

Former Grafton Food-Waste Recycler Hit with Penalties for Violations

The State Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell announced in December that Feedback Earth, Inc. has agreed to pay up to \$250,000 in penalties for violations of the Massachusetts Clean Air Act and the Massachusetts Solid Waste Disposal Act. According to the AG's office, the company installed unau-

thorized machinery, produced unapproved feedstocks, and emitted odors that impacted nearby residents.

Feedback Earth opened its facility on Creeper Hill Road in 2021 and soon after became the subject of complaints regarding strong odors. Company officials previously acknowledged that

the use of tofu in its production process contributed to the smell.

In addition to the environmental violations, the AG's office reported that some residents said the company made it difficult to file odor complaints by changing its hotline number, encouraging reports outside the MassDEP-mandated system, and making unannounced visits to complainants' homes.

A preliminary injunction issued in October 2024 halted many of the company's operations at the Grafton facility. Feedback Earth has since shut down the site and sold the property earlier this year for \$4.04 million, according to the Worcester Business Journal.

Of the total settlement, \$110,000 will be directed to the Massachusetts Environmental Justice Fund.

"Communities should not have to suffer the consequences of businesses prioritizing profits over compliance with our environmental laws," Campbell said. "This settlement holds Feedback Earth accountable and puts other companies on notice that violations affecting public health will not be tolerated."



Footbridge over the French River. Thomas J. McLaughlin photo

Heading West on the Midstate Trail

Bugs Swamp, Scythes, Past Residents, and Diminished Expectations

BY THOMAS J. MCLAUGHLIN

At nearly 65-square miles it was big - a land area bigger than Worcester or Boston. It was half the size of modern-day Detroit or Philadelphia, it was one and two thirds the size of Disney World, and almost as large as Washington D.C.

More than three hundred years ago, a grant was approved to create a new town southwest of Worcester. It would encompass a large part of what is now Charl-

ton, a quarter of Auburn, a fifth of Dudley, several square miles of Southbridge, and all of present-day Oxford, which bears the name. (History of the Town of Oxford, Massachusetts by George F. Daniels, 1892.)

Oxford, Massachusetts was named after Oxford, England, the "city of dreaming spires," and home to the oldest university in the English-speaking world. Today, from the U.S. Virgin Islands to Colorado, there are more than two dozen Oxfords throughout the U.S., but our Oxford was the first.

Oxford or Oxenforda, "ford of the oxen." It's a word that's as old as England itself. Ox (a castrated bull) and ford (a shallow area in the water that can be crossed) are two ancient, Old English words with Germanic roots going back centuries. The origin of "Ox" goes back thousands of years and has a Proto-Indo-European origin with a rare linguistic connection to several language families.

The names of the first three roads of the Midstate Trail in Oxford reflect more recent times. Lovett, Brown, and Dana are old





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MIDSTATE TRAIL

continued from page 1

Oxford family names going back to colonial days. These street names are probably where their homesteads were once located.

In his 19th century History of the Town of Oxford, Massachusetts, George F. Daniels mentions brothers Herbert and Walter Lovett

owning land in 1738, a tailor named Joseph Brown, making jackets for soldiers during the American Revolution in 1775, and John Dana, serving on a town committee dealing with an ecclesiastical and legal matter in 1783.

The Midstate Trail typically runs north and south, but in Oxford, it's west and northwest, if you're a NoBo (northbound) hiker. It crosses farm fields at the top of Whittier Hill in Sutton and leads into the forest toward Oxford where it crosses a small stream between Sacarrappa Pond and Bugs Swamp.

This is a hidden and secluded place with no public roads running around it. There's little to no development here. You would never know it looking at it now, but there was once a lot going on here.

In his History of Oxford, Daniels tells us about a saw-mill (built in 1792) located on the uppermost part of Bugs Swamp stream. He noted that it was "unserviceable in dry seasons."

There was also a second sawmill located on the lower end of the stream (built in 1788), that didn't fare well in drier spells—it probably didn't help having another built upstream from it. This lower stream mill was sold in 1801, when the owner, whom I'm guessing was fed up or bored, packed it up and moved to Maine.

The new owner of the lower end mill, David Lilley, built a shop there to manufacture scythes – those long, curved blades with bent handles used for harvesting and reaping (think Grim Reaper).

When Lilley died in 1815, Joab Maynard tried his hand at scythe making for a couple of years before selling it to the original scythe maker's sons. The Lilley brothers made scythes for four more years until leaving the property "unoccupied."

A half dozen years later in 1827, two brothers, Lawton and Joseph Pratt, bought the property to make shingles, washing machines, and "other house-

hold utensils," before they went broke and disappeared for "parts unknown," three years later. As Dante wrote about another place, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"

After all these attempts to give it a go, two more guys gave the scythe making business a shot before finally abandoning the place. The property was later purchased by Slater & Co.

In 1792, there was also a house, a blacksmith shop and a coal house on the brook at Sacarrappa Pond where they made scythes and nails. They built two shops and two dams there.

The only activity I found passing through there was of the flying and biting variety. Bugs Swamp really lived up to its name, especially in May, following rising temperatures and springtime rain.

I enjoyed a scenic stroll through this area that turned into a mad dash, outrunning swarms of black flies and mosquitoes. They're evil suckers. You can evade them if you move fast enough without stopping, but it's better to bring bug spray and mosquito face netting, or wait until colder and drier weather.

After emerging from the woods chewed up, the trail hit pavement for several miles, going across Oxford under I-395, across the railroad tracks, before it reached the center of town at Rt. 12/Main St.

Continuing onward to the end of Rocky Hill Road, the Midstate goes back into the woods. This is a beautiful stretch of hiking under the pines, along the flood plains of Hodges Village Dam.

You eventually cross a foot-bridge over the French River that was built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. According to their website at nae.usace.army.mil, "there are approximately 22 miles of trails weaving their way around the Hodges Village project area," which has nearly 1,200 acres of land.

At more than 25-miles long, the French River (a name stemming from Oxford's early French Protestant/Huguenot settlement) drains into dozens of lakes and ponds, eventually flowing to rivers in Connecticut before reaching Long Island Sound via the Thames.

The hike continues past nearby sand and gravel pits posted with hazard and danger warning signs. It goes uphill for a nice stretch, along a winding stream with small, tranquil waterfalls, before reaching Charlton.

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Sutton Firefighter Graduates from Academy

State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine and Massachusetts Firefighting Academy leadership announced on January 9 the graduation of 28 firefighters from the 50-day Career Recruit Firefighting Training Program, including Sutton firefighter Michael Holm.

“Massachusetts firefighters are on the frontlines protecting their communities every day, and today’s graduates are needed now more than ever,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “The hundreds of hours of foundational training they’ve received will provide them with the physical, mental, and technical skills to perform their jobs ef-

fectively and safely.”

“Massachusetts Firefighting Academy instructors draw on decades of experience in the fire service to train new recruits,” said MFA Recruit Program Coordinator Dean Babineau. “Through consistent classroom instruction and practical exercises, today’s graduates have developed the tools they’ll need to



work seamlessly with veteran firefighters in their home departments and in neighboring communities as mutual aid.”

Millbury Women’s Club Marks Active Year

The Millbury Women’s Club (MWC) has enjoyed a busy and engaging year, offering educational programs, social activities, and community outreach for its members. Meetings are held at the historic Asa Waters Mansion



members were introduced.

Throughout the year, the club offered a variety of programs and activities. In June, members organized a plant sale, followed by a line-dancing event in September. October’s meeting featured a guest speaker from the Rhode Island State Police Special Victims Unit. In November, the club hosted a special Veterans program with guest speaker First Sergeant (Ret.) Matthew Hill, a Millbury native, who shared stories from nearly three decades of service with the 82nd Regiment of the

U.S. Army.

on the first Monday of each month, except in January, July, and August. In October, MWC President Diane Hill hosted a “Meet and Greet” orientation for new members. T. Jablanski, past state president of GFWC Massachusetts, presented the history of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, while past MWC President Mary Lou Mulhane highlighted the club’s long-standing contributions to the Millbury community. Several past presidents and committee members also spoke about their roles within the organization, and new

U.S. Army.

During the Veterans program, Hill received a Quilt of Valor created from remnants of his uniform and designed by Karen Dinsdale Magnant of Hearts ‘n’ Hands. The club also collected donations for veterans, raising \$520 in cash and \$573 in donated goods for Central Massachusetts Veterans Support Inc.

The December meeting concluded the year with a festive regifting auction enjoyed by members.

The Millbury Women’s Club has already scheduled several

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Grafton Police Arrest Child Transport Driver for Crimes Against Children

The Grafton Police Department arrested 54-year-old Redi Gace of Worcester following an investigation into alleged crimes against children. Gace was employed as a school bus driver with AA Transportation that contracts with the Grafton School Department and drove children in Grafton. He has been charged with two counts of kidnapping, reckless endangerment of a child, misleading a police investigation and tampering with evidence. The investigation is ongoing and additional charges may be forthcoming.

He was employed by AA Trans-

portation, which contracts with the Grafton School Department. He was not assigned to general transportation routes.

Police said the school department and the bus company cooperated in the investigation.

The suspect, Redi Gace, of Worcester, was arraigned in Westborough District Court on Jan. 14 and is being held on \$50,000 bail. In the event bail is posted, the suspect will be placed on house arrest with GPS monitoring.

The school district has been in contact with the families of all students who may have had contact with the suspect, according to a statement by district Superinten-



dent Jay Cummings.

If you have any information relevant to this investigation, or

if you have concerns about your child, please contact Detective Sergeant Daniel Wend at

508-839-2858. All calls will be handled with sensitivity and confidentiality.

BLACKSTONE VALLEY Xpress

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New Year's financial resolutions: Making them stick



Jamie DeCaire

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As the calendar flips to a new year, millions of Americans pledge to improve their financial lives. But without a concrete plan, those well-intentioned resolutions often fade quickly.

Financial goals consistently top the list of New Year's resolutions. A 2025 CFP Board study shows that financial res-

olutions are prominent, with saving more money (45%) and reducing debt (32%) ranking among the top three goals.

Unfortunately, most resolutions don't last. A 2023 Forbes Health poll found that over half of people give up on resolutions by the four-month mark and only 1% make it the full year.

The challenge isn't a lack of desire for change. People may set the same resolution year after year, revealing a disconnect between intentions and action. Or it may be that they try to tackle too many goals at once, or aim higher than is realistic, setting themselves up for disappointment.

Set smart financial goals.

Before crafting your action plan, consider which financial priorities matter most to you. If you need ideas, here are some areas where you may want focus in 2026:

- Regularly review your financial goals and track progress

ress toward meeting them

- Increase your 401(k) contributions or max out your IRA and/or HSA contributions

- Pay down debt strategically and negotiate lower interest payments

- Build an emergency savings fund of six to 12 months
- Save more consistently

Be specific. Vague resolutions like "save more money" rarely succeed. Instead, it can help to make goals specific and measurable. For example, rather than making a resolution to "start an emergency fund," commit to a specific goal, such as, "I will put \$100 a month into an emergency fund."

This shift from general to specific transforms wishful thinking into actionable steps. When goals are attainable, it's easier to track progress and stay motivated.

Find an accountability partner.

Don't go it alone. Having someone to check in with can help you stay on track. This could be a spouse, friend or family member who shares similar goals.

Consider working with a financial advisor who can help you create a realistic plan, monitor your progress and adjust strategies as needed. A professional can provide expertise and accountability, making it easier to stay on track throughout the year.

Start small and build momentum.

Rather than overhauling your entire financial life all at once, focus on one or two priority areas. Identify where the largest gap exists between your current situation and where you want to be, then concentrate your energy there.

Breaking larger goals into smaller, manageable actions makes them less overwhelming and more achievable. Each

small win builds confidence and momentum for tackling the next challenge.

The new year offers a fresh start and renewed motivation to improve your financial health. With specific goals, a solid action plan and the right support system, this could be the year your financial resolutions finally stick.

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Business Spotlight

With Affordable Junk Removal, you can rent a dumpster or have their Junk Removal Professionals come to haul away items that have been gathering dust and taking up precious space. Setting a New Year’s resolution to clean up a neglected basement or attic is a great start. Sometimes



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the biggest challenge is not knowing where to begin with cleaning out your home and that is where Affordable can assist you.

“You can load your own dumpster or have our truck guys do all of the work for you,” Schadler explained. “And rest assured, we don’t just take everything to the landfill. We try and recycle as much as possible. Clothing and household items are donated to local organizations that help our friends and neighbors. That keeps them out of landfills, gives them a new life, and helps us keep our prices down. We’re always looking for ways to be more cost effective be-

cause customers appreciate our reasonable prices.”

Changes in legislation have made it increasingly more difficult to dispose of certain items, like mattresses, for example. It is a state law that most textiles and mattresses must be recycled. “Finding places to take mattresses is a challenge and the fees for disposal have gone through the roof,” said Schadler. Items like these carry a separate recycling fee that the commercial transfer stations charge because of how labor intensive that recycling is. “People are usually shocked at the cost, and we find ourselves educating the customer as to why these fees exist. Here at Affordable, we view ourselves as an avenue our clients can turn to when they have these items and want them disposed of legally, safely and properly.”

Affordable has many repeat customers. “When people call, they reach me, not some automated corporate call center,” he said. “They know me and the crew and trust us. We do a great job and are fast, efficient, and reliable. We come when we say we will and if anything unexpected comes up, we communicate. We live here too, we are your friends and neighbors. We sponsor your little league teams and run into you at the grocery store. We are your local guys.” A quick look at the many years of positive online reviews attests to this.

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Small Stones Festival of the Arts Opens Jan. 24

The Small Stones Festival of the Arts will open its eighth annual juried exhibit of fine art painting and photography on Saturday, Jan. 24, at noon at the Community Harvest Project barn, 37 Wheeler Road, North Grafton. An opening reception and awards ceremony will follow at 2 p.m. The free festival will run through Feb. 1.

The two-week exhibit features 144 works by regional fine art painters, watercolorists, photographers and other two-dimensional artists. Artwork will be displayed in a gallery setting, along with a schedule of artist and juror talks. The festival is sponsored by the Blackstone



Valley Art Association and the Worcester County Camera Club.

Artist talks will be held on Jan. 24 at 2:30 p.m. with fine artist Lissa Banks and photographer Dimitry Papkov. Banks works primarily in acrylics and is known for expressive florals, portraits, still lifes and landscapes. Papkov is an award-winning landscape and travel photographer whose work has appeared in juried exhibitions throughout New England.

The Worcester County Camera Club will also host a special remote presentation on Tuesday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m., featuring black-and-white landscape photographer Huibo Huo of San Diego, Calif. Huo will discuss the enduring appeal of black-and-white photography, developing a personal artistic vision and the techniques she uses to create her work.

Cash prizes for first, second and third place, along with jurors' choice awards, will be presented in

both fine art painting and photography. Winners are selected by a panel of six jurors with professional experience as practicing artists or curators at museums, galleries and colleges. Festival attendees will also vote for a popular choice award in each category.

Fine art jurors include Jim Welu, director emeritus of the Worcester Art Museum; Jo Ellen Reinhardt, co-founder and director of the New England School of Fine Art; and Janet Montecalvo,

an award-winning commercial and fine artist. Photography jurors include photographer and lecturer Ron Rosenstock; Nancy Kathryn Burns, Stoddard Curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs at the Worcester Art Museum; and Pip Shepley, a lens-based artist whose work has been widely exhibited.

The mission of the Small Stones Festival of the Arts is to elevate the practice and appreciation of fine art and photography in the Blackstone Valley and beyond. Grafton Arts Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization, serves as the festival's financial sponsor.

Festival organizers acknowledged support from numerous organizations and businesses, including the Brigham Hill Foundation, Grafton Cultural Council, Massachusetts Cultural Council, local credit unions, and several area businesses.

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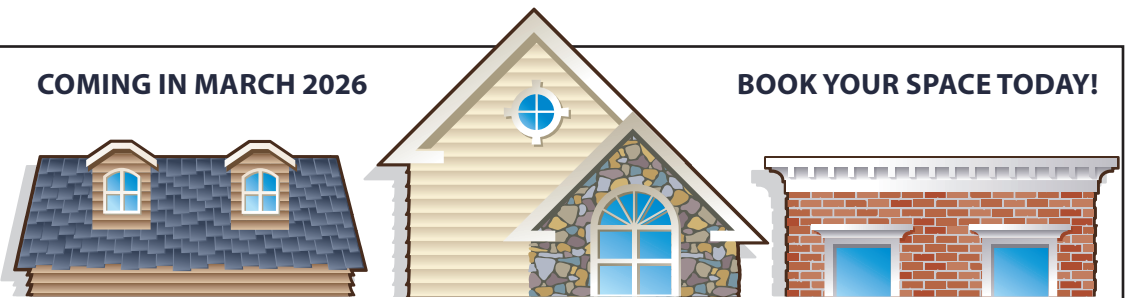


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BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTSWRITER

She began running in the sixth grade because she had tried other sports growing up and nothing really sparked her fancy. Since her friends were running and she was looking for something to do, Sutton's Annabelle Lamoreaux decided to give the sport a shot. Little did she know she was in the process of striking gold in terms of sports.

"I wanted something to do, and this was basically my only option in middle school, so I tried it out," she said. "I loved the pace of running cross country while competing against other runners."

Lamoreaux found that she had a good group of girls who pushed her to get better and she really enjoyed being part of a team that wanted to be there. As a sixth grader she found herself hovering as the team's number three runner that year and eventually would move up to become the second-best runner on the team. The young runner also found herself crossing the

finish line first on a couple of occasions, but her main goal was just to try and stay with the older girls while they were running.

The following year Lamoreaux would not only participate in cross country, but she would also take on the challenge of running outdoor track during the spring season. Having run 3.1 miles during the cross-country season she felt that the 800 and mile would best suit her and while in middle school she had built herself up to be that middle-distance runner. As she entered her final middle school season she decided to participate in indoor track but found it was something that she was totally not expecting.

"The first year in which I ran indoor track was very overwhelming as we were in the same room as all the high school girls and there were a lot of people there," Lamoreaux recalls. "That day I finished in the top five of the mile, which made me proud and at that moment I knew that I could be successful."

As a high school freshman, she

tried to emulate the older runners and their routines in preparing for races. She was hoping to duplicate their experiences and have success in doing so. Her main goal throughout her high school career would be to break as many of the school records as she could. She currently holds the 800 record with a time of 2:18 and has personal best times of 5:11 in the mile, 3:06 in the 1000 and 14.3 in the 600 and event that she just started to take part in recently.

Now as she enters her senior season, she participated in her 7th year on the cross-country course and will find herself running in her sixth year for outdoor track and fifth during the indoor season. Lamoreaux also hooked up with the Emerging Elites running team to keep her prepared while consistently running during the off season.

Coming into her final season she would like to take home a few more records, but if it doesn't happen, she'll be fine with it.

"Overall, I just want to continue to get better and improve while



enjoying my final year with everyone," she said. "If it comes with a school record then that'll make it even better."

Leaving her running friends in Sutton will be bittersweet. She will miss everything that they have done over the last seven years, but she is also looking to her future that will also include running all three seasons for Sacred Heart University in Fairfield Connecticut. She had spoken with a couple of coaches regarding her coming to their schools to run cross country and track, but she was unsure

where she wanted to go.

"I had visited colleges but was keeping my eyes open on where I wanted to go," Lamoreaux said. "Then I went to Sacred Heart for my official visit, and it sealed the deal. The school not only wanted me to run for them, but they also had my major (nursing), so everything was coming together for me."

Originally as someone who wanted to major in nursing she

SPORTS

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Gow Scholarship Recipient Announced

The Willard House & Clock Museum and the family of former museum conservator David G. Gow have announced Adrian Kison of Las Cruces, N.M., as the recipient of the 2025 David G. Gow Memorial Scholarship for Horology.

The annual \$5,000 scholarship supports students and early-career professionals pursuing clockmaking and clock conservation, a highly specialized trade with a limited number of practitioners nationwide.

Kison was selected from a competitive pool of applicants representing the next generation of professional clockmakers. He earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from New Mexico State University in 2017 and turned his focus to horology shortly thereafter. In 2018, he opened his own clock repair and restoration shop.

"Every customer has a story that's just as rich as the clocks they own," Kison said. "I also like seeing the traces of other clockmakers who've worked on a piece



before me."

Callum Gow, a member of the scholarship review board, said Kison's technical background and hands-on experience made him a strong candidate.

"His expertise, eagerness to learn and shop experience made him an ideal choice," Gow said.

Museum Executive Director Robert C. Cheney said the scholarship addresses a growing need in the field.

"The professional career path for museum-level clock conservation is not well defined, and

those entering the trade often face significant financial hurdles," Cheney said. "With only a few thousand conservators and clockmakers in the United States, demand far outstrips supply."

The scholarship was established by the Gow family in collaboration with the Willard House & Clock Museum to honor David Gow's legacy as a conservator, mentor and advocate for excellence in horology.

Any U.S.-based student who has begun formal training in clockmaking or conservation is eligible to apply. Applications for the 2026 scholarship are due Nov. 6, 2026, and the recipient will be announced Dec. 15, 2026.

The Willard House & Clock Museum, located at 11 Willard St. in North Grafton, houses more than 90 Willard clocks in the original birthplace and workshop of the Willard family. The museum is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

For more information, visit willardhouse.org.

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Preparation is Key for Productive Gardening

The Sutton Garden Club will present a program on "Preparing the Soil" at 7 p.m. on Feb. 19 at the A.L. Dudley-Gendron Post 414, 156 Boston Post Road, Sutton.

The quality and make-up of a garden's soil has a huge influence on how well your plants will do. Gretel Anspach, our February Speaker, is a Trustee of Mass. Horticulture and a Lifetime Master Gardener of the Mass. Master Gardener Association. She will talk with us about soil structure, compaction, fertility and pH and how we, as gardeners, can modify these properties for more successful, productive results.

Sutton Garden Club welcomes new members throughout the year. Annual membership: \$20 individual/\$30 family. Membership forms are available on the SGC website, www.suttongardenclub.com and at SGC meetings. If interested, first-time "check it out" visits are free; subsequent visits are charged \$5.

SPORTS

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was concerned about taking on not one, but three seasons of athletics while working on her degree. However, after speaking with a bunch of girls in the nursing program they were able to assure her that running would be obtainable while she studied to become a nurse. It was a reality that she would be able

to participate in both worlds with hard work and being one who likes to stay busy, Lamoreaux is ready for her future when it gets here.

"In college I am hoping that I will be able to compete on a higher level while exposing myself to a new environment," she said. "I've spent all my life in the small town of Sutton and to go to a college with bigger things I'll be able to branch out."

Although Lamoreaux is looking

forward to spreading her wings on the next level she still has two seasons of running track for the Suzies where she is looking to run into the future with a handful of school records.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Togetherness is the Best Exercise

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Confession: I'm not the best dog mom—at least during the winter months. Cold weather is a powerful demotivator, especially when it comes to dog walks. Cold toes give me the shivers; three layers, the quivers! I feel badly about it, but Luke has been remarkably understanding.

"Mummy's cold, Luke." I tug a blanket around my shoulders, which slips to the floor like a queen's robe that inadvertently collects dog hair. "I'm sorry. How about a peanut butter bone?"

The tactic—winning Luke over with food—is far from noble. Peanut butter? On my bone? Seriously? His heart seems to grow three sizes. I prepare the bone with shameless diligence. Meanwhile, he sits with a Grinchy grin, nose lifted as the

scent of peanut butter fills his space. I raise the bone to carry it to his spot, and he stalks me from behind. "Put it down. How about right here? Where's the best spot, Mom?" He hovers, invading my personal space, until I finally surrender and drop the bone.

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Luke stands over his prize, laps it clean, then lies down to wedge it firmly between his front paws. He gnaws with his back molars, his big head shifting to find the perfect chewing angle. He chomps hard, as though breaking down chunks of ice. The strength of Luke's jaw is magnificent—one of his many impressive traits. I once cracked a molar on an almond, yet here lies my dog—shredding the shin bone of a cow with finesse.

My heart swells with gratitude. My dog is understanding—and strong.

I lower myself to the floor and crowd him with a bear hug. He keeps chewing while his tail thumps happily. I kiss his head and pretend to take big bites



not interested in sharing.

Just when I think he's perfectly satisfied, I tiptoe into the kitchen—only to be reminded otherwise.

"Mom? Where are you going? I kind of liked chewing with you beside me." He looks up from his

bone as though we've just shared a dance. Why has the music stopped so suddenly?

I answer the cries in his eyes.

LUKE

continued on page 11

of his bone. "Chomp, chomp. Gobble, gobble." I make ridiculous noises while Luke chews faster, making it clear he's



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Sutton Historical Society Hosting Community Events

The Sutton Historical Society, in partnership with the Sutton Senior Center, will host two upcoming events focused on local history and community involvement.

On Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 1:30 p.m., Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor park rangers will present an interactive program at the Sutton Senior Center, 19 Hough Road. The presentation will highlight how individuals can assist in transcribing Revolutionary War Pension Records as part of the nationwide America 250 initiative, which aims to make these historic documents

searchable for the public. Attendees are encouraged to bring a laptop or tablet, though it is not required, and volunteers can complete transcription work from home. The program is open to the public, and participants do not need to be Sutton residents to attend.

The Historical Society will also host a Coffee Hour on Wednesday, Feb. 4, at 1 p.m. at the Senior Center, inviting residents to share memories of Sutton's past parades. With planning underway for Sutton's Living Timeline Parade on June 2, celebrating the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Or-

ganizers are seeking input to help recreate activities from earlier celebrations. The June event is planned as an all-day celebration featuring a parade, performers, craft vendors, food trucks, fireworks, and more. Community members are invited to enjoy coffee and refreshments while contributing their memories to the upcoming milestone celebration. More information about the parade is available at TheSutton-Fourth.org.

Additional information about Sutton Historical Society events and membership opportunities can be found at Sutton1704.org.

LUKE

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"I'll be right back, Luke."

Luke reminds me of something important: our physical, social, and emotional connection matters. Dog walks matter, yes—but so does time together.

That wisdom shows up outside, too. Luke has plenty of opportunities to run around the front or back yard on his own, yet he often chooses not to. The

reason is simple: it's more fun when we're together.

His signature zoomie gallop has become my favorite sport to watch, and he loves to show it off the moment he realizes I'm planted outside.

"Ohhhh, wow. Look at Luke. No one can catch Luke." I feed his ego as he gallops the perimeter of our property, exercising both athleticism and an impressive knowledge of our boundaries. He grazes the shrubs at our lawn's back edge, swivels through

elegant pear trees and, more profoundly, dares me to try to catch him. If I stomp in pursuit, he runs and zigzags even faster.

Luke's joy coats the air like a hazy sunlit vapor. His companionship warms me even more.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Follow Luke on IG @livingwith-lukevalentino

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Volvos Can Be Fussy About Battery Voltage

Q. I have a 2016 Volvo XC 70 wagon. Both the large and small batteries were replaced about two years ago. Frequently, both summer and winter, the warning "low battery charge" is displayed. The car always starts on the first attempt. I purchased a trickle charger and occasionally have it hooked up to the main battery. I still occasionally get this warning despite being hooked up for hours.

A. Volvos are famous for this message, even with a brand-new batteries. Normally the message will go away

once a battery reset is performed. If this procedure was not performed the message will still be displayed. Also, Volvo cars are very fussy about battery voltage. Although I believe aftermarket parts can be very good, some aftermarket batteries will cause this message to pop up from time to time. If the charging system is working properly then the issue may be short trips that never fully recharge the battery. At this point charge the batteries and check the charging system, if all looks good then keep doing what you are doing.

Q. I turned on my heater this morning on my 2013 Ford Mustang and there was a small hiss sound. Any idea what that might be? Perhaps a leaking heater core? When I turn on the AC it does not do it, just with the heat.

A. I suspect an issue with a temperature blend door. On your Mustang the doors are electric not vacuum actuated, so that would rule out a vacuum leak. If one of the doors or motors is hanging up a bit they could be making a noise. But at this point you need to narrow in on the noise to see where it is coming from. A rubber hose about two feet long can make a pretty good mechanics stethoscope to pinpoint noises.

Q. I purchased four new tires (GoodYear Assurance) in September 2018. I now have 42,000 miles on these tires. All tires have good tread on them. The tires are seven years old. I read that tires should be replaced every 6 years, even if tires look good. The reason is the rubber degrades over time, which compromises their safety and performance. We drive about 10,000 miles per year. Both local and long distance, should I replace these tires because of their age?

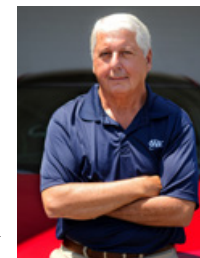
A. It really depends on the overall condition and how the tires have aged. I have replaced four-year-old tires that were dry rotting due to constant exposure in the sun and had

tires that were nine years old that looked fine. There are no hard and fast rules, six years is where you need to give tires a good look. As an example, I would not plan a cross-country road trip on tires more than 10 years old. If I had a collector car that only gets driven a few miles occasionally to shows, the age of the tire (providing there are no obvious issues) would not concern me. I will say if you have the budget, replacing tires is one of the best ways to give a older car that quiet new car ride.

Q. The windshield on my 2021 Lexus RX350 appears to have many very small dots on the outside. They appear to be the result of sand or something hitting it. It did not seem apparent when I bought the car used a couple of years back. Recently it can be seen from the inside when the sun shines on it and I am driving. I am trying to avoid replacing the windshield, and all that goes with it. Could the dealer have used something to cover up the dots? Is there a product that polishes or minimizes this condition? I must add that I am an older conservative driver who does little high speed and/or highway driving.

A. Unfortunately, the glass is just what you thought "sand-blasted". You may be able to get a glass shop to try and polish the windshield, although personally I have never had good luck with this. What you could try is to get the windshield very clean. Use a mild abrasive like Bar

Keepers Friend or Bon Ami then wash with clean water. Once this is done Clay-Bar the windshield. This clay (you can get it at an auto parts store) picks up all the very small bits of dirt. Then go over the windshield with a good window cleaner. I use Spray Way aerosol glass cleaner. The last step in the cleaning process is to polish the windshield with a microfiber cloth. If this does not help, a new windshield may be in your future.



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. The dash on my 2003 Toyota 4Runner is sticky and cracking. I put wax paper on the sticky part, but it just stuck to the dash. What's your recommendation to make it unsticky?

A. I would start with a mild cleaner like Dawn dish detergent and warm water. Vinegar cleaner can also work. If you don't have any success, then move to isopropyl alcohol. Try to find alcohol that is 90 percent concentration. You can also try combining the rubbing alcohol with the dish detergent. Readers have recommended Goo Gone adhesive remover. Use microfiber cloth and light to moderate pressure. If this still does not work perhaps the easiest thing would be a dashboard cover which is available online for \$25-\$50.

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REAL ESTATE

Reasons to be Optimistic about the 2026 Housing Market

If a move is on your radar for 2026, there's a lot more working in your favor than there has been in a while. After a stretch where many people felt stuck, 2026 is shaping up to be a year with



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

more options and more clarity for people who want to make a move. Not because the market is suddenly "easy," but because several key conditions are shifting. Top economists have one word to sum up the housing market for

2026: opportunity. Lower mortgage rates and a rising supply of homes are expected to open up the housing market - something the real estate industry and potential home buyers and sellers have been waiting for. For the first time in several years, things finally aligned toward gradual improvement. Mortgage rates may drift down slowly, but because income growth has exceeded house price appreciation, it will provide a boost to house-buying power, even in a higher-rate world. Affordability won't snap back overnight, but like a ship finally catching a steady tailwind, it's now heading in the right direction.

Just remember, while the national outlook is improving, conditions will still be different based on where you live. Some

markets will move faster than others. Some will see stronger price growth. Others will remain flat. Market performance will be based on local economic conditions, making 2026 one of the most geographically divided markets we've seen in years, say some economists. That's why understanding what's happening in your specific area is key. The national trends set the stage, but local dynamics determine how they play out for you. And that's why you need an agent.

If you want more information on what these trends mean for your local market and which trends you'll want to take advantage of, reach out to a member of the Marzeotti Group@Lamacchia Realty, or another trusted real estate agent.

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BVAA Invites Artists to Celebrate "Local Beauty"

Calling all artists of all abilities! The Blackstone Valley Art Association (BVAA) is hosting a free art show centered on the theme "Local Beauty," and artists are encouraged to submit works celebrating towns throughout the Blackstone Valley.

Submissions may include photography, drawings, sketches, paintings, and mixed media, depicting anything from favorite local landmarks to everyday scenes.

"Draw a pizza shop, paint a waterfall - any location in the Blackstone Valley is fair game," organizers said.

Artwork drop-off will be held Saturday, Feb. 28, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the BVAA Uxbridge Community Art Gallery, located at 5

South Main Street, Uxbridge.

In addition, BVAA hosts monthly art workshops, free and open to the public. The February workshop will take place Tuesday, Feb. 17, at 6:30 p.m., featuring a friendly feedback session. Participants are invited to bring in-progress or completed works for group discussion and creative brainstorming. If weather conditions are icy, the meeting will be held via Zoom.

The gallery is also typically open on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., offering a welcoming space to create art together using provided materials such as watercolors, colored pencils, paper, and music—all free of charge.

More information on events and

programs can be found at www.BVAA.org and on major social media platforms. Organizers encourage community members to "make a resolution to foster your creativity."

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

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

• Join Family Board Game Night with Grafton Rec. Tons of different board games to enjoy from 3-6 p.m. in the Municipal Center Gymnasium. Free. Concessions available for purchase. Sensory

friendly space is available in the Arts and Crafts Room. Registration required. Good for all ages.

• The museum of the Millbury Historical Society in the Asa Waters Mansion 123 Elm Street, Millbury will be open from 9:30 a.m. until noon. Some of the museum's holdings are: 100 years of Aftermath yearbooks; photos: churches, schools, downtown, sports; scrapbooks; research books & histories of Millbury & Sutton going back to colonial times; President Taft photos & memorabilia; military uniforms, guns, and flags. At 6 p.m. the same evening, The Historic Asa Waters Mansion is delighted to announce "A Toast To Two Centuries: A Candlelit Inaugural Dinner, an exclusive evening of refined dining, live music, and intimate historic charm. Guests are invited to step inside one of Millbury's most treasured landmarks for an unforgettable candlelit dinner prepared by award-winning

Johnny Burke Catering. The evening will feature exquisite cuisine, atmospheric lighting, a beautifully curated musical performance by renowned cellist Skip VonKuske, and a refined selection of refreshments at the cash bar. In addition to dinner, attendees will enjoy exclusive mini-tours of the Mansion, offering a rare opportunity to experience its rich, two-century history and architectural beauty up close. Experience the Mansion in a new light! Register online at <https://unipaygold.unibank.com/transactioninfo.aspx?TID=35274> or The cost to attend is \$65 per person, seating is limited, and advanced ticket purchase is required. For more information, please contact Traci Parath at 508.865.0855 or email Traci at tparath@millburyma.gov.

• Public Listening Session about Gray Rock Pocket Forest (GRPF) project at the Progressive Club, 18 Whittin Street, Uxbridge from

1 – 3 PM - Light Refreshments will be served. This session is open to all. There will be an informational presentation followed by feedback from attendees about the project. Input from the public is necessary for the success of this project. There will be an optional tour of the GRPF after the session.

For more information, please contact dtapscott@uxbridge-ma.gov or call Uxbridge Board of Health at (508)278-8600 option 8.

To take a survey regarding this project, visit <https://arcg.is/1TGnWL2>

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

• The Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting will be held at 5:30 p.m. at J. Anthony's Italian Grill, 917 Southbridge Street, Auburn. The guest speaker is Brian Westerlind of Webster Five. You can register for the meeting at www.wdocchamberma.com.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

• Dudley Library is offering a program on effective and thoughtful communication with family, friends, and colleagues. At a time when listening across differences may feel harder than ever, learn how to listen, share, and find understanding – even when you don't agree. The next session will be held at the Dudley Library at 6:00pm. No registration required.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7

• The Millbury Historical Society and the Millbury Lions will be holding a Meat and Seafood Raffle from 2-5 p.m. at the St. Charles Hotel at 126 West Main Street, Millbury. The Lions are requesting contributions of canned goods to their Food Pantry for which you will receive extra tickets!

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

• St. Patrick's Fish & Chips! Back by popular demand, St. Patrick's Church, 7 East Street, Whitinsville will be offering delicious Fish & Chips Dinners again this year during Lent on Ash Wednesday (Feb 18th) & Fridays (Feb 20- Mar 27) from 4:30pm to 7pm. Dinner options are baked fish/baked potato & coleslaw or fried fish/fries & coleslaw dinners for \$15. Vegetable Soup or Clam Chowder for \$6/bowl. In-house dining includes drink/dessert.

Place orders to go by calling 508-234-5656 after 4pm. Payment by Venmo or Cash. Thank you for supporting the Youth in Action Summer Service Trip to Bowling Green, KY.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

• Come to the first ever Active Agers health Fair for Older Adults at Plummer Place, 20 Highland Street, Whitinsville. The event is packed with fun and engaging activities, screening and wellness tips to keep you thriving. The first 20 people will receive a free reflective drawstring backpack. Free door prizes and grab and go snacks will be available as well as bone density tests and blood pressure screenings. There is a \$5 attendance fee, payable in cash at the door. Featured vendors and Organizations: Agria Draper Place, Azza Law, Alzheimer's Association, BrightStarCare, Cornerstone, Fallon Health, HearJoy Audiology, Lifeline, Salmon Home Care, SHINE and TriValley, Inc.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11

• Shamrock & Roll St. Patrick's Day Luncheon and Concert at Plummer Place. Doors open at 11:30 a.m. Event is 12:30 -2 p.m. Snow date is Thursday, March 12. Local musician and singer Russ Pimental will play a Celtic mix of songs along with some oldies and goodies, as well as cover tunes by the Everly Brothers, Johnny Cash and Church Berry. A themed corned beef sandwich luncheon is included. Sponsored by State Rep. David Muradian and the Friends of Northbridge Elders (F.I.N.E.) \$10 per ticket. Limit two per person. Northbridge residents have priority. Tickets go on sale February 9 at the Plummer Place main office, 20 Highland Street, Whitinsville.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

• The 26th Annual Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Home and Community Expo will take place from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at Northbridge High School, 427 Linwood Ave, Whitinsville. Register early and save on your booth. Save room to taste the goods at the Best of the Valley Chowderfest and vote for 2026 People's Choice. Judges will award a separate prize.

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<p>DOR FEBRUARY 21</p>	<p>2 Tickets to Paradise! FEBRUARY 28</p>	<p>A TRIBUTE TO THE BEATLES MARCH 6</p>
<p>MENTALIST JON STETSON MARCH 7</p>	<p>THE TRAVELLER MARCH 14</p>	<p>MINDSET MARCH 20</p>

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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The Windham Frogs

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

Not every tale from beyond has to deal with ghosts, UFOs, cryptic creatures and the like. Sometimes a moment in history becomes almost unbelievable. This is an account of one of those moments, a true story that took place in Windham Connecticut.

Windham is known for its historical significance in the thread industry, but one incident took place in 1754 causing much of the colonies to take delight in printing the dilemma that befell the good people of the village on a dark and murky summer night. One such printing was called "Lawyers and Bull-Frogs." Other publications took pleasure in creating their own tongue-in-cheek humorous titles to describe the following account. A recorded writing of the incident appears in a letter obtained by Dr. Stiles in the summer of 1754. Read on and let the unpredictable spirit of nature fuel your imagination with this next account.

The inhabitants of Windham

had finally laid down to rest on a hot summer evening when the silence of the night was shattered by a most unearthly disharmony of wails and screams. The hour had barely passed the midnight tolling when the townspeople were summoned from their slumber by the shrieks that filled the air above them. The French and Indian War was in full force, and the villagers at first feared the worst: an Indian attack. Many of the men from the village were already off fighting the campaign, leaving few to repel any such raid. The noise persisted with no physical beings pressing upon the township. Other members of the frightened throng surmised that judgment day had come and began hiding under their beds or running frantically in the streets.

As the terrified citizens huddled in fear, some of the screeches began to take on a more linguistic character most peculiar yet familiar to their ears. The names of Colonel Dyer and Elderkin, two prominent citizens and attorneys, echoed through the night air, sending even more

panic through the hearts of the confused multitude.

Several town militia loaded their muskets and wandered into the darkness to meet their foe. The brave souls meandered up the hill bounding the town to the east. It was there that they halted, daring not to march forward into an ambush, as the darkness had completely stunted their vision. Surely they would not wander into the blackness with no confirmation of the whereabouts of their enemy, whose cries seemed at that point to whirl around them from all directions.

The terrified citizens held fast until the dawn's rays brought abatement to the racket. The early morning light at once gave them an opportunity to see what the clamor was. Many of the villagers joined the militia that had camped out on the hill overnight, and together, they cautiously

sallied forth toward a millpond that lay about three-quarters of a mile east of the village. As they approached the pond, a most remarkable sight awaited them. Whether the discoverers of the commotion were amused, embarrassed or just outright relieved by what they beheld has never been recorded, at least not on an individual discourse. There in the dried-up pond lay (some say hundreds and other accounts say thousands) dead bullfrogs that had obviously battled all night for the remaining puddle that they needed for survival. On both sides lay the defunct combatants, whose cries of "Colonel Dyer, Colonel Dyer!" were offset by those that took a stand on the opposite side of the waterhole screaming, "Elderkin too, Elderkin too!" It was as if the frogs of Windham were blaming these two men for their plight and, thus

choosing sides, began a heated battle that persisted through the night. These cries, in the silence and absence of our modern noises and distractions, carried easily across the fields and forests and into the ears of the people of Windham.

Perhaps the frogs were not way off on their reprimands. It appears, according to record, that Colonel Dyer had drained the pond that June in order to repair the dam. Dyer, Elderkin and a man named Mr. Gray were among those who saddled up and rode toward the crest of Mullien Hill to find the source of the racket.

From that moment on, the waterhole was known as Frog Pond, and the town was written into history as the place where multitudes of frogs brought fear and embarrassment on that hot summer night so long ago.

Pianist and Composer David DeGrand to Perform at UUSGU

Pianist and composer David DeGrand will perform at the Unitarian

Universalist Society of Grafton and Upton (UUSGU) in Grafton, MA on Sunday, January 25 at 2 PM in the Sanctuary. A \$20 suggested donation to attend will support the Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, a local organization dedicated to alleviating homelessness.



David DeGrand. Courtesy photo

DeGrand will perform a concert of classical music featuring works of Frederic Chopin, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Charles Ives, Samuel Barber, and Albierto Ginastera, as well as works of his own.

"We are excited to showcase David's talents, both as a performer and composer, here in our historic meetinghouse," says Dr. Tyler Turner, music director at UUSGU. "We are lucky to have David's talents as a part of our community here at UUSGU, and we are thrilled to showcase his accomplishments through this concert."

DeGrand, a Grafton resident, is

a graduate of the Berklee College of Music, and taught at Berklee for a year after graduating. He then switched career paths and became a physician. DeGrand has served as substitute pianist at UUSGU over the last two years.

"David plays with his whole heart and soul," says Reverend Daniel Gregoire, minister at UUSGU. "He really feels the music, and then the music becomes an expression of joy. It is always a pleasure to hear him play."

The UUSGU meetinghouse is located at 3 Grafton Common and its second-floor Sanctuary is accessible via lift.

About the Unitarian Universalist Society of Grafton & Upton
The Unitarian Universalist Society of Grafton and Upton is a community of people who recognize the inherent good in all people, extend love and acceptance to everyone, embrace the worth and dignity of every individual, and foster each other's spiritual growth, no matter their beliefs.

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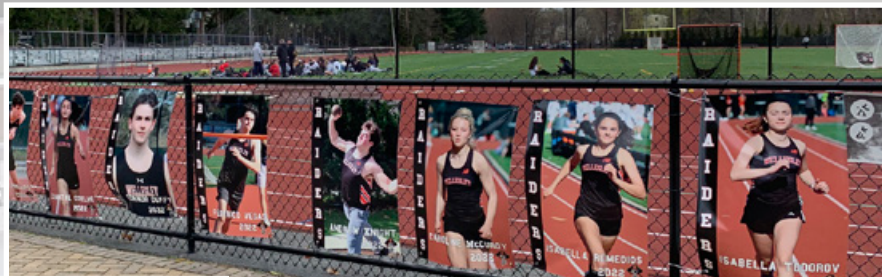
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