



Stevens Mill renovation project on Dudley Selectmen agenda Jan. 27

Representatives of Stevens Mill Owner, LLC are joining the Dudley Board of Selectmen meeting on January 27 with an update on the mill renovation project expected to begin in the spring of 2025. Residents with questions about the mill project are encouraged to attend this meeting.

The project had its beginning in August 2020 when Stevens Mill Owner LLC of Columbia, SC, bought the 6.95-acre property and its 267,000-square-foot mill at 8 Mill Street.

Project developer Camden

Management Partners, who holds Stevens Mill Owner LLC, proposed a \$43 million plan to renovate the mill.

The plan approved by the Dudley Planning Board in May 2022 detailed a mixed-use development in the historic Stevens Mill to contain 159 market rate apartments, including 16 affordable units, and 5,600 square feet of commercial space.

The groundbreaking was set for spring 2024, but high interest rates coupled with the continued high costs of construction nationwide

have created a multi-million-dollar shortfall in the developer's budget, thereby causing the delay of construction. The \$43 million project cost is now reported to be more than \$60 million.

Stevens Linen Assoc., Inc. dominated one of the region's oldest industries from 1850 to 1950. Incorporated by Henry Hale Stevens in 1846, Stevens Linens began production in a mill built in 1812 at the corner of Ardlock Place and

MILL RENOVATION

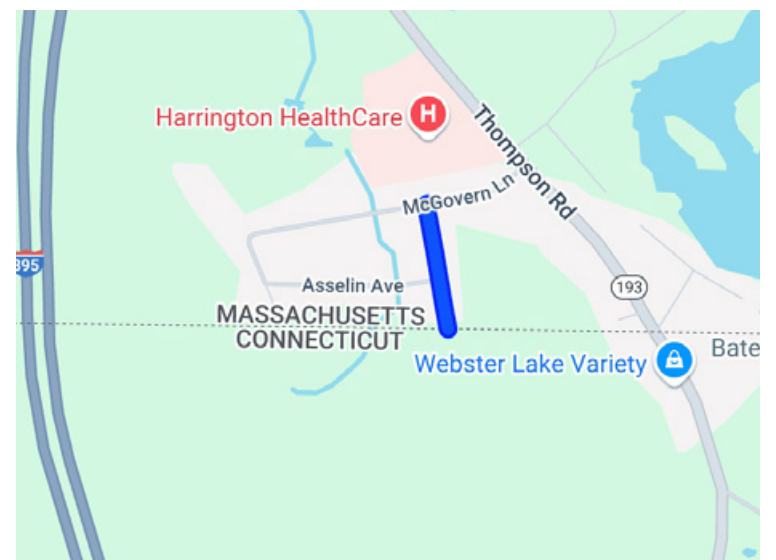
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Webster Access Road to Dr. Sharma's Housing Development has Gone to Court

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

There is a dispute between a Connecticut housing development site owned by Dr. Ishwara Sharma, a retired cardiologist, and the Town of Webster, Massachusetts. The housing development site located

campus as access. Brian Avenue is a short and well-worn road, as is McGovern Lane, that would be inevitably reduced to rubble and require new paving and restoration if heavy construction vehicles, dump trucks, and the like were allowed to traverse its pavement in addition to anti-



in the town of Thompson, Connecticut and does not have its own access road in Connecticut. Rather, developers seek to use Brian Avenue in Webster located off McGovern Lane near the Harrington/UMass hospital

pated new homeowner access. Webster taxpayers would have to pay for a new access road for

ACCESS ROAD

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Charlton Fire Station Project Moves Forward, Town Hall Service Counters, Permitting Guidebook and More

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Charlton Town Administrator, Andrew Golas, has released his January 2025 list of updates and projects. "Our fire

station project continues to move forward quickly," he said. "We should be receiving general contractor bids by January 17 with sub-bids received on December 27, 2024 that were released to general contractors. The sub-bids



appeared budget-favorable and the school district property conveyance to the town is currently on Governor Maura Healey's desk

CHARLTON

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ACCESS ROAD

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future Thompson residents who, obviously, would not be taxed, leaving as Webster residents are who live along Brian Avenue and McGovern Lane to pick up the bill.

“Thompson would benefit nicely from this construction project,” stated Webster Town Administrator Rick LaFond. “They would receive the taxes from the properties constructed, but Webster would suffer by having to maintain the roadways

accessing the Thompson housing development site. Currently, emergency response vehicles from Webster would be those to have access to the property.”

Because Webster was never notified of the project before the Thompson Planning Board’s approval of same, the town has two appeals pending in the Connecticut court system. Dr. Sharma has re-applied for a special permit before the court cases have been resolved. It is the same application that the Thompson Planning Board had approved but issued despite the fact that Thompson never met the abutter’s notice

requirements. The Thompson Planning Board failed to notify Webster before their public hearing regarding the construction site.

When Webster officials learned of the housing development project and the fact that there is no access to the site except through its streets, concrete barriers were placed at the end of Brian Avenue to prevent construction from proceeding before a court decision had been rendered. It appears that a simple remedy would be for Dr. Sharma to seek Connecticut roadway easements through Thompson Road in Thompson. The current project is not in compliance with Webster’s zoning laws.

The town is very much con-

cerned about the negative impact to McGovern Lane and Brian Avenue. Heavy construction vehicles on the fragile asphalt would turn into a nightmare for Webster taxpayers who would have to foot the bill for new repaving without the benefit of tax funding. All Webster taxpayers would be burdened with paying for new road construction, most likely requiring a tax increase for all Webster taxpayers. The additional tax load would pay for maintaining the roadways leading to a private investor’s housing construction project. It would certainly be in Webster taxpayers’ interest to let the town of Thompson’s Planning Board know of their concerns about Webster’s potential roadway damages if such a construc-

tion project were to come to pass.

Pavement damage increases rapidly with higher truck axle loads and actually increases faster than the loads increase. A nine-ton axle construction truck causes about 10 times more damage than a five-ton axle load according to the International Journal for Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology. With this type of heavy tonnage on Brian Avenue and McGovern Lane, the roads would most likely be reduced to rubble in a very short period of time necessitating new paving paid for by all Webster taxpayers for the benefit of the private investor as well as a real estate tax benefit to the town of Thompson.

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MILL RENOVATION

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Mill Road.

Its foremost structure, known as “The Main Mill,” was constructed of locally quarried granite block between 1861 and 1864.

In time, its two seven-story towers stood over what became the largest of five mill villages in Dudley. The now historic mill on the east side of town ceased operations in the mid-20th century and, with the exception of a short-lived flea market, has been vacant since.

Today, it is said to be the only remaining example of a linen manufacturing plant in the United States.



While the developer works to launch construction, the grant-funded infrastructure improvements to the neighborhood around the mill are on schedule. Work to install new water and sewer lines,

realign road intersections and install sidewalks has paused for the winter months and are set to continue in the spring.

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Published on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month. Direct mailed to nearly 65,000 homes and businesses each month and available on news stands in the region.

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2nd Friday: Blackstone Valley South: Douglas, Northbridge & Uxbridge
4th Friday: The YankeeXpress North: Auburn, Oxford
4th Friday: Blackstone Valley North: Grafton, Millbury & Sutton

Contact us:

Patty Roy, Editor: proy@theyankeeexpress.com
 Submit business news and community events to news@theyankeeexpress.com
 To request advertising info, please email ads@theyankeeexpress.com
 Jen Schofield, Advertising Director: The Yankee Xpress, Blackstone Valley Xpress, Local Town Pages, Milford and Upton Mendon Free Press; jenschofield@yankeeshopper.net
 Bill Cronan, Blackstone Xpress North and South (Douglas, Uxbridge, Northbridge; Millbury, Grafton, Sutton); bcronan@theyankeeexpress.com
 Christine Hodecker, The Yankee Xpress North and South (Auburn, Charlton, Dudley, Oxford, and Webster); chrishodecker@yankeeshopper.net
 Susanne Odell Farber, Upton, Mendon, Hopedale: sue@sodellconsult.com
 Laura Gleim, Billing & Sales: lgleim@theyankeeexpress.com

Kimberly Vasseur, Production Manager
 Sally Patterson, Graphic Artist
 Contributing Writers and Columnists: Tom D'Agostino, Christine Galeone, Amy Palumbo-Leclaire, Mark Marzeotti, John Paul, Janet Stoica, Christopher Tremblay

Blackstone Valley Xpress/©2025
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CHARLTON
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awaiting her approval. This approval will resolve any delays in finalizing a general contractor's agreement."

Additionally, a quote request for Town Clerk and Town Administrator offices' installation of service counters has been released as well as ADA (American Disabilities Act) improvements to the existing counters at the Treasurer/Collector & Assessors' offices. Bids will be due by January 23. Once a contractor is selected, each office will have the opportunity to schedule installation in the best way possible to least impact day-to-day operations.

"The Town Administrator's office has taken quick action and has already been reorganized by Mary and Chelsea to accommodate the upcoming improvements," said Golas. "Our town permit guidebook is in process of final revisions and I would like to thank Curt for taking the lead on putting this manual together."

Bids for the # 2 Schoolhouse Repair Project have been put out and the work is scheduled to be completed before June 30, 2025. Bid documents are available through the Town Administrator's office. "Our town permit guidebook is in process of final revisions and I would like to thank Curt for taking the lead on putting this manual together," stated the town administrator.

Mr. Golas also thanked all

departments who have submitted their annual budgets. This information will be compiled and placed into a master budget format awaiting state budget numbers. He awaits potential new costs for health insurance as the state has projected a "cautious" revenue projection heading into this year. Conservative projections are forecast as budget planning begins. "With the creation of the Facilities Department in last year's budget, this year we are looking to centralize facility maintenance in certain areas such as generator maintenance and pest control. These are two areas that we would like to centralize town wide," he said.

"I would also like to congratulate Rob Barton on his new appointment as our Fire Chief effective December 23, 2024 upon the retirement of Chief Ed Knopf. Best wishes and success to him and our fire department," said Golas.

Golas also updated about Charlton's ADA Self Evaluation and Transition Plan and how they are working with The Center for Living & Working. The Center is currently conducting evaluations of all municipal buildings for ADA accessibility. He also mentioned the Town Hall's roof leaks in the south wing. Roofing contractors have been contacted to make temporary repairs. The roof is over 25 years old and replacement costs will be placed on the town's long-term capital list.

The Dudley Senior Center welcomes the New Year with programs and events

January 16: Memory Café from 12- 2 p.m. Start the New Year with songs and dancing. Lunch will be homemade soup with plain pizza and assorted desserts at a cost of \$5 per person. Please RSVP for this event.

January 22: Potluck Lunch of turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberry sauce with vegetables and desserts at a cost of \$5 per person. Please RSVP for this event.

Monthly activities at Dudley

Senior Center: Tuesdays at 1 p.m. Pitch League; Wednesday at 11:30 a.m. the Dudley Senior Center Knitting group; Tri Valley lunches served Monday and Thursday. The Book Club is reading "Someone Else's Shoes" by Jo Jo Moyes. The discussion date will be determined.

The Senior Center is closed January 20, 2024.

For all reservations, please call 508-949-8015 or sign up in the Senior Center.

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Dudley PD Toy Drive


About a week before Christmas, members of the Dudley Police Department handed out toys to over 36 families that asked for assistance the holiday season. The department thanked Jimmy's Pizza, Spencer Bell Construction, Nichols College, Shepherd Hill Regional High School, the Hull family, the Budzynkiewicz family, the Hayes family, the Ferland family, the Grant family, and other residents who donated towards the toy drive. Your generosity has helped over 90 children. This year's toy drive was coordinated by Sgt. Keith Remillard and Officer Luis Pacheco.



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Dudley's energy aggregation program on track for April start up

The town's first electricity aggregation program was developed by Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda to reduce energy costs for Dudley residents. Mr. Ruda worked with a municipal aggregation consultant, Colonial Power Group, Inc., and the state Department of Energy Resources to build a public aggregation in compliance with state law.

The purpose of the plan is to represent Dudley residents in competitive markets to negotiate rates for electricity. In doing so, it brings together the buying power of more than 11,900 consumers to provide reduced energy costs for residents. It further enables the town to take greater control of its energy options, which includes the ability to pursue price stability,

savings opportunities and the amount of renewable energy procured.

At a Board of Selectmen's meeting December 30, representatives of Colonial Power said residents can expect to receive mailers in February that will explain the program and its options.

Residents who are presently under contract with a third-party



supplier and do not decline the service when offered in the February mailing will be automatically enrolled in the town aggregate program and may opt out at any time without fees or hassles.

The program start up is set to begin in April.

supplier, they said, may join the town program but suggests first checking with the supplier regarding possible fees for early contract termination.

Residents who do not have a

Webster Senior Center

5 Church St., Webster
508-949-3845
Monday- Friday 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.,
with every first Thursday 9 a.m. -

7 p.m.
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Seniors are welcome. Tri-Valley Lunches are served on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays at 11:30 am. Please call the center at least forty-eight hours in advance to reserve or cancel your meal. A \$3 donation is appreciated. All meals include milk, bread, and fruit or dessert.

Need Transportation? Contact SCM Elderbus at 1-800-321-0243 at least two business days in advance to schedule transportation.

Elderbus is available Mondays-Fridays 8:30 am- 3pm. Fuel Assistance is returning to the Senior Center. Worcester County Action Council (WCAC) will be here every other Thursday from 9:30 am- 2:30 pm. Please call WCAC for an appointment, 508-754-1176.

The Bomba Beauty Salon is at the Webster Senior Center! Call 508-341-8724 for an appointment. Bomba Beauty Salon is open for walk in appointments on Wednesdays from 10 a.m.- 1 p.m. Also Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays by appointment only from 10 a.m.- 3 p.m. Please call

508-341-8724 to schedule an appointment.

We are now offering Movie Matinees every Wednesday at 1 p.m.! Popcorn is provided. No registration needed. The movie January 15 is "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", January 22 is "Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark", January 29 is "Rescued by Ruby."

The first Thursday of every month we will be open until 7 p.m. with entertainment starting at 5:45 p.m. Chair Dancing Exercise classes with Forty Arroyo are the perfect workout for any fitness ability! The cost is a recommended \$3 donation per class. Classes are on Mondays, and Wednesdays at 9:30 a.m.

Mondays: Knitting/Crochet Social 10 a.m.- 12p.m.

Tuesdays: Bingo starts promptly at 1p.m. Please plan to arrive by 12:30 p.m. to allow time to buy your bingo sheets. Bingo sheets are not sold after 12:45 pm.

Do you like to play Cribbage? Thursdays: Our weekly Cribbage group meets weekly at 1 p.m.

Calling card players or interested persons to the Webster

Senior Center! Come join us for six-card or thirteen-card pitch! Six-card

Wednesdays : Six card pitch meets at 1 p.m.

Thursdays: 13-card pitch meets at 1 p.m.

Fridays: Mahjonn group meets at 1p.m. Beginners welcome!

The Worcester County Sheriff's Office House Numbering Program

will create a custom wooden sign with your house number free of

charge. One sign per senior household.

Please contact the Webster Senior Center at 508 - 949-3845 if you are interested in having a house number sign made for you.

Senior SAFE is a program that supports fire and life safety education

for seniors. The Webster Fire Dept. will do a home visit to ensure that you have the correct smoke and CO2 alarms, and that they are working properly. This is at no cost to you! All you have to do is give them a call at (508) 949-3875.

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Pearle Crawford Library January Events

40 Schofield Ave., Dudley
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Event calendar at www.crawfordlibrary.org The library will be closed on Monday, January 20 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Mondays in January

Gentle Yoga 10 – 11 a.m. Join our new yoga instructor Patricia, for a traditional “on the mat” yoga class with chair yoga modifications. This truly is a one size fits all class. Bring your own mat. Wear layers, do not eat heavily 1.5-2 hours before class. Registration is required to receive weather cancellation notifications.

Tuesdays in January

1 p.m. Movies at the Pearle! This month's theme is: Books we love that were

made into movies we love.

January 14: Princess Bride

January 21: The Devil Wears Prada

January 28: The Notebook

No registration required.

Monday, January 13

1:15 p.m.

Friends of the Library Monthly Meeting. Join the Friends of the Library for the monthly meeting!

Thursday, January 16

10:30-11:30 a.m.

A representative from the office of State Rep. John Marsi will be here to respond to any of your questions and concerns.

Saturday, January 18

10-11 a.m.

Community Yoga with Erin. Traditional “on the mat” yoga class with 15 minute relaxation at the end. Bring your own mat. Wear layers, do not eat heavily 1.5-2 hours before class. No registration required.

Thursday, January 23

6-7:30 p.m.

Lotus Flower Lantern Craft Join us to make a traditional Korean lotus lantern, learn about the lotus and the lantern festival, and finish up by learning a little about Korean customs at the end of the class. The Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project members will give step-by-step instructions on making a lovely lotus flower lantern using colored paper and wireframes. All materials are supplied.

Ages 17 + please. Registration is required.

Thursday, January 23

6-7:30 p.m.

Crawford Library Book Group. The book we are reading is “Unwind” by author Neil Shuster-

man. Books are available at the circulation desk for checkout one month prior to discussion. No registration required.

Thursday, January 30

6 p.m.

Literacy Volunteers of South Central MA information session for volunteers.

Wednesdays @ 1:30

Quilting Group. Are you a quilter? Would you like to learn how to be one?

All skill levels are welcome to this informal group. Bring your projects and join the fun! No registration required.

Thursday 5:30-7:30 p.m. and Friday 10 a.m. -12 p.m.

Knit & Crochet Group

All stitchers are welcome for

this informal group. Bring your project and enjoy the company! No registration required.

Thursdays, 6:00-7:30

Dungeons & Dragons Game. Come play the world's number one role playing game. This program is geared towards kids and teens that are looking to learn more about playing and some short adventures!

No registration required.

Storytimes at the Pearle, 10 -10:45 a.m.

Registration not required.

Siblings always welcome!

Tuesday-Pre-K Power (best for ages 3-5)

Wednesday-Toddler Time (best for ages 0-3)

Friday-Open Baby Play (best

for ages 0-12 months pre-walkers)

Wiggles & Giggles for Littles

Monday, January 13, 27, and Feb. 3, 10 (no session on 1/20) 10 -10:30 a.m.

YFCP is pleased to offer a free five -week music series for children, ages 6-24 months with a parent/caregiver. Ms. Laine will introduce music, movement, musical instruments and stories to your little ones. Registration required. Please note: you are registering for a five-week series.

Wiggles & Giggles for children ages 2 – 5 years 10:45 – 11:45 a.m.

Monday, January 6, 13, 27, and Feb. 3, 10 (no groups on 1/20)

Kids will sing, move, play musical instruments, learn rhythm and listen to stories. Siblings are welcome. Registration required. Please note: you are registering for a five-week series.

Monday, January 13, 6 p.m.

Guest Reader Story Times with Mason Road School teacher, Dawn Faubert. Join Mrs. Faubert for a winter story and fun craft!

Thursday, January 16 6-6:45 p.m.

Pokemon Club. Join us for Pokemon Club! Each month we will have exciting crafts and activities! Best for ages 6 and up. No registration required. This is not a drop off program.

The advertisement features a large group photo of the staff at Charlton Optical. Above them are several award medals from the 'Official Community Choice Awards' for 'Best of Central Mass' in Worcester County, spanning from 2016 to 2024. A large number '9' is prominently displayed, indicating nine consecutive years. The background shows the storefront of Charlton Optical with a sign that says 'EYE EXAMS'. A Facebook logo is in the top right corner.

Left to Right: Lauryn, Shannon, John, Emily, Gina, R.D.O. Peter, Lynda, Dave, Dr. Renee Gomez, April, Dr. Jenna Larocque

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Quabbin, Then and Now: A Photography Presentation

On Saturday, January 11, from 11 a.m. -12:30 p.m. Dale Monette of North Quabbin Photography will present "Quabbin, Then and Now." Dale has taken Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) images from the Quabbin Reservoir archives taken in the mid 1930's of

the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir and recreated these photographs from the same location in present day settings. Come see how the houses and scenes looked during the construction period of the Quabbin compared to what it looks like now some 80 years later. Many never seen



before images from the DCR Archives are included in this program. You will also see pictures of what everyday life was like living in the four Quabbin Valley towns

that would soon be no more. Free and open to the public, but registration is requested. Please visit charltonlibrary.org (event calendar) to register.

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Dudley Woman's Club Holiday Donations

Continuing an annual tradition, DWC members donated more than 600 food items valued at \$1,844 to assemble 30 Holiday Gift Baskets for local veterans, who needed a bit of help



Members of the Dudley Woman's Club with Veteran's Agent Stephen P. Rogerson.

stocking the pantry and putting a holiday meal on the table. The club delivered the 30 baskets to Webster-Dudley Veteran's Agent Stephen P. Rogerson, who arranged delivery to those in need.

The DWC membership of more than 65 women of various ages

and backgrounds from Dudley, Webster, Southbridge, Charlton, Uxbridge, Millbury and several Northern Connecticut towns work together to uplift and support our communities. For more information, please visit www.dudleywomansclub.org.

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January Events at the Charlton Public Library

For further details and to register for programs, please visit our website (charltonlibrary.org)

Additional parking is available across the street at Town Hall and at the Elementary School.

Movies @ The Library

All showings are on Tuesdays at 1p.m. - Dexter Hall

January 14 : REAGAN. 2024. Rated PG-13. 136 minutes. Dennis Quaid, Mena Suvari.

January 21 : IT ENDS WITH US. 2024. Rated PG-13. 130 minutes. Blake Lively.

January 28 : TWISTERS. 2024. Rated PG-13. 122 minutes. Daisy Edgar-Jones, Glen Powell.

Threaded Together Fiber Arts GROUP (formerly Silver Needles Knit & Crochet Group)

Thursdays from 1-3 p.m.- Upstairs Reading Room

Bring your current project and relax with friends. All are welcome regardless of skill level.

Quabbin, Then and Now: North Quabbin Photography Presentation

Saturday, January 11, 11a.m.-12:30 p.m. - Dexter Hall - Registration requested.

Dale Monette of North Quabbin Photography, has taken Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) images from the Quabbin Reservoir archives taken in the mid 1930's of the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir and recreated these photographs from the same location in present day settings. Come see how the houses and scenes looked during the construction period of the Quabbin compared to what it looks like now some 80 years later. Many never seen before images from the DCR Archives are included in this program. You will also see pictures of what everyday life was like living in the four Quabbin Valley towns that would soon be no more.

Friends of the Library Meeting

Tuesday, January 14, 3:30-4:30 p.m. - Community Meeting

Room

Monthly meeting of Friends of Charlton Public Library. All are welcome. Join us!

Simple Steps to Getting Organized in the New Year

Tuesday, January 14, 6- 7:30 p.m. Dexter Hall - Registration required.

This fun and interactive workshop will get you focused on your organizing goals. Learn tips on: New ways to think about your stuff; How to get started; Hot spots to help the process; Tackling the paper trail.

Alzheimer's Caregiver Support Group

Thursday, January 16, 6-7:30 p.m. Community Meeting Room

Led by experienced caregivers and offers information, resources, and strategies specific to caring for someone with Alzheimer's and other Dementias along with support for transitioning to different care settings. Co-sponsored by Tri-Valley and Charlton Public Library.

Death Cafe

Thursday, January 16, 6-7:30 p.m. Dexter Hall

A group-directed discussion of death with no agenda, objectives or course of action, no set conclusions and no judgment. Death Cafés are a safe environment to gather, eat cake, and enjoy open-minded conversation about dying and death. Email kwalker4@mac.com with questions.

Saturday Acoustic Roots Jam

Saturday, January 18, 12-1:30 p.m. Community Meeting Room

An acoustic only music jam. Open to all 18+. Email Cule5632@gmail.com for more information.

Felt Succulent Craft

Tuesday, January 21, 6-7:30 p.m. Community Meeting Room - Registration required

Wednesday, January 22, 10:30-12 p.m. - Community Meeting Room - Registration required
This month we're making

lovely felt succulents. This program is for adults and teens ages 13 and up.

Charlton Ukulele League & Ensemble

Thursday, January 23, 6-7:30 p.m. Community Meeting Room

Experienced musicians and newbies all welcome. Email Cule5632@gmail.com for more information.

Critical Thinking Discussion Group - The Metamorphosis by Kafka

Friday, January 24, 1-2 p.m. Sibley Reading Area (Main Floor)

No experience with critical thinking discussion groups is necessary. Books/materials are available for checkout one month prior to discussion. Email [\[charter.net\]\(http://charter.net\) for more information.](mailto:saga3@</p>
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Beekeeping for Beginners

Thursday, January 30, 6-7:30 p.m. Dexter Hall - Registration requested.

Come learn all about the honeybee and all of the fascinating things they do as individuals and as a colony. You will leave this presentation armed with the knowledge to start your very own hive. Presented by Scott Herbert, owner of Charlton Bee Company. Please visit the kids page on our website for Storytime details and more programs.

Fiber Arts Club for Tweens & Teens

Friday, January 27, 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. Story Time Room

Are you interested in knitting,

crocheting, needle felting, or other fiber art? Join us to practice your craft, learn from more experienced friends, or teach others! Don't forget to bring your current projects.

This group is best for tweens and teens ages 9 -18.

My Little Pony Club

Wednesday, January 22, 4-4:30 p.m. Story Time Room - Registration is required.

Do you love My Little Pony? Meet up with other My Little Pony fans and do a fun activity! Don't forget to bring your favorite pony (if you have one)! This club is for ages 5-10.

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SPORTS

Running for the Records

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Upon entering Shepherd Hill Regional High School as a freshman Anthony Graves was looking to play football for the Rams and while he did suit up that first year, his football career came to an end rather abruptly. Graves gave up on his dream to play football at the end of his freshman year, but despite the fact that he was walking away from football he was running toward track.

"I decided to quit football after my freshman year because I injured my elbow and had to have surgery," the Rams running back said. "Having found that I was good in track, I didn't want to keep playing football where I might get injured again and possibly end that career."

The now-junior began running track as a social thing; all the football players were doing it so during the winter season his freshman year he went along with a bunch of friends and joined the track team. Graves would run the 300m during the indoor season and liked it so much he continued to run during the spring season taking part in the 100 and 200 m races in addition to par-

ticipating in the 4x100 and 4x200 relays for Shepherd Hill.

"Being a running back on the football team I gravitated toward the sprinting events," he said. "I seemed to be acclimated for the event and the coach thought that I was doing good there and kept me there."

Although Graves believes that he was somewhat slow when he first began running, he found that by the middle of that first year he was knocking on the door to qualify for the 400 m at Nationals while he was actually running in the 600 m event. Graves would eventually qualify to run in the Nationals as a freshman crossing the line of the 600 with a time of 1:33.17.

The first-year runner remembers glancing over at the clock as he past the finish line and realized that he got below the qualifying time. The time gave him a sense of hope that he could do something if he continued to run high school track for Shepherd Hill.

"I knew the basics of running track, but after qualifying I started to do a lot of research into the little things so that I could become better," Graves said.

Liking what he was able to accomplish during the indoor sea-

son, Graves joined the outdoor track team as well and by the time his sophomore year rolled around he noticed that those little things that he was not doing (ice baths and heat compressions) as a freshman was helping him heal. Graves found that he was hindered with a lot of strains his first year, but by changing his routine and doing some of those little things he was not getting as injured during his sophomore season.

Despite the fact that Graves thought that he was slow as a runner his freshman campaign coach Len Harmon recalls the runner to be rather quick.

"As an eighth grader he was at the track with a bunch of his football buddies so I approached them and asked them if I could time them all running the 40-yard dash," the Rams coach said. "When Tony passed the line I remember looking at my stopwatch and thinking that it couldn't be right, so I had them run it again. He was by far the fastest runner of the group."

During the outdoor season of his sophomore year, he and his teammates qualified to take part in the 4x200 relay, but the foursome decided to forego the race due to expenses that they couldn't afford. That season the 4x1 relay team posted a personal best time of 44.84 and the 4x200 team broke the school record with a time of 1:31.33. That same outdoor season Graves also posted his best time in the 100 (11.3), the 200 (22.83) and the 400 (51.67).

As he got ready to enter his junior year on the track, Graves set some high standards for himself; with the biggest being to break the school record held by



Anthony Graves of Shepherd Hill. 2023 photo

Bryan Santos in the 300 as well as getting to the Nationals in the same event. When his sophomore indoor season came to a close Graves found himself a half of a second behind Santos' record.

"Tony has always been successful in the sprinting events," Harmon said. "After the first meet of the season he ran the 300 in a time of 35.87 and finds himself 2/10's of a second away from taking the record from Bryan; a record I thought would never be broken. Now he is only the second runner in school history to run the 300 in under 36 seconds."

Now running for the Rams in his third season Graves is not only looking for the school record in the 300, but he would also like to have his name etched

in record books as the owner of the 200, which he is .8/10's of a second off and the 400, where he finds himself a half second off the record holder.

"As someone who was not even fast in the beginning, I've progressed to where I am currently chasing three school records," he said. "Never mind getting one, but to get all three would be crazy and would show me that all my hard work had paid off."

Coach Harmon has noticed that Graves is ready to chase those records and he is hoping that as a junior he can finish in the top three at the Meet of Champions and find his way into the top six in the Division 3 Meet.

"Last year he did the work, but didn't take care of his body and had a lot of little nagging injuries," Harmon said. "Over the summer he attended some camps at Harvard where he has embraced everything they were teaching him. He's healthy and strong and after putting up a personal best in his first race this year, I believe that he's going to do some special things this year."

While Graves still has two years running indoor and outdoor track for Shepherd Hill he would very much like to run on the collegiate level following high school and has already gotten the ball rolling on the recruiting process by talking to some coaches.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Moll Pitcher

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

This story is an excerpt from the book *Strange New England* by Thomas D'Agostino and Arlene Nicholson published by Arcadia Publishing.

New England is full of tales regarding witches, wizards and other seers who made their living through the telling of fortunes, but few ever reached the celebrity of Marblehead's own Moll Pitcher.

Moll Pitcher was the granddaughter of famed Marblehead wizard John Dimond who was known to magically guide ships to safety during storms from atop Burial Hill in the small village. Moll was born Mary "Moll" Dimond in 1736 in a house called the Old Brig at the foot of Burial Hill.

Moll was of medium stature, possessing an unusually large head, with a pale, thin face, arched eyebrows and long brown hair. She was also a very wise and intelligent woman who had an uncanny knack for reading people by how they moved or acted.

Moll married a shoemaker by the name of Richard Pitcher on October 2, 1760, and had four children, John, Rebecca, Ruth and Lydia. They later moved to nearby Lynn, where she soon gained a reputation far and wide for telling fortunes.

From royalty to rags, they came seeking the talents of Moll. Her cottage at the base of High Rock created the most appropriate atmosphere for her craft. She made predictions of events that would

transpire up to ten, even twenty years later. It was said that she even predicted the outcome of the Battle of Breed's Hill. Generals such as Burgoyne, Pitcairn, Gage and even Washington were among those who heeded her predictions.

Sailors and sea captains came to see Moll before setting sail and would often postpone their journeys based on her predictions. In some cases, ships would sit at port empty for weeks until Moll gave a good prediction to sail. Nearly every port an American ship sailed into around the world knew of Moll Pitcher, and many would inquire of those who came from her jurisdiction of any news, good or bad. Business people often sought her advice before making important decisions.

Moll used tarot cards and read palms on occasion, but her primary fortunetelling method was derived from tea leaves. She would boil the leaves and dump them into the client's cup. From there, she would read the leaves that settled at the bottom of the cup. Their position revealed the fate of the inquirer. If the leaves fell scattered, the client would be unfortunate in love. If they fell crowded together, that meant happiness and wealth. If they arranged themselves in a series of lines, the client would live a long life and have many children. If but a few remained in the cup, the inquirer would die young.

Whether or not her predictions held much preciseness is a matter of modern conjecture, but those who sought her wisdom in her day,

took them as the wise words of a true seer. It is told that treasure hunters often sought out Moll for locations of lost booty. She would say something to the fact, "Fools, if I knew where money was buried, do you think I would tell you where it is?"

Moll Pitcher died on April 9, 1813, and was buried in the West Lynn Burial Ground. Her stone states her name, Mary Pitcher, with her birth date of 1738. Her original grave was unmarked until 1887, when a proper monument was erected in her honor.

Molly may have gone to live with the spirits, but her predictions live on in a book published in 1895 called *The Celebrated Moll Pitcher's Prophecies*.

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All Day Activities

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Maker Monday: Perler Beads 3:30 – 5 p.m.; The Nest: Business Plan Basics 6-8 p.m.

Tuesdays:

Sensory Bin Storytime 10 – 11 a.m.; One on One Tech Help with Jessica 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.; Mini Block Party 3:30 – 5 p.m.; 4-5:30 p.m. Farmers Market (Rec); Literacy Volunteers – ESL classes

6-7 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Stuffed Animals Storytime 10 – 10:45 p.m.

Thursdays:

Me and My Mini 10 – 10:45 a.m.; One on One Tech Help with Jessica 3-4 p.m.; Nourish Your Nerves; an Herbal Workshop 6-7 p.m.

Fridays:

Toddler Playtime 10 – 11 a.m.; Beginner Origami 3:45 – 4:45 p.m.

Saturdays:

Try Yoga 9:30 – 11:15 Try Yoga

Mondays: Jan. 11 Henna at the Library 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Jan. 18 Bluey Storytime 11:30a.m. – 12:30 p.m.; Jan.25 Bigfoot Jr. 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.; Adult Book Group 6:30 – 8 p.m.

Thursdays: Jan. 16 and Jan. 30 Teen Video Game Time 3-5 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 30 – Computer Basics – Unclutter your Email 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.; 6-8 p.m. the Nest: Steps to Start Your Small Business

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Luke Sees the Best in Others

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

I've noticed that Luke sees the good in me, and in others. He'll watch how I wrap a present and break into a quiet smile as though to say, "My Mom is so good at folding seams." He doesn't notice that I misjudged how much paper I'll need for the gift size, or that the pattern is off the mark. Instead, he stares up at me with the curiosity of a chimpanzee.

"Santa is going to bring Luke presents." His head froze while his mouth stiffened to the thought of Santa Claus, another good person. He knows what Santa looks like and what he stands for. "Look who's here, Luke!" December brought forth vast displays of Santa Clauses: hip shaking Santas, squeaking Santas, and fire-truck riding Santas. Goldens behave like children until the age of seven, so it felt okay to play up the red suited hero of his dog-hood. "It's Santa! It's Santa!" He raced to every door in the house to catch a glimpse of Santa Claus riding in the back of the fire truck while the siren blared. Luke's December flame, however, came with exception.

The Catholic church bishop wore the wrong hat. He looked like Santa. He dressed like Santa. But something was all wrong. Luke noticed the bishop's "mitre" (a tall ceremonial hat) and growled from the gingerbread table in the basement of my town's church festival. "GRRR."

"Luke, please!" My dog's suspicion did not belong in the church. "That's not the real Santa, Momma." I shushed. I scolded. I hushed. Still, he wouldn't let it go.

"Leave it." I spat the command with firmness, as though we were on a walk and a big dog equally as handsome as Luke was on the other side of the road. Then I distracted him with another clutch



—ignorance? —of small dogs. Hear me out. Little Chico had eyes that bulged while he choked on his own venomous growls. I don't know how much that doggie in the window cost, but one thing was for certain. Chico was certifiably crazy. His temper was hotter than a habanero. His growl was a low murmur, a ticking time bomb that haunted me. I never knew when Chico would snap and plummet through the window to grab my leg while I delivered the newspaper. However ruthless, I'm convinced Luke would have loved little Chico.

He allows them to snarl, jump up his chest and tap dance around him. "Those little dudes are hyper, but I love 'em to pieces." Perhaps as a big dog, Luke doesn't feel the need to compete with them. He only picks on dogs his own size. The cat has been a small friend of even greater intrigue.

"Where'd you go? Why'd you hide? Can we be just friends?" I've always worried about the cat picking on Luke because of his size. His exuberance has sent crafty cats up trees, under beds, and behind closed doors.

A black cat named Regina, his first love, once emerged from her hiding spot to allow Luke to stare at her. The two locked eyes for timeless moments. "I won't hurt you. Promise. I just want to tell you that you have the most beautiful green eyes."

Luke is certainly not perfect. But his ability to see the good in others is something I hope will continue to rub off on me, just like the blonde hairs on my black clothing.



Write to Amy:
amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Find Luke on Instagram
@livingwithlukevalentino

tactic. I broke a gingerbread boy in half and gently placed it in his unearned mouth. He inhaled an arm and salivated. Call it a bribe, but the bishop became a distant memory. (It's worth a mention that Luke's discrimination does not rest solely on a Catholic Church bishop. He doesn't care for, or accept, Mrs. Claus. Perhaps, her hair bun does not work for him).

Luke may have a few quirky preferences but, thankfully, he sees the good in most dogs, especially small ones. I've never owned (or particularly cared for) little dogs, especially those with rattling barks. Perhaps the gurgling and growling chihuahua who lived in the window of my childhood neighbor's home has led to my—distaste? Lack of understanding?



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REAL ESTATE

What will it take for prices to come down?

You may be wondering if home prices are going to crash.

Believe it or not, some people might even be hoping this happens so they can finally purchase a more affordable home. But experts agree that's not what's in the cards and here's why. There are more people who want to buy a home than there are homes available to purchase. That's what drives prices up. Nationally, home prices aren't going to be coming down anytime soon.

Prices depend on supply and demand. The housing market works like any other market – when demand is high and supply is low, prices rise. According to the latest estimates, the U.S. is fac-

ing a housing shortfall of several million homes. That means there are far more people looking to buy (demand) than there are homes for sale (supply). That mismatch is the key reason why prices won't fall at the national level. The main driving force on pricing is the limited amount of inventory in most markets across the country. That issue is not going to be solved overnight or in the next twelve months.

How did we get here? For over 15 years, homebuilders haven't been building enough homes to keep up with buyer demand. After the 2008 housing crisis, homebuilding slowed significantly, and it's only recently started to recover. Even with new construction on the rise over the past few years, builders are playing catch-up. They're still not even keeping up with today's demand, let alone making up for years of underbuilding. As long as there's a housing shortage, home prices will remain steady or increase in most areas.

What about next year? The

majority of experts agree prices will keep rising next year, but at a much slower, healthier pace. But it's important to note home prices vary by market. What happens nationally might not reflect exactly what's happening in this area. If your local market has more inventory available, prices could grow more slowly or even decline slightly. But in areas where inventory remains tight, prices will keep climbing – and that's what's happening throughout most of the country. That's why it's crucial to work with a local real estate expert like the Marzeotti Group who understands this market and can explain what's going here. If you're wondering what it'll take for prices to come down, it all goes back to supply and demand. With inventory still limited in most markets, prices are likely to remain steady or rise. To see what's happening with home prices where you live, contact the Marzeotti Group or another trusted Realtor. We can help you understand your market and make a plan that works for you.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI




Mark Marzeotti
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Marzeotti Group
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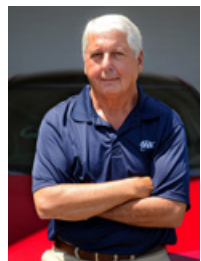



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THE CAR DOCTOR jpaul@aanortheast.com

Looking to Buy a Classic Car? Try an Auction, but Get Documentation



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I am in the market for a classic car. I see auctions on television all the time and the cars look fantastic. What do you think about buying from an auction and how about internet and telephone bidding?

A. I have been to a couple of auctions and will be going to another soon. What I have found is the cars range from 100 percent restored to others that are daily drivers. The cars that worry me are the cars that look extra clean. An engine that is spotless, has new paint, but no evidence of a rebuild or even refresh of gaskets and seals. I have also seen some very questionable body repairs. Buying in person and scouting the cars will certainly help with questions. Buying online you are going by pictures. Honest sellers will show you the car's faults but also documentation of repairs. My suggestions are do your research, know what you are looking for and become an "expert" with a few vehicles that interest you. Have a budget and stick to

it. Keep in mind almost every car, unless perfect is going to need some repairs. Also do not forget about added charges, such as buyer's premium and transportation costs. Finally buy a vehicle to enjoy, not as an investment. Send me a picture of your new car when you get it.

Q. My 2012 Honda CR-V now has 124,000 miles. The headlights are cloudy and already resurfaced once. To replace the headlight assemblies is quite expensive. This has been a great car, and I have put very little money into it, just routine maintenance. I have really only had one major repair and that was only a wheel bearing. It is 12 years old, and the chances of future major repairs are certainly possible. I really love my CRV and don't want to have to buy a new vehicle. What would John do?

A. It is always cheaper to fix an old car than buy a new one, but repairs and even major repairs are certainly possible at nearly 13 years old. Buying a new car should give you more reliability, possibly better fuel economy and the latest safety features that your current car lacks. If this CR-V is a secondary vehicle in your household, I would probably keep it and repair it as issues come up. If this is the only vehicle in your household, I think I would start thinking about a new car. You are in a particularly good position, since you don't need a new car immediately and you can take your time and find the perfect next car.

Q. I listen to your radio show, and I have heard you say it is a car program and not a political program. But I have a car question that is also political. With the new administration threatening tariffs on imported vehicles, should I buy a new Hyundai now?

A. I have heard the arbitrary 200 percent tariffs on vehicles built in Mexico. I also heard the president inviting Chinese car companies to build factories in the United States to avoid tariffs. Hyundai builds Tucson, Santa Fe and Santa Cruz vehicles in Alabama, so based on the invitation to build factories here in the United States I do not believe you will see a tariff. You are correct, I would rather answer questions about gas prices, oil engines and transmissions.

Q. I own a 2019 Honda Pilot with 67,000 miles on it. Can you recommend a qualified mechanic to replace the timing belt in my area?

A. This is a bit early for timing belt replacement unless the vehicle is regularly driven

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 13

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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com

Is buying a home always the right move?

It's widely thought that home ownership is a key to building wealth — but is it? And should you consistently make sacrifices to buy your own home?

Let's start with the first question: Is owning a home essential to building wealth? It would probably



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

be more accurate to say that home ownership can be helpful in building wealth. Building home equity — essentially, the difference

between the size of your home's value and what you still owe — is certainly valuable. Plus, the bigger your equity, the less you might have to take out in a new mortgage if you ever want to buy a different home.

Now for the next question: How much should you sacrifice to buy your own home? This isn't an easy question to answer because buying a home isn't just a financial issue — it's also an emotional one. Many people simply like the feeling of owning a home. If you fall into this category, you might be willing to make many sacrifices to join the

ranks of homeowners.

However, if you're relatively young and you are part of a single or even a dual-income household, you may well find that your other priorities are more important than home ownership, at least for the moment. These priorities can include paying off student loans, reducing other debts, paying for child care, meeting health care costs and even saving for retirement. With all these expenses, you might not be able to take on a big mortgage, along with real estate taxes, homeowners' insurance and the inevitable but costly repairs that come with owning a home.

In addition to the danger of becoming "house poor" by paying too high a percentage of your income on your mortgage, you could face another issue by sinking too much money into your home — and that's liquidity. A home is much more illiquid than savings or investment accounts, so if you needed money in a hurry, and most of yours was tied up in your home, you might be in a jam. You could tap into your home equity through a loan or a line of credit, but that's basically taking on even more debt, though these loans and credit lines typically offer lower interest rates than other forms of

borrowing.

So, here's the bottom line: You don't need to feel that you are missing out on a chance to build wealth by not buying a home immediately — especially if you would feel extremely stretched by the mortgage payments, given how expensive homes are today. You won't hurt yourself — and, in fact, you'll likely help yourself — by taking care of your most pressing priorities first.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you can never become a homeowner. If you would still like to own a home someday, you could start saving for a down payment, keeping the money in a liquid, low-risk account. Just as importantly, though, you should plan on how owning a home can fit into your budget and how it will affect your cash flow. If you can manage it, you may indeed find that there's no place like home.

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

CAR DOCTOR

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in extremely high temperatures above 110 °F (43 °C), or in very low temperatures below -20 degrees. I would wait until the car maintenance reminder displays indicator number 4 which is to replace the timing belt, spark plugs, check the valve adjustments and inspect the water pump. The typical mileage is much closer to 110,000 miles. Also

check with the dealer, some Pilots were recalled for premature timing belt failure. As for an independent shop, go to aaa.com/repair for an AAA Approved repair shop in your area. The typical cost for service 4 is about seven hours of labor plus parts.

Q. I have a 2021 Mitsubishi Mirage and when the gas light is blinking and gas is getting low, approximately how many miles do I have left till empty?

A. Typically, in most vehicles when the low fuel light comes on you have between 35-50 miles until you run out of fuel. A flashing low fuel light may be less, perhaps even 10 miles until the car stops running. I would not make a habit of driving with the low fuel light on. The fuel pump is cooled by gasoline in the fuel tank, driving with very little fuel allows the fuel pump to get hot and shortens its life.



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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.

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.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12

• B-I-N-G-O night hosted by Uxbridge Parents for a Safe Graduation meet at 2 p.m. at the Uxbridge VFW Post 1385, 13 Cross Road, Uxbridge. Cards are \$5 each. Sales begin at 1 p.m.

JANUARY 16

• Are you ready to tackle your home's clutter? From 6-7:30 p.m. the Charlton Public Library will host an organizing workshop guaranteed to help you start the new year off on the right foot. Jenna Elliott, owner of The Naked Flower Professional Organizers, will get you focused on your organizing goals in this fun and interactive workshop. She will share tips on: new ways to think about your stuff; how to get started; hot spots to help the process; and tackling the paper trail. Jenna has been an organizer and re-designer for more than 20 years and works with a variety of clients, both in the office and in the home. Prior to starting

The Naked Flower, Jenna was a master floral designer and project manager for a fortune 500 company. Please register for this program by visiting our website/event calendar at charltonlibrary.org. Charlton Public Library is located at 40 Main Street in Charlton, Massachusetts.

JANUARY 19

• New England Country Music Club presents the "Rhode Island Red Necks" at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin Street, North Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 p.m. Music plays from 1-5 p.m.

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.

MONDAY, JANUARY 27

• The Webster/Dudley/Oxford Chamber of Commerce will hold its Annual Meeting from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Samuel Slater Experience, 31 Ray Street, Webster. The guest speaker is John Gumpert of Camden Management, developer of the Stevens Mill site in Dudley. Members are \$25 and non-members are \$30. Register at www.wdochamberma.com.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

• Uxbridge Parents for a Safe Graduation

Comedy Fundraiser, VFW Post 1385, 13 Cross Road, Uxbridge. Pasta Dinner and Dessert included. Cash bar, raffles, 50/50 drawing, auctions. An 18 + event. Tickets are \$30. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Show starts at 6:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15

• The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce is hosting its 25th Anniversary Home & Community Expo at the Northbridge High School Field House, 427 Linwood Avenue. This is a unique chance for businesses, non-profits, and community organizations to connect with local residents to showcase their products and services. Register online at blackstonevalley.org/events or contact Liz O'Neil at 508-234-9090 or email loineil@blackstonevalley.org.

THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH

• Coin Show at the VFW Post 1385. 13 Cross Road, Uxbridge. 3-7 p.m. Free Admission, Free Appraisals

Webster to Hold Second Business Outreach Breakfast on January 21

BY JANET STOICA

The town has gotten off to a great start with its first Business Outreach meeting that was held in August for its downtown businesses. Local businesses have provided good feedback and

the town wants to keep the momentum going by having informal but sustainable meetings. "We want everyone to feel comfortable about their concerns," said Rick LaFond, Webster's Town Administrator, "We're trying to connect with members of our business commu-

nity and we are looking forward to their continued feedback."

The invitations have gone out and the meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, 2025, from 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. and will be held in the first floor Community Room of the Gladys E. Kelly Library on

Main Street. Light refreshments will be served.

Items to be discussed will be upcoming events; the new small business assistance center, The Nest, located at the library; and other potential invitees. "We'll brainstorm and update on potential projects," said Mr. LaFond.

Ann Morgan, Webster's Director of Planning & Economic Development, and Carole Marchand, Webster Senior Center Director, will host the program and will



review benefits and impacts of the Business Outreach group.

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<h3 style="margin: 0;">SUNDAY BRUNCH</h3> <p style="margin: 0;">10:00 AM - 3:00 PM</p>						
<p style="margin: 0; font-weight: bold;">FOR MENUS, RESERVATIONS, TICKETS, AND MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.SAMUELSLATERS.COM</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: small;">OVERLOOKING WEBSTER LAKE • 200 GORE ROAD, WEBSTER, MA</p>						

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It's Over, the Holiday Gift-Frenzy Is Finally Over ...

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Sweet January, at last. The more December holidays that pass the more I look forward to January when there is no pressure to rack your brain thinking of just the right gift for your family members, friends, etc. during the holiday season. Of course, just when you think you have gifted that most special item for a close family member or friend, you open your gift from THEM and Lo and Behold, it's one of the most unthoughtful and impersonal items you've ever laid your eyes on. Why do you bother yourself to search far-and-wide for their wondrous gifts every single blessed year? Why? Especially when you are not gifted in kind from the giftee? Why do you put yourself through this? Are you a glutton for punishment? Sadly, yes. In my case, I think I enjoy crazing myself. I must! Or, why in heaven's name do I make myself so fanatical coming up with awesome gifts? If there are two characteristics I freely admit I do have, it's creativity and the hunt for that perfect gift.

Since none of my relatives live in the area, none of them will ever read this article so I'll just write what I feel. Yes, yes, of course I know that "tis better to give than receive," but come on! It's absolutely great to receive gifts! Most especially if it's a well-thought-out and totally unexpected prize. Unwrapping a present is exciting and brings back childhood memories of when you believed in Santa and/or whomever was the bearer of amazing and cool bequests!

Wouldn't you agree that you are an 8-year-old child for one brief shining moment as you anticipate what's behind that gift wrap or what's in that gift bag filled with multi-colored tissue paper? You've receive a beautifully-wrapped or gift-bagged beneficence. You hold it in your hand

wondering what it could possibly be....a magnificent surprise, an unexpected treasure, something sure to stun you, right?

Well, what if it happened to be dish towels and an inexpensive candle with a globe topper? Please! These are items from a family member who I always thought loved me along with the all-expenses-paid two-week Cape Cod vacations I had taken her on in her younger years. All above items donated to my local senior center, thank you very much. I finally smartened up this year and bought her an inexpensive gift of a cocoa mug with a Ghirardelli hot chocolate packet. I used to receive thank you cards for all the very expensive gifts I always gave but for the past few years, I've been ghosted, not even a text message of thanks. Yes, I've finally taken Dear Abby's advice and that is to stop wasting my brain power and money purchasing presents for those who just don't care or appreciate your thoughtfulness. I'm done, it's over.

But! On the other hand, other family members and friends were wonderfully generous and surprising.....my dear aunt and her nephew and his wife surprised me with unexpected monetary bequests, a good friend's wonderfulness included a pair of beautiful Cape Cod earrings and a Willow Tree figurine, another friend gave me beautiful handmade Christmas tree ornaments, my sister-in-law and brother presented me with dining certificates (always a great gift), my nephew and his lady gave me various special gifts, and my co-workers blessed me with unique and thoughtful presents along with a now-cherished memento about Wordsmiths, whom I certainly liken myself to as I write articles for two publications. I really appreciated the Wordsmiths gift, it was perfect!

I know that many people reading this might think that I'm being ungrateful but I will never feel that way especially when

much thought is put into the gifts I enjoy giving and year-after-year you hope that your kindness and generosity will be reciprocated but it never is. I guess it's time to realize that your big-heartedness is going to waste and your feel-

ings towards that person will never be returned.

I have finally given up. Give unto others as you would want to be. Just make sure "the others" feel the same way about you. "But it's all right now, I learned my les-

son well, you can't please everyone so you got to please yourself" (Thank you, Rick Nelson and The Stone Canyon Band for your song lyrics.) And, that my friends, is it.

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