



Keeping Local News Alive and Communities Connected

BY JENNIFER RUSSO

For the first time in our newspaper's history, the cost of postage has surpassed the cost of printing. On average, mailing services have increased in price by over 7% in the last couple of years. While the USPS may require this operationally, it does underscore the growing financial challenges facing local journalism today. Paper, ink, fuel, and distribution costs have all risen sharply in the past year, and while we've absorbed those increases for as long as we could, we now find ourselves at a turning point.

Despite these challenges, one thing hasn't changed: our commitment to providing free, local news that keeps our communities informed and connected. Local journalism is not just about headlines — it's about people. It's about the high school team's championship win, the opening of a new family business, the celebration of a lifelong volunteer, and the coverage of town meetings, and ensuring that every story is told.

When you open your community newspaper, you read about your neighbors, your schools, and the heartbeat of your area. You're seeing your community reflected in print - its triumphs, challenges, and spirit. Local news brings people together, fosters accountability, and preserves

the stories that make each town unique. Without it, those small but powerful connections risk being lost.

Advertising revenue has always been a vital source of support for our papers, and we are deeply grateful to the local businesses that continue to support us. But as printing and mailing costs rise to historic levels, advertising alone can no longer carry the full weight of production. We recognize that our small businesses are facing similar pressures, and we would prefer not to raise advertising rates too much. Instead, we're turning to you — our readers — for help.

This November, we're launching our annual Support the Newspaper campaign. Every donation, no matter the size, helps offset the rising costs of printing and distribution, ensuring that your paper remains free, local, and delivered right to your doorstep or mailbox. Your contribution isn't just helping to print pages — it's helping to keep civic engagement alive, preserving our community history, and giving a platform to local voices that deserve to be heard.

We are endlessly thankful for your readership, your trust, and your belief in the value of local journalism. For decades, this

COMMUNITY NEWS

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Grafton's Business Scene

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Although the summer family vacations and beach trips have come and gone, families should still be able to spend quality time together having fun. And they shouldn't have to wait for the holiday season.

Fortunately, in the coming weeks local businesses and organizations will offer much anticipated family-friendly events. Some businesses will also offer products that families can use to have that same type of bonding time in their homes or the great outdoors.

In North Grafton, families will have the chance to help fight food insecurity while enjoying many fun seasonal activities. The 19th annual Community Harvest Project Harvest Home Festival & 5k will be held at Community Harvest Project on Sunday, Nov. 2 from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. For more

information and admission costs, please visit the nonprofit's website: community-harvest.org. Among other things, festivities will include kids' activities, live music, apple cannons, hayrides, food vendors, a 5k run, a raffle, an online auction and a dog adoption event with Safe With Us Animal Rescue.

Families will also have the chance to support Our Lady of Hope Parish church and its ministries to those in need. On Saturday, Nov. 1 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. at Our Lady of Hope at St. James Campus Recreation center building in South Grafton, Our Lady of Hope Parish will hold its annual Harvest Fair. There will be free activities and games for kids, raffles, a silent auction and a white elephant table. Additionally, there will be crafts, themed baskets, baked goods and other food available for purchase.

Families that would like to carve jack-o-lanterns or decorate their

homes together with festive fall natural decorations should be able to find what they're looking for at Houlden Farm in North Grafton. The multi-generational farm has been known, for years, for its abundant selection of pumpkins and gourds.

In South Grafton, The Saddle Shed offers a wide and wonderful selection of items that families can use to enjoy fall and winter equestrian events and activities. The shop, which just celebrated its 56th anniversary this month, sells horse equipment, accessories, gifts and tack and has winter wear for horses and their riders of all ages.

The holidays will be here before you know it. But, in the meantime, families can enjoy this season together.

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



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Library Happenings

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35 Grafton Common, Grafton
Graftonlibrary.org
Ongoing events:
Mondays: Library Babies 9:30 a.m.
Book Club for Adults 6:30 p.m.
Tuesdays: Tasting Tuesday 3-7 p.m. for 10-18 years
Adult Yoga: 6:30 p.m.
Unplug with Art, adults (begins Nov. 4)
Wednesdays: Watch Party for 10-18 years
Thursdays: Sewing for Adults for 5:30 p.m.
Fridays: Drop-in Cribbage for 18+, 1 p.m.
Fri-YAY Game Day for 10-18 years, 2-6 p.m.
Visit the website for special events.

Tuesday, November 11, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Want to have a say at your library? Come and help with teen program ideas, decorate the Teen Space, create book displays, and make collections suggestions to the Young Adult Librarian. Snacks provided while supplies last. Ages 14-18. No Registration Required.

SUTTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

4 Uxbridge Road, Sutton
Suttonpubliclibrary.org
508-865-8752
Special events:
Call or register at <https://suttonpubliclibrary.org/calendar-of-events/>
Clay Tic-Tac-Toe Board Friday, November 7, 4 p.m. Build your own board game using air dry clay! We will spend the first session creating our boards, and the second session will be for painting them! This program is for tweens aged 8-12. Registration required.
Recurring events:
Baby Storytime: Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m. For babies and caregivers to meet friends, read books and sing songs.
Wednesday Storytime: Every Wednesday, 10:30 to 11 a.m.
Thursday Storytime: Every Thursday, 10:30 to 11 a.m.
Cribbage Club: Mondays, 1 to 2 p.m. Beginners or experienced players' welcome! Writing Group: Second Thursday of each month, 6 to 7:45 p.m. Join local author Lisa Shea for our writing group. Come bounce your ideas off of other authors and get creative and constructive feedback. For full details about the writing group please visit: suttonmass.org/writinggroup/

MILLBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Millburylibrary.org
508-865-1181
Recurring events:
Storytime: Wednesdays, 10:30 a.m. ages 0-4. Stories, fingerplays and sensory playtime
Knitting/crochet group: Wednesdays 10 a.m.
Cribbage Club: Thursdays at 6 p.m. All levels of play welcome.
Teens Dungeons and Dragons: Thursdays 3-5 p.m. Registration required.
Watercolor Painting, Level 2: Thursdays, 6-7 p.m. Must attend all four classes. Bring a notebook. Other supplies provided. Registration required.
Intro to Watercolor: Wednesday, Oct. 29 from 6-7:30 p.m. Please only sign up if you are able to attend all four classes. Bring a notebook. Registration required.
Teen Advisory for Millbury Public Library:



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4th Friday: Blackstone Valley North: Grafton, Millbury & Sutton

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Sutton's Revolutionary War

You're invited to step back in to Sutton's Revolutionary past and uncover the stories of the people who lived it. Learn about the Sutton Historical Society's "Revolutionary War Soldier Biography" project. Hear about soldiers who marched off to fight, families who kept life going at home and newcomers to Sutton. This presentation is all about the small stories that show how ordinary people found themselves playing a role in extraordinary events.

Discover how you can participate in the 250th commemorations and tell your own stories.

Presented at the First Congregational Church of Sutton, 307 Boston Road at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, November 7.



Sutton Historical Society member and Assistant Museum Curator Charlotte Wilson will share her research what Sutton's militia, patriots and citizens contributed during the Revolutionary War. Photo courtesy of Sutton Historical Society

COMMUNITY NEWS

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paper has been honored to share your stories, celebrate your milestones, and champion the spirit of our towns. With your help, we can continue to do so for many years to come.

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our community news, please visit <https://unipaygold.unibank.com/transactionInfo.aspx?CustomerID=2779&TransID=36396> or scan the QR code. Thank you for your support. We have been honored to be a part of your community, and we are excited to continue to bring you the news and stories that matter to you each month.





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Making the most of Medicare open enrollment



Tim Furbush, CFA

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When you turn 65, Medicare becomes a vital part of your health care coverage. But signing up is just the beginning. Many people don't realize that Medicare isn't a "set it and forget it" program. In fact, you have the opportunity — and often the need — to review and adjust your coverage every single year.

The annual Medicare Open Enrollment period, which runs from Oct. 15 through Dec. 7 each year, is your chance to

take a fresh look at your health care needs and make sure your Medicare plan still fits your life. Then you can determine whether your medical and prescription plans need to be switched or dropped.

Just like your health can change from year to year, so can Medicare plans. Insurance companies may adjust their coverage and costs or even discontinue certain plans entirely. By taking time during the open enrollment period to compare your options, you might discover a plan that saves money, offers better coverage or both.

As a reminder, you have several options when it comes to your Medicare coverage.

• **Original Medicare (Parts A and B)** covers hospital stays and medical services such as doctor visits. Part A typically comes with no monthly premium if you've worked for at least 10 years. Part B requires monthly premiums — \$206.50 or more in 2026, depending on your income. They may also be copays and deductibles.

• **Medicare Advantage (Part C)** offers an all-in-one alternative to Original Medicare. These plans are offered by private insurance companies. They often bundle together hospital, medical and prescription drug coverage. They may also include extra benefits like vision, dental and wellness programs that Original Medicare doesn't cover.

• **Medicare Part D** provides standalone prescription drug coverage for those who stick with Original Medicare.

• **Medicare Supplement (Medigap)** policies help cover the out-of-pocket costs that Original Medicare doesn't pay, such as copayments and deductibles.

When shopping for Medicare plans, there are several important areas you should consider to determine which options are right for you:

• **Out-of-pocket costs** such as monthly premiums, deductibles, copayments and any other expenses Medicare doesn't

cover. Sometimes a plan with a higher premium saves you money overall because of lower copays.

• **Prescription drug coverage** deserves special attention. All Medicare plans for 2026 will include a \$2,100 cap on what you pay out of pocket for covered prescription drugs, up from \$2,000 in 2025. However, this cap only applies to drugs that your plan covers, making it crucial to verify your medications are included.

• **Your health care needs** for the coming year matter too. Do you have surgeries planned? New health conditions to manage? You'll want to make sure your potential plan covers the care you expect to need.

• **Travel plans** can also influence your choice. Original Medicare typically doesn't cover services overseas, so frequent travelers might want supplemental coverage for emergencies abroad.

If you don't make any changes during open enrollment, you'll likely be automatically reenrolled in your current plan for the following year, as long as it's still available and you continue paying required premiums.

Don't let your Medicare plan run on autopilot. Take advantage of the annual open enrollment period — between Oct. 15 and Dec. 7 — to ensure your coverage continues to serve you well in the year ahead.

Contact Tim for assistance with your personal finances.

Tim Furbush, CFA
Edward Jones Financial Advisor
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With gratitude,
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Millbury Women's Club Open to New Members

The Millbury Women's Club (MWC) was founded in 1894 and has been dedicated to community service ever since. While the faces and needs may

change, the service and support of community needs has held fast. The MWC is part of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and echoes the theme: "Living the Volunteer Spirit." It is a non-profit organization. In September, the club was busy continuing the tradition of "Fingerprinting for Safety" with Millbury Police Officer Fortu-



(Left to right) Millbury Women's Club officers: Paula Beaugard, membership chair, Marguerite Duncan, VP and sponsor of new inductees Carol McLaughlin, Diane Boursick and Club President Diane Hill.

include selling yellow tulip bulbs to plant "Hope" gardens to bring support and "Smash the Stigma" about mental illness. The MWC holds their monthly meetings at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm Street, Millbury with a variety of programs and interesting presentations. September's meeting was focused on Cyber Security which can be a

very overwhelming and stressful situation for us all, if targeted. A law enforcement detective gave the presentation and valuable information was received. Regular meetings are held on the first Monday of each calendar month, with the exception of January, July and August. Meetings are held at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm Street, Millbury at 6:30 p.m. New members are always welcome to join. Submitted by Diane Hill

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Arriving on the Midstate

Visiting the Site of the Great Train Wreck, Crossing Three States and Standing on a Path from the Mountains to the Sea

BY THOMAS J. MCLAUGHLIN

Thomas McLaughlin is writing a series of articles on hiking in the region.

Finding the Midstate Trail isn't difficult. You could say it finds you. Maybe you've seen the signs for it driving over it on Route 20, or under it on the Mass.

Pike, or along it on several roads throughout the region. But arriving at the starting point takes a little planning since it begins and ends in the middle of the woods.

The 92-mile Midstate Trail passes through fourteen Central Massachusetts towns. The blaze of yellow triangles marking the Midstate runs through Douglas, Sutton, Oxford, Charlton, Spencer, Leicester, Oakham, Rutland, Barre, Hubbardston, Princeton, Westminster, Ashburnham, and Ashby. All the towns are in Worcester County, except for Ashby, which is in Middlesex County. Ashby is also the only town among them that borders three different counties—Worcester, Middlesex, and Hillsborough (New Hampshire).

If you want to hike the Midstate or just learn more about it, a great starting point is midstatetrail.org, the official website of the Midstate Trail, where you can view maps and get information on the trail.

For fifteen bucks you can buy their Midstate Trail Guide Book, which provides topographical maps with northbound and southbound distances, access points, elevations, and trail descriptions.

In hiking articles, terminus is a word that's commonly used to describe the two ends of a trail. It's a centuries-old Latin word that's become part of the long-distance hiking jargon since one hiker's starting line is another's finish line. Merriam Webster defines it as, "either end of a transportation line or travel route," and as, "an extreme point." So, depending on the direction you're going it can be the end or the beginning of your journey.

I decided to start at the southern terminus of the Midstate and head north since these towns were closer to my home. Before I began, I studied the map, estimated the miles,



and researched all the connecting trails leading to the Midstate.

I could come at it from any direction. From Massachusetts, I could connect to it in the Douglas State Forest at Wallum Lake. In Rhode Island, I could reach it from Pascoag. From Connecticut, I could arrive via the Tri-State Trail.

I saw online pictures that hikers posted of the Tri-State Marker where you can stand in three states at once. Located high atop a hill in the middle of the forest since 1883, is a small granite obelisk marking the spot where Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island meet.

I liked the idea of hiking in three states and eventually four (it sounds impressive), and I wanted to see the Tri-State Marker and stand in three states at once so I headed to East Thompson, Connecticut.

Connecticut's Air Line Trail extends 50-miles from the 'quiet corner' of northeastern Connecticut to the Connecticut River. You can walk this trail from East Thompson to Portland. This was where the legendary "ghost train," the New England Limited, the Boston & New York Air Line Railroad,

formerly known as the New Haven, Middletown and Willimantic Railroad once roared across the rails during the Gilded Age of the 1890s. According to the Pomfret Historical Society, it was known as the "ghost train" because of its "creamy white color with gold trim. Even the black coal used for fuel was whitewashed. The crew wore white uniforms and much of the interior was adorned with white and gold trim." It was a luxury line that traveled the shortest distance between New York City and Boston with limited stops, making record time.

Today, on the Air Line Trail in East Thompson you can visit the site of the Great East Thompson Train Wreck, a massive collision involving four rail lines that occurred on the morning of December 4, 1891.

The local Southbridge Freight, Boston Freight, Long Island and Eastern States Express, and the Norwich Steamboat Express crashed into each other on this

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MIDSTATE

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spot. Connecticuthistory.org describes it as, “the site of one of the most horrific railway accidents in American history,” and “one of the only accidents in US history to involve four trains.”

There are signs at the site describing the catastrophic events of that morning, along with the foundations and remains of the engine house, depot station, and engine turn table. Transparent historical pictures allow viewers to catch a glimpse of what the station and the surrounding area looked like in 1891.

After visiting this site, I headed northeast for a half mile on the Air Line Trail, which is a flat and straight-line trail as it would have been when it was a railway. I proceeded to the Connecticut and Massachusetts border marker, hiked uphill along the rocky Tri-State Marker Trail, and arrived at a clearing at the top of the hill where the Tri-State Marker sits where the

three states meet. I stood in three states, and continued along the Tri-State Trail with Massachusetts to my left and Rhode Island to my right.

I could sense there was someone behind me some distance on my way up the hill to the Tri-State Marker. He maintained the same pace and distance the whole time until I stopped to take some pictures of a scenic turn in the path and he caught up to me.

He was a physically fit, retiree from East Thompson, Connecticut, who in his earlier years hiked over a hundred miles of the Appalachian Trail from Massachusetts through Vermont into New Hampshire. He hikes a circuitous route of a few miles, three times a week from the site of the Great Train Wreck to and from the southern terminus of the Midstate and the northern terminus of Rhode Island’s North/South Trail. It’s great exercise with its varying terrain.

We walked to the southern terminus of the Midstate Trail between Pascoag, RI and Douglas where wooden signs point in one direction for the Midstate in Mas-

sachusetts and in another direction for the North-South Trail in Rhode Island. We talked for a little while and I told him of my plan to hike the Midstate. He said, “Enjoy your hiking,” and he continued back to East Thompson.

If you’re up for a long walk to the beach, 78-miles, the North/South trail leads to the Atlantic Ocean (Ninigret Beach), or you can walk 92-miles north on the Midstate to Mt. Watatic. Beyond that is the Wapack Trail, extending another 21-miles to North Pack Monadnock, where you can see the White Mountains off in the distance. It’s something to appreciate

when you’re standing there in the middle of the forest. This narrow footpath leads from the mountains to the sea. I enjoyed the moment,

but the North/South Trail would have to wait another day. Today I was hiking the Midstate.

The Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild is pleased to announce that it’s biennial quilt show will be held on Saturday and Sunday, March 14th and 15th, 2026 at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical Show in Uptons. The Guild has selected “Creating Comfort” as their show theme. This theme reflects not only the members’ love of quilting but also reflects the guild’s mission and fundraising efforts. Over 200 member quilts as well as guild challenges and round robins will be on display. Also included at the show will be a special raffle quilt, the Quilters’ Boutique, raffle baskets, and local area vendors. Any local area vendor wishing to participate in the Guild’s show should contact Deb Hudgins by mail at TPQG, P.O. Box 447, Mendon, MA 01756.

The guild has chosen “Home Base” as the show’s special fundraiser. All funds raised through the sale of items at the special fundraiser table will be donated directly to Home Base. Home Base is a Red Sox Foundation dedicated to healing the invisible wounds of veterans, service members, and their families through clinical care, wellness, education and research. The 2026 show is being chaired by Gina Brooks, Donna Hopkins, and Val Ogilvie.

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Touchstone Appoints New Head of School

Touchstone Community School is pleased to announce the appointment of Elisabeth Swain as its new Head of School, beginning in the 2025–26 academic year. Elisabeth follows the tenure of Sally Kent, long-time Touchstone teacher and Head from 2019-2025.

Swain brings over 20 years of experience in progressive education, including leadership roles in schools, nonprofit consulting, and curriculum development. Her approach to education emphasizes equity, creativity, and whole-child learning—values deeply aligned with Touchstone’s mission.

“Elisabeth’s experience, vision, and warmth stood out immediately,” said Emily Shugarman, Chair of the Board of Trustees. “We’re excited to welcome her leadership into our community.”

Swain brings a strong academic foundation to her role, with advanced degrees in both Educational Leadership and Elementary Education. Known for her thoughtful and inclusive approach to school leadership, she and her family look forward to becoming an active part of the Touchstone community.



Sally Kent, the former Head of Touchstone Community School with new Head Elisabeth Swain

“I’m honored to lead a school so clearly committed to joyful, meaningful education,” Swain said. “Touchstone is a truly special place.”

About Touchstone Community School Touchstone Community

School is a progressive, independent school for preschool through grade 8 in Grafton. Since 1982, it has provided a vibrant, student-centered education rooted in curiosity, compassion, and social responsibility.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

tomdagostino.com

Some "Other" Witches of New England

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

New England, notably, Salem, Massachusetts is known for its witchcraft dilemmas. Connecticut held witch trials and executions as early as 1647 when Else (Alice) Young was hanged at the gallows for witchcraft on May 26 of that year. This took place forty-five years before the Salem witch trials. There are many accounts of witches in the pages of New England history books. Presented here are a few of the lesser known witch accounts of the region.

This excerpt is from Henry Nourse's History of the Town of Harvard Massachusetts, 1731-1893.

"Throughout that century and even to within the memory of the living, from time to time in Harvard individuals otherwise sober-minded have declared themselves the victims of witchcraft; usually charging their mishaps to the evil eye or magic arts of some forlorn old crone. For instance, the later years of Moses Tyler and Daniel Willard, it is said, were greatly embittered by their believing themselves afflicted by witches; and good dame Knight, when she had ill success in butter-making, never blamed her own lack of skill, but inveighed against her neighbor Goody Pollard for bewitching the cream. She declared that she one day struck with the peel a great, black spider which ran out from the churn, but, though seriously crippled, it got away up the chimney; and the next day she found out that it was a witch she had hurt, and who it was, for Goody Pollard had to send for the doctor, having been badly lamed, as she alleged, by falling downstairs."

Like many of the original churches in early New England, the first meeting house in Simsbury, Connecticut served as both church and town hall.

The original site of the building was at the foot of a hill near the old cemetery. This story takes place between 1690 and 1710 and concerns the alleged witch of Simsbury, Debby Griffen.

Debby was a recluse for the most part. She was tall with piercing eyes and a most unfriendly demeanor. She spent much of her time in the woods around her small cottage gathering herbs or mushrooms and berries. The only time she found herself in the public eye was when she wandered into the village for provisions. The townsfolk shied away from her lonely cabin in the woods, for it was there that black cats with arrogant yellow eyes pranced about, or massive gray ganders squawked at those who had no choice but to traverse past her home. There was one story that circulated about the town concerning two militia men returning from training. As they cautiously passed Debby's house they were startled by a clamor. Looking up, they saw Debby flying away on one her giant ganders.

On a sunny April Sunday morning, Deacon Eleazer Hill inserted the key into the lock of the church but then something strange transpired; a small bird that had followed him to the meeting house chirped, "you'll find trouble, you'll find trouble." The deacon swung the heavy wooden door open and to his horror, discovered the wooden chest holding the alter ornaments had been broken into.

A quick inventory revealed the only item stolen was the silver drinking chalice but that was more than enough for the congregation to bear. They assembled and narrowed down the suspects to only one person, Debby Griffen. It was thought she may return for a second helping the next night.

As the sun set, several villagers took positions around the

church. When darkness had completely enveloped the land, the men spied a figure slowly moving down the hill past the cemetery leading to the church. As the figure grew near, they immediately recognized it as Debby Griffen. She approached the door but did not attempt to open it, instead she turned into a vaporous mist and disappeared through the keyhole.

Moments later she reappeared with one of the silver communion plates. The group stealthily followed her to the area of Three Corner Pond. There the witch paused for a few moments. This gave one of the pursuers enough time to raise his musket and fire at the woman.

His aim was true and Debby Griffen was hit by the musket ball, but before she fell, she screamed a curse, held the silver platter in the air and jumped into the pond, never to be seen again. Subsequent searches of the water proved fruitless in finding the old hag or the plate. It is reported to this day that sometimes, when

the moon is full one can look into the water where Debby met her end and see the glimmer of what resembles a silver plate reflecting

the moon's rays into the night sky.
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SPORTS

Millbury Volleyball Captains

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Last fall the Millbury Girls' volleyball team put together an impressive 17-3 regular season performance; one in which they were awarded the number four seed in the Division 4 State Tournament. The Woolies then went on a run through the tournament, making it all the way to the

Semi-Finals where they fell 3-1 to the number one seed, Bellingham, ending their season. Coming into this year, Coach Michael McKeon knew that his squad was not going to have the same type of success they had the year previous.

"Knowing that we lost nine seniors from last year and having a difficult schedule, probably the most challenging I've ever encountered in my 22 years," McKeon

said. "The challenge partly comes from the change of leagues and the competitive teams we are now playing for our non-league games. We looked for competitive teams to help us gain experience as well as get that exposure to higher level volleyball teams."

Millbury has only three returning starters from last year's success. All three girls are seniors in Kaden Ellis, Brielle Brothers and Nayha Bichotte and they will be the face of the Woolies this fall. According to the coach, all three girls are really good students in school as well as in their community in addition to being well rounded volleyball players.

"It's something that we talked about earlier in the year [regarding the upcoming challenge of the season]," the coach said. "This season was going to be nothing compared to the last few years and the leaders were going to be the ones to get the group of girls ready for the next one, two and three years. And so far, they're doing a tremendous job."

Of the three returners, Ellis has been part of the Woolies volleyball program the longest, being a varsity member for four years as an outside hitter. She is probably the best player to take to the courts for the Woolies as a year-round volleyball player. She is the team's number one hitter and leads the team in kills (110 at the time of this writing) and has been in the top three the previous two seasons. She is second in digs with 140. Ellis is a very experienced player that knows the game as well as what needs to be done and when.

Over the years she has become more confident as a hitter and is consistent in scoring points for Millbury; each year she has increased her hitting percentage and has turned herself into one of the



Millbury Girls Volleyball co-captains: (l-r) Brielle Brothers, Kaden Ellis and Nayha Bichotte. Submitted photo

team's better back row passers.

"Kaden is someone that as she goes, so does the team," McKeon said. "If she is playing well the rest of the girls feed off her and if she is struggling, we have yet to find someone to step up and cover for her. Thankfully, she is on more than she is off."

Bichotte, who has been with the varsity team for three years now, is the team's motivational and inspirational leader, picking up the girls when they are down. Playing middle hitter, she has continued to impress with her blocking skills and currently is the team's top blocker.

"I'm still working on getting her to become more aggressive at the net, but her big blocks get the team fired up," the coach said. "Over her three years I have seen her inspiration grow. Last year we had some strong personalities and a few seniors, who were more vocal, but this year she has taken on the role."

Brothers began as a

middle hitter, but as of lately she has been playing right side hitter and has seemed to prefer it as she has more room to move. In addition to her hitting skills, the senior has also been a very good setter giving the team yet someone else to handle the job. Millbury's other two setters are a freshman and a sophomore who are still in the learning phase of the game.

As a sophomore during her first varsity season, McKeon saw a very timid young girl who didn't get a lot of court time due to the two seniors middle hitters in front of her, but last year she broke out of her shell.

"I consider her our quiet leader where her actions speak more than her words," the Woolies coach said. "She works extremely hard at practice, does the little things and is always looking to see what she can do to help."

SPORTS

continued on page 13

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Small Business Series Announced by State Treasurer and M&T Bank

Series will provide valuable insights and resources to empower small businesses

In collaboration with M&T Bank, State Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg's Small Business Initiative (SBI) opened online registration for its Fall 2025 Small Business Empowerment Series. The series includes two free virtual workshops that will help Massachusetts entrepreneurs becoming business owners and protect themselves from fraud. Both workshops will be presented in English with live interpretation in Spanish.

"Small, growing businesses need access to the right kind of information, tools and support when starting out," said State

Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg. "That is why our empowerment webinars, developed to support our state's entrepreneurs, are so critical to their long-term success. We thank M&T Bank for partnering with us on this important work."

"M&T Bank is proud to partner with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts offering a series of informative webinars that help protect small business owners from fraud and empower them to grow. We're deeply committed to serving and supporting the people and small businesses of the Bay State to help build stronger,

more resilient communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive," said Jeff Carpenter, M&T Bank's Interim Regional President in Massachusetts.

The series will kick off on October 27 with recorded remarks from Treasurer Goldberg and Kim Gainsboro, Head of Government Banking at M&T Bank, and will conclude on November 3. During the series, participants will attend virtual trainings presented by experts at M&T Bank who will cover topics related to expanding access to business ownership and fraud prevention.

You can register for one or

both of the following sessions at: [https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/](https://us06web.zoom.us/join/join?secret=register/WN_IOUkGcKsQT-2fof-sPNNiw)

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SPORTS

continued from page 12

The coach went on to say that Brothers is one of, if not the most, consistent servers on the team giving the Woolies a lot of service points. She is also a player who has the ability to pinpoint the area on the court where her coach wants her to place the ball. Currently, she has scored 121 service points with the next best player 40 points behind her. Brothers is also second on the team with 62 kills. Although

she typically doesn't play the back row unless she is serving, she is fourth on the team in digs.

At the time, the Woolies are not having a good year in terms of their record, but according to their coach their record is not indicative of how the girls have played. Of their current 10 losses, nine have come at the hands of some of the best teams in the conference as well as in the state. While their record is not that great, their strength of schedule currently ranks them as 18th in division 4. The top 32 teams make the tournament as well

as any team that is .500 or better.

McKeon was originally hoping to grab eight or nine wins this year and give themselves a chance at qualifying for the state tournament. With approximately seven games remaining on their schedule, Millbury holds their fate in their own hands. If they continue to play the way that they have through the first part of the season, then there is no doubt that they should be able to qualify to play in the Division 4 post-season.



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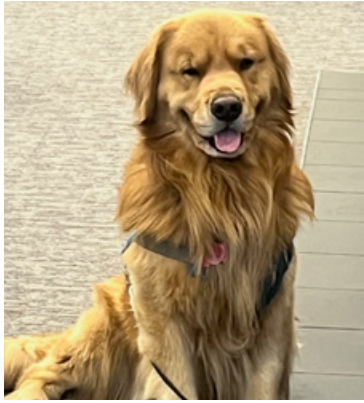
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“GOOD MORNING, MOM!!”

He does his morning duty, then gallops back inside, grinning wide. “Breakfast time!” He sits tall while I prepare his meal: a bowl of Science Diet kibbles—chicken or beef. The same dish, twice a day, still sparks the same boundless joy. A dimple creases the corner of his mouth, forming an adorable question mark. Sometimes I want to stop mid-task just to kiss him.

“Luke, you are so cute!”

He squirms with impatience. “I know, but hurry!”

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Luke’s To Do List

I pour warm bone broth over the kibble and stir. “Mummy is so proud.” He ignores my chatter; eyes locked on the bowl. He watches me drizzle broth with the scrutiny of a wine connoisseur. When I finally set it down, he lunges into his feast—tail wagging in overdrive. Lamb kibbles again! One more bite. One more lick. Scrape the bowl clean. Done. Thank you, Momma!

Then he freezes. Time to bring a gift.

A retriever at heart, Luke noses through his toy box, pulls out his stuffed elephant, and prances back. The trunk bounces like a pipe as he tap-dances around the kitchen. Let’s play elephant today!

“Do you have Elefante, Luke?”

I add a little Spanish for fun. He loves to tease, brushing close but whisking the toy away with a flick of his head whenever I reach. “Can Mummy have a turn?”

He freezes with understanding.

“Boo Hoo Hoo,” I fake cry and turn my knuckles to the beat of fake tears. Puzzled, Luke stares at me. Who ate Mom? Then he trots

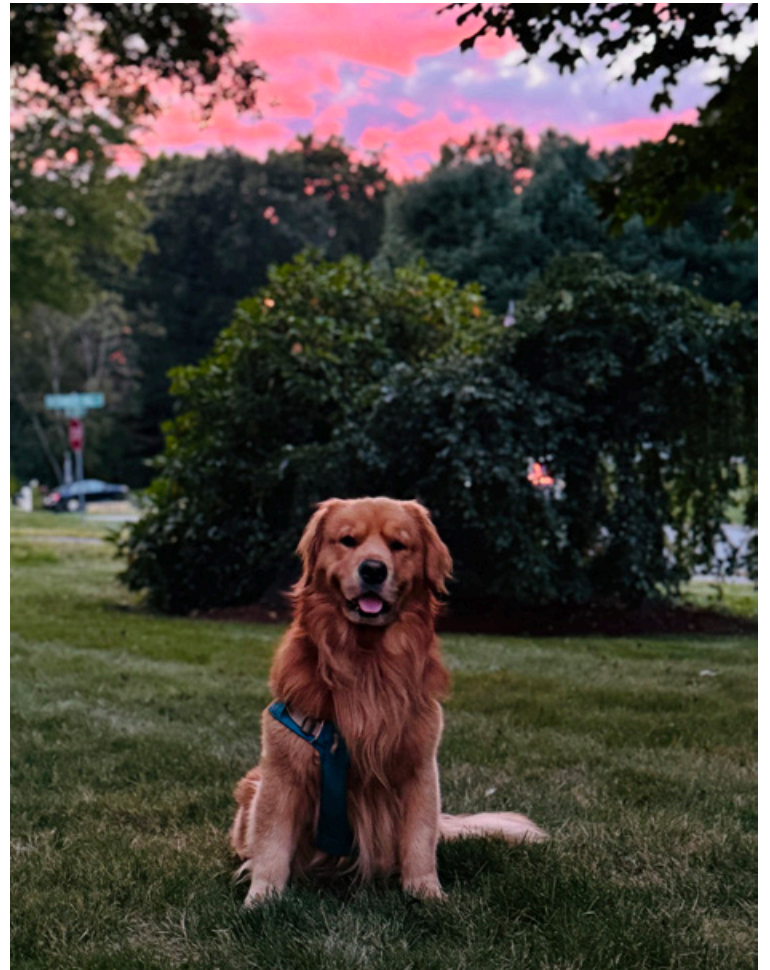
off with Elefante and plops onto his bed.

Our mornings unfold in dialogue—about what I must do, and what he must do.

“Mummy has to go for a ride today, Luke.”

He tilts his boxy head, as if to say: I would love to go for a ride. My mind connects impossible dots (especially on hot days) to bring him to work with me. Even with windows open, a dog cannot regulate body temperature and cool down in a car as we can. One time I left him for a very short period in his travel crate. When I rushed back and popped the trunk, he popped his head out of the sunroof with bedhead and a panting smile that said—it was kind of clammy in here. Please remember that I can’t sweat the way people can. But I’m over it, Momma! I still love and forgive you. Let’s go for a walk now.

Luke is so pure and innocent. He always sees the good in me. It’s what dogs do. I think about the difference between our agendas. His: breakfast, bone chewing, shrub sniffing, napping, socializing, one



more nap, walking. Mine: teaching, errands, deadlines, housework, appointments.

While I chase lists, Luke chases joy. And maybe—just maybe—he’s got the better plan.

Wake up grateful. Eat with gusto. Bring a gift. Play elephant. Nap like it’s your job. Forgive each other. Repeat tomorrow.

Luke’s To-Do List:
1. Wake up wagging.

2. Kiss Mom with my eyeballs.
3. Eat kibbles like a champion.
4. Deliver elephant. (Important.)
5. Nap aggressively.
6. Forgive freely.
7. Repeat steps 1–6 forever.

I feel like I’m onto him.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com
Follow Luke on IG @livingwith-lukevalentino

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REAL ESTATE

3 Reasons Affordability is Signs of Improvement This Fall

For the past couple of years, it's been tough for a lot of homebuyers to make the numbers work. Home prices shot up. Mortgage rates, too, and a number of people stopped



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

looking because it just didn't feel possible. Maybe you were one of them! But there's some encouraging news. If you've been waiting for a better time to jump back in, affordability may finally be showing signs of improvement this fall.

The latest data shows the typical monthly mortgage payment has been coming down, and is now about \$290 lower than it was just a few months ago, and here's why this is happening. The cost of buying a home really comes down to three things: mortgage rates, home prices and your wages. Right now, all three are finally moving in a better direction for you. While that doesn't mean it's suddenly easy to buy at today's rates and prices, but it does mean it's not as challenging.

Mortgage Rates. Mortgage rates have come down compared

to earlier this year. In May, they were roughly 7 percent and now, they're closer to 6.3 percent! That may not sound like a big deal, but it does matter. Even small changes in rates can make a difference in your monthly payment. Compared to when rates were 7 percent, if you take out an average \$400K mortgage now at 6.3 percent, it'll cost about \$190 less a month based on just rates alone and for some people, that's been enough to make buying a home possible again. Lenders have explained it this way: The downward rate movement spurred the strongest week of borrower demand since 2022. Mortgage applications increased to the highest level since July and continued to run more than 20 percent ahead of last year's pace.

Home Prices. After several years of prices rising very rapidly, price growth has finally slowed. Economists have said: National home price growth remains positive, but muted, low single digits and we expect this trend to continue in the second half of the year. For buyers, that's actually a big relief. That moderation makes it easier to plan your budget and in some markets, prices have even dipped slightly. If you're in one of the markets, you may be able to find something that's more affordable than you'd expect.

Wages. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS),

wages are up near 4 percent annually. It's been stated: wage growth is now comfortably outpacing home price growth, and buyers have more choices. In other words, the typical paycheck is rising faster than home prices right now, which helps make buying a little more affordable. Now, it's not a big difference, but in a market like this, every bit counts.

What this means for you is lower rates, slower price growth, and stronger wages might be enough to make the numbers finally work for you this fall. While affordability is still tight, it's a little easier on your wallet to buy now than it was just few months ago. Remember, data shows the typical monthly mortgage payment is already around \$290 lower than it was earlier this year.

Have you been wondering if it's worth taking another look at buying? Contact a member of The Marzeotti Group or another Real Estate Professional to re-run the numbers. Together you can go over your budget, see what's changed, and figure out if this fall is the time to turn window-shopping owning something of your own!



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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Should I replace a six year old battery with some life left?

Q. I have a six-year-old Toyota with the original battery. The car has started fine so far this year. I am wondering, should I just replace the battery due to age?

A. The typical life of a battery is five years, so you are to some extent on borrowed time. I test my car's batteries routinely to see how they are doing. I am in a comparable situation with one car and will replace the battery soon. The last test showed it was at 71 percent life. I will replace this six-year-old battery for no other reason that I do not want to hear from my wife that the car did not start.

Q. I purchased a Ford Explorer when they came out more than 20 years ago, and it was a great vehicle. About 10 years later I purchased the redesigned model and found it was lacking in several areas. I am looking at the latest Explorer, what are your thoughts on the newest model.

A. Based on my most recent experience, this latest version may be the best Explorer that Ford has built to date. The optional 400 horsepower turbo-charged V-6 engine is smooth and powerful, the newly redesigned 10-speed transmission shifts smoothly and is nicely matched to the engine. The model I evaluated was the "platinum" trim and it was very luxurious. As a three row SUV, Ford did an excellent

job with this newest Explorer.

Q. I purchased a new battery from the local parts store. I based on one of your columns purchased a TopDon battery tester and found this battery although new was at only 80 percent life. I asked the parts guy about it and he just shrugged. He suggested that after a month or so of charge cycles it should get over 90 percent life. Your thoughts.

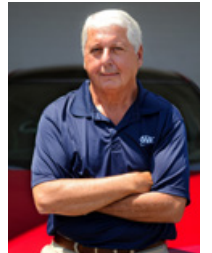
A. Batteries can degrade as soon as they leave the factory. At AAA we test every battery before we install it to make sure it is at 90 percent or better life. The idea that the battery was not "fully baked" yet sound like an excuse for a less than stellar battery.

Q. I was given a Bolens garden-tractor that has not run in a long time. I think it was made in Canada and then the company went out of business. I really like the looks of this tractor; it has a manual transmission and differential. It looks like it would be handy around my property. Where do I start to get it running? You once said you answer every question, even lawn tractor questions?

A. Getting an old tractor to start is pretty similar to rescuing any old vehicle. Most of these 1970s vintage tractors used engines still in use today, so parts should be avail-

able. Typically, the fuel system is usually the biggest issue.

Drain and clean the fuel tank, replace the fuel filter, and clean out the carburetor. Depending on the condition, you may find the carburetor needs a rebuilding. Drain and replace the oil and spark plug(s). When the spark plug(s) are out, add some light oil to the cylinders. Check the engine turns over and there is spark. On the first attempt to start the tractor I would use premixed two-stroke fuel. The little bit of oil in the fuel will help lubricate the engine. Once it is running, let it fully warm up and then shut it down. Check the oil and belts and look for loose bolts, brackets, and wire connections. Yes, I do try to answer every email, usually within 24 hours. If you do not hear from me, send a follow up.



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. A simple question I recently purchased a used car, and it has an inspection sticker, parking sticker, and car wash sticker on the windshield. It also has a few off-color bumper stickers. How do I get these off?

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 17

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Healthier Baking in the Blackstone Valley

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

The warm comforting scent of autumn baking is so appealing that it's not difficult to find a candle or two dedicated to imitating the aroma. But we all know that a candle just isn't the same. It can't hold a candle—if you'll excuse the pun – to the real thing.

But since the autumn season is a busy one, there's not always time to bake cobblers, pies and dumplings from scratch. And store-bought baked goods are generally loaded with sugar and artificial ingredients. But there is a solution. This cranberry apple harvest crisp will fill your kitchen with a heavenly aroma. And it doesn't take much time or effort to prepare or bake. It's also a delicious fall treat.

The ingredients in this crisp are as nutritious as they are simple. To start with, apples, which are a great source of fiber, are known to be heart healthy. They're also believed to be beneficial for lung health. Cranberries are also a good source of fiber. And they provide antioxidants as well as vitamin C, vitamin E and other vitamins and nutrients. Many people even associate cranberries with good urinary tract health.

But it's not just the fruits that are nutritious. Oats are a heart-healthy whole grain that contains iron and protein and can provide energy. And walnuts are not only a heart-healthy food, they're beneficial for brain health as well. They contain omega-3 fatty acids, protein and vitamin E in addition to other nutrients.



CRANBERRY APPLE HARVEST CRISP

Ingredients for the fruit base:

- 2 small apples (peeled and sliced)
- ¼ Cup of Cranberries (fresh, if possible)

Ingredients for the crisp topping:

- ½ cup of oats
- ¼ cup of chopped walnuts
- ¼ cup of brown sugar
- 2 tbsp. butter or olive oil

Directions:

- Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees.
- Distribute the fruit base evenly between two 4-5-inch pie plates.
- Combine the crisp topping ingredients.
- Distribute the topping evenly on top of the fruit base.
- Bake for about 20 minutes or until topping is golden.. Each crisp contains about one

to two servings. Let cool for about 15-20 minutes and serve warm. Enjoy!

Candles can be absolutely lovely for ambience or when the power goes out. But the genuine article will almost always be better. Happy (healthier) baking!

Once the stickers are removed clean off any residue and wax the bumper.

CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 16

On the windshield use a razor blade scraper, with a new blade. Carefully scrape off the stickers, being careful not to slip and nick the trim. Once the stickers are removed, use a little cleaner such as Goo-Gone to remove the sticky residue then follow up with glass cleaner to clean the entire windshield. On the bumper use a hair dryer and warm up the bumper stickers and with your fingernail try to lift up the corner of the sticker. Once you have a good grip on the sticker try to pull it back on itself. Using an 180-degree release angle, combined with heat is key to minimizing tearing and reducing leftover residue.

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

Event, 7 East Street, Whitinsville. 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Accepting gently used books (no encyclopedias), media & magazines, gently used textiles/clothing and accessories, electronics for a fee (no propane, batteries, lightbulbs), rinsed bottles/cans returnable in MA (no glass).

Please keep items for each station separate. Call 508-234-5656 or contact Officesupport@mystpatrick.com for price list or questions. Proceeds benefit Youth in Action service projects.

• Blackstone Valley Crop Hunger Walk will start at 9 a.m. at the Village Congregational Church in Whitinsville. Registration starts at 8:30 a.m. For more information, contact

100 years of Aftermath yearbooks; photos: churches, schools, downtown, sports; scrapbooks; research books & histories of Millbury & Sutton going back to colonial times. Also, President Taft photos and memorabilia; military uniforms, guns, and flags.

• The Sutton Historical Society will be set up at the M. M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop, 6 Singletary Avenue, from 4-7 p.m. as part of the OMG Pumpkin Festival 2025 hosting a miniature Halloween village exhibit, Revolutionary War metal detecting finds from several Sutton farms, and interpreters sharing some of Sutton's more colorful and historic events. This community event at

at the school complex, as well as a Boo Bash at the Sutton Library. More information can be found at thesuttonfourth.org. This event is free and open to the general public of all ages. The Historic Sutton Center Walking Tour begins at 5 p.m. on Sutton Town Common, 4 Uxbridge Road. Re-enactors will guide visitors to multiple stops around the Common sharing the town's history and some stories befitting the Halloween season.

Great food and fellowship can be had at the Community House Ham & Bean Supper, 5 p.m. at 8 Court Street, Uxbridge (behind the Uxbridge Town Common). Sponsored by the Uxbridge Congregational Church. The menu includes baked ham, home-cooked beans, potato salad, coleslaw, brown bread, beverages and dessert. \$15 per person, children under 6 years are free. For reservations, call 818-361-2881. Limited tickets will be sold at the door.

and what did they do with the unearthed corpses? And what about Count Dracula? So many questions.

The presentation will take place from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. at the museum, 11 Willard Street, North Grafton. Wear your Halloween costume and the museum will have treats.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

• Annual Holiday Fair from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. at St. Denis Church, 23 Manchaug Road, Douglas. Crafts, raffles, baked goods, kids' table. Luncheon served from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Vendor spaces still available. Visit SaintDenisChurch.com for more information.

• St. Peter's Parish in Northbridge will hold its Annual Holiday Fair from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in the parish hall, 39 Church Avenue, Northbridge. Come out with your family and friends to enjoy the day! We will have all of your favorites: White Elephant Table, Baked Goods Table, Holiday Table, Craft Table with beautiful handmade quilts. There will also be tables filled with raffles (you never know what will be there!), a silent auction, scratch ticket raffle, quilt raffle and a gift basket raffle. Stay and enjoy a bite to eat with all of your favorite foods being served. For more information, please contact the parish office at 508-234-2156 or email: parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org

• Meat Raffle, sponsored by the Millbury Lions Club will be held from 2 p.m. - 5 p.m., St. Charles Hotel, 126 West Main Street, Millbury. Early bird tickets available at 1:30 p.m.

• Harvest Festival: There's something for everyone at the annual Harvest Fair fundraiser to benefit Our Lady of Hope Parish. The fair will be held at St. James Church Hall, 89 Main Street, S. Grafton on Saturday, November 1, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

• "Vampires in New England? Myths and Realities of the Undead." The Willard House Clock Museum presents Old Sturbridge Village Historian and Curator Tom Kelleher with an intriguing story that goes back hundreds of years. "Did some rural Yankees 200 years ago believe in vampires?" Kelleher queries. "Why did scores of early new Englanders open the graves of their sweethearts, sons, daughters, husbands and wives?" What were they looking for

HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 19

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BVT Admissions to Hold Open House Tours Available November 12

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School will hold an Admissions Open House for prospective students and their families on Wednesday, November 12th, from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. No registration is needed.

The evening is an opportunity to tour the state-of-the-art facility located at 65 Pleasant Street in Upton and see for yourself how BVT is transforming education and the lives of its students. Meet staff members who will be on hand as a resource to answer questions

about academics, student support services, student activities, and the admissions process.

The schedule of events will include mini-sessions featuring the Special Education program and the support available to students at BVT and during the application process. Also, learn more about the Spanish Immersion program and how to enroll.

If you are interested in learning more, visit: valleytech.k12.ma.us/admissionsopenhouse/

About Blackstone Valley Regional

Vocational Technical High School:

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School serves the towns of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge. Located in the heart of the Blackstone Valley, BVT creates a positive learning community that prepares students for personal and professional success in an internationally competitive society through a fusion of rigorous vocational, technical, and academic skills.

HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 18

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

• Then Grafton Land Trust will hold its annual dinner meeting at 6 p.m. at the Highfields Golf Club in Grafton. This year's speaker will be Dr. Stephen Mrozowski, the founding director of the Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archeological Research at University of Massachusetts Boston.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9

• A Polka Dance featuring Dennis Polisky & Maestro's Men will be held from 1-5 p.m. at the Uxbridge Polish American Social Civil Club, 217 Mendon Street, Uxbridge. Plenty of seating and room for dancing. Full bar, food and raffle tickets will be available for purchase. \$15 admission. For more information, call 508-278-7583.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

• Charlotte Wilson will share fascinating facts about Sutton's citizenry during

Revolutionary days at 7 p.m. in the first Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton. Courtesy of the Sutton Historical Society.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16

• The New England Country Music Club will hold a dance with live classic country music by Rustic Country at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin Street, Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 p.m. Music plays from 1-5 p.m. Snacks may be brought in, cash bar for beverages.

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