

localtownpages

Norfolk & Wrentham

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Solar Farm Sparks Concerns in Norfolk

By JOE STEWART

The wooded buffer that long separated the Norfolk Police Department on Sharon Avenue from Pond Street is gone. In its place, a 25-acre expanse of graded earth now stretches toward the horizon — the footprint of a solar farm, where solar panels and battery storage are set to be installed. However, recent community concerns have surfaced, including emergency planning relating to the onsite batteries and the loss of a promised access road from the Police Department to Pond Street, which was expected to reduce response times.

NextGrid, a developer and operator of distributed solar energy and storage projects in the US with offices in Massachusetts, NextGrid Patriots, LLC, is seeking modifications to previously approved permits for their



Conceptual illustration of the solar farm off Pond Street. Base imagery: Google Maps. Solar layout from public NextGrid filings. Illustration created using ChatGPT (OpenAI).

ground-mounted solar photovoltaic system on the 25-acre site spanning multiple parcels.

The project, which received initial town approvals in 2022, involves clearing portions of the largely wooded lot to install solar panels, battery storage containers, electrical infrastruc-

ture, and stormwater management facilities. According to Richard McCarthy, Norfolk's Director of Planning and Development, in March of 2024 NextGrid submitted a modified

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Building Community for Those Aging Alone

By GRACE ALLEN

For older adults who live alone or lack nearby family support, everyday planning can pose unexpected challenges, from transportation and safety to medical decision-making and social connection. The Solo Agers Discussion Group at the Norfolk Senior Center was created to address exactly those concerns.

Now one year old, the group offers a space for discussion, shared problem-solving, and community building among residents who are aging alone.

Becky Poynot, the outreach coordinator for the Norfolk Senior Center, facilitates the meetings, which are held on the fourth Monday of each month at 11 a.m. Attendance is flexible, Poynot said. "It's a very low-commitment group. You can come once, or you can come every month. There's

no requirement."

Poynot said the idea for the Solo Agers group took shape after she attended the Massachusetts Council on Aging state conference in early 2025. A speaker addressed concerns about seniors who don't have family support and don't have anybody to list as an emergency contact.

"It was just a very basic premise of, what if you do not have someone to call? That touched a nerve for me," recalled Poynot.

The topic was personal for Poynot, who had moved to Norfolk from Texas. "When I moved here, I had no one to put down for my children's emergency contact. I didn't know a soul," she said. "I wound up asking my realtor, 'Can I put you down, because I know no one else?'"

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plan, approved by the Planning Board, which removed the access road.

A recent change to the plan involves repurposing the area of a soon-to-be-removed tower. With that obstruction gone, NextGrid proposes to “fill this void with additional solar modules” to maximize the site’s efficiency, according to a December 17 letter from the project’s engineering firm, BSC Group. Another modification adjusts the stormwater plan because ledge, which is impermeable to water, was discovered, and that requires changes to the planned subsurface infiltration system.

The completed facility is designed to generate approximately 6.1 megawatts of clean energy for the grid and on-site battery storage will store about 3 megawatts.

Residents’ Concerns

As the Planning and Zoning Boards conduct public hearings on NextGrid’s site plan modification to adjust the storm water plan and to add panels given the removal of the tower, a group of residents has organized to demand more information and safeguards. The Norfolk Commonsense Coalition, spearheaded by organizers Jack Olivieri and Teresa Fernald, comprises roughly 50 citizens who say they support renewable energy but have serious concerns about how this specific project has been managed.

“We want the solar farm,” said Fernald, “but we’re worried about the batteries, and we would like to have the promised access road.” The coalition’s concerns center on two main issues: a perceived lack of transparency in the town’s process and specific fears about the safety risks of the large-scale battery energy storage system (BESS) that is part of the plan.

Coalition members note that the 2021 Town Meeting warrant article authorizing the land lease did not mention battery storage. They also point to changes like the cancellation of the access road from Sharon Avenue to Pond Street. Their fundamental critique is that town boards have approved contracts and permits without what they consider complete information, leaving critical safety questions unanswered.

The Coalition submitted a 24-page “Memo to Town Officials” detailing their concerns. In its



Construction entrance on Pond Street, with grading complete and equipment staged.

December 23 filing to the Planning Board, NextGrid addressed the concerns that fall within their area of responsibility. In particular, the company described the battery system’s design, certifications, and emergency protocols.

The system will use Lithium Iron Phosphate (LiFePO4) chemistry, which NextGrid states has a higher thermal runaway onset temperature and is generally considered safer than other lithium-ion types. A thermal runaway is a chemical chain reaction that often leads to a fire or explosion in a battery. Regarding safety certifications, the system is listed under UL 9540 and its design complies with NFPA 855, the national standard for energy storage systems. In an email response

to questions, NextGrid shared that they plan two container batteries. For a sense of scale, each container battery weighs approximately 66,000 lbs., can charge at 2MW, and can store 4MWh.

For fire suppression, the container batteries are equipped with a dry-type sprinkler system featuring 124 nozzles per container and a flammable gas detection system that vents gases if detected. NextGrid states that if these measures fail and “full thermal runaway” occurs, the system can be completely submerged in water by the fire department.

Regarding environmental impact, NextGrid states the system “does not release any chemicals liquid or airborne during operation” and that no wetlands or water bodies are within 1,000 feet of the proposed battery location.

Concerning emergency planning, NextGrid’s operations and maintenance vendor will work with the Norfolk Fire and Police Departments to develop an evacuation plan and will provide training on the system. Financial protections are also addressed, with the project carrying general liability,

pollution liability insurance, and a decommissioning bond for removal and site restoration at the end of the system’s life.

Stakes and Path Forward

The debate touches on a central tension of the clean energy transition: balancing the urgent need for renewable infrastructure with the legitimate safety and procedural concerns of host communities. The Coalition’s memo cites incidents of battery storage fires in other states and pending Massachusetts legislation that could impose substantial setback requirements for facilities with batteries.

For NextGrid, the modifications are logical improvements that “do not increase the scale of the project.” For the Norfolk Commonsense Coalition, the project highlights a need for “complete, transparent, and coordinated review” before any final approvals.

As Norfolk deliberates, the outcome will likely be watched by other Massachusetts towns navigating their own paths toward a greener, but increasingly complex, energy future.

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Jennifer Schofield

Editor

Grace Allen

Send Editorial to:

editor@norfolkwrenthamnews.com

Advertising Director

Jennifer Schofield
508-570-6544

jenschofield@localtownpages.com

Creative Design & Layout

Michelle McSherry
Kim Vasseur
Wendy Watkins

Office Address

9 Industrial Road, Suite 107
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Correcting the Record on the School Committee Agreement

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the recent article in the January issue regarding the tentative agreement between the Wrentham School Committee and the Wrentham Educators' Association (January 1, 2026, page 5).

I am deeply troubled by the suggestion that gender played any role in the committee's negotiations or final offer. That implication is both false and unfair to the dedicated individuals, myself included, who volunteered countless hours to reach an agreement that meaningfully advances compensation and benefits for educators while remaining fiscally responsible to the community.

School Committee Chair Phil Jordan is a father of three daugh-

ters, a longtime advocate for equity, and someone whose values are rooted in fairness and respect. Four of the five School Committee members are women, including a former president of the Wrentham Educators' Association. To suggest that sexism influenced this committee's work ignores both the facts and the people involved.

In the agreement, paraprofessionals received a 22.5 percent increase over three years, including an immediate 15 percent raise that moves Wrentham from the bottom of comparable districts to the middle. Teachers at the top of the salary scale will earn more than their peers in surrounding districts. Educators are also the only Town employees who will receive paid parental leave, a benefit included in this contract.

These gains were achieved within the existing town budget, without the need for a tax override.

It is also important to clarify several misleading comparisons. Police, fire, and DPW all received the same 7.5 percent increase over three years. Custodians received 9 percent. Paraprofessionals received more than double that. Claims that educators were treated differently do not align with the actual numbers.

The funding that was mentioned for an MSBA-supported school building project and for recreational fields comes from entirely different sources and follows different rules. As the father of three girls, Chair Jordan's vocal support at the November Town Meeting for recreational fields stems from a real concern about the lack of available field

space for sports in our community, including those for girls. Municipal finance does not allow money to be casually shifted from one category to another. Suggesting otherwise misrepresents how public budgeting works and oversimplifies decisions that require careful management of taxpayer dollars.

Progress does not require perfection to be effective. This agreement represents meaningful movement after months of difficult negotiations and reflects compromise, good faith, and responsible stewardship.

Throughout this process, the verbal attacks and unfounded insinuations directed at committee members have been both surprising and hurtful. We are parents, neighbors, former educators, and unpaid volunteers who serve be-

cause we care deeply about this town. I have served our community for six years, including through some of its most challenging moments. As a former teacher, I understand and respect the work our educators do, and that respect guided my approach throughout this process.

With three meetings remaining in my term, I am proud of the work we have done and the integrity with which we have done it. Our committee acted thoughtfully, transparently, and in the best interest of the community. It is my hope that we can move beyond the divisions this process has created and return to our shared purpose of supporting Wrentham's students and those who educate them.

Veronica Gonzalez
Wrentham School Committee

Applications Open for Barbara Bartholomew NHC History Scholarship

The Norfolk Historical Commission is pleased to announce the Barbara Bartholomew NHC History Scholarship. The scholarship is for students who lived in Norfolk while attending Norfolk Public Schools: H. Olive Day, Freeman-Kennedy, King Philip Regional Middle and/or High Schools. Applicants must have successfully completed two years of an accredited four-year college or university and majoring in history or a history related subject.

Barbara Bartholomew was raised in Norfolk, Massachusetts and became a life-long resident.

She attended Norfolk's Center School through eighth grade; she graduated from Walpole High School as Norfolk did not have a high school. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and a Master of Arts in Teaching from Harvard University. Barbara was one of the first women to attend Harvard. She studied history and brought her love of history to the classroom, spending her career as a high school history teacher in Ashland where she served as head of the History Department.

It can be said that Barbara was an early advocate for women in education and sports. While at Walpole High School, she was responsible for starting a girls' softball team, and later she coached girls' softball and field hockey in Ashland. She was recently inducted posthumously into the Ashland High School Athletic Hall of Fame. After she retired from teaching, she joined the Norfolk Historical Commission and was a devoted board member for many years. Upon her passing in 2024, she left an endowment to the Town of Norfolk for educational pur-

poses, including funds for the scholarship and for the elementary schools to create a teaching unit on local history.

The Town of Norfolk appreciates her generosity, and the Norfolk Historical Commission is pleased to offer this scholarship opportunity. In order to apply, candidates must follow the application process and meet all qualifications.

Applications are available on the Town of Norfolk website: www.norfolkmass.gov. For additional information, please contact the Norfolk Historical Commission via email: nhc@norfolkmass.gov. Applications for this year must be submitted on or before April 30.



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That experience shaped her understanding of how stressful aging without built-in support can be.

According to AARP, twenty-one percent of U.S. adults age 50 and older now live alone. That's 24 million people, and those numbers continue to grow. Longer lifespans, far-flung families, low marriage rates or "gray divorces," and an increase in childlessness are fueling the trend.

While the Solo Agers group offers emotional support, Poynot is careful about how it is framed.

"We call it a discussion group and not necessarily a support

group," she said. "We do have a topic almost every week, broad things like transportation, housekeeping, or medical power of attorney."

At its core, however, the group is about connection. "A lot of it is building the community of people who are in the same boat as you," Poynot said.

Participants include individuals without children, those whose children live far away, and people who are widowed or never married. "Those are some unique situations for people who are aging alone," she noted.

Discussions often focus on issues that may be overlooked by those with family support.

"We've talked about everything from how difficult it is to

put the sheets on your bed when you live alone, to if you fall and there's no one to come check on you," Poynot said.

Other challenges include winter safety and mobility. "Little things like, how do you get your mail on an icy day? How do you roll your garbage cans out if your mobility is limited?" she said.

Transportation is a recurring concern. "It's a huge issue," Poynot said. "People drive well beyond when they should — and they know it — because there's not really another option."

Medical logistics can be equally difficult. "If you need somebody to pick you up after your eyes have been dilated, or after a colonoscopy when you're loopy, you can't call a taxi for

that," she said. "They have to know the person."

The group also serves as a hub for sharing trusted local resources, including recommendations for housekeepers, attorneys, emergency response devices, and transportation options. "People have opinions about who they like, who has good customer service, and who actually serves Norfolk," Poynot said.

Outside speakers at the meetings have included representatives from the Norfolk Police Department and Fire Department, though Poynot noted that even first responders are sometimes surprised by the realities of aging alone.

"They'll say, 'Just put down your next-door neighbor,'" she

said. "But a lot of people don't know their neighbors."

There are no strict requirements to participate, nor is it limited to Norfolk residents. "You can self-identify as a solo ager," Poynot explained. "If you feel like maybe you're lacking support as you age, even if you live with someone, then you're absolutely welcome in the group."

As the group enters its second year, Poynot says interest continues to grow. "There are people who come every single month from the start," she said. "We have a really great core group."

For more information about the Solo Agers group at the Norfolk Senior Center, contact Poynot at 508-528-4430 or bpoynot@norfolkmass.gov.

Norfolk Invited into MSBA Eligibility Period for Freeman Kennedy Expansion

BY GRACE ALLEN

School officials are continuing to plan a potential expansion of Freeman Kennedy School, following the February 2025 vote in which the project was not supported by residents. The possibility of state funding is now under consideration.

The school system learned that it has been invited by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to enter the Core Program Eligibility Period for the Freeman Kennedy School Expansion Project, marking the first formal step in the state's school construction grant process. The invitation was approved by the MSBA Board of Directors on Dec. 12 following the district's submission of a Statement of Interest citing space constraints re-

lated to enrollment growth.

Entry into the Eligibility Period allows the district and town to work with the MSBA to confirm educational needs, enrollment projections, community readiness, and project governance requirements.

"We are grateful to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for inviting Norfolk into this essential program," said Superintendent Dr. Ingrid Allardi. "The Eligibility Period allows us to continue careful planning alongside the town and the MSBA to determine the best long-term solution for our students."

At the conclusion of the Eligibility Period, the MSBA may invite Norfolk into the Feasibility Study phase, during which potential options for the expansion

would be formally evaluated.

The Freeman Kennedy School opened in 2012 and was named in memory of U.S. Army Sgt. Adam Kennedy and Alvin J. Freeman, a long-time School Committee member. The school replaced the Freeman-Centennial School on the site, which was built in stages starting in 1950.

Norfolk Public Schools has added more than 100 students over the past decade, with projections showing an additional 200 students by 2035. Freeman Kennedy School is currently at full capacity, while H. Olive Day School has repurposed instructional and specialty spaces, including the music room, technology lab, and library offices, to accommodate classrooms.

District and town officials



An architectural aerial rendering of the previously proposed Freeman Kennedy School Expansion Project. (Photo courtesy Ai3 Architects)

have identified a permanent expansion of Freeman Kennedy School as the most efficient long-term solution.

"The town has taken a deliberate, step-by-step approach to this project, with a focus on long-term planning and fiscal re-

sponsibility," said Interim Town Manager Michael Gallagher. "This invitation allows us to continue that work in partnership with the MSBA and ensure that any future decisions are based on clear information and community input."



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Larin Automotive: A Trusted Local Shop for Auto Repairs and Quality Used Cars

By JENNIFER RUSSO

At Larin Automotive in Norwood, the focus is not just on fixing cars. It's helping people feel confident about the decisions they are making for their vehicle, their budget, and their daily life.

The shop provides full-service repair and maintenance for both domestic and foreign vehicles, from everyday needs to more complex diagnostic work. But what many customers remember most is the experience: clear explanations, honest recommendations, and a calm, no pressure approach that makes even stressful repairs feel manageable.

That sense of clarity starts at the front desk. Service advisors Alyssa and Wetherly (Lee) are often the first people customers speak with, helping translate



technical problems into plain language and working with each driver to map out the best next step, whether that means prioritizing safety items first, planning repairs over time, or simply understanding what is going on before committing to anything.

Founded in 2012 by owner Victor Larin, the business grew out of a desire to do things differently. After working in a deal-



Alyssa and Lee helping customers feel heard, informed, and taken care of from the first hello.

ership environment, Larin saw how confusing communication and rushed interactions could leave people feeling uncertain. He set out to build a shop where respect and transparency mattered just as much as technical skill, and those values remain central today.

"To me, honest service is not just a slogan. It is everything we do. People trust us with their cars and their families. When someone brings us a vehicle or is looking to buy one, I want them to feel like they have been treated fairly, that everything has been explained clearly, and that they have options that make sense for them," shares Victor.

In addition to repair services, Larin Automotive also sells carefully selected used vehicles, often clean, lower-mileage cars in the 2007 to 2015 range, with many priced under \$20,000. Many are sourced from southern states, where vehicles typically see far less road salt and harsh winter wear. The result is a cleaner, better-preserved vehicle than many buyers are used to seeing in New England.

Each vehicle is inspected before being listed, reflecting the same standards the shop applies in the service bays. For customers, it means buying from a team that works on cars every day and stands behind what they sell.

Local customers may also recognize Sales Manager Bob Genatossio, formerly of Washington Motorcars, who has helped drivers in the Norwood area for more than 30 years.

While the shop has built a reputation through consistent service, its connection to the community also manifests in quieter ways. Larin Automotive worked with the Norwood Veterans' Services Office to help a local veteran with a failed transmission rebuild so he could get back on the road and return to work. The shop also supports Ricky Inc. charity fundraisers, a local Norwood organization that helps people affected by homelessness, mental illness, and substance use disorder.

Ahead of Valentine's Day, they are offering punny hand-drawn Valentine's Day cards, available at the shop free with a donation of any amount to No Kid Hungry. It is a simple way to grab a last-minute card while supporting a worthy cause.

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Gas Pipeline Expansion in Wrentham: Cost, Need, and Energy Future

By JOE STEWART

At the November 4 Select Board meeting, representatives from Enbridge's Algonquin Gas Transmission subsidiary presented plans for a multi-state, multi-million-dollar pipeline upgrade, a small segment of which passes through West Wrentham, crossing Bellingham's Washington Street, then Wrentham's West Street and Spring Street before passing into Rhode Island.

Enbridge argued that the project is critical for regional energy reliability and affordability.

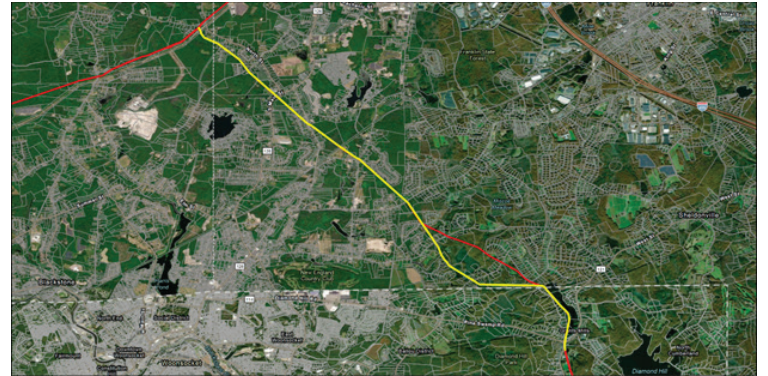
However, energy policy analysts question the fundamental need for the expansion that ratepayers will pay for and whether ratepayers will see the promised savings.

The "Reliable Affordable Resilient Enhancement" (RARE) project spans components in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. It involves not only replacing pipeline but also extending other segments and upgrading a compressor station. The portion directly affecting Wrentham is known as the G-1 segment which involves replacing

approximately 7.1 miles of an existing 16-inch diameter pipeline with a modern 36-inch pipe along a route that runs through Mendon, Bellingham, Franklin, Wrentham, and Cumberland, Rhode Island. Officials stated the work in Wrentham would be confined to the existing pipeline right-of-way, which has been in place since the 1950s.

The Case for Expansion

During the presentation, Enbridge representatives, including John Sheridan, Director of Government Relations, Guy Glodis, Community and Legislative Affairs liaison, and Nancy Kist, Director of Land and Right of Way, described a region under energy strain. They stated that the Northeast faces the highest energy prices in the nation, driven by high demand, infrastructure constraints, and the scheduled closure of the Everett Marine Terminal, a key liquefied natural gas (LNG) import facility.



Algonquin Pipelines through West Wrentham. Enbridge (Algonquin Gas Transmission, LLC), Algonquin Reliable Affordable Resilient Enhancement Project, map dated Nov. 3, 2025.

According to their presentation, the proposed larger pipeline is designed to alleviate long-standing transmission constraints, improve system reliability particularly during peak demand, and help stabilize energy prices by reducing reliance on volatile international LNG markets.

Glodis shared that Eversource estimates that ratepayers could save \$340 million over the next

decade with the enhanced pipeline capacity. In an email confirmation, Eversource elaborated on their estimate: "Taking advantage of this supply opportunity is expected to save our customers in Massachusetts approximately \$400 million in supply costs over the course of the agreement by reducing our reliance on foreign

PIPELINE

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Your Money, Your Independence

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 con-

tributions, 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 overpaying taxes.

Use Market Downturns to Your Advantage

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

Today's Tax Rates Will Change

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

Legacy Benefits Always Overlooked

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

If the original owner was taking RMDs from a Traditional IRA, those taxable withdrawals continue under the SECURE Act's 10-year rule. With an inherited Roth, heirs face the same 10-year rule but no annual RMDs,

allowing assets to compound tax-free and be withdrawn at the end of the period without generating taxable income or increasing the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of mid-career beneficiaries.

Take Ownership

By modeling conversions early, executing with updated 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. 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 intentionally sources jewelry from



Business spotlight

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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Norfolk County Real Estate Activity Rises in December

Norfolk County Register of Deeds William P. O'Donnell reported that real estate activity in Norfolk County remained strong in December 2025, with

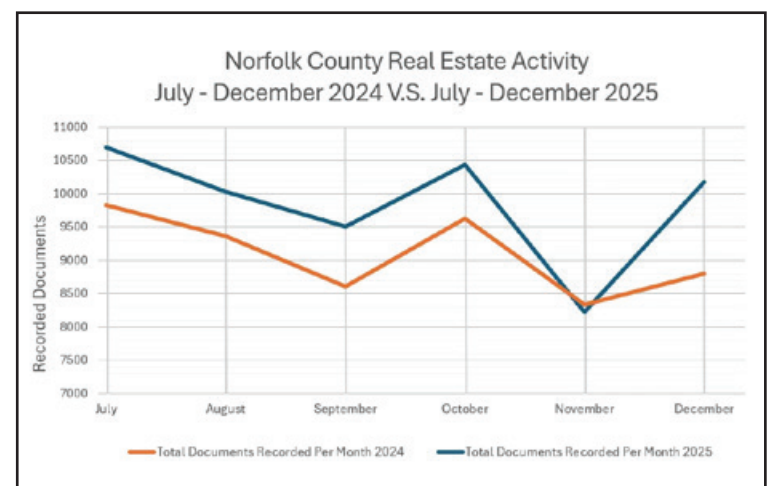
increases in both deed and mortgage recordings compared to last year.

The Norfolk County Registry of Deeds recorded 10,178 docu-

ments in December, a 16 percent increase from December 2024 and a 24 percent increase from November 2025. A total of 1,545 deeds were recorded, up 13 percent from last year and 25 percent from November. Of those, 745 were real estate sales, an 11 percent increase year over year.

The average sale price of commercial and residential properties in December was \$1,437,216, an 18 percent decrease from December 2024 but a 2 percent increase from November. Total dollar volume of sales reached \$1.07 billion, down 10 percent from last year but up 27 percent from the prior month.

Lending activity also rose, with 1,753 mortgages recorded in December, a 29 percent increase from December 2024 and 25 percent higher than November. Total mortgage indebtedness recorded was \$1.28 billion, up 12 percent from last year and 28 percent from the previous month.



Foreclosure activity declined, with four foreclosure deeds recorded in December compared to six last year. Notices to foreclose fell to 11, down from 33 in December 2024, a 67 percent decrease.

For several years, the Registry of Deeds has partnered with Quincy Community Action Programs and NeighborWorks Housing Solutions to assist residents facing mortgage challenges. Homeowners may also

contact the Massachusetts Attorney General's Consumer Advocacy and Response Division for assistance.

The Norfolk County Registry of Deeds is located at 649 High Street in Dedham. More information and land record research is available at www.norfolkdeeds.org. Residents needing assistance may contact the Registry's Customer Service Center at (781) 461-6101 or registerodonnell@norfolkdeeds.org

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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®

O: (781) 652 - 9573 call or text
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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.

fluidics, and phacoemulsification 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 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 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.

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.

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

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Michael H. was rear ended while stopped at a red light. He immediately felt a twinge in his neck and his lower back, but thought it was ok. As time went on, however, the pain intensified and he started to get headaches. Since he didn't normally get headaches, he knew something



Dr. Rochelle Bien, Dr. Molly Rappaport & Dr. Michael Goldstein

wasn't right.

A friend told him to seek the help of Dr Goldstein at

The Holistic Center at Bristol Square. Dr. Goldstein performed a consultation and

examination and explained how he could eliminate his discomfort and pain. Once under care

with Dr Goldstein, Michael's symptoms started to resolve. His headaches became less frequent and were less intense until they went away altogether. His neck and lower back pain improved with chiropractic adjustments and a home exercise program. Today, Michael has resumed all the activities he enjoyed prior to the accident.

If you have had a slip and fall, or have been in an auto accident and are experiencing symptoms call The Holistic Center at Bristol Square, at (508) 660-2722 and book an appointment today. The Center is located at 1426 Main Street in Walpole.

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Plainville Teacher Receives National Teaching Honor

Devon Houghton, a fourth-grade teacher at Beatrice H. Wood Elementary School in Plainville, has been named the January 2026 recipient of the Honored National Teaching Award, a national recognition presented by the nonprofit organization Honored.

As part of the award, Houghton received a \$5,000 cash prize and was featured on "Inspiring Teachers: The Honored Podcast," which highlights educators who have made a life-changing impact on a student.

Houghton was nominated by a former student, Sammy, who credited her teacher with providing a safe, supportive classroom environment during a difficult transition to fifth grade. In her nomination, Sammy shared that Houghton helped restore her

confidence and love of learning, calling the experience life-changing and inspiring her own interest in becoming a teacher.

Known for fostering strong relationships with students, Houghton emphasizes open communication, daily check-ins, and affirmations to create a growth-oriented classroom where students feel supported and encouraged to be themselves.

Honored is a national, non-partisan nonprofit organization dedicated to keeping great teachers in the classroom and inspiring future educators. Each month during the school year, the organization recognizes one Pre-K-12 teacher from anywhere in the country whose work has had a profound impact on a student.



More information about Houghton's story and the Honored National Teaching Award is available at honored.org.



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PIPELINE

continued from page 6

LNG at EMT and replacing it with a fuel source that is less expensive and less carbon intensive.”

In response to questions from Select Board members about town revenue from property taxes, the company reported annual payments of \$130,379.46 for the pipeline in Wrentham, which would increase due to the higher value of the upgraded infrastructure. As to construction impacts, they noted that the Wrentham segment is relatively short, approximately two miles, with much of it not near residential areas. Enbridge described the work as a replacement upgrade within an existing easement.

Kist described the project’s immediate next steps involve surveys beginning in December 2025 of properties within and adjacent to the existing right-of-way to conduct civil, environmental, and cultural resource assessments within the study corridor, about 150 feet to both sides of the existing pipeline.

Questions of Need and Cost

Despite the company’s arguments, the project’s necessity is challenged by clean energy advocates such as Acadia Center, a non-profit public policy research and advocacy organization focused on the clean energy transition in the Northeast with an emphasis on affordability. Joseph LaRusso, Acadia’s Manager of the Clean Grid Program, posed a foundational question: “Does Massachusetts need to expand its natural gas infrastructure?”

In an interview, LaRusso cited data from the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) showing that natural gas consumption by residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the state declined from 2019 to 2024. Likewise, Federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) data, which includes gas used for electricity generation, also shows an overall decline for Massachusetts over the same period despite a slight increase in gas use by power plants.

Critically, LaRusso pointed out that between 2019 and 2024, other pipeline expansion proj-

ects in the region have already added 362 million cubic feet per day (MMcf/d) of capacity. The RARE project will add another approximately 75 MMcf/d. However, over the same period, residential natural gas prices have continued to rise despite the capacity increase. According to the EIA, since 2019, Massachusetts natural gas prices have risen from \$14.72 to \$21.80 (per thousand cubic feet) in 2024.

LaRusso attributed sustained high natural gas prices to the United States becoming the world’s leading exporter of LNG, thus tying domestic prices to the global market. The EIA reported that the United States exported 11.9 billion cubic feet per day (Bcf/d) of liquefied natural gas from eight export facilities in 2024, remaining the world’s leading LNG exporter. In a follow-up email, LaRusso concluded, “New England won’t be able to ‘pipeline’ its way to lower natural gas prices.”

LaRusso also raised a practical concern about demand: even if more gas is made available, new natural gas-fired power plants face a backlog in turbine deliveries of five to seven years, suggest-

ing it will be years after pipeline expansions are completed before generators could fully utilize the added capacity and reap any cost reductions.

The Path Forward

For Wrentham, the immediate process involves survey work likely concluding in the spring of 2026. Enbridge plans to hold an informational open house for the public in April or May 2026, with a formal filing to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) expected in the third quarter of 2026. If approved, construction would begin in 2029, with an in-service date of November 2029.

The debate now unfolding mirrors a larger regional tension: balancing immediate infrastructure upgrades with a long-term transition to cleaner energy, all under the pressure of high consumer costs. As Enbridge moves forward with its surveys and outreach, ratepayers are left to weigh the promise of enhanced reliability and the potential for future savings against analysis showing that more pipeline capacity has not led to lower bills.

Norfolk Lions Club Announces 2026 Scholarships

The Norfolk Lions Club will award four \$2,500 scholarships to Norfolk resident high school seniors pursuing higher education. Eligible applicants include students attending public or private schools, as well as those who are home schooled. Scholarships may be used toward college, prep school, or trade school.

Scholarships will be awarded to candidates who have been actively involved in community service activities.

The scholarship application will be available on the Norfolk Lions Club website, www.norfolkmalions.org, beginning Feb. 13. Completed applications must be submitted by March 10.

For questions, email the scholarship committee at norfolkliionsssc@gmail.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 aggressive 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, excessive down-

time, 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



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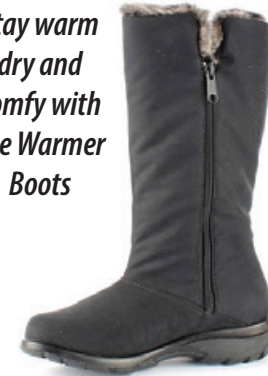


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Lions 8th Annual Polar Plunge to Benefit Eye Research Set for March 21

The Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund will host its 8th Annual Polar Plunge on Saturday, March 21, from 9 to 11 a.m. at Lake Pearl in Wrentham. Brave participants will plunge into the chilly waters to raise funds in support of life-changing eye research.

Founded in 1951, the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund was created after the Lions of Massachusetts learned that nearly 2,500 premature babies were losing their sight each year due to a condition then known as “baby blindness.” Early Lions-funded research led to the discovery that excessive oxygen use in neonatal incubators was the cause—an important medical breakthrough that changed practices worldwide and saved the vision of countless children.

For more than 74 years, the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund has remained an all-volunteer, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the charitable arm of the Massachusetts Lions.

By mandate, 100% of funds raised go directly to eye research, not to salaries or administrative costs.

Since its founding, the organization has donated over \$41 million to vision research, including more than \$740,000 in grants last year alone. These funds support critical research at leading institutions such as Boston Children’s Hospital, Boston University School of Medicine, Joslin Diabetes Center, Massachusetts Eye and Ear, Schepens Eye Research Institute, and Tufts Medical School.

Research supported by the Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund focuses on preventing blindness and treating eye diseases such as diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, dry eye disease, corneal injuries, and other vision-threatening conditions. Many advances in eye care today began with Lions-funded research.

At a time when federal medical research funding has slowed,



private support is more important than ever. Without continued funding, vital research could be delayed or lost, and talented researchers may be forced to seek opportunities elsewhere. The work being done in Massachusetts has global impact and may one day preserve the sight of someone you love.

Community members, businesses, and organizations are encouraged to support the Polar Plunge through donations, spon-

sorships, or participation. Every contribution helps ensure that critical eye research continues.

To register for the plunge or sponsor a plunger, visit www.norfolkmalions.org/polar-plunge.

For more information about the Lions 8th Annual Polar Plunge or how you can support Massachusetts Lions Eye Research, contact Al Bozza at 774-571-5170.



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Guest Column

“The Ice Man Cometh,” Part II

By G. GREGORY TOOKER

As a very small lad, I remember well the sturdy ice man, forearms and biceps bulging as he wrestled a large block balanced on his shoulders, tongs deeply embedded in the blue mass which rode on a rubber mat. Into my grandmother’s wooden refrigerator went the massive cube, to be replenished before the week was out. He was a good man, a jolly man, who always had a smile and a kind word to share. Next to the Good Humor gent who brought chocolate covered ice cream bars, he ranked a close second.

Today’s version of the ice man creates a cold image indeed, despite the fact that that he carries not a chip of frozen precipitation at all, except perhaps in his heart. We cannot see the iceman’s face because it

is covered up to his eyes. However, those eyes betray the fact that there is no smile beneath the ugly mask. He is anonymous and speaks only in gruff and muffled tones.

This ice man lurks in packs, among clones of similar image. The pack stalks and captures, not particular about the nature of its prey as long as it takes human form. Both innocent and the guilty are swept up in unison, a small price to pay in the eyes of some. The tears of the young flow in torrents and the indelible memories of this injustice will mold those tears into rock-hard icicle daggers as the years pass. As the Good Book teaches, we reap what we sow.

Opinions expressed in the Guest Column do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

Winter Schedule and Events at Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church in Wrentham has announced its schedule of winter services, programs, and community gatherings.

A Bible Study session focusing on “The Book of Tobit” will take place on Sunday February 1, following the 11 a.m. worship service.

On Sunday, February 8, following the 11 a.m. service, Trinity Church will host a Shrove Tuesday celebration, followed by its Annual Meeting.

A Senior Lunch will be held on Tuesday, February 10 at noon, preceded by a Healing Service at 11:30 a.m. Senior Lunches are offered on the second Tuesday of each month, except July and August.

An Ash Wednesday service will be held on February 18 at

7 p.m. in the church sanctuary. During Lent, Evening Compline (closing of the day) services will be conducted by the Spiritual Life Team on Wednesdays at 7 p.m., on February 25 and March 4, 11, 18, and 25.

Ongoing programs at Trinity:

- Bridge card games and mentoring are held on Thursdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Healing Service is at 11:30 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month.
- The Good Grief Support Group, a non-denominational gathering open to all, meets on the first and third Sundays of each month at 4 p.m. and includes a light meal.

Wrentham Engagement to Host March Candidates Forum, Candidates on the Common

Wrentham Engagement (WE) is hosting its third annual Candidates Forum on Wednesday, March 11, beginning at 7:30 p.m. at King Philip Regional High School, facilitated by Jerry McGovern. On Saturday, March 21, WE is hosting the fifth annual Candidates on the Common beginning at 11 a.m. at the Town Common.

Wrentham Engagement is a local, grassroots, non-partisan group established to encourage

greater awareness and engagement in Wrentham’s governance and future through events that introduce candidates to voters. As part of this work, WE publishes the annual Wrentham Voter Guide, now in its fourth year, which gives candidates an opportunity to submit information directly to voters in advance of Town elections.

For more information, visit <https://www.wrenthamvoter-guide.com/we>.

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Norfolk and Wrentham Residents Reminded to Return Annual Census Forms

Annual census forms are mailed to households in both Norfolk and Wrentham each January, and town officials are reminding residents that completing and returning the form is required to maintain accurate records and voter status.

Residents must sign and return the completed form in order to remain listed as active voters. Under state and federal

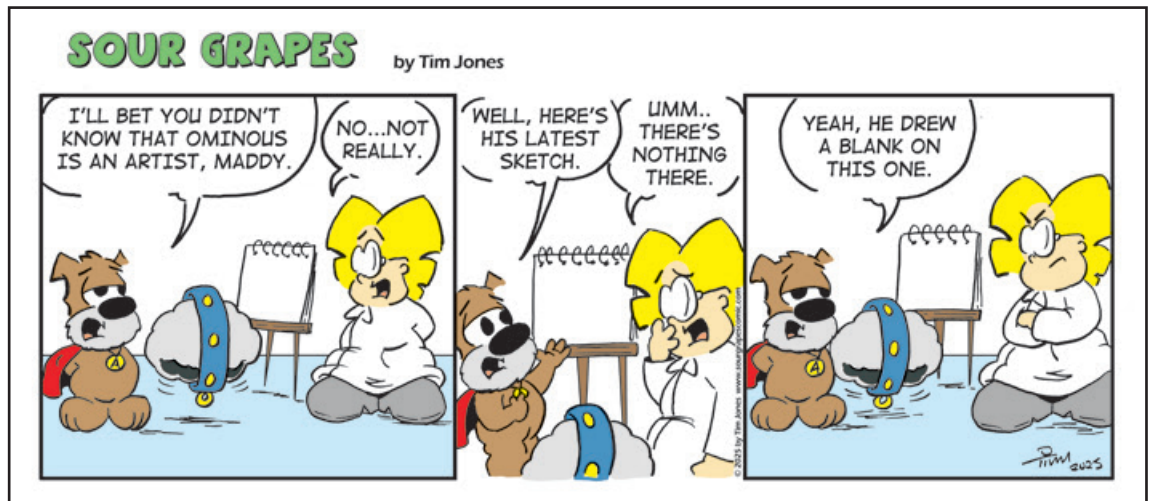
law, voters who do not return their census forms within the required timeframe are moved to inactive status.

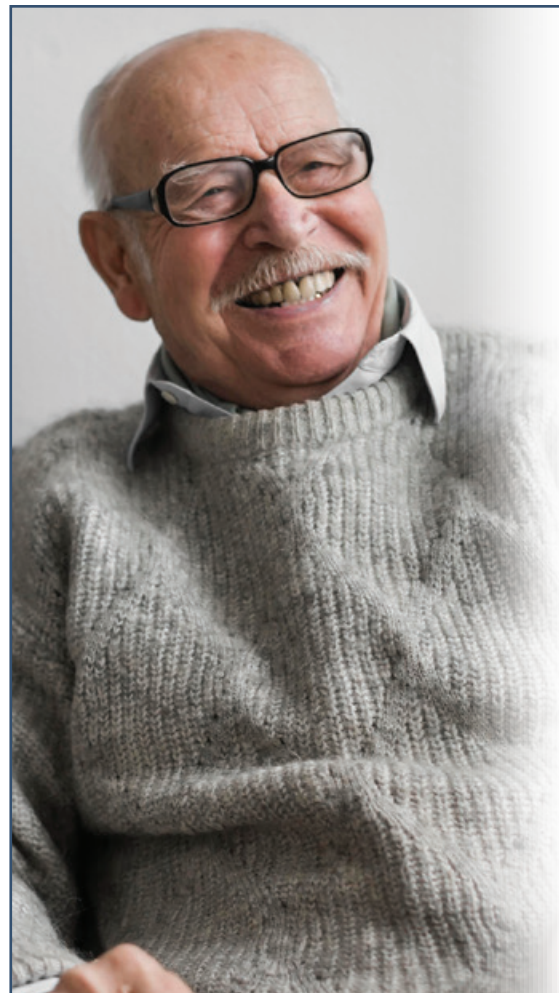
Town officials note that census information serves several important purposes beyond voter registration. The data is used by emergency responders to better assist residents who may require services and helps guide future planning and

growth within the communities.

Norfolk residents may return their census forms using the town’s ballot drop box, which has been repurposed for census drop-off. The box is located outside of Town Hall.

Residents with questions are encouraged to contact their respective town clerk’s offices.






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February Senior Year: Don't Wait - Use This Time Wisely

For many high school seniors, the waiting game is finally easing. Early Action and Early Decision results have arrived, and students are beginning to see real options take shape. While some decisions, especially Regular Decision and deferrals are still ahead, February is not the time to pause. In fact, it's one of the most important months in the college decision process.

Rather than waiting until all decisions are released, seniors can use this time to begin narrowing their options academically, socially, and financially. Three key steps can make this process far more manageable - and far less stressful.

Attend Accepted Students Days

Accepted Students Days are one of the best tools students have to determine whether a college is truly the right fit. These programs, typically held between February and April, allow admitted students to take

a deeper look at campus life, academics, and community. Most colleges also offer parent sessions during these events, making them valuable for the entire family.

Accepted Students Days go beyond a standard tour. Students can attend sample classes, meet faculty, talk with current students, explore residence halls and dining options, and get a feel for campus culture. Registration is required, and spots often fill quickly, so families should plan ahead.

The academic and financial fit are very important, but interestingly the social fit matters too. In fact, the number one reason students transfer colleges is for social reasons - not academics.

Tips for Accepted Students Days

Students should arrive with a short list of four or five "must-haves" for their future college. These might include size, location, distance from home,

campus culture, or academic offerings.

During each visit, take notes and compare schools. Reevaluate key factors like size and location - does the campus now feel too big or too far from home? No school will check every box, so the goal is to find the college that best matches the student's most important priorities. I love to eat in the dining hall, talk with students, explore the surrounding town, and ask questions about academics and career outcomes.

Compare the Bottom-Line Costs

For many families, affordability plays a major role in the final decision. Before committing to a college, families should compare the true bottom-line costs for each college in one place. This includes tuition, fees, housing and meals, scholarships and grants, family contribution, and any loans needed.



Maryline Michel Kulewicz and Tracy Sullivan of College 101 Admissions Consultants

If loans are part of the plan, families should understand what monthly repayment might look like after graduation. Federal studentaid.gov offers free tools, including a loan simulator, to help estimate future payments.

A commonly recommended guideline is to keep total student loan debt at or below the student's expected first-year salary after graduation - often estimated around \$50,000. Having these conversations now helps avoid difficult surprises later. Free resource: email tracy@my-college101.com to receive our cost comparison spreadsheet.

If the Student has Been Deferred

A deferral is not a rejection. It means the college wants to review the application again in the Regular Decision pool. This often happens because first-term senior grades are important, or because the student falls in the middle of a very competitive applicant group.

Some colleges allow students to submit additional materials, such as updated grades, a new recommendation, test scores, or a Letter of Continued In-

terest (LOCI). A strong LOCI should be specific, thoughtful, and clearly explain why the student and the college are a good match - while highlighting any new accomplishments.

Students should also meet with their guidance counselor, who may have insight into how the college handles deferrals and how best to move forward.

Finally, students should reassess their current list and identify colleges where they can already thrive academically, socially, and financially.

February is a turning point. These steps help families move from uncertainty to clarity - knowing the bottom line costs and attending Accepted Students Days offer a powerful opportunity to feel confident about the final decision.

Good luck, and enjoy the journey.

College 101 Admissions Consultants LLC. Website: www.my-college101.com. Email: tracy@mycollege101.com. Phone: 508-380-3845.

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King Philip Regional Middle School announces its 2025-2026 Term 1 Honor Roll:

7th GRADE

HIGH HONORS

Amper-Daily, Owen; Armour, Bria; Bansal, Aryav; Barboza, Domenic; Batt, Charlotte; Bielak, Ryder; Blood, Sidney; Bramhavar, Jackson; Bresson, Reegan; Browning, Mason; Card, Brielle; Chen, Wenyu; Chisholm, Samuel; Cloutier, Hadley; Conley, Elise; Courier, Amelia; Cyr, Olivia; DeSimone, Ella; Devlin, Tyson; Dolan Machado, Ariella; Drennen, Charlotte; Dumay, Belize; Egan, Shea; Elyamani, Maya; Finlay, Emma; Fisk, Aleksandra; Geden, Maxwell; Godin, Alexander; Guinan, Aine; Hackett, Willa; Hafez, Phoebe; Hatami, Eli; Heering, Madelyn; Herman, Lydia; Higginbotham, Gavin; Jacobson, Rory; Jaundrill, Grace; Jones, Parker; Kavanah, Nora; Keleher, Morgan; Ketrow, Vivienne; Laliberte, Xander; Leavitt, Jack; LeBlanc, Brayden; Lee, Ian; Lefebvre, Brayden; Lochhead, William; MacRae, Emma; McKay, Theodore; McLacklan, Travis; Meneses, Marley; Milani, Christopher; Miraoui, Badr; Napier, Cait; Nayyer, Allen; Nerbo, Lillian; Newcom, Sophia; O'Brien, Reagan; O'Leary, Brenna; Olesen, Ella; Orlando, Giuliana; Padilla, Samuel; Passafaro, Olivia; Patel, Meer; Patlola, Shrika; Pruell, Penelope; Quan, Elizabeth; Reilly, Paxton; Richards Villarreal, Jakob; Roberts, Amelia; Ross, Emily; Russas, Lillian; Simarrian, Giana; Smith, Taran; Spratt, Abby; Tomes, Danielle; Turenne, Kai; Willis-Olson, Tyler; Wright, Alexander.

HONORS

Alcindor, Annabelle; Amante, Matthew; Andrews, Charlotte; Angeli, Madeline; Babbitt, Monty; Ballantyne, Reagan; Balnis, Nicholas; Bartucca, Brock; Beal, Liam; Burke, Nora; Byda, Hudson; Caillouette, Madeline; Caillouette, Aidan; Canty, Andre; Carney, Karen; Casto, Sophia; Chauvin, Benjamin; Cherukuri, Siddharth; Cleveland, Anthony; Clough, Maleia; Coen, Reid; Coliflores, Ryan; Collins, Olivia; Collins, Finn; Connelly, Andrew; Cook, Oliver; Corbett, Alexander; Cormier, Emily; Costello, Lindsey; Cullinane, Connor; D'Amelio, Anthony; DeMarco, Angelina; DeRosa, Giuliana; Downs, Grace; Dubendris, Connor; Duffy, Harper; Dugas, Sara;

Dunfey, Hannah; Dwomoh, Bailey; Edwards, Alexandra; Etter, Daniel; Faford, Riley; Favaro, Gianna; Finley, Harper; Flanagan, Ellie; Flanagan, Chloe; Forsman, Noah; Francoeur, Sara; Garvey, Sadie; Gilmore, Alyssa; Godin, Kaia; Gonzalez, Emma; Gosetty, Rama; Graham, Lyla; Greene, Shayla; Groenheide, Chase; Haddad, Lila; Halloran, Dakota; Hanlon, Evelyn; Herrera Felipe, Abigail; Hicks, Arden; Higgins, Lincoln; Hill, Della; Hodgman, Dexter; Holden, Ainsley; Horvath, Parker; Hough, Alexander; Hughes, Connor; Jesensky, Stephen; Jordan, Charlotte; Kelleher, Ryan; Kennedy, Riley; Khan, Rumman; Labeledz, Zofia; Labonte, Benjamin; Lamoureux, Charles; Lanza, Calvin; Leite, Vivian; Leuchte, Samantha; Lima, Zachary; Lowe-Hardy, Aliyah; Marchand, Matthew; Marold, Max; Massoud, Charlotte; Massoud, Sophia; McGrath, Charlotte; McGrath, Victoria; Menneni, Aashna; Metrios, Josiah; Miraoui, Sophia; Muldowney, Scarlet; Murphy, Charles; Muthumailvaganan, Theevya; Nichols, Andrew; O'Connell, Shannon; O'Neil, Harper; Pacella, Celia; Payne, Lucy; Perez, Amarii; Politis, Daniel; Poynot, Adam; Prater, Nora; Pruell, Thomas; Reynolds, Raegan; Roensch, Joshua; Rogers, Sean; Rothman, Kai; Rudsit, Gregory; Ruggieri, Reese; Russo, Brianna; Saraf, Christopher; Semas, Audrey; Shaik, Sana Shaista; Shaughnessy, Sofia; Shepard, Anna; Shong, Bella; Shumila, Brooke; Spak, Brady; Stacy, Ronan; Stark, Boden; Stevens, Nicholas; Thompson, Addison; Townsend, Alice; Uriarte, Lily; Vercillo, Emma; Vierkant, Ethan; Vitek, Justin; Weiler, Havyn; Winer, Dylan; Woodward, Kyle; Wynn, Leah; Yanosick, Mallory; Zhu, Brandon.

8th GRADE

HIGH HONORS

Anderson, Brooke; Aragao, Alexis; Barnard, Christopher; Barton, Evelyn; Battafarano, Reece; Berard, Kendall; Bonaceto, Christopher; Borst, Kinley; Brabants, Isabella; Brooks, Meredith; Brooks, McKenzie; Brown, Seraphina; Burke, Maya; Camara, Abigail; Carbone, Sadie; Cardona-Ortez, Kamila; Carew, Alexis; Chen, Daniel; Cohn, Eli; Collins, Ryan; Connor, Jorie; Corcoran, Benjamin;

Corner, Riley; Curry, Malcolm; Dang, Jaxon; Darling, Samantha; Dempsey, Olivia; DePillo, Emilia; DePillo, Sophia; Dolan, Madeleine; Elias, Madelyn; Flynn, Teagan; Ford, Jack; Fritz, Jaclyn; Gavin, Colin; Gilbert, Jace; Godoi, Milena; Gonzalez, Isabel; Greaney, James; Gulino, Laurel; Hanf, Sophie; Hartford, Lily; Hawes, Robert; Hawley, Sebastien; Hennessy, Sophie; Iannino, Tess; Insogna, William; Jain, Siyona; Jerome, Violet; Johnston, Hanna; Jost, Ava; Joy, Keneth; Kalkut, Colin; Kazorek, Sawyer; Kemple, Megan; Kerrigan, Abby; Kopoi, Dolimah; Labonte, Sadie; Lambrenos, Mackenzie; Lamothe-Cotter, Ainsley; Libetario, Ema; Lombard, Diya; Machettira, Aryan; Manley, Jeremy; McKechnie, Mia; Miller, Emma; Mollica, Phoebe; Montanaro, Bradley; Morris, Peyton; Mucciarone, Wes; Mui, Anna; Munsinger, Jaxon; Newell, Jacob; Oliver, Viola; Pollard, Lilyanna; Pollender, Calla; Quinn, Anthony; Quinn, Riley; Richard, William; Ruiz, Keira; Sachdev, Brycen; Sandy, Jack; Sharkey, Regan; Silva, Abraham; Sorel, Scott; Spitzer, Julia; Todd, Abigail; Townsend, Amelia; Vasseur, Isla; Visser, Paige; Wainwright, Vera; Wambolt, Wyatt; Weake, Jainith; Weaver, Francis; Weeman, Lola; Weeman, Zoe; Xu, Cameron.

HONORS

Anderson, William; Andrade, Zoey-Rae; Anzalone, Benjamin;

Astin, Adam; Atakian, Chris; Ayoub, Hassan; Barreras, Noah; Beaulieu, Ursula; Bellico, Madeline; Blakesley, Henry; Bluhm, Anne; Bremilst, Heidi; Burch, Dylan; Burnham, Sophia; Cady, Jasper; Callahan, Richard; Careddu-Jackson, Morris; Carone, Giada; Cassano, Gavin; Cereno, Saraphina; Chatham, Emm; Chauvin, Samantha; Chisholm, Liam; Cleveland, Keymaira; Comendul, Lila; Conidi, Olivia; Cook, Jaelynn; Corneliusen, Brooke; Coutchie, Samuel; Cox, Sean; Crowley, Tyler; De Almeida, Anna Leah; DeAngelis, Joseph; Delano, Parker; Desrosiers, Jacob; Donovan, Saoirse; Dorcil, Addison; Doucette, Jacob; Dowling, Abe; Duignan, Killian; Eaton, Emily; Faille, Olivia; Fenore, Marshall; Ferreira, Jesse; Finnerty, Molly; Ford, Edward; Francisco, Mia; Freeman, Pepper; Fregeau, Mason; Garrity, Cole; Genereux, Maxwell; Gillis, Arianna; Gogineni, Rana; Gonzalez, Olivia; Green, Ryan; Griffin, Evelyn; Hafez, Fady; Halloway, James; Hartwell, Jackson; Hasson, Liat; Hazlett, Thomas; Henney, Sydney; Hogan, Emma; Holmes, Lilly; Houlding, Aubrey; Huyler, John; Joachinivil, Christania; Johnson, Addison; Joughin, William; Keays, Laila; Kelley, Alexa; Kelly, Hadley; Kennedy, Lillian; Kerner, Dakota; Kettell, Owen; Khalil, Alexander; Kinahan, Brooklyn; Kotkowski, Ruby; Kuzmanoff, Sloan; Laliberte, Connor; Lamothe-Vaughn,

Anderson; Laplante, Brielle; Leclair, Isabella; Liptak, Flynn; Loehfelm, Colin; Lonergan, Declan; Lopes, Sara; Lorenzo, Robert; Lovell, Daniel; MacEachen, Thomas; Manning, Kyra; Mastroianni, Cole; Matthews, Alecia; McCabe, Mackenzie; McDonagh, John; McDonald, Aidan; McGann, Brady; McGonagle, Brielle; McGourthy, William; McGowan, Brendan; McGrath, Delaney; McGuckian, Caitlin; McKeon, Morgan; McManus, Patrick; McNamee, Kaelie; Medina Gudiel, Evelyn; Mehrotra, Karysa; Milot, Sophia; Moore, Hudson; Morley, Harper; Morrison, Thomas; Mudulodu, Neha; Mumira, Lucy; Murphy, Keagan; Neipris, Brady; Neipris, Vienna; Noonan, Logan; O'Leary, Abigail; Panda, Rivan; Paralta, Ella; Parker, Mason; Perreault, Kaiden; Pettit, Nathan; Prakapas, Fiona; Quintin, Connor; Raymond, Cody; Revell, Cassidy; Salguero, Soraya; Sanford, Ella; Scarsciotti, Gianna; Shehukhalifa, Ameera; Shook, Cameron; Siddiqui, Sophia; Small, Patrick; Small, Owen; Smith, Nathan; St. Laurent, Cameron; Stark, Emerson; Stefanelli, Charles; Sullivan, Gary; Tezber, Charlotte; Thomson, Sarah; Tiernan, Brynn; Tobin, Kiera; Tomasello, Hunter; Weiblen, Gavin; Wenstrom, Courtney; Wetmore, Sophia; Wilayah, Mohammed; Wilayah, Ahmad; Woodley, Cassidy; Wosny, Sean.

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who passed away in March 2023. Throughout his lifetime, Scott demonstrated the extraordinary ability to regularly engage others and influence change and was dedicated to serving the community.

For more information or to apply for the scholarship, students should contact the King Philip High School guidance office.

1776 Financial Services is located at 443 E. Central St., Franklin. 1776 Financial is not a registered broker dealer and is independent of Raymond James Financial Services Inc. Securities offered through Raymond James Financial Services Inc., Member FINRA/SIPC. Investment advisory services offered through Raymond James Financial Services Advisors Inc.

Stony Brook Camera Club Announces February Programs

The Stony Brook Camera Club (SBCC) continues its 2025-26 season with a full slate of February programming, offering photographers opportunities for learning, creativity, and connection.

The club meets on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. from September through June, with meetings held both in person and virtually. In-person meetings take place at the Anglican Church of the Redeemer, located at 195 Main Street in Franklin. SBCC meetings feature guest speakers, member competitions, and discussions of general photographic interest, along with photography activities and workshops throughout the year.

SBCC welcomes photographers of all skill levels, from beginners to experienced professionals.

The club's February schedule includes:

- 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

Those interested in photography are encouraged to attend and participate in the club's programs, whether online or in person. Visit <https://www.stonybrookcc.com/> for more information.

Wrentham Democrats Plan Caucus

The Wrentham Democratic Town Committee (WDTC) will hold its annual caucus on Monday, March 2, with registration beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Wrentham Senior Center, located at 400 Taunton Street. Please arrive before 7 p.m. as doors will be closed once the caucus begins.

Registered Wrentham Democrats are encouraged to attend

this public meeting, which serves as the local organizing body of the Massachusetts Democratic Party. The caucus is the foundation of grassroots democracy, where attendees elect delegates and alternates to represent Wrentham at the 2026 Massachusetts Democratic State Convention.

The event is open to all registered Democrats in Wrentham. Those not currently registered

as Democrats may register or change their enrollment at the caucus. The 2026 Convention will be in person at the DCU Center in Worcester, MA, on Friday, May 29, and Saturday, May 30.

For more information about the committee's mission and activities, visit <https://www.wrenthamdemocrats.org/>.

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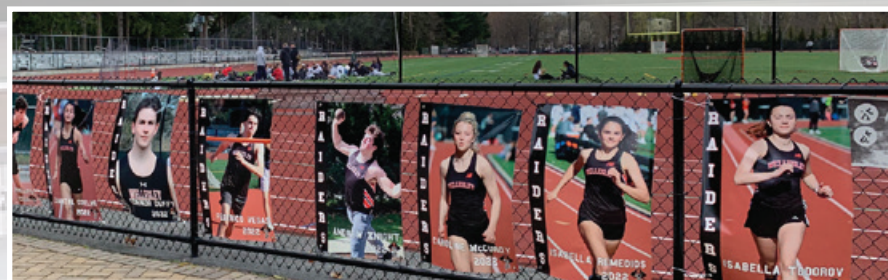
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King Philip DECA Members Advance to the State Career Development Conference

Multiple King Philip DECA students have qualified for the State Career Development Conference (SCDC) in Boston this March. The school had an impressive showing at the Massachusetts DECA District 2 Conference, held Jan. 8 and 9 at the Mansfield Envision Hotel.

“These accomplishments truly illustrate the pride our students have for this program,” said DECA Advisor James Dow in a statement. “Our unmatched success would not be possible without the support we receive from our school and community. The chapter now looks to our State Conference with optimism and excitement as we bring over 85% of our membership to competition.”

Students competing at the district conference needed to finish in the top five in their category to advance to the state conference. Students were recognized for their work in marketing, community service, finance, hospitality, and tourism. The chapter has qualified 85% of the student projects in the entire state, a statistic consistently held by King Philip.

In addition, six KP DECA students qualified for DECA's



Students Luke Rogers and Cole Faford, who will be advancing to SCDC this March. (Photo Courtesy King Philip Regional School District)

Stock Market Game after placing in the North Atlantic Region Top 25, earning spots at DECA's International Competition in Atlanta, Georgia. KP DECA also earned the highest level in the DECA Inc membership and community service campaigns, which grants the chapter four leadership spots at the DECA ICDC in April.

About King Philip DECA

King Philip DECA is a high school business organization and part of a larger network of nearly 300,000 high school

students worldwide. DECA prepares young leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management through student projects and three rounds of competition: Districts, SCDC in Boston, and the International Career Development Conference (ICDC) in Atlanta, Georgia. For more information, visit the KP DECA website.

About DECA Inc.

DECA is a career and technical student organization that prepares emerging leaders and



Grace Rutan and Paige Dow, members of a freshman group, received awards at their first District Competition. (Photo Courtesy King Philip Regional School District)

entrepreneurs interested in careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, DECA has over 240,000 members in 3,600

high school and college chapters in nearly all 50 United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Germany. For more information, visit deca.org.

Crys Matthews to Perform at Circle of Friends Coffeehouse

Acclaimed singer-songwriter Crys Matthews will make her first appearance at the Circle of Friends Coffeehouse on Saturday, February 7, bringing her powerful blend of music and message to Franklin.

A Nashville resident and widely respected troubadour of truth, Matthews is recognized as one of the brightest voices in a new generation of social justice-focused musicians. An award-winning and prolific lyricist and composer, she weaves together elements of country, Americana, folk, blues, and bluegrass, creating performances that are both rooted in tradition and unmistakably contemporary. Her songs are known for their honesty, depth, and inspiration, of-



fering thoughtful reflections that resonate deeply with today's audiences and underscore music's enduring ability to comfort and connect.

The Circle of Friends Coffeehouse is a nonprofit organization affiliated with Franklin's First Universalist Society. Concerts are held in a smoke-free

and alcohol-free environment at the Society's handicapped-accessible Meetinghouse, located at 262 Chestnut St. in Franklin. The February 7 concert begins at 7:30 p.m., with doors opening at 7 p.m.

Tickets for the performance are \$25. Beverages and gourmet desserts will be available for purchase. For tickets and additional information, visit circlefolk.org. More information about the artist can be found at crysmatthews.com.

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KPMS Hosts Charity Movie Night Benefiting For Kids' Sake Foundation

King Philip Middle School (KPMS) seventh-grade Purple Panther Team recently hosted their second annual KPMS Purple Panther Charity Movie Night.

The fundraiser, held on Nov. 11, honored former KPMS Purple Panther Malia Jusczyk, who passed away from neuroblastoma on June 14, 2023. The event raised \$1,172 benefiting the For Kids' Sake Foundation, a non-profit supporting those affected by pediatric cancer.

The evening included a viewing of "Home Alone" and activities such as a coloring station, bracelet-making station, estimation jars, prizes, personalized tumblers and snacks. Purple Panther teachers provided supplies and organized the event.

Malia's family established the For Kids' Sake Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children "crush cancer." Their mission is to raise awareness and improve the lives of children with pediatric cancer through peer-to-peer fundraising, sponsorships, partnerships and awareness cam-



Purple Panthers teachers presented a check to Megan and Kole Jusczyk, Malia's mother and brother, on Nov 26, representing the funds raised during the second annual Purple Panther Charity Movie Night. (Photo Courtesy King Philip Regional School District)

paigns.

The Purple Panthers teacher team presented a check for \$1,172 to the foundation on Nov. 26. The team is led by Whitney Hartwell-Jones and supported by teachers Michele Austin, Pam Hughes-Rogan and Melinda Parker.

"I wish to thank our Purple Panther Team teachers who so generously donated their time and supplies to ensure the fundraiser ran smoothly," KPMS

Principal Michelle J. Kreuzer said. "I would also like to thank the community for supporting such an important cause and making this year's movie night even more impactful than last year. We are grateful to the Jusczyk family for allowing us to honor Malia's legacy and support the For Kids' Sake Foundation, and we are proud to continue to spread Malia's message of kindness throughout our school community."

Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild to Host Biennial Quilt Show March 14-15

Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild will hold its biennial quilt show on Saturday and Sunday, March 14 and 15, at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School. The show will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days.

Visitors will have the opportunity to view the Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild raffle quilt, "Dresden Bloom," and purchase raffle tickets for a chance to win it. The quilt measures 74.5 inches by 74.5 inches and was created by guild members Karen Pierce, Glory Torres, and Rita Partridge. The makers selected a pattern designed to showcase both appliqué and piecing techniques, and chose bright, cheerful fabrics to complete the design. The quilt was custom quilted by Kimberly Cloutier of Blooming Quilts.

Raffle tickets are available from guild members prior to the show and will also be sold during the event. Tickets are \$2 each or six for \$10.



"Dresden Bloom" will be raffled off for Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild.

State Officials Remind Residents of Open Burning Rules and Safety During Season

Massachusetts fire and environmental officials are reminding residents to use caution during open burning season, which runs from January 15 to May 1.

State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine, MassDEP Commissioner Bonnie Heple, and DCR Chief Fire Warden David Celino said open burning restrictions are imposed at both the state and local levels and apply only to specific materials.

"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," Davine said.

Heple warned that improper open burning can create safety risks and harm air quality, while Celino urged residents not to risk fires that could put homes and communities in danger.

Open burning is prohibited year-round in: Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Chicopee, Everett, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, Medford, New Bedford, Newton, Somerville, Springfield, Waltham, Watertown, West Springfield, and Worcester.

In other communities, only certain agricultural waste may be burned, including brush, driftwood, residential forestry debris, fruit tree and bush prunings, raspberry stalks, infected bee hives, and trees and brush from agricultural land clearing. It is unlawful to burn leaves, grass, hay, stumps, tires, household trash, construction materials, or demolition debris.

Open burning may only be conducted with a permit, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., at least 75 feet from dwellings, and under conditions that do not cause a nuisance or contribute to air pollution. Local fire departments may deny permits or impose additional restrictions.

Officials also reminded residents that fires must be attended by an adult at all times, burned in small amounts, and never started with gasoline or other accelerants. Residents should extinguish fires immediately if winds pick up and call the local fire department right away if a fire gets out of control.

February Program Highlights at the Fiske Public Library

The Fiske Public Library will be closed Monday, February 16 for Presidents' Day. The library's regular hours are Monday and Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For a full list of programs or to register, visit www.fiskelib.org.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Valentine's Day Crafternoon

Friday, Feb. 13 from 3 to 4 p.m.

Stop by the Children's Room to make a Valentine's Day craft, as well as valentines for loved ones.

Lunchtime Movie

Tuesday, February 17 from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The Fiske will host a PG-rated, family friendly movie in the Sweatt Room. Bring your lunch and a picnic blanket and enjoy a movie with friends.

Zoo Show with Records and Burpee

Thursday, February 19 from 11 a.m. to noon

In this conservation-based program, meet an exciting assortment of animals, learn about them, get a taste of their personalities, and have fun too! How fast can an alligator run? What

mammal dines on scorpions and tarantulas? Which primate has the largest brain in proportion to its body size? Get up close to a variety of creatures including birds, mammals, and reptiles, big and small. This educational program is best for ages 5 and up.

UNO Tournament

Saturday, February 28 from 2 to 3 p.m.

Join us for a special UNO® card game event. Children will play multiple games of UNO® with friends. Prior knowledge of how to play UNO is highly suggested. A few decks of UNO cards will be available but please bring your own if you have them. For ages 6+. Register on the calendar page at fiskelib.org.

ADULT PROGRAMS

The Best Way to Declutter Your Home

Wednesday, February 4 from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Confused by all the decluttering methods online? Join Susan from A Less Cluttered Life for a helpful program covering popular decluttering approaches, including the pros and cons of each, and how to choose what works best for you and your home. Sponsored by the Friends of the Fiske Library and funded by a grant from Eversource, MA.

Learn To Sew!

Wednesdays, February 11, 18, and 25 from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

In this 3-week program, participants will learn how to use a sewing machine and sew with confidence. The library currently has four sewing machines donated by the Friends of the Fiske which can be checked out for the duration of the program but must be returned on the final day for the next series. Participants can also bring in their own (good working order and ready to go) sewing machine. Two of the projects will require participants to purchase fabric of their choice. For more information or to register, please visit fiskelib.org.

Abigail Adams: Living History Presentation

Tuesday, February 24 at 6:30 p.m.

A portrayal of Abigail Adams (1744-1818) will be presented by actor and living history interpreter Audrey Stuck-Girard. The program will explore Adams' unexpected role on the national stage, her support of husband John Adams, and her advocacy for education and women's rights. Stuck-Girard has portrayed Revolutionary-era figures for more than a decade through her business Cuffed & Coiffed.

Film Screening and Potluck to Explore Food Justice and Regenerative Agriculture

The First Universalist Society in Franklin Food Justice Team will host a screening of the award-winning documentary "Common Ground" on Sunday, February 22 at 12:30 p.m.

The film features appearances by Woody Harrelson, Laura Dern, Jason Momoa, and Danny Glover. Blending investigative journalism with personal stories from those on the front lines of the food movement, "Common Ground" examines the money, power, and politics shaping today's food system. The documentary explores how current farming practices developed and highlights a growing movement of white, Black, and Indigenous farmers using regenerative agricultural models that aim to improve health outcomes, address climate challenges, and strengthen the economy.

Attendees are invited to enjoy a potluck during the screening or bring their own lunch. Admission is free. A post-film discussion will follow the screening.

Community members are also encouraged to mark their calendars for Sunday, March 8, when the conversation on regenerative agriculture will continue with a discussion featuring Ali Coakley, proprietor of Night Owl Farm in Franklin.

The First Universalist Society in Franklin is a Unitarian Universalist Welcoming Congregation located at 262 Chestnut Street. For more information, contact info@fusf.org or call 508-528-5348.

Wrentham Resident Completes Goldman Sachs Small Business Program

Ruth DiGiovanni, a Wrentham resident and co-founder of RemiPBX, Inc., graduated as part of the largest cohort of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Rhode Island program, a highly competitive 14-week business growth initiative run in partnership with the Community College of Rhode Island and Babson College.

DiGiovanni and her husband, Zopito "Zo" DiGiovanni, co-founded RemiPBX, a cloud-based business phone service company serving small businesses across Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The company has an office at the CIC in Providence, a client-facing meeting space in

Boston, and a private operating space in North Attleboro.

"This program's 25th cohort in Rhode Island included 39 business owners from more than a dozen industries statewide," DiGiovanni said. "Serving small businesses across Massachusetts and Rhode Island with reliable VoIP solutions has fueled steady organic growth for RemiPBX, and the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program helped me refine the strategies needed to scale even further. The insights and tools I gained in the program have already made a meaningful impact on our planning and operations. I am honored to be part of Cohort 25 and energized for

what comes next."

Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Rhode Island is built upon a Babson College curriculum and focuses on job creation, sustainable growth, and strengthening the local small business economy. The most recent graduates join a network of nearly 600 Rhode Island businesses and more than 17,000 national graduates.

Goldman Sachs and former Governor Gina M. Raimondo brought 10,000 Small Businesses to Rhode Island in 2016. The program is a partnership with the Community College of Rhode Island.

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Sports

KP Boys Ice Hockey Squad Built for the Long Run

Warriors Rely on a Variety of Strengths

By KEN HAMWEY
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Toby Carlow knows a thing or two about coaching ice hockey — especially after 24 years in a plethora of rinks.

Now in his fourth year as King Philip's boys coach, the 48-year-old Carlow led Medfield High to a Division 2 state championship in 2016 during a 14-year career at the Tri Valley League school. He also was an assistant coach for six years at Burrillville High School in Rhode Island where he was an all-league defenseman.

So, when Carlow speaks, it's a good idea to listen. His outlook for the current edition of the Warriors is upbeat and direct.

"Our goal is to win a state championship," he said without hesitation. "It's realistic because we've got talent and we're skilled. But, our players have to keep improving daily and be better than they were yesterday. They've got to push each other and hold one another accountable. The key is execution because nobody is going to give us anything."

The Warriors go beyond being skilled and talented. There are other positive attributes that work in their favor. KP has 19 returnees from last year's 9-8-3 squad that bowed in the first round of state tourney to Westwood in overtime. And, 16 of the returnees are seniors.

Experience is a huge factor but there's more. Much more.

"We also have depth," Carlow said. "We've got three solid lines. The players are strong skaters, they have high hockey IQs, their work ethic is excellent and they're

very coachable. We're also athletic. We check effectively, we've got four veteran defensemen, our goalies are experienced and our goal-scoring has improved over last year."

The Warriors' captains are all seniors and labeled as "level-headed leaders" by Carlow. They are right wing Grady Binculli, defenseman Sonny Binculli (twin brother), and center Joe Robison.

"Grady is a two-year captain who leads by example," Carlow said. "A hard-worker, he's tough, never gives up, passes well and battles in the corners. A very good situational player, he was a Hockomock League all-star last year. Sonny, like his brother, is in his fourth varsity season. He's tough, controls the pace, and is a strong skater. Also a league all-star last year, Sonny is a quality leader and a defenseman who can score.

"Joe skates on the first line with Grady. He's very coachable, has a good wrist shot, and can score. He's also very reliable on the defensive end and he anchors the first line. Joe had 15 goals and 12 assists last season."

Senior Jack Gresham, a left wing, rounds out KP's first line. "Jack works hard in the corners and has a good shot," Carlow offered. "A four-year veteran, he has a high hockey IQ, is rugged and tough. Jack has improved a lot."

KP's second line includes seniors Finn Cunningham (center), Tom Frazier (left wing), and Matt Crotty (right wing).

"Our second-line players are strong skaters, they've got speed



Toby Carlow is in his fourth year as KP's boys ice hockey coach.

and quickness and they create offense," Carlow noted. "They're a well-balanced line and they complement one another effectively. Their hockey IQs are high and they know how to get to the right spot."

The parade of seniors continues on defense with Evan Regan, Charlie Pelkey and Damon MacKinnon. The trio has a total of 10 years of varsity experience.

"Evan is tough, strong and smart," Carlow noted. "A strong skater, he gets the puck up ice quickly. An all-around defenseman who can score, he's good in all situations. Charlie has a high hockey IQ and is strong moving the puck. He's a very capable stay-at-home defenseman. Damon is strong, physical and offensive-minded. A very coachable player, he's willing to do whatever is asked."

Carlow has three goalies who provide plenty of depth. Senior Hayden Tyrell is a senior transfer from Worcester Tech High School and in reserve are juniors Andrew Morneau and Liam Beachkofski.

"Hayden is big, about 6-2 and 190 pounds," Carlow said. "He's athletic, calm in the net and has good instincts. He's got speed and quickness and he knows how to play the angles. Andrew and Liam are similar. Both are in their second varsity year, they battle hard and are fearless. They're athletic and both are capable goalies."

Carlow's staff includes varsity assistants Tony Iaffola and Albert Carlow (brother of the coach); Drew Diko (javy head coach) and Ted Ducharme (assistant javy coach). "They're all capable and dedicated," Carlow said. "They relate well to the kids and they make my job easier."

Acutely aware that winning a state title involves focusing on one game at a time and one situation at a time, Carlow assembled the Warriors schedule with formidable non-league foes and two in-season tourneys that would provide the Warriors with an atmosphere of tourney competition.

The Warriors lost to Methuen in the Methuen Christmas Tournament, then defeated Algonquin in the third-place game. Later this month, the Warriors will face off in the Sogin Cup, hosted by Walpole. The other teams are Mansfield and North Attleboro.

Non-league foes on KP's schedule include Newburyport, Arlington Catholic, Natick, Whitman-Hanson and Hopkinton.

Another checkpoint en route to the playoffs involves the league's Kelly-Rex Division. "We'll strive to win the division," Carlow emphasized. "Franklin

is the defending champion and is a traditionally strong team. Taunton and North Attleboro are also contenders."

Carlo played four varsity seasons at Burrillville and was a three-time all-star and also a captain as a senior. He played college hockey at UMass-Boston where he was an ECAC all-star and an assistant captain.

Relying on a coaching philosophy that stresses "reaching one's potential and enjoying athletics," Carlow firmly believes that when those two situations occur, "winning is the by-product."

Carlow also knows that sports teach valuable life lessons. "Great life lessons include overcoming adversity and being resilient," he said. "Other key lessons are learning how to lead, how to be a quality teammate and being accountable and responsible."

KP, which had a 6-1 record and a power ranking of 9 at Local Town Pages deadline, relies on an up-tempo style on offense. "We like to get the puck up ice quickly," Carlow emphasized. "Obviously, we've had a good start to the season. The boys are working hard every day to improve and get prepared for the post season."

No matter what style the Warriors choose, it's a given that they'll compete hard, stay focused and give 100 percent.

State championships don't come around often. Toby Carlow has experienced one as a head coach — with the Medfield Warriors.

The time, however, could be ripe for another crown — with KP's Warriors.

Barbarians Youth Rugby Earns 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Status

Wrentham-based Barbarians Youth Rugby announced it has officially received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, a milestone that will support the club's mission of bringing rugby to local youth while promoting personal development through the sport's core values.

With its new designation, Barbarians Youth Rugby can accept tax-deductible donations,

apply for grants, and invest in areas such as equipment, coaching certification, facility access, and scholarship opportunities to help keep the sport accessible for families in Wrentham and surrounding communities.

"Rugby is more than just a game; it is a vehicle for character development," said Stephen Signes, president of Barbarians Youth Rugby. "Our program

is deeply committed to the game's core values—Integrity, Passion, Solidarity, Discipline, and Respect. These principles guide fair play, teamwork, and sportsmanship both on and off the pitch, ensuring the game's unique spirit of camaraderie and mutual regard for teammates, opponents, and officials is upheld by every Barbarian."

Barbarians Youth Rugby offers programs for girls and boys beginning at age five (Kindergarten). Through sixth grade, the club runs a co-ed flag program that teaches rugby fundamentals. From seventh grade through high school, players join girls' and boys' contact teams to develop skills, strategy, and game understanding.

The club encourages community support through donations, sponsorships, and volunteer efforts. Additional information about getting involved and sponsorship opportunities is available through Barbarians Youth Rugby.

For more information, visit <https://www.barbariansrugby.club/home>.

Sports

King Philip Regional High School Hosts Hockey Fights Cancer Game

For the King Philip Regional High School Boys Ice Hockey team, a recent game was about much more than scoring goals.

On Saturday, Jan. 10, the team hosted a Hockey Fights Cancer game to raise awareness about prostate cancer and collect donations for cancer research.

The KP and North Attleboro teams banded together in a competitive show of community to support those living with, going through and moving past cancer.

The team raised a total of \$956 at the game and honored KP parent Jason Morneau, who is currently fighting prostate cancer, with his own jersey. KP players wore white and light blue jerseys to bring attention to the American Cancer Society, specifically recognizing prostate cancer.

“The District would like to thank the entire boys ice hockey community, but specifically Manny Barros and David Gresham, for their initiative and support of this great celebration,” said KP Athletic Director Gary Brown in a statement.



The King Philip Regional High School boys ice hockey team recently hosted a Hockey Fights Cancer game, where they wore blue and white jerseys to raise awareness for prostate cancer. (Photo Courtesy King Philip Regional School District)

Funds raised through Hockey Fights Cancer in partnership with the American Cancer Society (ACS) support people affected by cancer, their families, and caregivers through ACS patient programs and support.

Some of the supports include lodging, transportation and around-the-clock support for patients.

Hockey teams anywhere in the country can host Hockey Fights Cancer Assist games to

raise money for the initiative.

“We are incredibly proud of our boys ice hockey team for using their platform to support the American Cancer Society,” said Athletic Director Brown. “This game was much bigger

than the scoreboard, and our student-athletes showed what it means to be leaders in their school community.”

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Norfolk Residents Come Together for World Meditation Day at Public Library

On Sunday, December 21, residents of Norfolk gathered at the Norfolk Public Library to observe World Meditation Day, a global initiative recognized by the United Nations to highlight the role of meditation in mental well-being, resilience, and peace.

Twenty-six community members came together for a calm, welcoming meditation session that connected Norfolk with communities around the world. Participants joined a live global meditation streamed from New York City and led by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, internationally respected humanitarian and founder of the Art of Living Foundation, as part of a worldwide observance taking place

across dozens of countries and cities.

The Norfolk gathering offered residents an opportunity to pause, reflect, and experience a moment of calm during the busy holiday season. The event was free, open to the public, and non-denominational, welcoming individuals and families of all backgrounds. No prior meditation experience was required.

Attendees participated in simple breathing and meditation practices focused on stress relief, relaxation, and inner calm. Many appreciated the opportunity to come together locally while also participating in a larger global moment dedicated to peace and well-being.



The event was organized by local volunteers from the Art of Living Foundation – Massachusetts as part of a broader statewide and international observance of World Meditation Day. Similar community gatherings were held across Massachusetts in libraries, universities, and community centers.

Organizers expressed gratitude to the Norfolk Public Library and the local community for hosting and participating in the event, emphasizing the importance of creating accessible spaces that support mental wellness and community connection.

HCA Calls for Art!

Creatives! Submit Your Artwork

CALL FOR ART: Steadfast Companions: Animals and Artists

The HCA Artist Collective is excited to announce a call for artwork for “Steadfast Companions: Animals and Artists,” a special exhibition celebrating the creativity and spirit of our students, instructors, and community members.

This show invites you to explore the theme “Animals and Artists”—whether that means showcasing a beloved creature that inspires you, capturing the spirit of wildlife, or interpreting the bond between humans and animals in your own unique way.

For more information, visit <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeZEJ9YOeuHMg87KEsj1q3fkuFAT-pcG0wdQansfwZEjJEGGow/viewform>

CALL FOR ART: 2026 Winged Feet Exhibition and Auction

Winged Feet 2026, April 3-26, 2025

Opening Reception: April 3 6-7 p.m.

Entry Deadline: 1/30/2026

Artist Notifications: 2/5/2026

Art drop off at HCA: 3/21-22/2026

Hopkinton Center for the Arts and 26.2 Foundation, 501(c)(3) organizations, invite artists to submit their proposal for a Winged Foot, a project celebrating the Boston Marathon. The Winged Feet will be displayed on the Hopkinton Town Common from April 3 through April 26. Winged Feet will be auctioned off to benefit the Hopkinton Center for the Arts and the 26.2 Foundation.

Twenty-six proposals will be chosen this year. If your proposal is selected you will be paired with a local business sponsor who will provide a stipend of \$500 to cover the cost of art materials. Sponsors are chosen at random. Stipends will be paid at the opening reception. If you cannot attend it will be mailed to you.

If an artist’s proposal is accepted they will be provided with a flat winged foot cut out of Versatex. Designs must be family friendly and weather resistant. The winged feet will be approximately 2 feet wide by 3-foot-high exterior art installations that will be mounted to a metal pole which will rest at eye level. Designs should be appropriate for all ages.

When designing the Winged

Foot please ensure that the foot points to the right so that all of the Winged Feet on display are facing the same way. Please only paint one side of the winged foot, if you want to paint the reverse please use a solid color, a metal pole will be affixed to the back for the outdoor installation.

For full details, visit <https://wingedfeet2026.artcall.org/>.

CALL FOR ART: Depth of Field: Open Call for Photography

March 16 - April 8, 2026

Reception: Friday March 20th, 6-7 p.m.

Entry Deadline: March 6, 2026

Artist Notifications: March 9, 2026

Art drop off at HCA: March 12-13, 2026

Pick up artwork: April 9-10, 2026

This exhibit aims to honor the art of photography in all its forms, embracing the wide range of approaches and styles that photographers bring to the medium. By showcasing this diversity, we celebrate the creative spirit and the unique perspectives that make photography such a powerful art form.

Everyone is invited to submit online applications containing 1

or 2 works of art no larger than 30”wide. There is no age limit.

HCA Members will receive a discount on the submission fee, for coupon code please email megann@hopartscenter.org

No AI (Artificial Intelligence) artwork will be accepted.

Our guest judge will be Rebecca Skinner. She will be picking first, second and third place winners and three honorable mentions that will be announced at the reception on Friday March 20th

<https://hca-depthof-field2026.artcall.org/>

HCA CALL FOR ART: Arts in Bloom 2026 - For The Birds

April 29- May 29, 2025

Opening Reception: May 9, 6 p.m.

Entry Deadline: 04/08

Artist Notifications: 04/11

Art drop off at HCA: 4/25-4/26

Show opens: April 29

Pick up artwork: 05/30-31

HCA is excited to announce our 21st annual Arts in Bloom exhibition, juried by artist Marcia R. Wise, who will choose the artwork to be exhibited and select six outstanding works for awards. The six winning artists will receive cash prizes totaling

over \$1,000.

The Hopkinton Garden Club will be choosing several pieces to inspire floral arrangements that will be on display in the gallery. Last year, we had ten floral arrangements. Garden Club members choose a piece that inspires them.

The theme for this year’s Art in Bloom is For the Birds. This phrase, commonly used as an idiom, refers to something perceived as worthless, not to be taken seriously, of no value, or only believed by the gullible, or to express a dismissive or irreverent attitude. We’d like you to consider the concept of frivolity, things that waste our time (Bills, laundry, politics, addiction to devices, pop culture, cold weather, high prices, scam calls, name-dropping, boasting, etc.) Incorporate humor or sarcasm into your creative choices to capture the essence of this theme.

Although you may submit artworks that depict flowers, please consider other subjects to make it more interesting for the floral designers.

<https://artsinbloom2026.artcall.org/>

KPHS Achieves Gold Status on College Board's 2025 AP School Honor Roll

King Philip Regional High School (KPRHS) has again achieved Gold status on College Board's 2024-25 AP School Honor Roll. This is the second consecutive year the school has been recognized for its Advanced Placement programs that effectively prepared students for college success.

Schools achieve one of four levels of honor: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum.

For a school to be recognized as Gold on the AP School Honor Roll in a given year, it must meet the following criteria:

- **College Culture:** 65% or more of the graduating cohort took at least one AP exam during high school.
- **College Credit:** 35% or more of the graduating cohort scored a three or higher on at least one AP exam during high school.
- **College Optimization:** 10% or more of the graduating

cohort took at least one AP exam during high school. At least one of those exams was taken in 9th or 10th grade so that students spread their AP experience across grades rather than feeling disproportionate pressure in any year.

KPRHS had 69% of seniors who took at least one AP exam during high school, 56% of seniors scoring a three or higher on at least one AP exam, and 13% of seniors who took five or more AP Exams.

The school exceeded gold criteria for college credit, reaching a Platinum-level percentage, and was only 2% shy of reaching Platinum criteria for college optimization.

"I wish to recognize the Advanced Placement students, whose commitment to their programs has led to this impressive achievement," Principal Nicole Bottomley said in a statement.

"I'd also like to thank our AP teachers, whose constant support of their students prepared them for success in their AP exams, as well as for college-level coursework."

The annual recognition is based on criteria that reflect a commitment to increasing college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credit and maximizing college readiness.

College Board's Advanced Placement Program enables students to pursue college-level studies — with the opportunity to earn college credit, advanced placement, or both — while still in high school. Through AP courses in 38 subjects, each culminating in a challenging exam, students learn to think critically, construct solid arguments and see many sides of an issue — skills that prepare them for college and beyond.

"I am immensely proud of our AP students and educators

for achieving Gold status on the Honor Roll two years in a row," Superintendent Dr. Rich Drolet said. "This accomplishment is evidence of their consistent hard

work and determination to succeed in their academics, and I am pleased that we are once again being recognized for their efforts."

Three Wrentham Residents Named to Massasoit Dean's List

Massasoit Community College has announced its Fall 2025 Dean's List, recognizing 996 students from communities across Massachusetts and Rhode Island. To earn Dean's List honors, students must complete at least nine credits and achieve a grade point average of 3.40 or higher.

The following Wrentham residents were named to the Fall 2025 Dean's List:

- Janet M. Sozio
- Abigail Grace Sullivan
- Thomas C. Waitekus

Congratulations to these students on their academic achievement.



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Massachusetts Fire Deaths Drop by 12% in 2025

44 Fatalities Reported; More than 90% Took Place at Home

Massachusetts fire deaths in 2025 declined from a seven-year high in 2024, with more than 90% taking place in the victims' homes, according to State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine.

Excluding fatal motor vehicle collisions with an ensuing fire, Massachusetts recorded 44 fire

deaths in 30 fires during 2025. That number is a decline from the 50 civilian fire deaths recorded in 2024 and on par with the five-year average of 44 per year from 2020-2024. One child – a 4-year-old North Adams girl – was lost to fire, down from three in 2024. Two dozen people aged 65 or older lost their lives in fires during 2025, making them nearly 55% of fatal fire victims but only about 17% of the population.

Single-family homes accounted for 14 deaths, followed by the devastating fire at Gabriel House Assisted Living in Fall River, which claimed 10 lives and represented the greatest loss of life to a single Massachusetts fire incident in decades. Nine people died in apartment or multifamily home fires, four people died in mobile home fires, and three people died in two-family homes.

The unsafe use or disposal of smoking materials was the known cause or a possible factor in 21 fire deaths in 2025, making it by far the most common factor and continuing a decades-long trend. Smoking is especially dangerous in the presence of medical oxygen – a fact pattern that investigators believe contributed to the Gabriel House fire. The Department of Fire Services last year updated its Home Oxygen Fire Safety brochure, which is offered on the DFS website (<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-fire-services>) and through the Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse in English, Spanish, and Portu-

guese. Smoke alarm operation could be provisionally determined for 30 of the 40 residential fire deaths. Only 16 of these homes or units of origin had working smoke alarms. The alarms in the remainder were either not working or missing entirely.

“Sadly, the places we should feel safest – our homes – are the places where most people lose their lives to fire,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “Changes to building construction allow fires to grow and spread faster. Synthetic furnishings create deadly smoke and toxic gases as they burn. The US Fire Administration estimates that we have less time to escape a fire at home than ever before, so it’s vital to have working smoke alarms to alert us to the danger before it’s too late.”

Four people perished in non-residential fire incidents. Three lost their lives in outdoor fires, including one who suffered fatal injuries while using illegal fireworks, and one was overcome by smoke and flames in his vehicle when the engine caught fire.

While fatal fires tend to be most likely in the winter months, the Gabriel House fire caused 10 of the 11 fire deaths in July. November was the second leading month with nine fatalities, followed by March and October, which accounted for four each. Fatal fires were distributed relatively evenly throughout the day, with spikes between 9 p.m. and 4 a.m.

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Wrentham Student Ambassador Helps Support South Shore Food Bank At "Stuff-A-Bus" Event

In December, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts partnered with Project 351 for a holiday "Stuff-a-Bus" event supporting the South Shore Food Bank.

Matigan Roach, a Project 351 student ambassador from Wrentham, helped load and sort donations. Student ambassadors from several South Shore communities also participated.

Project 351 is a Massachusetts-based youth service and leadership organization that works to develop the next generation of community-minded leaders. Each year, it selects eighth-grade student "Ambassadors" from communities across the state and supports them through a year of service projects, leadership training, and civic engagement activities aimed at strengthening communities and addressing local needs.

Blue Cross and Project 351 donated 2,500 pounds of food for the South Shore Food Bank's "Feed the Wey" Mobile Pantry Bus, which brings free groceries to neighborhoods with limited access to fresh, nutritious food.

"With food insecurity impacting so many people across the South Shore right now, we are excited to partner with Project 351 to support the South Shore Food Bank's critical mission," said Jeff Bellows, vice president of corporate citizenship and public affairs at Blue Cross.

"Project 351 is honored to join the Blue Crew in support of the South Shore Food Bank," said Carolyn Casey, founder and executive director of Project 351.

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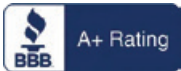
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