



# Bellingham BULLETIN

Vol. 32 No. 3

Bellingham's Favorite Hometown Newspaper

February 1, 2026

## Winners Bellingham Lions 2025 Holiday House Decorating Contest

The Bellingham Lions Club is pleased to announce the winners of this year's Holiday House Decorating Contest, a cherished community tradition that celebrates creativity, holiday spirit, and neighborhood pride. Eight homes across Bellingham entered the contest, each contributing to a festive and joyful season for residents and visitors alike.

After careful consideration, the judges selected the following winners:

- 1st Place: 40 Muron
- 2nd Place: 400 Caroline Drive
- 3rd Place: 18 Flagg Drive

The Bellingham Lions extend heartfelt congratulations



Wow! First place holiday spirit on Muron Drive!

to all participants for helping make the town shine bright this holiday season. The club also thanks the community for its continued support of Lions programs and service initia-

tives throughout the year. For more information about

**DECORATING**

*continued on page 2*

## See a Bobcat? Take a Pic, but Keep Your Distance

By GRAYDON WEBB

According to several reports around social media, it seems there may be some unnerving visitors in the area: bobcats! While it may seem like a creature such as this would be out of place in your town, wildlife experts say bobcats can be seen all across Massachusetts. In fact, they're the only wild cat species still present

in the state! In order to stay safe this winter, we wanted to give you some quick tips that could keep you - and especially your pets - out of a bobcat's way!

First of all, you should be able to identify a bobcat in your area! According to Mass.Gov, bob-

**BOBCAT**

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This trail cam caught Broadmoor Sanctuary's first confirmed bobcat sighting in over 15 years, although locally, folks have been posting their own pics on social media. Photo used courtesy of Jonathan Davis, Mass Audubon Society.

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DECORATING

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the Bellingham Lions Club or upcoming events, please contact the club at BellinghamMALions@outlook.com or message us through our Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/BellinghamMALions.



Sweet second place winner on Caroline Drive!



A reindeer-friendly Flagg Drive home is the 3rd place winner!

# Bellingham, Franklin, Wrentham Receive MassTrails Grants

On January 5, Senator Becca Rausch announced that the Town of Bellingham, Franklin and Wrentham each received MassTrails grants.

“Trails connect our Commonwealth in beautiful and unexpected ways, bringing people closer to neighborhoods, parks and downtowns. Congratulations to Town of Bellingham MA, Town of Franklin MA, and Town of Wrentham, Massachusetts for receiving MassTrails Grants to help develop and improve the Charles Headwater Greenway, the SNETT Rail Trail, and many more outdoor spaces,” Sen. Rausch wrote on Facebook.

## localtownpages

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# A Love-ly History

By NATALEE WEBB-RUBINO

Valentine’s Day was not always a joyful celebration. It originated from the beheading of a Priest named Valentine in A.D. 270.

Valentine secretly married couples against a ban enacted by Roman Emperor Claudius II. The emperor believed men were not joining his army because of their duty to their wives and families. Claudius banned marriages and engagements to solve his infantry enlistment problem.

During the carnal “Feast of Lupercalia,” on February 14th in A.D. 270, Claudius had Valentine executed by decapitation. During his incarceration Valentine became friends with his jailor’s daughter. Before his guillotine walk, he left a farewell note for her. The letter was signed

“from your Valentine.”

Another morbid February 14th is Chicago’s St. Valentine’s Day Massacre in 1929. Gang leader Al Capone sent four of his Associates to make a hit on his rival, Bugs Moran. Dressed in police uniforms, the thugs entered the Lincoln Park garage, lined up 7 of Moran’s gang members against a wall, and then shot them with machine guns. In all, 70 rounds of ammunition were pummeled into Moran’s hoodlums immediately killing 6. The lone survivor would not testify against Capone.

Following Emperor Claudius’s execution of the Priest Valentine, the Christian Church proclaimed him a Saint. As “St. Valentine” he became the patron Saint of lovers, people with epilepsy, and beekeepers.

In A.D.496, then Pope Gelas-

ius put an end to the pagan “Feast of Lupercalia” by declaring February 14th to be “St. Valentine’s Day.” Instead of pagan rituals, gifts of love messages, poems and flowers were exchanged.

The first mailing of a handwritten “Valentine Card” was posted in 1806. In 1913, Hallmark Cards of Kansas City, MO., began producing “Valentines DAY Cards.” Now simply known as Hallmark, they remain the leader in Valentines Day card sales.

Boston has a unique symbolism for Valentine’s Day, the “bridge of locks.” Have you ever wondered why the fence on the bridge at the Hynes Convention T stop has so many padlocks on it? The locks attached to the Bridge’s fencing are “love locks,” a globally recognized symbol of love whose tradition began in Paris. Some of the locks adorning the fence are professionally engraved while others simply have their “who-loves-who” written with a thick magic marker.

In a survey by WalletHub in 2025 of 100 of the largest cities in America, Boston ranked #14. With its quaint charm, amazing waterfront views, and romantic restaurants, Boston is the perfect place for romance on this now “amorous” Valentines Day.

Celebrate the day with joyful hearts!

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# Garden Club of Bellingham, MA Plans Black History Month Podcasts

JUDITH DORATO O'GARA

In honor of Black History month, the Garden Club of Bellingham, MA will present some podcasts on the resiliency of African American farmers in agriculture.

"I think it's time for people to acknowledge black history," says Mickey DeFosses, of Garden Club of Bellingham, MA, adding, "It's also important to know some of the challenges that African Americans have faced as well as the opportunities for advancement that they are seeking, and that can be very helpful to share some of those tools. The focus is on how successful African American families have dealt with some of the challenges of history, focusing on agriculture, gardening and farming."

Tune in to *Garden Tea Talk* special story segment, episode 26, *Exploring the Resilience of African American Families*.

Garden Club of Bellingham, MA has also announced a \$500 scholarship for Norfolk County students enrolled in a program



of agriculture, with applications through February 28th.

"The REESE Scholarship was put together (in memory of) a very loving soul, a garden enthusiast who was often self-sacrificing, in memory of her as well as her love for people," says DeFosses. The link to the application is <https://forms.gle/4ujJc7vTSQzydFW6>.

Find out more about at the Garden Club of Bellingham, MA website, [bellinghamgardenclubofma.com](http://bellinghamgardenclubofma.com) or on Facebook at Bellingham Garden Club.

## BOBCAT

*continued from page 1*

cats "can be easily identified by [their] short, "bobbed" tail (up to 12 inches)." Their coats vary in shades of brown with black spots, and their adult size can be anywhere from 28-47 inches in length. The website also states, "male bobcats are approximately 33% larger than their female counterparts," so size can certainly vary!

Bobcats are probably more common around this time as we are nearing their mating period. From February to March, the cats tend to mate and pretty soon, they'll produce offspring in April or May. Bobcats make their habitats in rocky crevasses and hollow trees, looking for damp, dark areas to make their home and females may use the same den sites for several years in a row.

So, what can you do to stay safe during this time? Fortunately, bobcats don't tend to pose much harm to humans, or even domesticated pets. These cats prefer smaller prey like rabbits, possums, and the occasional bird. That being said, bobcats do have a history of attacking livestock, so it is advised by Mass.Gov to "avoid pasturing animals or placing coops in remote areas or in areas near heavily wooded cover." As long as pens have the right protection - such as thick wire fencing - they should be just fine.

Bobcats can be active at any time of day, but they're most often seen around dusk and dawn. Their tracks look quite similar to domestic cats, which

can make it harder to determine if they're in the area or not. They're also great climbers, with an excellent sense of smell, sight, and hearing. Thankfully, according to the MSPCA, "they are shy and solitary animals," and if you lock up your trash properly and keep a good eye on your pets when they go outside, chances are you'll never have a bad encounter with a bobcat.

But still, it can be a bit of a shock to see them in the area. So, how can you help out the community if a bobcat does cross your path? Well, sharing pictures to social media does help to raise awareness. You can also contact your local animal control office, so they know of bobcats in the area. This can help them track its movement as well!

We spoke with a representative from Mass Audubon Northeast, Jonathan Davis, and he informed us that "bobcats have big territories and will cover as much as four miles in a single day." Outside factors like habitat loss and even automobile collisions have actually made bobcat appearances more rare in the area, and Davis says "they really require a large amount of conservation land to thrive," which also affects

their movement patterns.

As previously stated, bobcats rarely cause any harm to humans and are, in fact, quite skittish. Humane World for Animals tells us that, should a bobcat cross your path, "be big and scary: Raise your arms over your head, yell or blow a whistle." Make a lot of noise as you move toward them slowly, and this will scare them off. Of course, this action should only occur if you encounter the animal in the wild, like on a walk, for example. When dealing with bobcats in general, Jonathan Davis reminds us, "give wildlife space if you encounter one, and don't approach."

We hope these tips and factoids will help calm your nerves about bobcat sightings in the area. Remember, as long as you keep an eye on your pets, dispose of trash properly, and secure livestock as best as you can, these wild cats will remain nothing but tracks in the snow!

If you're interested in more information on bobcats, you can find some resources from Mass Audubon at <https://www.massaudubon.org/nature-wildlife/mammals-in-massachusetts/bobcats>.



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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.

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# Happy New Year from the Town Clerk's Office!

By now, you should have received your 2026 census. Please fill out, sign, and return the form to the Clerk's office as soon as possible to ensure you remain on the active voter rolls. We work diligently to make sure our street listings are as up-to-date as possible. Per Massachusetts General Laws, if your census is not returned, you will be designated an "inactive voter." Rest assured, this is not an overnight process. You will remain inactive for two state election cycles before being removed, and many notices go out in the meantime. However, to avoid any of those complications, simply sign and return your form. Census forms can be sent back in the mail, dropped at the office, or dropped in the blue bin outside the municipal center.

Along with your census, you received a dog license form. If you have a dog in Bellingham, please fill out the form and return it with the appropriate fee (\$15 for neutered or spayed dog, \$20 for intact), along with rabies vaccination information and proof of spay/neuter. For convenience, we have an online dog license renewal option available. If we have up-to-date rabies information about your

dog in our system, you can renew your license online at [www.bellinghamma.org](http://www.bellinghamma.org) under the "Town Clerk" tab. There is also a means to request vital records on the Town Clerk's page as well.

Looking forward, dates and positions for the June 2nd Local Election have been finalized and are as follows. For information on any of the positions, please contact us at the Town Clerk's office at (508) 657-2830 or [townclerk@bellinghamma.org](mailto:townclerk@bellinghamma.org), and please make sure you're registered to vote by May 22nd for the election! Current elected officials are marked as (I) for incumbent.

**Select Board, 2 positions, 3-year terms.**

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Michael J. Hennessey (I)

**Planning Board, 1 position, 3-year term**

William F. O'Connell, Jr. (I)  
Planning Board, 1 Position,  
1-year term

**Library Trustee, 2 Positions, 3-year terms**

Laura M. Howard (I)  
Macala Lamour (I)

**School Committee, 1 Position, 3-year term**

Beverly Pierce

**Housing Authority, 1 Position, 5-year term**

Debra K. Sacco

**Constable, 2 positions, 3-year terms**

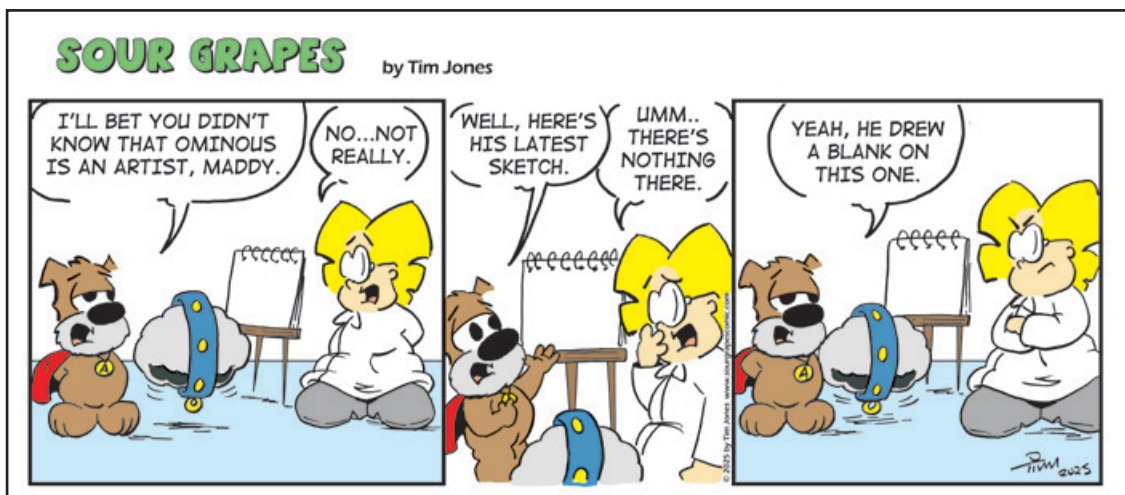
Nomination papers will be available Monday, March 2nd. To ease the process of running for local election, we've cre-

ated a "how to" guide for running for office in Bellingham. It can be found on our website at [www.bellinghamma.org](http://www.bellinghamma.org) under "Town Clerk." This packet contains a timeline for the Local Election, campaign finance dates and information, and offices up for election. A paper copy can be picked up at the Town Clerk's office, as well as nomination papers for those interested. Fifty verified signatures are required to be on the ballot,

and these must be returned to us by April 14th. All the positions listed above are open, and we welcome participation. Author Roald Dahl once said, "somewhere inside of all of us is the power to change the world," and I truly believe that everyone can make a difference.

As always please reach out with any questions or concerns.

Amy Bartelloni  
Town Clerk



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## Municipal Spotlight

# Diligence and Training Make for a Safer Bellingham

BY JUDITH DORATO O'GARA

The Bellingham Police are busy. In 2025, the 34 active-duty officers responded to 30,500 calls for service and made 698 arrests or summonses.

"Calls for service are going up; crash reports are going down," says Lt. Stephen Daigle.

Daigle believes crashes are down, because Bellingham Police officers are performing more motor vehicle stops. In 2023, they stopped 2,666 vehicles, but this past year, they stopped 5,112. Motor vehicle stop outcomes ranged from verbal warnings to citations or sometimes summons or arrests. Traffic grants also allow some officers to be put on the road in an overtime shift. This year, they received a \$34,000 grant toward this end.

"We have certain officers on patrol, and they're responsible for calls for service," explains Daigle, but these (traffic) officers are dedicated to traffic enforcement. Unless there is an extreme emergency, they don't respond to calls going on for that shift. We

use it for distracted driving, people on cell phones, drive sober get pulled over, and this year we started issuing pedestrian crosswalk and bicycle violations to make roads safer." One member of the police force also serves on Bellingham's Traffic Advisory Committee.

Since the department is budgeted for 36 officers, Daigle reports, "We just recently filled our 35th slot with an officer transferring from Plainville, and we're currently interviewing for the 36th spot."

The department is working to attract more female officers, with a goal of 30% female staff by 2030. Currently, six Bellingham officers are female. Overall, Daigle says, not a lot of qualified candidates are applying in general. "We only have a certain pool to pull from, and in this latest round of interviews, we had very few female applicants," he says.

Although the department will increase its staff by two, more officers would be preferred. "We



Last month, the Bellingham Police joined others at St. Mary Parish in Franklin to honor Uxbridge Officer Stephen LaPorta, killed on duty. Photo used courtesy of Bellingham Police.

feel like, with the call volume we have, we'd be better suited with 39 or 40 officers," says Daigle, "and that would allow us to fill some other positions we currently don't have, like a dedicated traffic officer, an officer (added) to the Detectives Bureau, and a dedicated community officer who can follow-up on (things like) domestic violence and overdoses."

Bellingham Police are part of a regional group that refer those who need it to Milford's Community Impact ([www.community-impact-inc.com](http://www.community-impact-inc.com)), for clinician services.

"Basically, we'll refer people to them for different things, for mental health, for substance use disorder ... It gives us extra tools to use for de-escalation. Sometimes a clinician is better suited than an officer to handle some calls," says Daigle, who sees a rise in those types of calls.

"We're dealing with more people having to be transferred to hospitals or be referred to one of those clinicians," says Daigle. Last year, 126 calls had to do with mental health crises, and 252 were related to domestic violence. De-escalation is "always the goal ... unless it's not feasible," he says, adding, "Use of force in this town is very rare. We have a good group of officers that are able to deescalate and have conversations with people before it rises to the use of force."

Daigle attributes this to training. Over half of the BPD has undergone CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training, with a goal of 100% trained. Bellingham Police also sometimes provide mutual aid with neighboring agencies, with an officer assigned to CEM-LEC (Central Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council), an officer assigned to the Motorcycle Metro team, and two officers assigned to the METRO-LEC (Metropolitan Law Enforcement Council) SWAT team.

In general, Daigle says, all police officers in the Northeast receive extensive training.

"We undergo 800-hours of academy followed by special training," he says, with ongoing training each year in a topic prevalent in the country. "This year, we're going to 'trauma-informed policing,' so we can better handle traumas police face," he says.

Two school resource officers, Nicole Sandell and Kelcey Kelly, acquaint children with the police, and the department holds family-friendly outreach such as the annual Munchkins with Santa. "It's a great thing to have that early interaction with kids, to let them know we're a friend," says Daigle.

Daigle says Bellingham Police want all residents to trust them, acknowledging the widespread national fear of federal immigration enforcement. "We're aware ICE has been in town, but ... they don't tell us anything about what they're doing or where they're going," Daigle explains, adding that only if someone is arrested might their whereabouts become entered into a database, and even then, the department does not hold a person for that agency.

The bottom line, he says, is Bellingham Police want residents to feel safe to call for help.

"What we're seeing across the country is not what I'm seeing locally, that's for sure," says Daigle. While national sentiment toward police might not be great, "we don't feel that here," says the Bellingham native, who has family in town. "We have a lot of support from the community, and we appreciate that. We try to do the best we can for everybody."



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### Valentine's Day Quiz II

♥ 1. Mark organized a relaxing Valentine's Day evening for his wife, Lisa, by fixing dinner and starting a bubble bath. As Mark began to fill the tub with water, he got distracted with dinner and the tub overflowed. The water ran down the stairs and through the ceiling. Is this a covered claim even though it was Mark's fault?

♥ 2. Richard bought Susan a once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Grand Canyon. While Richard and Susan were hiking around the park, someone broke into their hotel room and stole some of their belongings. Would their homeowner policy cover the theft claim even though they are not in Massachusetts?



Question 1 Answer: Yes

Question 2 Answer: Yes

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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 Traditional 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 insu-

lated 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.

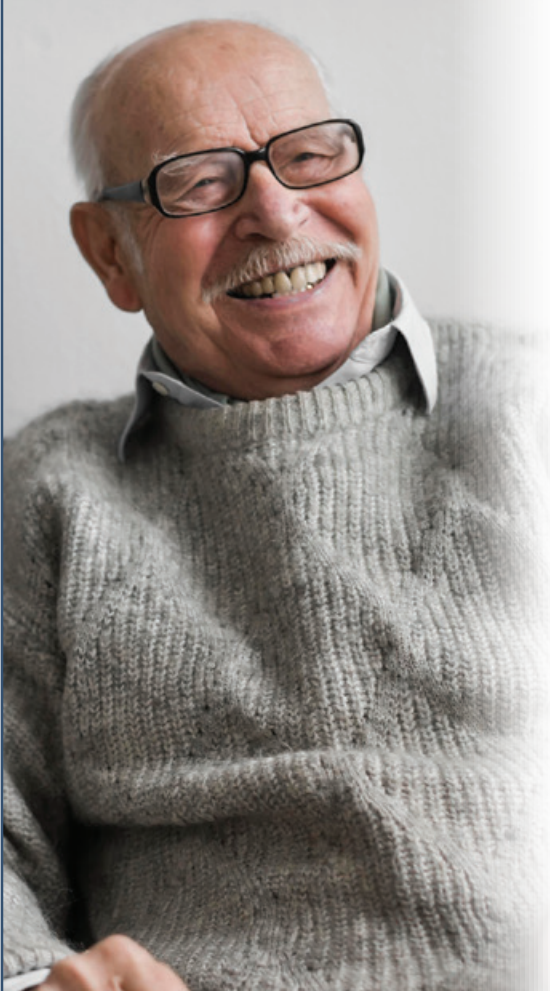
## Take Ownership

By modeling conversions early, executing with updated knowledge, 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.

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

Glenn Brown is a Holliston resident and owner of PlanDynamic, LLC, [www.PlanDynamic.com](http://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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# Piette Jewelers: A Legacy of Elegance

By JANE LEBAK

Diamonds may be forever, but most diamond rings aren't backed by seventy-two years of family history.

"We treat our customers like family," says Ross Piette of Piette Jewelers. "That's how my grandparents ran the business, how my parents ran the business, and how we're running it now."

Since opening in 1954, Piette Jewelers has cultivated a reputation for reliability and style in the Blackstone Valley and greater Woonsocket areas. From sweet bracelets for Valentine's Day to matching necklaces for an entire bridal party, Piette's is conscious that while jewelry is a product, the meaning of jewelry is to enhance our lives.

"We're a hometown jeweler," says Ross. "As a part of the community, we're not just selling a product. We're providing you with an experience and a memento for an occasion that you're always going to remember."

Ross Piette is of the third generation to operate Piette Jewelers, along with his wife Jennifer and his brother Ryan. "I've been a part of this business since I was

born, poking around the store even as a little kid," says Ross. "I was trained by my parents and grandparents in all aspects of the trade until it became engrained in me."

So many of life's milestones are highlighted by jewelry. Whether it's a cross necklace for First Communion, a locket from a first love, a watch for graduating high school, or an anniversary ring, jewelry commemorates our achievements and punctuates the seasons of our lives. After seventy-two years of serving the Bellingham community, Piette's work has crossed generations. A couple that chooses their wedding set will return in ten years to select their child's first diamond earrings.

"That's what we mean by community," says Ross. "Rather than just selling a product, we look forward to being a part of our customers' lives."

Piette Jewelers offers a wide range of products, from casual, everyday necklaces to fancy, "hitting the red carpet" pieces.

Their community understanding is carried through in their products. Piette Jewelers in-



## Business spotlight

tentionally sources jewelry from family-owned businesses and local manufacturers.

Piette's looks out for the community in other ways, as well, by offering appraisal services and repairs. "Custom design is another service we offer," says Ross. "I've had customers return to us with older jewelry that has great sentimental value. Grandmothers may have had a ring for forty years, and working with us, they redesign it into something their grandchildren will wear. These custom designs breathe life into their history by creating a legacy piece they're proud to pass down."

These connections are what brings back customers every time they reach a new high point



in their lives. Ross says, "My parents have semi-retired, but this business is more than just a store. It's a part of our lives, so they keep coming back for some of our longtime customers."

Especially when certain occasions are inextricably linked in our minds with jewelry—such as engagements—it's important to have a jeweler with a solid history.

"Our work is timeless," says Ross. "I'm working on pieces right now that my father designed forty years ago, and that

tells me, our best creation is our legacy. We're creating further legacies for our customers, heirlooms and memories that they can pass down through the generations."

Visit Piette Jewelers online at <https://www.piettejewelers.com> or view up close photos on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/piettejewelers>. Afterward, you can stop by the shop at The Dean Bank Plaza, at 429 Pulaski Boulevard in Bellingham.

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# Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild Plans Show at BVT in March

Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild will hold their biennial quilt show on Saturday and Sunday, March 14th and 15th at

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Visitors to the show will have the op-

portunity to view the TPQG Raffle Quilt and to purchase raffle tickets to win this beautiful quilt. The quilt measures 74.5"

by 74.5" and is named Dresden Bloom. The quilt was created by TPQG members Karen Pierce, Glory Torres, and Rita Partridge. Their focus in creating this quilt was to find a pattern that showcased both applique and piecing techniques. Once the pattern was determined fabrics were selected that were bright and cheerful. The quilt was custom quilted by Kimberly Cloutier of Blooming Quilts.



The 2026 Thimble Pleasures Raffle Quilt was custom quilted by Kimberly Cloutier of Blooming Quilts

You are invited to attend the quilt show and view this quilt in person and purchase raffle tickets. Tickets are also available from quilt members before the show and are \$2 each or six for \$10.

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# Local Business Owners: Don't Overlook Retirement Plans



Todd Miller, CFP®

## FINANCIAL FOCUS®

Provided by Edward Jones

If you're a local business owner, you're juggling many priorities: growing revenue, managing expenses, supporting your team and planning for your own future. What if one tool could help with all these goals?

A workplace retirement plan might be that solution and can, directly or indirectly, offer benefits that extend beyond simple savings.

**Double the tax advantages.** Starting a retirement plan can deliver immediate tax advantages. For the business, employer contributions are tax-deductible. And as a participant in your company plan, your pretax salary deferrals are excluded from income taxes; your investments within the plan are tax-deferred until distributed. Many plans now offer Roth options that allow tax-free withdrawals in retirement.

Local businesses may also qualify for federal tax credits that help offset startup costs, employee education expenses and plan administration fees. Additional credits may be available for auto-enrollment features and employer contributions made during the plan's first five years.

**A competitive edge in hiring.** In today's labor market, offering a retirement plan can differentiate your business from competitors and help improve employee retention.

Many plans also provide access to financial education tools and resources, helping your employees make informed decisions about saving, investing and planning for retirement. This support can lead to greater employee satisfaction and productivity, contributing to a positive work environment for your business.

**More flexible than state-sponsored options.** If you live in a state requiring an employee retirement program, you might be considering a state-sponsored plan. While these programs can provide a starting point, they typically offer fewer investment options, lower contribution limits and limited design flexibility.

Establishing your own workplace retirement plan lets you customize features for your business needs to control administrative costs, set contribution limits and offer employees a wide range of investment options. This added control in plan design can lead

to better outcomes for your business and your employees.

**Reducing a hidden risk in your own retirement planning.** Business owners often have as much as 80% of their net worth tied up in their businesses, according to the Exit Planning Institute. While that demonstrates commitment to success, it also creates significant financial risk to the owner.

Relying solely on a future business sale to fund your retirement can be precarious. Market shifts, timing challenges or limited buyer interest could derail those plans. By building personal assets through your employer-sponsored retirement plan, you can gain financial flexibility and reduce the risk of having your retirement lifestyle depend entirely on one event.

**Getting started.** With various retirement plan options available, determining which one fits your business best can feel overwhelming.

A qualified financial advisor can help you navigate these decisions, explaining the trade-offs between different plan types and identifying which option best suits your unique situation. They can also help you understand eligibility requirements and ensure the plan you choose aligns with your business goals and personal financial objectives.

Starting a workplace retirement plan represents an investment in your future, your employees and the long-term success of your business.

For more information contact:

Todd Miller, CFP®

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Todd.Miller@edwardjones.com

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# The b.LUXE *beauty beat*

## Low-Maintenance Beauty Is the New Luxury

Luxury used to mean more. More steps, more products, more time in front of the mirror. But lately, something has shifted. Today's most sought-after beauty trend isn't about excess. It's about ease. Low-maintenance beauty has officially become the new luxury, and it's one busy women are happily embracing.

Low-maintenance beauty is about creating a fuss-free baseline that works effortlessly for you, a look that falls into place each morning. A great haircut that grows out beautifully. Hair color that looks polished weeks later. Skin that glows without layers of makeup. These aren't shortcuts—they're smart investments. When your routine becomes as simple as a quick hair fluff, face wash, moisturizer, and five-minute makeup, you suddenly have an extra 45 minutes in your day for what truly makes you feel beautiful: family moments, a good book, a workout, or whatever brings you balance.

The shift is everywhere: skincare focused on barrier repair and hydration rather than ag-

gressive routines, makeup designed to enhance rather than mask, haircuts and color that allow more grace between appointments. Even wigs and toppers are being embraced in mainstream beauty for convenience and confidence. The goal isn't to do less because beauty doesn't matter—it's to do less because life is full, and beauty should support it, not complicate it.

Ready to get your time back? Here are our favorite low-maintenance services and products that make it happen.

### Power of 3 Facial

**The Power of 3 Facial** combines dermaplaning, extractions, and a customized peel to transform your skin in one appointment. By eliminating facial hair and creating a smooth canvas, your skincare products absorb better and makeup glides on flawlessly, giving you a more even, polished look that lasts throughout the month. This treatment helps new skin rise to the surface without harsh chemicals, exces-

sive downtime, or pain. Using a specialized surgical blade, the top layer of dry, dead skin cells and fine vellus hair (peach fuzz) are carefully removed, freeing your face of debris. A light steam, T-Zone extractions, a customized brightening peel, and a soothing mask complete this anti-aging game-changer. The result? Smoother, more radiant skin, better product absorption and easier makeup application.

**Product Recommendation: GM. COLLIN PEEL TONER EXFOLIANT** - Gently eliminate dead skin cells and reveal a radiant, even complexion with this daily leave-on liquid exfoliant. Sweeps away dead skin cells and impurities, regulates excess sebum, smooths skin texture, reveals a brighter, more even complexion, and tightens the appearance of pores while hydrating and softening the skin.

### Low-Maintenance Hair Color

Low-maintenance hair color is all about creating beautiful results that grow out gracefully, giving you more time between salon visits. These techniques use softer color placement to eliminate harsh regrowth lines and keep your look fresh for months.

#### Lived-In Color Techniques

Balayage, root smudging, and shadow roots create a natural, sun-kissed look that can extend 10-12 weeks between appointments instead of the typical 6-8 weeks. Root smudging and shadow roots involve applying a darker tone at the base to create a seamless transition and softer grow-out. Between full services, a color balance appointment refreshes your color by blending retouched roots from mid-length to ends, adding shine and moisture without requiring a complete highlight or balayage.

**Grey-Blending** Grey-blending is a game-changer for embracing natural silver while maintaining depth and softness. Instead of covering grey completely, this technique uses strategically placed highlights and lowlights to blend grey hair with your natural or desired tone. The multi-tonal result creates a forgiving grow-out



that eliminates harsh root lines and gives you months between touch-ups while keeping your hair looking dimensional and refined.

**Product Recommendation: Kerasilk Hydrating Essence Brightening Shampoo** - This lightweight, rinse-out treatment delivers instant, deep hydration while locking in shine for a healthy, polished finish.

### Soft Layers and Styles That Hold Their Shape

Modern haircuts emphasize soft, textured layers that create natural movement and volume without requiring extensive styling. These cuts are designed to air-dry beautifully or need just a quick blow-dry to fall into place. Styles like long layers, textured bobs, and shaggy cuts work with your hair's natural texture rather than against it, reducing your reliance on flat irons, curling wands, and round brushes. The key is precision cutting that considers your hair's growth pattern, density, and natural wave, creating a shape that looks intentional and polished as it grows.

**Product Recommendation: Goldwell Air Dry BB Cream** - The Goldwell StyleSign Smooth Air-Dry BB Cream is a nourishing hair cream that helps to combat frizz while providing the hair with light hold and a soft shine, no matter what texture your hair is! This styling cream is ideal for air-drying your style, but can also be used for blow-drying to help you create a stunning blow-out every time.

### Professional Beauty Products Extend the Life of Your Service

The right beauty products can double the life of your salon and spa services. For hair, color-safe sulfate-free shampoos preserve vibrancy and prevent fading, while dry shampoo extends blowouts by absorbing oil and refreshing volume between washes. Heat protectants shield hair from styling damage, and leave-in treatments maintain moisture and shine. For skincare, professional-grade cleansers, serums, and moisturizers work deeper than drugstore options to maintain the clarity and glow you get from treatments like the Power of 3 Facial. Daily SPF is essential for protecting your skin investment and preventing sun damage. Strategic product use means fewer salon visits, less heat styling, healthier hair, and skin that stays glowing longer.

Your stylist or esthetician can recommend professional products tailored to your specific needs, maximizing every service and keeping you looking your best.

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# Completion of New England Clean Energy Connect Transmission Line Announced at State House

Boston, MA - After years of careful planning, legislating, and implementation, the completion of the New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) transmission line has happened and is now delivering affordable, stable hydropower from Canada to Massachusetts

The long-awaited New England Clean Energy Connect is a 145-mile high-voltage transmission line that carries power generated by hydroelectric facilities in Quebec to the Commonwealth. With a capacity of 1,200 megawatts, the line can transmit enough power to satisfy about 20% of Massachusetts' total electricity needs. And thanks to a 20-year fixed price contract with the state's electric utilities, it's projected to save ratepayers \$50 million a year.

The fixed prices in the contracts provide power and clean energy attributes at prices well below the projected costs of buying the same amount on the market, and lock in those prices for the next 20 years.

"Bringing Canadian hydropower into Massachusetts is a major milestone that strengthens our energy reliability, advances our clean energy goals, and—most importantly—delivers a robust new source of power to consumers at a reasonable and predictable price," said State Representative Jeffrey N. Roy, former Chair of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities & Energy (D-10th Norfolk). "This long-anticipated moment is the culmination of nearly a decade of careful planning, legislating, and implementation, carried forward despite significant legal, political, and logistical obstacles. I had the opportunity to see the source of this power firsthand when I visited the St. James Bay hydropower facilities—an

engineering marvel—in Quebec last March, and it is deeply gratifying to see that work come to fruition."

In addition to lowering electricity prices, this clean, sustainable hydropower will help meet rising electricity demand, provide needed energy reliability in the winter, and reduce harmful pollution in Massachusetts and the region. During cold temperature periods, New England relies on higher-priced, more carbon-intensive fuels. This leads to expensive and volatile winter energy pricing and regional reliability concerns. The NECEC project will help address these challenges by providing consistent clean energy production during cold temperatures.

"Today, power is flowing to Massachusetts through the New England Clean Energy Connect transmission line," said Governor Healey. "My administration worked closely with the Legislature, the Attorney General, and private partners to ensure the project moved forward and delivered savings. The NECEC line represents our all-of-the-above approach in action – working with regional partners to bring affordable energy into the state that will lower costs and meet our growing demand. We are proud to flip the switch on this line and bring costs down, and we are continuing to work to bring more energy into Massachusetts."

Several Hydro-Québec teams dedicated their efforts and expertise to designing and building this strategic 100-km infrastructure across Québec. On the US side, their partner constructed a 230-km transmission line in Maine. Among the project's highlights are the creation of a new family of towers that blend more seamlessly into the landscape, a crossing of over one kilometer at the



former Asbestos mine in Thetford-Mines and the integration of four of the largest transformers in Hydro-Québec's power system.

"This is an historic day; the New England Clean En-

ergy Connect is now delivering enough renewable energy to power a million homes," said Hydro-Québec Energy Services U.S. COO Serge Abergel. "We are proud to be your partners.

We have all overcome many obstacles to get to today. Now we are not just talking; we are delivering. This is a shining example of our regional partnership, which will continue for the next 20 years and beyond."


In 2018, following a competitive solicitation, the Massachusetts electric distribution companies negotiated and executed contracts with the NECEC project. Following authorization from the Massachusetts Legislature in 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration, the Attorney General's Office, Eversource, National Grid, and Unitil negotiated with NECEC to ensure these contracts remain beneficial for Massachusetts ratepayers. The joint settlement agreement was later approved by the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities, helping pave the way for the project to finish construction. Under the contracts, NECEC will import 9.55 terawatt-hours annually of 100 percent hydroelectricity from Quebec to the New England electric grid.



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# Living Healthy

## World-Class Eye Surgery Closer to Home:

### Why the Cataract Surgery Center of Milford Is Special

By: ROGER M. KALDAWY, M.D.

For patients facing cataract surgery, choosing where to have the procedure can feel overwhelming. Many assume the best care requires traveling to a major academic hospital in Boston. In reality, some of the most advanced, safest, and most patient-centered cataract surgery in Massachusetts is happening right here at the Cataract Surgery Center of Milford, operated by Milford Franklin Eye Center.

Milford Franklin Eye Center has served the community for more than four decades, earning a reputation for comprehensive care grounded in continuity, accessibility, and physician involvement. Unlike practices that rely on rotating or visiting surgeons, the ophthalmologists here most of them live and they all work in the community, provide emer-

gency coverage, and care for patients before, during, and after surgery. That continuity is a key reason patients trust them.

A major distinction of the Cataract Surgery Center of Milford is that surgery is performed in a fully licensed, Medicare-certified, and QUAD A-accredited ambulatory surgery center—not a standard office. This distinction has important safety and financial benefits.

Office-based cataract surgery often requires patients to pay out-of-pocket office use fees. This is because many insurance companies decline coverage for office-based surgery because of safety concerns for surgeries performed outside accredited centers. At the Cataract Surgery Center of Milford, this is not a concern: these charges are covered by insurance. The center meets strict standards



for sterility, anesthesia, staffing, infection control, and emergency preparedness—comparable to hospitals—ensuring patient safety and avoiding unexpected costs.

Patients are encouraged to ask questions when referred for cataract surgery. They should ask

their optometrists whether the ophthalmologist performs surgery in an accredited center or an office, and whether any commercial relationships may influence the referral. Transparency helps patients make informed decisions about safety and cost.

The center is also a regional leader in innovation. It was among the first in Massachusetts to adopt laser-assisted cataract surgery and advanced premium intraocular lenses, helping many patients reduce or eliminate dependence on glasses. More recently, it became the first in the state to implant the Clareon Pan-Optix Pro trifocal lens, a next-generation implant providing sharp vision at near, intermediate, and distance ranges.

The center also leads in glaucoma care as well. It was the first in the region to offer Direct Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (DSLT), which delivers laser energy without touching the eye, making treatment faster, more comfortable, and precise while maintaining a strong safety profile. With this laser, patients often reduce or eliminate daily eye drops. The center was also the first in New England to use iDose TR, an advanced treatment that delivers sustained-release medication for cataract patients, a milestone covered in a Channel 5 news story.

The center was also the first to install the Unity Cataract System, a fully integrated surgical platform that combines imaging, fluidics, and phacoemulsifica-

tion in one system. This allows surgeons greater control, consistency, and efficiency, improving safety and outcomes.

The center remains deeply patient-centered. Cataract surgery is typically performed using topical anesthesia—eye drops rather than injections—combined with gentle IV sedation. Patients are awake but comfortable, and follow-up care is provided by the same surgeons who performed the procedure, reinforcing continuity. Compare this to the sad and scary situation of office-based surgery, where only a pill is given and additional sedation cannot be administered due to the lack of IV access and no anesthesiologist present.

The Cataract Surgery Center of Milford offers a rare combination: hospital-level safety standards, cutting-edge technology, transparent insurance coverage approved by all insurers, and local care. Patients do not need to travel far, go outside their insurance network, or pay out-of-pocket fees to receive exceptional cataract and glaucoma treatment. For many in Milford and surrounding communities, world-class eye care is not only accessible—it is right here at home.

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# Santa Had a Very Successful Ride Around Bellingham

Santa and his elves traveled throughout town on November 28, 29, and 30, spreading holiday cheer to residents of all ages. The visit was coordinated and supported by the dedicated members of the Bellingham Lions Club.

Santa Claus expressed heartfelt gratitude for the incredible kindness and generosity shown by the community, whose do-

nations totaled \$1,500 for the Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry. "This will make a meaningful difference for those in need, especially during the holiday season," he said.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Bellingham Fire Department, Bellingham Police Department, and Sadie Lemansky Photographer and owner of Fox & Crow Photos



In the picture is Rosemarie Marsh, Coordinator at Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry - Robin Ewing, Treasurer Bellingham Lions - Sue Durkin Director Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry.

# Bellingham Republican Town Committee 2026 Candidates' Breakfast March 7

Bellingham, MA - The Bellingham Republican Town Committee (RTC) will host its 2026 Candidates' Breakfast on Saturday, March 7th, at PJ's Bar & Grille (191 Mechanic St, Bellingham, MA) from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

The Candidates' Breakfast will convene Republican candidates, party leaders, and local voters as the 2026 election cycle begins. Statewide Republican candidates are expected to attend and will have the opportunity to speak with attendees, share their priorities, and engage in discussion.

The program will open with a welcome address by State Representative Mike Soter of the 8th Worcester District. A buffet breakfast, including pancakes and eggs, will be served during the event.

Confirmed state-wide candidate attendees include Gu-

bernatorial candidates Mike Kennealy and Brian Shortsleeve, as well as candidate for Treasurer, Elizabeth Dionne. Additional statewide candidates are expected to attend as the event approaches.

The event is open to Republicans and any member of the public inter-

ested in learning more about the candidates who will appear on the 2026 ballot. Tickets can be purchased at BellinghamRTC.com. The Bellingham Republican Town Committee is led by Chair Lenny Holden and Vice Chair Dan Ranieri.



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# Bellingham Fire Reflects on 2025

The Bellingham Fire Department reported on its Facebook page that it responded to a total of 24,275 calls in 2025. This included 20,030 medical responses, 3,152 fire responses, and 1,055 responses by Community Paramedics. Emergency medical services made up 82.5 percent of total responses, while fire responses accounted for about 13 percent. Since 2015, when the department responded to 15,608 calls, the department's overall call volume has increased by nearly 9,000 responses, representing an increase of approximately 56 percent over the past decade.

The post continued, "We remain committed to serving our community with professionalism, care, and dedication every day!

For more detailed information on our call responses, visit our Fire Department Dashboard:

<https://cob.org/.../fire.../fire-department-data-dashboard>."

# LoSA Plans Movie Night after Fun Paint Night

The January meeting of the Ladies of St. Anne began with a prayer to St. Anne and a business meeting. Members then created winter-themed signs for their home décor. Stencils pressed to a wooden round or square are the starting point for the project. Listen to Your Art owner Crystal Trudeau provides all the materials including paints, sponges, brushes, and ribbons for hanging the finished product. It's our fourth year, and we are still loving Paint Night!



Our February 12 Movie Night meeting will begin at 6 p.m. in the Parish Hall. A light dinner and drinks will be available during the business meeting. During the movie there will be popcorn and candy with ice cream sundaes served at intermission. Don't forget to wear your PJs!

All women 18+ years are invited to come to a meeting to discover more about our Sodality and mission. Our ministry is to develop and strengthen one another in devotion to St. Anne,

mother of our Blessed Mother Mary, and grandmother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her sole desire is to lead us to Jesus, to obtain from Him all the graces we

need in order to follow Him with joy and peace. Please join us for Movie Night and learn a little more about the Ladies of St. Anne.

# Bellingham Women of Today Plans Events, Welcomes New Members

## UPCOMING EVENTS

We are planning our annual "Marshmallow Peep Diorama" contest, so start thinking about what you can do with those sweet little treats. There will be more information coming. This activity is fun for all ages and creative abilities!!

One of our members will be spreading kindness with the help of her students. They will make Valentines and positive messages to be distributed with one of the Meals on Wheels deliveries in February.

The Bellingham Women of Today will again be participating in the High School Scholarship Program. The guidance counselors at the High School will make the applications available later in the spring. We will share more information in the future.

In December, we had a fundraising event called Muffins with Santa. It was a fun event for children and families with craft projects and photos with Santa, as well as an assortment of muffins and treats. We would like to thank St. Blaise Church for allowing us to host this event.

Our members also made Holiday poppers for the seniors that receive Meals on Wheels. They were little poppers full of little treats such as candy and Chapstick.

## JOIN BELLINGHAM WOMEN OF TODAY

We are always open to new members. Please feel free to check us out by joining us at our monthly meetings. We meet at the Bellingham Police Department in the conference room starting at 7:30 p.m. on the second Monday of the month from September until June. Message us for more information about our organization, at [bellinghamwomentoday@gmail.com](mailto:bellinghamwomentoday@gmail.com) or find us on Facebook.

## FORMER EVENTS

In November we made some bagged treats and donated them to Meals on Wheels for their Thanksgiving dinner deliveries.

Our members also collected warm socks, hats, mittens and gloves for the homeless.

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## Bellingham Fire Department Extinguishes Fire in a Home

Bellingham, MA — Last month, the Bellingham Fire Department and mutual aid partners worked together to quickly extinguish a fire that started accidentally in the chimney of a Stella Road home.

On Friday, Jan. 16, at approximately 4:15 p.m., Bellingham Fire received a 911 call reporting a chimney fire with extension into a home.

Chief William R. Miller was first on scene and he arrived to find heavy smoke showing from the home, and fire showing through a front window.

Companies stretched two hose lines into the home and quickly knocked down flames that spread from the chimney into a closet and the home's living room. Crews then performed extensive overhaul to ensure the fire was out.

Damage was contained to the chimney, closet and living room, but the home suffered smoke damage throughout and was no longer habitable.

A family of six was displaced by the fire and made arrangements to stay with relatives.

Firefighters from Mendon, Medway, Franklin and Norfolk provided mutual aid support at the scene, and firefighters from Blackstone covered Bellingham stations.

The cause of the fire was accidental combustion of material around the chimney.

"Firefighters did excellent work in cold temperatures to prevent this fire from doing significantly more damage," said Chief Miller. "I want to thank our mutual aid support."

## Tri-County Regional Chamber Upcoming Events

### Connecting Women Leaders - The Habits of Successful People

Wednesday, February 4th, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Grab lunch, make new connections, and leave feeling inspired.

Join us for a laid-back Women's Luncheon & Networking event where great conversation meets real-life motivation.

We'll kick things off with networking (no awkward stuff, promise), then hear from our speaker Shawon Davis, as she shares the everyday habits of successful people—the kind that actually work in real life. Think simple mindset shifts, small routines, and practical habits that help you stay focused, confident, and moving forward without burning out.

This is a great chance to step

away from your to-do list, connect with other amazing women, and pick up ideas you can actually use—whether you're running a business, growing your career, or just looking for a little inspiration.

Atria Draper Place, 25 Hopedale St., Hopedale, Registration Required

### Speed Networking: Make More Connections in One Night Than Most Do in a Month!

Tuesday, February 10th, 5-7 p.m.

Tired of awkward networking events where you only meet one or two new people? This isn't that. The Greater MetroWest Connector Speed Networking Event is a fast-paced, high-energy networking experience designed to help you meet lots of local pro-

fessionals in record time.

Here's what to expect:

- Rapid-fire introductions that get right to the point
- A fun, structured format that eliminates the awkwardness
- New connections, fresh ideas, and real opportunities to grow your business or career
- An open-to-all event – This event is open to business owners, entrepreneurs, and professionals from all industries.

Doubletree Hotel, 11 Beaver St., Milford, Registration Required

To register for these and other upcoming Tri-County Regional Chamber events, visit [www.tri-countychamberma.org](http://www.tri-countychamberma.org).

## Bellingham Fire Reflects on 2025

The Bellingham Fire Department reported on its Facebook page that it responded to a total of 24,275 calls in 2025. This included 20,030 medical responses, 3,152 fire responses, and 1,055 responses by Community Paramedics. Emergency medical services made up 82.5 percent of total responses, while fire responses accounted for about 13 percent. Since 2015, when the department responded to 15,608 calls, the department's overall call volume has increased by nearly 9,000 responses, rep-

resenting an increase of approximately 56 percent over the past decade.

The post continued, "We remain committed to serving our community with professionalism, care, and dedication every day!

For more detailed information on our call responses, visit our Fire Department Dashboard:

<https://cob.org/.../fire.../fire-department-data-dashboard>."

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# Norfolk County Real Estate Activity Rises in December

Dedham, MA – Norfolk County Register of Deeds William P. O'Donnell reported that real estate activity in Norfolk County remained strong in December 2025, with increases in both Deed and mortgage recordings compared to last year.

The Norfolk County Registry of Deeds recorded a total of 10,178 documents in December 2025, a 16% increase from December 2024 and a 24% increase from November 2025.

“The increase in overall document recordings compared to last December is a strong indicator of continued engagement in the real estate market,” stated Norfolk County Register of Deeds, William P. O'Donnell. “This level of activity reflects confidence among buyers, sellers, and lenders as we close out the year.”

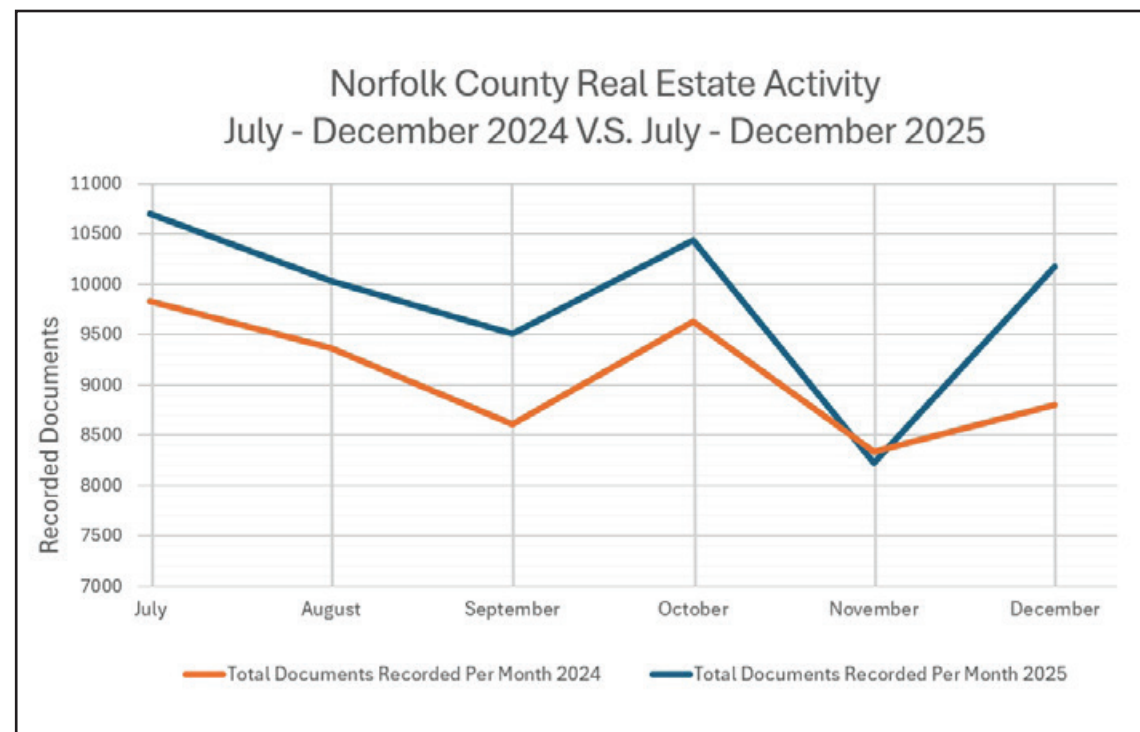
The total number of deeds recorded in December, which includes both commercial and residential real estate sales and transfers, was 1,545, up 13% from December 2024 and 25% higher than November 2025. Looking at just real estate sales, 745 properties were sold, an 11%

increase compared to last year.

The average sale price of commercial and residential properties in December 2025 was \$1,437,216, an 18% decrease from December 2024, but a 2% increase from November 2025. The total dollar volume of commercial and residential sales in December was \$1.07 billion, down 10% compared to last year, but up 27% from November.

“This reduction in overall real estate prices compared to last year may offer some relief to those looking to purchase property in Norfolk County,” said Register O'Donnell. “Lower average sale prices could create new opportunities for first-time homebuyers and current homeowners looking to move who were previously priced out of the market. However, purchase prices remain high relative to past years”

Lending activity also showed strong performance. A total of 1,753 mortgages were recorded in December 2025, up 29% from December 2024 and 25% higher than November 2025. The total dollar amount of mortgage in-



debtedness recorded in December was \$1,280,227,467, a 12% increase compared to last year and 28% higher than the previous month.

The foreclosure market in Norfolk County saw positive developments during December 2025. There were 4 foreclosure


deeds recorded as a result of mortgage foreclosures taking place in Norfolk County, down from 6 recorded in December 2024. Notices to foreclose also declined significantly, with 11 notices recorded in December this year compared to 33 during the same time period last year, a 67% decrease.

“Any reduction in foreclosure activity is positive news,” said Register O'Donnell. “With that said, we must remember that foreclosure activity has a human impact, and there are still a number of our neighbors who have lost their homes, and even more are dangerously close to losing their homes. I would urge anyone struggling to pay their mortgage or who knows someone who is struggling to contact one of the non-profit organizations listed on

our website, www.norfolkdeeds.org.”

“The positive trends we have seen in December underscore the resilience and continued desirability of Norfolk County as a place to live, work, and invest,” said Register O'Donnell. “Despite fluctuations in the broader economy, the local real estate market has shown strength across key indicators including property sales, mortgage activity, and pricing adjustments that may improve affordability. This momentum reflects confidence in our communities as we move into the new year.”

The Norfolk County Registry of Deeds is located at 649 High St., Dedham. Reach them at (781) 461-6101 or registerodonnell@norfolkdeeds.org. Also find them on Facebook and X.



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## Lunch at the Senior Center Was Enjoyed by All

On Saturday, December 6, the Bellingham Lions Club proudly continued its tradition of hosting an in person holiday lunch at the Bellingham Senior Center, welcoming more than 100 seniors for a festive afternoon.

Guests enjoyed a full, home-style meal featuring turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, squash, gravy, cranberry sauce, and an assortment of desserts.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who helped

make the event such a success: the Senior Center staff who handled reservations and provided support throughout the day; PJ's Smokehouse, who generously provided the lunch; Mike Soter, who donated desserts; and the Bellingham High School National Honor Society students, whose assistance and enthusiasm were greatly appreciated.

The Lions look forward to continuing this wonderful tradition next year.

# Franklin Art Association to Welcome Sculptor Brendan Sullivan February 4th

The Franklin Art Association warmly welcomes the public to its next public meeting at 6:30 p.m. on February 4, 2026 at the Franklin Senior Center. Our artist demonstrator will be sculptor, Brendan Sullivan. His work is a contemporary inspired exploration of the evolving landscape of American Masculinity; working with materials, form and cultural ritual. He received his BFA in Studio Art at Umass, Amherst and his MFA at the New York Academy of Art in 2018. He has been the recipient of numerous awards and residencies. Drawing from his own experiences as a man, an athlete and manual laborer, Sullivan examines the social and psychological tension between vulnerability and strength imagery embedded in masculine identity. He hopes his work will challenge fixed ideas of masculinity and tradition. Wood, steel, worn leather, industrial remnants and animal images, etc.



The Franklin Art Association takes pride in offering a student scholarship yearly to a local art student wishing to continue their art career in art instruction after high school graduation. Donations are welcome. FAA is having an on-going raffle for the scholarship of local artist's, Peg Munson's seashore pastel artwork.

Please join us at our monthly meetings for art instruction, the camaraderie of art conversation and refreshments at intermission.

Wednesday, February 4th from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Franklin Senior Center.



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# Bellingham Public Library News & Events for February

For updates, please visit, [www.bellinghamlibrary.org](http://www.bellinghamlibrary.org).

Closed, Monday February 16 for Presidents' Day

## Special Programs

**Library Annual Art & Photography Show, Sunday, February 15th from 2-4 p.m.**

**Submissions accepted from January 30th through February 11th at 8 p.m.**

We are looking forward to seeing the creativity of our artists and photographers again this year. The show will feature music from acoustic guitarist, singer, songwriter Ric Allendorf and refreshments courtesy of the Friends of the Bellingham Library.

## Important Dates

Wednesday, February 11th at 8 p.m. - Submission deadline

Sunday, February 15 - Opening reception 2-4 p.m.

Guidelines and entry forms available at: <https://bit.ly/3YwgfIZ>

Questions, email [library@bellinghamlibrary.org](mailto:library@bellinghamlibrary.org)

**10 Steps to Researching the History of Your House in Bellingham, Thursday, February 5, 6:30 p.m.**

This program, facilitated by Marian Pierre-Louis, <https://northeasthousehistorian.com/>, is brought to the library in partnership with the Bellingham Historical Commission.

Please register.

**Pete the Cat's Groovy Valentine's Party - Saturday February 7 at 11 a.m.**

We're throwing a Pete-the-Cat style party to celebrate Valentine's Day! Join us for some good vibes and a groovy time - we'll be making cool crafts and rocking in our dancing shoes! Please register!

**Conversation with Local Author Dina Honour - Tuesday, February 10th at 6:30 p.m.**

Dina's new book, *This is a Love Song: Thoughts from the B Side of a Gen X Life*, came out on December 1. She is also the author of *There's Someplace Like Home and It's A Lot To Unpack*.

Dina is an expat currently living in Berlin, Germany, but she's moved from NYC to Cyprus to Copenhagen and now, Berlin. Her books are about marriage, motherhood and the unique expat life. Please register.

**Winter Olympic Games - Thursday February 19th at 3 p.m.**

Join us in celebrating the 2026 Winter Olympics by competing in our indoor version of the winter games! For families - Please register to help us plan.

**Red Cross Blood Drive - Saturday, February 21st from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm.**

Register at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org)

**Ongoing Children's Programs**

**The Baby Bunch** - Mondays, 9-10 a.m., for infants 0-18 months and their caregivers

**Ring a Ding** - Mondays & Thursdays at 10:15 a.m., for ages 0-5, no sessions school vacation week

**Lego Builders** - Mondays at 4:30 p.m., open hour to build with Legos. For Grades K to 3

**Read to Freedom the Reading Dog** - Mondays from 5:30-7 p.m. Check the calendar to sign up for a 15-minute time slot!

**Sensory Story Time** - Tuesdays at 10:15 a.m., for children ages 2-5 of all abilities (younger siblings always welcome). Please register for each session, no session on February 17th.

**Adult/Child Book Clubs** - For kids in grades 2-4, 5-7 or 8-11 and an adult in their life who loves to read. Meets monthly.

Grades 2-4 should contact Melissa Denham, [mdenham@cwmares.org](mailto:mdenham@cwmares.org), grades 5-7 should contact Amanda Maclure, [amaclure@cwmares.org](mailto:amaclure@cwmares.org), and grades 8-11 should contact Diane Nelson, [dnelson@cwmares.org](mailto:dnelson@cwmares.org). Check the library calendar for meeting dates and times.

**After School Programs** - ASK for grades 4-6, registration required. Teen Room from grades 7-12, drop in.

## Adult Programs

**Book Discussion Group** - Generally meets the 1st Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m. In person or on Zoom. February 2, *Happy Land* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez. Contact Suzanne at [salpert@cwmares.org](mailto:salpert@cwmares.org). Titles for the remainder of the year:

March: *The Frozen River* by Ariel Lawhon; April: *All the Colors of the Dark* by Chris Whitaker; May: *Animal Farm* by George Orwell; June: *Finding My Way* by Malala Yousafzai; July: *The Orphan Collector* by Eileen Marie Wiseman; August: *James, A Novel* by Percival Everett; September: *Somewhere Beyond the Sea* by TJ Klune; October: *None of This is True* by Lisa Jewell; November: *The Berry Pickers* by Amanda Peters; December: *Oona Out of Order* by Margarita Montimore

## English Conversation Circles Group

Monday, February 2, 4 p.m., Tuesday, February 10, 5 p.m., Wednesday, February 18, 6 p.m., Thursday, February 26, 7 p.m., Saturdays, February 7 & 28, 10:30 a.m.

Facilitated by Thienne Risatto, our Library Assistant - Multilingual Learners Coordinator, for our newly revamped Conversation Circles program. Thienne, a native Portuguese speaker, is also fluent in Spanish and English (as well as learning Italian!). Practice speaking English in a relaxed, comfortable place, and meet new friends as we learn by talking. If you can speak English but want to improve your English conversation skills, this is the group for you! No registration. Just show up!

**Tuesday Fiber Arts & Other Crafts** - alternating Tuesdays, February 3 and 17, from 6-7:45 pm. Love to knit, crochet or do other arts and crafts? Join others with similar interests.

**A Novel Idea: Book Club for Adults** - Tuesday, February 3, from 6:30-8 p.m., with light refreshments. This month's selection - *Devolution*, by Max Brooks. Please contact Diane Nelson [dnelson@cwmares.org](mailto:dnelson@cwmares.org)

**Needlecraft Night** - Wednesdays from 6-8 p.m. All skill levels welcome, bring your own materials.

**Friends of the Library Monthly Meeting** - Tuesday, February 10, 7 p.m. To attend email [library@bellinghamlibrary.org](mailto:library@bellinghamlibrary.org) for the Zoom link!

**Library Board of Trustees Meeting** - Thursday, February 12, 7 p.m., Conference Room

**Virtual Author Talks** - to register for these talks, go to: <https://libraryc.org/bellingham>. Recordings of these talks are posted on the library website in days following the event.

- Swashbuckling Heroines and High Seas Adventures with novelist Vanessa Riley,

Thursday February 5th at 7 p.m.:

- Mojos, Mermaids, Medicine, 400 Years of Black Women's Magic,

Thursday, February 12th at 2 p.m.

- Smithson's Gamble - Incredible History Behind the World's Largest Museum,

Tuesday, February 24th at 2 p.m.

**Yoga: Slow Down & Warm Up** - Kripalu Yoga For Winter - Tuesdays at 8:30 a.m. starting February 10. Check the library calendar to register.

**Writing Group for Adults** - Tuesday, February 17th at 6:30 p.m.

Hybrid meeting. Writers, readers, listeners - come join us! Local area writers Amy Barteloni and Marjorie Turner Hollman welcome you to hear what local writers are working on and share what you are working on. Works of fiction or non-fiction are welcome. Reading limit is 9 minutes per reader, with a brief opportunity for positive, personal comments. Contact Marjorie Turner Hollman at [marjorie@marjorieturner.com](mailto:marjorie@marjorieturner.com).

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## SPRING HOME REVIEW

Spring Home Review is the perfect location to promote your business! If you're a Real Estate Agent, Broker, Mortgage Company, Mover or Home Service Provider - we're here to help you get the word out!

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- Multi-Generation Living
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**Deadline is Monday, Feb. 9, 2026**









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### PUBLIC LIBRARY

*continued from page 18*

#### Chat & Craft for Adults: Wooden Heart Blocks – Wednesday, February 11th at 6:30 p.m.

Join us and create four Love-themed decorative wooden blocks--perfect for your home decor or a gift. All materials provided, and guidance will be available. Wear your paint clothes! Contact Suzanne for more information. Program supported by the Friends of the Bellingham Library.

#### Bellingham Genealogy Club – Monday, February 23rd from 6-7:30 p.m.

Registration is required; all registrants will receive an email with the Zoom link.

#### Multicultural Festival Committee Members Wanted

The library plans to host Bellingham's first Multicultural Festival. With the assistance of

the community, we hope to turn this into an annual event. We are actively seeking members of the community that represent a variety of cultures and reflect the diversity in our community. To learn more, please contact Library Director Bernadette Rivard at [brivard@bellinghamma.org](mailto:brivard@bellinghamma.org) or (508) 657-2776.

**Friends of the Library Program Supply Wish List** – Can you assist the Friends by purchasing one of these items from the Wish List? Many items are under \$10! <http://bit.ly/3KJiV2i>



## Did You know?

### The Library Has Programs & Resources for Multilingual Learners & Speakers.

Access the following with your library card:

#### In-Person Programs

**English Conversation Circles** - Join Thienne Rissatto, our Library Assistant - Multilingual Learners Coordinator, for our newly revamped English Conversation Circle program. Thienne, a native Portuguese speaker, who is also fluent in Spanish and English (as well as learning Italian!) will be facilitating our English Conversation Circles, one session each week throughout the month, as well as some Saturday sessions. Practice speaking English with other adult English language learners in a relaxed, comfortable place, and meet new friends as we learn by talking together. If you can speak

English but want to improve your English conversation skills, this is the group for you! This is not an English class, but a place to practice speaking to become more fluent in the English language. No registration necessary for this free program. Just show up!

#### Bilingual Pajama Story Time (English/Portuguese)

– Join us for Bilingual Pajama Story Time, a special program for children and families! Geared toward children ages 2-5; siblings welcome. This event features movement, songs, dancing, and the reading of children's books in English and Portuguese, along with simple interactive activities. The goal is to create a warm and fun environment while introducing children to both languages

in a natural and engaging way through music, storytelling, and participation. Children are encouraged to wear their pajamas for a cozy and relaxed experience.

NOTE: check our online calendar for dates and times.

#### Digital Language Learning

– There are three digital language learning platforms available through our library. Transparent Language, Mango Languages, and Lingo LITE.

#### Transparent Language Online

provides lessons and language learning for over 110 languages, including English as a Second Language (ESL) and American Sign Language. Interactive learning activities encourage users to practice listening, speaking, reading, and typing. There is also a section called

#### LIBRARY

*continued on page 21*



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# Bellingham Senior Center Upcoming Events

The Bellingham Senior Center is located at 40 Blackstone St., Bellingham. Reach them at (508) 966-0398 or online at www.bellinghamma.org

**Winter Stroll:** Join Lisa Loo for a stroll at Hopedale Pond on Thursday, February 12 at 11 a.m. Meet at the Hopedale Street parking lot. Walk is 11am-noon, then lunch at the Rail Trail Flatbread Company in Milford. Please dress appropriately. Call Lisa for more info at (508) 657-2714.

**Diner's Club:** Wanna FREE lunch? Join our Diner's Club and get ready for a tasty, satisfying, no-cost lunch! You'll get a small punch card and every time you come into the Joyful Cup Café for a \$5+ meal, we'll punch your card. Ten punches = free lunch!

**Tech Connect:** This informative session returns this month on Tuesday, 2/3 at 1 p.m. Bring your questions!

**Personal Home Care:** Learn about navigating home care, ways to pay for support (VA, insurance, pro-grams), elder law and estate planning, and more affordable staffing options for seniors. Bring your questions and join us for this educational presentation on Thursday, February 12, at 1 p.m.

**Make a Joyful Noise:** Join us on Mondays at 9 a.m.... just for fun!

**First Annual Chili Cook-Off - Bellingham Fire versus Bellingham Police**

It's coming to the Senior Center on Friday, February 6, from noon to 1 p.m. Join us for this tasty competition. Attendees will choose two small cups of chili to taste, and vote.

**Senior Strong:** 8 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 11:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Two, 16-week sessions. Call the Senior Center for more information.

**SHINE:** Need help with your health insurance? Between 9 a.m. and noon on every other Wednesday you can get it with our SHINE representative. Please call ahead and book your appointment.

**Black History Month:** Every Thursday in February the Center will offer a 60-minute documentary about a black American who made a difference. 10:30-11:30 a.m. On the 5th: President Obama's legacy and unfinished business. On the 12th: Maya Angelou and Still I Rise. On the 19th: How Martin Luther King Jr. changed the world. And on the 27th: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.

**BSC Men's Club:** The Club meets every Wednesday at 11:30am at Liz's Tavern in Bellingham.

**Learn To Paint:** Join Amy Adams for an opportunity to learn how to paint all kinds of pictures. All the supplies you'll need are included. Wednesday, February 11 at 1 p.m. Class is FREE and made possible by a grant from the Bellingham Cultural Council. Please call ahead to let us know you'll be attending.

**Canadian Rockies & Glacier National Park is the place to learn about on Thursday, Feb. 19 at 1 p.m.** Join us at the Senior Center as Diane Silverman details a special six-day travel opportunity to Calgary. Explore ice fields, waterfalls, glacial peaks, and towering summits. And bring your questions to the presentation.

**Coffee & Conversation:** Every Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. Town Manager Joe Laydon will attend the first Tuesday of each month.

**Spiritual Book Club:** The Club meets via Zoom on Mondays at 9 a.m. Discussion will be about *The Girl Who Baptised Herself* by Meggan Watterson. Please call host Josie Dutil at (508) 657-2705 for more information.

**AARP Tax Prep:** If you'd like to take advantage of free, professional help in preparing your federal income tax filing, then call the Senior Center and make an appointment. No voicemails, please. You must speak to a person to get an appointment.

To ADVERTISE in THIS PAPER

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email jenschofield@localtownpages.com

## FUSF Food Justice Team to Screen Common Ground, Hold Potluck

On Sunday, February 22, 2026, at 12:30 pm, the First Universalist Food Justice Team will be screening the award-winning film “Common Ground,” starring among others, Woody Harrelson, Laura Dern, Jason Momoa and Danny Glover. “By fusing journalistic expose’ with deeply personal stories from those on the front lines of the food movement, Common Ground unveils a dark web of money, power, and politics behind our broken food system. The film reveals how unjust practices forged our current

farm system in which farmers of all colors are literally dying to feed us. The film profiles a hopeful and uplifting movement of white, black, and indigenous farmers who are using alternative “regenerative” models of agriculture that could balance the climate, save our health, and stabilize America’s economy”.

Enjoy a potluck while watching or feel free to bring your own lunch. Admission is free. The screening and post-film discussion will take place at the First Universalist Society at 262

Chestnut Street, Franklin.

Please also mark your calendars for March 8, 2026 when the discussion of regenerative agriculture farming practices continues with a discussion with Ali Coakley, proprietor, Night Owl Farm, Franklin.

The First Universalist Society in Franklin (FUSF) is a Unitarian Universalist Welcoming Congregation located at 262 Chestnut Street, Franklin. For more information, please contact us at [info@fusf.org](mailto:info@fusf.org) or call (508) 528-5348.

## Podcaster Shines Bright Light on Franklin Cold Case

*This article first appeared in and is used courtesy of The Franklin Observer, <https://franklinobserver.town.news>.*

BY ALAN EARLS

The sad story of Theresa Corley, a Bellingham teen who left a Franklin bar late one night in December of 1978 and was found later, strangled, on the margin of Interstate 495, has haunted locals for nearly half a century. At the time, investigators determined that she may have been sexually assaulted at some point but evidence sufficient to prosecute

anyone has never been found.

There have been some attempts to revive the investigation, including the inclusion of Corley’s case in a pack of “cold case cards” put out a few years ago by the Mass. State Police.

Now, podcaster Nicole Ryan, who has built her reputation on coverage of the Karen Read murder trials with her Read Report, is putting her own efforts into trying to get a resolution. The first episode of her coverage can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/CorleyReport>.

### LIBRARY

*continued from page 19*

KidSpeak for young learners of certain languages, which includes fun and engaging activities for children.

**Mango Languages** contains over 70 world language courses to choose from. Each lesson combines real-life situations and audio from native speakers with simple, clear instructions. The courses are presented with an appreciation for cultural nuance and real-world application.

**Lingo LITE** is an image- and video-based foreign language learning tool for 260 of the most basic words and terms in

30 languages. It uses Associative Multimedia Learning to help the user associate an image with the correct foreign word without first translating it into their native language.

#### Other Digital Resources

Another online resource to consider is MassLINKS Online Academy, which is a free Massachusetts statewide adult education program. Students can choose from High School Equivalency (GED or HiSet) preparation classes or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL/ESL) classes. Classes are offered fully online with evening and morning options to help you work around your schedule.

#### Physical Items

The library has a number of language learning books in print, as well as CDs, Playaways, and computer software that can be checked out with your library card.

We also offer a variety of Children’s, Young Adult, and

## Bellingham Needs Poll Workers!

### Becoming a Poll Worker in Bellingham

One of the best ways that you can help make sure Massachusetts holds successful elections this year is by offering your time to be a poll worker. Poll workers are hired by local election officials to help check in voters, distribute ballots, tally votes, and assist voters in the polling place. Generally, poll workers must be registered voters of the Commonwealth, though up to 2 poll workers per precinct may be 16 or 17 years old.

Although 2025 wasn’t a busy election year, we have three scheduled elections in 2026. Below, please find an applica-

tion with your availability for these elections. Please also note we will have poll worker training in April and May (with additional trainings for wardens and clerks) that will be mandatory.

In addition to poll worker positions, we have certain designations (with responsibilities involved). Find the positions at <https://www.bellinghamma.org/895/Becoming-a-Poll-Worker>.

Thank you for your interest, and please call the office with any questions. We can be reached at [townclerk@bellinghamma.org](mailto:townclerk@bellinghamma.org) or (508) 657-2830.

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# Sports

## Bellingham HS Grad Hammann Enjoys Role As 2-sport Volunteer Coach

By KEN HAMWEY,  
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Tom Hammann is an assistant varsity coach in basketball at Hopedale High during the winter, and he pivots quickly in the spring, taking on the role as a varsity assistant for Millis High's baseball team.

The 60-year-old Hammann, who excelled in both those sports at Bellingham High in the early 1980s, takes no money for coaching — no salary, no stipend. He's strictly a volunteer and he wouldn't have it any other way.

Hammann isn't unique, but he sure is a rare breed. He's now in his 16th year as an unpaid Hopedale assistant to varsity coach Tony Cordani, and last spring he assisted, Millis coach Jack Nally for the first time. It was Nally's first head-coaching post, and Hammann just wanted to help a friend.

Often asked why he works for free, the personable Hammann cited two reasons.

"I do receive something back," he emphasized. "I get lots of joy seeing kids succeed in sports, or in the classroom and in daily-life situations."

Hammann also likes seeing the two programs use money that he would get to buy what's needed to meet expenses — like uniforms, equipment, or busing costs. It's kind of like winning a 50-50 raffle at a football game," Hammann added. "You win but you give the money back to the program."

However, Derek Phinney, the Millis Athletic Director, insisted that Hammann accept money. Hammann reluctantly accepted, but hopes to return in the spring for no pay.

His volunteer work is a labor of love, and Hammann definitely qualifies as Bellingham's gift to Hopedale basketball. The Blue Raiders ended their season in March, 2020, by sharing the Division 4 State title with Abington after the MIAA canceled all play-off finals because of the coronavirus. That co-championship was Hopedale's first in the program's history.



Tom Hammann is always willing to help Hopedale High basketball players improve their skills.

"Last year, we had a chance to capture a second State crown, but we lost to Pioneer Valley Regional," Hammann said. "We won three tourney games, but couldn't win in the final. That season was a thrill because of the journey. We beat some good teams."

A fan favorite, Hammann is liked by the players and respected highly by Cordani. "Tom is a great guy who's developed excellent relationships with the players," Cordani said. "He's helped us so often and his knowledge of the game is a huge asset."

Hammann's savvy and his keen ability to relate to players, whether starters or reserves, make him a valuable asset and obviously a key piece in the Blue Raiders continual success.

"My role is to be supportive, especially for the kids who don't get much playing time," Hammann said. "I try to emphasize the value of teamwork, and when I'm asked for advice, I'm happy to give it."

The players relate well to Hammann, obviously because

he's easy-going, talks softly and knows how to build confidence.

Hammann doesn't sit near Cordani or jayvee coach Dan Liberatore during games. He sits at the opposite end of the bench. "I don't want too many cooks in the kitchen," he emphasized. "There's no reason to have three coaches talking to the kids. Every year, one of the players is designated to sit next to me for every game. We talk about the game in progress, about strategy and even things that aren't game-related."

During his playing days, Hammann was the spark that ignited a championship basketball team during Bellingham's 1982-83 season. The 5-foot-9, 160-pound point guard guided the Blackhawks in stylish fashion, always getting the ball into the right hands at the right time. Hammann kept the engine purring, the link to the squad's top shooters — Cliff Lander and Roger Canestrari Jr.

The results were magnificent — a 17-3 record and the TVL title. At one point, the Blackhawks were 15-0. Ham-

mann averaged 12 points and eight assists that season. Lander starred at center, Canestrari was a phenomenal off-guard, and Mike Reed and Pat Tannen were quality players at forward. Kevin Winship often got lengthy stretches of playing time off the bench.

"I was proud to be one of the captains," Hammann said. "We were a classic run-and-gun team. Everyone knew their role and no one complained about how many points they got or didn't get. I took the quarterback reins gladly when (coach) Jim Bonollo handed me control."

Hammann had some super efforts for the Blackhawks. The Holliston game was one he recalls fondly.

When Bellingham opened the tourney against Oliver Ames, it won easily — by 28. Hammann finished with 15 points and 10 assists. The season ended in a loss to Rockland.

Also a star in baseball, Hammann played second base for three seasons, hitting .400 as a sophomore and finishing with

a career .340 batting average. "Our teams were .500," he said. "My top thrill came as a sophomore against Holliston. I got a winning RBI-single off all-star hurler Rich Glickman in a 3-2 victory."

After graduation, Hammann went to Dean College for two years, playing basketball and baseball. A second baseman, he excelled, hitting .300 for two seasons. In basketball, he played guard in a reserve role. After getting his associate's degree, he enrolled at UMass-Dartmouth, where he majored in history.

In 1994, Hammann started his own construction company — Hammer's Roofing Co. In 2008, he was hired in Hopedale as the facilities manager for the town's three schools. He retired from that post in 2020.

"When I played sports, my philosophy was to work hard and learn from every practice," he said. "When you work hard, good things usually happen."

# Sports

## BHS Boys' Basketball Team Striving to Improve

By KEN HAMWEY,  
BULLETIN SPORTS WRITER

The 2026 edition of the Bellingham High boys' basketball team is a mix of players who are athletic, work hard, provide depth, have size, can rebound and compete on defense.

Whether those ingredients can mesh effectively and lead to a berth in the state tournament remains to be seen. Coach TJ Chiappone, however, has included a playoff invitation as one of his goals but he stresses that other objectives must occur if a tourney berth is to become a reality.

"We have to improve daily, in practice, games, as individuals and as a team," he emphasized. "Our team culture and confidence have to keep improving, and we must keep learning how to win. We'll strive to earn a playoff berth."

Why improvement is a recurring word in Chiappone's vocabulary is linked to what the Blackhawks endured last year. They finished winless.

Now in his 15th year as Bellingham's coach, he's eager for better days ahead. The Blackhawks have displayed promise early on, defeating Medway, then beating Wayland in the Hutchinson Memorial Tournament. BHS lost in that tourney's final by three to powerful Hopedale.

At the *Bulletin's* deadline, the Blackhawks had a 2-7 record. Their playoff power rank was 60 but an 80-75 loss to powerful Medfield in overtime and some hard-earned wins in the days ahead will provide hope for a better rank later in the season.

Chiappone has implemented a captain's council this year that provides a voice for all classes in the program. "The captains meet with me and varsity assistant Rich Blue," Chiappone said. "This gives them an opportunity to air any issues and provide feedback whether it's positive or negative. They've responded to this concept very well."

The captain are leaders by example, and they include seniors Wyatt Callery (center) and



**Captain Stan Kiley has good ball-handling skills and is dynamic on offense.**

Jason Greenberg (point guard), junior Doug Walton (forward), and sophomore Stan Kiley (guard).

"Wyatt is a vocal leader who gives us an inside presence," Chiappone said. "He plays hard, rebounds well and is averaging 10 points and 8 rebounds a game. Jason is an unselfish point guard who is our best on-ball defender. He runs our offense effectively."

"Doug has a good outside shot, gives us presence on the perimeter, is a good positional player who defends well and has a good work ethic. Stan has a high hoop IQ, plays lots of ball in the off-season, has good ball-handling skills and is dynamic on offense."

Two capable forwards, senior Sam Sullivan and sophomore Nate Parmentier, bring top-notch attributes to the front court.

"Sam is a blue-collar player who does the dirty work," Chiappone said. "He's the hardest worker on the team, a physical player, our best passer (four assists per game), and he drives to the hoop effectively. Nate worked hard to become a starter, playing a lot in the off-season. He's athletic, a good rebounder (six per game), gets good position and has a nose for the ball."

Junior Cam MacGregor is averaging 10 points a game from the wing and giving the Blackhawks some fuel on offense. "Cam is a very skilled offensive player who gets to the hoop and shoots effectively off the dribble. He also hits three's and is a very good mid-range shooter."

Senior Matt Marino can play either guard or forward. "Matt is a good athlete who gives us a good outside threat," Chiappone offered. "He's also a capable three-point shooter."

Junior Brock Barry plays forward but also can fill in for Callery at center. "Brock is good on the boards, has a nose for the ball and can shoot from outside," Chiappone said.

Three reserves who can contribute when called upon include junior forward Will Landrigan, and freshmen Sean Landrigan (point guard) and Luke Proler (guard-forward). "Will works hard and is an effective rebounder and Sean and Luke are skilled players who've got bright futures."

Chiappone's staff includes Blue and CJ Fama (varsity assistants), Brian Martin (javyee coach), and Justin Crayon (freshman coach). "Rich Blue is a great resource who instills great life lessons and experiences," Chiappone noted. "Brian has a great demeanor and loves the game and CJ and Justin are former players who know our system and are eager to give back to the community."

Chiappone's philosophy of coaching includes helping players reach their potential and enjoy their athletic journey. He

firmly believes that if those two elements occur, then winning will be the by-product. And, he also thrives on teaching his players valuable life lessons.

"Overcoming adversity and becoming resilient are two life lessons that are high on my list," Chiappone said. "Assuming responsibility and being accountable are important lessons, too. Others include being a good teammate, learning how to lead and to be competitive while maintaining good sportsmanship."

To stay in the mix for a tourney berth, here's what Chiappone says has to occur.

"Ultimately, we will need to win a few games for our confidence to grow. We have been in every game that we've played so far, but haven't been able to play a complete four quarters yet. We have made improvements in our shooting percentage and our team rebounding, which has allowed us to keep games close. We are getting better."

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# Sports

## Hopedale Outlasts BHS in Hutchinson Tourney Thriller

By KEN HAMWEY,  
BULLETIN SPORTS WRITER

Hopedale and Bellingham High's basketball teams made the 19th annual Barry Hutchinson Memorial Holiday Tournament very memorable.

The Blue Raiders not only won the tourney championship, 60-57, but also held on to repeat as tourney champs. The Blackhawks, who advanced to the title game by downing Wayland in a 54-52 thriller, needed a 12-point run to beat the Warriors. Against Hopedale, they erased a 15-point deficit, and took a one-point lead in the final quarter before losing on Josh Douglas' three-pointer.

Both teams displayed effective up-tempo styles on offense and relied on defense and rebounding. And, three-point shooting was on display throughout the tourney final. Hopedale converted 10 threes and Bellingham connected on seven.

Both coaches — Tony Cordani of Hopedale and TJ Chiappone of Bellingham — offered their thoughts on a game that was intense and filled with dynamic momentum swings.

"Bellingham is gritty and physical," Cordani said. "We struggled defending them. It was a very competitive final, and we're glad Josh hit that three on what was a broken play. He's a very good shooter and has good range. We've got so much respect for TJ and his players. They pass and defend well, can shoot and rebound."

Chiappone focused on his team's improvement after a down season a year ago.

"Our effort was there, we battled, and we're learning how to play together," he noted. "We lost a winnable game, but we took care of the ball, got defensive rebounds and made shots. But we struggled at the free-throw line, converting only four of 12 attempts."

Hopedale was led by Keigan Murphy's 19 points and Douglas' 16. The Blackhawks top scorers were Cam MacGregor with 16 points and Wyatt Cal-



Bellingham's Wyatt Callery, left, and Sam Sullivan were selected as tourney all-stars.

lery's 12.

Bellingham trailed, 35-20, in the second quarter but edged closer at intermission, down by nine, 35-26. After three quarters, Hopedale's lead dwindled to seven (52-45).

Sophomore Nate Parmentier gave Bellingham the lead, 53-52, on a layup but Murphy's three-pointer put Hopedale on top, 55-53 in the final quarter. With the score knotted at 57-all with 33 seconds to go, Douglas sank a three from 25 feet away. Two missed shots by Bellingham ensued but it got possession with .3 seconds left after a Blue Raider

double-dribble infraction. A desperation shot by MacGregor hit the rim but time had expired before the attempt.

Bellingham's journey to the championship game was another example of true grit.

A five-point lead at halftime became a five-point deficit for BHS after three quarters. The final period, however, was a breath-taking, roller-coaster ride. Wayland led, 48-41, with three minutes remaining but the Blackhawks surged ahead, 53-48, thanks to Stan Kiley's 11 points and two key baskets by Matt Marino.



Hopedale's Keigan Murphy, left, was the tourney's MVP and teammate Josh Douglas was selected as an all-star. Courtesy

Photo by Tom Hammann

But, a technical foul and three missed free throws by Bellingham kept the Warriors alive. Joshua Lewis-Guy converted one free throw and Cooper McFarlane's three-pointer cut Wayland's deficit to 53-52. A free-throw by Jason Greenberg put BHS up, 54-52, and with five seconds to go Wayland's Giovanni Sailsman drove the length of the court and missed a lay-up.

"We made shots in the final quarter and that settled us down," Chiappone said. "Callery's 19 points and Kiley's 14 were huge. Wyatt has played

consistently and Stan's been a catalyst, a kid who has a high hoop IQ and passion for the game. Matt also was a plus with his rebounding and five points down the stretch."

Wayland's coach, Jeff Brewington, credited the Blackhawks for their rally and assumed responsibility for the setback. "Bellingham executed and made adjustments," he noted. "We didn't capitalize on our chances and that's on me. I have to do a better job."

**TOURNEY**  
continued on page 25

# Sports

## TOURNEY

*continued from page 24*

Hopedale advanced by defeating Batson Academy of South Boston, 79-53, in a matchup the Blue Raiders dominated from start to finish.

Hopedale led by eight after the first quarter, increased its advantage to 20 at intermission, then cruised to a 26-point triumph over the Knights.

Murphy led Hopedale with 26 points, Nathan Rutkowski scored 23 and Douglas added 14. Tayvaughn Couch topped the Knights with 17 points followed by Jayden Fuentes-Jackson's 16.

Cordani had high praise for

Murphy, Rutkowski and Douglas. "Keigan is an exceptional point guard who does it all," Cordani emphasized. "Nathan is athletic, rebounds and runs the floor well, and Josh is a terrific shooter and a very good defender."

Knights' coach Paul Rogers, who was a teammate of Chiappone's when they played at Bridgewater State, called the game "a learning experience" and lauded Hopedale. "They're a premier team in the state," he said. "They hustle, spread the floor and get open for threes."

TOURNEY NOTES: The tourney all-star team included Batson Academy's Tayvaughn Couch, Wayland's Giovanni Sailsman, Bellingham's Wyatt

Callery and Sam Sullivan, and Hopedale's Josh Douglas and MVP Keigan Murphy ... Wayland won the consolation game, defeating Batson Academy, 64-48 ... Barry Hutchinson died at the age of 47 of a heart attack in 2006. He led the Blackhawks to their only state basketball championship in 2003 when they defeated Bromfield, 49-40, at the Worcester Centrum ... Chiappone, now in his 15th year as BHS' head coach, served as a varsity assistant to Hutchinson ... Cordani knew Hutchinson and admired his coaching style. "He believed in effort and a strong work ethic," Cordani said. "Both teams in the final lived up to those attributes."

## VOLUNTEER

*continued from page 22*

Bllingham hosted the Barry Hutchinson Memorial Basketball Tournament in December, and Hopedale won a thriller over Bellinghamand for the title. Hammann always enjoys returning with the Hopedale squad. "It's always nice to be back, coaching against my alma mater," he said. "I've known TJ Chiappone (Bellingham's hoop coach) for 30 years."

The father of five children, Hammann firmly believes it's better to give than to receive.

Last October, he was volunteering out of season. He helped Cordani run a youth basketball camp at Hopedale Elementary School. "We worked for four Sundays, from 5 to 8 pm, with three different grade levels," Hammann noted. "It was fun instructing kids from grades 1-8."

Tom Hammann's giving nature isn't unique but his caring style truly is a big plus in this day and age.

## Stony Brook Camera Club February Meetings

The Stony Brook Camera Club meets in person and/or virtually on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. from September to June. In person meetings are held at the Anglican Church of the Redeemer, 195 Main Street, Franklin. Our meetings feature speakers, competitions, and discussions of general interest. We also sponsor a number of photography activities and workshops throughout the year.

SBCC includes and welcomes photographers of all abilities.

Our program for February:

- February 5: (Zoom) Member competition
- February 12: (Zoom) "Vision, Passion, and Projects" with Cole Thompson
- February 19: (Hybrid) "Photographing Rhode Island" with Kevin Bruff

- February 26: (In Person) Cabin Fever Workshop

See our website : [stonybrookcc.com](http://stonybrookcc.com) for a calendar of events and member information.

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## CALENDAR

### February 2

**Book Discussion Group, 6:30 p.m.** In person or on Zoom. Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone St., Bellingham, *Happy Land* by Dolen Perkins-Valdez. Contact Suzanne at salpert@cw-mars.org. Titles for the remainder of the year:

### February 3

**A Novel Idea: Book Club for Adults, 6:30-8 p.m.**, with light refreshments. *Devolution*, by Max Brooks. Please contact Diane Nelson dnelson@cw-mars.org

### February 4

**Franklin Art Association meeting, 6:30 p.m.**, Franklin Senior Center, 10 Daniel McCahill St., Franklin. Artist demonstrator is sculptor, Brendan Sullivan.

### February 5

**10 Steps to Researching the History of Your House in Bellingham, 6:30 p.m.**, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone St., Bellingham, brought to the library in partnership with the Bellingham Historical Commission. Presented by Marian Pierre-Louis <https://northeasthousehistorian.com/>. Please register for program on library website.

**Virtual Author Talks: Swash-buckling Heroines and High Seas Adventures with novelist Vanessa Riley, 7 p.m.**, to register for these talks, go to: <https://libraryc.org/bellinghamma>.

**Stony Brook Camera Club Member competition, 7:30 p.m.**, Zoom, stonybrookcc.com

**Stirring the Pot: A Conversation on Culinary Creativity, 7 p.m.**, Medfield Council on Aging, 1 Ice House Rd., Medfield, leading chefs, authors, and culinary entrepreneurs share stories and insights into the creative process behind the plate, free, but suggested donation \$25, register at [www.bellforge.org](http://www.bellforge.org).

### February 7

**Pete the Cat's Groovy Valentine's Party, 11 a.m.**, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone St., Bellingham, we'll make cool crafts and rock in our dancing shoes! Please register!

**Community Concerts @ Franklin UMC presents Michael Rivelis on acoustic guitar, 7 p.m.**, Franklin United Methodist Church, 82 West Central St., Franklin. Refreshments served after concert. Free.

**Bruce Mattson's Mardi Gras Party! (Ex keyboardist for the Gregg Allman band), Doors open at 6:30 with 7pm show-time, Niagara Coffee Haus, 8 Exchange St., Millis, [https://](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bruce-mattsons-mardi-gras-party-tickets-1979659805770)**

[www.eventbrite.com/e/bruce-mattsons-mardi-gras-party-tickets-1979659805770](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bruce-mattsons-mardi-gras-party-tickets-1979659805770)

**Nashville's Crys Matthews, 7:30 p.m.**, Circle of Friends Franklin's First Universalist Society Meetinghouse, 262 Chestnut St. in Franklin, <https://circlefolk.org/>

### February 8

**Second Sunday Speaker Series: Looking back at 115 Years of Scouting, 1:15 p.m.** (doors open 1 p.m.), Franklin Historical Museum, 80 West Central St., Franklin, with Peter Glass, Curator at the Casoni Museum, a part of the Camp Squanto Alumni Association on the South Shore who will share history and display some items related to the generations of Scouting in the region. Admission free; donations appreciated.

### February 9

**Bellingham Women of Today Meeting, 7:30 p.m.**, meeting room of Bellingham Police Department, 30 Blackstone St., Bellingham

### February 10

**Conversation with local author Dina Honour, 6:30 p.m.**, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone St., Bellingham, Please register.

### February 11

**The Bad Apples Present: Date Night Concert, 6:30 p.m.**, Franklin Public Library, 118 Main St., Franklin

### February 12

**Virtual Author Talks: Mojos, Mermaids, Medicine, 400 Years of Black Women's Magic, 2 p.m.**, to register for these talks, go to: <https://libraryc.org/bellinghamma>.

**Ladies of St. Anne Sodality Meeting/Movie Night, 6 p.m.**, St. Blaise Parish Hall, 1158 S. Main St., Bellingham, business meeting followed by movie, popcorn and candy with ice cream sundaes served at intermission, all women 18+ welcome. Wear your PJ's!

**Stony Brook Camera Club "Vision, Passion, and Projects" with Cole Thompson, 7:30 p.m.**, Zoom, stonybrookcc.com

### February 14

**Franklin LGBTQ Alliance Valentine's Bake Sale, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.**, Stop & Shop, 40 Franklin Village Drive, left side entrance

**Freak Formal (formerly Zombie Prom) to Benefit Project Just Because, 7 p.m.**, Dou-

bleTree Hotel, Milford, Ages: 18+, includes dancing, games, raffles, zombies, prizes, dress up in ghoulish attire or come for the spectacle, <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/freak-formal-event-presented-by-new-england-legends-tickets-1980103869978>

### February 15

**Library Annual Art & Photography Show, Sunday, 2-4 p.m.**, Bellingham Public Library, 100 Blackstone St., Bellingham, Submissions accepted through February 11th at 8 p.m., Guidelines and entry forms at: <https://bit.ly/3YwgfIZ>. Questions, email [library@bellinghamlibrary.org](mailto:library@bellinghamlibrary.org)

### February 18

**LGBTQ Book Club, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**, Franklin TV and Radio 23 Hutchinson St. This month's selection: Reflections in a Golden Eye by Carson McCullers.

### February 19

**Stony Brook Camera Club "Photographing Rhode Island" with Kevin Bruff, 7:30 p.m.**, Anglican Church of the Redeemer, 195 Main Street, Franklin, MA, Hybrid program, stonybrookcc.com

### February 22

**FUSF presents film Common Ground, and Potluck, 12:30 p.m.**, First Universalist Society at 262 Chestnut Street, Franklin, film, starring among others, Woody Harrelson, Laura Dern, Jason Momoa and Danny Glover takes a look at our food system.

### February 24

**Virtual Author Talks: Smithsonian's Gamble - Incredible History Behind the World's Largest Museum, 2 p.m.**, to register for these talks, go to: <https://libraryc.org/bellinghamma>.

### February 26

**Stony Brook Camera Club Cabin Fever Workshop, 7:30 p.m.**, Anglican Church of the Redeemer, 195 Main Street, Franklin, MA, stonybrookcc.com

**MetroWest Boston Visitors Bureau (MBVB) Annual Tourism Summit and Legislative Breakfast, "The World Is Coming: Preparing for Visitors, Impact & Opportunity", 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.**, Renaissance Framingham Hotel & Conference Center, To view the full agenda and register, visit [www.metrowestvisitors.org/annual\\_meeting](http://www.metrowestvisitors.org/annual_meeting).

# State Officials Issue Annual Reminder on Open Burning Season

## Fire Safety, Environmental Health, and Injury Prevention are Top Concerns

Stow, MA - Massachusetts' fire and environmental leaders are reminding residents to use caution, care, and common sense if they plan to burn certain agricultural waste during open burning season, which runs from January 15 to May 1.

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

"Open burning season applies only to specific types of fuel and is always limited based on the daily fire hazard, environmental concerns, and location," said State Fire Marshal Davine. "Even where burning is authorized, you must have a permit from your local fire department

and you must be able to extinguish the fire on a moment's notice. Please make safety your priority when burning."

"Improper open burning creates safety risks and can harm air quality," said MassDEP Commissioner Bonnie Heiple. "Only burning approved natural materials — like driftwood and prunings — and burning on 'good air days,' when pollution levels are low and air circulates well, ensures these fires can be managed safely."

"Massachusetts residents have seen just how quickly outdoor fires can grow out of control," said DCR Chief Fire Warden Celino. "We encourage everyone to exercise caution - don't risk a fire that puts you, your home, or your community at risk. Burn only approved materials, always get a permit from your local fire department, and ensure that any fire is extinguished properly and completely."

These restrictions are authorized by 310 CMR 7.07, which sets baseline requirements based on air quality and allows for "no burn" days; MGL chapter 48, section 13, which prohibits any open air fire unless a permit is issued; and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Fire Safety Code, which gives local fire chiefs the authority to impose additional limits.

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

All permits for the town of Bellingham must now be completed online. Please find the link to apply on the fire department's web page on the town of Bellingham's website at <https://www.bellinghamma.org/901/Apply-for-a-Burning-Permit>.

Only certain agricultural waste may be burned. This includes brush, cane, driftwood, residential forestry debris, fruit

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

### Open burning may only be conducted:

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

Persons who burn unlawfully or allow a fire to grow out of control could be held liable for firefighting costs or face fines or even jail time.

### Open Burning Safety

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

## New England Legends Presents Valentine's Day Freak Formal to Benefit Project Just Because

Milford, MA - New England Legends, the creators of the popular New England Legends podcast, are thrilled to announce the return of their much-anticipated annual charity ball on Saturday, February 14th, 2026 at 7 p.m. The "Freak Formal" is a ghoulishly delightful event that will take place at the DoubleTree Hotel in Milford, Massachusetts, promising attendees an unforgettable night of monsters, ghosts, zombies, dancing, games, raffle prizes, and a pizza party—all in the spirit of raising funds for Project Just Because, a 501(c)3 charity based in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, that provides for struggling families in their times of greatest

need by supplying basic necessities including warm clothing, food, and school supplies.

Hosted by Jeff Belanger and Ray Auger, the minds behind the New England Legends podcast, the Freak Formal has become a cherished alternative celebration for those looking to escape the clichés of Valentine's Day.

"We look forward to this parade of the macabre all year long," said Jeff Belanger, author and co-host of the New England Legends podcast. "Formerly called 'Zombie Prom,' we decided to rename it to the Freak Formal to cast the horror net a little wider."

"People can dress up as any weird character they like, or just attend to watch the spectacle—all for a great local cause," added Ray Auger, co-host of the New England Legends podcast. "Best costumes will be crowned King and Queen of the Freaks!"

Uniting horror enthusiasts and those with a taste for the macabre, this event offers a unique, entertaining, and light-hearted experience for attendees to revel in the delight of the unconventional.

Ticket information for Freak Formal 2026 (18+) can be found here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/freak-formal-event-presented-by-new-england-legends-tickets-1980103869978>

## Massasoit Community College Announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

Brockton, MA – Massasoit Community College today announced its Fall 2025 Dean's List. The 996 students, representing dozens of communities across Massachusetts and Rhode Island, have completed at least nine credits and earned a 3.40 GPA or higher.

The following students from Bellingham made the Dean's List

Ian M Brown, Nina Melody Dewitt, Benjamin Hughes, Mounir Nahas, Riley Ann Nealon and Ella Theresa Taft

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# Rep. Soter Appointed to Conference Committee to Negotiate Cannabis Modernization Legislation

Boston, MA – State Representative Michael J. Soter (R-Bellingham) has been formally appointed to the Conference Committee for H.4206 and S.2749 to modernize the Commonwealth's cannabis policy. The appointment, made on December 24, 2025, follows the House's move to non-concur with a Senate amendment, necessitating a three-member House delegation to reconcile legislative differences between the two branches. This committee is tasked with finalizing a comprehensive overhaul of the state's cannabis industry, aiming to provide regulatory stability and modern standards for a sector that has become a cornerstone of the regional economy.

"The cannabis industry represents a significant economic driver for our region, and it is vital that the 8th Worcester District has a strong voice in these final negotiations," said Representative Soter. "Our district—including Bellingham,

Blackstone, Medway, Millville, and Uxbridge—is home to 49 marijuana business licenses. My goal on this committee is to ensure that we foster a competitive, safe, and transparent marketplace that protects both our local small businesses and our consumers." The stakes for the district are high; since 2020, Worcester County has recorded \$1.4 billion in cannabis sales, while Norfolk County has contributed \$460 million during the same period. Soter has consistently advocated for policies that prioritize product safety and business growth, ensuring the industry evolves responsibly within the community.

Representative Soter's appointment highlights his standing as a cannabis policy leader on Beacon Hill, where he is currently serving his third consecutive session on the Joint Committee on Cannabis Policy. "As a member of the Joint Committee on Cannabis Policy, Mike has been leading the charge to

reform the Cannabis Control Commission, whose work has often been overshadowed by multiple internal and external conflicts that have played out in public over the last two years," said House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr. (R-North Reading). "I am confident he will work with his fellow conferees to produce a viable framework that will put the Commission on a solid footing so it can provide more effective oversight of the industry moving forward."

The Conference Committee will negotiate a wide array of modernization efforts contained in H.4206 and S.2749, including:

- **Commission Governance** (House bill proposes a three-member Cannabis Control Commission (CCC) where all members are appointed by the Governor, with only the Chair serving full-time, while the Senate version requires all three commission-

ers to be full-time and splits appointments between the Governor (two seats) and the Attorney General (one seat)).

- **Regulation of Hemp and CBD** (House version implements direct licensing regulatory scheme, while the Senate version opts instead for a comprehensive study to develop future recommendations for the regulation of the hemp-derived cannabinoid market);
- **License Ownership Limits** (House version allows a single licensee to hold up to six marijuana retailer licenses, while the Senate version caps the number of retail licenses at four).
- **Retail Delivery and Advertising** (Senate version introduces new mandates allowing for limited delivery of marijuana products in any municipality and pro-

poses allowing certain discounts and customer loyalty program advertising, while these provisions are not present in the House version).

- **Public Health and Research** (Both versions mandate studies, but with different focuses. The House emphasizes patterns of use and economic analysis of license caps, while the Senate adds specific requirements to study mental health outcomes, including potential links between cannabis use and psychosis).

Representative Soter is joined on the Conference Committee by Representatives Donahue and Gonzalez, along with Senators Gomez, Comerford, and Durant. The committee is expected to convene soon to negotiate a final consensus measure for consideration by both chambers.



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