

How Many Security Breaches Do We Have to Put Up With?

BY JANET STOICA
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I swear if I receive one more business letter advising me that my personal information has been stolen I will lose my mind. Just this week I received another informational “courtesy letter” from a local hospital’s computer software vendor advising me that their computer systems had been

file system has been electronically carted away. It was simply given away. Does the software company care? Maybe, because it shows how vulnerable they were, but why should they? It’s no big deal. Happens every day, doesn’t it? They all react instead of acting to prevent this type of situation.

Just like gun violence. We’ve become so inured to it that it’s a common everyday occurrence.

future loan or credit card.

When I received my latest security breach letter, I was amazed and rip-snorting angry. Why is this still happening? Why indeed. Oh yes, and thank you so very much for providing me with a credit-monitoring service for the next two years. I have so many of these free offerings from hospitals, health-care companies, hacked credit card accounts, etc. that they must all be piggy-backed upon each other until the end of time.

What makes a company not ensure that its software is fully protected from dark webbers and other scam artists who want access to your personal info?? This is absolutely ridiculous! I guess they can pay their CEOs gigantic salaries, bonuses, and stock options and to heck with protecting their customer’s/patient’s information. If they had purchased and installed iron-clad protection software they wouldn’t have to give us free credit-monitoring services after the breach. It certainly doesn’t cost these companies very much to give us credit-monitoring services vs. paying for a strong firewall. Oh, they’re just saving their stockholders’ money. They simply don’t want to pay for an A+ rated firewall that would prevent these sinister con artists from accessing our information.

And, yes, I’m going to say this ... the Federal and State governments should make iron-clad protection

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hacked and that all my personal and health information had been stolen by a group on the dark web. The information taken was my name, address, social security number, driver’s license number, and health information.

That’s all, just all my personal information. No big deal, right? That’s right. Who cares if the devils’ minds of foreign-paid computer geeks half-way around the world have found a glitch in the hospital vendor’s (or insert any company’s name here) software system? The hospital’s entire patient/customer

Whatever! We have accepted that all of our personally identifiable information is now in the hands of whoever wants to pay for it so they can check out the easiest names to use and can now open charge accounts, take loans, and basically ruin our credit ratings so we are reduced to crazed idiots trying to repair our good credit scores.

If course, if your credit score is in the dumper anyway, you’re probably glad to have your personal information compromised so you can forever use that as an excuse when trying to apply for a



Auburn Senior Center Plans Bermuda Trip

BY JANET STOICA
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Get out those shorts and sandals and get ready for a wicked good time cruising to Bermuda!

The Auburn Senior Center is planning a sun-filled relaxing trip to one of the closest islands our area can get to Paradise! It’s golden, it’s relaxing, it’s as busy or as serene as you’d like.

If your budget allows, this may be the gift you give to yourself. It’s not scheduled until May but your reservations must be made right quick as full payment is required by January 10, 2025. You can obtain optional travel insurance which I personally advise since you never know what the future brings.

Back in my college days I had the privilege of traveling to Bermuda on my spring break. I’ve since travelled to many other vacation destinations but Bermuda is one beautiful location I’ll never ever forget. Yes, yes, I know I was young

and adventurous, but it was such good times. I’m not young anymore but I’m still adventurous and this trip looks like a winner.

I’ll never forget the pink sand beaches, the gorgeous clear blue water, the friendly people, and the sunny and beautiful days spent there. We rented a motorbike and cruised the island taking in the sights and sounds of the local landscape. The island is about 21 miles long and less than 2 miles wide. Fascinating. There are many wonderful sights to see and things to do including scuba diving if you wish but main attractions include its crystal caves filled with stalactites and stalagmites, the Royal Navy Dockyard, and Gibbs Hill Lighthouse. Of course its glorious sun-kissed beaches such as Elbow Beach and Horseshoe Bay are truly a postcard paradise. There is also the Bermuda aquarium, museum,

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Christmas Message from Reverend Julia Dunbar

BY JANET STOICA
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It’s been quite a year for all of us, hasn’t it? The weather has been phenomenal, the political scene has been interesting to say the least, and now the blessed season of Advent and Christmas is upon us. After speaking with Reverend Julia Dunbar of Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Oxford, she has graciously provided us with her current thoughts for the Christmas season combined with previous comments from years past. Thank

you kindly, Reverend Dunbar.

“As we get closer to Christmas we long to find a way to the heart of the nativity story about the essential simplicity and profound joy of Jesus birth, his teenaged mother Mary and of Joseph depicted as strong, loving, and protective. The challenge to relate the beauty of the Christmas story is to find light and love in a world where both seem greatly diminished. We won’t likely find either in glittery displays or in greedy appetites for power.

“As we enter into the Advent season, we are in a holy time of waiting

for the light of Christ to come into the world. The four Advent candles symbolizing hope, joy, love, and peace have even more meaning this year. The white candle at the center of the Advent wreath symbolizes Christ, our hope. It’s time for our thoughts and prayers to be focused on what we are currently living through. This is the Holy Season of waiting for the light of Christ to come into the world. And, we wait with faith, hope, and love for the joy that will one day come upon us holding onto the hope of what is to come. What sustains us is our faith

and love and caring for one another. All are welcome here at Good Shepherd. We are a non-judgement zone. We have tradition and reason as our tenets. God doesn’t ask us to be perfect as we can’t be anyway. You are enough as you are and together we raise our hearts and our hopes to God. In this Christmas season, especially 2024, we pray for the health and heart of the world so we may live in peace.”

CHRISTMAS
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SCAMMERS

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software mandatory for every institution and company that operates in the United States. Just like auto insurance, software theft prevention should be absolutely mandatory. It's too bad there aren't responsible companies out there who are pro-active and secure. There should be huge fines and penalties for those ignorant boards of directors who only care about their personal stock and pocketbooks—and I mean BIG fines. Like \$5 million each time a compromise happens. Maybe that will wake them up and their stockholders will cry foul but to heck with them. They've obviously invested in a company that only cares for its own interests and how it can payback its investors. Fie on them and the horse they rode in on!

Here are two small free activities you can do to protect yourself immediately:

Freeze your credit information with the 3 major credit bureaus. This will prevent any inquiries to your credit history. You will be asked to provide a password and answer security questions that only you would know the answers to. It's easy and worth the peace of mind to do so. www.transunion.com www.experian.com www.equifax.com When you access these sites, the companies will ask you to pay for an upgrade, just use the free service. Don't forget, however, that if you apply for a credit card, loan, mortgage, etc., you will have to quickly go online and un-freeze your accounts so your credit history will be viewable. You can use their provided calendar to request the length of time to un-freeze.

With the influx of foreign mili-

tary software (originally meant for military tracking apps but now being sold internationally) enabling direct spyware to be placed on everyone and anyone's cellphones, be sure to reboot (shut down & restart) your cellphone daily. If the government decides to use these tracking and cellphone reviewing apps, your cellphone is in for a workout and you won't even know it. Your Fourth Amendment rights are being chipped away daily and until our Senators and Representatives pass strong legislation preventing government software from implanting itself into your cellphone, doing a daily reboot can be extremely beneficial to you. It's not 100% effective but definitely disrupts malware from running in the background and tracking you.

Maybe it's time to return to landlines ... Verizon are you still there?

BERMUDA

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and zoo. There are intimate waterfront bars, art galleries, and unique shops.

Restaurants feature all food types including oysters to sushi to surf-and-turf. There used to be a drink there known as a Bahama Mama (of course, rum based, as there is a Bacardi Rum distillery on the island) but the proper well-known libation is a Rum Swizzle which sounds eerily familiar! So

try something new while there from their cod fish stew chowder to bacon & truffle fries to calamari and chicken pot pie!

Check out the details of the trip on the Auburn Senior Center's site - <https://www.auburnma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/14437/Boston-to-Bermuda---May-16th-23rd-2025-PDF> It's not cheap but don't forget, everything's included in the pricing! Oh, and don't forget your passport. Send pictures and I'll write a story about your adventures!

CHRISTMAS

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"It's very difficult for people to step away from all the chaos and perceived demands of Christmas," said Reverend Dunbar, "it's ironic that this is supposed to be a season of peace but it's really not so peaceful. We should all try to find time to be in a quiet place to find peace within ourselves. This is a period of time when we should remember the vulnerability of the Christ Child being born and how He woke up the world. We should be aware of those who are vulnerable: babies, the elderly, and the disabled. These are loud, loud times in a very chaotic world. I was just reading a maxim about putting the Christ back in Christmas. What about putting the Christ back in Christian? This season is about compassion, love, and peace. We should remember that love is a verb. In the midst of everyday life we need to find hope and we won't find it in outside powers

like politics, prestige, and materialism. We can find hope, however, in our spiritual connection and whatever we choose to believe in. This is where we can find goodness and love. We need to find the light of others to bring us back to hope so that peace doesn't just become a pipe dream. Peace is the point! Unfortunately, attending church has become irrelevant to people. They're busy attending kids' sports events and other activities. There is no silver bullet but we hope that people will be drawn back to prayer. We hope they will find comfort and solace in attending and returning to church services. We would love for them to come and visit us here at Good Shepherd."

Christmas service hours can be found on their website or by phoning (508) 987-1004. On December 24th at 4pm there will be a Christmas Eve Eucharist with Choir. Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, 270 Main Street, Oxford. www.goodshepherdoxford.org

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UniBank – Woven into the Fabric of the Blackstone Valley Community for over 150 Years

BY JENNIFER RUSSO

The history of banking goes back to ancient times, as a way of securing the funds of the community, but also strategically using assets to build it to a greater potential. More than just a system of dollars and cents, banking was really about ensuring that the people had what they needed to thrive, investing in the local economy and providing stability through jobs and other area programs.

Now, with more modern systems in place, many banks have seemingly lost that original idea – that sense of community and an individualized touch. UniBank stands apart in this regard, with their priority being local families, businesses, non-profits, and employees.

“The vast majority of our employees live in the Blackstone Valley area, and we believe in supporting our local residents and merchants because that is who our employees are and who they engage with in their daily lives. Wherever an institution’s headquarters is tends to be where the focus and attention is paid,” shares UniBank CEO Michael Welch.

“We are intimately involved with

Business spotlight

the community we are in. With our headquarters right here in the Blackstone Valley, our future focus is always going to be here, even as we expand. We are very mindful in that we do not want to become a “big bank” headquartered in a large metro area. We want to support those living and working in our neighborhoods.”

UniBank, which has been serving the community for over 150 years, takes pride in being one of the bigger employers in the area, while embracing the personalized attention and recognition that every customer is important – from a family opening a first checking account for their child to a business looking for a \$20 million construction loan. They enjoy getting to know the people they serve and growing with them, holding fast to the belief that true success is shared.

“As people bank with us, ev-



erything goes right back into the community. We are not considered a stock bank, so we don’t have an obligation to serve any shareholders – our mission has only ever been to serve this area. We stand by the idea that by doing good, everybody does well,” says Welch.

And they certainly do good. Along with offering various types of banking for individuals and businesses, investment guidance, competitive loan rates, and IRAs, UniBank is a supporter of the Whitin Community Center in Whitinsville, Uxbridge’s First Night celebrations, local homeless shel-

ters, churches of all denominations, local libraries, The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, youth athletic organizations, and more. They are also a founding partner of the Worcester Red Sox (WooSox).

UniBank will soon be opening a new full-service branch across from Polar Park in Worcester, so they can help provide services to those in an area that is in an era of revitalization, fostering even more growth opportunities there.

Being native to the Valley area himself, Welch considers the bank and everyone it serves a family.

“Because we are local, people

have direct access to the decision-makers at the bank, which I know is unusual, but I really think it makes all the difference,” he shares. “We live here too, and we care about everything our customers care about. We also want to see our community thrive and we are extremely proud to empower everyone to achieve their goals, whatever that looks like for them.”

Learn more about UniBank, their mission, community outreach, and the services they provide by visiting their website at <https://www.unibank.com/>

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Local Recruits Sworn in as Correctional Officers

On Monday, November 25, Worcester County Sheriff Lew Evangelidis proudly administered the Correctional Officers Oath to the 26 graduating recruits of the Sheriff's Office's 62nd Basic Recruit Training Academy (B.R.T.A.) at Quinsigamond Community College's Hebert Auditorium. Among the twenty-six graduates were Officers Jacob Champagne of Dudley, Alain Westover of Oxford, Damian Marhefka of Webster, and Jordan Molina of Webster.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office is dedicated to ensuring the public safety of the cities and towns in Worcester County. The department acknowledges the significance of assembling a team

that mirrors the community it serves. The graduates of B.R.T.A. #62 constitute a highly qualified and diverse cohort of recruits, each contributing unique skills and experiences to their new roles as correctional officers. These officers originate from fourteen different towns across Massachusetts.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office Academy is a paid full-time 13-week program that teaches recruits how to handle and maintain the care, custody, and control of inmates at the Worcester County Jail and House of Correction. The academy incorporates both classroom time and hands-on instruction.

Throughout the academy, re-



Officers Alain Westover of Oxford, Damian Marhefka of Webster, Jordan Molina of Webster, and Jacob Champagne of Dudley at the WCSO BRTA #62 Graduation Ceremony. Photo submitted



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recruits are exposed to all areas of corrections, including de-escalation, duty to intervene, fire safety, defensive tactics, first responder training, suicide prevention, mental health, and substance abuse. The academy also includes daily physical fitness training, weekly exams on classroom content, and frequent guest lectures/demonstrations from many partners in public safety.

"After 13 rigorous weeks of training, I'm thrilled to present the best and brightest in corrections today," commented Worcester County Sheriff Lew Evangelidis. "The Worcester County Sheriff's Office Training Department is one of the best in the state. I can confidently say that

these men and women are ready to join the ranks as full-time corrections officers and contribute to successfully executing our mission. Congratulations to these graduates as they begin their new careers."

Since taking office, Evangelidis has implemented several changes to enhance the professionalism and integrity of the department hiring process. The new standards for correctional officer applications include a minimum of an associate degree, two years of military service, or two years of relevant work experience.

Before the start of the academy, applicants must pass a written exam, physical fitness test, background check, and

psychological screening test. To ensure fairness and impartiality, Evangelidis has also implemented a policy that prohibits the submission of letters of recommendation from politicians and gives preference to hiring those who have served our country.

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office is accepting applications for its 63rd Basic Recruit Training Academy, which will begin in March 2025. To learn more about what it takes to be a correctional officer, please visit www.WorcesterCountySheriff.com/Careers/Correctional-Officer-Academy/

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Successful Stuff-A-Cruiser Event Will Help to Make the Season Bright

Officers and Dispatchers from the Auburn Police Department were outside of Macy's at the Auburn Mall and Big Lots, at 416 Southbridge, accepting donations of new unwrapped Christmas gifts on November 30.

The Auburn Police Association Secret Santa Program supports families in the Auburn community who may need a little assistance keeping the holiday season bright! The organization is a 100% donation-based program helping

kids from infant to 16 years of age. Monetary donations were also accepted – in fact, members of the Elks Lodge #2118 donated \$2000 to Secret Santa.

Enrollment Now Open for Massachusetts Home Energy Assistance Program

Eligible Massachusetts households can now apply for financial assistance for the 2024-2025 heating season

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities today announced that the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) enrollment period for the 2024-2025 winter heating season will open on October 1. This critical program provides financial relief to eligible households to help them pay their winter heating bills, ensuring they can keep their homes safe and warm during the colder months.

HEAP is a free, statewide resource that assists eligible renters and homeowners by paying a portion of their winter heating bills directly to their heating companies. Starting Oct.1, homeowners and renters can apply online or through local administering agencies across the state. The assistance period runs from Nov. 1, 2024, to April 30, 2025. HEAP offers grants that do not need to be repaid; however, households must meet specific eligibility requirements to qualify.

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"No resident should have to worry about heating their home during the winter," said Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities Ed Augustus. "With high costs continuing to strain household finances, the Home Energy Assis-

tance Program is more critical than ever. We urge anyone in need of heating assistance to explore their eligibility by applying online or visiting the nearest administering agency. Please share this valuable information with loved ones or neighbors who could benefit from this support during the colder months."

Eligibility is determined by several factors, including household size and the 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 heating sources, including oil, electricity, natural gas, propane, kerosene, wood and coal. Households do not need to be on public assistance or have unpaid heating bills to qualify.

For more information find your local HEAP agency.

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The Very Merry Dickens Carolers brought Christmas cheer to the Samuel Slater Experience museum on December 8. The group, dressed in vintage Victorian attire, delighted the audience with the merriment of Christmas from long ago. The program was held on Main Street, Webster as it was in the early 1900s which added to the festive holiday atmosphere.

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Kyle Case, Hadley Coraccio, Olivia Daoust, Anthony DeGaetano, Cora Descheneau, Kendall Donnelly, Isabelle Gurney, Isabella LaMountain, Mason Livingston, Brooke Mastromatteo, Joseph Menke, Caroline Montalvo, Beowulf Morin, Landon Morris, Brandon O'Connor, Stella Pantano, Tianna Parker, Matthew Peck, Tessa Peloso, Samuel Santos, Chad Sliworski, Mia St. Peter, Briley Todd, Bradley Toedt, Liam Valipor, Aislyn White.

GRADE 7 HONORS

Ignacio Acosta-Lopez, Cameron Aquafresca, Lilah Archambeault, Gemma Balboni, Princess Bonagwa, Olivia Boulette, Saniya Bull, Haley Capistran, Hailey Cicerchia, Karoline D'Alessandro, Noah Durand, Joseph Esposito, Welinton Estrada-Lopez, Brielle Fournier, Kohen Garney, Jeremiah Gonzalez, Hailey Johnson, Devante Lanausse, Lucas Laurie, Brookelynn Manganano, Matthew Martellotta, Alana McFarland, Sophia Meneguzzo,

Ashton O'Malley, Maxwell Palaia, Ava Peters, Jenselys Ramos, Sophia Renaud, Rachel Rodriguez-Pacheco, Lilliana Tervo, Maci Turner, Parker Tyrrell, Anabelle Watters.

GRADE 8 HONORS

Michael Annancy, Loukas Baraklilis, Zachery Barberio, Lukus Berman, Brenna Burke, Alexander Campbell, Ethan Campbell, Mason Case, Chase Checkoway, Sophia Coghlan, Kendra Cutoni, Kellsey Dunn, Sophia Francis, Marquis Gagne, Natalie Gauthier, Emmary Gustafson, Mary-Jane Hall, Jaiden Handen, Ethan Hamilton, Brianna Judge, Quilan Ketter Larocque, Sophia Kinhan, Peter LaMountain, Victoria LaMountain, Chloe Lavallee, Olivia Martinez, Nathan Mayo, Tyler Melton, Agnes Molloy, Gusthavo Oliveria, Kaliyana Padilla, Grady Powers, Canon Rheault, Isabelle Richmond, Jayden Rosado, Harper Shoblom, Ava St. Peter, Jameson Tyrrell, Malayna Viera, Jude Worden.

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Webster Five Foundation Wraps 2024 with Record \$264,000 in Grants

Year's final grant cycle awards \$36,000 to 14 nonprofits making a difference

Embracing the spirit of giving, the Webster Five Foundation is proud to announce a record-breaking year of charitable contributions. In 2024, the Foundation awarded \$264,862 in 67 grants to support a range of local nonprofit programs and initiatives—surpassing its previous record by over \$23,000.

The Foundation's support addressed a variety of community needs, with 54 grants allocated to program development, including 23 that focused on improving or expanding access to youth programs.

Each quarter, the Foundation provides grants to nonprofit organizations or programs that support expanding or improving access to education, culture and the arts, social services, charitable activities and community development.

In the fourth and final grant cycle of 2024, the following 14 nonprofit organizations received \$36,000 in total funding from the Webster Five Foundation:

- Abby Kelley Foster House, Inc. \$2,500 to support the Food & Nutrition Services program, which ensures access to fresh, nutritious food through their weekly food pantry, regular nutrition and cooking classes and their healing herb garden.
- Ascentria Care Alliance \$1,000 to support the organization's Foster Care Outreach and Community Education campaign for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors program, the Unaccompanied Children program, and the Intensive Foster Care program.
- Boys & Girls Club of Worcester \$1,000 for the Club's Academic Success core area, which helps youth develop the qualities needed to become responsible citizens and community leaders.
- Edward Street \$2,500 to fund Worcester is Ready4K programming, a software program for parents that offers individualized learning strategies for their children.



Participants in Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll), which received \$2,500 from the Webster Five Foundation. The grant will support the EparaTodos Spanish-language program, helping Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses or nonprofits.

- Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll) \$2,500 to support its EparaTodos Spanish-language programming that focuses on helping Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs in the Greater Holyoke community start and grow their businesses or nonprofits.
- Friends of St. Luke's Inc. \$2,000 to help fund St. Luke's Guesthouse, which provides short-term sheltering and programs that guide guests to achieve self-sufficiency. Their vision is to offer all people who are homeless in southern Worcester County a place to experience Christian hospitality and empowerment.
- Open Door Arts, Inc. \$1,000 to support the Open Door Gallery at the Worcester Art Museum, which showcases the work of emerging and established artists with disabilities. Open Door Arts works annually with more than 2,000 students, teaching artists, educators and leaders of cultural organizations through innovative and inclusive programming.
- Pawsitively 4 Pink \$1,000 and a match of up to \$1,000 was also approved toward its Supporting Underserved Women Battling

- Breast Cancer programming. Pawsitively 4 Pink is committed to providing comprehensive financial and emotional support for low-income, underserved women in Massachusetts burdened by breast cancer.
- Rachel's Table \$1,500 for its Milk Program, which provides essential milk and dairy products to children and families in need. Rachel's Table works with local farms, grocery stores, and restaurants to collect and deliver food that would otherwise go to waste, ensuring that no one in the Worcester, MA, community and surrounding areas goes hungry.
- Thompson Ecumenical Empowerment Group, Inc. (TEEG)

- \$5,000 to support TEEG's Life Skills Empowerment Group programming to improve the lives of low-income individuals and families in the northeast corner of Connecticut. TEEG is a small grassroots non-profit community service agency that offers essential programs.
- VNA Care Network \$1,000 toward its Mentoring the Next Generation of Home Health and Hospice Clinicians programming. VNA Care provides home health, palliative, and hospice care to individuals and families in Worcester and throughout Central Massachusetts.
- Worcester Community Housing Resources (WCHR) \$7,500 for

the organization's general operations. WCHR's mission is to create and preserve affordable housing opportunities for low and moderate-income households and to initiate and support neighborhood revitalization throughout Worcester County.

- Worcester County Horticultural Society (New England Botanic Garden f.k.a. Tower Hill Botanic Garden) \$5,000 for Project Bloom, which partners with nonprofit organizations in greater Worcester to deliver hands-on, nature-based experiences to youth aged 5 to 18. The New England Botanic Garden aims to engage the local community and create experiences with plants that inspire people and improve the world.
- YOU, Inc., an affiliate of Seven Hills Foundation \$1,500 to support its Youth Academy, which is a fully grant-funded after-school college access and leadership program for promising low-income, first-generation high school students.

"The success of the Webster Five Foundation in 2024 shows just how much we can accomplish when we come together to invest in the future of our community" said Don Doyle, President/CEO, Webster Five. "These grants are more than just dollars—they're investments in lasting change, progress, and opportunity for generations to come." Since its inception in 1996, the Foundation has awarded \$4,165,370 to 299 organizations. The next round of grant recipients will be awarded in the first quarter of 2025.

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SPORTS

Hoping to Help His Team Go a Round Deeper

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Playing for the Auburn High School hockey team since he was a freshman, Landon Connor has seen the Rockets improve each year in the Division 2 State Tournament. During his first year with the team, Auburn lost to Duxbury in the first round; the next season, Connor and his teammates defeated Somerset Berkley Regional High School and lost to Walpole in the Sweet 16. Just last winter the Rockets captured wins against Amesbury and Plymouth South before falling in the Elite 8 to Tewksbury Memorial.

Now as he enters his fourth and final season with Auburn, Connor is hoping that he can help take his team at least one game deeper into the State Tournament.

“Each year we’ve been able to improve in the playoffs and I would really like to get even further this year,” the senior said. “Individually I want to go out and play my best hockey and do whatever I can to help this team while enjoying my final season.”

As the team has gotten better over the past three seasons, so has Connor’s game. During his freshman campaign he scored one goal and added four assists for five points, his sophomore year he was able to put the puck in the net 10 times while adding eight assists for 18 points and last season he netted nine goals and had 19 assists for 28 points.

The senior attributes his best season to his hard off-season work.

“My junior year was by far my best season and although it took me awhile to finally get the puck in



Landon Connor puts the puck safely in the net. Submitted photo

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the net, I eventually started to get hot,” he said. “That year I worked hard on my game, grew and put some weight on and it was harder to knock me off the puck.”

Connor also plays golf and lacrosse for the high school, but it’s hockey that is absolutely the number one sport in his heart. Having gotten the hockey bug from his father, who also skated for Auburn High School, Connor fell in love with the game at the young age of 3 and just couldn’t give it up.

He was little more than a toddler when he first stepped onto the ice with the town’s Learn to Skate program. Once he learned the game of hockey, he found himself playing for the Minuteman Flames out of Marlborough for five years. He would eventually leave the Flames

to begin playing for the Junior Railers club team out of Worcester, where he played up until the beginning of this year’s high school season.

Playing a partial season for the Railers helped him prepare for the upcoming high school season. He noted the extra skating and coaching really helped him to get ready for high school.

Growing up playing in the Auburn youth hockey league Connor was picked to play center and despite not being able to pick the position himself, he made it his own.

“Playing center allowed me to feel in control,” Connor said. “I know what is going on at all times on the ice and I get to help out the defense while still being an offensive player.”

Coming into the high school tryouts during his freshman campaign he wanted more than anything to make the varsity squad, but it wouldn’t kill him if he didn’t make the cut.

“High school hockey was difficult at first; it was a definitely a change of pace from what I was used to and the players were bigger, stronger and faster,” he said. “I feel that I adjusted to it quite well and had prepared and worked hard that summer and fall hoping to make the varsity team that year.”

Although his goal was to make the varsity team he was in a bit of a shock when he actually got onto the team. Despite his surprise, he was feeling really great about mak-

ing the team.

That season the freshman was able to start, but unfortunately he dislocated a knee in his first game and was forced to miss a handful of games while he recuperated.

“Originally I really didn’t know what was going on. All I knew was that I was in a lot of pain,” Connor said. “When I found out that I had dislocated my knee I was upset that I was not going to be able to skate for a while, but luckily it was pretty easy recovery with a lot of rest.”

As soon as he was cleared to get back on the ice, it was just a matter of time. The first-year player had to get used to things all over and just trust his knee. Before he knew it, he was back to his old self.

He knows this will be his final year playing competitive hockey and is hoping that it can become a very special year, one which he’ll remember for a long time. When the season does come to an end, Connor is hoping to go on and play club hockey on the collegiate level.

“I may play club hockey after this year, but I know it will not be as competitive as what I have been used to on the high school level and without the same energy the game will be losing something,” he said.

While he is thinking about his future playing time on the ice, he is not going to worry about it until it comes. Right now, he has one season, his senior campaign, with Auburn and is hoping to make the very best of it.

TALES FROM BEYOND

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The Crying Rocks

John Onion and The Devil

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

At the edge of Cedar Swamp in Charlestown, Rhode Island, just north of the old Narragansett Indian schoolhouse sits an outcropping of rocks called The Crying Rocks. The rocks are also located near School House Pond where a Narragansett boy named John Onion once challenged the devil. Both legends presented here are from our latest book, Ghost of King Philip's War.

According to Narragansett legend, the woods are so evil that according to Jeff Belanger and Ray Auger from their podcast New England Legends, "nature herself recoils in fear." The evil that once took place at the rocks still reverberates to this day and the flora below sometimes oozes with the crimson red blood of those who met their fate at the base of the outcropping.

The rocks are about a quarter mile past the old Narragansett

church. It is there that the sounds of babies crying echoes through the woods. A Narragansett named John Paul once told Colonial Minister, Ezra Stiles of the terrible fate that befell many infants at the rocks. Children born out of wedlock or those born with an infliction, or became infirm were brought to the rocks and either left there to perish or thrown over the edge.

Times were different and the constant movement of the tribe to summer camps and winter camps, along with hunting, wars and other vigorous living, created little room for any weakness. Those who were thought to be frail and useless through severe birth defects or illness were left at the rocks. It is said that at one time a mass of tiny skeletal bones could be seen gleaming in the sun below the ledge. The bones may be long gone, but the spirits of the children still linger about the rocks.

People wandering by the rocks

get an uneasy feeling or hear the sounds of babies crying. If one should dare venture out between the dark hours of 2 to 3 am, they may hear the restless spirits at their most active moments.

Just a short distance from The Crying Rocks in Charlestown, Rhode Island is Schoolhouse Pond. The pond is frequented by locals who enjoy its beauty year-round. There is a darker side of the pond that is told by locals and old timers. The legend is of a Narragansett named John Onion.

John was a strong and brave Narragansett lad who was fond of visiting the pond, especially in winter when the frozen surface afforded him the pleasure of skating. John was fast on skates and always found the opportunity to challenge anyone who was there to a race. The result was always the same; John would out skate his opponent by a long shot. The other kids often tried to race John, but were no match for his strength and

endurance on the ice. One evening, as the sun began to sink low in the Winter sky, John, in his confidence of his ability yelled out to his friends, who had long packed their skates and were leaving the shore for home, "I can never be beat on skates. In fact, I could out skate the devil!"

John continued skating and suddenly, from behind, he heard another set of skates. He turned around to see who was so close behind him but saw no one. John began skating faster and faster

but the sound of someone else on skates stayed right on his tail. Suddenly, he saw a dark figure closing in on him. No matter how fast he tried to skate, the figure kept gaining, skating faster and faster. John then remembered his words and in fear, rushed as fast as he could toward the shore where, in haste, never removed his skates, but instead ran all the way home with them still attached.

John never again dared to challenge anyone, especially the devil, to a skating match.



The Auburn Elks hosted a very well-attended Christmas party at the Auburn Senior Center and a holly jolly time was had by all.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Luke's Friends

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

The Golden Retriever is a breed known to have lots of friends. Luke Valentino is no exception. Intelligent and social, he craved interaction at an early age. He'd sit in the front yard, a live teddy bear, and watch the big dogs stroll by. "You look like my biological mother. Sort of. Want to come over?"

I imagined how difficult it must have been for Luke to leave his litter mates—to then sense that something was missing. His new bed smelled of lavender. His new home had comfy rugs. His new parents had gentle voices and soft hands. Still, something wasn't right. He nuzzled his blankets and whimpered. "Where are my sisters and brothers? I'm lonely!"

My heart broke.

Our plan was to house two pups following Lincoln's passing. I even wrote a story titled "Two in the Queue." I wanted to double the dog fun. Then something changed. I blame a 2 a.m. incident that happened in the backyard during an icy March night. Luke zoomed away from me to steal another piece of mulch. I lunged for him and ended up pulling a groin muscle. I hobbled back inside with a sore crotch and naughty pup. Something inside me stirred. I was too old for two pups. On the bright side, memories of Luke's siblings began to fade. Crocuses bloomed. Luke lifted his leg to pee over them and mark his territory. "Luke was here." The grass truly was greener at his new home—especially where he watered it!

My pup may not have a sibling (yet) but he certainly has a lot of friends, credit to watching and studying them as a puppy. As though humbled by their greatness, he'd lie down and wait for them to respond to his request to meet and greet. "Are you my biological mother? I was separated from my parents at birth."

Weeks turned into months and Luke's skin wizened to the unkind laws of the jungle.

We learned that not all dogs are friendly, and many are reactive. A silver lab once lunged for his soft, puppy ear during a dog-walk and nose-to-nose greeting. "YOWZA! THAT HURT!" The owner, apologetic, explained that his dog, a rescue, had not been socialized. I took

him to the dog park when he was about six months old. The decision led to more trauma. "Come on, triangle-eared dude! Let's play!" Innocent and immature, Luke barked in the face of a German Shepherd that was not into playful puppies. A wrestling match ensued. Things went from bad to worse until I found myself prying the shepherd's mouth from my pup's neck. Thank goodness for Luke's fluff! I held my emotions together to break up the dog fight, then teared up in the car. "I'm sorry, Luke. That was not okay." He popped his head from the sunroof of his dog crate and smiled. "I'm over it, Momma." I was soon to learn that Luke was not over it. In fact, the attack would leave a scar on his heart and mind.

Two years flew by. A dog walker casually strolled by our front yard with her muzzled German Shepherd, who happened to be new to the neighborhood. Luke darted across the yard after her. "You're not going to hurt me or my family, and you will not set foot on my grass!" He barked and snarled and showed his teeth. In his mind's eye, this was the dog who had nearly killed him. I intervened immediately. "I'm so sorry." My heart went out to the dog walker. I knew exactly how she felt. We do our best to domesticate our dogs, but sometimes their primal colors emerge. A dog is still a dog. Luke instinctively knew to protect his family from a dog he perceived to be a threat. Thereafter, I hired a dog trainer and learned how to best deal with Luke's trauma. Now I'm more selective about who Luke will socialize with. I offer him scheduled playdates with dogs whose parents are my friends.

His besties, listed alphabetically, have captured both our hearts.

HAVEN

Haven is a feisty, little English Cream with a surprisingly big appetite for wrestling big dogs. The first time she met Luke, she submitted with grace, slowing crouch-



ing to the ground to lie down. "I'm okay. I won't hurt you. I just want to play rough." She yielded to a downward dog pose that Luke couldn't resist. "Bring it on." The two dogs chased and nipped, galloped and whipped, flopped and flipped like a pair of dogs from a Dr. Seuss book. Haven's speed and agility complements Luke's defensive bear hugs. If given the opportunity, he'll hold her in place until she springs from his clutch for another round of Chase. Luke and Haven are a pair of opposites, attracted by a love for play

KODA

Koda is an adorable husky, most likely to be found buried at the bottom of a leaf pile. Nothing quite compares to the sight of a soft-faced husky who has just plunged



headfirst into a pile of leaves to track the delicious scent of a varmint. Koda is a member of Luke's morning Dog Walking group (there are six dogs in all) and one of his more peppery friends. "You are one crazy girl, but I love ya to pieces." The two dogs often share quick play sessions on my front lawn.

NESSIE

Nessie is a sassy and strong Viszla (a mix-breed) rescued from South Carolina. The two friends met on the street and forged an interesting relationship. "Excuse me. I'm not sure about you." Anxious and sensitive, Nessie set boundaries early on with a dog who appeared harmless, but one never knows. Better safe than sorry is Nessie's mantra. Luke behaved charmingly, sitting like a gentleman and allowing her to decide how much attention she'd like from him. He's long since ended up winning her heart over. The two share robust playdates in her spacious fenced-in yard. "Luke's over! Luke's



over! Luke's over!" I pull up in her driveway and Nessie's hollers flood our car. Luke fidgets and whines from his dog crate in the trunk. "Hurry up, Momma! Nessie needs me!" I park, activate the lift of the hatch, and circle around to unzip him. He soars like Superman from the back of my car, dashes to the edge of Nessie's wrought iron gate, and stares into her hazel eyes. "Let me in, Nessie."

OBI

Obi is Luke's favorite pillow thrashing, body slamming, stuffed animal mangling Labrador buddy. Luke and Obi have shared an affectionately aggressive relationship



for years. Obi loves to tease Luke with beloved toys and play Keep Away. "Give me back my lamb, Obi!!!" Luke barks like a seal in the poor dog's face. Obi, laid-back and resilient, shakes it off. "I'm not finished with it yet, Luke." Did I mention Obi also has a lake house, and a boat?

ROCCO

Luke's friendship with Rocco emerged slowly yet assuredly. Rocco was the new pup who took the place of Luke's sweet, Golden friend Bruno, who passed away last December at the age of ten. Upon entering a home that no longer included his buddy, Luke was confused. He ignored the new pup completely and searched the floors. "Where's Bruno? I smell him, but I can't find him. Where'd he go?"

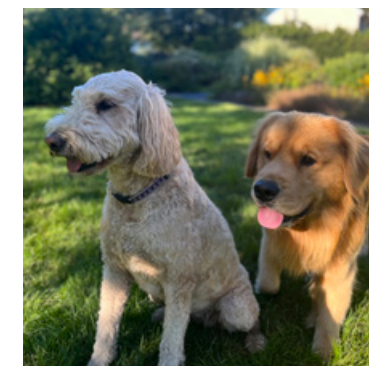
He sniffed Bruno's bed while we all held back tears. Mesmerized by the leonine Golden, Rocco stared longingly at Luke and waited to be noticed. "Hi. My name is Rocco. I sometimes get into mischief, but I'm a good boy, too." Luke has since adjusted to his favorite Golden



Family home and warmed up to a patient pup named Rocco.

ROSIE

These two friends, Golden and Doodle, have been partners in crime for a few years now. "Hi Rosie. Can you come over to play?" Luke charms her from the front step while she strolls on past, her neck craned back to him while she stammers forward on the leash. "I. Have. To. Go. For. A. Walk. Now. Luke." She fights her Dog Momma until a verdict is made. "Hah!" She's unleashed. Rosie bolts like lightning towards Luke. He concentrates on his friend with stoic obsession, and remains aloof to her sudden presence, as though



he's not interested. Then the two rumble and reveal their personalities. Rosie, svelte and agile, gallops gracefully around the yard. Luke, a defensive back, body slams her to imitate a wrestling match. Rosie and Luke are a match made on Wildflower Drive.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Visit Luke @[livingwithlukevalentino](https://www.instagram.com/livingwithlukevalentino) on IG

REAL ESTATE

Should you sell your house or rent it out?

When you're ready to move, figuring out what to do with your house is a big decision. Today, more homeowners are considering renting their home instead of selling it. Recent



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

data from Zillow shows about two-thirds (66 percent) of sellers thought about renting their home before listing, with nearly a third (28 percent) taking that possibility seriously. Compared to 2021, when fewer than half (47 percent) of homeowners considered renting before selling, it's clear this trend is on the rise.

So, should you sell your house and use the money toward your next home or keep it as a rental to build long-term wealth? Let's walk through some important questions to help you determine the right path for your financial and lifestyle goals.

Is your house a good fit for renting? Before you decide what to do, it's important to think about if it would make a good rental in the first place. For instance, if you're moving far away, managing ongoing maintenance could be difficult. Other factors to consider are if your neighborhood is ideal for rentals and if

your house needs significant repairs before it's ready for tenants. If any of these situations sound familiar, selling might be a more practical choice.

Are you ready for the realities of being a landlord? Managing a rental property involves more than collecting monthly rent. It's a commitment that can be time-consuming and challenging. For example, you may get maintenance calls at all hours of the day or find damage that needs to be repaired before a new tenant moves in. There's also the risk of tenants missing payments,



not taking care of your property or breaking their lease, which can add unexpected stress and financial strain. Landlords have to fix things like broken pipes, temperamental HVAC systems, and structural damage, among other essential repairs. If you don't have

a few thousand dollars on hand to take care of these repairs, you could end up in a bind.

Do you understand the costs? If you're considering renting primarily for passive income, remember, there are additional costs you should anticipate. You still need to pay your mortgage and property taxes, even if the rent doesn't cover all of it.

Insurance, landlord insurance typically costs about 25 percent more than regular home insurance, and it's necessary to cover damages and injuries.

Maintenance and repairs, plan to spend at least 1 percent of the home's value annually, more if the house is older.

Finding a Tenant: This involves advertising costs and potentially paying for background checks. Vacancies, if the property sits empty between tenants, you'll lose rental income and have to cover the cost of the mortgage until you find a new tenant.

Management and HOA fees, a property manager can ease the burden, but typically charges about 10 percent of the rent. HOA fees are an additional cost too, if applicable.

To sum it all up, selling or renting out your home is a personal decision. Make sure to weigh the pros and cons carefully and consult with professionals like those at The Marzeotti Group or another trusted real estate professional so you feel supported and informed as you make your decision.

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Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (intention), Amen.
 If you pray three times a day, three consecutive days, you will receive your intention, no matter how impossible it may seem. Praise and Thanksgiving please the Heart of God. **Believer**

Oxford Public Library

Thursday, Dec. 26 – December Movie Matinee at 2 p.m. “What We Did on Our Holiday.” PG-13

Monday, Dec. 30 – Sensory-friendly Storytime hosted by Reagan Bush at 10 a.m.. Children and young teens are welcome to join us for this special sensory-friendly Storytime with local author Reagan Bush. Reagan Bush is a 9 year old girl from central Massachusetts. She wrote [the book “Perfectly Me, Autism Included”] because all the others did not paint a full picture of a person, just a disability. She loves to sing, see live music, do gymnastics, and advocate for

herself and others on the autism spectrum. **Registration is not required, but recommended.**

Monday, Dec. 30 – Join us for three hours of gaming with OneUp Games! From 1 - 4 p.m for ages 10 – 17 years. Open game play with virtual reality and multiple gaming systems. Play the games you didn't get for Christmas! Check online for registration details.

Tuesday, Dec. 31 - 11:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. - Bluey themed New Year's party for children in the downstairs meeting room. Crafts, games and more! Please register: <https://forms.gle/f5oPTyCvy2WsHqPu5>

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THE CAR DOCTOR jpaul@aanortheast.com

Beware the Self-Fix for Check Engine Light

Q. What do you think about disconnecting the negative side cable of battery for 10 seconds on 2017 Mazda CX-5? I want to reset the dash and get rid of the check engine light. Do all the other functions the computer controls stay set?

A. Disconnecting the battery will clear the check engine light, but it will not fix the problem that turned on the light initially. Disconnecting the battery will typically clear memory items such as the radio presets, seat memory and the clock. It would be better to scan the computer for fault codes, repair the issue and then electronically clear the code. If the check engine light comes back on you still have more work to do.

Q. Years ago, I was involved in an accident because the oncoming driver had no lights on. Today's cars have an auto setting on the light switch and the sensor activates the lights when dark enough. Unfortunately, I still see so many drivers not using this

function and driving without lights. It's obviously dangerous. I suspect that the instrument cluster lights are illuminated, maybe giving the driver a sense the lights are on. Would you know if AAA or other driver safety organizations addressing this?

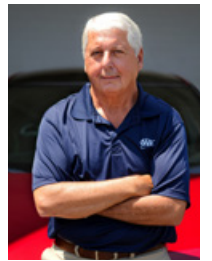
A. As a lead instructor for AAA's Defensive driver classes I would remind students of this issue of this all the time. This is especially true in your household has more than one car and one does not have automatic headlights. (This is the case in our household.) Also, periodically I try to address the issue on my Car Doctor columns. Too often people get fooled into thing their headlights are on, but it is only the daytime running lights. Nearly every state has some variation of a law that requires headlights on one half hour after sunset to sunrise. This also includes during rain and when visibility is less than 1,000 feet.

Q. I own a 2020 Cadillac CT5 Sedan and it is a "Certified Pre-Owned" (CPO) vehicle. The car was used by the Cadillac Motor Company Northeast Zone Manager prior to my purchase. The car just turned 14,000 miles and I am truly pleased with the vehicle; and I have access to a nearby Cadillac Dealer that I have used for service with other Cadillacs that I have owned. The CPO runs out the end of next month and I went ahead and purchased an extended warranty through the Finance Manager at the nearby dealership. Then I just read that you do not endorse the purchase

of an extended warranty! Did I make a mistake?

A. No mistake, a car like yours with many high-tech features is a very good candidate for an extended warranty. The dealer/manufacture's and (self-promotion) AAA's warranty are the only ones I would recommend. In my 40 years at AAA I have seen so many of the television and now internet warranty companies come and go. In many cases the consumer is left with nothing but an expensive piece of paper. You did the right thing.

Q. I had been using Invisible Glass and found that lately it wasn't as effective as it used to be. You suggested another brand which I tried and found to also be not as effective as I would have liked. Today I tried Invisible Glass-Glass Stripper. It says to use it to prepare your windshield for something else like Rain-X. It is a very mild abrasive mixture. I have to admit, it did a great job on both the inside and outside of my windshield. Now I don't know if you are supposed to use it on the inside but I did. I'm hoping there are no bad reactions to its use both inside and out, time will tell. I will say this. There is going to be some



BY JOHN PAUL

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 13

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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

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Time for New Year's Financial Resolutions

Now that the calendar has flipped, it's time for some New Year's resolutions. You could decide you're going to exercise more, lose weight, learn a new skill, reconnect with old friends — the possibilities are almost limitless. This year, why not add a few financial



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

resolutions to your list?

Here are a few to consider:

• **Reduce your debts.** It may be easier said than done, but if you can cut down on your debt

load, you'll increase your cash flow and have more money available to invest for your future. So, look for ways to lower your expenses and spending. You might find it helpful to use one of the budgeting apps available online.

• **Boost your retirement savings.** Try to put in as much as you can afford to your IRA and your 401(k) or other employer-sponsored retirement plan. If your salary goes up this year, you've got a good opportunity to increase your contributions to these retirement accounts. And

once you turn 50, you can make pre-tax catch-up contributions for your 401(k) and traditional IRA. You might also want to review the investment mix within your 401(k) or similar plan to determine whether it's still providing the growth potential you need, given your risk tolerance and time horizon.

• **Build an emergency fund.** It's generally a good idea to maintain an emergency fund containing up to six months' worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account. Without such a fund, you might be forced to dip into your long-term investments to pay for short-term needs, such as an expensive auto or home repair.

• **Keep funding your non-retirement goals.** Your traditional IRA and 401(k) are good ways to save for retirement — but you likely have other goals, too, and you'll need to save and invest for them. So, for example, if you want your children to go to college or receive some other type of post-secondary training, you might want to invest in a tax-advantaged 529 education savings plan. And if you have short-term goals, such as saving for a wedding or taking an overseas vacation, you might want to put some money away in a liquid account. For a short-term goal, you don't necessarily need to

invest aggressively for growth — you just want the money to be there for you when you need it.

• **Review your estate plans.** If you haven't already created your estate plans, you may want to do so in 2025. Of course, if you're relatively young, you might not think you need to have estate plans in place just yet, but life is unpredictable, and the future is not ours to see. If you have already drawn up estate plans, you may want to review them, especially if you've recently experienced changes in your life and family situation, such as marriage, remarriage or the addition of a new child. Because estate planning can be complex, you'll want to work with a qualified legal professional.

You may not be able to tackle all these resolutions in 2025. But by addressing as many of them as you can, you may find that, by the end of the year, you have made progress toward your goals and set yourself on a positive course for all the years to come.

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



Season's Greetings

May you have a happy, prosperous and healthy new year!



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CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 12

serious swearing when that first bug hits my windshield.

A. I have not seen the Invisible Glass, Glass Stripper product, but will look for it the next time I am at the store. No one is fussier than my wife when it comes to clean car windows. I typically use Sprayway window cleaner and recently discovered Scott Shop paper towels for glass. This heavy duty (and a bit pricey) paper towels

do a nice job. When the windows are clean, I still go over them with a new microfiber towel.

Q. I wish to replace my six-year-old car battery (no problems yet, just age). Can I install a replacement myself without disturbing any electronics. Disconnect the negative terminal first then proceed with the positive. Just reverse procedure installing new replacement?

A. In most cars yes, you can install a new battery with no issues. Yes the clock, radio presets and memory functions will

need to be reset. Some vehicle have anti-theft radios, you will need a radio code. With some cars the computer will need to relearn a few basics. This is usually nothing more than the engine may start and stall a couple of times after the battery is installed. Some European cars will need the battery/charging system reset or registered. The car will run fine but the car needs to know it has a new battery. At AAA when we change a battery, we use a memory saver, just to eliminate issues.

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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 20

• The Webster Senior Center will hold its annual Christmas party for Webster seniors at 12 p.m., 5 Church Street. Catered luncheon by Mac's and live music by Steve Lyons. Contact the Senior Center for your

ticket, 508-949-3845.

• The Birch Alley Brass Ensemble will present a concert at Valley Chapel in Uxbridge on Friday, December 20th at 7 P.M. The brass ensemble, directed by William Moffett, is made up of 35 student and professional musicians from area towns including Uxbridge, Northbridge, Upton, Hopedale, Mendon and Milford. This concert will feature Christmas music from around the world and is free and open to the public. This will be the 13th annual performance. The concert is funded in part by the Uxbridge, Milford and Hopedale Cultural Councils.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

• Celebrate the Winter Solstice with "Christmas in New England," hosted by the Grass Roots Coffeehouse and the Rockdale Congregational Church. "Christmas in New England" has been performing concerts

for over 20 years, at RCC since 2007. Karen Wilber, Amy Gallatin, Roger Williams, JD Williams, Dave Orloski, Krissy & Bob Dick will present a night of traditional, contemporary, original Christmas and Holiday/Seasonal songs.

The concert will take place in sanctuary of the Rockdale Cong. Church, 42 Fowler Road, Northbridge, MA. Prior to the show, come have a bowl of soup or chili, and at intermission have dessert. Proceeds go to the Church. Also we'll have our Cookie Walk at intermission. Buy a box for \$10 and fill it up with cookies baked by the congregation.

Admission to the show is \$15 at the door only. Doors will be open at 6:30. Seating is at a first come/first serve basis.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27

• The Charlton Public Library and Charlton Senior Center will host the Second Annual New Year's Eve Celebration for our Seniors!

Join us from 6 - 8 p.m. for some light refreshments and good conversation, and shake a leg to the sounds of the Mason Tyler Band! Seating is limited so advanced registration is required. Please register by calling the Senior Center at 508-248-2231. Priority will be given to Charlton residents ages 60+. Registration will open to non-residents after Dec. 13. Charlton Public Library is located at 40 Main Street in Charlton, Massachusetts.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31

• Finish up 2024 at the Sutton Historical Society signature event, the annual Last Night Cannon Firing by our cannon crew at the M. M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop, 6 Singletary Avenue. Arrive by 11:55 p.m. or you will miss this unique event. All events are free and open to members and the general public of all ages. Information about the Society, membership forms, and event updates can be found at sutton1704.org.

THROUGH MONDAY, DECEMBER 30

• "Christmas by Candlelight" is a cherished holiday tradition at Old Sturbridge Village, welcoming thousands of new and returning visitors each year.

Guests are invited to watch demonstrations of classic Christmas projects, stroll through the decorated Village and Christmas Tree Trail, listen to stories and live music, taste sweet treats, ride the horse-drawn carryall, vote for their favorite gingerbread house, learn about the history of holiday traditions, visit with Santa, and more. It runs from 2 - 8 p.m.

New this year: embark on a musical journey through the 19th century with "Upon a Midnight Clear: An Acoustic New England Christmas," presented by ClockJack Productions.

HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 15

Christmas by Candlelight at Old Sturbridge Village

There's still time to experience the Magic of the Holidays

Old Sturbridge Village announces the return of Christmas by Candlelight, a cherished celebration of New England's festive holiday traditions.

The Village transforms into a stunning winter wonderland, featuring over 85 beautifully decorated trees on the Christmas Tree Trail, over 80 wreaths, hundreds of candles illuminating the pathways, and more than a mile of garland

used to adorn the historic buildings. Each evening of the program will kick off at 4:30 p.m. with a magical lighting ceremony.

Visitors can experience a variety of activities, including knitting Christmas stockings and baking traditional holiday treats. Guests can stroll through the picturesque village and cross the enchanting Christmas Wish Bridge, a scenic path lined with trees along the



Quinebaug River. Children will have the chance to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus in their new cabin, where they can share their holiday wishes. Visitors are also encouraged to participate in the annual Gingerbread House contest, where creative entries will be displayed for public voting.

"Christmas by Candlelight is a celebration of the cherished traditions that make the season truly special," said Rhys Simmons, Director of Interpretation at Old Sturbridge Village. "Our goal is to transport you back in time with an experience that delights all the senses. Picture twinkling lights adorning the trees, the enticing aromas and flavors of mulled cider and freshly baked gingerbread, and the familiar sounds of holiday carols echoing all around."

This year's Christmas by Candlelight will feature an array of live entertainment, including historical performances and readings of Christmas tales for children. New this year is "Upon a Midnight Clear - An Acoustic New England Christmas," a musical journey showcasing local artists reinterpreting classic carols.

In addition to the festivities,

guests can explore the origins of classic traditions such as nutcrackers and gingerbread, along with a remarkable miniature nativity scene featuring over 600 pieces. The Richardson House will showcase Italian Christmas customs. There will also be plenty of opportunities for holiday shopping at the Miner Grant Store and the Ox & Yoke Mercantile.

"This event has become a tradition for so many guests year after year, and many families look forward to it as the highlight of their holiday season," continued Simmons. "We invite everyone to experience the joy of the season, relish in classic traditions, and create new memories with loved ones this winter at Christmas by Candlelight."

Christmas by Candlelight is made possible by generous sponsors: Cornerstone Bank, Country Bank, G&F Precision Molding, and Southbridge Credit Union. For more information on tickets and full event details, visit the Old Sturbridge Village website, www.osv.org.

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<p>NEW YEAR'S EVE WITH WHISKEY BOULEVARD</p> <p>Dinner and party tickets and party only tickets available</p> <p>DECEMBER 31</p>	<p>COMEDY NIGHT AT SLATERS</p> <p>DECEMBER 20</p> <p>FEATURING: KEVIN DORSEY, RYAN COOKE, BOBBIKURS, HOSTED BY: JESS GUMFADA</p>	<p>ELVIS PRESLEY'S 90th Birthday Celebration</p> <p>JANUARY 4</p> <p>WITH AN AWARD WINNING TRIBUTE ARTIST DAN FONTAINE!</p>
<p>COMEDY NIGHT AT SLATERS</p> <p>JANUARY 17</p> <p>FEATURING: KELLY MARCHAND, VICTOR DAVIS, JESSIE COOK, BOB, BETH AND JESSIE FERRIS</p>	<p>Mojo Rhodes</p> <p>JANUARY 18</p>	<p>JON STETSON</p> <p>JANUARY 25</p>
<p>WORLD GONE CRAZY: NEW ENGLAND'S PREMIERE COMEDY BAND</p> <p>FEBRUARY 1</p>	<p>RED SOLO CUP: A TRIBUTE TO THE LEGENDARY TOBY KEITH</p> <p>FEBRUARY 22</p>	<p>BELOW DECK BAND: A TRIBUTE TO YACHT ROCK</p> <p>MARCH 1</p>

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Tina Bemis of Bemis Farms led a holiday decoration workshop at the Oxford Senior Center on Dec. 12

Christmas Gift Ideas from the Auburn Historical Society & Museum

Is there a person on your Christmas list that's hard to buy for? Do you need some ideas? Come to the Auburn Historical Society & Museum and see the different items available for that person on your list. Vintage ornaments, different buildings immortalized. Historic books which include the pictorial history of Auburn, as well as the newest book, Auburn Then and Now written by Rich Hedin. Other books written by local authors include Images of America:

Hope Cemetery, The Grip The 1918 Pandemic and a City Under Siege, The Historic Houses of Auburn Vol.2. There are Dandie mugs, magnets, Posters of historic buildings, and the "Auburn Doors" poster. Free guided tours offered with purchases. The Auburn Museum is located at 41 South St. and is open Tuesday and Saturday 9:30 to 12:30. It is free and open to the public.

HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 14

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

• The Samuel Slater Experience museum in Webster will host three-session rigid heddle loom weaving workshop for beginners from 12 – 3:30 p.m. The second and third classes will be January 11 and 18. A one-day rug weaving workshop for intermediate weavers will take place on Saturday, February 8. Local fiber artist Sharon Geyer will lead the workshops. Students will learn all basic weaving skills How to create a project planning sheet to calculate yarn requirements, how to use a wrapping peg, how to use the direct warping method as well as weaving tips and techniques that will lead to success. The basic workshop is \$150 with a \$15 additional charge for yarn. The fee for the rug weaving workshop is \$50. For more information, email admin@samuelslaterexperience.org or call 408-461-2955. Samuel Slater Experience is located in the former National Guard Armory at 31 Ray Street, Webster.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11

• St. Peter's Parish in Northbridge is holding a Chicken Parm Dinner starting at 5:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall. Bring your family and friends for a wonderful meal and meet some new friends. Tickets are \$17 per dinner and include salad and dessert. To go

meals will be available for pick-up around 5 p.m. All to-go orders must be paid for in advance. Please call the parish office at 508-234-2156 or email: parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org to purchase tickets or if you have any questions.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

• The 2025 Small Stones Festival of the Arts is open from 12 – 5 p.m. today at the Brigham Hill Community Barn in North Grafton. The Festival will run through February 2. The Barn, even in winter, is a lovely, open locale for enjoying art. Parking is plentiful and the heating system is more than adequate to keep up with the winter weather! With the support of area artists and the Blackstone Valley community we look forward to an even more successful Festival in 2025. An awards ceremony will be held at 2 p.m. today. Artists' talks will also take place at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 25. The exhibit is open at the following times. There is no charge for admittance. Sunday, January 26: 12 – 4 p.m. Tuesday, January 28: 12 – 8 p.m. Wednesday, January 29: 12 – 4 p.m. Thursday, January 30: 12 – 4 p.m. Friday, January 31: 12 – 4 p.m. Saturday, February 3: 12 – 6 p.m. Sunday, February 2: 12 – 4 p.m. Juror Talks, 2 p.m. This is the final day of the Exhibition for 2025.

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