through the years, and once again, the "curse" was to blame.

In 1983 a film crew decided to do a story on the ghost town. Their accounts only helped cement the legend when the reporter got violently ill while trying to tell the story, and the equipment refused to work while in the confines of the village.

I was very fortunate to be able to visit Dudleytown many years ago before it was forbidden and illegal to enter. The trails, during our visit, were thinly defined in most cases

with Dudleytown Road and Dark Entry Road meeting a few miles from their origin in the center of the old town. Any evidence of a once-thriving village was either long gone or covered by the overgrowth of time. The woods were eerily quiet and void of wildlife, yet there was a certain serenity about them. It felt as if the trees and remains of stone walls and foundations were eager to speak of the history that made the place so famous. There are plenty of tales to peruse of the place and plenty of people who swear the stories are true, whether they have experienced the town for themselves or have only read about the history and haunts.

The area of Dudleytown is privately owned and has been for some time. Anyone caught within the boundaries of what was once Dudleytown will be arrested for trespassing. The town has gone as far as to rename the roads in order to confuse and thwart thrill seekers from going up there in the first place. Why Dudleytown? Is it the story of the ill-fated Dudley family coming to New England to settle?

Is it the stories of cloven-hoof beasts that drove residents to the brink of their sanity? Was it the mysterious over publicized ill-luck of the townsfolk? Was it any of these or all?

Abandoned ghost towns create the perfect backdrop for the creation of scary stories and myths. The tales of ghosts, demons, curses, satanic rituals and tragedy have made many swear that Dudleytown is the most haunted place in the

United States. Even if the place is now forbidden from the eyes, one may read about its history, using imagination to paint their own picture in deep corners of the mind.



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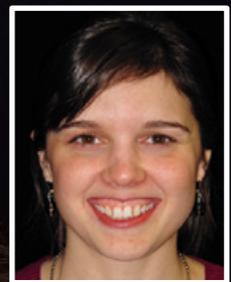
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