

Go Where the Rail May Run

BY PATTY ROY

Old Sturbridge Village is currently alive with thousands of lights – sparkling on trees and fences outside the early American homes of the 1830s. It's a special celebration called "Christmas by Candlelight" and a walk around the village is spectacular.

As the dwellings, shops and Meeting House are sourced from New England, they will look familiar to Worcester County residents, though the Christmas decorations they sport would have seemed strange to

those who lived during this era. The region had everything present day holiday makers like to see during this joyful season - plenty of greenery and red winterberries, wood to stoke roaring fires and a knack for pie-making and mulling cider.

But Christmas didn't really become a big deal until the mid-1800s when the Puritan hold on the population (and the holiday) finally loosened.

RAILROAD
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BVT town leaders meet to discuss budgeting

Member towns discuss concerns related to mandatory contributions, admissions, charter relevance

BY THERESA KNAPP

On Oct. 26, the Hopedale Select Board hosted representatives from the 13 towns that make up the Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School district.

Member towns include Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon,

Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge.

In the invitation to the member towns, Town Administrator Mitch Ruscitti said, "The intent of this summit is to engage in a district-wide conversation about our individual and collective community needs, the role that the vocational school plays in

meeting those needs, and the overall impact of bonded capital investments on our other public-school districts/systems. More succinctly put, there have been concerns expressed by constituents, boards, and committees across town boundaries regarding tough decisions about the use of funding sources."

The 1.5-hour meeting was held at the Hopedale Community House.

As she welcomed the group, Hopedale Select Board Chair Glenda Hazard said, "Over the years I've heard it said that the 13 towns in the BVT district don't really care how the rest of the towns in the district feel, and I called this meeting because I don't really believe that's true. There've been many times I've wondered how you all respond to financial constraints the majority of us are facing, and if there are other related concerns that we all share. To that end, I'm

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Charles Tatsis of the Worcester Model Railroaders Club at Old Sturbridge Village where his Christmas Town train layout is on display.

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HOLIDAY GIVEAWAY

Dr. Sean T. Lordan, DPT

RAILROAD

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As OSV relaxed some of the strictures on Christmas, there are a few anachronistic touches around the village that are magical, anyway.

You can ride in a carryall drawn by two American Belgian horses, a precursor to the group transportation of modern buses – definitely not out of place and time. Or, you can visit the more modern Christmas Express Model Trains set up by the Worcester Model Railroaders Club of Webster with miniature seasonally appropriate scenery, taste of transportation models to come.

The connection between railroads and Old Sturbridge Village? Railroading was just arriving on the scene in the 1830s and 1840s.

Charles Tatsis built his model railroad with a love that he has held for trains since he received his first set of Lionels many Christmases ago.

“I’ve been in this since I was four or five,” he said about his hobby. “When I was a kid you hoped for one of these or an Erector set. I got the Lionel trains and my brother got an Erector set. We built a lot of stuff with that.”

Model train tracks are scaled to various sizes with O Scale (1:48) being one of the most popular and oldest scales in the model railroading world.

“What it means is a quarter inch

to the foot,” he said. “A G gauge is a little bit bigger; it’s a half inch to the foot. HO scale is called that because it stands for Half O Scale, so it’s about an eighth of an inch to the foot.”

The Worcester Model Railroaders Club has a 40’ by 50’ HO layout. A second layout is 10’ by 37’ O gauge.

Some folks bring their own trains, but there are also club trains and cars that are free to try.

“Anybody’s welcome,” Tatsis said. “I’ll be glad to show them around.”

Tatsis enjoys creating his own little world on train set-ups. But it can be an expensive hobby if you let it, said with a smile.

Tatsis’ experience with trains is first hand on the Boston to Albany route. He was an engineer for Conrail, a freight carrier, for about five years, he said, after training for about five months in New Haven.

“I did a little bit of that and once in a while they they’d call us from Amtrak (passenger trains) to engineer,” Tatsis related.

It was the fulfillment of a childhood dream, he admitted.

The schedule he followed was leaving home on Saturdays at 10:31 a.m. and didn’t return until about 5 p.m. the next day. Then the crews

were home again for a day or two according to national safety rules. There were occasional overnight stays in Albany.

When Totsis was with Conrail the train crew consisted of an engineer, a fireman and a conductor, along with a head end brakeman and a rear end brakeman. Trains also had a caboose in those days.

“But they don’t have that anymore. Not like it used to be,” he said with a tinge of sadness. “I caught the tail end of it.”

An admitted train spotter, Tatsis remembers when you could set your watch by the appearance of trains at certain crossings. “They were that on time,” he said.

He also appreciates the romance of train travel.

“Years ago you could just about go anywhere by train, he said. “You could get around easier than than you can now.”

The Worcester Model Railroaders Club is located at 14 Rail Road Ave., Unit 54 Webster, just over the tracks and to the right. Meetings are held Tuesdays 6-9 p.m. and Saturdays 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. Meetings can go overtime if there’s a good crowd.

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hoping that this is the beginning of a meaningful collaboration between all of us.”

“Tonight’s summit is a result of us having heard from many surrounding communities with a desire to discuss budgetary issues related to our vocational school. We feel this is absolutely in the spirit of the [BVT] charter.”

Hazard said that “BVT is a tremendous institution and one of best technical schools in the Commonwealth,” but noted that, like many other member towns, Hopedale “operates under a tight budget” and “must be responsible for every dollar we spend.” She said that, because of the nature of the state assessment process and the town’s resulting mandatory contribution, “we find ourselves forced to cut local programs and services in response to costs such as those related to BVT that we can’t control. This scenario makes it difficult, if not impossible, to invest in our own public school students, facilities, and operating and capital improvements without asking for additional revenues from taxpayers in the form of overrides.”

She said that, because of the timing of BVT’s budget-setting timeline and Hopedale’s fiscal process, “Historically, by the time our annual town meeting comes around, we’re told that BVT already has enough votes in the other communities to pass [its budget], effectively negating our vote. Generally, we are presented with a figure that would be Hopedale’s share without input from [the] local finance committee or Select Board and whether or not we feel we can afford it. This has been deeply concerning for both our local boards and our residents who tell us that they feel they are cut out of the process. We’ve heard that several of your towns feel the same way.”

Hazard said, “In Hopedale, we think that as towns included in the charter, we should all be able to determine what costs we can afford so that all students that reside in our towns are equitably

supported. We often feel that Hopedale Public Schools are forced to cut, yet BVT hasn’t had to make the same kinds of sacrifices,” adding that Hopedale had to ask residents for an override for FY24 but still had to make cuts to the school budget while BVT’s budget increased.

“As an institution, we [Hopedale] believe that BVT should have to operate within the same financial constraints that each municipal budget does... We think it should be clear that the goal is to provide a great education for all students in our communities, whether they go to BVT or stay in our local schools. We want to be able to invest in programs and facilities locally at the same level that we invest at BVT.”

Bellingham Selectboard Chairman Michael Connor thanked Hopedale for calling the summit. “I think it’s an exceptional opportunity... This is one of the best ideas that’s come along.”

Connor said their per student costs for BVT students “are dramatically higher” than they are within the Bellingham Public Schools. He, in addition to other attendees, expressed frustration that local town budgets go through detailed scrutiny from town boards and taxpayers, yet the BVT budget does not.

“The budget process is what has really skewed me the most over the last 15 years. When the Superintendent of BVT comes into our town meeting, the votes are ‘locked up’ - the process to speak up has long passed... [and] it’s simply ‘pay up’ and I think we, as the communities of BVT, need to vet that process.”

As a possible solution for future consideration, Connor suggested each member town would calculate its own public school budget increase from one year to the next, and the average budget increase among the 13 member towns would be the increase BVT would also receive.

Connor said, “We’ve never had a choice as to what the BVT budget would be” and said Bellingham has some ideas for future forum topics.

Millbury Select Board Chair-

man Chris Naff told the story of a Millbury student who was interested in attending BVT and would have been well-served there but their academic record was not strong enough to be admitted into BVT.

“That story can be told again and again. And I think the problem we all face today is the very students that BVT was founded for no longer have the opportunity to go. That, to me, is a very big problem.”

“Our gracious host [Hazard] asked us not to disparage anyone tonight, but it’s a matter of fact that one administrator told the Town of Millbury to no longer send its ‘riff raff,’” said Naff, adding “That ‘riff raff’ are the very students BVT was founded for, and those students are being denied the opportunity they should have today.”

“Until some reform is done, which I believe has to take place at the state level, and that reform is much needed and would be heavy-handed, until that is done, the conversation at the municipal level is only going to become more and more difficult each year because I know as a fact that Millbury, and I think a lot of the communities like us, are becoming more and more tired of providing significant funding for what we believe to be a very significantly flawed system,” he said.

BVT Superintendent-Director Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, who has held the position for 31 years, was invited to respond. He

pointed out he recognized many faces in the room “because I do make appearances at the finance committees, the public hearings, and the town meetings.”

Each year, BVT makes “a modest budgetary request which is inclusive of all expenses,” Fitzpatrick said. He detailed the items that go into the BVT school budget, reiterated his frequent offers for town officials to visit the school, and said the BVT building is a model that other vocational technical schools hope to replicate.

Fitzpatrick said, “The state doesn’t allow us to ask for equal-

ized costs or assessments in order to comply with the 1993 Ed Reform Bill;” acknowledging that Hopedale and Bellingham have been at the latter part of the budgetary process; and said that, if two-thirds of the towns vote to support, then all towns are directed to honor the budget.

He said the BVT process is “very transparent,” the district is committed to collaborating with member towns; and said “it’s embarrassing to think” any of their students are considered “riff raff.”

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Gingerbread House Contest



The winners of the Millbury Chain of Lights Gingerbread House Contest have built houses that look good enough to eat. Family/Group 2 entered a tasty version of Mr. Frederickson's house from Disney's "Up" as well as Kids 1 for their submission of Barbie's gingerbread world – ooh, very pink! Both winners will receive Cake Shop Cafe gift certificates. (Since the contestants include minors, names have been omitted).



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Among the issues raised during the public comment segment were: revisiting the BVT charter which has not been reviewed since it was created in 1962; possible implementation of an admissions lottery; review of administrator and superintendent staffing levels, compensations, and benefits plans for BVT and the feeder districts; review of expenses related to extracurricular activities, campus amenities and student services for each district of BVT; review of admissions process; review of proposed capital projects; and agreement to a joint finance committee each year at which BVT makes one presentation to all member towns at one time.

Scott Savage of Hopedale, speaking as a resident and not a selectman, said, "It is my hope

that the towns will reject the majority of the capital requests that BVT has put forward for next fiscal year. The town needs more time to review the need of these improvements and weigh the financial burden it will place on our own schools and town services."

Neal Sherman, a public school teacher in Milford, said, "I am concerned that [BVT] is not serving the needs of the sending towns. I see students in the hallways every day who would be well-served by access to a technical education but right now 75% of the graduates from BVT are college-bound...I think that it should be revisited to consider whether or not the school is serving its mission and allowing access to a high-quality education to all students from its sending towns."

Chris Naff of Millbury asked Supt. Fitzpatrick if BVT uses a

blind-lottery admission system. Fitzpatrick said they do not. "We've examined the merits of that along with colleagues throughout the Commonwealth and did not feel it represented the best way to recruit."

Naff noted that Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School uses a lottery. Fitzpatrick said Assabet is the only district in the state that uses a lottery, adding, "We've seen no results. We've seen nothing but turmoil. You're not speaking to the staff of the system," he said with a chuckle. "I don't want to badmouth any other system, but we would hardly follow the example that we've seen there."

Matt Wojcik, Town Administrator in Douglas, said he was reluctant to make a comment earlier in the evening because "our frustration level with BVT in the past has been very, very high and it has not necessarily simmered down completely as we sit here," but did note the agreement dates back to 1962 and can only be amended by unanimous vote of the member communities.

"If there's anything we need to reopen in this governance agreement, it is that each individual town needs to have its own voice, elected by its own people. We live in America, we have a representative democracy, and it is only fair that it be done that way. This governance model has outlived its useful life. Period. It can't continue like this."

To watch the full meeting, visit townhallstreams.com.

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Avoid these investment mistakes



Mark Freeman

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Here are some of the most common investment mistakes:

- **Too much buying and selling** — Some people find it exciting to constantly buy and

sell investments in the pursuit of big gains. Yet, frequent trading can work against you in a couple of ways. First, it can be expensive — if you're always buying and selling investments, you could rack up taxes, fees and commissions. Perhaps even more important, though, excessive purchases and sales can make it difficult to follow a unified, cohesive investment strategy. Such a strategy requires, among other things, careful construction and management of an investment portfolio that's appropriate for your goals, risk tolerance and time horizon. Heavy trading can disrupt this strategy.

- **Failing to diversify** — If you only owned one type of asset, such as growth-oriented stocks, your portfolio could take a hit when the financial markets go through a downturn. But not all investments will respond the same way to the same forces — for example, stocks and bonds

can move in different directions at any given time. And that's why it's usually a good idea to own a mix of investments, which can include domestic and foreign stocks, bonds, certificates of deposit (CDs) and government securities. Keep in mind, though, that while diversification can help reduce the impact of market volatility, it can't guarantee profits or protect against losses in a declining market.

- **Trying to "time" the market** — "Buy low and sell high" might be the original piece of investment advice, but it's pretty hard to follow — because no one can really predict when an investment will reach "low" or "high" points. Also, trying to "time" the market in this way can lead to bad decisions, such as selling investments whose price has dropped, even if these same investments still have good business fundamentals and strong prospects.

- **Not understanding what you're investing in** — If you don't know the nature of investments when you buy them, you could set yourself up for unpleasant surprises. For example, some companies, by the very nature of their business and the type of industry they're in, may consistently pay dividends to their investors even though their stock prices may only show relatively modest price gains over time. If you bought shares of this stock, thinking it had the potential to achieve quite substantial appreciation, you might end up disappointed.
- **Making the wrong comparisons** — You're no doubt familiar with some of the most well-known investment benchmarks — the S&P 500, Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nasdaq Composite. But it might be counterproductive to compare your results against these indexes. If you have a diversified port-

folio, you'll own an array of investments that won't fit into any single index or benchmark, so you won't get an apples-to-apples comparison. You're better off comparing your portfolio's performance against the only benchmark that really matters — the progress you need to make to help achieve your goals.

Investing will always have its challenges — but you can help make it easier on yourself by staying away from as many mistakes as possible.

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

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HEALTHIER BAKING

Peppermint Bark

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Reindeer. Sleigh bells. Mistletoe. It's an intriguing challenge to think about any of them without thinking about Christmas. One hallmark of the entire holiday season – from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day – is peppermint bark.

Since it's not generally in stores throughout the rest of the year, it's sought after during the holidays. But did you know that peppermint bark is incredibly simple to make? This pure goodness dark chocolate peppermint bark is the kind of sweet little treat that could

genuinely make you smile.

You've probably already heard that small amounts of dark chocolate can benefit your heart. That's because the cacao in dark chocolate has heart-healthy antioxidants. It also contains flavonoids, magnesium, iron, fiber, zinc and copper.

It's also a gluten-free and dairy-free treat, so it's not just festive; it can be a thoughtful gift for many people. And even though candy canes aren't healthy, homemade peppermint bark contains less artificial ingredients than the store-bought kind. To make it even better, buy candy canes that don't

contain dyes, artificial ingredients or excess sugar.

PURE GOODNESS DARK CHOCOLATE PEPPERMINT BARK

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Cup of Dark Chocolate Chips
- ¼ Cup of Crushed Peppermint-Flavored Candy Canes
- 1 Tbsp. of Light Olive Oil
- 1 Tsp. Pure Peppermint Extract

DIRECTIONS:

Pour the dark chocolate chips into a microwave-safe bowl, cover the bowl with a



paper towel, and microwave for 30 seconds.

Remove from the microwave, and stir in the olive oil.

Cover again, and microwave the mixture for another 30 seconds.

Remove, stir in the peppermint extract, and stir the mixture until the chocolate is completely smooth.

Stir in half of the crushed peppermint-flavored candy canes.

Pour the mixture evenly into a shallow pan or baking sheet that's lined with parchment paper or aluminum foil.

Sprinkle the rest of the crushed candy canes on the mixture.

Let the mixture cool for at least 30 minutes. Break the bark into pieces, and enjoy!

Although it's true that dark chocolate is bittersweet, there's something enchanting in the pure goodness of this dark chocolate peppermint bark. It even reflects a bit of the warmth and beauty of Christmas...just like reindeer, sleigh bells and mistletoe. Happy (healthier) candy making, and have a happy Chanukah, a merry Christmas and a healthy New Year!



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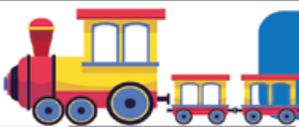
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Sturbridge Village at Christmas

Old Sturbridge Village is currently alive with thousands of lights – sparkling on trees and fences outside the early American homes of the 1830s. It's a special celebration called "Christmas by Candlelight" and a walk around the village is spectacular.

As the dwellings, shops and Meeting House are sourced from New England, they will look familiar to Worcester County residents, though the Christmas decorations they sport would have seemed strange to those who lived during this era. The region then had everything present day holiday makers like to see during this joyful season - plenty of greenery and red winterberries, wood to stoke roaring fires and a knack for pie-making and mulling cider.



Left, OSV blacksmith Ethan Choiniere points out the irregularities in an early iron kitchen tool.

But Christmas didn't really become a big deal until the mid-1800s when the Puritan hold on the population (and the holiday) finally loosened.

During "Christmas by Candlelight" every corner of Old Sturbridge Village's 200-acre campus has been transformed into scenes from Christmas in 19th century New England with some tweaks concerning decorations.

Watch our cabinetmaker crafting wooden toys and gifts, sample mulled cider or traditional Polish gingerbread, or check out this year's entries into our Gingerbread House Contest. See a blacksmith at work or watch the train set-up by the Worcester Model Railroaders Club.

Walk the Christmas Tree Trail and see more than 4,000 candles and tin lanterns lighting the Village adorned in its holiday finest.

There is also ample holiday shopping to do at the Miner Grant Store and the Ox & Yoke Mercantile (which does not require an admission fee).

"Christmas by Candlelight" is open on select Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through the end of the year, and will also be open between Dec. 27 and Dec. 30 for those who want to extend the holiday season.

There is also ample holiday shopping to do at the Miner Grant Store and the Ox & Yoke Mercantile (which does not require an admission fee).

No visit to Christmas by Candlelight would be complete without taking a ride on the horse-drawn carryall or taking your picture with Santa. Delicious hot cocoa and cookies are also must-haves by the bonfire.

Daily admission is: \$30 for adults, \$28 for seniors, \$15 for College Students, \$15 for children ages 4-17, children 3 and under admitted free. Tickets can be purchased in advance at this link:

osv.org/plan-your-visit/



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See Me, Hear Me at Booklovers' Gourmet

Nature & Wildlife Photography by Janet L. McDonald will be on display and for sale at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 East Main Street, Webster, through December 30 in the cafe gallery during regular business hours. Free and open to the public. For more information call 508-949-6232 or email deb@bookloversgourmet.com. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Wednesday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Special holiday hours: Sundays, December 10 and 17, 12-4 p.m.; Mondays, December 4, 11, and 18, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and December 24 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Closed December 25.

Janet McDonald is an artist, a creator, and nature lover. She received a BFA from UMass Dartmouth and later earned a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Eastern Connecticut State University. Janet worked for over a decade as a textile graphic designer before pursuing a completely different creative outlet as a Pre-K teacher. Now in retirement, Janet walks dogs, pet sits and enjoys taking pictures while canoeing or hiking with her partner Tom.

Janet's photography has been exhibited at the Sprinkler Factory Gallery, The Vanilla Bean Café, The Rose Room, Booklovers'

Gourmet, Attleboro Art Museum, the Sherill Library in Cambridge as well as many other libraries in the Northeast. The Brookside Chalet holds a permanent display of Janet's photographs, inspiring visitors to explore the beauty, history and serenity of the Quiet Corner of Connecticut whether it be a whimsical look into the Thompson Dam or a striking view of Cargill Falls.

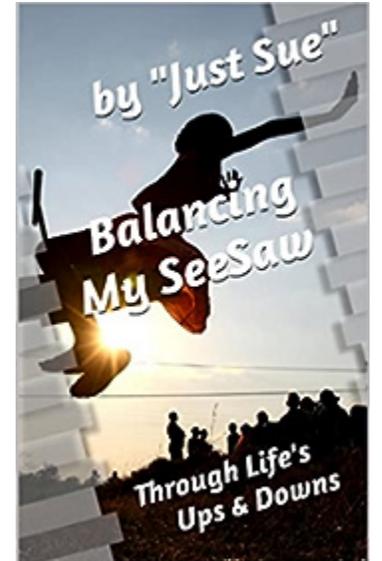
Janet says: "I often find wonder and beauty in the world around me. Whether I'm walking through the woods or even spending time in my own neighborhood, I always see magic in the ordinary. I am compelled to capture those scenes through my eyes so I can not only relive the joy I felt in that moment but share these portraits into my perspective and experience with others."

For more information on Janet and her work, visit her Instagram accounts @janetmcdonaldphotography or @frenchcatdrawings.

On Saturday, December 16, visit Booklovers' Gourmet as Sue Sheperd discusses and signs copies of her latest book "Balancing My Seesaw: Through Life's Ups and Downs." Free and open to the public. (Rescheduled from an



Above, Janet McDonald is an artist, a creator, and nature lover. Her photography has been exhibited at the Sprinkler Factory Gallery, The Vanilla Bean Café, The Rose Room, Booklovers' Gourmet and Attleboro Art Museum. Sue Shepherd has penned a book outlining some of the secrets she has learned on her "SeeSaw," and how to hold on when the ride gets too rough.



earlier date). Signed copies will be available for purchase.

Diagnosed with a chronic condition, over 29 years ago, Sue has learned how to live with life's ups and downs. Even so, she has navigated her way through divorce from an abusive marriage, homelessness, loss, and times of loneliness. And now she would like to share some of the secrets she has learned on her "SeeSaw,"

and how to hold on when the ride gets too rough.

Through short stories and poems, Sue has found her voice and wants to share the hope and inspiration she has discovered so that others can also find ways to balance their own "SeeSaw" of Life. She wants everyone to know the excitement of following Jesus and wants to show how involved He is in our lives. With God in the

middle of it all, He helps to keep us balanced when life's circumstances are trying to bring us down or throw us off.

Sue is a life-long New Englander, and has been blessed with three adult children, two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren (and we can't forget the five grand-dogs). You are welcome to contact her via email at: JustSue4@gmail.com.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program's Winter Heating Season

Applications are now open for eligible Massachusetts households to apply for financial assistance this heating season through April 30, 2024

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) is pleased to announce November 1 as the start of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) 2023-2024 winter heating season. LIHEAP is a free, statewide service funded by the federal program of the same name that helps eligible households stay warm during the winter months by paying a portion of winter heating bills.

Applications for home energy assistance are currently being

accepted online at toapply.org/massliheap, and income-eligible households may receive financial help to offset heating bills from November 1, 2023, through April 30, 2024.

Both homeowners and renters can apply online or through local administering agencies for LIHEAP assistance. Households must meet specific eligibility requirements to qualify for aid, which will be paid directly to their heating vendor.

Eligibility is based on several factors, including household size and combined gross annual income of residents 18 and older. Qualifying households – including those with the cost of heat

included in the rent – can receive assistance for all sources of heat, including oil, electricity, natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood and coal.

"The Massachusetts home energy assistance program is free, because no resident should have to worry about heating their home during the wintertime," said Ed Augustus Jr., Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities. "High fuel costs can have a devastating

effect on household budgets and can even endanger Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents. We encourage anyone who needs heating assistance to explore their eligibility by applying online or visiting the nearest administering agency. And to please share the information with loved ones or neighbors who could benefit from this free resource."

For more information, or to find your local LIHEAP agency,

visit www.toapply.org/MassLIHEAP.

About EOHLC

The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) was established in 2023 to create more homes and lower housing costs in every region. EOHLC also distributes funding to municipalities, oversees the state-aided public housing portfolio, and operates the state's EA family shelter.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Luke's Christmas Gift

BY AMY LECLAIRE

“Are you coming to see me?” When it comes to the sights and sounds of the season, Luke is not shy to the joy of Christmas. He’s an avid watcher. He’s aware of the reason for the season.

“Amazon!!” He stares across the front lawn. Another blue truck screeches to a halt and states the obvious. “A person is inside! He’s coming, he’s coming, he’s coming. I can feel it in my bones.” Luke quivers and smiles. His mouth opens and shuts. “He’s coming. He’s not. He’s texting. He’s just about ready!”

Luke stares some more, turns around like an oversized ballerina, then snaps out of delirium to concentrate. He doesn’t want to miss out on a single clue that, indeed, a person will carry a pizza or a present to his front lawn.

“I wonder if he’s bringing me something?” He stalks to the middle of the lawn and crouches down to submission. “I’m going to show the driver that my big



head has nothing to do with my personality. I’m going to show him how gentle I truly am.” He remains down for as long as he can bear it. Given his age (not yet two) I find Luke’s patience to be remarkable. Still, my pup is about to learn a lesson—that not everyone likes dogs. The Amazon

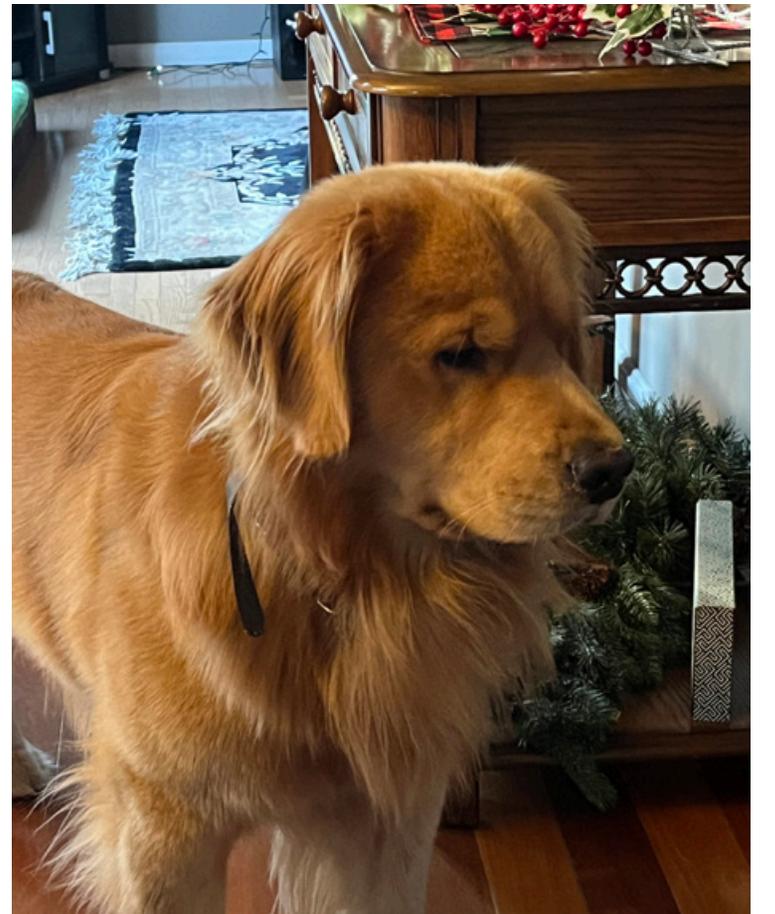
driver is no exception.

He appears stiff and serious, a cautious elf. Sensing his ambivalence, Luke attempts to compromise the awkward moment. He sits up straight and smiles proudly. “My name is Luke Valentino and I have my own column and website. You can find me at---

Cautious Elf is unimpressed. He recoils. I eye him through the bubble glass of the front door like Mama in her kerchief, though I’m unable to settle down for any kind of nap. A Christmas package is in jeopardy.

“Hi there!” I pull open the front door.

Luke takes my sudden appearance as a clue that a front yard social is in order. He gallops



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closer to Cautious Elf. “Momma, look – the elf with a vest on has a present for me!” Then he resumes a clownish habit he’s recently adopted during new transitions. He chases his tail foolishly, spinning around like a top with a fur coat. My gaze rests on my crazy, spinning dog. Fearing him seems superfluous. Nevertheless, the driver has a right to be afraid.

The journalist in me longs to better understand him. (Moreover, I want that package).

“Luke is just shy of two. He still has some puppy in him. I’m sorry.”

Not sorry, Luke finishes one final spin and hedges closer to

LUKE
continued on page 11

REAL ESTATE

The Perks of Selling Your House When Inventory Is Low

When it comes to selling your house, you're probably trying to juggle the current market conditions and your own needs as you plan your move. One thing that may be working in your favor is how few homes there are for sale right now.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

The Supply of Homes for Sale Is Far Below the Norm. When you're selling something, it helps if

what you're selling is in demand, but is also in low supply. Why? That makes it even more desirable since there's not enough to go around. That's exactly what's happening in the housing market today. There are more buyers looking to buy than there are homes for sale.

To tell the story of just how low inventory is, here's the latest information on active listings, or homes available for sale. The data from Realtor.com shows how many active listings there were in September of this year compared to what's more typical in the market. Monthly listings in September, 2017 were 1.3 million, same in 2018. In 2019 there were 1.2 million and in September, 2023 there were only 700k

As you can see, if you look at the last normal years for the market versus the latest numbers

for this year, it's clear inventory is still far lower than the norm.

What That Means for You. Buyers have fewer choices now than they did in more typical years. And that's why you could still see some great perks if you sell today. Because there aren't enough homes to go around, homes that are priced right are still selling fast and the average seller is getting multiple offers from eager buyers. Based on the latest data from the Confidence Index from the National Association of Realtors (NAR):

69% of homes sold in less than a month.

2.6 offers: the average number of offers on recently sold homes.

An article from Realtor.com also explains how the limited number of houses for sale benefits you if you're selling: "... homes spent two weeks less on

the market this past month than they did in the average September from 2017 to 2019... as still-limited supply spurs homebuyers to act quickly..."

Bottom line, because the supply of homes for sale is so low, buyers desperately want more options – and your house may

be just what they're looking for. If you work with The Marzeotti Group or a trusted local agent to get your house listed at the right price for today's market. You could still see it sell quickly and potentially get multiple offers.

LUKE

continued from page 10

our guest.

"It's just that—" Cautious Elf takes a deep breath. The cloud of his exhale falls heavily in the space between us.

"You've been bit?" I read his mind.

"Yeah. I had a bad experience." The Valentino in Luke flares. "Give me a name." He tilts a curious head to the victim holding a present and inquires. "No one messes with my people." I make a fair decision to grab Luke's collar and collect more information.

"That must have been terrible. Was it a Pitbull, by chance?"

He places his free finger on his chin, a detective with a new clue. "Actually, it was a dog that looked like yours."

Luke looks up at me. He appears curious, a bear cub who's just finished the last of his honey. "Wasn't me."

The thought of a Golden Retriever attacking a person seems inconceivable, but the truth is grim. Any dog can bite. We don't know exactly what passes through a dog's mind pre-attack, though we do know that temperament, a dog's upbringing, territoriality or food aggression, and fear play a role. I pet Luke's big head. He, too, seems to understand.

"Can I still have the present?"

The Amazon gift bag dangles lifelessly in the hand of Cautious

Elf, an employee I place at the age of 25. He has a whole life ahead of him to experience the joy of dogs, yet he's been traumatized by one that looks like a bear cub. I remember the day Luke was attacked by a shepherd at the dog park. I haven't been able to return to that very park. Despite my perplex with the situation, I do understand this young man. "I'll go put Luke in the house," I say, and proceed to tug Luke by the collar, back towards the front door.

"I didn't do anything, Momma!" Luke shuffles against my side with a heavy heart. I feel badly, but it's the right thing to do.

"Wait."

Little did I know we were all about to witness the kind of gift that can't be wrapped.

Luke and I pause.

"Your dog seems pretty cool." Luke tugs me back to the elf's voice. "He said I'm cool!"

"Are you sure you want to meet Luke?" I don't want to exacerbate his trauma, yet deep down, I'm proud of the decision to face his dog demon. Luke is equally as proud. He wiggles joyfully. "Aw. That driver had me at Park."

Cautious Elf approaches Luke then kneels to his level. Roles shift. A Man Bitten and A Dog Loved form a match made on my frosty lawn. "He's so soft," he says, massaging Luke's big head. "Your vest smells like popcorn." Luke sniffs the man's pocket.

"Luke, be easy," I command,

partially fearing the worst, that my dog bites the hand that feeds us somebody's Christmas gift. However valid, my fear is short-lived. Luke licks the scruff of the man's chin, boasting a relationship that works. "Hey, you can't have that." Happy Elf chuckles while Luke gnaws playfully at the corner of a package that's taken far too long to be delivered.

"I'll take that," I say with a snatch and a smile. Happy Elf hands it over but deep down I know the truth. Once again, my dog, a healer, has delivered a gift that can't be wrapped.

Follow Luke on IG @livingwith-lukevalentino

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The Spectre Leaguers: Part II

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

If you missed Part I, go to www.theblackstonevalleyxpress.com

On July 14, the whole garrison spied a half dozen men who were now in gunshot range of them. Babson and his fellow townsmen set out in hot pursuit of the strangers. Babson saw two and took aim, pulling the trigger of his gun but it would not fire, thus allowing the two to get away. He then saw three more exiting the swamp where he then shouldered his rifle and fired at them. All three fell at once. Babson yelled to his companions that he had shot all three, but when he approached

them, the three dead men rose and stole away into the night. One of them returned a volley that hissed by Babson's ear, implanting the bullet into a tree.

Babson and his comrades took cover and plotted another attack upon where the spectres were now concealed. Once again, the strange beings rose and retreated but not before one could be hit by a shot from Babson's rifle. As they closed in on the casualty, they were taken by a sudden horror; the place where the enemy had fallen was void of a body. It was clear to the exhausted men that neither lead nor iron was useful against whatever demons had come to torture them. No sooner had they reached

the garrison when more were spotted roaming about the brush just out of gunshot reach.

The next day, Babson went out to the harbor to warn of the visitors and the danger that may follow. As Drake puts it,

"While on his way thither he was waylaid and fired at by the 'unnaccountable troublers,' who, strange to say, loaded their guns with real bullets, as poor Babson was near finding out to his cost. Having procured help, the neighborhood was scoured for traces of the attacking party, two of whom were seen, but not being of mortal flesh and blood, could not be harmed by lead or steel."

For several days, scouts combed the vicinity of the garrison in search of the spectres. One day the scouting party spied eleven men departing an orchard where they were performing strange incantations. Richard Dolliver fired into the assemblage but, as before, the bullets did nothing but make them scatter. It now became more evident than before, in Drake's words that the "strange visitors bore a charmed life, and that the cape was in great peril from this diabolical invasion..."

A regiment of sixty men from Ipswich were called in to assist in the fight against the unearthly visitors who for a fortnight had continually appeared in various places, harassing the people of Gloucester. Though repeatedly shot at, not one was killed or injured. The assailants beat on barns with clubs, threw stones, whooped and made various noises much to the resemblance of a poltergeist more than a foe wishing to annihilate an enemy. To make matters more supernatural, they left no footprints in the sands or swamps where they were seen and chased.

It was a matter of time before the spectres began confronting the soldiers of the garrison. Three of them were seen one morning by Babson walking toward him with no fear or apprehension. Babson quickly hid and waited until they were within stones reach. He then shouldered his rifle and fired at them. The powder flashed in the pan, but no shot projected from the barrel. He tried repeatedly to shoot them with no success as the phantoms passed by without as much as flinching. He later was able to fire the gun several times in succession without fail. There was only one

explanation Bason could come up with; the wraiths had charmed his rifle so it would not harm them.

In time, the visitors either grew weary of their diabolical pranks or had better things to do somewhere else. The odd happenings ceased as quick as they had started. One account states that it was not just the spectres going away but divine intervention that played a role in their retreat.

It was decided that if mortal tools could not harm the spectres, then the only answer was to pray to their savior for redemption from the evil. The people of the garrison converged and began praying for salvation. Their plan seemed to have worked, for it was not very long before the spectres were gone for good and the people of Cape Ann were relieved of the devil's minions that had for some time kept them in fear of being taken by the evils that prevailed at the time.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote of the phenomenon that beleaguered the people of Gloucester in his poem, The Garrison Of Cape Ann.

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.

Believer

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Grafton's Business Scene



BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Christmas is less than two weeks away. And while the stores in Grafton have an incredible array of items that shoppers can buy to put under and on their Christmas trees, the local organizations have a lot to offer as well.

Through the kindness of the people who work and volunteer for those organizations and the kindness of many Grafton stores, other businesses and residents, they have been bringing much-needed cheer to the community and beyond this holiday season. Their determination to brighten this little corner of the world is heartwarming.

One very distinctive person who's known for spreading Christmas cheer is Santa. On Saturday, Dec. 16, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., the Grafton Fire Department – which has been spreading lots of joy itself by collecting toys for Toys for Tots – will once again escort Santa and his buddy, the Grinch, through neighborhoods in Grafton. A tracking link will be available once they set off on their journey.

The Grafton Police Department has also been bringing joy to kids by continuing to help an area nonprofit. Last month, the GPD held

its annual Fill the Cruiser event and collected more than 2,000 toys/bikes. The toy drive benefited Toys for Kids and Teens, the nonprofit run by Blackstone Valley veterans that provides new toys and bikes for area families in need during the holidays. Additionally, the GPD recently raised \$1,000 for Project New Hope Inc., a nonprofit that serves veterans. And the GPD has been helping people to stay safe by re-posting an article by Chief Normand A. Crepeau, Jr. on its Facebook page. The article includes tips on how to deer collisions – a significant problem in Grafton and Central Massachusetts, in general, during this time of the year, which is the animals' mating season. The article includes tips concerning things such as the importance of fully braking, instead of swerving, when a deer darts out in front of you, staying alert for deer after sunset and just before sunrise and being aware that deer frequently cross the street single file, so if you see one, another might be close behind. The chief wrote that the use of high beams, when safe for other drivers, is also helpful.

The Grafton Lions Club supports several drives that serve people in need. During the Grafton Police

Department's Fill the Cruiser event, the club donated 126 toys and helped spread the word about the event.

The Grafton Olde Men Soccer Club (GOMSC) held its annual Thanksgiving Turkey Bowl tournament. And as usual, the focus wasn't just soccer. The club also collected food and monetary donations for the Grafton Food Bank.

Millbury Street Elementary School recently held the school's annual Pajama Drive. The successful drive, which is connected to the national nonprofit Pajama Program, collected pajamas (which are paired with donated books from Scholastic) that will bring warmth and cheer to homeless and low income children throughout Worcester County.

With plenty of heartbreaking news in the world, it's wonderful to know that there are many people of good cheer who are sharing their gifts and resources with the community in so many heartwarming ways. We wish you and your loved ones a happy, healthy holiday season!

Contact Christine with your business news items at cmgaleone15@gmail.com.

Notes from Community Harvest Project

Community Harvest Project is settling in for winter. The fields are cover cropped, garlic is planted, and planning is already underway for next year. In 2023, the community - once again made CHP's work possible. CHP distributed 321,327 pounds of food this year. Thanksgiving distributions made up a significant part of several partners' offerings and our produce went out to the following in time for the holiday: Grafton Food Bank; Lovin' Spoonfuls - Worcester area; St. Anna's - St. Vincent DePaul Food Pantry - Leominster; St. Francis of Assisi - St. Vincent DePaul Food Pantry - Fitchburg; Stone Soup Kitchen - Ayer; Acton Community Pantry - Acton; Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry - Devens; Sharing is Caring - Clinton;

Clear Path for Veterans - Devens.

The food totaled 1.48 million servings with apples being our largest producer, followed by eggplant (27 thousand pounds of it) with cabbages and tomatoes not far behind.

Over six thousand volunteers, monthly givers, event

attendees, and other supporters, helped to make that happen.

Though 2023 was a challenging year overall, new crops did fairly well. Shallots were a big success and stay on the grow-list. The farm team took a different approach to tomato varieties this year and grew both determinate and indeterminate varieties to manage harvest peak timing and flow.

Our farm teams take a much deserved winter break and then resume planning for the 2024 growing season. Until then, thank you for your support and CHP wishes you all a peaceful winter's rest.

Support CHP when you shop at Target this month!

Until December 31, 2023 each trip to Target (online or in-store) allows you to vote for CHP as a non-profit that Target can help. Here's how to vote for CHP in the Target app:

Step 1: Choose "My Target" in the Target app

Step 2: Tap on "Target Circle"

Step 3: Select "Vote for non-profits"

Step 4: Find Community Har-

vest Project & and vote!

Not a Target Circle member? Join their rewards program at target.com/circle.

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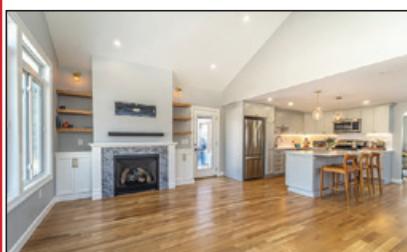
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SPORTS

Continuing to Improve

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

The Grafton Boys basketball team has produced several successful campaigns over the past seasons. Unfortunately, the Gators have not fared that well when it came to the newly created Division 2 State Tournament over the past two years. Two years ago, Grafton fell to Foxboro 63-60 in the first round and last season they once again were edged out, this time losing 52-50 in overtime to Newbury Port.

In addition to making the State Tournament, Grafton has the distinguished honor of being the longest running school to qualify for the Clark Tournament. Only 16 teams (eight each from the large and small division) are invited to the prestigious tournament and the Gators are very proud of their qualifications. Last year Grafton

opened with a 40-29 win over Tansasqua before falling to Millbury in the second round.

Qualifying for the Clark Tournament is a big deal and teams are talking about it," said Grafton Coach John Patraitis. "The tournament has a long history and it's a goal of ours every year."

As the 2023-24 season gets ready to begin, Patraitis is very optimistic about his team's chances as the team has been working hard this past summer and fall during their off-season leagues.

"The team is building team chemistry," the Grafton Coach said. "The kids are starting to identify their new roles for the upcoming season. I am really excited about the upcoming year as they all have a great attitude and enjoy playing the game to get better."

Patraitis lost five seniors from last year's squad but believes that the team will not miss a beat



2023-24 Grafton Gators.

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with this year's players. Grafton's returning athletes to the court have gained significant experience. Last year the coach inserted his players into pressure situations and big-time moments gaining them some important minutes to get them ready for the new season.

The only returning starter from last winter will be Shabd Murty, the team's guard as a junior playing alongside four seniors. Six foot-seven senior center Mark Dickson was either the sixth or seventh man for the Gators last winter. Along with James Hanna, a 6-5 center/forward, and Spencer Ford, a strong defender and hustler on defense, the trio will looked to as the team's big guys that will provide a post presence and maximize the oppositions size.

Others who came off the bench for Grafton last year were Larry

(LJ) Lamar Jr. and Rob Troast in addition to Hanna. Lamar was a spot starter and the team's back-up guard, while Troast saw some action at guard or on the wing.

"All three played last year at times and will be looking to move into those starting positions," Patraitis said. "LJ will be in a tough spot, he's the leader of the floor and will be running the offense, while also being asked to score for us this year. A lot will be asked of him as he's also a good defender."

Troast is a strong defender that gives 100 percent day in and day out, including practice. According to the coach, he'll be all over the court for the Gators.

"He's a 50 / 50 guy," the coach said. "He'll be asked to be a great defender who is also capable of scoring for us."

With the newer state qualifying

rules Patraitis is very excited about the team's conference schedule. Grafton will be taking the court against some of the bigger schools with stronger programs like Acton-Boxboro, Doherty, Algonquin, Sharon, Shrewsbury, and Tewksbury to name a few coming up this season. The adjusted schedule will test the team during the regular season to get ready for the post-season.

The SWCL will once again be very strong, but this year will be broken up into small and large divisions, with the Gators taking their skills to the larger. Patraitis and his team will once again be in the mix and looking to shoot for that top spot in the league despite the division.

Capturing the SWCL, qualifying for the Clark Tournament and the State Tournament are once again goals Grafton will be looking for in the new season.

"We are at the mindset of having to earn everything and pay the price while doing s with a strong work ethic," the Grafton coach said. "We'll worry about the stuff that we can control, and good things will happen. Obviously, we want to get back to the Tournament and go further this year than we did the last few years."

In order to be successful once again and achieve their goals the Gators are going to have to continue to work hard.

"As a coach I couldn't be happier with this group and what we can accomplish," Patraitis said.

Now all they have to do is take the court and prove the coach right.

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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Dead Battery? Could be a parasitic drain ...

Q. I have a 2010 Dodge Journey. One morning, a couple of weeks ago, the battery was dead. The car is used every day and always started. I charged the battery up, and it worked fine for over a week. I visited a sick relative at the hospital for a couple of



BY JOHN PAUL

hours, and the car would not start after my visit. I was able to jump start it and charge it again. I brought it to my local tire/battery/brake guy. They checked the charging system, and although the battery looked like it should have some life left in it, I had them replace it anyway. Four days later (unfortunately at night leaving the same hospital), the car was again dead. When I charged the battery, and then left it alone for several hours, I rechecked the battery, and it had drained quite a bit. Do you have any recommendations for doing some initial troubleshooting for a draining battery?

A. This is a classic example of parasitic drain on the battery. There are a couple of methods to test for a potential drain. The classic method is to remove the negative battery cable and connect a multimeter, set to measure amps, in a series between the negative battery terminal and the disconnected negative battery cable. Be aware that you will need to wait for the electronics to "go to sleep." If you see a draw, then remove fuses one at a time, until the draw returns to normal. The secondary method is to measure voltage across the fuses. A circuit that is not active should have no voltage flowing. Here is a pretty good article with more detail <https://testmeterpro.com/parasitic-draw-test-with-a-multimeter/> The most common cause of parasitic draw with this vehicle is related to the radio and Bluetooth module.

Q. We have a 2006 Cadillac DTS, and the left front directional light does not work, I assume a blown bulb. Though only one front-blinker bulb is currently blown (dead), should we have both front blinker bulbs replaced at the same time?

A. All bulbs have an expected life and typically if one bulb burns out the others doing the same job could certainly be near the end of their useful life. Although you would think replacing a bulb is easy, but the assembly needs to be removed and this will take a little more than an hour. Depending on the shop and labor rate, replacing one bulb could cost \$150 or more.

Q. My Mom recently needed to get another car and I helped her pick out and purchase a 2012 Nissan Versa. Everything was going fine for months, seemed to be a good purchase. Her mechanic even looked it over and recommended a few minor things like new wipers, nothing to worry about. After several months of use, something strange started to happen. As she pressed on the brake, the car seemed to rev up, as if the gas were being pressed as well. The vehicle seemed to want to "go" when the brake was being applied. It has happened three times to her, with no warning. The local mechanic drove it around for about 30 minutes and it never happened. Then we went to a Nissan dealership, and they said they were able to recreate the issue. Their recommendation was a new master cylinder and brake booster. The bad news was that they said Nissan no longer made the parts and they were not able to get them anywhere. So back to the local guy, but he was very hesitant to do work based on another mechanics diagnosis. He also did not think it was correct but could not come up with any different diagnosis. Any suggestions? Other than taking it to another mechanic to look it over?

A. This is an interesting one. I also suspect it might be due to a leaking brake power booster. When you apply the brakes, the booster uses engine vacuum to apply more brake pressure. If the booster is leaking it may draw too much vacuum (air) from the engine and the car's computer tries to compensate for this by speeding up the engine. You mechanic may be able to watch all of this by putting a vacuum gauge in line to the power booster and then driving. I also checked a couple of sources and found available parts are going to be a problem, which also could indicate this may be more common than I thought. I checked eBay motors and there are used brake power boosters and boosters and master cylinders for \$100. I would go back to your mechanic to talk with them about it and the possibility of using used parts.

Q. I have a 2007 Volvo convertible with only 30,000 miles on it. Since the first year, it has had an intermittent

electrical problem the dealer has been unable to fix. When I turn the key, it sometimes will not start. The dealer replaced the starter years back. When it does not start, it will always start on the second try. Since I only drive a few thousand miles and only in the summer I have just been putting up with it. Any ideas Mr. Car Doctor?

A. Volvo did have a problem with the ignition system immobilizer. The symptom sounds just like the issue with your car, especially with it always starting on the second try. The repair involves replacing the central

electronic module and updating the software.

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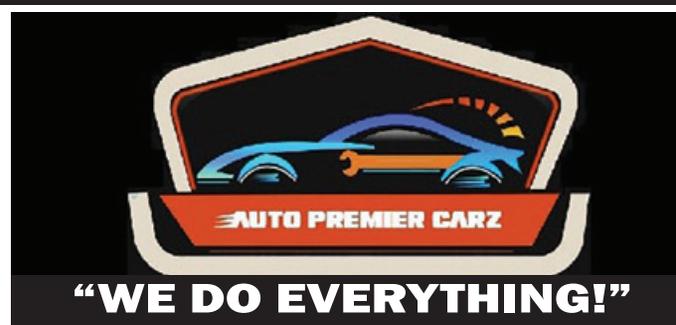
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NOTE: Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the Happenings! section of the Xpress newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to news@theyankeeexpress.com.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

• Birch Alley Brass Ensemble, Valley Chapel Uxbridge. Thirty-five student and professional musicians from Uxbridge, Hopedale, Mendon, Northbridge and Milford in their 12th annual performance of carols from around the world. At 7 p.m. at Valley Chapel, Uxbridge.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

• For over 65 years the Auburn Fire Rescue Department has brought Santa around town in the Fire Truck to visit children and adults throughout the community. It has become a tradition shared in families for generations. The route will start at approximately 11 a.m. from the Drury Square Fire Station on Auburn Street. Times are approximate when listed. Please be patient as this is all dependent upon traffic and times are subject to change.

• Kids Movie Night featuring "The Polar Ex-

press.", Aspire Dance Center from 5-8 p.m., 278 Main Street, Oxford. Drop your kiddos off for a big screen movie. Make a craft and enjoy a hot chocolate bar. Kids are encouraged to wear their most comfortable pajamas and bring a pillow and blanket. Snacks and drinks will be provided. (No outside food/drinks please) For ages 4 and up. \$25 per child. No refunds. Purchase here (there may be a surcharge eventbrite.com/e/kids-christmas-movie-night-the-polar-express-tickets-764022009397)

DECEMBER 16-23

• A Christmas Carol — The Hanover Theatre will put on the holiday classic, "A Christmas Carol", Worcester. Saturday performances at 2 p.m., and 7 p.m. A "relaxed performance" will be held at 1 p.m. on Sunday, December 17 and at 6 p.m. with audio description and ASL. Wednesday, December 20, and Friday, December 22, performances at 7 p.m. Saturday, December 23, performances at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Featuring the Mighty Wurlitzer Organ, the annual holiday favorite returns to the main stage with timeless music period costumes and spectacular lighting and scenery. See and hear the tale of that grasping miser, Ebenezer Scrooge, who is visited by the Spirits of Christmases Past, Present and Yet To Come. Use promotional code GHOST for \$31 tickets.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

• Baptist Church of Grafton will present the Christmas Story in Song during their regular worship at 10 a.m. A special service to sing

and learn about the most inspirational Christmas carols.

• The New England Ringers Handbell Ensemble will give their final concert of the holiday season at their home church, at 4 p.m. at First Congregational Church, 355 E. Main Street, Oxford.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31

• Midnight, Last Night Cannon firing, M.M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop, 6 Singletary Ave., Sutton.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 9

• Coffee Break Bible Study for Women will explore The Power of Forgiveness: Finding Freedom in Forgiveness. Childcare and refreshments provided. 9:30-11 p.m. Pleasant Street Church, 25 Cross Street, Whitinsville. For more information, contact Anna t 508-234-4902; email churchoffice@psvc.org or visit pscrc.org/adults.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

• Bethel Lutheran Church, Auburn Centennial Celebration February 18, 2024. Festive Eucharist Service at 10:30 AM in the church, 90 Bryn Mawr Ave followed by Banquet at the Auburn Elks at 12:30. Centennial Committee reaching out for information on anyone who has attended or whose family has a history with Bethel to share in this event. Please contact Judy Sampson at jas2155@charter.net; Jackie Walsh at jackmae@charter.net or Bethel Facebook page Bethel Lutheran-Auburn MA Centennial. A series of special events will follow throughout 2024.

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Sutton Serenaders Christmas Concert - Tuesday, December 19 at 11a.m.- Come and enjoy the beautiful songs of the season by our very own choir and stay and join them for the Christmas Luncheon Chicken Cordon Bleu

Cranberry Herbed Stuffing Roasted Carrots and Broccoli
Mondays : Chair Yoga 10 a.m.; Mat Yoga 12:30 p.m.
Tuesdays: Darts 10:30 a.m.; Chorus 11 a.m.; Cardio Barre 1:30 p.m.
Wednesdays: Muscular Strength 9 a.m.; Blood Pressure Clinic 10 a.m.
Thursdays: Chair Yoga 9:30 a.m.; Tai Chi 10 a.m.; Pitch 10 a.m.; Computer Club 10 a.m.

Fridays: I'm Sorry 9:30 a.m.; Zumba 10 a.m.; Bingo 1 p.m.
Wednesday, December 20; 2p.m. Book Club held at Sutton Library
Thursday, December 21; 9:30 - 11:30 a.m. Veterans Agent Office Hours
Thursday, December 28; 11:45 a.m. December Birthday Party Luncheon Salisbury Steak RSVP by Noon 12/26

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 - Podiatry Clinic - 3rd Friday of each month
 - Memory Café - 4th Tuesday of each month
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Monday
9:30 am - 10:15 am Light Exercise Class
12:00 pm Lunch
12:45 pm Mahjong Game
1:00 pm Zumba (starts 9/11/2023)

Tuesday
9:00 am - 10:00 am Blood Pressure
9:30 am - 10:30 am Tai Chi
12:00 pm Lunch
1:00 pm Cribbage

Wednesday
9:30 am Craft Class
10:30 am Line Dancing
12:00 pm Lunch
1:00 pm Social Bingo

Thursday
9:00 - 10:00 am Yoga
10:00 - 11:30 am Coloring Class
12:00 pm Lunch
12:30 pm Pitch

Friday
9:00 am Shopping
9:30 am - 10:15 am Light Exercise
11:30 am Lunch

Grafton Senior Center

30 Providence Rd, Grafton, MA 01519
Phone: (508) 839-9242

The Senior Center is closed Monday, December 25 for the holiday.
Monday, December 18 at 2:30 p.m.: Grafton High School tech support:
Wednesday, December 20, 11:45 a.m. : December birthday luncheon:
Friday, December 29, 1 p.m.: Holiday movie:

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"NOTE PLEASE ORDER EARLY"

UniBank Annual Holiday Giving Program Runs Through Mid-December

UniBank recently announced that the bank kicked off its annual Holiday Giving Tree Program on November 24th to make the season brighter for individuals and families throughout the community. The program is part of the bank's dedication to improving life for the communities it serves.

Each UniBank branch has chosen an organization that fills a need in their community and supports the program by making and purchasing items, and accepting donations from customers and the general public. Many local residents face difficult times around the holiday season and UniBank is pleased to work with local charitable organizations in support of this effort to help its neighbors. Branch collections are as follows:

Blackstone: Requesting items to be distributed by the Divine Mercy Parish for individuals in Blackstone.

Douglas: Collecting non-perishable food items for the Douglas Food Pantry located at St. Denis Church.

Hopkinton: Requesting items that will be distributed to families in need by Project Just Because.

Milford: Requesting items that will be given to individuals and families in need in the Milford Community. Donations will be distributed by the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Mary of the Assumption Church.

North Grafton: Requesting items needed by senior citizens that will be distributed by the Grafton Senior Center.

Shrewsbury: Requesting food donations that will be distributed by St. Anne's Human Services.

Sutton: Items for senior citizens to be distributed by the Sutton Senior Center.

Upton: Items needed by senior citizens to be handed out by the Upton Senior Center.

Uxbridge: Requesting specific items for individuals in Uxbridge to be distributed by the People First Food Pantry.

Whitinsville Main: Requesting items that will be distributed by the Friends of Northbridge Elders to individuals in Northbridge.

Whitinsville Plaza: Requesting items to be distributed by the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families to benefit local children.

Worcester: Tags requesting specific items needed by women and children to be distributed by the YWCA.

Donated items may be dropped off during regular banking hours through mid-December. Check with your local branch for specific details and deadlines. Visit www.unibank.com for a listing of branch locations and hours.

Vietnam Veterans

Grafton is casting a second bronze plaque to add 187 or so names that were not included on the first plaque to honor the service of its veterans in the Vietnam Era.

Names are being sought from veterans who resided in Grafton, North Grafton, South Grafton or Fisherville from February 28, 1961 through May 7, 1975. If you any military branch during this period (whether enlisted or were drafted), send a copy of your dishonorable discharge papers (DD-214), to Jeff Farrell

Grafton's Veterans Services Officer by calling 1-774-293-2208 to make an appointment to see him at his office at the Grafton Municipal Center, 30 Providence Road, Grafton 01519 to see if you are eligible to be named on the plaque.

The deadline for determining eligibility is December 31, 2023.

Names found after the deadline can be added, but not alphabetically. If you cannot locate your DD-214, Farrell may be able to find a copy for you.

Dean's List

Local residents make Dean's List at Wentworth Institute of Technology for the Summer 2023 semester,

- Anna Pyche of Auburn, Mass.
- Aidan Gordon of Douglas, Mass.
- Madeline Davis of Dudley, Mass.
- Karina LeBlanc of Sutton, Mass.
- Robert Whiton of Uxbridge, Mass.

Founded in 1904, Wentworth Institute of Technology provides a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, project-based education in architecture and design, computing and data science, engineering, management, and sciences and humanities that integrates classroom, laboratory, studio, cooperative and experiential learning to develop career-ready, skilled professionals, and engaged citizens.



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Captain Job Knapp DAR Chapter Honors Local Veterans

The Captain Job Knapp Chapter of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) of Douglas and Grafton, recently held a ceremony for two local United States Veterans and presented them with Veteran Honor Quilts. The quilts were handmade by chapter member Louise Zyguntowicz of Douglas and given to Jose Rios, US Marine Corps, and Ralph "Skip" Michniewicz, US Coast Guard. They also received a DAR Certificate of Appreciation for their service to the United States of America. The presentation concluded with a benediction by Pastor Anthony Mattscheck of the First Congregation Church of Douglas and a reception for all in attendance.

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, founded in 1890 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a volunteer women's service organization dedicated to promoting patriotism, preserving American history, and securing America's future through better education for children. It is a nonprofit, non-political, volunteer women's service



Pictured from left to right: Chapter Regent Noveline Beltram, Ralph "Skip" Michniewicz, Jose Rios, and Louise Zyguntowicz

organization. Any woman who has an ancestor who fought in or rendered aid in the American Revolution may be eligible for member-

ship in DAR. For information, contact Chapter Regent Noveline Beltram at noveline@verizon.net.

Rep. Soter receives Legislator Award from the Massachusetts Speech-Language Hearing Association

State Representative Michael J. Soter (R-Bellingham) received a legislator award from the Massachusetts Speech-Language Hearing Association (MSHA) this past Friday at their 2023 American Speech Language Hearing Association Annual Convention held in Dorchester. Representative Soter received this award for his work to help advance and advocate for the MSHA policy initiatives, including his work to help pass H.5094 – An Act Providing for Provisional Licensure for Speech-Language Pathologists. Rep. Soter was honored along side Senator Nick Collins and Representative Paul McMurtry.

On November 10, 2022 then-Governor Charlie Baker signed An Act for Provisional Licensure

for Speech-Language Pathologists into law. This bill created a provisional or temporary license for clinical fellows, in turn solving a long-term licensure and billing challenge. Clinical fellows will now be allowed to bill Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance for the services that they provide. With this law, hundreds of clinical fellows are able to stay and work right here in Massachusetts, helping to improve the staffing shortage affecting the industry.

The implementation of this law now waits approval from the Board of Registration of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiology.

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