

localtownpages 

Natick

Vol. 11 No. 2

Free to Every Home and Business Every Month

February 1, 2026

Message of Martin Luther King Jr. Relevant in Today's World, Speaker Says

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

Natick residents gathered on Monday, Jan. 19 to celebrate the birthday and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

The national holiday falls on the third Monday of the month, to roughly coincide with King's Jan. 15 birthday. The civil rights hero was born in 1929.

Snow had filled Natick yards, fields and streets the morning and night before that Monday, but roads and lots had been cleared in time for the 10 a.m. event. The celebration was held in Natick High School's auditorium,



Natick High School's West Street Jazz Combo played "Stompin' at Savoy" at the celebration. Photo by Sean Sullivan

where attendees filled about half of its 800 seats.

The event was kicked off and interspersed with performances by local student

jazz musicians, who set a tone for a gathering that was

MLK

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Technology, Experience Help Ease Snow Removal

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

When snow falls, DPW trucks hit the road, pretreating and plowing to ensure Natick residents experience safe travels.

But planning for a snow event starts before the first flake swirls.

Months before, in fact, said William Spratt, executive director of the Department of Public Works and Facilities.

While residents are sunning themselves at the beach or by the pool, DPW workers are checking out trucks to ensure they are ready for a storm six months away. "We're planning way before," he said.

When the winter does arrive, Spratt and his team keep a careful eye to the forecast.

Natick has its own meteorology service that pinpoints Natick



Snow removal vehicles rely on driver experience and technological advances. Courtesy photo

specific weather. Computerized weather forecasts provide updated information. As weather watchers know, the closer the storm, the more accurate the forecast.

With a potential storm on the horizon, workers make sure plows

SNOW

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A Home Downsizing Estate Plan Reset



Ted Raad, Realtor
eXp Realty

REAL ESTATE INSIGHTS

Downsizing is often framed as “less house, more freedom.” It can also serve as an estate-planning checkpoint. Selling a home can convert a large, liquid asset into cash or investments, change how assets are titled, and cre-

ate a new set of records your family may rely on later. For many households, that makes a move—whether downsizing or simply selling—an opportunity to review whether legal documents, account settings, and real estate decisions still align.

In the broader real estate context, two themes frequently surface. The first is authority and continuity. Documents such as a will, a durable power of attorney, and a Massachusetts health care proxy are commonly used to clarify responsibilities and decision-making if someone becomes unable to manage affairs. Some families also use a revocable living trust as an organizational tool to simplify administration and preserve privacy, even though a revocable trust typically does not reduce taxes on its own.

The second theme is control. Many financial assets transfer by beneficiary designation, in-

cluding retirement accounts, life insurance, and certain bank or brokerage accounts. When those designations differ from a will or trust, the beneficiary form often governs. Real estate title also plays a role. How a new home is decided at closing—individually, jointly, or in a trust—can influence how easily the property transfers later, which is why these questions often arise during a sale or purchase.

Massachusetts introduces several state-specific considerations. The Massachusetts estate tax threshold is \$2 million, with a credit structure that can eliminate tax at or below that level and reduce it above. For homeowners whose net worth may change materially after a sale, it can be helpful to think through where proceeds will be held and whether sufficient liquidity will be available down the road. Separately, Massachusetts homestead protection may help shield

equity in a primary residence from certain unsecured creditor claims. Automatic protection is up to \$125,000, while filing a Declaration of Homestead can protect up to \$1,000,000.

Gifting is another area some households revisit during this transition. The federal annual gift exclusion for 2025 is \$19,000 per recipient. Direct payments to medical providers or schools for tuition may be treated differently under federal rules when handled properly. Clear documentation can help avoid confusion later.

Many families also assemble a simple information summary listing key advisors, institutions, policy numbers, where originals are stored, and how digital accounts are accessed. For a move into a condominium, this often expands to include management contacts and association documents.

Disclaimer: This is intended as general information, not tax or financial advice. Ted Raad is a Realtor with eXp Realty; he is not a tax expert nor a financial planner. Please confirm details with your CPA or financial planner. The information contained here has been obtained through sources deemed reliable but cannot be guaranteed as to its accuracy. Any information of special interest should be obtained through independent verification.

This is the third of six installments in the Downsizing Series. Next article: Downsizing Accessible Home Search: A Checklist That Feels Like Luxury

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SNOW

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are on the trucks and the salt shed is full.

When the storm is close, crews pretreat the roads for a few hours, Spratt said. But deciding when and how to take this step relies on further weather information.

Trucks are equipped with infrared thermometers to measure the road temperatures.

“Road temperatures matter when we’re plowing,” Spratt said. A few degrees can make a big difference and air temperatures do not always coincide with road conditions.

If the weather has been cold for a while, even though the air temperature may be 38 degrees, for example, the roads can be 29 or 30 degrees, meaning any moisture will freeze and pre-treating needs to begin as soon as possible.

On the other hand, if the sun has been shining all day, the road temperatures may be higher than the air conditions. In that case, “we can delay salt” application, Spratt said.

Of course, as every New Englander knows, forecasts can be wrong “I’ve pretreated and not seen one flake,” he said.

Technology helps with salting efficiently by measuring the speed of the salt truck to ensure that salt is applied consistently.

“Everybody loves the technology, it makes it easier” said

Brian Caisse, highway sanitation supervisor.

Once the snow flies, “a game time decision” is made on when to transition from salting to plowing, Spratt said. After about 1½ to 2 inches fall, “we’re losing the salt battle” and plowing generally begins, he said.

GPS technology also helps keep track of where trucks are at any time, which Caisse said allows supervisors to know where every vehicle is located at any given moment.

The department tends to keep sanding to a minimum. “Sand doesn’t melt snow,” Spratt said, but only provides traction.

In an ice storm, sand can be helpful, he said, but otherwise sand can block catch basins and have negative impacts on the roads in spring, he said.

The only time I sand is if there’s black ice,” Caisse said.

Keeping the roads safe is a task done by dedicated professionals, Spratt said, but residents can play a role.

Waiting for the plows to complete their work can minimize one of the great frustrations of a storm: Having snow plowed right back into a newly cleaned driveway.

Trucks don’t do this intentionally, but the plow tilts to move snow to the side, Spratt said. The snow often lands on banks on the side of the road, but, to the homeowners’ consternation, the white stuff can also land in driveways.

Caisse advises keeping two or three feet at the bottom of the



GPS in plows helps the effort go more efficiently. *Courtesy photo*

driveway unshoveled until the plows complete their work.

And do shovel sidewalks, Spratt urged. That keeps walk areas clear and avoids the risk of people walking in the road and being injured.

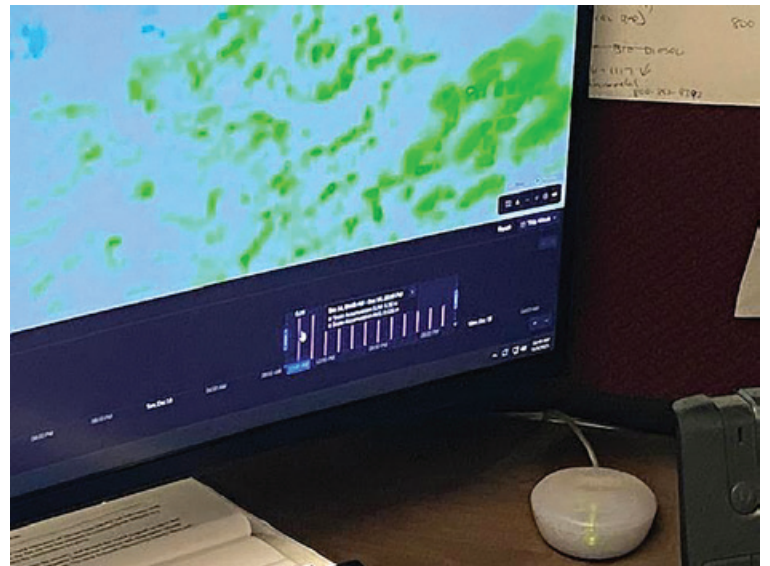
“It certainly would be helpful if more people would shovel their sidewalks,” Spratt said.

Spratt also urges another approach, one that can be challenging in our busy lives.

“Be patient,” he said,

The roads will be cleared in time.

And of course spring will eventually arrive.



Updated weather forecasts help with snow removal planning. *Courtesy photo*

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Volunteers Make Clean Sweep of Senior Yards

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

With rakes and full hearts, volunteers helped clean leaves from the yards of Natick seniors in November.

The program, run through the Natick Community Services Department, drew groups and individuals willing to lend a hand.

Volunteers included representatives of the Achieve Program, Avitzur Family, Andres Chan, Richard Charles, Jayden Chow, Boy Scout Troop 1775, Cub Scout Pack 7, Cub Scouts Pack 40, Girl Scout Troop 70621, H & H Landscaping, Hnatyshyn Family, Mitsubishi Electric, Natick Travel Basketball-multiple teams, New Life Ministry-Hopkinton, Felipe Quintero and representatives of the Rivers School.

One of the Natick Travel basketball teams “went above and beyond” by raking leaves



Mitsubishi Electric staff supported Natick seniors. *Courtesy photo*



Members of the Achieve program pitched in. *Courtesy photo*



Travel basketball teams went above and beyond. *Courtesy photo*



Cub Scout pack 40 members proved they are good scouts. *Courtesy photo*

two weeks after the scheduled date, which was rained out, said Grace O’Donnell, program manager for volunteer services of the Natick Community Ser-

vices Department. And because the town trucks had completed leaf bag pick-ups by the time they could rescheduled, team members brought the

leaves to the dump themselves. “The homeowner was so grateful that they honored their commitment to him,” O’Donnell said.

Gratitude was a common theme. “We’re grateful to all the volunteers who care about our seniors to help in this way,” she said.

localtownpages

Published Monthly
Mailed FREE to the
Community of Natick
Circulation: 16,442
households & businesses

Publisher

Jennifer Schofield

Editorial

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Send Editorial to:

editor@naticktownnews.com

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9 Industrial Road, Suite 107
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Model Twice, Execute Once: Roth Conversion Analysis Done Right



Glenn Brown, CFP

One of the most underutilized and often misunderstood strategies in retirement and tax planning is the Roth IRA, particularly Roth conversions. Evolving tax laws, funding options, and legacy planning have made understanding how and when to use this strategy more important than ever.

A Roth IRA provides tax-free growth and distributions with no lifetime RMDs, unlike Tradi-

tional IRAs that require taxable withdrawals regardless of need. Despite these benefits, many high earners say, “I make too much money to do a Roth.” While this may limit direct contributions, especially outside workplace retirement plans, it does not eliminate the ability to build Roth assets through other planning strategies.

Contribution vs. Conversion

A Roth conversion moves assets from a Traditional IRA into a Roth IRA, triggering income tax on pre-tax contributions and earnings in the year of conversion. Once converted, those assets grow and can be distributed tax-free, providing long-term flexibility. This is where Roth conversions become a form of tax-rate arbitrage: paying taxes today at known rates to avoid higher or uncertain taxes in retirement.

Understanding the Pro-Rata Rule

When converting, the IRS looks at all Traditional, SEP and

SIMPLE IRAs combined to determine the taxable portion. You cannot cherry-pick only after-tax contributions; the taxable amount is proportional to the ratio of pre-tax to after-tax funds across all balances. Ignoring this rule can lead to unexpected tax consequences.

Model Twice, Execute Once

Effective Roth conversions are rarely last-minute decisions. Early in the year, potential conversions should be modeled to estimate taxable income, marginal brackets, and downstream effects such as Medicare premiums or state taxes. Establishing guardrails early provides a framework for decision-making.

Execution should wait until later in the year, after income, bonuses, capital gains, and deductions are clearer. Re-running the model allows adjustment of conversion amount, or skipping a year, to reduce the risk of over-paying taxes.

Use Market Downturns to Your Advantage

Market declines can improve the tax efficiency of Roth conversions. If stocks or ETFs fall significantly, converting at lower values reduces the taxable amount while allowing future growth to occur tax-free. If this situation doesn't occur, conversions must still be completed by December 31. Spreading conversions over multiple years can help manage marginal tax rates and plan for cash flow to pay taxes with non-retirement assets.

Today's Tax Rates Will Change

It's dangerous to assume federal or state taxes will remain fixed. Even “permanent” laws can change with new Congressional majorities or administrations. Rising deficits, shifting fiscal priorities, and evolving state policies make future tax rates, deductions, and exemptions uncertain. Roth conversions create income insulated from these changes, offering greater tax diversification, flexibility and certainty in retirement planning.

Legacy Benefits Always Overlooked

Many analyses of Roth conversions stop at the death of the second spouse, overlooking benefits for children and grandchildren. Inherited Roth IRA distributions are tax-free, unlike inherited Traditional IRAs, where withdrawals are taxed at the beneficiary's income rate.

If the original owner was taking RMDs from a Traditional IRA, those taxable withdrawals continue under the SECURE Act's 10-year rule. With an inherited Roth, heirs face the same 10-year rule but no annual RMDs, allowing assets to compound tax-free and be withdrawn at the end of the period without generating taxable income or increasing the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of mid-career beneficiaries.

Take Ownership

By modeling conversions early, executing with updated knowl-

ROTH

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MLK

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by turns celebratory and somber. Natick High School's West Street Jazz Combo played "Stompin' at Savoy," and the Walnut Hill School for the Arts brought their jazz ensemble to perform "We Shall Overcome," and "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free."

Later, trombonist Amara St. Cyere accompanied by Joshua Lynch on piano, performed "After a Dream."

Throughout all, the clarity of brass instruments filled the hall.

"We're reminded that his words were never meant to stay on the page," said Jackie Mendonsa from the podium. She serves as director of human resources for Natick public schools and introduced readings of original poetry composed by Natick middle school students.

"Steps to Justice" was written and read by Wilson Middle School's Mary Gianni. Hili Barkaee and Illia Morozli, both of Kennedy Middle School, read theirs as well. They presented "Begins With a Dream" and

"They Tell Me" respectively.

An ensemble of Natick students also performed a reading of "The ABCs of Black History," an illustrated poetry book authored by Rio Cortez and drawn by artist Lauren Semmer.

The event's keynote speaker was Audi Lynch, who is director of the long-running METCO program for Natick Public Schools. Begun in the late 1960s, the program brings Boston-area students to study in the Natick school system. Lynch also serves as a pastor in Boston.

"We're here to respond to the dream that Martin Luther King Jr. had," said Lynch. "We're not here this morning to sanitize his dream."

Lynch quoted King: "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom."

Lynch hinted at the United States' current annual defense spending, which neared a trillion dollars last year, as evidence of King's prophetic vision.

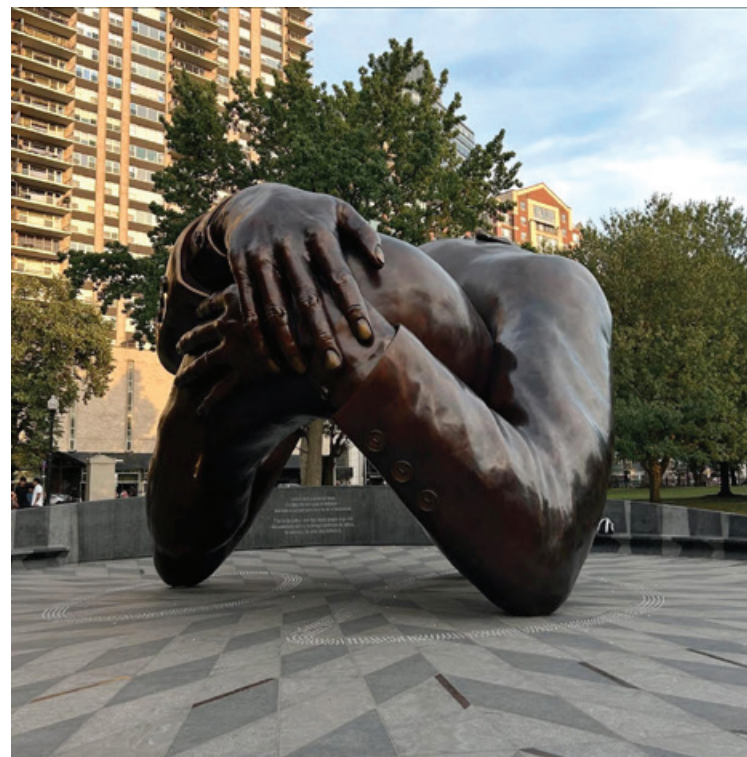
"I wonder what he would say today, if he were alive," Lynch

said. "It was the prognosis of a country that, for all its gifts and advantages, had made itself unhealthy by not living well. He saw us as a nation suffering the symptoms of a long march of investment in military misadventures that continue even to this day. It's a country, as King saw it, that was at the same time walking away from social compacts and programs that formed the New Deal ethos."

King championed the rights of people of color, but his was also a colorblind critique of a culture that neglected to care for the needs and wellbeing of all its citizens. It's an economic populism that's often excised out of King's legacy, she said.

"Lifting the burdens of the least of us," said Lynch on that Monday last month. "Let us build something that looks like love."

Sounding much the pastor from the pulpit before his ecumenical audience, Lynch exhorted that we must learn from the lessons of Reverend King, learn from history. That we must not continue to be, as Gore Vidal termed it, the "United States of Amnesia."



Martin Luther King Jr. is memorialized in a statue in Boston. Photo by Sean Sullivan

To this end, Lynch said we must be answerable to and responsible for, one another. And he seemed to imply as well, liable to the rule of law.

"We have to be the United States of Accountability," said Lynch.

The "moral arc" of history bends toward justice, Dr. King famously declared. But Lynch cautioned that that wasn't a property of physics, but rather a claim about people.

"Only if we're the ones doing the bending," Lynch noted.



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ROTH

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edge, and taking advantage of market dips, you can reduce future tax uncertainty and preserve flexibility. Consult your Certified Financial Planner to see how Roth IRAs and Roth conversions fit into your holistic financial plan.

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provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual.

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

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'Slow Down, Relax and be Less Tense,' Buddhist Monk Advises

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

"They're making an intention to craft a life of more simplicity."

That's the cornerstone ethic, said Gen Khedrub, behind becoming a Buddhist monk.

He's been leading a series of group meditations in Natick over the past few weeks, the last of which will fall on Feb. 3.

The sessions are sponsored by Natick's Recreation and Parks Department.

Being ordained as a monk, as Khedrub has, entails taking and adhering to a set of vows. One is renunciation, a pledge to give up possessions and worldly attachments.

That alone would qualify as a life of simplicity for many people in most Western cultures.

Among those vows also are generosity, truthfulness, non-violence and celibacy.

But attendees of a meditation session need not undertake such commitments. All that's required is a willingness to be open and pay attention for a little while.

The "Gen" in Buddhist practice is used in a similar way as

the title "Rabbi" is in Judaism or "Father" in Christianity. Gen is translated as "teacher," and is placed before the last name of the ordained.

Even to those who haven't formally meditated for a minute in their lives, the process would likely seem familiar. It starts with participants finding a comfortable posture, and then usually closing their eyes.

Meditators are then challenged to observe thoughts, feelings and emotions as they arise and dissipate. Participants may marvel at the antics of the "monkey mind," a term used in the Buddhist tradition to describe the inherent chaotic character of human consciousness.

The mind in monkey mode swings and careens at random from branch to branch (thought to thought), tree to tree (emotion to emotion). It grasps at objects, guarding some jealously while carelessly flinging others into the void. Sounds like a real rascal, no?

Not so fast.

An essential part of the pro-

cess is observation without judgement. The judging mind, after all, is simply the mischievous monkey in one of its many moods. It sits atop a high branch, shaking its head and hooting in disapproval of the chaos it just caused. Sound familiar?

And while meditation can't evict the monkey from our minds, it can change our relationship to it. We may learn to observe it instead, cultivating a posture of curiosity and compassion.

This shift in perspective can result in us being less reactive, less reflexive, to the world outside of the confines of our consciousness.

In addition to enjoying more equanimity, this increased openness allows us "to be of more benefit to other people," said Khedrub. "To simply help us slow down, relax and be less tense."

The Buddhist practice explores the concepts of gratitude, mortality and compassion, "learning how to embody those more deeply."

And while the vows and exis-



Buddhist monk Gen Khedrub has led a meditation program to encourage participants to consider a more simple life. *Courtesy photo*

tence of a monk entail hours of meditation each week (Khedrub does so twice daily), he emphasizes the value of quality over quantity.

"Sometimes, we can be a little competitive with ourselves," he said, imagining that mindfulness accrues with the minutes we invest. But Khedrub says it's best to avoid feeling stuffed at the conclusion.

Like a sensible meal, he said,

a good meditation session is one that doesn't leave practitioners overwhelmed and spent at the end.

"As opposed to leaving ourselves a little hungry."

A few ten or twenty-minute sessions per week, for example, will suffice.

"Leaving with a good feeling helps us build a positive habit," he said. "Trying to keep the attitude of always being a student."

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All Together Preschool Storytime, Mondays and Tuesdays at 10 a.m. Join in for stories and songs.

Lapsit Storytime, Wednesdays at 10 a.m. Stories, bounces, and songs for newborns through 24 months and their grownups

Jammin with You, Friday, Feb. 6 at 10:30 a.m. at the library and Friday, Feb. 20 at 10:30 a.m. at the Common Street Spiritual Center. Be prepared to laugh, dance, sing, and jam through 30 minutes of non-stop family fun. Registration is required due to space limitations.

ALL AGES PROGRAMS

Featured Art Exhibit: The library will host a variety of works created by students at the Walnut Hill School for the Arts through March 18.

ADULT PROGRAMS

Virtual: An Evening for People who Love Animals, Wednesday, Feb. 4 at 7 p.m. on Zoom. In this virtual program, hear from Melanie Kaplan, author of "Lab Dog: A Beagle and His Human Investigate the Surprising World of

Animal Research," as well as E.B. Bartels, author of "Good Grief: On Loving Pets, Here and Hereafter."

Virtual: "The Art Spy: The Extraordinary Untold Tale of WWII Resistance Hero Rose Valland," Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 7 p.m. on Zoom. Listen in as award-winning journalist and author Michelle Young discusses her new book. A riveting and stylish saga set in Paris during World War II, "The Art Spy" uncovers the true story of how an unlikely heroine infiltrated the Nazi leadership to save the world's most treasured masterpieces

Virtual: Burglary at the Louvre, How Can Writer Top This?, Wednesday, Feb. 25 at 7 p.m. on Zoom. The world is fascinated by the recent jewel robbery at the Louvre, and so are authors Connie Berry, Lane Stone, Nina Wachsmann, and M.A. Monnin. In this program, the Curators of Crime will examine the public's fascination with the recent burglary of Napoleonic jewels at the Louvre and discuss how they have used the same elements in their books. They cover the crime itself, the police investigation, the psychology and motives that prompt such a bold theft, and how the intrinsic and historical value of the jewels make them targets and add to the public's fear of their loss.

ADULT BOOK AND FILM CLUBS

Registration is required for all clubs. Visit baconfreelibrary.org/clubs-programs for more information.

Mystery Book Club, Thursday, Feb. 5 at 1 p.m. on Zoom: "King of Ashes" by S.A. Cosby.

History Book Club, Thursday, Feb. 12 at 11 a.m. on Zoom. "Night Flyer: Harriet Tubman and the Faith Dreams of a Free People" by Tiya Miles.

Environmental Book Club, Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 7 p.m. Zoom: "The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World" by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

Tuesday Book Club, Tuesday, Feb. 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the library, "The Art Thief" by Michael Finkel.

Nonfiction Book Club, Saturday, Feb. 28 at 10 a.m. on Zoom: "Driving Mr. Albert: A Trip across America with Einstein's Brain" by Michael Paterniti.

Cinephile Mondays, Monday, Feb. 23 at 4 p.m. on Zoom. Watch and discuss films. Check the website for the film of the month and to register.

The library is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with extended hours on Tuesday until 7 p.m. and Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Closed for the holiday



Bacon Free Library. Theresa Knapp photo

Monday, Feb. 16.

For up-to-date information and registration, visit baconfreelibrary.org. The historic

nature of the building limits accessibility. Programs are offered in an accessible location at the Morse Institute Library.

Detective Helps Fraud Victim Retrieve \$92K

Natick Police Detective Greg Lanoue was honored by the department for his hard work, diligence, and professionalism during a recent fraud investigation.

Through persistence and attention to detail, Lanoue worked closely with financial institutions and the District Attorney's Office to help recover more than \$92,000 that had been stolen and return it to the victim.

The department reported that they are proud of Lanoue's dedication and commitment to serving the community and thanked him for his "outstanding" work.

For tips on how to avoid scams and fraud, visit mass.gov/info-details/avoiding-scams-and-frauds.



Natick Police Detective Greg Lanoue was honored for his fraud investigation. Courtesy photo

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New Tax Laws for 2026 That You Should Know



Gary Shilman, Financial Advisor

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Provided by Edward Jones

The new year brings more than resolutions and fresh starts; it also ushers in several tax changes that could affect your wallet. Whether you're saving for retirement, funding your child's education or supporting your favorite charity, here are a few things you need to know about the tax landscape in 2026.

More room to save for retirement and healthcare. There's good news for savers: Contribution limits for retirement accounts are going up. If you're under 50, you can now contribute up to \$7,500 to an IRA, which is up from \$7,000 in 2025. Those 50 and older can contribute an additional \$1,100, for a total of \$8,600.

The limits for 401(k), 403(b) and governmental 457(b) plans are also increasing, with workers younger than 50 able to defer up to \$24,500. Visit IRS.gov and search "401k limit increases" for an article outlining the details.

Health savings account limits are rising too. In 2026, individual coverage increased to \$4,400 and family coverage to \$8,750. If you are age 55 or older and are not enrolled in Medicare, you can contribute an additional \$1,000 as a catch-up contribution.

The start of the year is an ideal time to review your contributions and consider increasing

them, even by small amounts which can add up over time.

A catch-up rule for high earners. If you're 50 or older and earned more than \$150,000 last year, there's a new wrinkle in your retirement planning. You can still make catch-up contributions to your workplace retirement plan, but they must now be Roth contributions rather than traditional pre-tax contributions. This includes 401(k), 403(b) and 457(b) plans.

While you won't get an immediate tax break, Roth contributions offer tax-free income in retirement and can provide a tax-free legacy for your heirs.

Expanded benefits for 529 education plans. Families using 529 plans to cover K-12 expenses will see the annual federal distribution limit double from \$10,000 to \$20,000 per student. The definition of qualifying expenses has also expanded to include curriculum, books, certain tutoring expenses and testing fees.

This change provides more flexibility for families with overfunded plans and increases options for managing education costs across multiple children or beneficiaries.

New charitable giving provisions. The rules around charitable deductions are shifting in two directions. Taxpayers who take the standard deduction can now deduct up to \$1,000 in cash donations (\$2,000 for joint filers) to qualified organizations.

However, those who itemize deductions face a new threshold: only charitable contributions exceeding 0.5% of adjusted gross income are now deductible. Donors may want to consider bunching strategies or using donor-advised funds to maximize their tax benefits.

Getting help. Navigating these tax changes can be challenging, but you don't have to go it alone. A qualified financial advisor and tax professional can help you understand how these

and other changes affect your specific situation. Together, you can develop strategies to make the most of new opportunities while minimizing your tax burden.

Contact Gary Shilman to discuss your financial needs, wants, and wishes.

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Clear the Clutter and Start Fresh This Winter!

Winter's quieter months invite us to slow down, spend more time indoors, and finally tackle the clutter left behind by a busy holiday season — with help from Affordable Junk Removal. It is a natural time to give your home some extra attention by clearing out unused items and reclaiming everyday spaces. "Life is hectic, we are all so busy in our daily lives that we don't notice how quickly we are being overrun with junk," said Jason Schadler, who founded the business in this area 20 years ago. "It's nice to park your car in the garage during the cold months, but maybe you need to make room there first, and we can help with that."

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

Business spotlight

"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 because 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.

For more information, visit AffordableJunkRemoval.com. For an estimate or appointment, call or text 774-287-1133.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Hockey Team Scores Big Off the Ice With Volunteer Efforts

Members of the Natick High School boys and girls varsity hockey teams get credit for a big assist to the Natick Service Council.

Team members recently volunteered to help the council.

They rolled up their sleeves to help organize donations in Harriet's Closet and in the council's food pantry, which council supporters say made a big difference for neighbors in need.



Teamwork made the day victorious. Courtesy photo



Hockey players help stock the pantry. Courtesy photo

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Once again, the Red Hawks victory for their Natick neighbors. flew high as they recorded a big

Ice Can be Nice – But Also Dangerous

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

An icy pond can be a temptation too appealing for skaters, ice fishing fans and other outdoor enthusiasts to pass up.

But use caution.

Ice conditions can be difficult to determine, experts warn. Appearance alone can be deceiving other factors matter, including water depth, the size of the water body, water currents, snow cover and the age of the ice.

Members of the Natick Fire Department recently practiced ice rescue training and shared a reminder that no patch of ice is 100 percent safe.

Although the department does not offer recommendations about ice safety, here are some tips from Mass Wildlife,

New ice is stronger than old ice. Four inches of clear, newly formed ice may support one person on foot, while a foot or more of old, partially thawed ice may not.

Ice doesn't freeze uniformly. Continue to check ice conditions frequently as you venture out onto the ice.

Ice formed over flowing water and currents is often more dangerous. Avoid traveling onto ice-bound rivers and streams, as the currents make ice thickness unpredictable. Many lakes and ponds may contain spring holes and other areas of currents that can create deceptively dangerous thin spots.

When planning a trip on the ice, tell someone your plans, including where you are going and when you expect to return.

Come prepared. Carry a cell



Members of the Natick Fire Department practice ice rescue skills. Courtesy photo



Rescuers practice making their way on the ice. Courtesy photo

phone. Always carry ice picks and rope with you on the ice. In case of an emergency, drive the nails into the ice and pull yourself to safety while kicking.

Wear a life jacket. In case of a fall, a life jacket will keep you at the surface and can provide insulation against the effects of cold water.

IF YOU FALL IN:

Don't panic: Call for help if there are people nearby.

Don't remove winter clothing: Air trapped in your clothes can provide warmth and help you float.

Turn the direction you came from: Ice you previously walked on should be the safest.

Place your hands and arms on an unbroken surface and kick your legs: If you have ice picks or a pair of nails, use them to pull yourself up onto the ice while kicking.

Lie flat and roll away: Once your torso is on firm ice, roll toward thicker ice to distribute

your weight.

Find shelter and get warm:

Change out of wet clothing and find warm, dry coverings. If you are in a remote area, get to or start a campfire. Otherwise, get to a car or house. Seek medical advice from your physician on medical attention.

IF SOMEONE ELSE FALLS IN:

Remember the phrase "Preach-Reach-Throw-Go."

Preach: Call 911 if you can. Shout to the victim to reassure them help is on the way.

Reach: If you can safely reach them from shore, extend an object like a rope, jumper cables, tree branch, or ladder to them.

Throw: Toss one end of a rope or something that will float to the victim.

Go: If the situation is too dangerous for you to perform a rescue, call 911 or go to find help.

Recommended Minimum Ice Thickness
(on new "clear/blue" ice on lakes or ponds)

Under 2" STAY OFF!	4 inches Ice Fishing	5 inches Snowmobile or ATV	8-12 inches Car or Small Pickup	12-15 inches Medium Truck
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No ice is without risk; ice should always be considered potentially dangerous.
*New ice is stronger than old ice.
** "White ice" or snow ice is approximately half as strong as new, clear ice. Double the above thickness guidelines when traveling on white ice.

MA Environmental Police (Facebook)

Ice thickness can be varied and unpredictable. Courtesy image

Untrained rescuers can become victims themselves.

IF A PET FALLS IN:
Do not attempt to rescue the pet, go find help. Pet own-

ers can easily become victims themselves when trying to assist their pets.

Remember to **always keep pets leashed** while walking on or near ice.

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Free Tax Help, Valentine's Celebration Among Senior Events in February

Here is a sampling of the varied activities scheduled in February at the Natick Senior Center.

Mediterranean Diet Made Easy, Tuesday Feb. 3, 1 p.m., \$12.

Proven to help prevent cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, the Mediterranean Diet is the foundation of healthy eating and can taste great. Learn how to follow the diet, enjoy healthy meals, and try some recipes. Perfect for anyone looking to eat well and savor every bite, come and sample it.

Love Notes: Valentine's Day celebration, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 1 p.m.

Join pianist David Sparr for a special Valentine's Day concert celebrating classic love songs from the golden era of American popular music. Through heartfelt performances and engaging commentary, David brings to life the romantic ballads and timeless standards that defined the era's sound. He'll also share

stories from the musical world of that time, offering an intimate glimpse into the culture behind the music.

Sharp Mind, Strong Heart: Practical Strategies for Lifelong Health, Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 11 a.m.

This 90-minute workshop is based on science backed protocols that have prevented or reversed symptoms of cognitive decline. The focus is on the proven lifestyle and dietary changes that provide dual benefit. The workshop will cover sharp mind strategies to prevent brain fog, improve memory and protect against dementia and strong heart protocols that are the best defense against heart attack and stroke.

Every Bite Counts: Why Safe Swallowing is Important, Tuesday, Feb. 10 at 11 a.m.

This is an informative session on the importance of safe swallowing and how it impacts over-

all health and well-being. Learn from a licensed speech pathologist about how speech therapy supports swallow function, why proper nutrition matters, and the signs that it may be time to seek help for swallowing difficulties. This helpful, engaging talk offers practical tips to stay safe, nourished and confident at mealtimes. Presented in partnership with Mary Ann Morse Home Care.

The Memory Café, Feb. 19, 11:30 a.m.

The Meaningful Connections Memory Café is a welcoming social gathering designed specifically for people living with dementia and their care partners. The focus is on connecting with others who understand these experiences, enjoyment and reducing isolation. This month's entertainment is the Retro Polatin Duo who will perform songs by artists of the rock & roll era. A light lunch will follow the performance. Call Katie to learn more or to register by Friday, Feb. 13.



Natick Community Senior Center. Theresa Knapp photo

AARP Tax Preparers Feb. 9 through April 6.

For anyone who needs help preparing their taxes, IRS trained and certified AARP tax volunteers will be available by appointment only to prepare the 2025 Federal and State Income Tax returns. There is no cost for this service. The program is designed to assist all people of low to middle income with special attention given to those 60 and older. Prior to the appointment, a list will be provided of the documentation needed to bring to the appointment. Call to schedule an appointment at 508-647-6540.

Managing Life Transitions, Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2 p.m., \$5.

This interactive workshop helps participants to learn to recognize, process and regulate strong emotions that can be a part of experiencing changes in our life. Perfect for anyone facing career transitions, relocations, life changes or simply wanting to build emotional resilience.

The Natick Senior Center is located at 117 East Central Street. For more information or to register for programs, call 508-647-6540.

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With Dignity and Respect, Natick Works to be Dementia-Friendly Community

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

Treating people with dignity. Taking time to really listen. Showing respect.

Those are a few of the things people can do to interact in a dignified manner with people diagnosed with dementia.

And that message is one that a newly formed action team hopes to share with the town as Natick works to become a dementia-friendly community.

By earning this designation, Natick would become one of a growing number of cities and towns that are committed to providing a safe and respectful environment for people with dementia.

The goals of dementia-friendly communities include increasing awareness of people living with dementia and understanding of brain health and risk reduction; working with public, private and not-for-profit sectors to better serve people with dementia and their caregivers and creating a welcoming social and cultural environment and an improved physical environment in public places, according to Dementia Friendly America.

Training in Natick will begin with team members and then expand to town employees and members of the business com-

munity. The information can be particularly relevant to members of the police and fire departments and staff members at the library, who frequently interact with people diagnosed with dementia.

The number of people diagnosed with dementia is growing, said Debra Budd, assistant director of services and outreach for the Natick Council on Aging and Human Services.

Awareness of the needs of a person with dementia can help people can better interact with them. Patience is key, said Katie Carew, outreach coordinator for the Natick Council on Aging and Human Services.

Dementia patients may “take a little longer to answer things,” she said. It can take 20 seconds for a response, for example, which Budd acknowledged “can feel like a lifetime” in a busy world.

But the patience allows a person with dementia to feel acknowledged, she said. At times, she said, people can see a dementia patient and a caregiver and direct their conversation strictly to the caregiver.

This is where “understanding how to communicate” matters, Carew said. “A person with dementia is still a person who deserves to be respected.”

The process of securing the designation in Natick is just beginning, but community input will be crucial as the team does its work. “As time goes on, if business and community members want to share their thoughts and ideas, we will want to hear it,” she said. “The more input, the better. We don’t want to do this in a vacuum.”

The Council on Aging already sponsors a memory café to provide support and outreach to people with Alzheimer’s/dementia and their caregivers.

The café meets the third Thursday of every month from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The café, which is open to people with Alzheimer’s/dementia, provides lunch, entertainment, and, perhaps most importantly, “a safe place” for people to interact.

The music can be especially impactful, Budd said. “Music seems to be what they really enjoy,” she said.

“We may not get that verbal feedback” from dementia patients, Carew said. “But seeing their faces light up as they dance in their chairs is really moving to see.”

Caregivers can also benefit from the café, she said, by having “social interaction relationships with others going through



Debra Budd, assistant director of services and outreach for the Natick Council on Aging and Human Services, left, and Katie Carew, outreach coordinator for the Natick Council on Aging and Human Services. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles

similar situations,” Budd said. “We’ve seen social interaction increase tremendously.”

The café and the dementia friendly designation have a common denominator.

The ultimate goal, Budd said, is to allow people with dementia to “feel like they’re a part of the community.”

Even with the challenges of dementia, with support and understanding, “people can live a full life.”

To register for memory café, call 508-647-6540, ext. 1908. Anyone in need of support can call the information referral line at 508-647-6519. To learn more about Dementia Friendly Communities, visit dfamerica.org

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Something for all Ages in February at Morse Institute Library

Check out some of the scheduled events for a busy February at Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central St.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Lapsit Storytime, - Monday Feb. 2, Feb. 9, Feb. 23, 10 - 10:30 a.m. Stories, bounces, songs, and bubbles for babies newborn to 24 months and their grownups. Gather in the Story Craft Room in the Children's Department on the lower level. No registration required.

Elementary Explorations: "Hamburger" Sweet Treats, Thursday, Feb. 5, 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. An afternoon of in-person crafting, creating "hamburger" sweet treats. This program is for children in grades K-3. Registration is required.

Hugh Hanley's Circle of Songs, Friday, Feb. 6, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. Join Hugh Hanley as he brings this musical adventure each month for families with children ages 2-7. No registration is required at this drop in event.

Lunar New Year Family Event, Saturday, Feb. 7, 10 - 11:30 a.m. This family event celebrates Chinese Lunar New Year with crafts,

activities, and lots of time for the community. This program is geared for children preschool through elementary accompanied by grownups. No registration is required.

Project ABC, Friday, Feb. 6, Feb. 13, Feb. 20, Feb. 27, 10 - 11 a.m. Project ABC's playgroup in collaboration with the library offers a variety of activities for children (infant to age 6) and their families. Explore a new theme each week based on a favorite book. There will be STEAM, ELA, and SEL activities, and a circle time with songs and stories. Play, learn, and grow together. No registration required.

Tween Explorations: Sock Donuts, Thursday, Feb. 12, 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. An afternoon of in-person crafting, creating sock donuts. This program is for children in grades 3 to 5. Registration is required.

Open Art: Love Bugs! Saturday, Feb. 14, 10 - 11:30 a.m. Drop into the children's department and make love bugs. No registration required. Geared for kids from preschool through early elementary.

Music with Fran Friedman! Thursday, Feb. 19, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. Join us for a morning of music and fun with Fran Friedman. This program is geared towards families with children ages 2-7, but all are welcome. No registration is required.

Pajama Time Stories, Wednesday Feb. 4, 11, 18 and 25, 6:30 - 7:15 p.m. Join Miss Susan for a few songs and lots of stories in the Children's Library. No registration required.

Elementary Explorations: LEGO Erupting Volcano, Thursday, Feb. 26, 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. An afternoon of in-person crafting, making LEGO erupting volcanoes! This program is for children in grades K-3. Registration is required.

Game On! Saturday, Feb. 28, 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. A day of board games in the children's department. Families with children of any age are welcome to stop by.

ALL AGES PROGRAMS

Bookmobile: Farmers Market - Saturday, Feb. 7, 21, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Bring a library card to check out books, audiobooks,

bestseller speed reads, and DVDs for all ages. At Common Street Spiritual Center, 13 Common Street, Natick.

Art for All Club: Cartoon Characters in Color Pencil, Sunday, Feb. 8, 2 - 3 p.m. Join Walnut Hill School for the Arts students to learn various art techniques. Teens and adults with all levels of experience are welcome. Registration required.

Art for All Club: Intro to Traditional Chinese Painting, Saturday, Feb. 14, 2 - 3:30 p.m. Join Walnut Hill School for the Arts students to learn various art techniques. Teens and adults with all levels of experience are welcome. Registration required.

Meet the Artist Talk: Samela St. Pierre, Saturday, Feb. 21, 2:30 - 3:30 p.m. Join the artist to learn more about her work and art exhibit "Tarot of the Inca." Homemade Peruvian food, music, and a Q&A session to follow. No registration required.

TEEN PROGRAMS

Teen Take & Make: Paracord Keychain, Monday, Feb. 2, 2 - 9 p.m. For tweens and teens ages

11-18, available in the Teen Room until the kits run out.

Beading Workshop with ZMakesBeads, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 6 - 8 p.m. A creative and meditative beading workshop! Zangar Freeman of ZMakesBeads will be here to lead this workshop using semi-precious stones and other natural jewelry materials. Learn the basics of beading and the difference between semi-precious and precious stones while honoring the rich heritage of African cultures and diverse global traditions of beadwork. All materials provided and teens will get to keep the jewelry they make. Teens and tweens ages 11-18, registration required.

Teen Drop-In: Mini 3D Wooden Sculptures, Saturday, Feb. 7, 2:30 - 4 p.m. Teens and tweens ages 11-18 can stop by the Teen Room between 2:30 and 4 p.m. to put together a mini 3D wooden puzzle. No registration is needed but puzzles will be available until they run out.

MORSE

continued on page 15



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Residents Help Firefighters Fill the Boot



Firefighters reached out to help the MDA. Courtesy photo

Natick Fire Department members were out and about recently asking residents to "fill the boot."

Money raised through this effort benefits the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

"It was a great turnout," fire representatives reported. "Thank you to all who contributed and helped support an amazing charity."



All smiles at the event. Courtesy photo

MORSE

continued from page 14

Teen MakerLab To Go: Table Tennis Robot, Monday, Feb. 9, all day. February break is right around the corner, the perfect excuse to practice maker and engineering skills, and then your tennis serve. This kit is open to all tweens and teens ages 11-18, but designed by Kiwi Co for those 14 and older so some tweens may need some assistance. For ages 11-18, registration required.

Teens & Tweens: Lunar New Year Double Luck Lantern Magnets, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 3:30 - 4:30 p.m. Make double luck magnets with Perler Beads in honor of Lunar New Year. For tweens and teens ages 11-18, registration is required.

Teen Drop-In: Journal Decorating, Saturday, Feb. 28, 2:30 - 4 p.m. Stop by the Teen Room to decorate your own journal. Journals, washi tape, stickers, gel pens and other items will be available. No registration is needed but supplies are limited. For tweens and teens ages 11-18, no registration needed.

ADULT PROGRAMS

Bead Therapy Workshop, Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2:30 - 4:30 p.m. Bead therapy is an expressive arts workshop that teaches participants the basics of beaded jewelry making and the difference between semi-precious stones and precious stones. The

materials used are semi-precious stones and other natural jewelry materials. Each participant will keep all the pieces they make. This session is for adults. Space is limited and registration is required.

Winter Sowing with Native Plants Workshop, Thursday, Feb. 5, 7 - 8 p.m. Learn about winter sowing and native plants and then try it by making up to five winter-sown milk jugs. Winter sowing makes adding native plants to the landscape much more accessible to anyone with a patch of yard or apartment patio receiving at least hours of sunlight. This program is for adults and registration is required.

Crochet Penguin, Wednesday, Feb. 11, 3 - 4:30 p.m. Start the crochet journey with this cute penguin project. This class is geared towards complete beginners. Use a crochet kit and learn some of the skills needed to work on the penguin. Each kit comes with access to instructional videos. The class will focus on holding the yarn, and crochet hook, and learning the single crochet stitch. This class is for adults and registration is required.

10 Steps to Researching the History of Your House in Natick, Tuesday, Feb. 17, 7 - 8:15 p.m. Learn how to uncover the past of any home, whether it's 20 years old or 200. House historian Marian Pierre-Louis will introduce where to find the deeds to a house, how to chain a deed, and locate other sources

of information such as the US Federal Census records, maps and tax records. And you'll learn how to find the stories that bring the history of a house alive. Come learn 10 steps to get you started on house history research. This talk is appropriate for both beginners and those who have research experience. Registration is suggested, but not required.

Bollywood Dance Workout, Saturday, Feb. 21, 2 - 3 p.m. Join Purnima for BollyX – Bollywood Dance Workout. Wear workout clothes and bring water. Registration required.

In Concert: Pianist Liana Paniyeva, Monday, Feb. 23, 7 - 8 p.m. Award-winning pianist Liana Paniyeva will present a solo recital featuring masterworks of the Romantic repertoire. The program includes Schumann's Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Brahms's Fantasies, Op. 116, Amy Beach: 4 Sketches, Op. 15, and Clara Schumann: Scherzo, Op. 14, No. 2 in C minor. This richly varied program offers deep emotional contrasts from Schumann's passionate intensity to Brahms's introspective beauty. Registration is suggested, but not required.

Peaceful Poses, Thursday, Feb. 26, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. Unwind and relax with Beginner Breathwork, Yoga, and Meditation. Lipi is a yoga, breathwork and meditation faculty member with the Art of Living foundation. Students need to bring a yoga mat and water. Registration is required.

Chat & Chew Book Club, Friday, Feb. 27, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Bring a lunch or snack and discuss books you've read recently. There's no assigned reading, so you get to read what you want. Drop in if you have time or reg-

ister to get event reminders. The library is open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday; 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information and to register, visit morseinstitute.org

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Sports

Three-star Standout Wood Eyed by Recruiters

BY MATT HYLEN

Xaverian Brothers High School quarterback Will Wood is a three-star prospect from Natick who has made some major waves in his football journey. Keeping the values at heart given by his family, Wood is the kind of person, player, and quarterback any coach would want as their leader.

For Wood, football began as a passion that grew alongside his father. "I started playing in second grade in Natick. I always loved to watch the sport with my dad and wanted to play the game myself," Wood said.

This passion grew into an obsession for Wood, who realized his potential at an early age. "I think during COVID, once I really started to grow and get bigger around seventh and eighth grade, was when I realized I could really go for it and go far if I started to take it seriously," Wood said.

Wood was not shy to acknowledge everyone who had helped him along the way in his football journey. It often takes a village to achieve a goal, which Wood made sure to emphasize.

"My mom, dad, and brother have been a huge support system for me, which has helped a lot in my football journey," Wood explained. "And of course, people I have encountered along the way: Mike McCarthy, Alex McLaughlin, James Cahoon, and then my coaches, like Coach Al Fernaro and Coaches Bill and James Carvin. I've been extremely lucky."

Wood has also had the incredible opportunity to work with NFL-level talent quarterbacks such as Matt Hasselbeck and Brian Hoyer. "I think I was able to gain a deeper level of understanding of the game working with them," Wood detailed. "It really helped me work on the

mental side of being a quarterback, being a leader, understanding defenses and all the X's and O's, as well as how to deal with the pressure of being a quarterback of a high-level program."

This year, as a junior, Wood helped lead Xaverian to a third straight D-1 title, marking them the first Division 1 team to accomplish this feat.

Wood was automatic at the helm, completing 11 of 16 pass attempts for 345 yards and five touchdowns, while adding 43 yards on the ground on 13 attempts.

"We knew coming into the year that we had enough talent to do it," Will said. "But we knew we couldn't look ahead. We started the season out 2-0 but hit a cold spell after we lost two in a row, so we knew there had to be a shift in how we approached things. We went on a nine-game win streak after that."



Will Wood makes a play. Photo courtesy Defoe Designs, Harry Defeo

Wood humbly acknowledged the history he and his team were able to make together. "It was the best feeling in the world being able to defeat St. John's Prep and win the [Division 1] Super Bowl."

Even with all the success Wood has earned over his football journey, his hometown of Natick has always held a special place in his heart.

"The entire Natick community has had a huge impact on me and my football journey," Wood noted. "It is where everything really started for me, where I started playing. It's where I learned all the fundamentals and the place I grew to really love the game. I've interacted with so many good people and made so many great friends and lifelong bonds that I won't ever forget. I am very grateful

for the Natick community and the Natick Football community for everything they have done for me."

The bet Wood has placed on himself has paid off tremendously, with eleven D-1 offers already on the table for Wood to consider. "It was always a goal of mine to play at the next level, wherever I fit," he explained. "I think it's helped me realize that as long as I work hard, I can achieve it."

With the season officially over, Wood's main focus has shifted to recruiting. "I will be deciding where I'm going within the next four months, I'd say," he declared.

Whatever school he chooses will be getting a championship-caliber quarterback with deep roots and even deeper character.

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Sports

Natick Hockey Team Giving Postseason its Best Shot

BY KEN HAMWEY AND MATT HYLEN

Last year, Head Coach Karl Infanger directed Natick High's hockey team to an 11-5-5 record, the Carey Division title, and a No. 16 seed in the state's Division 1 playoffs.

The Redhawks defeated Weymouth and lost to St. John's of Danvers in the tourney. But this time around, the coach and his players are eager to get to a higher level, and they're optimistic their playoff journey could become a longer ride.

However, a 2-6-2 start to the season was not quite the beginning the Redhawks had hoped for.

"One of the things we have been talking a lot about [as a team] is competitive stamina, which is the ability to keep moving forward," Infanger detailed.

Yet, Infanger remains extremely confident in his group that they can turn things around.

"The kids have been playing really well; it's just a matter of finding the back of the net," the head coach said.

Sure, the start may not have been ideal, but due to the tough matchups in which Natick has kept competitive, the state Power Rankings seem to reflect their team's effort and skill.

"They [the players] were thinking they were going to be in the 30s and out of contention, but we ended up being ranked at number 22," Infanger said.

This seemed to have sparked a fire within Infanger, who still thinks the team can do great things down the line.

The 50-year-old Infanger, who spent two years playing professional hockey, is acutely aware that his current squad is not only talented, but also has a plethora of assets.

"We've got experience, depth, balance, good hockey IQs, a strong work ethic, and solid team chemistry," he said. "On the ice, our skating ability is a plus, thanks to fast forwards and defensemen who can move. Our defense is strong, and so is our senior leadership."

The Red Hawks' five captains

are all seniors who have three years of varsity experience. They include Mike Zahornacky at wing, defensemen Jonathan Chase and Will Fair, and forwards Braeden Homer and Joe MacDonnell.

"Their styles are a blend of leading by example, being communicative, vocal, and supportive," Infanger noted. "They know the expectations of the program."

With a great set of captains leading the charge, the Red Hawks are primed for a strong second half. "It starts with culture, our Natick culture," Infanger said. "Some teams, you never know what you're going to get. I know what I am going to get out of this team: a full effort, full speed, full tilt from every single player, which our leaders do a great job of directing."

A season turnaround won't just come down to the players, however, but also the experience and guidance of the coaches. This is something Natick Hockey has no shortage of.

Infanger's staff of assistants includes varsity aide Neil Donohue, a Tri Valley League MVP at Medway High; jayvee red co-coaches Matt Kustra (four-year starter at Natick) and Jake St. Pere (TVL all-star at Medway); jayvee blue coach Mike White (Natick goalie); goalie coach

Paul White; and varsity aides Nathan Joyal (Natick defenseman) and Andrew Decristoforo (Medway defenseman).

Nevertheless, no matter what the record sheet may say, Infanger always makes it a top priority to make his players the best players they can be, but even better men. "One thing in high school sports you want to show these kids is that you're part of something bigger than yourself," he explained. "Sports can also teach kids to be good teammates, to be leaders, and to be accountable. A strong work ethic leads student-athletes to be improved players, better teammates, and good human beings."

The players seem to take Infanger's principles to heart, which is a testament to his abil-



Natick High hockey squad still has strong shot at playoffs. From left to right, Johnathan Chase, Mike Zahornacky, Joe MacDonnell, Will Fair and Braeden Homer. Courtesy photo

ity to connect with his players.

"On Mondays, we [the team] volunteer at the Natick Food Pantry. We all get together to help organize the food pantry; it's a great way to give something back."

Looking into the second half of the year, Infanger will rely on an athletic philosophy that focuses on winning, reaching one's potential, and having fun. "Winning is a by-product of reaching one's potential and enjoying competition," he said. "Team

chemistry also plays a key role."

With the end of the season looming and the tournament within reach, the Natick Boys Hockey Team has a fantastic opportunity to finish the year off strong.

"All that matters is that the team plays their best hockey in the last five games of the year.

That is always something I make sure I stress," Infanger said. "With the tournament still within reach, I want our best hockey going into that tourna-

ment. With the way they work, they practice every day, get better every day, I am confident that we are well on the way to being there."

There's no doubt that Natick High's hockey fortunes are in good hands. Infanger has all the attributes to get results, and his current skaters have lots of strengths.

Desire, dedication, and devotion to the task just might make the 2025-26 Natick squad a very special group.



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Real Estate Corner

Selling Luxury Homes: Why It Doesn't Have to Be Hard — and How Sable Homes Gets It Right



Business Spotlight

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Across towns in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, luxury homes are consistently part of the conversation for affluent buyers looking for more space, suburban charm, quality schools, and proximity to both Boston and open recreational spaces. In many of these communities, luxury inventory continues to attract attention.

Recent regional market reports reveal that the number of listings above \$2 million and median sold prices had both ticked upward from 2024 into 2025,

with sales still moving at competitive paces — even as inventory gradually grows and the market becomes more balanced.

That balance is important: it means buyers have options, and sellers who price smartly and present thoughtfully are rewarded with serious attention and offers.

That's where Sable Homes stands out. With deep knowledge of Massachusetts luxury markets and a tailored approach built for high-end properties, they help sellers turn listings into successful closings — without the headaches.

So, what makes a luxury sale feel effortless instead of painful? It's all in how the home is prepared, marketed, and positioned for today's buyer.

First impressions count, and high-end buyers expect quality from the moment they see a

listing. Professional photography, drone footage, and excellent staging all show the potential of a home to the buyer. Attention to detail, such as curbside appeal and outdoor kitchens should be highlighted as well. Square footage matters but telling the lifestyle story does too.

Sable Homes can help with positioning luxury homes that fetch premium prices thanks to strong demand, because they consistently research current market data and have a clear understanding of what today's high-end buyers value most. Their deep familiarity with the local community, including school systems, lifestyle amenities, zoning nuances, and buyer motivations, allows them to guide sellers with clarity and confidence. Framing your listing to tell that story is a differentiator that sophisticated buyers respond to.

In addition to deep MetroWest expertise and a sophisticated understanding of what high-end buyers are seeking, they offer access to Raveis Refresh, a compli-

mentary concierge solution that prepares homes - from impactful updates and cosmetic upgrades to professional staging and design - without out-of-pocket expense until closing, helping properties sell faster and for top dollar.

With the right strategy, selling a luxury home isn't stressful; it's strategic. It just requires thoughtful planning, smart pricing, and targeted marketing - all knowledge that Sable Homes brings to the table. As the buyer market continues to evolve in 2026, working with a team that understands the details makes all the difference.

Whether you're considering your first luxury listing or your next, the combination of smart market strategy, polished presentation, and a partner who makes selling feel seamless is why so many local sellers are choosing Sable Homes. Learn more at www.sablellshomes.com or reach out to the team at 508-733-8935.

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BY JENNIFER RUSSO

Selling a luxury home might sound complicated and daunting, but in today's market, with the right preparation and local expertise, it doesn't have to be. In fact, market conditions in 2025 and early 2026 are working in

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01/15/2026	10 Kelsey Rd.	\$940,000
01/15/2026	18 University Dr.	\$1,160,000
01/14/2026	20 Marion St.	\$899,000
01/13/2026	5 Deer Path	\$3,000,000
01/09/2026	4 Sylvia Ave.	\$694,900
01/08/2026	191 E. Central St.	\$860,000
01/08/2026	15 Penobscot Rd.	\$1,260,000
01/06/2026	62 E. Central St.	\$535,000
01/06/2026	58 N. Main St. #304	\$740,000
01/05/2026	8 Flynn St.	\$1,100,000
01/05/2026	36 Porter Rd.	\$735,000
01/05/2026	26 Walnut St.	\$1,050,000
01/05/2026	8 Stanley St.	\$730,000
01/02/2026	2 Lodge Rd.	\$725,000
12/30/2025	4 Richard Rd.	\$775,000
12/29/2025	12 Walden Dr. #19	\$320,000
12/23/2025	3 Pineridge Rd.	\$1,350,000
12/22/2025	6 Village Rock Ln. #17	\$290,000
12/19/2025	4 Willow St.	\$834,000
12/19/2025	38 Ranger Rd.	\$1,220,000
12/19/2025	47 High St.	\$550,000
12/19/2025	6 Ambler Ct. (0.67 acre lot)	\$775,000
12/19/2025	48 Graystone Ln.	\$2,400,000
12/17/2025	48 S. Main St.	\$654,000
12/17/2025	21 Harvest Moon Dr.	\$1,690,000
12/17/2025	39 Indian Ridge Red.	\$932,500
12/17/2025	15 Church St. #3	\$357,000
12/16/2025	38 Westlake Rd.	\$1,460,000

Source: zillow.com Compiled: Local Town Pages



The 5-bed, 8-bath, 7,200-square-foot condo at 5 Deer Path in Natick recently sold for \$3 million. Image credit: www.zillow.com

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