

King Philip Senior Wins Congressional App Challenge



By GRACE ALLEN

Rep. Jake Auchincloss has named Sophia Evans, a 12th grader at King Philip Regional High School, as the winner of the 2024 Congressional App Challenge for Massachusetts's 4th District.

The national competition invites students to showcase their talents in computer science.

Evans' app, called EcoConnect, aims to make it easy for people to promote and attend cleanup events in their community. The idea for the app came to Evans after taking an AP Environmental Science class at the high school during her junior year.

"I learned a lot about the effects of litter on the environment," she said. "I guess I was inspired by that experience."

Rep. Auchincloss, who hosted Evans and the other finalists on January 10 at his Newton office, said in an email



Norfolk Emergency Shelter Update

By GRACE ALLEN

Norfolk's decommissioned Bay State Correctional Center has been operational as a shelter for over seven months now. While still on track to close at the end of June, town officials in the meantime are juggling a constantly changing situation as the state grapples with how to respond to the migrant and homeless crisis.

At press time, there were approximately 392 individuals and 126 families housed at the site,

reported Justin Casanova-Davis, Norfolk's town administrator. The shelter's capacity is 405 individuals.

According to Kevin Connor, the press secretary for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, only families with children or single pregnant women are staying at the site, per program policy. He did not have

Sophia Evans, winner of the 2024 Congressional App Challenge for Massachusetts's 4th District, poses for a photo with Congressman Jake Auchincloss.

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CHALLENGE

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that EcoConnect was an example of “clean coding and a wonderful way to improve our towns and meet our neighbors. Congratulations to Sophia.”

Evans, a Norfolk resident, says she first became interested in computer science after taking a class at the high school during her sophomore year. That same year, she participated in a hackathon at MIT with other high school students. She enjoyed the experience so much that she went on to participate in several other hackathons.

“I just love the problem-solving aspect of coding,” said Evans. “Being able to sit down and focus on a problem, it’s very rewarding.”

She also pointed out that computers provide teens a platform for social interaction.

“I love how computers can connect people,” she explained. “I play a lot of video games and I meet a lot of people through those games. The fact that computer science, and all these projects you might work on, can connect people across the globe, that’s really cool to me.”



Evans and the other finalists presented their apps on Jan. 10 during a visit to the Newton office of Rep. Auchincloss.

Last summer, Evans interned for Hack Club, a non-profit that supports and encourages teenagers from all backgrounds to use their computer skills to solve problems. It was there that she first learned about the Congressional App Challenge and decided to apply.

The Congressional App Challenge was created in 2015 by leaders in the U.S. House of Representatives to foster an appreciation for STEM and

computer science in teens. Every year, members of Congress challenge middle and high school students in their districts to create original apps with the goal of encouraging careers in tech. The challenge is considered one of the most prestigious awards for student coders.

In the challenge, students work alone or in teams to produce a demonstration video which shows the purpose of the application, how it works, the

target audience, and the tools and coding languages used to create the app. Students are encouraged to apply for the challenge regardless of coding experience. A panel of judges evaluates the entries.

“I was heartened this year to see many of the apps focus on building community, including one that brokered civil discourse on political issues, and another that coached young people on how to socialize better,” said

Auchincloss. “The next generation knows that Web 2.0’s version of social media, which foments tribalism, does not need to remain the status quo. Seeing students build better on the same day that Tik Tok lost oral arguments at the Supreme Court felt like an inflection point to me.”

Evans says she plans to add a user-friendly interface and other improvements to her app, with the goal of eventually putting it on the App Store. The senior, who moved with her family to the U.S. from England when she was just three years old, hopes to stay in the Boston area for college and major in computer science. She has an interest in art also, so game development is another possibility.

Evans and other winners from across the country will travel to Washington, D.C. in April to participate in the annual House of Code celebration, which is held at the United States Capitol. The event will honor the participants as well as offer opportunities to meet members of Congress and leaders in the tech industry. Last year, 360 winning students from over 220 Congressional Districts participated.

To learn more about the Congressional App Challenge, visit congressionalappchallenge.us.

localtownpages

Published Monthly Mailed FREE

to the Community of Norfolk/Wrentham Circulation: 8,473

households and businesses

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Ad Deadline is the 15th of each month.

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Musical Bingo Fundraiser Set for Feb. 8

A musical bingo fundraiser will be held on Saturday, Feb. 8 at the American Legion, 592 South

St., Wrentham. The event starts at 7 p.m.

Tickets are \$40 and include pizza, salad, snacks, and dessert. There will be raffle and door prizes. Purchase tickets at www.gillyshouse.com.

The fundraiser will benefit the Tri-County Vocational Scholar-

ship-James M. Paquette Memorial Fund (J.U.M.P.) and Gilly’s House Sober Living Scholarship Fund.

Questions? Email sshipfools@aol.com or maureen@gillyshouse.com.

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Wrentham's Myrtle Street Remains Closed Following Crocker Pond Dam Breach

By JOE STEWART

Myrtle Street, a key connector between Route 1 and Pond Street in Wrentham, remains closed nearly a year after heavy rains in late winter and early spring 2024 caused the dam at Crocker Pond to breach, damaging the roadway. With no plans or funding identified for repairs, the future of Myrtle Street and the surrounding area remains uncertain.

According to Brian Anatoli, Wrentham's Director of Public Works, the town collaborated with Attleboro to apply for a Massachusetts Seawall and Dam Repair Program grant to fund a structural engineer's analysis of the dam. Unfortunately, the grant was not approved. Without repairs to Crocker Dam, Anatoli noted, it is not feasible to repair Myrtle Street. The dam, which is owned by Attleboro, serves as a vital part of the pond's ecosystem and infrastructure, influencing water levels in Crocker Pond

and downstream flows into Lake Mirimichi.

The road closure has had mixed reactions from residents. Local resident Steve McKinney shared that while some neighbors appreciate the reduction in traffic from the former cut-through, others are concerned about accessibility issues. A recent incident in which a fallen tree blocked access to Thurston Street left the neighborhood temporarily isolated, highlighting the potential risks of the current situation.

McKinney also observed environmental changes resulting from the dam's breach and lowered spillway, which has significantly reduced the pond's water level. The stream downstream from Myrtle Street has seen a surge in vegetation growth, including an abundance of cattails.

Crocker Pond, a 17-acre body of water within a 122-acre park, holds historical and ecological significance. Originally the

site of grist and saw mills, the property was purchased by the Crocker family in the early 1900s and later donated to the Town of Wrentham in 1988. Today, the pond and its surrounding watershed play a critical role in local water management, recreation, and environmental preservation. It also forms the upper watershed for Wrentham's well number 4, a groundwater resource.

Attleboro, which owns the dam, has long recognized the need for repairs. The dam is classified as a low-hazard structure in poor condition and Attleboro plans for a \$250,000 Phase 1 design, permitting, and bidding project. Matt Crotty, acting Water Superintendent, shared that Attleboro has been focused on bringing a new 2M gallons/day water treatment facility on the Wading River into production, which is expected in 2027. A pilot plant is currently treating about 1M gallons/day. That work is impacting other projects



and thus significant delays in addressing the Crocker Pond dam remain likely.

For now, the future of Crocker Pond, its dam, and the closed stretch of Myrtle Street hinges on grant funding and collabora-

tion between Wrentham and Attleboro. Residents, local officials, and environmental stakeholders are left grappling with balancing infrastructure needs, accessibility, and environmental stewardship.

SHELTER

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demographic information but said the statewide shelter population is 50% new arrivals and 50% longtime Massachusetts residents. In August, the town reported that the shelter was housing just Haitian and Venezuelan families.

Casanova-Davis said the number of residents at the shelter fluctuates, almost on a daily basis. He pointed out that the state's policy is a 30-day limit, with options for extensions for qualifying families. He noted that after the winter holiday break, there were about 30 school-age children living in the shelter. No students have decided to stay in the schools after their families have left the shelter.

The town administrator reported there have been relatively limited demands on Norfolk's police and fire departments so far. Most calls, he said, have been for ambulance services, emphasizing that the "Select Board and police and fire leadership continuously collaborate and communicate with state officials regarding public safety."

After several incidents at Massachusetts shelters raised questions over safety, Gov. Maura Healey recently ordered that everyone entering the shelter system undergo background checks. Press Secretary Connor said that all residents at the Norfolk shelter have received CORI and SORI screens, as well as periodic, systemwide warrant checks.

"Pursuant to the Governor's direction, on-site shelter staff recently conducted room inspections, consistent with Rapid Shelter Track rules," said Connor in an email. "When inspecting, staff looked for non-compliance with shelter rules, such as criminal activity, possession of firearms or drugs, or anything that would raise significant health or safety concerns."

The most recent inspections were completed on January 10 and identified no major concerns or any indication of criminal or illegal activity, he added.

Casanova-Davis reiterated that town officials meet biweekly with state officials via Zoom, and reminded residents that the town has updated information on its website: Norfolk.ma.us.

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Norfolk Police Investigating Attempted Thefts Involving Delivery Service

The Norfolk Police Department is investigating multiple attempted package thefts involving a third-party delivery service.

On Monday, Jan. 13, at approximately 3:31 p.m., Norfolk Police received a call reporting suspicious activity at a home on Pennacook Street.

During an initial investigation, Norfolk Police learned that three drivers, all of whom appeared to work for the DoorDash delivery service, came to the address within 25 minutes to pick up packages. No pickup request had been made.

Three packages had been delivered to the address earlier that day, two of which contained Apple products.

The preliminary investigation indicates that the DoorDash drivers were legitimate and following order instructions from the person or people attempting to commit theft.

The incident remains under investigation by Norfolk Police Detectives.

Anyone with information on the incident or who believes they may have been the victim of a similar situation is asked to contact Norfolk Police at 508-528-3206.

The Norfolk Police Department wishes to share the following tips from the National Neighborhood Watch to help prevent package theft:

- Consider getting a P.O. box at your local post office or having packages delivered to your office or a package delivery locker
- Set up notifications to track your packages
- Install a security camera in the area(s) outside your home where packages may be delivered
- Require a signature upon delivery to ensure packages are never left unattended
- Reschedule delivery or ask for a package hold when on vacation
- Research potential home security technology and locking device options to protect and monitor packages
- Try smart locks or get a package guard alarm
- Ask your neighbors to grab your packages for safekeeping until you return home

How to Prevent Package Thefts

Important tips from the National Neighborhood Watch

Request notifications for your deliveries via phone or email

Require a signature on your deliveries to ensure packages are not left unattended

Schedule deliveries for when you can be home to receive them

Set up a vacation hold if you plan on traveling so gifts aren't left unattended

Install security cameras outside your home where packages may be delivered

Contact the police immediately if you think your package has been stolen

Trinity Church Services and Programs

The Trinity Episcopal Church in Wrentham announces that

Healing Services are performed every second Tuesday of the

month at 11:30 a.m., in the chapel at the rear of the building.

This service is free and the public is invited.

the building. Guests are welcome free of charge.

Contract bridge sessions are held at the church on Fridays at 10 a.m., in rooms at the rear of

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Q & A With Healthy KP

We understand that talking to your children about drugs and alcohol can be one of the most difficult and sensitive topics as a parent. This monthly Q&A section is meant to guide you through these important discussions. Parents often ask us questions about VAPING, because it is a relatively new and concerning trend, especially among teenagers. Here are some questions we have recently received from KP parents.

What is vaping?

Vaping is the act of inhaling a vapor created by an electronic device, such as an e-cigarette or vape pen. These devices heat a liquid, which usually contains nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals, turning it into a vapor. Some are made to look like pens, USB sticks and everyday items. The products are designed to allow for discrete carrying and use and can be used to vape other substances, such as marijuana.

My teen says it's basically flavored water. What's so bad about it?

Vaping poses significant health risks for teens:

- **Nicotine effects:** Most vape liquids contain nicotine, which can harm adolescents' developing brains. Risks include nicotine addiction and permanent lowering of impulse control. Nicotine also changes the way synapses are formed which can harm the parts of the brain that control attention and learning. Teens can get addicted more easily than adults.
- **Lung health issues:** Vaping can lead to respiratory problems and has been linked to severe lung injury (EVALI). Vape liquids can contain harmful chemicals, including ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deep into the lungs; flavoring such as diacetyl, a chemical linked to

a serious lung disease; volatile organic compounds and heavy metals.

- **Behavioral risks:** Nicotine addiction can impact mood, learning, and attention, and may increase the likelihood of using other substances.

Why are teens attracted to vaping?

The industry targets teens directly by offering appealing candy, fruit, and dessert flavors, along with social media marketing campaigns that portray vaping as trendy or fun. Teens and adults often have the perception that vaping is less harmful than smoking. Teens are also curious and may feel the pressure to fit in.

How can I tell if my teen is vaping?

These signs could be indicative that your teen is vaping: unusual sweet or fruity smells, frequent use of USB-like devices or pens, increased thirst or dry mouth, irritability or restlessness (possible nicotine withdrawal symptoms), decline in academic

performance or change in social circles.

What should I do if I find out my teen is vaping?

Try to stay calm and have an open conversation about their reasons for using. Provide information about the risks and set clear rules about vaping and consequences. Your teen may need help to quit if they are addicted. Visit mass.gov/vaping for free resources.

Ongoing discussions and setting clear expectations can make a difference when it comes to prevention. Visit healthykp.org for more information and watch for next month's Q&A. Please email your questions to info@healthykp.org. Your questions will remain confidential and anonymous.

**Source: Massachusetts DPH "Get Out Raged: The New Look of Nicotine Addiction."*

Formed in 2018, Healthy KP is a community-based group of volunteers from the tri-town communities



working together to prevent and reduce the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products among our youth. In December of 2020, Healthy KP was awarded a Drug-Free Communities (DFC) grant allowing the coalition to strengthen community collaboration and engagement to prevent and reduce substance use among youth. By implementing evidence-based prevention programs, strengthening partnerships and building connections through community events, Healthy KP has made progress in reducing rates of youth use. For more information, visit www.healthykp.org

Wrentham Select Board Forms Town Manager Search Committee

By JOE STEWART

The Wrentham Select Board has established a Town Manager Search Committee to identify the town's next chief executive officer following the departure of former Town Manager Kevin Sweet. Sweet, who began his tenure in Wrentham in 2018, accepted the position of City Manager in Winter Springs, Florida, effective December 16, 2024.

During his six-year tenure as Town Manager in Wrentham, Sweet led several significant initiatives that enhanced the town's infrastructure and financial standing. Notably, he secured a grant to improve the central parking lot across from the town common. Under his leadership, Wrentham continued its com-

mitment to transparent and effective financial planning and was recognized with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association for its Fiscal 2025 budget.

The search committee is comprised of Select Board member Michelle Rouse, Wrentham Police Chief Bill McGrath, and local attorney Peter Marinelli.

During their initial meeting on November 6, 2024, the committee appointed Michelle Rouse as chair, discussed the advertisement for the Town Manager position, and outlined the application process. They decided to reconvene in January following the closure of the application window.

The advertisement for the position, posted last year, emphasizes the need for an experienced municipal executive with strong financial skills. The ideal candidate will demonstrate leadership skills, a commitment to preserving Wrentham's charm, and a vision for sustainable economic development. Applications were due by December 5, 2024.

On January 2, the Search Committee met in executive session to review the applications, likely to conduct an initial screening to determine which candidates to invite for interviews. No date has been set for the next meeting.

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Norfolk American Legion Post 335 Honors Departing Commander

On January 8, Norfolk's 79-year-old American Legion Post 335 conducted a change of command ceremony at its monthly meeting at the Federated Church. The outgoing Post Commander, Benjamin McCarty, was honored for his continuous service over the last 12 years.

In front of the assembled membership, McCarty was presented with a Departing Commander plaque by incoming Post Commander Frank C. Zolli. The ceremony, which is a highly traditional rite in the military, emphasizes the achievements of the outgoing command and commits the incoming command to continued dedication to progress. It demonstrates the unity of all the crew as they embark on their future mission.

A second award was presented to McCarty as a recognition of the opportunity that the Legion provides to leaders who accept the challenges of command. McCarty was given a statuette, in the form of an American Eagle, whose wings enfold members of all service branches. Its soldiers at the ready, the unsaid message is



"Americans are secure beneath the wings of the Eagle."

McCarty expressed his thanks and appreciation for the relationships he developed during his time as Post Commander

and for the honors bestowed on him.

"We went through some difficult times together," said McCarty, "but with the commitment of several good people we



Outgoing Post Commander Benjamin McCarty, left, receives a plaque from incoming Post Commander Frank C. Zolli.

survived. The Post was hurt by COVID, our members restricted by the health concerns, but we emerged intact. Now I can feel

secure that we are handing over the gavel to another generation which will continue the work of the Legion."

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Park St. Bridge Remains Closed While Inspections Continue

By GRACE ALLEN

Norfolk's Park Street bridge remains closed while the Massachusetts Department of Transportation works on updating the bridge load rating, based on existing conditions.

MassDOT provided the update to the town on January 15, said Town Administrator Justin Casanova-Davis.

The updated bridge rating is required to determine a plan of action, he noted. The rating process will take three to four months.

Rep. Marcus Vaughn said in a Facebook post that the updated load rating was essential and that "the assessment and calculations are highly detailed and necessary

to ensure that any actions taken will prioritize the safety of all who use the bridge."

In 2020, the bridge was inspected and found to have structural issues. After being downgraded from Fair to Poor, inspections were increased and the decision was made in early December to close the bridge.

The bridge is located at the end of Park Street, where it crosses the MBTA commuter rail tracks. Park Street runs from Route 140 in Wrentham to Main Street in Norfolk. Significant detours are in place, impacting drivers in Norfolk, Wrentham, and Franklin.

MassDOT is responsible for all work on the bridge.

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A Year of New Friendships and Fur-tastic Adventures at Dogtopia

By JENNIFER RUSSO

Whether you added a new pup to your home over the holidays, are planning on doing some travel without your furry friend or have been looking for just the right place where you can leave your favorite canine companion for the day, Dogtopia understands that dogs are more than just pets, they are a part of your family.

Dogs are unique in that they are full of unconditional love, they give all of themselves to the people who care for them, expecting nothing in return except some food and attention. They bring a joy to their owners that can't really be described, so finding a caregiver for them is an important choice for any pup-parent.

Dogtopia is committed to giving these extended family members a happy, loving, and safe environment to play and learn in. With their state-of-the-art facility, impeccable safety standards, and certified animal-loving team members who are expertly trained to meet the needs of every pup, dog moms and dads can rest assured that their animals are very well taken care of and having a fabulous time.

Dogtopia, located in the Franklin Village shopping area, aims to be a haven for dogs by creating a fun and engaging environment for them while their owners are busy with work, errands, vacations, or other responsibilities.

"We want your pup to look forward to coming here. Nothing makes us happier than when one of our furry clients shows up and their tails are wagging in excitement to start their day with their friends," says Dogtopia Director Amy Hughes.

The Franklin Dogtopia location has three spacious playrooms where the dogs are placed based on their size, temperament and play style. Safety is always the first priority, and there are a number of protocols in place to ensure the pups' wellbeing, such as certified staff, compressed rubber flooring to reduce impact on the dogs' joints, soundproofing, a climate-controlled environment, and pet-friendly cleaning supplies.

Dogtopia requires a meet and greet for new clients, so that they can find the best placement for the pup, since all dogs are different. Each dog needs to be fit for an open play environment, and they conduct a thorough temperament test during this visit to better understand how the pup prefers to interact with others.

"We want to safely socialize the pups so they can release their energy, while getting lots of exercise and having fun," shares Hughes. "We have agility exercises, brain games, and more. It's an activity-filled day that will leave pups happy and fulfilled, so when they go home, they can relax and snuggle with their families."

All dogs need to be at least 12 weeks of age and must be up to date on all required vaccinations (Rabies, Canine Influenza, DHPP, and Bordetella). Dogs 7 months old and up must also be spayed/neutered. If you don't have the records on hand, Dogtopia is able to call your vet and obtain them for you.

For those who welcomed a new pet to the family this year, Amy shares some important tips:

- 1) Early socialization is extremely important so that the pup understands how to act within different environments and becomes more desensitized to distractions.
- 2) Be consistent with everything and have a routine in place that the pup can expect. A certain mealtime, play time, bedtime, potty time, etc. can make all the difference.
- 3) Be patient and calm while training. All dogs are different, and no pup is perfect. Praise for good behaviors and calmly correct those that need improvement.

"If the dog is still a puppy, we do offer a puppy pre-school that can help dogs acclimate early and be more adaptable," she says. "Bringing any pup into Dogtopia is always a win, because they will learn to safely socialize, have fun playing in a structured way, and reinforce good behaviors that make home life even smoother."

Business Spotlight



Dogtopia promises peace of mind for dog parents, with live webcams in every playroom that can be looked at any time, and periodic report cards to keep them in the loop.

In addition to daycare, boarding and spa services are also available. Homestyle crates are set up comfortably for rest and that feeling of "home away from home" and pups can even be pampered with a bath, nail trim and blueberry facial!

Dogtopia operates with a community mindset, with events that clients can take part in with their pups, such as a craft day where pups create gifts for their human parents, themed dance parties, Mini Mondays which offer specialized play for small dogs, and more. They even recently had a Santa and pup photo op and an ugly sweater party.

In addition to helping the community by caring for local pets, the Dogtopia Foundation also comes together to raise money for important causes, such as service dogs for Veterans. Stay tuned to learn how to help them with these efforts.

Does your pup need a place for socialization, exercise, love, and endless fun? **Take advantage of a special, limited time offer – for just \$99 a week, your pup can enjoy unlimited daycare visits.** This deal won't last long, so grab it while it's available!

Learn more about Dogtopia of Franklin Village and their amazing services by visiting <https://www.dogtopia.com/massachusetts-franklin-village/> or check out their Instagram at @DogtopiaFranklinVillage



Check out our February Events!

Puppy Bowl * January 30th through February 9th

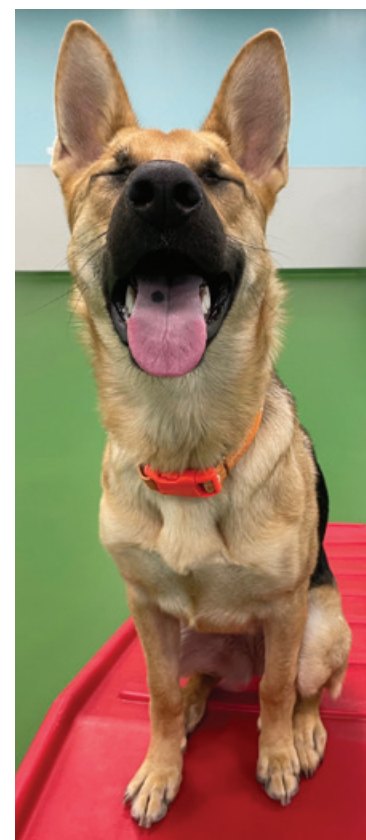
1/30- Draft Day- "Draft" into either Team Ruff or Team Fluff. They'll compete in a series of playful challenges designed to showcase their skills and personalities.


- 2/2 - Tailgate Party
- 2/3 - Team Ruff and Team Fluff Photo Day
- 2/4 - Speed and Agility Day
- 2/5 - Pre-game Bubbles
- 2/6 - Huddle Party
- 2/7 - Touchdown Dance Party
- 2/9 - Puppy Bowl!- Viewing party starts at 2pm ET.

Valentine's Day * February 14th- Kissing booth and photo day.


Eloperments * February 20th and 27th- Celebrating daycare couples, photo day.

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Community Organizations Make the Holidays Brighter for Shelter Children

Two new community organizations came together over the holidays to collect Christmas presents for the children at the Baystate Temporary Respite Shelter.

Norfolk Strong has been partnering with local organizations to lend more than 384 member

volunteers as “hands and feet” in the community. Six days before Christmas, the group joined forces with the Norfolk and Medfield chapter of St. Vincent de Paul Society to provide presents for the children at the Baystate Shelter. The newly formed St. Vincent de Paul chapter is orga-

nized out of the parishes of St. Jude in Norfolk and St. Edward in Medfield.

Days before Christmas, the organizations put out a joint call for new toys and donations, asking volunteers to purchase highly requested items like soccer balls, baby dolls, and toy trucks. The answer from the community was so tremendous that each of the children in the shelter, 65% of whom are under the age of five, could open four to five gifts each on Christmas morning. In a real-life Santa’s workshop, fifteen volunteers spent all day on December 23 wrapping presents. They returned bright and early at 8 a.m. on Christmas Eve to deliver the gifts, just as the snow started to gently fall.

“We are so grateful to our incredibly generous partners at St. Vincent de Paul and our flexible and energetic Norfolk Strong volunteers. Collectively, we’ve demonstrated the power of community and the importance of serving others in need, especially children. Now these kids have something of their own as they start their new lives with their families,” said Lucy Bull-



ock-Sieger, Steering Committee Member of Norfolk Strong.

“The St. Vincent de Paul Society exists to feed, clothe, house and heal individuals and families in our community who have nowhere else to turn for help. The parishes of St. Jude and St. Edward are excited that this is one of our first acts as a new chap-

ter,” said Tom Melville of the Norfolk and Medfield St. Vincent de Paul Society.

For more information about Norfolk Strong, visit www.NorfolkStrong.org. For more information about the St. Vincent de Paul Society, email SVdP.EJNM@gmail.com.

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Town of Wrentham Mourns Passing of Select Board Chair Joseph Botaish, II

Wrentham Select Board members Chris Gallo, William Harrington, James Anderson, Michelle Rouse, and Interim Town Manager Michael King regret to announce the passing of Select Board Chair, Joseph “Joe” F. Botaish, II.

Joseph Botaish passed away peacefully on Jan. 14, surrounded by his loving family. A longtime Wrentham resident, he was first elected to the Select Board in 2010, serving continuously for 15 years, with 10 of those years as chair. He had an unwavering commitment to Wrentham and generously gave his time to many

town endeavors including serving on multiple search and building committees.

Joseph Botaish had a passion for public service and viewed Wrentham as not just a town, but as a family. Joe personified Wrentham and his devotion to the community will be strongly remembered and deeply missed. He leaves a beautiful legacy of dedicated service worthy of praise and emulation.

A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Tuesday, Jan. 21 at St. Mary’s Parish in Wrentham.

Your Money, Your Independence

Marriage & Finances: What's Love Got To Do With It?



Glenn Brown, CFP

couples can set themselves up for long-term wealth. Here's how to work together as one effectively.

1. Financial Values and Habits

Before combining finances, it's essential to understand each other's financial habits, values, and experiences. Are you a spender or a saver? Do you prioritize security or investment?

Sharing how you were raised to think about money, past financial experiences, and your attitudes toward spending and investing can avoid future misunderstandings.

2. Combining Finances

Couples must decide whether to share everything, keep things separate, or take a hybrid approach. While some CFPs say there is no right answer, I don't encounter \$5M+ married households where finances are separate. Sure, a small discretionary account may exist, but so does transparency of it and across the household.

When couples feel they're underachieving, I'll see evidence of divided assets, funky income-based ratios to cover expenses and opportunities missed due to each spouse having several unknowns of the other. In summary, a lack of trust prohibits taking calculated risks to generate wealth.

The way you manage assets, liabilities and spending should reflect values and shared vision of where your household is in 3, 5 and 10+ year increments.

- If one enters marriage with 6-figure student loan debt, you both work to pay it down.
- If one comes from family money, accept offers of assistance that align with your household's vision.
- If one makes more than the other, spending and payments are balanced.
- If making a large purchase requiring a loan and/or investments, details are discussed and are to fit into the household's vision.

3. Setting Shared Financial Goals

Once finances are combined, it's time to set shared financial goals. These range from short-term goals (saving for a vacation or building an emergency fund) to long-term goals (buying a house or saving for retirement). Start by discussing your personal aspirations and then find ways to align them into a unified plan. Prioritize these goals based on timelines and importance and be prepared to compromise.

It's essential both partners feel involved and heard when

setting goals. This shared vision will make the process of working together more fulfilling and successful.

4. Budget & Prioritize Spending Together

A budget helps couples allocate income, control spending, and save for shared goals. Start by listing all monthly expenses, debt repayments and automatic savings (i.e. 401k). Separately list one-time expenses expected in coming 1-3 years, such as home improvements, travel, auto, etc.

If cash flow is positive, then monitor your budget and adjust as necessary. For some it's monthly, others it's revisited when expected results don't occur.

5. Transparency and Communication

Just as love requires ongoing communication and transparency, so does financial planning. Working together as a team with check-ins and honest conversa-

tions ensures you stay on track, discuss progress toward your goals, and adjust when necessary.

Make sure to celebrate milestones together. Besides keeping each other motivated, it recognizes your power of working together and strengthens your emotional bond.

So, "What's love got to do with it?"—the answer is simple: everything.

The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and are not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual.

Glenn Brown is a Holliston resident and owner of PlanDynamic, LLC, www.PlanDynamic.com. Glenn is a fee-only Certified Financial Planner™ helping motivated people take control of their planning and investing, so they can balance kids, aging parents and financial independence.

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Valentine's Day is a time to celebrate love, but also an opportunity to reflect on how love influences every part of your relationship—even finances.

Financial planning for married couples is not just about managing money; it's about working together toward shared goals with trust, understanding, and united purpose.

Yet, it's surprising the rising number of married couples entering financial planning engagements with separate finances and desire to keep it that way. Blame pre-existing debt (i.e. student loans), divorce rates and desired autonomy to continue not having to answer for personal spending habits.

By combining finances and collaborating on financial goals,

Pediatric & Adult First Aid/CPR Offered Through Norfolk Recreation

Many New Programs for Adults Planned for Winter Session

Norfolk Recreation will host a Pediatric & Adult First Aid & CPR/AED class on Wednesday, February 12. This 2-year certification through the American Safety & Health Institute provides an ideal training solu-

tion for schools, Scout leaders, childcare providers, youth sports coaches and more.

Details for this program, as well as many other upcoming adult offerings like Estate Planning, Sound Bath classes and

Charcuterie Design workshops, can be found at NorfolkRec.com or by calling 508-520-1315.

Residents from all towns are welcome to register for Norfolk Recreation adult programs.

Norfolk Lions Club Scholarships Now Available

The Norfolk Lions Club will be awarding four \$2,500 college scholarships to high school seniors who are residents of Norfolk. The students may attend public or private schools or be home schooled.

The scholarships will be awarded to candidates who have been actively involved in community service activities but will also be evaluated on academic

performance and other extracurricular activities.

The scholarship application will be available on the Norfolk Lions website at www.norfolkmalions.org on February 14. Applications must be completed by March 9.

Any questions, please email the scholarship committee at norfolkionssc@gmail.com.



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The b.LUXE *beauty beat*

Curls Just Wanna Have Fun!

By GINA WOELFEL

The b.LUXE Curly Cut

At b.LUXE, we're all about celebrating texture, and our curly hair specialists love working with every curl, wave, and coil to bring out their unique style. Our professionals focus on unlocking your curl's full potential with a new level of curl confidence you didn't know was possible! With extensive training, a passion for precision, and a deep understanding of curly hair, our specialists consult with you to craft a look that's uniquely your own. Their expert cuts, tailored treatments, and creative styling tips help you achieve a look you love.

The Specialists:

Meet Sandra Wilkey, Emily Mateo, and Donna Guadagno, the b.LUXE Curly Haired Specialists who are revolutionizing curly hair styling in Boston's Metrowest. With their extensive training and passion for natural textures, they offer innovative styling techniques that celebrate curly hair's individuality.

They also offer essential education on maintaining curls at home, product recommendations, tips for heat-free styling, and deep conditioning treatments. By helping clients understand their unique curl patterns and teaching them the proper way to care for them, they can achieve beautiful, healthy hair and wave goodbye to "bad hair days" faster than you can say, "Not today, frizz!"

What's a "Curly Cut"

A "curly cut" is a specialized haircut tailored to enhance curly hair's natural pattern and texture. This technique involves cutting the hair while it is dry, allowing the stylist to see how each curl behaves. Clients are encouraged to arrive with clean, dry hair styled in their usual way. The stylist sculpts the hair during the appointment, cutting each curl individually. This method maximizes definition and reduces frizz by considering the unique characteristics of the client's curl type and density.

Understanding Your Curls, Coils & Waves

Did you know that the shape of your hair follicle where your hair grows determines the shape of your curls? Hair follicles that are flatter or more oval-shaped produce curlier hair, while rounder follicles produce straighter hair. The shape of your curls determines your curl pattern. Many individuals have multiple curl types on their heads, with different curl patterns in various sections of their hair. This phenomenon is known as "multi-textured hair." Hair width can be coarse, medium, or fine. Curly hair is generally more porous and fragile than straight, thus making it more susceptible to humidity.

Every curl is unique with a full spectrum of textures:

SCAN FOR MORE DETAILS



BEAUTY IS OUR BUSINESS...

- **Wavy:** Loose, beachy waves that need lightweight products for definition and hold.
- **Curly:** Spirals and ringlets that benefit from moisture and frizz control.
- **Coily:** Tight, densely packed curls that thrive with deep hydration and gentle handling.

To effectively manage your curly hair, it's essential to identify your curl patterns and follow your curly hair specialist's product and styling recommendations.

Key Features of The b.LUXE Curly Cut:

- **Dry Cutting:** The stylist cuts the hair dry to observe how the curls naturally fall and shape the cut accordingly.
- **Curly-by-Curl Sculpting:** Each curl is carefully cut to enhance its natural shape and definition.
- **Focus on Shape and Volume:** The goal is to create a balanced cut that, de-bulks, adds volume and movement while maintaining curl definition.
- **Reduced Frizz Potential:** Working with the natural curl pattern helps define and separate the natural curls, allowing each curl to "stack" on top of one another. This minimizes the exposed hair cuticle surface that contributes to frizz while also removing split ends, which can exacerbate frizziness. A good curly cut helps the curls naturally hold their shape and reduces flyaways and uneven strands. You can also combat frizz and restore moisture with targeted treatments. At b.LUXE we use premium styling products that deeply nourish curls, lock in hydra-



tion, and leave your hair feeling soft, shiny, and manageable. For extreme cases, we also offer "The Saphira De-Frizzing Treatment," which eliminates frizz and smooths dry, brittle hair into soft waves that enhance your natural hair pattern and texture. This treatment includes a full-sized Prep & Maintain Shampoo and Mineral Mist for you to take home.

- **Styling Education:** At-Home Education: Sandra, Emily, and Donna are more than just hairstylists; they're your curly hair confidantes! During a comprehensive consultation, they will assess your needs, customize your haircut, and provide essential tips for washing, conditioning, and styling your curls. You'll leave the salon looking

fabulous and equipped with the knowledge to keep your curls thriving between visits!

Book Your Curly Cut Today!

Are you ready to fall in love with your curls again? Look no further than the experts at b.LUXE. With their specialized curly hair services, Sandra, Emily, and Donna are here to help you achieve the best curls of your life!

For more information, go to bluxe.com or scan the QR code to visit our "Curly Hair" webpage. When booking, be sure to select the "b.LUXE Curly Cut" to experience the difference this cut can make.

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State Officials Urge Fire Safety During Open Burning Season

Wildfires in Massachusetts and California Prompt Safety Reminder

After an unprecedented fall fire season in Massachusetts and as wildfires rage in California, state officials are urging residents to protect themselves and their communities by following local and state restrictions on open burning.

State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bonnie Heiple, and Chief Fire Warden David Celino of the Department of Conservation & Recreation said restrictions on open burning are imposed at the state and local levels.

“Open burning season began January 15 in communities where it’s allowed,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “Even where burning is authorized, a permit from your local fire department is always required in advance and it’s your responsibility to be able to extinguish the fire on a moment’s notice. For two years in a row, Massachusetts residents have lost their lives when they couldn’t contain their fires – please make safety your priority when burning.”

“Open burning is limited to protect public health and public safety,” said MassDEP Commissioner Heiple. “The governing laws and regulations are in place to reduce air pollution, property damage, and personal injury. If open burning is allowed in your community, please follow the local and state guidance to keep yourself, your neighbors, and our environment safe.”

“This fall, residents across Massachusetts saw just how quickly outdoor fires can grow out of control,” said Chief Fire Warden Celino. “Right now, California is facing an even worse crisis with devastating fires consuming entire neighborhoods. Please don’t risk a fire that puts you, your home, or your community at risk. Burn only approved materials and always get a permit from your local fire department first.”

These restrictions are authorized by 310 CMR 7.07, which sets baseline requirements based on air quality and allows for “no burn” days; MGL chapter 48, section 13, which prohibits any

open air fire unless a permit is issued; and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code, which gives local fire chiefs the authority to impose additional limits.

Open burning is prohibited year-round in the cities and towns of Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, Medford, New Bedford, Newton, Somerville, Springfield, Waltham, Watertown, West Springfield, and Worcester.

In the remaining communities, open burning season runs from January 15 through May 1 with the following limitations. Local fire departments may deny a permit or set additional limitations if circumstances make open burning hazardous.

Only certain agricultural waste may be burned. This includes brush, cane, driftwood, residential forestry debris, fruit tree and bush prunings, raspberry stalks, infected bee hives, trees and brush from agricul-

tural land clearing, and fungus-infected elm wood if no other acceptable means of disposal is available. It is unlawful to burn leaves, grass, hay, stumps, tires, household trash, construction materials, demolition debris, or brush, trees, cane, or driftwood from commercial or industrial land clearing.

Open burning may only be conducted:

- With a permit issued in advance by the local fire department;
- Between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.;
- At least 75 feet from all dwellings and without causing a nuisance;
- As close as possible to the source of material being burned; and
- When it will not cause or contribute to a condition of air pollution.

Persons who burn unlawfully or allow a fire to grow out of control could be held liable for

firefighting costs or face fines or even jail time.

Open Burning Safety

- An adult should tend to the fire at all times and keep tools to extinguish it close by.
- Burn small amounts at a time.
- Never use gasoline, kerosene, or other accelerants to start the fire.
- Don’t wait for the fire department to tell you that it has become unsafe to burn: put the fire out if winds pick up or the weather changes. Most fires get out of control during sudden wind changes.
- If the fire gets out of control, call the local fire department right away.

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Living Healthy

Macular Degeneration:

What It Is and How to Treat It
 By ROGER M. KALDAWY, M.D.
 MILFORD FRANKLIN EYE CENTER

Macular degeneration is one of the leading causes of vision loss, particularly among older adults, significantly impacting the quality of life for millions worldwide. This article examines macular degeneration, its symptoms and signs, diagnostic methods, current treatments, recent therapeutic advancements, and available care options.

What is Macular Degeneration?

Macular degeneration, often called age-related macular degeneration (AMD), is a progressive eye condition affecting the macula, the small central area of the retina responsible for sharp, detailed central vision. AMD is categorized into two primary types: dry (atrophic) and wet (neovascular).

- **Dry AMD:** The more common form, comprising 85–90% of cases. It occurs due to gradual thinning of the macula and the accumulation of drusen, yellow deposits under the retina. Vision loss progresses slowly in most cases.
- **Wet AMD:** Though less common, it is more severe, responsible for most advanced vision loss cases. It results from abnormal blood vessel growth under the retina, causing leakage, bleeding, and scarring, often leading to rapid vision loss without treatment.

Symptoms and Signs

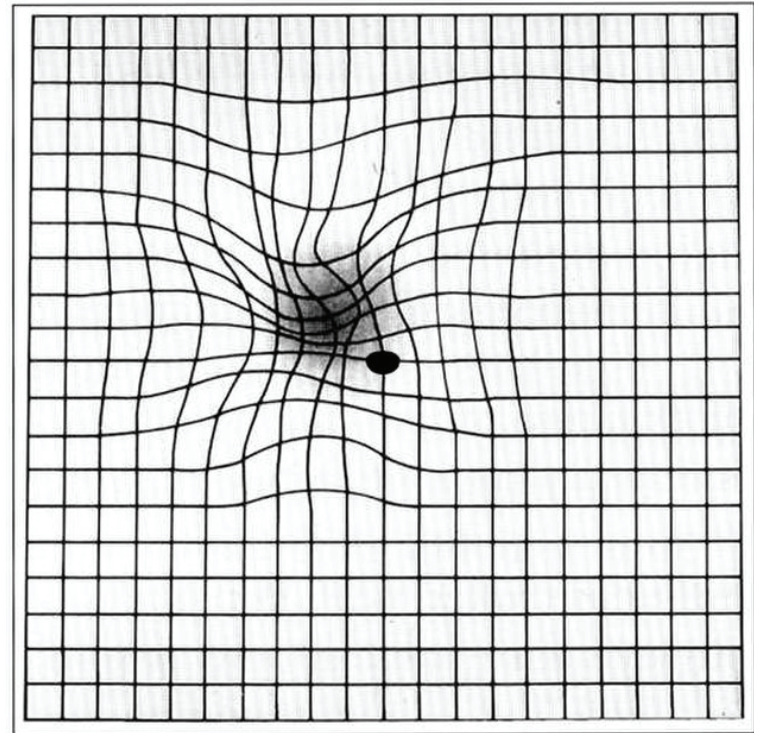
Symptoms of macular degeneration vary by type and stage. Common signs include:

- **Blurred central vision:** Early signs may include difficulty reading or recognizing faces.
- **Distorted vision (metamorphopsia):** Straight lines may appear wavy or distorted.
- **Difficulty adapting to low light:** Challenges in transitioning from bright to dim environments.
- **Central blind spots (scotomas):** Dark or empty areas in the central field of vision.
- **Reduced color perception:** Colors may seem less vibrant over time.

Diagnostic Testing

Accurate diagnosis is vital for managing AMD effectively. Key diagnostic tools include:

- **Comprehensive eye exam:** Identifies early signs such as drusen or retinal changes.



- **Amsler grid test:** Detects distortions or blind spots in central vision.
- **Optical coherence tomography (OCT):** Offers detailed cross-sectional imaging of the retina, highlighting thinning or fluid accumulation.
- **Fluorescein angiography:** Highlights abnormal blood vessel growth and leakage in wet AMD.
- **Fundus photography:** Captures high-resolution retinal images to monitor changes over time.

Wet AMD:

Treatment focuses on halting abnormal blood vessel growth:

- **Anti-VEGF therapy:** Medications like ranibizumab (Lucentis), aflibercept (Eylea), and brolucizumab (Beovu) inhibit vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), reducing abnormal vessel formation.
- **Photodynamic therapy (PDT):** Combines a light-sensitive drug with laser activation to target abnormal vessels.
- **Laser therapy:** Less commonly used, this destroys abnormal blood vessels with laser energy.

Current Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the type and severity of AMD:

- **Dry AMD:** While no definitive cure exists, lifestyle modifications and supportive care can slow progression:
 - **Nutritional supplements:** The AREDS2 formula (antioxidants, zinc, and copper) reduces the risk of advanced AMD.
 - **Lifestyle changes:** A healthy diet rich in leafy greens, omega-3 fatty acids, avoiding smoking, and UV protection are essential.

New Therapeutic Advancements

Advancements in AMD research are offering improved outcomes:

- **Gene therapy:** Experimental approaches aim to deliver protective genes to the retina, reducing the need for frequent anti-VEGF injections.

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Living Healthy

I Never Saw a Bulls-Eye!!!!

Lyme Disease often goes undiagnosed as the symptoms often mimic many other diseases such as chronic fatigue and the flu. When symptoms last several weeks, those signs should be followed up with a blood test. Lyme Disease is typically treated with doxycycline. This antibiotic however is not always effective, especially with the many co-infections of Lyme, such as Borrelia, Bartonella, Babesia, Rickettsia and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), an estimated 300,000 Americans are diagnosed with Lyme Disease each year, and the numbers are rising. Although it is believed that Lyme is a result of a tick

bite, the infectious bacteria can be spread by other biting or blood-sucking insects, including mosquitoes, spiders, fleas and mites.

Common effects of tick bites include an itchy “bulls-eye,” but this rash only occurs in about half of those infected. Other symptoms include unrelenting fever, headaches/migraines and achy muscles and joints.

For three years Lillian suffered with various ailments, including muscle aches, joint pains, brain fog, extreme fatigue and unrelenting headaches. Her primary care physician diagnosed Lyme Disease, prescribed doxycycline, and notified her several weeks later she was successfully treated for Lyme. An

appointment with a rheumatologist for her “arthritic” condition resulted in a prescription for antidepressants, a side effect of dealing with the pain. Lillian felt her life was slowly slipping away. A referral to the Holistic Center at Bristol Square set her on a new path. At the center, Lillian was diagnosed with Bartonella, a coinfection of Lyme, and was treated homeopathically for the strain as well as for her other related health issues. Within three months Lillian’s life started to return. Today she is virtually symptom free and enjoying her life free of pain and fatigue.

If you suffer from Lyme Disease, don’t delay. Call the Holistic Center at Bristol Square



Dr. Rochelle Bien & Dr. Michael Goldstein

today (508)660-2722 and schedule an appointment with Dr. Bien or Dr. Goldstein.

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EYES

continued from page 12

- **Long-lasting drug delivery systems:** Innovations like the Port Delivery System (PDS) with ranibizumab provide sustained medication release, minimizing injection frequency.
- **Stem cell therapy:** Research explores using stem cell-derived retinal pigment epithelial (RPE) cells to replace damaged macular cells.
- **New pharmacological agents:** Drugs like complement inhibitors (e.g., pegcetacoplan) target previously untreatable stages of dry AMD and geographic atrophy.

Living with Macular Degeneration

Managing AMD extends beyond medical treatment and includes:

- **Low vision aids:** Magnifiers, special glasses, and electronic devices maintain independence.
- **Support networks:** Connecting with groups and counseling provides emotional and practical support.

- **Routine monitoring:** Regular follow-ups ensure timely interventions and management adjustments.

Macular degeneration presents significant challenges, but early detection and proactive management can preserve vision and improve quality of life. If you experience symptoms or have risk factors, schedule a comprehensive eye exam with an eye care professional.

At Milford Franklin Eye Center, we use state-of-the-art technology to address a variety of eye conditions, including macular degeneration. Our dedicated retina specialist focuses on treating retinal eye diseases and AMD, utilizing the most recent treatment modalities discussed in this article. With advanced equipment rivaling the best teaching eye hospitals, we proudly offer world-class eye care close to home.

For more details, see our ad on page 12.

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Wrentham Voter Registration

A voter registration will take place on Friday, March 28 for the Annual Town Election of Monday, April 7. Any Wrentham resident who is not registered or will become 16 years of age on or before April 7, 2025 may pre-register/register to vote.

The registration will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Fiske Public Library located at 110

Randall Road. Voter registration forms may also be downloaded from the Town Clerk’s page on the Town’s website: <https://www.wrentham.gov/265/Voter-Applications>.

Please call the Town Clerk’s office at 508-384-5415 with any questions.

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February News and Program Highlights at the Fiske Public Library

For a full list of programs at the Fiske, visit <https://fiskelib.org/>.

The library will be closed Monday, Feb. 17 for Presidents' Day.

Mission: Earth & Space with the Ecotarium

Wednesday, February 5 from 6 to 7 p.m.

Think you need a billion-dollar telescope to be an astronomer? Think again! Uncover the mysteries of the grandest science of them all through hands-on experiments and demonstrations. Build a star, design a satellite, or maybe even create a cosmic catastrophe! Then head outside and peer through a traveling telescope (weather permitting). This program is for ages

6+. Register on the calendar at fiskelib.org.

Read to Sophie the Therapy Dog

Saturday, February 8 from 1 to 2 p.m.

Kids aged 5-10 are invited to come read to Sophie, a therapy dog from Dog B.O.N.E.S. of MA.

Once registered, each child will get an email with an assigned 10-minute time slot to read to Sophie. Register on the calendar at fiskelib.org.

The Poop Museum

Tuesday, February 18 from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m.

The Poop Museum is coming to Fiske! The Poop Museum covers the serious science of

poop and pooping and is delivered with the silliness that you might imagine accompanying a program about poop for kids. It is the perfect combination of fun, and fabulous, fascinating facts so that kids (and parents) never forget what they learned.

This program is best for kids age 5-10 and will answer questions such as:

- What is poop?
- Does every animal poop? (Spoiler: NO!)
- Does every animal have a butt? (Spoiler: NO!)
- Is there really sweet, tasty poop that you can eat? (Spoiler: YES!)
- Is there really poop that you can play in? (Spoiler: YES!)

- Who is the world's messiest, fartiest, pooper?
- Which animal does a poop dance?
- Which animal has poop attack power?
- Which animal eats their mom's poop?
- and much more!

This program is sponsored by The Friends of the Fiske. Register for this event on the calendar at fiskelib.org.

Page Turners Book Club

Wednesday, February 19 from noon to 1 p.m.

Kids in grades 4-6 are invited to bring a lunch and join us for a "school vacation day" meeting of the Page Turners Book Club. This month, we will be read-

ing "The Year I Flew Away" by Marie Arnold. This book is a nominee for the Massachusetts Children's Book Award list for '24-'25.

Copies of the book can be checked out at the circulation desk. Register for this event on the calendar at fiskelib.org.

Teen Advisory Board

Wednesday, February 26 from 6 to 7 p.m.

All teens (grades 7-12) are welcome to join us for a meeting of the Teen Advisory Board. We will discuss volunteer opportunities, learn about the library, plan events, share ideas, and have fun! Registration for this event opens Wednesday, January 29 at 4 p.m.

Register for this event on the calendar at fiskelib.org.

Climate: What will you do?

The First Universalist Society in Franklin (FUSF) will present a

special program on Sunday, February 16 at 10 a.m.

The issue of climate change is an immense problem which can

seem overwhelming. The Unitarian Universalist values of Justice,

Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, Generosity and Love remind us of our responsibility to protect the earth and all beings from exploitation and to respect the interdependent web of existence.

Please join us for this lay-led service as several members of FUSF's Climate Justice Team share personal perspectives and the steps they are taking to put UU values and their faith into action. They will also share examples of relatively simple steps one can take to make a difference.

The First Universalist Society in Franklin is a Unitarian Universalist Welcoming Congregation located at 262 Chestnut Street, Franklin. Our Interim Minister is Reverend Beverly Waring. For more information about FUSF, please visit our website at fusf.org, email us at info@fusf.org, or call 508-528-5348.

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John Adams, MD



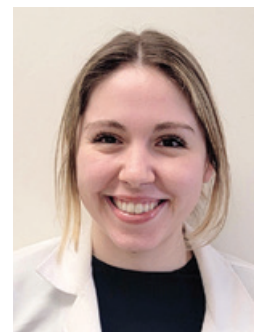
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Understanding Institutional Priorities at Highly Selective Colleges

The college admission process for highly selective colleges is unpredictable and a bit mysterious. It may seem that an applicant's outstanding accomplishments are destined for acceptance, but then the student faces unexpected rejection. An important piece of the puzzle is understanding institutional priorities - college factors that influence the final admission decisions at selective colleges. While families can't control the outcome, focusing on what students can control is the best approach.

What Are Institutional Priorities? Institutional priorities are the strategic goals and needs that colleges want to achieve through their admission process. These priorities can shift from year to year and are tailored to each college's mission, financial goals, and institutional development plans.

How Do Institutional Priorities Impact Admissions? Selective colleges receive thousands of applications from highly qualified students, far exceeding the number of available seats. Having exceptional grades, test scores, and course rigor is the first step in the process that enables applicants to become a part of the initial review. However, colleges will often differentiate among the applicants by weighing their institutional goals alongside the applicants' academics and accomplishments. The final admission decisions are ultimately influenced by factors that go beyond individual merit.

A good friend once said to me, "If you play the glockenspiel, and the college needs a glockenspiel percussionist- you are in!" Here are a few examples of how institutional priorities can shape admissions outcomes:

- 1. Filling Specific Academic Programs:** A college may need to increase enrollment in underrepresented

majors, such as physics or classics versus popular majors like business or biology.

2. Geographic Diversity:

Many colleges strive to enroll students from all 50 states and many countries from different parts of the world to create a diverse community.

3. Institutional Legacy and Alumni Connections:

Some schools place value on "legacy" applicants — students with family ties to the institution. While controversial, this priority often aligns with colleges' goals of maintaining alumni engagement and fundraising.

4. Athletic Recruitment:

For Division I and II schools, recruiting athletes to fill spots on sports teams is a significant priority. These students often go through a separate admissions track that considers their athletic contributions as heavily as their academic qualifications.

Why You Can't Control Institutional Priorities?

Institutional priorities are shaped by internal discussions within colleges and are rarely made public. Because these priorities are unique to each school and shift over time, families cannot predict the factors that are influencing the decision making. For example, a college might prioritize first-generation college students one year and focus on increasing enrollment in the engineering school for the next year.

What Can Families Focus On?

While institutional priorities remain outside of your control, there are key areas that students can manage to strengthen their applications:

1. Admissions decisions still heavily weigh grades and course rigor. Excelling in the classroom is the first step in being competitive.
2. Compelling essays provide a chance to share a student's unique story and personality. Crafting thoughtful, authentic responses can make a significant impact.
3. Colleges value intellectual curiosity, which shows a genuine passion for learning and a willingness to explore new ideas.
4. Meaningful and "uncommon" activities are unique, less conventional pursuits that demonstrate a student's individuality, creativity, or initiative.
5. Building relationships with teachers and mentors can lead to letters of recommendation that offer genu-



Maryline Michel Kulewicz and Tracy Sullivan of College 101 Admissions Consultants

ine insight into a student's character and abilities.

6. Researching schools and applying to a balanced mix of selective, probable, and likely options ensures that students will have good choices come decision time.

Institutional priorities may seem like an unpredictable wild-card in the admissions process, but they're only one part of a much larger picture. Families can't control these priorities, and worrying about them often leads to unnecessary stress. Instead, focus on what you can control: presenting a strong, authentic application that highlights a student's unique strengths and interests. By doing so, you'll maximize your chances of finding a college that's a great fit, regardless of the institutional priorities shaping the admissions decisions.

Good luck and enjoy the journey!

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Metacomet Greenway Progress Continues

SNETT, Area Trails Offer Recreation for Outdoor Enthusiasts

BY MARJORIE TURNER HOLLMAN

Behind the scenes, community members right here in Wrentham, Norfolk and Franklin have been working hard to bring about a transformation. Around the country abandoned railroad beds have lain nearly forgotten. A movement is taking place to reclaim these abandoned tracks and create new recreational resources and alternative transportation options.

One such local effort is the proposed Metacomet Greenway. A portion of the project is between Walpole and Wrentham and is in the design phase (a big step!), but much remains to be done to make it a reality.

The partially developed Southern New England Trunkline trail (SNETT) stretches from Grove Street in Franklin to Douglas. The added 1.7 mile of trail will go from Grove Street to Union Street in Franklin, and its completion is still several years off.

Both trails (Metacomet Greenway and the SNETT) have community groups that meet regularly to raise funds and advocate for development of the trails. Support for maintenance of the Franklin and Bellingham sections of the SNETT is part of the ongoing mission of the Franklin & Bellingham rail trail committee.

Zach McKeever, president of the Metacomet Greenway Association, noted that “the current course of action for the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) grant opportunity is to design the [rail] trail at the northern most section, the Lorusso fields in Walpole (the new Rt. 1A field complex), down to Wrentham town center (Franklin Street/Rt 140). This phase [of the project] certainly poses some unique challenges but we’re looking forward to the design process.”

McKeever continued, “The Metacomet Greenway Association has been working closely with Rich McCarthy, in his role as Director of Planning and Development in Norfolk, as well as folks from Wrentham and Walpole in similar roles to align our efforts and move the project forward.”



The Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT) in Franklin, when the trail surface was first installed. The trail is now 10 feet wide, with a packed crushed stone dust surface from Franklin to Rt. 126 in Bellingham.

McCarthy stated, “We are very excited to start the engineering, design, and permitting process for Phase 1 of Metacomet Greenway project.”

The group has been meeting for several years already. It takes a lot of work, determination, funding, and community support to make these versatile recreation resources a reality.

Quite nearby, the town of Franklin’s trailhead on Grove Street presently offers parking for about eight cars. The Franklin Town Council has recently agreed to purchase 19.51 acres of land between Grove Street and Franklin Center, which will bring the trail head to Union Street near downtown Franklin.

The Franklin & Bellingham Rail Trail Committee explained that “we worked closely with town and state officials for many years in hopes of securing this stretch of land for the trail. Financing for the purchase came from a restricted fund that could only be used to purchase Open Space, so will not require the town to take on any debt and will not come from the town’s operating budget.”

The Franklin & Bellingham Rail Trail Committee’s website (<https://www.franklinbellinghamrailtrail.org/>) clarified that, “while this news is very exciting, there is still much work to do, and it will be a few years until the 1.7 mile SNETT extension is ready for use. It will take a while for this complicated financial transaction to be completed. Then the existing rail infrastructure needs to be removed before the final pedestrian surface can be installed.”

trian surface can be installed.”

The present trailhead at Grove Street has a pedestrian light to allow people to access the trail safely. Visitors can walk or ride their bikes on the packed crushed stone dust path. Leashed dogs are welcome. The developed trail has additional parking on Lake Street and Center Street in Bellingham. Presently, a total of four miles of developed trail allows for walking, bicycling, birding, and other recreational activities, from Grove Street in Franklin to Rt. 126, S. Main Street, in Bellingham.

Multiple other developed rail trails in our area are ready for visitors. Mansfield has recently added an additional five miles to the original one-mile trail in Mansfield center. It now reaches into Norton as a paved rail trail (<https://tinyurl.com/4tjhkp2d>).

The Blackstone River Bikeway/Greenway has miles of paved paths. Established parking



SNETT in Franklin.

areas are located alongside the river in Woonsocket, Lincoln, and Cumberland, RI. Another portion is complete from Blackstone, into Millville, then on into Uxbridge (with multiple bridges over the Blackstone River!). Yet another section of trail reaches from Worcester to Millbury. A detailed map of the trail system, both completed and still in process, can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/3f5ucdef>.

The Upper Charles Trail stretches from the Hopkinton town line on Rt. 85, down to Milford center, then back north to Holliston, with a small completed section over the town line into Sherborn. This trail offers 10+ miles of developed rail trail, which consists of paving in Milford, and crushed stone dust in Holliston (<https://tinyurl.com/mr27s8vt>).



SNETT in Franklin.

We are fortunate to have community residents who have volunteered their time and their talents to help make these projects a reality. Community support is the determining factor in whether or not these projects attract grant funding that will make continued development a reality. Once you get out on any of the completed rail trails in our area, you will be able to better imagine a completed system of rail trails that will connect our communities.

McKeever said, “We’re lucky to have such a dedicated group of supporters [of the Metacomet Greenway.] We recently had our annual General Membership meeting and had many new faces and it was our most attended meeting to date. Folks are genuinely excited about the project, eager to help at community events, and looking forward to accessing the trail.” McKeever continued, “Folks interested in learning more can go to our website www.metacometgreenway.org or e-mail metacometgreenway@gmail.com.”

Footing can be tricky in the winter months, depending on snowfall and buildup of ice but there are no real barriers to visiting the trails. Once the weather warms, area residents have so many options to get outdoors on nearby dedicated rail trails. Spring is coming—I promise.

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Sports

KP Boys Five Aiming for Third Straight Playoff Berth

BY KEN HAMWEY
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Coach Dave DeStefano and his King Philip boys basketball teams have qualified for the state playoffs for the last two years, and three times during his five years at the helm. For the 2024-25 season, the coach says: “A tourney berth isn’t a goal, it’s an expectation.”

The Warriors, who are off to a slow start, had a 3-5 record at Local Town Pages deadline, but a playoff date is still an expectation. If a three-point loss to Milford had gone the other way, KP would have started the season at .500. In spite of a sub-.500 record, the Warriors’ power ranking was No. 32, still good enough for a playoff berth.

“It has definitely been an up-and-down beginning to the season,” DeStefano said. “We’ve shown flashes of greatness, but there definitely are areas where we can improve. Our rebounding has been fantastic. We still have a long season ahead and our best basketball has yet to come. The boys have been working hard every day and show a willingness to improve. Overall, this is the most coachable group I’ve had in my coaching career.”

Only five seniors graduated from last year’s squad that finished with an 11-11 record, leaving the current contingent with 10 experienced returnees.

And, when DeStefano lists his team’s overall strengths, it’s easy for Warriors fans to be upbeat about a tourney date.

“We’re athletic,” he emphasized. “We’ve got good senior leadership, our basketball IQs are high and we’ve got experience and depth. This group’s skills are the best I’ve seen in my six seasons at KP.”

Battling for the Kelly-Rex Division championship in the Hockomock League is another goal but DeStefano calls that objective “possible but lofty.”

“Franklin and Attleboro are teams that will be in the title race,” he said. “Franklin has won the division crown the last two years, and they were Division 1 state runners-up last year. Attleboro has everyone back and they’re a team that’s tough to beat. Our guys, nevertheless, have a strong competitive edge and will strive to be in the mix.”

KP’s captains are a good starting point when assessing the cast that DeStefano will rely on. The captains, all seniors, are Jack Assini, a 6-1 guard; Brandon Nicastro, a 6-foot-guard; and Tommy Kilroy, a 6-3 power forward. The coach likes the trio’s leadership style. They’re vocal, lead by example, accept responsibility and are accountable.

Through seven games the trio is setting the pace in the sta-



Coach Dave DeStefano will strive to get his KP basketball team its third straight playoff berth.

tistical department — Kilroy is averaging 14.4 points and 8.3 rebounds; Assini is averaging 14.3 points; and Nicastro has a scoring average of 10.3.

“Jack was our top scorer last year (12.6 average),” DeStefano said. “A three-year veteran point guard, he knows what it takes to win. He was our assist leader last year. He’s got a high hoop IQ, he makes his teammates better and he can score at the hoop, mid-range or from the three-point arc. Relying on great court awareness, he took 26 charges last year and forces lots of turnovers.”

Nicastro was KP’s No. 2 scorer last year (12.4 average) and is also a point guard. “Brandon is a four-year veteran, a sharp-shooter from the three-point line who also can drive and finish,” said the 38-year-old DeStefano. “His court awareness is good and he’s very instinctive.”

Kilroy is another four-year veteran. “Tommy is a good three-point shooter who can also finish at the hoop,” DeStefano offered. “He’s athletic, instinctive and quick. A read-and-react player, he guards our opponents’ best players.”

Seniors Drew Laplante (6-foot guard) and Ryan Higgins (6-foot off-guard) are key players building on the minutes they got last year.

“Drew was our sixth man and unsung hero last year,” DeStefano noted. “He’s very athletic, quick, and instinctive. He’s improved his shooting and has a winning mentality. Ryan has a

high hoop IQ and he’s very instinctive. His shooting ability is good, he’s quick on defense and he can guard effectively on one-on-one situations.”

Two seniors DeStefano believes will make a big jump from last year on both ends of the floor are Andres LePain (6-2 forward) and Ryan Evans (6-1 guard).

“Andrew had a good off-season where he improved his shooting,” DeStefano said. “He’s athletic and has good court sense. He provides a spark on the boards. Ryan is a sharp-shooter and a threat from the three-point arc. An instinctive player with a high hoop IQ, he’s improved his defensive ability.”

Five talented juniors will get opportunities. They include Brodie McDonald (6-2 forward), Cole Pitman (5-11 guard), Liam McGrath (6-3 forward), Brian Hitchen (6-2 guard), and Matt Shore (6-3 guard).

“Brodie has a physical presence inside, is athletic and can help us rebound,” DeStefano said. “Cole handles the ball well, is quick, has improved his shooting and is a threat when he attacks the hoop. Liam is athletic and long, finishes at the basket and will help on the boards. Brian is a good shooter who’s got defensive ability. He gets steals frequently. Matt is long and should help us on the boards. He’s also capable around the hoop.”

Three sophomore guards round out the roster — Roman Assini (6-1), Donovan Rohrs (6-0), and Ryan Marrone (5-11).

“Roman has improved, he’s athletic, and is quick on defense because of a quick first step,” DeStefano noted. “Donovan alternated on the jayvees. A sharp-shooter, he’s a threat on offense. Ryan is quick and a strong one-on-one defender. A capable three-point shooter, he’s got a high hoop IQ.”

A native of Attleboro, DeStefano has two reliable assistant coaches. Jim Danielson coaches the junior varsity and Nolan Bradley is the freshmen coach.

Before taking the KP job, DeStefano previously was Foxboro’s jayvee coach for three years. He also was a varsity assistant for seven years at Bishop Feehan. He played football and basketball at Feehan and during his four years there, he was on the Shamrocks’ grid teams that won four Super Bowls.

Banking on an athletic philosophy that focuses on winning, reaching one’s potential and having fun, DeStefano hopes his players learn valuable life lessons from basketball.

“Some life lessons that can be learned in sports are overcoming adversity, learning how to be good teammates and good learners, setting goals and being accountable,” he emphasized.

How well KP executes during the second half of this season and how much they’ve improved on defense will be key factors if the Warriors are to fulfill their goal of battling for a division title and realizing their tourney expectation.

“On offense we aim to have a balanced attack,” DeStefano said. “We don’t have a player who’ll score 17-plus points. We have to create great scoring opportunities as a team. One area that I think we will improve on from a year ago is defense. It’s no surprise that this team is athletic and if we really commit to defense, we’re going to have a successful season. We want to make our opponents uncomfortable and focus on working together to get stops.”

The Warriors may not be vocal about a three-peat as far as a tourney invite goes, but they certainly will focus on competing intensely for a playoff berth.

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February Program Highlights at the Norfolk Senior Center

RSVP to 508-528-4430 or register for programs in person at the Norfolk Senior Center, 28 Medway Branch Road. For a full list of activities, visit the Council on Aging page on the town's website: norfolk.ma.us.

Thursday, February 6 at 1 p.m. **Downsize Your Stuff** Even if you are not moving homes, reducing clutter and planning for your most beloved possessions can give you tremendous peace of mind. Professional home organizer Avery Amante will break it down into manageable steps and obtainable goals, how to make decisions, and ultimately what to do with the things you no longer want or need. Get ready to take on downsizing projects with clarity and a can-do attitude! RSVP requested.

Tuesday, February 11 at 10 a.m. **Brain Boosting Foods** Join a lively and informative presentation on the 5 best foods for brain health. Presented by Tara Hammes, RDN of MCOA. RSVP requested.

Tuesday, February 11 at 11 a.m. **Harnessing the Power Of AI** Artificial Intelligence is transforming the world and older

adults have a unique role guiding this technology. With Professor Rubin of Senior U, discover how you can help shape this tool for the future. Shown via Zoom at the Senior Center or watch from home. RSVP requested.

Wednesday, February 12 at 1 p.m. **Estate Planning Basics** Are you wondering what the necessary steps are to protect your family if something were to happen? Local attorney Amy Antonellis will explain the necessary components of an effective estate plan and real-life scenarios will be evaluated to illustrate the use of various estate planning tools, such as wills, trusts, durable power of attorney, and health care proxies. RSVP requested.

Thursday, February 13 at 12:30 p.m. **Famous Impressions** Enjoy the work of famous Impressionist painters such as Monet, Renoir, Degas and others. Learn what Impressionists believed, how they worked, and how their creations stirred the art world, inspiring so many artists—from the post-impressionists onward. Join art historian Jill Sanford of Art for Your Mind challenging yourself to see

in new ways! Programs are for people of all backgrounds –artists and non-artists alike. RSVP requested.

Friday, February 14 **Valentine's Day Lunch, Hershey Talk, And Chocolate Tasting** Come celebrate Valentine's Day with your friends at the Norfolk Senior Center. At noon: **Lunch** will include cheese lasagna, meatballs, salad, and rolls. Cost \$3, limited to 50 people. At 1 p.m.: **The Secrets of Sweet Success: The Story of Milton S. Hershey** This program looks at the life of Milton S. Hershey and how he founded a company, town and school that are still thriving today. We will examine eight guiding principles that Mr. Hershey followed to become a successful businessman and community leader, including start with a passion, keep trying, and pursue new ideas. Led by The Hershey Story in Hershey, PA via Zoom at 1:45 p.m.: **Chocolate Tasting: International Chocolates** We will try four single-source chocolates from around the world as we discover and discuss how each has a unique flavor profile. We will also

provide some American Hershey chocolate samples to compare. Chocolate tasting limited to 30 people. RSVP required for all three events.

Wednesday, February 19 at 10:15 a.m. **Behind the Scenes: Academy Awards** How did this Hollywood award get started? Who has won (or lost) the Oscar over the years? What are some of the ceremony's most famous and infamous moments? Get ready for Hollywood's big night with interactive trivia questions, clips, poster board displays, movie-themed door prizes, and Oscar ballots! Presented by Film Lecturer & Podcast Host Frank Mandosa. RSVP requested.

Monday, February 24 at 11 a.m. **Solo Ager Discussion Group** Are you an older adult who lives alone and doesn't have reliable support from children or family members? Are you making decisions about your future independently? Then this is the group for you! This is a monthly meeting to discuss the practical planning steps that are unique to solo agers. Call Outreach Coordinator Becky Poynot with questions. RSVP requested.

Tuesday, February 25 at 1 p.m. **Terrarium Gardening** Explore the fascinating world of terrariums and then make your own! Therapy Gardens will discuss the best plants to use and techniques for care and maintenance. Participants will design and build a mini-terrarium to take home. Limited to 24 people. Cost: \$10. RSVP required.

Wednesday, February 26 at 1 p.m. **UFOs and Spy Balloons** Podcaster and paranormal enthusiast Chris Torres discusses recent developments on UFOs and spy balloons and how to use the internet to research this topic. RSVP requested.

Thursday, February 27 at 1 p.m. **Seasonal Affective Disorder and Winter Blues Lecture** Why does winter make us SAD? Let's find out why and what we can do with neuroscientist Kymberlee O'Brien. First, it's not your fault! Our brains have evolved to have seasonal shifts. Let's explore how shorter days and less sunlight affects brain chemistry, leading to lower mood and energy, and how to brain boost your mood and feel better! RSVP requested.

Tracy Grammer to Perform at Circle of Friends Coffeehouse

Jim Henry to Accompany Grammer

Tracy Grammer returns to the Circle of Friends Coffeehouse stage on Saturday, February 8 at 7:30 p.m. Doors open at 7 p.m.

Grammer, a nationally touring multi-instrumentalist and singer, has accompanied and opened for Joan Baez and recorded with Mary Chapin Carpenter. Renowned for her springwater-clear alto, perfectly intoned violin, and guitar playing that is by turns percussive and delicate, Grammer has become one of folk music's most beloved artists. She is also a masterful storyteller with an ease and charisma on stage as well as a riotous sense of humor.

"Her pure voice conveys the simple truths of these songs; her gifts as a musician are like that of a painter who is a master of chiaroscuro, offering light and

shadow at every turn," said Mary Chapin Carpenter.

Tracy will be accompanied by world class guitarist/dobro/mandolin player Jim Henry.

Admission for this performance is \$25. Visit <http://www.circlefolk.org/> to purchase tickets or for more information.

The Circle of Friends Coffeehouse is a non-profit organization affiliated with Franklin's First Universalist Society. Concerts are presented in a smoke-free and alcohol-free environment at the Society's handicapped accessible Meetinghouse, 262 Chestnut St. in Franklin. Beverages and gourmet desserts will be available.

Save the dates for these upcoming shows: Joe Crookston (March 8), The Kennedys (April 5), and John Gorka (May 17).



State Fire Marshal Offers Heating Safety Tips

Heating Equipment is a Leading Cause of Fires, Carbon Monoxide

Massachusetts State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine reminds residents to stay warm safely and protect their loved ones from some of the most common home heating fires.

“Heating equipment is the leading cause of carbon monoxide at home and the second leading cause of residential fires,” said State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine. “Whether you’re using gas, oil, solid fuel, or space heaters to keep warm, be sure you keep safe, too.”

State Fire Marshal Davine said there were nearly 6,000 heating fires in Massachusetts from 2019 to 2023. These fires claimed eight lives, caused 139 injuries to firefighters and residents, and contributed to over \$42 million in damage. And in 2023 alone, Massachusetts fire departments reported finding carbon monoxide at nearly 5,000 non-fire incidents.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Every household needs working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on every level of their home. Check the manufacturing date on the back of your alarms

so you know when to replace them. Smoke alarms should be replaced after 10 years, and carbon monoxide alarms should be replaced after 5 to 10 years depending on the model. If your alarms take alkaline batteries, put in fresh batteries twice a year when you change your clocks. If it’s time to replace your alarms, choose new ones from a well-known national brand. Select smoke alarms with a sealed, long-life battery and a hush feature.

Natural Gas and Oil Heat

If you have a furnace, water heater, or oil burner, have it professionally checked and serviced each year. This will help it run more efficiently, which will save you money and could save your life. Always keep a three-foot “circle of safety” around the appliance clear of anything that could catch fire. Never store painting supplies, aerosol cans, or other flammable items near these appliances. If you smell gas, don’t use any electrical switches or devices: get out, stay out, and call 9-1-1 right away.

Residents struggling to pay for heating bills or maintenance may be eligible for assistance through

the Massachusetts home energy assistance program (HEAP). No matter what type of heating equipment you use, HEAP may be able to help you pay your winter heating bills or maintain your heating system. All Massachusetts residents are encouraged to explore eligibility for this free program and apply for assistance.

Solid Fuel Heating

If you use a fireplace or a stove that burns wood, pellets, or coal, always keep the area around it clear for three feet in all directions. This circle of safety should be free of furniture, drapery, rugs, books and papers, fuel, and any other flammable items. To prevent sparks and embers from escaping, use a fireplace screen or keep the stove door closed while burning. Use only dry, seasoned hardwood and don’t use flammable liquids to start the fire. To dispose of ashes, wait until they are cool and shovel them into a metal bucket with a lid and place it outside at least 10 feet away from the building.

Have your chimney and flue professionally inspected and cleaned each year. Most chimney fires are caused by burning

creosote, a tarry substance that builds up as the fireplace, wood stove, or pellet stove is used. If burning creosote, sparks, embers, or hot gases escape through cracks in the flue or chimney, they can cause a fire that spreads to the rest of the structure. Annual cleaning and inspection can minimize this risk. Contact the Massachusetts Chimney Sweep Guild or Chimney Safety Institute of America to identify reputable local companies.

Space Heaters

Keep space heaters at least three feet from curtains, bedding, and anything else that can burn. Plug them directly into a wall socket, not an extension cord or a power strip, and remember that they’re for temporary use. Always turn a space heater off when you leave the room or go to sleep.

When purchasing a space heater, select one that’s been tested and labeled by a nationally recognized testing company, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or Intertek (ETL). Newer space heaters should have an automatic shut-off switch that turns the device off if it tips over. Unvented kerosene space heat-

ers and portable propane space heaters are not permitted for residential use in Massachusetts, State Fire Marshal Davine said: the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning that they pose is too great.

Create and Practice a Home Escape Plan

Everyone should have a home escape plan that accounts for two ways out of every room, and everyone should be able to open the doors and windows along the way. Remember that children, older adults, and people with disabilities may need extra assistance.

More Home Heating Safety Tips

The Department of Fire Services offers a wealth of home heating safety information, including the “Keep Warm, Keep Safe” tool kit for local fire departments, caregivers, and service providers, on the DFS web site: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/winter-home-heating-safety>

Heating Help Available for Massachusetts Residents

MA Home Energy Assistance Program Enrollment Open Through April

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities’ Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) enrollment period for the 2024-2025 winter heating season remains open through April. This critical program provides finan-

cial 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. 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.

“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 Assistance 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 (<https://hedfuel.azurewebsites.net/>) or apply here: <https://toapply.org/MassHEAP>.

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Norfolk Cultural Council to Hold Juried Art Exhibition

The Norfolk Cultural Council will be sponsoring a juried art exhibition to be held at the Norfolk Public Library May 3-31.

Artists can submit any family-appropriate artwork, including paintings, mono-prints, drawings, photographs, collages, and flat fiber art. Prints of original artwork will not be accepted.

All work must be original. Pieces cannot exceed 36" x 36" (including frame). Application is available at <https://bit.ly/ap-ncc>. Applications will be accepted until April 1.

Entry fee is \$25 for one entry or \$45 for two entries. Maximum of two entries. Fee is non-refundable. Digital payment can be submitted at <https://bit.ly/nccpay> or send checks to Norfolk Cultural Council, One Liberty Lane, Norfolk MA 02056.

A reception and awards ceremony will be held on Saturday, May 10 from 5 to 7 p.m. Prizes will be awarded.

OCC to Hold Bluegrass Concert

The Original Congregational Church of Wrentham presents the acclaimed Bluegrass group "Southern Rail" on Saturday, March 1 at 7 p.m.

Join us for an evening of Bluegrass and delicious blueberry buckle! Southern Rail's music is high-octane, exuberant fun with sparkling banjo, guitar, and mandolin. The group has 11

recordings and two of the band's members have been inducted into the RIBA Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

Ticket prices are \$20 and are available in the church office or at the door (cash, check or Venmo).

For more information, call 508-384-3110, or email: office@occhurch.net. The church is lo-

cated at 1 East St., Wrentham, with parking available in the church lot or town lot across the street.

The concert is to be held in memory of Ken Graves, founder and organizer of the OCC Coffeehouse.

Senator Markey to Lead as Top Democrat on Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee

Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) was officially named the Ranking Member, or top Democrat, of the U.S. Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee (SBC). Senator Markey has served on the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee since his election to the Senate in 2013. As

Ranking Member, Senator Markey will work to build a fair, just, opportunity economy for entrepreneurs and the 34 million small businesses across the country, including more than 722,000 in Massachusetts and their 1.4 million employees. Massachusetts is a small business beacon, especially as a leader in the innovation and clean energy economy.

As Ranking Member, Senator Markey will focus on reaching businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in underserved communities, expanding training and mentorship resources, assisting small businesses to adapt to emerging technology, addressing wealth disparities by closing access gaps, and supporting innovative and clean energy small businesses - including by permanently reauthorizing the Small Business Innovation and Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs. During the Biden-Harris administration, a record 20 million applications were filed to start new businesses, led by growth in new Black, Latino, and women-owned businesses.

"Whether it's a local restaurant, laundromat, beauty salon, or hardware store, strong small businesses help local economies thrive and contribute to the fabric of our communities. By supporting small businesses and new

aspiring entrepreneurs, we can close gender and racial wealth gaps, invest in the success of working families, and foster innovation. As the top Democrat of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, my goal will be to continue the historic growth in new small businesses under the Biden-Harris administration and ensure opportunity for current and future generations," said Senator Markey.

Senator Markey has a long history of working on issues within SBC's jurisdiction. Since joining the Committee, Senator Markey has been an outspoken champion of the SBIR and STTR programs and in 2019 introduced legislation to expand the program. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Senator Markey introduced legislation to ensure greater equitable distribution of Paycheck Protection Program loans. In the 118th Congress, Senator Markey introduced legislation to provide opportunity grants to aspiring entrepreneurs in underserved communities.

Senator Markey is also a member of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, Environment and Public Works Committee, and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. He is also lead co-Chair of the Climate Change Clearinghouse.

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New Legislation Aims to Protect Drinking Water

Legislation filed in mid-January would enable Massachusetts to develop minimum statewide water quality standards for private wells and expand a financial assistance program to remediate wells affected by PFAS (“forever chemicals”) and other harmful contaminants in drinking water supplies.

The filing of the bill (SD.847) by Sen. Jamie Eldridge (D-Marlborough) and Rep. Natalie Blais (D-Sunderland) was applauded by the Coalition for Safe Drinking Water, a grassroots group

led by RCAP Solutions and supported by The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts that is focused on equitable access to clean and safe drinking water.

More than half a million Massachusetts residents – located heavily in rural areas but also in all 351 cities and towns – rely on private wells for their drinking water. Yet many are consuming water that may be unsafe because the source is not regularly tested and treated like public water supplies and could

have harmful contaminants such as PFAS, arsenic, radon, uranium and more. A 2023 poll revealed that 92% of residents believe that state government should play a role in ensuring safe drinking water for all.

“As the Legislature continues to address PFAS contamination in communities across the state this session, it’s crucial that the hundreds of thousands of households relying on private well water have access to clean and safe drinking water,” said Sen. Eldridge. “That’s why I’m proud to once again file legislation to empower the DEP to regulate private wells and establish a program to help homeowners test their wells for dangerous contaminants.”

The initiative gained momentum last year in the state budget process, with \$100,000 appropriated to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) to conduct a study and make recommendations for a statewide

program to ensure that drinking water from private wells is safe to consume. The MassDEP study is currently in progress.

The newly filed legislation would grant the MassDEP clear authority to establish standards and define testing requirements for new and existing wells to ensure effective implementation. Upon the sale of a home, a private well used for drinking water would have to pass a test for the transaction to be completed (similar to the state’s Title 5 septic system regulations). The state would make resources available to assist eligible homeowners with the cost of well water upgrades.

“We applaud Senator Eldridge, Representative Blais, Representative Kilcoyne and Representative Sena for their leadership on this important issue. Too many homeowners are not aware of what’s in their well water or how the presence of PFAS and other contaminants could harm their family’s health,” said Brian Scales, President & CEO of RCAP Solutions, a nonprofit community development corporation based in Worcester.

“Massachusetts residents who live in municipalities with public water systems have access to water that is tested and treated to meet state and federal standards, but those protections do not extend to those who rely on well water,” said Amie Shei, Ph.D., President & CEO of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. “Wells require regular testing and maintenance, just as public water systems do, but not everyone is aware of the need or can afford these services – creating a regional equity issue that can be addressed through this legislation.”

RCAP Solutions’ Private Well Program to Protect Public Health, funded by The Health Foundation, conducted over 500 water quality tests of private wells across several Massachusetts communities from 2020 to 2022, finding that about a third of the wells contained levels of contaminants higher than state health standards or suggesting potential health risks.

For more information about the legislation and the Coalition for Safe Drinking Water, visit www.whatsinyourwellwater.org.

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Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Page Realty Congratulates Danielle Rochefort as their AGENT OF THE YEAR for Six Consecutive Years!



Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Page Realty is thrilled to recognize Danielle Rochefort as the company's Agent of the Year and their #1 Sales Agent for an impressive sixth consecutive year! In addition, Danielle continues to be a top-selling agent in Norfolk, finishing 2024 as the #1 selling agent in the community, further solidifying her reputation as a trusted leader in the local real estate market. Her sustained success is a testament to her dedication, expertise, and the genuine relationships she builds with her clients, business partners, and the communities she serves.

"With her in-depth market knowledge and personalized approach, Danielle has earned a reputation not only as a top-performing agent but as a trusted partner, guiding her clients with care and expertise through every step of the process. Her ability to connect with her clients and

deliver results while ensuring a seamless transition is what sets her apart," said Ellen Rao, broker owner of the company. "She brings a warmth, professionalism, and an unmatched expertise to every transaction."

A cornerstone of Danielle's success is her active involvement in the community. As a member of the local Lions Club, she regularly contributes to local initiatives and is deeply committed to giving back. Her previous experience in marketing and operations at a Boston-based investment management firm gives her a unique perspective, helping clients navigate the complexities of real estate transactions with confidence. "It's such a privilege to work with wonderful people and be part of their lives during such an important transition," Danielle shares. "It's the most rewarding part of my job and I'm excited to help even more clients and families make their move this year."

Looking ahead, Danielle is already preparing for an exciting spring market with a number of properties set to come on soon. If you're considering buying or selling a home, or if you'd simply wish to discuss the current market Danielle is ready to help.

She can be reached at 508-954-7690 or at danielle@BHH-Spagerealty.com

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Page Realty congratulates Danielle on her outstanding achievements and looks forward to supporting her continued success in 2025 and beyond.



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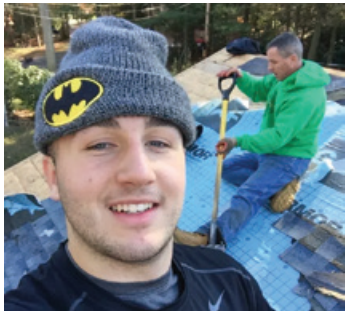
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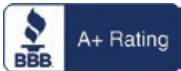
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