

A Walk in the Douglas Woods

From Paleoindians to Puritans—a 12,000-year journey walking through New England

BY THOMAS J. MCLAUGHLIN

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

With nearly 6,000 acres, the Douglas State Forest offers a trove of nature trails. There are more than 36 miles of trails, 7.8 miles of which is the Midstate Trail. Just 20 miles south of Worcester and 25 miles north of Providence, this forest is a hidden oasis. “Away from the lake, a different visitor experience awaits. Trails crisscross thousands of acres of rock-strewn uplands, allowing visitors to get away from crowds, explore the Forest, and reconnect with nature.” (Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR))

Longer outside trails connect to the forest (the Midstate, the Southern New England Trunkline (SNETT), Air Line State Park, Tri-



State, and the North-South), but there’s also numerous shorter trails within the Douglas Woods—Coffeehouse, Cedar Swamp, Bird Blind, Rocky Brook, Chamberlain Pond, Sassafras, Ridge, Wallis Pond, Eagle Bridge, Laurel, CCC Water Hole, Schmidt, White Pine, Red Pine, and others.

Heading north on the Midstate from the Massachusetts and Rhode Island border you can enjoy more than three miles of uninterrupted wilderness before reaching South-

DOUGLAS

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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

COMMUNITY NEWS

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DOUGLAS

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west Main Street, which is a minor break in the wilderness. Beyond this

you can hike almost two more miles until you reach Route 16 with a few more miles of woods after this.

The Douglas Woods are full of remnants of the past from old foundations and stone walls to random glacial erratics among the trees. It provides a nice hike along ponds and marshes, on boardwalks over streams, across rocky fields, and through serene pine groves.

When you exit the forest and begin walking north along Northwest Main Street you're not far from where New England's Great Trail, the Old Connecticut Path, crosses into the Douglas Woods.

Some portions of the Old Connecticut Path are main roadways today such as Route 126 from Wayland to Framingham, near the Shopper's World Plaza, but in Douglas it's still a walk in the woods. What was once a major trade and travel route for the Nipmuc and Agawam people is itself a remnant in the forest.

This path began in what is now Harvard Square in Cambridge, and it ran through Framingham, Westborough and Grafton. It con-

tinued on through Sutton, Douglas, Webster and Dudley and across Connecticut all the way to the Connecticut River.

Jason R. Newton, a retired educator, created an impressive website on this trail, "Guide to Rediscovering the Old Connecticut Path." He



has researched and written extensively about this topic. He shows portions of this ancient trail in his YouTube videos that include visits to Water's Farm, Manchaug Pond, and the Douglas Woods. It's worth checking out.

The Paleoindians were the first to arrive in New England thousands of years ago. These early hunters followed herds of woolly mammoths and mastadons from Siberia into North America. As the ice retreated here in Massachusetts (leaving behind glacial erratics, tills, drumlins, and kettles), vegetation grew, and herds of caribou, elk, and deer populated our region.

After the Paleoindian period ended, later groups in the Archaic and Woodlands stages populated the region.

DOUGLAS

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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A Retiree's Guide for National Retirement Security Month



Mark Freeman, CEPA

FINANCIAL FOCUS®

Provided by Edward Jones

If you're retired, it's easy to let your finances go on autopilot. Since October is National Retirement Security Month, it's a good time to revisit some areas that can impact your long-term financial security and help your money last a lifetime.

Consider these suggestions:

Manage your withdrawal rate. You'll likely need to tap

into your retirement accounts — your IRA and 401(k) or similar employer-sponsored plan. But think carefully about how much income you withdraw every year. If you take out too much, especially in the early years of your retirement, you risk outliving your resources. You have the option of withdrawing from these accounts at age 59½. Once you turn 73, you'll be required to take out at least a certain amount each year based on your age and account balance.

Estimate health care costs. When you turn 65, you will be eligible for Medicare, but you may still need a Medicare supplement plan, both of which will require premium payments. You'll probably also incur a variety of other unreimbursed expenses for doctor visit copays or deductibles, prescription drugs and vision, hearing and dental care. Additionally, about 70% of adults ages 65 and older will need some form of long-term support, according to the Depart-

ment of Health and Human Services. This may include a paid home health aide (average cost of \$77,792 per year), an assisted living residence (average cost of \$70,500 per year) or nursing home care (private room average cost of \$127,750 per year). (Cost estimates are from Genworth 2024 Cost of Care Survey.) Over the course of your retirement, these can add up, so be realistic when budgeting for health care expenses in retirement.

Consider when to take Social Security. You can start receiving monthly Social Security checks at age 62, but your payments will generally be larger if you wait until your "full" retirement age of 66 or 67. (The size of your payments will "max out" at age 70.) If you believe you have longevity working in your favor, and you can afford to wait, you may well be better off by delaying Social Security as long as possible.

Avoid investing too conservatively. Once you're retired, you might think you should take as few chances with your investments as possible — after all, you have less time for them to bounce back from a downturn than you did during your working years. Nonetheless, it's important to consider keeping a reasonable percentage of growth-oriented investments in your portfolio to help you stay ahead of inflation. Even at a low rate, inflation can erode your purchasing power over time.

Keep your generosity in check. If you have grown children who need financial help, or grandchildren heading to college someday, you'd no doubt like to do what you can to assist them. However, the hard truth is that they have more time than you to find workable financial solutions, whereas if you deplete your funds through your generosity, you could put yourself in a precarious position. So, be as giving as you can afford — but

try not to go beyond that. By preserving your financial independence, you'll end up benefiting your family as well.

Retirement is ideally an enjoyable time in your life, especially if you feel financially stable. So, take time to check in periodically to keep that stability on track.

Contact Mark today to discuss this topic or any of your financial goals.

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For centuries the Nipmuc and Agawam tribes walked along the Old Connecticut Path and the Bay State Trail. They walked on trails that were likely created and worn down by deer drawn toward lakes, streams, and grazing areas.

Less than fifteen years after the Pilgrims arrived on the Mayflower in 1620, and just four years after John Winthrop, who spoke of a shining city on a hill, arrived in Boston on the Arabella in 1630, a group of ten Puritans known as the Adventurers set out in 1634, on the Old Connecticut Path from Watertown to establish Wethersfield, CT.

The adventurers were led by John "Mad Jack" Oldham, who was banished from Plymouth Colony. Oldham's death off of Block Island

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two years later led to the Pequot War.

Two years later, a second, larger group of Puritans led by Cambridge ministers, Thomas Hooker and Samuel Stone, ventured out on the Old Connecticut Path and founded Hartford, Connecticut and created the Connecticut Colony.

These groups were the first Europeans to venture into Central Massachusetts. All the English settlements were on or near the coast in the early 1630s. It would be decades before the English established settlements further inland at Lancaster, Groton, and Mendon.

Sandwiched between the adventurers and Thomas Hooker's party was William Blaxton or Blackstone, who moved from the western

wilderness of Beacon Hill to settle in Cumberland, Rhode Island in 1635. Roger Williams went on to establish Providence the following year in 1636.

William Pynchon, a trustee of the Massachusetts Bay Company and founder of Roxbury, sailed up the Connecticut River in 1635, and returned in 1636, to found Springfield, MA.

But the Old Connecticut Path offered an overland route from Boston that otherwise would have required sailing around Cape Cod on a ship, passing Rhode Island and going up the Connecticut River. This historic path went through our area and crossed through the Douglas Woods.



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The Uxbridge Historical Society invites all members and interested members of the public to attend its Annual Meeting on Sunday, November 16, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. at the Community House of the First Congregational Church, 8 Court Street, Uxbridge, Massachusetts.

This important annual gathering offers members an opportunity to reflect on the past year, learn about upcoming initiatives, and help guide the future direction of the Society as it continues its mission to preserve and share the rich history of Uxbridge.

A highlight of this year's meeting will be the unveiling of a remarkable piece of local history recently reclaimed by the Society. The long-lost sign of the historic Samuel Taft Tavern Inn, a cherished relic of Uxbridge's early years, has been discovered and brought home. Once hanging in a private collector's home in Columbus, Ohio, the sign has returned to Uxbridge through dedicated sleuthing, successful negotiations, and generous community support. It is now proudly part of the Uxbridge His-

torical Society's collection.

The Taft Tavern Inn holds a special place in Uxbridge history, most notably for hosting President George Washington during his surprise overnight visit in 1789. The iconic sign was even featured in a 1910 New York Times article recounting President William Howard Taft's visit to the former inn. At that time, property owner Sara Taft retrieved the sign from a corn crib to share with the President—a moment forever etched in Uxbridge lore.

Attendees of the Annual Meeting will have an opportunity to see this treasured artifact up close and hear the fascinating story of its recovery. The Society extends heartfelt thanks to Tom Gagnon and Mike Potaski, whose generous donations made this historic acquisition possible. Also, a special thank you to Dave Moriarty in his extraordinary efforts to find and retrieve the sign.

At the Annual Meeting, members in good standing will elect individuals to serve on the Society's Board of Directors. Members may submit nominations in advance



using a nomination form, available by sending an email request to uxbridgehistoricalsociety@gmail.com. The completed form may be returned by email or mail and must be received by Friday, November 7, 2025. Nominations can also be made from the floor during the meeting.

A copy of the Society's Bylaws has been distributed to members for review. Any proposed amendments may be brought in writing to the Annual Meeting for discussion and vote.

The public is welcome to attend the Annual Meeting; only members may vote.

For more information, contact Mary Beauchamp at uxbridgehistoricalsociety@gmail.com or (508) 930-6021.



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What's in a Name?

Many area towns were named after elite outsiders

BY THOMAS J. MCLAUGHLIN

In his 1879 book, "History of the town of Douglas," William Andres Emerson, wrote that Douglas was first known as, "New Sherburn, or "New Sherburn Grant," because it was settled by residents of Sherborn, MA.

It was later renamed, "Douglas," after Boston physician and Scotsman, Dr. William Douglas in 1746. Doctor Douglas made a lot of promises to the town residents that

he didn't keep, including a pledge of \$500 in old tenor to establish and maintain free schools. Old tenor was a nickname for the controversial paper money issued by the Massachusetts Bay Colony before the Revolution.

According to Emerson, Douglas also offered the town 30 acres of land with a dwelling-house and barn that was in, or near, Douglas Woods. He promised residents a school bell and 50 pounds a year for seven years to support a ministry, stipulating that the land couldn't be sold, which it eventually was since he didn't honor many of his pledges.

In 1771, Douglas could have been renamed, "Jennison," after Douglas patriot, Dr. Samuel Jennison, who represented the town in the Second Congress, but voters rejected sending the proposal to the General Court.

A similar scenario to this happened in Maine, and probably elsewhere. In Dixfield, Maine (Massachusetts at the time), in 1795, a small group of local settlers named their new town, "Holmantown Plantations," after Revolutionary War Colonel Jonathan Holman of Sutton (now West Millbury), a Saratoga veteran, who was granted the township by the Massachusetts General Court in 1789.

Dr. Elijah Dix, a wealthy landowner from Boston promised Holmantown residents a library if they changed the town's name to Dixfield. So, in 1803, they changed the name, and Dr. Dix sent them, "a box of second-hand medical books and two German dictionaries." (Maine. A Guide 'Down East', 1970, p. 363)

While other towns don't neces-

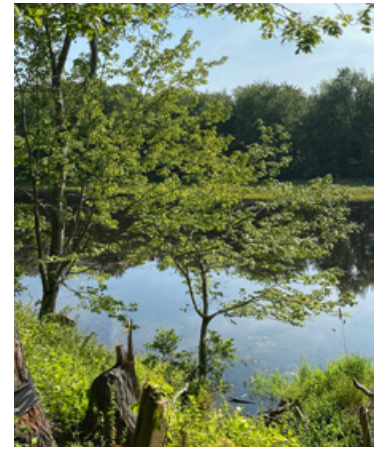
sarily have this "bait and switch" history, they were named after well-connected, well-heeled outsiders who had nothing to do with their towns—usually men in long powdered wigs with royal titles.

You can usually find out who the town was named after on the individual town websites, in Wikipedia or their referenced sources, and in the town history books (Archive.org) that seemed to be popular in the 19th century when many of them were written.

Charlton was named after an English Baron – Sir Francis Charlton, 4th Baronet Charlton (1707-1784). The Charltons hailed from Northumberland in North East England. This English Baron never stepped foot in the New World.

The Town of Dudley was named after the two sons of Joseph Dudley (1647-1720), the Royal Governor of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. One son was William Dudley, and the other was Paul Dudley (1675-1751), a Massachusetts Attorney General and Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature in the royal government. Joseph Dudley's business partner was William Stoughton, who was the chief judge and prosecutor in the Salem Witch Trials. Stoughton and Dudley were friends and business partners who acquired large tracts of land from the Nipmucs in Central Massachusetts, including what later became Oxford.

The Town of Webster was named after the legendary orator and lawyer, New Hampshire native, U.S. Secretary of State, U.S. Senator Daniel Webster (1782-1852). The pioneering textile industrialist, Samuel Slater, named the town after



his friend Webster.

The Town of Uxbridge was named after someone else who never ventured here, the Earl of Uxbridge, Henry Paget, the 1st Earl of Uxbridge (1663-1743) who became Baron Burton in the House of Lords and Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire in England.

Auburn was originally named after a local hero. The town was named in honor of Shrewsbury Patriot and Revolutionary War General Artemas Ward (1727-1800). The Town of Ward was created in 1778, during the American Revolution, out of parts of Worcester, Sutton (Millbury), Leicester, and Oxford. 59-years later, 37-years after Major General Ward's death, the Town of Ward became the Town of Auburn because of mail delivery confusion with the Town of Ware.

Grafton was named after Charles FitzRoy, 2nd Duke of Grafton (1683-1757), the son of Henry FitzRoy, 1st Duke of Grafton (1663-1690) the illegitimate son of King Charles II and his mistress, the 1st Duchess of Cleveland, Countess of Castlemaine, Barbara Villiers.

Millbury, which was once known as the Second or North Parish of Sutton, was modestly named because of its status as a mill town.

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Fifth Graders Find Their Rhythm: WCS “Try It Before You Buy It” Band Program Hits a High Note

The halls of Whitinsville Christian School are frequently alive with the sound of music. With the new school year, fifth grade students have an exciting opportunity to participate in the Explorer Band. This semester-long program lets young musicians explore instruments, discover their strengths, and experience the joy of making music together. “I like Explorer Band, it’s a pretty unique idea,” said Andrew, WCS fifth grader.

What makes this program truly special is its “try it before you buy it” approach. Under the direction of WCS Band Director, Derek Wielsma, students can experiment, make a joyful noise, learn the basics of an instrument and how to care for it, and see what fits best before committing to one instrument. Instead of having to choose an instrument the summer before your sixth-grade year, before even knowing how it feels to play it, students get hands-on experience with a variety of instruments. “We get to learn about all sorts of instruments like flutes, clarinets, trumpets, trombones, and saxophones, not just one or two,” said Logan, Explorer Band student.

“This approach exposes the students to the world of music in



a safe, non-performance-based situation,” said Elisabeth Goodson, Elementary Principal. “Students aren’t afraid to make mistakes. They’re encouraged to explore and try out an instrument, or two or three. That’s how they discover what they love.” Ezra, one of the Explorer Band students shared, “You can make some really cool sounds with the different instruments.” “After two weeks, I made a really good sound on the flute. It felt so good,” said Reagan, Explorer Band student. Her classmate, Zoe, added, “Once you make that first real sound on an instrument, you have this joy and confidence.” “Everyone claps when you make a

good sound, and that’s really cool,” said Mason. “The clarinet was the first instrument that I was able to make the best sound on. I could sort of make a sound on the trumpet, but I like the clarinet better.”

“The Explorer Band program reminds us that learning can be joyful, brave, and full of discovery,” said Goodson. As for the fifth graders, one thing is sure: the WCS Explorer Band is hitting all the right notes - creating confidence, connection, and maybe even a few future musicians along the way. “I know I’m going to ask Santa for a trumpet for Christmas!” exclaimed Zoe.



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BY LEE-ANN BARKHOUSE

AWARENESS IN ACTION: THE QUIET STRENGTH BEHIND CONNECTION

In every interaction, whether cheering from the sidelines, standing in line, or walking through town, our behavior leaves an impression. Self-awareness is the foundation of genuine

connection. It's the pause that helps us notice our surroundings, choose our words with care, and respond with kindness rather than reaction.

When we take the time to understand how our tone, actions, and presence affect others, we elevate everyday moments into opportunities for respect

and trust. Self-awareness builds relationships, strengthens communities, and reminds us that small courtesies often speak the loudest.

Q. At my child's weekend soccer game, I often see parents yelling at referees, coaches, and even kids. What's

the right way for adults to behave at youth sports? And what should bystanders do when it happens?

A. Sports are meant to teach teamwork, perseverance, and fun, not pressure or perfection. They also give children an important chance to learn, negotiate, and build their own skills—both on and off the field. When adults overstep, we unintentionally take those learning moments away.

The best thing parents can do is cheer for effort, not outcome. Applaud good plays on both sides, model sportsmanship, and leave coaching to the coaches.

Our children learn how to win and lose by watching us. Let the loudest thing from the stands be your support, not your criticism.

For bystanders, the most effective approach is to stay composed and redirect the energy. Yelling back rarely helps and can escalate tension. Instead, model calm enthusiasm, cheer appropriately, and if behavior crosses a line, discreetly notify a coach or event official. Sometimes the most powerful statement is your example of restraint and respect.

And remember, this isn't just for kids' sports. Good sideline behavior applies at every level—from youth games to professional sporting events. Respectful fans make the experience better for everyone: players, coaches, referees, and fellow spectators alike.

Q. Our town hosts lots of public gatherings such as concerts, parades, and farmers markets. Lately, people seem unaware of basic courtesies. Any reminders?

A. Community events thrive when everyone shows up with courtesy and awareness. Simple acts like standing back so others can see, keeping walkways open, and saying "please" and "thank you" to volunteers make a huge difference.

If you bring chairs, coolers, or

strollers, be considerate of space. Be patient, kind, and flexible. When we practice small courtesies, we strengthen the fabric of our communities.

Q. I have noticed people letting their dogs pee in main foot-traffic areas, near store entrances and sidewalks where people walk. Is that acceptable?

A. Our furry friends bring us joy, but they also come with responsibilities. Allowing a dog to relieve itself in high-traffic areas can create unpleasant surprises for others, and not everyone appreciates stepping where your dog just went. Little ones may be crawling or playing nearby too.

A kind approach is to guide your dog to a grassy or less-traveled spot away from entrances, dining areas, or storefronts. Always carry bags or wipes, and if an accident happens, do your best to rinse or clean the area.

Being a considerate pet owner is more than following rules—it's showing respect for our shared spaces and neighbors. Those few extra steps demonstrate thoughtfulness, responsibility, and kindness in action.

Q. I was at the grocery store and received wonderful service from a young cashier. He greeted me warmly, looked me in the eye, and truly made my day. What's the best way to compliment him? I'm sure most stores hear more complaints than praise.

A. What a lovely observation, and you are absolutely right! Positive feedback can brighten someone's day and reinforce great habits. When you receive exceptional service, start by thanking the

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ETIQUETTE
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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Sprague Mansion

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

Cranston's Sprague Mansion remains as one of the most haunted houses in the state of Rhode Island. Many tragedies have unfolded in this 18th century homestead. These tragedies have left psychic scars in the passing of time that still resonate in the former estate of the prominent, yet tragic family.

William Sprague built the manor in 1790. His various mills and bleachery amassed quite a fortune for his family. Sprague met with an unfortunate demise during dinner one evening when a fish bone became lodged in his throat. Doctors tried desperately to remove the bone but he died during the surgery. His son William went on to become a United States Senator while his other son, Amasa tended to the family business. Amasa turned an even larger fortune from the business he inherited.

A long running feud between the Sprague family and the Gordon clan, who wanted to put a pub next to one of the Sprague mills would later end in tragedy.

The Sprague family feared it would become a problem with work attendance at the mill. The idea was shot down by the town council. On December 31, 1843, Amasa Sprague was found brutally beaten and shot to death near his home. John Gordon was hanged for the murder, but Gordon's brother later confessed to the crime. This case caused the Rhode Island government to rescind the death penalty.

Amasa was laid out in the living room of the great estate and buried at Swan Point Cemetery where the massive Sprague memorial sits. His original stone is on display at the mansion. The family fortune dwindled during the post Civil War depression and the mansion was eventually sold. In 1966 the Cranston Historical Society obtained the property and restored it as a public building for tours and functions.

The first ghostly activity began around 1925 when an apparition was seen on the staircase. Since that time, there have been numerous sightings of the ghost descending the steps of the 28-room mansion. The mansion

has a number of ghosts roaming its corridors. Along with the wraith on the stairs, witnesses have reported seeing the ghost of Lucy Chase Sprague who lost a large portion of the family fortune. Other ghosts could be the spirits of William Sprague II who founded the empire and left this world so unexpectedly. Some even claim to see the son of Civil War Governor William Sprague IV who committed suicide in the house in 1890.

Paranormal research groups have conducted investigations on the property for years. Some claim to have witnessed wraiths reflecting in the glass of a hutch in the ballroom. As one group stood in the room, three separate times the image of a man passed by the glass. According to data collected at the house, the place is extremely active with all kinds of paranormal activity. Scores of photographs have been taken allegedly revealing ghosts or paranormal activity in many of the rooms. One photo even shows the figure of the ghostly woman ascending the famed staircase. Another has im-

ages in the ballroom of a lady in what appears to be a long white Victorian dress. Other photos are of misty or wispy white figures human in form but not recognizable enough to say whose form it might have been. EVP recordings (Electronic Voice Phenomenon) in the house concluded that the living room, ballroom, wine cellar, doll room, and a spare room seem to be active with spirit activity. Even the gift shop is occupied by a spirit whose footsteps are heard wandering through the room.

Many visitors through the years have met the ghosts of the Sprague mansion. Guests and

caretakers alike have stories of covers being pulled off beds or objects moving without visible hands to guide them. The ghost of a little girl and a dog were seen in one of the bedrooms. There is a room full of dolls that seem to follow your every move while passing by. Visitors have claimed that they heard voices coming from that particular room. Contact the Cranston Historical Society to arrange a tour and perhaps you may see one of the Sprague family as well. (401) 944-9226

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SPORTS

Douglas Football Players

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Throughout the past few years Douglas high school football has been involved in a co-op with the Sutton football program, but following last season Sutton pulled out and eventually hooked up with Millbury, leaving Douglas without a team. The Tigers' Athletic Director immediately went to work looking for a team to co-op with so the boys could continue playing football.

"We had a great tradition with Sutton, so the kids were really bummed out when the split happened, but I worked hard to get them another co-op," Douglas AD Elisabeth Berard said. "I hooked up with Jeffrey (Clarkson) at Oxford and he was awesome. We put together a meet and greet and instantly, the kids were excited. They all became a family right off the bat."

While the Douglas kids were ecstatic about playing football with

Oxford, the school didn't have transportation for them to get to the school, some 20 minutes away. While the Douglas AD is trying to make progress on transportation to the Oxford field, the players are carpooling at the time.

"Without transportation through the school it takes a level of commitment from those who want to play," Berard said. "The kids are excited, smiles from ear to ear and ready to do what it takes to make it work. Although unfamiliar with

Oxford at first, the kids have been all hands-on deck once they got going."

Head coach Clarkson noted that Oxford's numbers were not all that great prior to connecting with Douglas. The team would have enough players to field a varsity team but without the support from Douglas, there would have been no way they'd have a junior varsity program this fall.

"Those extra kids meant a lot to us, seniors are always helpful to a team no matter what – knowledge is critical to the game," Clarkson said. "Elisabeth was great, we got to talk and recruit a bunch of kids, although some eventually quit. It's a tough ride from one school to the next but those kids who stayed hats off to them. Those kids may go to Douglas High School but they are Oxford Pirates on the field."

Six Douglas players have continued to make the pilgrimage to Oxford each and every day for practices and games. Seniors Sean Vitale and Lenny Hicks bring leadership to the Pirates on the field. Vitale is the first linebacker to come off the bench for Clarkson and the coach noted that he is a very excitable player, sometimes too excitable and he has to reel him in, but he is a

very good football player. Hicks is a speedy wide receiver that the coaching staff has implemented some special plays into their schemes just for his ability.

Sophomore Elijah Perez is an all-around fantastic football player according to the coach who brings his skills to the defensive back position. Clarkson thought that Perez would have made an excellent linebacker on the JV squad, but the young athlete was adamant about sticking to his position.

Freshman Ezekiel Knight moved to Douglas from Florida and is currently playing linebacker for the Pirates. Clarkson noted that although Knight is young, he has football in his blood and will eventually be a good player.

Rounding out the Douglas players to don an Oxford football jersey is Sebastian Negron, a wide receiver who had never played football before and eighth grader Jayden Boucher, a running back who is truly enjoying playing for the JV team.

"All the Douglas kids have really jelled with the Oxford players," the coach said. "I know they had a real tough time last year, but they are proud to be playing with us this year and we are glad they're here."

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Our Lady of the Valley Hosts 41st Annual Holiday Fair

Our Lady of the Valley Regional School is set to host its 41st Annual Holiday Fair on Saturday, November 22 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 75 Mendon St., Uxbridge.

Organized by the OLV Parents' Guild, the Holiday Fair is one of the school's most significant fundraisers of the year, with proceeds directly supporting Catholic education and activities for over 230 students in the region.

Children can look forward to a variety of activities, including a

bounce house, kids' crafts, a special kids' raffle table, a hot cocoa bar, games, balloon animals, and a scavenger hunt. Santa will also be making an early trip to Uxbridge for free pictures.

The Fair will feature over 25 local vendors, offering unique gifts just in time for early holiday shopping. You can also try your luck on a wide selection of raffle prizes, including a grand raffle, super raffle, and over 50 unique themed raffle baskets.

The Fair will also feature a lun-

cheon, which includes chicken parmesan and meatball subs, hot dogs, French fries, snacks and more.

The OLV Fair is held across three separate buildings: the main school building, the G.R.A.C.E. Center, and The Good Shepherd Parish Hall within St. Mary's.

For the latest updates, follow the OLV Fair Event page on Facebook: facebook.com/events/4115336518717991

For any questions, the guild can be reached via email at olvguild@gmail.com.

BVT 2025 Annual Report Now Available

Document highlights facts, figures, student achievements and more

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) is proud to announce that its 2025 Annual Report is now available on the school's website. Covering the FY25 fiscal year, the report highlights the distinctive achievement of students and staff, as well as key financial information.

"As responsible stewards of your regional vocational technical high school, we continue to take cost-saving measures to protect your investment while providing high-quality career and technical education," said Superintendent-Director Anthony E. Steele II. "This report

reflects on the previous school year, which culminated in celebrating the prolific career of Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, who served as superintendent-director from 1994-2025. It goes beyond facts and figures to show how every dollar is maximized to prepare our students to be career- and life-ready by the time they graduate."

Browse the Annual Report

It takes a spark to ignite a passion for safety and a one-of-a-kind career. Discover how unconventional choices, risk-taking, and the pursuit of innovation have shaped the entrepreneurial journey of Kevin Healy and Noah Boudreau

(Electronics, Class of 2019) in the Alumni Spotlight, "It Takes a Spark." As founders of Smart Escape LLC, they're revolutionizing safety and successfully demonstrating how a BVT education continues long after graduation.

We invite you to read this story and others in the 2025 Annual Report, available now on that BVT website at valleytech.k12.ma.us/annualreport.

BVT serves the towns of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton and Uxbridge.

may be featured in a future column. Let's build a kinder, more respectful world, one interaction at a time.

Lee-Ann Barkhouse is a certified etiquette and leadership coach who helps people show up with confidence, kindness, and credibility. At Invest in You (www.investinuma.com), she shares practical tools to make everyday moments more thoughtful and meaningful—whether at work, at home, or right here in the community.

ner, a walk with a friend, or a cup of coffee shared in real conversation, those simple moments of presence strengthen trust, deepen relationships, and remind others they're valued.

See you next month—and until then, keep showing up as your best self.

-Lee-Ann

Have a situation you'd like help with? Write in or email (info@investinuma.com) and your question

ETIQUETTE

continued from page 10

person directly. A simple "You've been so helpful—I really appreciate how kind and professional you are" goes a long way.

If possible, tell a supervisor or fill out a customer comment card or online survey mentioning the employee by name. Many stores track positive feedback for recognition or bonuses, and your words could make a meaningful difference in that young cashier's day.

Kindness multiplies when we notice it. Taking the time to acknowledge good service not only rewards the individual, it also reminds everyone watching that courtesy and connection still matter.

ETIQUETTE TIP OF THE MONTH

Disconnect to Reconnect - Some of life's best moments happen when we're fully present—listening, laughing, and sharing time with the people who matter most. Setting aside our devices, even briefly, allows us to slow down and truly connect. Whether it's a family din-

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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When Luke has Something Important to Say

A dog owner discovers that listening to her pet's instincts can teach her a thing or two about trust, intuition, and joy.

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Luke's language is silent yet expressive. He tells me all I need to know with dark, honest eyes and a subtle tilt of his head. Over time, I've grown fluent in this quiet dialogue, as one might grow attuned to a favorite song—the rhythm, the pauses, the spaces where meaning hides between notes.

"Let's go for a walk, Luke," I tell him, looping the leash. "You can pick the way."

He doesn't move. Instead, he anchors himself to the front step, bracing against my tug. His face folds in protest. I can't help but smile. He looks like a furry Eskimo—steadfast, resolute, unwilling to compromise his point of view. I don't want to walk. Frisbee is more fun.

I stop, considering his proposal. "You'd rather stay home, Luke?" His head tilts, eyes bright,

as though to say, You truly do understand me. Yes! Let's stay here and play! His conviction makes me wonder if he's part human.

"Go get the frisbee, Luke!"

His sprint—smooth, elastic, athletic—tells me otherwise. He zigzags through the yard with the focus of a bloodhound, then gallops back, triumphant. The soft disc dangles loosely from his teeth, teasing me to grab it. But I've learned my lesson. The frisbee is looped around his two front canines in a remarkably strong hold. I could pry open his



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mouth and free it, but why resort to barbarism when Luke is cognitively advanced?

"Luke, do I need to get the beeper?"

The word barely escapes my tongue before he drops the frisbee at my feet. That he associates the word "beeper" with its imagined sound—and adjusts his behavior accordingly—makes me ridiculously proud.

Fine, he seems to say. Have at it.

Until he humbles me again.

I'm about to launch the frisbee—graceful as a magician freeing a dove—when Luke charges me like a linebacker. "Luke, please!" I lose balance, the frisbee veering off-course and disappearing into a Rose of Sharon bush.

"What are we going to do now?" I fret.

Luke, oblivious, sniffs the ground. Where's the frisbee? What happened?

Upon seeing me lost in the shrub's arms, he connects the dots. Watch out, Mom! I'll rescue it! He noses in and out of dense branches, bobbing his head as if determination alone might free the disc. Meanwhile, I devise a more creative plan.

I aim the garden hose at the hostage frisbee. A steady stream loosens its grip until it trembles. Luke, now fully involved, invades my space and barks—head lifted high—DROP IT. DROP IT. DROP IT. The frisbee obeys, falling just in

time for Alligator Luke to snatch it up.

He takes off across the grass—a streak of muscle and light, tail whisking the air behind him. For a moment, I swear he's advertising joy itself: an emblem of what it means to be healthy, happy, and wholly alive.

Luke's insistence that frisbee is more fun than a walk seems perfectly reasonable. Note to self: Listen to Luke. Take him seriously. He knows how to be happy.

But what about when Luke's body language conveys something darker—something protective, even foreboding? Is it possible for a dog to sense a bad vibe? I'm convinced it is, and that we should take heed.

We had just settled into our usual spot at the local bookstore. Luke, tied to the round table on a short leash, relaxed at my feet as I worked, waiting for his share of blueberry scone. The routine had long been smooth and predictable. I'd write, he'd charm visitors and accept gentle pats with regal calm.

"Your dog is so calm!"

"What's his name?"

"Can my daughter pet him?"

"Look, honey—he's so soft."

Sometimes, between greetings, Luke would nap beside me like a lion, utterly at peace. But not today. "Grrr."

LUKE

continued on page 17

REAL ESTATE

New home inspection law in Massachusetts, what is it?

What home buyers and sellers need to know

Massachusetts has implemented a new law that significantly changes how home inspections are handled in real estate transactions. The law takes effect October 15, 2025 and applies to transactions entered into on or after October 15, 2025.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

There are two very significant changes that this law brings moving forward: First, buyers are given the right to conduct

a home inspection if they choose. However, once under agreement, the buyer may choose not to conduct a home inspection. Second, sellers (and their agent) are required to provide buyers with a new disclosure form which details the rights and obligations of each party.

This law, part of the Affordable Homes Act, a statute passed in August 2024, aims to protect buyers' rights to conduct home inspections and introduces specific restrictions on how offers involving inspection waivers can be made and not made. The law is intended to prevent the seller or their agent from putting pressure on buyers to waive an inspection as part of the home purchase process. After several delays in late 2024 and early 2025, the final regulations were published by Governor Healey's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities in June 2025. The regulations (760 CMR 74) provide the details on how the law will operate.

The law applies to purchase agreements dated after October 15, 2025, and only on the sale of residential buildings with one to four units, condominium units, and co-op shares tied to residential occupancy. First, sellers or their agent cannot state that they will only accept offers from buyers who agree to waive, limit, or forego a home inspection. As an example, this means that a seller cannot counter a buyer's offer with a provision that would remove the buyer's contractual right to conduct a home inspection. Second, sellers cannot accept an offer that waives the home inspection. During negotiations, a buyer (and their agent) should not convey any intent to waive a home inspection. As a consequence of limitation

being placed on sellers, buyers can no longer make their offer more attractive by indicating their intent to waive an inspection in advance of acceptance. Third, there is a new disclosure form requirement. Sellers or their agents will be required to provide the disclosure form to buyers and the form must be signed by the buyer and seller on or before the date of signing the first written purchase agreement. For most of Massachusetts, the first purchase agreement is the "Offer to Purchase" or "Contract to Purchase", although in some parts of the state, the first purchase agreement is the "Purchase and Sale Agreement." Regardless of what agreement is used, the new disclosure form must be signed at or prior to signing the purchase agreement.

The form confirms several things: seller represents and warrants that the purchase agreement is not contingent on the waiver or limitation of the buyer's choice to have a home inspection. A seller's acknowledgement that the buyer may have the property inspected by a licensed home inspector of the buyer's choice. A notice that the seller will provide the buyer with a "reasonable" period after entering into the purchase agreement to decide whether to proceed with the transaction.

What About Negotiations? The regulations state that the parties cannot include a provision in the purchase agreement that would "Render a Home Inspection Meaningless." This means that the parties cannot agree on an unreasonable limit on the buyer's ability to schedule, receive, or review a home inspection. It also means that the agreement cannot prevent the buyer from choosing not to proceed with the deal if the buyer is unsatisfied with the results of the

home inspection. As an example, the parties cannot agree that the buyer has just 12 hours from signing the purchase agreement to complete a home inspection and review the results. This provision would likely "render a home inspection meaningless" because it's highly unlikely the buyer could schedule a home inspection in that time frame and review the results.

But the regulations do allow for negotiations around two specific areas: First, it is permissible to agree to limit a buyer's choice not to proceed with the transaction if the aggregate estimated cost of repairs exceeds a reasonable threshold to be negotiated by the parties. Second, the parties can agree to reasonably limit a buyer's deposit refund if the buyer chooses not to proceed after the home inspection. While these areas are negotiable, they call for the agreement to be "reasonable." There is no single definition of "reasonable." It is used as a flexible standard and dependent on the totality of the facts and circumstances in the transaction.

There are however exemptions. For this complete list, reach out to a member of the Marzeotti Group or your trusted real estate professional.

Penalties for Non-Compliance. Failure to comply comes with harsh penalties. For sellers, a violation may be used as evidence of an intent to misrepresent or conceal a material fact about the home. For agents, a violation may be considered an unfair or deceptive business practice under Massachusetts consumer protection laws (Chapter 93A).

This law is designed to create a more level playing field for home buyers by ensuring all buyers have a fair opportunity to inspect a property. However, it removes the ability of the buyer and seller to negotiate around certain areas and introduces significant changes to how offers are structured and what can be communicated before acceptance.

For more information on this topic, please reach out to the Marzeotti Group or your trusted real estate professional.

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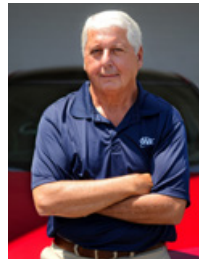
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THE CAR DOCTOR jppaul@aanortheast.com

Car Design Inspo Comes From Everywhere



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. An observation and a question about car styling. I saw a 2025 Hyundai Sonata, and it reminded me of the 1958 Packard Hawk's front grille. Do you think the designer saw the 1958 Hawk at a car show?

A. Designers take inspiration from many places. I remember talking to Ford's head of design J. Mays at the time, and he told me he would walk around Target and get inspiration for design and color in the housewares section. Another designer told me he was struggling with a fender shape and found the exact curve in a vintage Electrolux vacuum cleaner. So could a Hyundai designer see a design in a Packard, it is certainly possible. There is an expression "that everything old is new again."

Q. I own a 2022 Volkswagen Atlas with 65,000 miles on it. Recently the air conditioning on the two driver side vents started blowing warm

air after 15-20 minutes of driving. The passenger side was cold and worked perfectly. The dealership was not able to locate the problem, any suggestions?

A. The dealer should be the best source of repair since they have the best technical information. Looking at the theory and operation of the system there are a left and right air motor/doors. It is possible the left motor has failed or is getting a poor command. The other issue I have not seen in Volkswagen but was common in Honda vehicles was, if the system was low on refrigerant the passenger side vent would blow warm air. So, it gets down to the basics, drive the car until it malfunctions, take a reading of pressures and look for fault codes and manually operate the blend doors with a scan tool. The issue may be a faulty door motor, but testing needs to be performed.

Q. I am looking for a new car. I have owned two Hyundai Tucson SUVs over the last decade or so. But I am looking for something a little smaller. I will be 75 next year and do not expect to do any heavy driving. But I do go kayaking and bicycling in the summer, so I need something to haul the equipment. I am looking primarily at the Subaru Crosstrek, Hyundai Kona, Mazda CX30 and Buick Encore GX in that order. I would appreciate your thoughts on these or any other suggestions you can make.

A. I would also look in the same order you have listed. I would add the Kia Soul to the mix. Although the Kia Soul lacks all-wheel drive that the Subaru has, it is roomy, rides well and has good and not overcomplicated tech/safety features.

Q. Upon leaving my house today, I saw my neighbor come home and after I arrived back home, I happened to

notice the car still running - it is quiet, so I noticed the dashboard.

It is a VW Jetta, so besides the lost gas, anything else that could have potentially happened, or damage done? The car was running for about three hours and only gets driven about once per week.

A. Today's cars can run for a very long time without any damage, providing they are well maintained. Still if this were my Volkswagen Jetta, I would have the oil changed. Heat and unburned fuel can cause oil to break down. Fresh oil and a check of fluids are all that is necessary. The good news is some new cars will limit engine run time to an hour if the computer senses the driver has left the vehicle. Recently I have noticed in some new cars, if you get out of the car with the engine running it shuts off in about an hour.

Q. My grandson purchased a 2013 Volkswagen Passat 2.5 liter 5-cylinder engine with 57,000 miles. It is a beautiful car, except that it overheats when driven above 60 mph, local driving is fine. We brought it to a very reliable local shop who replaced the thermostat, flushed the cooling system (that was extremely dirty), performed a block check and checked the cooling fan operation which worked as designed. Any suggestions to resolve this issue. Possibly replace the radiator.

A. As I was reading your email, the first item that came to mind was a leaking cylinder head gasket. Driving on the highway with a leaking head gasket can cause the

CAR DOCTOR
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LUKE

continued from page 14

He lifted his nose to the air, a low grumble rising from his chest.

“What’s the matter, Luke?” I asked, scanning the room. A baby sat in a carriage nearby. I stroked his head. “It’s okay, Luke.”

He wasn’t convinced. Another growl followed, sharper this time, building into a coyote-like howl—“Ahroo! Woo, woo!”—and ending as suddenly as it began. I returned to work, though he remained upright, alert.

Moments later, a man appeared from behind a bookshelf like a troll emerging from a stony fortress.

“I cannot believe you have your dog here.”

The contempt in his voice was thick with anger. His eyes, black and unblinking, locked on mine.

The air turned cold. I’d never

encountered such hostility in a lifetime of dog parenting.

“Excuse me? I’ve been here about sixteen times,” I replied, voice measured but firm. “My dog is on a short leash. He barked. Dogs do that occasionally.”

Two wrongs don’t make a right, I reminded myself (on sarcasm). Still, my steadiness must have lit a spark in his already smoking temper.

“It’s a f---ing bookstore. It’s for humans.”

The curse word hung between us like a hard menthol cough drop—sharp, bitter, lingering. Luke sat at my side, panting calmly. He knew.

“Go report your story to management,” I said. “And please, be kind.”

My faith in humanity proved to be as strong as Luke’s sixth sense. The manager—fair, calm, and diplomatic—listened to both sides. “I see no reason for you to leave,” he said, restoring a small but powerful

balance to the moment.

Relief swept through me. Luke, ever intuitive, sensed the shift and leaned into my leg.

Our happy ending got even happier. A follow-up conversation with the area supervisor confirmed that the man’s behavior would be addressed—and that Luke would always be welcome back.

Now, each time we return to the bookstore, Luke trots through the door with quiet confidence, ready to resume his post by my chair.

He settles beside me as I write, as though nothing ever happened—even though we both learned something important.

Luke reminds me, with every steady breath at my feet, that calm can be contagious, kindness still counts, and sometimes the best way to listen is simply to trust.

Write to Amy at amyclair@hotmial.com

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CAR DOCTOR

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cooling system to get bound up with air and overheat. Since the system was checked for internal leaks, the next step would be the radiator. Since the coolant was badly contaminated it is possible the radiator is partially clogged. A non-contact thermometer or

thermal imaging camera can easily find cold spots in the radiator. On a higher milage engine I would suspect the water pump, but with low mileage that is unlikely. Based on your description I would replace the radiator. As a general rule, the 2.5 liter 5-cylinder engine is usually quite robust and with proper care can last 200-300,000 miles.

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

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.

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14;
 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15**
 • Vaillancourt Christkindlesmarkt & Artisan Show: Friday, November 14, 2025 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.; Saturday, November 15, 2025 11

a.m. – 7 p.m.
 Celebrate the start of the season with a traditional German Christmas Market in the quintessential New England town of Sutton! This event is rain, snow, or shine. All ticket sales are final and cannot be changed once purchased. Valfa.com/calendar/kris Yuletide Wine Garden Nov. 28 10 am. – 4 p.m. Nov. 29; Nov. 30; Dec. 6; Dec. 7; Dec. 13; Dec. 14; Dec. 20; Dec. 21

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.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21
 • Annual Church Turkey Raffle at C.F. Minney VFW Post at 16 South Main Street, Millbury. First prize: \$500 cash. Second prize: \$250 Amazon gift card. Third prize: Case of

Whitinsville Celebrates Shop Small

Celebrate the spirit of community and creativity this Small Business Saturday! Now in its 12th year, the Shop Small 01588 Passport Holiday Hop event brings together local artists, makers, and small shops for a festive day of handcrafted gifts, cozy treats, and

neighborly fun.
 Running from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m., this free event encourages visitors to stroll between two studio locations at 110 and 116 Church Street, Whitinsville, to discover a curated collection of local talent, collect passport stamps from each vendor,

and enter to win a grand raffle filled with handmade goods. It's a wonderful way to support small, independent businesses and kick off the holiday season right here in Whitinsville. For more information visit @milltownmerchants.

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• 9:30 a.m., Waters Farm Preservation, Sutton. Breakfast with Santa, sponsored by Sen. Ryan Fattman and Stephanie. Breakfast, photos, crafts. Free but reservations are required. <https://bit.ly/breakfastwithsantatickets>

• 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., various locations, Sutton. Sutton Chain of Lights. Celebrate Christmas in historic Sutton with businesses, churches and organizations in town for the annual Christmas and holiday season celebration. Hop on a free trolley for rides to more than three dozen locations to do shopping, enjoy delicious food, kids' activities and animals. The Sutton High School Band plays traditional carols and Christmas tunes at 5 p.m. on the Town Common and Santa Claus comes by to light

the Town Christmas tree.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

• "The Fright Before Christmas" with author and television personality Jeff Belanger sharing stories of ghoulies, ghosts, and things that go bump in the night during this darkest time of year. Be delightfully frightened during this multi-media program. Caution: this program is not for young children. Register. Millbury Library.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

• The 2025 Jingle Jaunt 5K will take place on December 13 at 10:30 a.m. It takes place at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Rd. Sutton. Info and entry forms at howie189@verizon.net or fccs@sutton-firstchurch.net. Registration: \$23 race day packet pick up. Wear some bells!

BVT Admissions to Hold Open House

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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.

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Saturday, January 10, 2025

January's theme: **Ice, Ice, Baby**



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Questions? Michelle.Benjamin@openskycs.org or visit openskycs.org/openmic



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