

Our Town Publishing Changes Hands, Celebrates Relocation

Tri-County Regional Chamber Facilitates Milford Ribbon-Cutting Event



Front row at ribbon-cutting, from left, Laura O'Callaghan, President & CEO of Tri-County Regional Chamber, Our Town Publishing new owners Jen and Marty Schofield, and Mass. Rep. Brian W. Murray of the 10th Worcester District.

BY JUDITH DORATO O'GARA
 On Friday, Jan. 23, Jen and Marty Schofield, new owners of Our Town Publishing, cel-

ebrated a grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new location at 9 Industrial Road, Ste. 107, Milford,

Mass. The full-service print-

OUR TOWN
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Natick's Pinball Wizard Keeps his Hand in the Games

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

"I was kind of a child of the 80s," said Tasker Smith.

Walking among rows of pinball machines that rule his backyard barn, visitors can testify to that.

The Natick resident is more than a casual collector of those machines that thrived in popularity even through the golden age of video games.

Smith's barn bars the biting wind that harries New Englanders during winter months, but cold air still seeps in and makes itself at home within its walls.

A portable heater raises the temperature during such times, when Smith might be tinkering in the space that also serves as a workshop. During this darker season, he might also warm things up within



Tasker Smith has transformed his love of pinball machines into a book. Photo by Sean Sullivan

the barn to play a few games of pinball.

On a night after work in Febru-

PINBALL
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OUR TOWN

continued from page 1

ing company provides a range of marketing services for all clients, from consumer to business, as well as publishes community newspapers reaching 28 Massachusetts towns. The reception drew many local professionals, along with Rep. Brian W. Murray of the 10th Worcester District and Laura O’Callaghan, President & CEO of the Tri-County Regional Chamber of Commerce, who was “thrilled” to help facilitate the ribbon-cutting event.

Our Town President & CEO Jen Schofield expressed her gratitude to all who attended for their support.



“As both the owner and publisher of 16 area newspapers and a full-service print shop, Marty and I are incredibly proud of the work we do—and even more proud of the relationships that have built this business brick by brick,” Schofield added, “This event is more than just showcas-

ing our print shop, newspapers, products and services; it’s about building lasting connections. Printing has always been a collaborative craft, and today is a perfect opportunity to share ideas and build new partnerships in a community we are so fortunate to be part of.”

“It was wonderful to see such a strong turnout from the newspaper’s clients and supporters,” said O’Callaghan. “The energy in the room and the enthusiasm for networking really spoke to the respect and support Jennifer and Marty have already earned as the new owners. And of course, nothing makes it official quite like oversized red scissors and a bright red ribbon!”

“I’m pleased to have Our Town Publishing in Milford and very impressed with the number of local community newspapers (it) publishes,” said Rep. Murray, who recognized Our Town Publishing with an official citation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts at the celebration. Murray continued, “Today, it is so difficult to try to get current local information, and the papers that Our Town puts together does just a great job of getting that information out to residents in the community. I was also very pleased to learn of the extent of



(L to R) Nicole and Charles Tashjian, former owners of Our Town Publishing, chat with attorney Laurie Fowles.

full-service printing services Our Town offers to businesses and residents in the community. It’s very important for folks who have printing needs to know they’ll be done locally, professionally and cost-effectively.”

Rep. Murray also gave a nod to the Tri-County Chamber for helping to bring exposure and attention to local businesses such as Our Town Publishing.

Tri-County Regional Chamber’s O’Callaghan extended her well wishes “to former owner Nicole and her husband, Charles, on their retirement - hopefully they are enjoying their free time somewhere sunny and warm.”

The Tashjians said they could not be happier to entrust the

company they built to Jennifer and Marty.

“With Jennifer’s 26 years in the industry and Marty’s technical experience, we know our employees, and the continuation of what has been established, will have a long life for the years ahead,” said Nicole Tashjian.

For more information on Our Town Publishing’s full-service printing, publishing and graphic design services, visit www.our-townpublishing.com.

To learn more about Local Town Pages’ community newspapers, visit www.localtownpages.com.

For more information on the Tri-County Regional Chamber, visit tricountychamberma.org.



Our Town Publishing’s celebration afforded local professionals an opportunity to make connections with area businesses.

Matthew Welch

for Natick School Committee

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VOTE on Tuesday March 31st

Free Intergenerational Concert March 1

SINGtogether: Rise & Shine!, a free intergenerational concert and collaboration between Golden Tones chorus and Natick High School Concert Choir will be performed at 4 p.m. Sunday, March 1 at First Congregational Church, 2 East Central Street, Natick.

Two generations of singers will once again come together to create a live experience of songs celebrating light in its many forms.

This event is sponsored in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

A Home for Future Generations Views Energy Saving in an Artful Way

BY SEAN SULLIVAN

Through a participatory art project, local residents are learning how to get creative in building a more energy-efficient way of life.

The project is a collaboration between local artists Julia Csekö and Raquel Fornasaro, who shared a vision for a tangible way to inspire and educate neighbors about ways to conserve power and save money.

“Two heads think better than one,” said Csekö.

Shaped like small house, the art installations will be a community effort, calling on the creativity of local residents throughout March. Volunteers will each add a personal touch to the piece in a series of roving workshops held locally.

Natick’s house will make the rounds, popping up at Natick landmarks and institutions, where locals will be invited to add their own creativity to the structure.

“You can just come and make art with us,” Csekö said.

There will be two mini houses, one based in Natick and other in Framingham. The two communities are partnering in the program, which is fully funded by the state’s Mass Save program.

That initiative is powered by Massachusetts utility companies and energy-efficiency groups. Through education, incentives and other resources, Mass Save’s mission is to help residents and businesses lessen the cost and environmental impact of energy use.

The interior walls of each house will be decorated with murals made with input from community members. The themes of those paintings will be energy conservation and shared responsibility.

The structures’ exterior walls will feature community-created shingles, each a piece of the power-and-planet-saving puzzle. The shingles will be color-coded, with different shades along the spectrum corresponding to the environmental impact of an action.

On the utopian end, purple shingles represent the pinnacle of sustainable impact.

Found within this category are upgrades like home insulation, energy-efficient windows and heat pumps, among other technologies.



Public participation is encouraged in A Home for Future Generations. Photo by Sean Sullivan

“All that good stuff,” said Csekö.

On the other side, red shingles represent an inefficient use of resources, with lots of areas of opportunity to improve.

Together, the shades of color will tell the story of a collective “Energy Conservation Journey.”

“We thought it was absolutely perfect,” said Fornasaro of the duo’s idea of a mini house as a canvas for conservation. The places people live and work constitute a sizable chunk of the energy used as a civilization.

Much of Fornasaro’s art is inspired by the subject of sustainability, particularly recycling.

Both Brazilian-American, she and Csekö share similar ancestry.

“It was a good combo,” said Fornasaro.

“We were really excited about it,” said Jillian Wilson-Martin. She serves as Director of Sustainability for Natick.

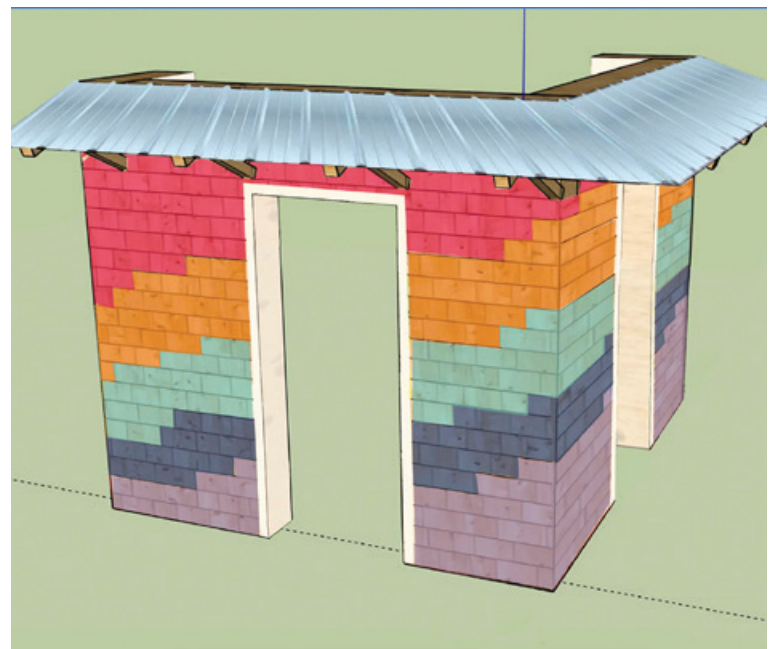
Fueled by the state grant and purpose, Wilson-Martin said the group wanted to educate and inspire “in a way that wasn’t just sending them another letter. We were really excited about it.”

Fornasaro echoed that sentiment, acknowledging that it’s all too easy to fall into the default of business-as-usual when using the energy that enables modern life.

“It’s easy to not be able to find



Reflecting the importance of the natural world. Photo by Sean Sullivan



A colorful home reflects an energy saving message. Photo by Sean Sullivan



A sampling of the different colored panels. Photo by Sean Sullivan

solutions,” she said.

“A Home for Future Generations” is the title of their project, one that belongs to the commu-

nity of all living things.

“To bring the issue to the public in a more positive way,” said Fornasaro. “A little bit of hope.”



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When Your Aging Loved One Needs Help At Home



Shawn Kelly

SENIOR CARE INSIGHTS

More often than not, families wait until a drastic change in their loved ones' health before putting a plan in place for elder care. It could be a fall, broken bone, stroke, etc. To ensure our aging loved ones are kept healthy and safe, it's important to proactively look out for these ten signs and indicators that can help you assess their situation

and determine if they require additional support.

- 1. Changes in physical health:** Declining physical health, unexplained weight loss, difficulty with mobility or balance, chronic pain, or frequent accidents or falls.
- 2. Cognitive decline:** Noticeable changes in memory, confusion, difficulty with decision-making, disorientation, repetitive speech or actions, or difficulty following conversations.
- 3. Neglecting personal hygiene:** Personal care, hygiene & grooming, is a common need when it comes to elderly parent care.
- 4. Increased dependency:** Becoming increasingly dependent on others for activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, eating, or managing medica-

tions, Fielding more calls, making more visits, staying longer at their home to ensure your loved one is safe. This can create a hardship for the family caregiver.

- 5. Social withdrawal or isolation:** A noticeable decline in social engagement, withdrawal from hobbies or activities they once enjoyed, or a lack of interest in interacting with friends or family might suggest a need for more support.
- 6. Erratic or forgetful behavior:** Frequent forgetfulness, missed appointments, difficulty managing finances, or problems with medication management could be signs that additional care is required.
- 7. Safety concerns:** Neglecting home maintenance, unexplained bruises or injuries, leaving stoves or appliances on, or forgetting to lock doors.

- 8. Emotional or behavioral changes:** Significant changes in mood, increased irritability, signs of depression or anxiety, or unusual behavior that is out of character for your loved one
- 9. Lack of proper nutrition:** Weight loss, skipped meals, spoiled food in the refrigerator, or a general decline in eating habits can be indicators that they need assistance with meal planning and preparation.
- 10. Caregiver burnout:** If the primary senior caregiver, whether it's you or someone else, is experiencing extreme stress, exhaustion, or struggles to provide adequate care, it might be a sign that additional elderly care support is necessary.

behavior and overall health. It's essential to communicate openly and compassionately with your aging loved one to discuss their needs and preferences regarding elder care options. Additionally, involving healthcare professionals, such as doctors or geriatric care managers, can provide valuable insights and guidance in determining the appropriate level of care, be it in home care or a move to a senior care facility. But the sooner you notice changes, the better it is to take action and secure the care needed.

Shawn Kelly is the owner of 2nd Family MetroWest Boston, which provides non-medical home care to local residents.

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Remember, these signs should be evaluated in the context of your loved one's baseline

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Three Contenders for Two School Committee Seats

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

School Committee incumbent Matt Brand will face two challengers, Donna McKenzie and Matthew J. Welch, in the only contested race in this year's election.

The three candidates are vying for two three-year positions.

Incumbent Brand, who is seeking a third term, has stated that he is proud of the committee's work during his tenure. He noted that in the most recent three years he has served as chairperson for the Superintendent Screening

Committee which led to hiring Dr. Melissa Spash.

"I have been, and continue to be, proud of the work I was part of on the School Committee during my first two terms and hope to continue that work for another three years," he said.

McKenzie said she plans to champion inclusive policies, support mental health and wellness and engage the community.

"When we stand up for all students, we build a stronger, more inclusive future," she said. She

said she wants to "ensure that Natick's schools remain a place where every child has the opportunity to succeed."

Welch said his candidacy reflects four E's: Evidence, experience, excellence, and everyone.

"Good decisions start with good information. Natick already has a strong school system, and I am committed to helping it grow even stronger," he said. "I bring decades of experience as a teacher, researcher, evaluator, and coach. Every student de-

serves the opportunity to succeed, feel supported, and belong."

All other races are uncontested.

Incumbent Kristen Pope and newcomer Cody Jacobs are seeking re-election to the Select Board.

Andrew J. Meyer is seeking re-election to the Planning Board. Karla Hope Sangrey is on the ballot for a seat on the Board of Health. Wendy J. Curran-Elassy is vying for a seat on the Board of Assessors.

No candidates are listed for associate member of the Planning Board, two positions on the Parks and Recreation board, and one post on the Housing Authority.

Anyone interested in being a write-in candidates for town offices should contact Town Clerk Andrew Ghobrial at clerk@natickma.org or aghobrial@natickma.org or call 508-647-6430, ext. 4.

Election Day is Tuesday, March 31. Polls are open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Contribution Supports Organization Aimed at Helping Children

Cocotree Kids, a Natick-based nonprofit dedicated to providing new underwear to children in need, has received a \$5,000 foundation grant from Dedham Savings Community Foundation in

support of its annual Season of Giving campaign.

The grant will help Cocotree Kids purchase and distribute new underwear to underserved children across the region, addressing a critical yet often overlooked basic need.

Funds raised through the Season of Giving campaign support large-scale distributions to shelters, schools, and community organizations serving children experiencing housing instability, poverty, or crisis.

"We put a lot of thought into deciding where our contributions will have the most impact," said

Lauren Patt, Marketing Specialist at Dedham Savings. "When we talk about the Dedham Savings community, we mean every single one of our clients, neighbors, and local organizations who help make our community so special. We're proud to support organizations like Cocotree Kids that are making a meaningful difference, whether next door or in the next town over."

"In Massachusetts, one in three children experiences clothing insecurity, and more than 100,000 children ages 5-17 live at or below the poverty level without reliable access to clean

underwear that fits," said Catherine Maloy, founder and executive director of Cocotree Kids. "Support from community partners like Dedham Savings allows us to meet this essential need while expanding our reach during one of our busiest giving seasons. This grant helped us reach our goal of raising \$300,000 during our Season of Giving campaign and provide underwear to 30,000 kids across Massachusetts."

Cocotree Kids a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization that provides new underwear to children in need. By addressing a basic yet frequently unmet ne-

cessity, the organization restores dignity, comfort, and confidence to children facing hardship.

A \$10 donation provides one child with a week's worth of new underwear, while \$250 supplies 175 pairs, enough for 25 children. A \$350 gift can provide a full week of underwear for 100 children.

To learn more or make a donation, visit www.cocotreekids.org.



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As your parents grow older, it may be time to talk with them about financial and aging issues, which may involve difficult conversations.

You'll want to be careful how you approach this. Mention ahead of time that you'd like to talk to them about their future

plans and reassure them that you want to understand their wishes, so their affairs will be taken care of as they would like.

If your parents are agreeable, choose a comfortable location and ask whom to invite (or not invite). Then, think about how to open the conversation, preferably not with what they want to do with their money, as this could be interpreted as your seeking information about your inheritance or being skeptical about their financial decisions. Instead, build a broader discussion about their vision for their aging years. A series of shorter conversations may allow you to cover topics more comfortably rather than trying to solve everything at once.

Try to address these areas:

- **Health care** – Seek to learn whether your parents have established appropriate health-related legal documents such as a health care power of attorney, which gives someone

the authority to make decisions about their medical care if they become unable, and a living will, which spells out the extraordinary medical treatments they may or may not want.

- **Independence** – As people age, they may begin to lose their independence. Have your parents considered options for long-term care, such as an assisted living community, a nursing home or a home health aide? If they plan to receive support from family members, do your parents' expectations match yours?
- **Financial goals** – Focusing on the personal and financial aspects of the legacy your parents want to leave can be a valuable conversation. Have they updated their will or other estate documents, such as a living trust? Have they created a durable power of attorney for a trusted family member to make financial decisions for them if

they become incapacitated? Do they have the proper beneficiary designations on their insurance policies, retirement plan and bank accounts? If you position these issues around your parents having control over transferring their assets, rather than curiosity over "who will get what," you'll more likely have a productive conversation.

- **Last wishes** – You'll want to learn whether your parents have instructions in their will about their funerals and last wishes. Express that you or another close family member should know who is responsible for making sure their wishes are met in a timely fashion.

Money, independence and aging can be sensitive topics. You don't have to go it alone, though — enlist help from another close family member. Or, if your parents work with an attorney, financial professional or other trusted advisor, consider asking if they're interested in

having them participate in your talks. You might even be able to introduce your parents to one of your advisors.

In any case, keep talking. These conversations can be challenging, but if handled correctly can be of great benefit to your parents and your entire family.

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

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Bacon Free Library Sizzles with March Programming

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

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

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

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

ALL AGES PROGRAMS

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

Art for All: Zentangle / doodling, Saturday, March 7, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Try this mindful, “brain yoga” practice of creating intricate designs in ink on paper. Drop-in to do the craft at the library or call ahead for curbside pickup “take & make.”

Art for All: Friendship Bracelets, Saturday, March 14, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Weave embroidery floss or string beads to create a friendship bracelet for yourself, and one to swap with a friend. Drop-in to do the craft at the library or call ahead for curbside pickup “take & make.”

Adult Book and Film Clubs. Registration is required for all clubs. Visit the baconfreelibrary.org/clubs-programs for details.

Mystery Book Club, Thursday, March 5 at 1 p.m. on Zoom. “*Faceless Killers*” by Henning Mankell.

History book club, Thursday, March 12 at 11 a.m. on Zoom. “*The Boston Massacre: A Family History*” by Serena Zabin.

Environmental Book Club, Tuesday, March 17 at 7 p.m. on Zoom. “*The Lost Trees of Willow Avenue: A story of climate and hope on one American street*” by Mike Tidwell.

Tuesday Book Club, Tuesday, March 24 at 6:30 p.m. at the library. “*The Art Thief*” by Michael Finkel.

Nonfiction Book Club, Saturday, March 28 at 10 a.m. on Zoom. “*Dropkick Murphy: A legendary life*” by Emily Sweeney.

Cinephile Mondays, Monday March 30 at 4 p.m. on Zoom. Watch and discuss films. Check the website for the film of the month and registration details.



Bacon Free Library. Theresa Knapp photo

Bacon Free Library, 58 Eliot Street, is open Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with extended hours on Tuesday until 7 p.m. and Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For more information and registration, visit baconfreelibrary.org.



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Your Money, Your Independence

Homebuying in 2026: Smart Moves To Plan Your Purchase



Glenn Brown, CFP

March marks the start of the spring homebuying season. Sellers who waited out the slower winter months are listing homes, and some buyers wait until summer to align closings with the school year.

With mortgage rates slightly lower than 2025 peaks, timing and strategy remain critical. The Fed’s latest dot plot signals gradual easing in 2026 and 2027, which could create refinancing opportunities. However, waiting for rates to drop carries trade-offs, as falling rates often coincide with rising home prices.

Before scrolling Zillow, open houses, and finding a real estate agent, let’s discuss things you need to prepare.

Define your priorities

Start by listing what matters most in a home, then prioritize #1-25, as not everything can be #1 or 1A. Consider location,

bedrooms, outdoor space, remote work offices and play areas. Decide between move-in ready versus fixer-upper, quiet streets versus active neighborhoods, and public versus private schools. Don’t let innovative listing photos sway your lifestyle goals and long-term needs.

Understand the local market

Research pricing trends in your desired neighborhoods. Check school ratings, public safety, property taxes, and local infrastructure plans. Also, if you don’t want to live on a busy road, know the existing commercial and industrial zones.

Get pre-approved for a mortgage

Pre-approval signals to sellers that you’re serious and can afford the property. Don’t confuse pre-approval with ability to pay, as an underwriter is viewing your financial situation today - not what you have planned.

Explore mortgage options

Mortgage type matters more than ever in 2026:

Conventional Loans - Not backed by the government, these are offered by banks or private lenders. Down payments are 5-20% with required credit scores higher than 620, best rates for scores 780+. Benefits include competitive rates and flexible terms, however, there are limits on the amount borrowed.

FHA Loans - Government-backed Federal Housing Administration loans are designed to help first-time homebuyers or those with lower credit scores qualify for a mortgage. Down payments are as low as 3.5% for credit scores of 580 or higher. Keep in mind, Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI) is required, which increases overall costs.

Jumbo Loans - A type of mortgage that exceeds the conforming loan limits set by the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA). Down payments are often 20%+ with higher credit scores, incomes, and investment assets.

Adjustable-rate mortgages (ARMs): Lower initial rates for five, seven or 10 years, then adjust with market conditions. Good if you plan to refinance or move within that time frame.

Tip for 2026 buyers: Consider an ARM with the intention of refinancing in two to five years if rates drop. Locking a lower rate

now with a plan to refinance later could save thousands, but ensure your budget can handle potential adjustments.

Plan for full costs

Beyond the down payment, budget for closing costs such as escrow, prepaid interest and other fees. These can add \$5,000–\$15,000. Some costs can be rolled into the mortgage, but get a detailed lender breakdown to avoid surprises.

Factor in future refinancing if you plan to take advantage of rate drops. This can positively affect monthly affordability and long-term planning.

Align homebuying with your financial plan

The real peace of mind comes after moving in. Planning ahead helps ensure your new home supports your financial goals.

- Adjust your monthly budget for mortgage, insurance and taxes

- Plan short-term renovations or upgrades
- Build contingencies for unexpected expenses or family changes

With a clear plan, you can confidently buy a home that aligns with both lifestyle and long-term financial independence.

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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PINBALL

continued from page 1

ary, Smith switched on the bulky machines that stand stalwart on legs seeming too slim to support such heavy cabinets.

Each is a carnival of blinking light and sound when activated, a show designed to attract players and quarters in the context and competition of a busy and noisy arcade.

"I kind of fell into the whole arcade, video game scene," said Smith.

Born in 1968, he was of age to appreciate the heydays of the pinball machine (1970s), and videogame (1980s).

A few centuries in Florence, Italy witnessed the Renaissance's flowering of creativity.

Hundreds of years later, these two decades of modern Americana hosted the dawn of the digital age, and the masterpieces of electronic entertainment that filled galleries with light, sound, adventure and imagination.

Smith has written an ode to this era, or more precisely the pinball machines that played such a starring role in that story. His new book, "Pinball, a Quest for Mastery," delves into all things pinball.

The work serves as a how-to guide to becoming a better player, and also a treasure map for those on a quest to find pinball arcades. The book touches on the history and anatomy of the machines that have captivated players for decades.

Smith is a shop manager and technical educator at Boston University's Engineering Product Innovation Center. Immersed in a world of emails and data during work days, the tangible technology of pinball has always been a touchstone that helps keep him grounded.

"I think it's the analog nature" that's so appealing, said the author, who during warmer months will pop into the barn for a quick

pinball fix while burgers sizzle outside on the grill. "There's something for me about that."

The author calls the mid-1970s the apex of artistic design for pinball. A machine's front display is a flashing billboard to prospective players. Each has its own theme, and is a backlit fresco designed to intrigue and entice pinball enthusiasts and amateurs alike.

Smith says some in the pinball world will swap out modern LED lights in displays when the old ones fail. But the author is a purist, preferring the old-school bulbs to their modern descendants.

Smith has his favorite videogames from the arcade era as well, classics like Joust, Galaga and Missile Command. Games of that era reflected the science fiction and fantasy trends prevalent then in pop culture.

Invest enough time (and quarters) in those early games, and you could internalize the patterns of characters playing out on the screen. Armed with those patterns, a player could navigate and even dictate the script, accruing big numbers on the scoreboard and a high level of skill.

Not quite with pinball. That silver ball never takes quite the exact same path twice.

"It's much more interactive," said Smith.

There's something infectious about another person's seemingly boundless enthusiasm for a particular subject.

"Ready Player One," the New York Times bestselling novel from 2011, is an ode to 1980s nostalgia. The book owes its success to author Ernest Cline's encyclopedic knowledge of and affection for the pop culture trappings of the Decade of Excess.

The novel's hero Wade Watts lives in a dystopian America set several decades from now. It's a dark future whose denizens can briefly escape into a virtual-reality multiplayer game/universe called the "Oasis."



Tasker Smith's pinball collection reflects a variety of themes. Photo by Sean Sullivan



It takes a quarter and a dream. Photo by Sean Sullivan



Nostalgia fans flip for the pinball machine collection. Photo by Sean Sullivan

Watts puts his adoration for 80s culture and minutiae to good use in the novel, wielding his knowledge of the decade to advance in an all-or-nothing contest devised by the Oasis's late creator.

Cline lets his geek flag fly with abandon in the novel, taking readers along for the ride in a pageant of pop culture. The author manages somehow to get readers to care about the obscure origins of video games that are, even now, decades old and laughably primitive by today's standards.

Music from the era permeates the pages of Cline's novel, those songs often turned into yet more pieces of the narrative puzzle. The author even draws from Dungeons & Dragons, the analog role-playing adventure game that uses dice to determine the fates of its characters.

Reading on, we become invested in these things because Cline (and Wade) care so much about them.

More recently and virally, millions of fans have likewise been captivated by the young heroes of Hawkins. The streaming series "Stranger Things" has been a worldwide phenomenon for a decade, just ending its fifth and final season late last year.

Set in 1980s, the Duffer brothers (the show's creators), wear their nostalgia for the decade on their sleeves. Supernatural and science-fiction narratives aside, the show is a carnival of 80s cool and kitsch. Its seasons are replete with dial-up corded telephones, 80's pop anthems, and the ever-present atmosphere of the analog.

Even among the youngest watchers of "Stranger

Things," the absence of the internet and mobile phones in the show didn't seem to dampen fans' enthusiasm for it. Indeed, the Duffer brothers' celebration of a more primitive, unplugged and outwardly adventurous life is likely what drew so many to a party that's spanned ten years.

"It's a nice departure from that" digital and demanding world, said Smith of his pinball pastime.

The author said that a bit of ambivalence came with the acquisition of his first machine about 15 years ago. With kids then on way, he wondered if a pinball machine might be a self-ish extravagance.

But along with Smith's family, his collection of classics has grown just fine.

"It just kind of took over my life a little bit."

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Funds Raised to Honor ‘Mrs. V’ with Plaque

An effort is ongoing to honor a beloved Johnson School community member with a memorial on the Cochituate Rail Trail..

Natick resident Katherine Penders von der Lieth, who was 57 when she died Friday, Dec. 26, 2014, will be memorialized with a bronze plaque at the red bicycle sculpture on the trail.

Affectionally known as Mrs. V, she was described in her obituary as a “paraprofessional and expert chocolate chip pancake maker” for the Johnson School. The students and staff at the school were devoted to her, the obituary states.

She was a dedicated runner, gardener, and flower lover.

To make a contribution, visit fundrazr.com/campaigns/6221Ac/pay.

The Friends of Natick Trails will match all donations up to \$500.



Katherine Penders von der Lieth was beloved in the community.
Photo courtesy currentobituary.com



The bronze plaque will be placed at the red bicycle sculpture.
Photo courtesy Friends of Natick Trails

Grant to Support Revolutionary War Education Project

The Natick Historical Society has been awarded a \$500 grant from the Natick Cultural Council to support its Revolutionary War Treasure Trunk project.

The trunk is a traveling educational kit designed to give children of all ages a hands-on experience learning about the

Revolutionary War.

The program builds on other Revolutionary War projects at the Natick Historical Society, including a traveling war memorial and student archive project funded by Mass Humanities and the Frank and Sheila Magullion Foundation and the preserva-

tion of Natick’s 1775 Bunker Hill Muster Roll, funded by the Natick Community Preservation Committee.

Planning and purchasing for the kit is underway. Contents will include reproduction artifacts and documents from the Revolutionary War period. Teachers and other

adult group leaders such as Girl Scouts will be able to rent the kit beginning this spring.

The rental will come with structured activity and curriculum plans to inspire learning about what life was like in Natick and beyond during the Revolutionary War.

The Natick Cultural Council is a local agency supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency. The treasure trunk will be supported with matching funds from the Frank and Sheila Magullion Foundation.

For more information, visit www.natickhistoricalsociety.org.

Free Program Helps Families, Youths Navigate Technology

Navigating Technology and Tween/Teen Well-Being will be presented at 7 p.m. Thursday March 12 at Kennedy Middle School, 165 Mill St., Natick.

The program, led by Dr. Jill Walsh, will provide practical strategies for more balanced use of technology.

This is a free interactive program for families with students in grades 4 to 8. Parents/caregivers and students meet separately at the same time.

They will share research-informed conversations about AI,

social media and group chats, among other topics.

Those attending will learn about tools to make technology work for, rather than against, families. The program is presented by Spark Kindness, Natick 180, Natick Health Department, Natick Supports Mental Health, Natick Public Schools, Town of Natick and Natick Above the Influence.

For more information and to register, visit www.spark-kindness.org/events/navigating-tech-teen-well-being.

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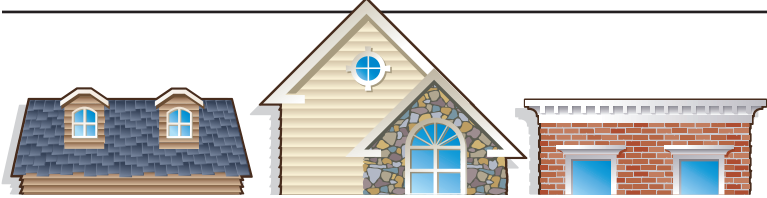
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How Much Home Can I Afford?

By the third quarter of 2025, the tide seemingly began to turn in regard to a housing market that had been marked by limited inventory since the onset of the



COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to market indicators from Redfin, the National Association of REALTORS® and Homes for Heroes, by the summer of 2025 things began to shift in regard to inventory (9.4 percent increase year-over-year). Prices also began to level

off, as the median existing home price in the United States was \$435,300 in June 2025, which marked a 2 percent increase from the previous year. Price reductions also became more common compared to 2024, signaling a cooldown in some segments.

Although affordability concerns still persist, many people may finally be ready to enter the home-buying arena. When doing so, it's essential prospective home buyers recognize how much they can comfortably spend on a home. Most experts suggest buyers combine lender affordability guidelines with an assessment of one's personal budget. These factors can help individuals determine a reliable budget when shopping for homes.

- Debt-to-income ratio: Lenders use various parameters to identify a borrower's creditworthiness. That includes figuring out a person's debt-

to-income ratio (DTI). Wells Fargo says DTI can be calculated by adding up all of a person's monthly debt payments and dividing them by gross monthly income. That number is multiplied by 100 to get a percentage. The lower the DTI, the less risky one is to lenders.

- The 28/36 rule: Part of the DTI equation may include the 28/36 rule utilized by many mortgage lenders. This is a standard guideline that can help one see if it's possible to afford a home loan. The 28 percent is allotted housing costs. The monthly housing expenses (principal, interest, taxes, homeowners insurance, private mortgage association fees) should be no more than 28 percent of one's gross monthly income. One's total monthly debt

payments, including housing, car, loans, student loans, and credit cards, should be no more than 36 percent of the gross monthly income. So if a prospective home buyer earns \$10,000 per month, or \$120,000 per year, the housing costs should not exceed \$2,800. Total debt payments, including housing, should not exceed \$3,600 per month.

- Personal budget considerations: Lenders may allow borrowers to borrow a certain amount of money, and buyers then go out and spend that much on a home. But to avoid living paycheck to paycheck and having all of one's money go toward a home, it is best to account for personal spending habits and savings goals. It's important to have an emergency funds account to pay for unexpected things like home repairs, or to account for instances when income may decline. Ongoing costs to manage the home also merit consideration, as do utilities and future renovations.
- Income-to-home price ratio: Some people abide by another general guideline to

shop for a home that costs no more than three to five times their annual household income. That means with an annual income of \$100,000, one should aim for a home priced between \$300,000 and \$500,000. The specific range will also depend on a person's existing debt.

- Interest rates and other factors: The interest rate on home mortgages as well as down payment also must be considered. Resources like Bankrate and Zillow provide home affordability calculators that will factor in interest rates, terms of a loan, down payment, and property taxes. Buying a home when interest rates are high means spending more over the life of the loan. Also, how much one puts toward a down payment has a big impact. Aiming for 20 percent means avoiding paying for private mortgage insurance (PMI).

There is no fail-safe way to determine how much home you can afford. Many factors are in play and are exclusive to buyers in the market for a new home.



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Did you know?

The market research experts at Business Research Insights report that the three-season sunroom market size is projected to nearly double between 2025 and 2035. BRI reports that 65 percent of homeowners prefer cost-effective sunrooms when seeking to extend their living space. The popularity of sunrooms can be traced to a number of variables, including year-round access to a home's surrounding landscape. That access might be hindered if the only spaces to experience nature is a patio, deck or another traditional type of outdoor living space. But sunrooms, particularly those equipped with heating and cooling, can bring homeowners in touch with nature during times of year when they might otherwise be compelled to steer clear of their outdoor living spaces due to less welcoming weather.





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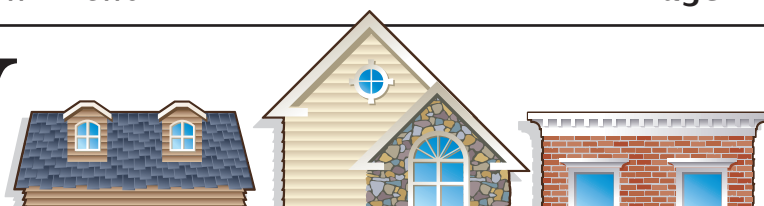
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HOME REVIEW



Planning for the Future with Flexible Living

By TRACY LAROSA

The way we think about housing is changing—and flexibility is at the heart of it. Today's buyers are no longer focused on the biggest home possible. Instead, they're thinking ahead: how they want to live now, and how their needs may evolve over the next 10, 20, or even 30 years.

Less space, but better

One of the most noticeable shifts is a desire for less space, but better space. Many homeowners are intentionally downsizing or choosing homes with smaller footprints that are easier to maintain. One-level living is especially popular, offering convenience, accessibility, and long-term comfort without the need for stairs. Ranch-style homes, first-floor primary suites, and layouts with minimal level changes are in high

demand—and for good reason. They support aging in place while remaining functional for all stages of life.

Equally important is the rise of multi-purpose rooms. Homes no longer need a formal dining room that's used twice a year or a dedicated guest room that sits empty most of the time.

Instead, buyers are looking for rooms that can adapt:

- A guest bedroom that doubles as a home office
- A dining area that functions as a workspace or homework zone
- A den or bonus room that can serve as a playroom for young children now and a media room for teens later

This flexibility allows homeowners to make the most of every square foot, adjusting how

they use their space as their lifestyle changes.

ADUs

Another major trend shaping future-focused housing is the growing interest in Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). An ADU offers incredible versatility. For many families, it's a smart way to plan across generations. An ADU can house young adult children just starting out, potentially provide rental income to offset rising homeownership costs, and/or serve as a comfortable space for aging parents who want independence while remaining close to family.

Over time, the roles can reverse. Adult children may transition into the main home while older parents downsize into the ADU, maintaining proximity without sacrificing privacy. This kind of multigenerational



Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) offer incredible versatility – for many families, it's a smart way to plan across generations.

living is becoming increasingly common, especially as Massachusetts ranks in the top 10% of the most expensive states in the country. With the cost of living continuing to rise, families are rethinking traditional housing models and embracing solutions that offer financial flexibility and long-term stability.

Ultimately, these housing

trends reflect a smarter approach to homeownership—one that prioritizes adaptability, efficiency, and thoughtful planning. Flexible layouts, multi-purpose rooms, one-level living, and ADUs aren't just trends; they're practical tools for building a home that works for you now, and well into the future.

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Traffic Signs Display Powerful Messages in Exhibit

BY SANDY QUADROS BOWLES
EDITOR

We see the traffic signs daily. Stop. Detour. Strictly Enforced. No Parking.

But an exhibit recently featured at the Morse Institute Library showcased the images in a very different, and completely thought-provoking, way.

The display, which filled a wall of the library, showcased images of stylishly dressed models. But their heads are replaced by familiar traffic signs.

“Story Telling Through Street Signs & Fashion, presented by photographer Chelsea Bradway and fashion stylist Brooke Kanal, has as many interpretations as there are viewers, Kanal said.

Slow, for example, might be a reminder to take a breath in a busy life.

Detour might mean “I’m taking my own path, I’m finding my own way,” she said.

Stop, with its universal red color reflecting urgency, could be a way to say “stop, don’t

touch me.”

This could be “creating boundaries” for girls and women to tell others to respect them and their words.

The exhibit was inspired when Bradway’s daughter randomly held a sign over her head while working in a gallery.

That gave Kanal and Bradway an idea.

“We said, We should do a [display] for women, give them a voice.”

Bradway decided to photograph images of women with signs replacing their faces to put the focus not on the model but on the words she was holding.

Kanal, a fashion stylist by trade, chose outfits she hoped would catch people’s eye and correspond to the sign’s message.

The exhibit features models from New England Models Group in Manchester, N.H. Models also included Bradway’s daughter Miley Charlette Francis, Kanal’s daughter Sadhya Kanal, and



Brooke Kanal with some of the images she styled and Chelsea Bradway photographed. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles



Internet Safety Transaction could make people think about online presence. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles



Stop can mean so much more than hitting the car’s brakes. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles



Strictly Enforced might reflect how a woman’s boundaries should be respected. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles



Strictly Enforced might reflect how a woman’s boundaries should be respected. Photo by Sandy Quadros Bowles

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her niece: Livee Gillin.

Kanal is proud of the reaction the work has received. After a showing at a local high school, a range of responses came in.

“The exhibit/photos make your mind think about what each sign could possibly be... you can

look at a sign three or four times, and each time have a different idea about what it means,” one student wrote.

“It was really cool and nothing like anything I’ve seen before,” another student opined.

Those reactions hearten Kanal

because they reflect a message she and Bradway are trying to share.

The signs, their exhibit shows, might be everywhere. But the message can be powerful and something a viewer may not have considered before.

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March into fun at the Natick Senior Center

There’s plenty to do and enjoy in March at the Natick Senior Center. Here is a sampling

World Travels with Sophia. Monday, March 2 at 1 p.m., \$3.

Join Sophia on a photographic journey on her trip to London and Penzance. Complete with Shakespeare’s Globe Theater, Big Ben, the London Eye, the English countryside, fish and chips, a Tidal Island, and more events.

Tech workshop with Natick High Robotic Club, Monday, March 2, at 3 p.m.

Struggling with your computer or device? Join an in-person technology workshop led by students from the Natick High School Robotics Club. This one-hour session offers simple, helpful guidance for older adults using their own technology. Bring your device. Space is limited, so pre-registration is required.

Lunch with Friends, Wednesday, March 4, at noon.

Enjoy great food and friendly

conversation. Lunch will feature grilled chicken Greek salad with grilled chicken, romaine lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, red peppers, onions, black olives and feta cheese served with dessert. These are dine-in meals only. Lunch provided by Fresscafe.

Fraud prevention, Keeping Yourself and Your Money Safe Thursday, March 5, at 2 p.m.

Phishing or spoofing may sound made up, but they’re very real scams. Join Cassie Kelleher, Needham Bank’s VP of Fraud & Loss Prevention, for a talk on today’s most common scams, spotting red flags, preventing elder financial abuse, and keeping your money safe.

Still Life Drawing, Fridays, March 6 to April 24, at 10 a.m. \$55.

In this beginning drawing class students will be introduced to life drawing (drawing from observation of real world objects.). Emphasis will be placed on realistic perspective, lighting and com-

position. The class will include instructor demonstrations of all lessons. Lessons will be carefully prepared to allow for progression towards more complex compositions. List of supplies given during registration.

Ukulele lessons, Fridays March 6 to April 24, at 10 a.m. \$57.

This class is designed for players who have mastered the basics of ukulele playing. In this class, students will enhance their rhythm skills and learn how to play chord progressions. Students need to bring their own instrument. Class is limited to 10 people.

Opera and music appreciation, Fridays March 6 to April 24, at 10:30 a.m. \$65.

Join award-winning artist Ron Williams as he guides participants through symphonies, jazz, and world music.

Guitar lessons, Fridays, March 6 to April 24, \$65.

Take guitar skills to the next level in this intermediate class for

players who know the basics. Join Memo Rubio, musician, singer, composer, and producer, for hands-on instruction. Students must bring their own instrument. Class is limited to 10 participants.

Acrylic painting, Fridays, March 6 to April 24, \$65.

Learn about composition, light and shadow, and other key visual concepts while also learning how to mix colors, apply paint to different surfaces, and create texture and depth that will help in creating dynamic and engaging works of art. No experience is necessary. List of supplies given during registration.

Falls Prevention, A Guide To Stay Safe And Independent Tuesday, March 10 at 2:20 p.m.

Angela Powers from Rebound Physical Therapy will discuss the statistics of falls, educate the audience to understanding falls, explain risk factors, speak to falls prevention, as well as provide insight into the use of assistive devices and fall emergency prep.

Buried in Treasures Workshop: For Those Having Difficulty Addressing Excessive Clutter, Wednesdays March 11 to June 17, at 10:30 a.m.

Buried in Treasures in a structured group is one of the most effective ways to address excessive clutter and hoarding disorder. Each participant is required to have the book “Buried in Treasures.

This workshop is being held at the Wayland Senior Center, but is open to both Natick and Wayland residents. Call Debbie Budd at 508-647-6543 to register.

Bingo, Monday March 9 and 23, at 1 p.m.

Have a blast at Bingo, a drop-in activity open to all. Six cards and 10 games for \$4. Sponsored by the Friends of the Natick Senior Center.

SENIOR CENTER
continued on page 17



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Upcoming Events

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A Busy March Planned at Morse Institute Library

Spring into the Morse Institute Library for a variety of March events. Here is a sampling of their offerings.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Lapsit Storytime, Mondays March 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30, at 10 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.

Stories, bounces, songs, and bubbles for babies newborn to 24 months and their grownup. Gather in the Story Craft Room in the Children's Department on the Lower Level. No registration required.

Play Nights, Mondays, March 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30. Drop in and play, with select themed play items for littles and their grownups to explore. Play nights are for everyone, but are geared to the preschool set and their adventuresome grownups. No registration required.

All Together Preschool Storytime, Tuesdays March 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31, from 10 - 10:30 a.m. Join in for stories, songs, and a short play activity. This story hour is geared for children ages 3 - preK5 and their grownup partner. Younger siblings are welcome as observers. Registration is required.

Pajama Time Stories, Wednesdays, March 4, 11, 18, 25, from 6:30 - 7:15 p.m. Join Miss Susan for a few songs and

lots of stories in the Children's Library, with 45 minutes of stories and songs. No registration required

Tween Explorations: Make a Mug & Tea Cozy, Thursday, March 5, from 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. An afternoon of in-person crafting, decorating a mug and tea cozy. This program is for children in grades 3 to 5. Registration is required.

Elementary Explorations: Candy Sushi, Thursday March 26, from 3:45 - 4:30 p.m. Join in for an afternoon of in-person crafting, making candy sushi. This program is for children in grades K-3. Registration is required.

ALL AGES PROGRAMS

Mini Golf at the Library: Family Fun Day, Saturday, March 7, from 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. A fun-filled Mini Golf Family Fun Day at the library. Bring the whole family and enjoy a unique twist on the classic game of mini golf as you make your way through 18 creatively designed holes scattered throughout the library. Last tee time is 3:30 p.m. No registration required.

Craft Swap 2026, Friday, March 27 and Saturday, March 28, from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Between March 23 and 26, drop



Mini-golf at the library is one of the March events.

off unwanted craft supplies (in good condition and in appropriate containers) at the library and receive an Early Access ticket. Early Access "Shopping" for ticket holders is Friday, March 27 from 9 - 11 a.m. The Craft Swap opens to the general public Friday, March 27 at 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Saturday, March 28 from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. There is no requirement to donate supplies in order to participate. All swapping is free. There is no charge for craft supplies. There is no limit to the amount of supplies you can take, but be mindful of your neighbors, and be kind. Bring your own bags for the craft swap.

Teen programs

Teen Take & Make: Paint By Numbers, Monday, March 2, from 2 - 9 p.m. For tweens & teens ages 11-18, available in

the Teen Room until the kits run out.

Teens & Tweens: Drop-In Decorate A Mini Photo Frame, Wednesday, March 11, from 2 - 4:30 p.m. Decorate a mini photo frame in the Teen Room! This craft will be available while supplies last for teens 11-18, drop-in program. No registration required.

ADULT PROGRAMS

Tea & Mindfulness: A Chinese Tea Ceremony Experience, Monday, March 2, from 2:30 - 4p.m. To gentle guqin music, explore classic Chinese teaware, Yixing teapot and gaiwan, and learn to recognize tea by sight and aroma. Then enjoy a hands-on session covering basic etiquette and brewing, with two tastings: gongfu-brewed oolong and gaiwan-brewed black tea. Bilingual English and Chinese. This program is for adults. Space is limited and registration is required.

Cookbook Club, Tuesday, March 3, from 6:30 - 8 p.m. Anyone who enjoys cooking, sharing ideas, and kitchen tips, while enjoying great food is encouraged to sign up for the Cookbook Club. This month's cookbook is: What to cook when you don't

feel like cooking" by Caroline Chambers. The cookbook is on display at the Reference Desk (second floor) and available for check out at Circulation or available as an Ebook using Libby. Pick and prepare a recipe from the featured cookbook and bring it to the library where participants will eat, share, chat, and connect over food. Registration is required.

Open Mic Night, Tuesday, March 10, from 7 - 8:30 p.m. Singers, poets, musicians, writers, performance artists, all are welcome. Performers can sign up for a five or 10-minute time slot on a first come first served basis. No registration is required.

Boston Light Keeper: Sally Snowman, Thursday, March 12, from 7 - 8 p.m. Boston Light, the first established Light Station in colonial America, began lighting the way for safe navigation into the fledgling maritime port of Boston in 1716. However, its notoriety in the maritime community as "the last manned Coast Guard Light Station" in the country has come to closure with the retirement of Sally

MORSE

continued on page 17

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MORSE

continued from page 16

Snowman, its 70th and last keeper. A power-point presentation provides photos of Boston Light's 307 years of history and a few photo anecdotes of Sally's experiences as a 21st Century Keeper. Registration for this event is suggested, but not required.

Scratch Art: Flora & Fauna, Thursday, March 19, from 7 - 8:30 p.m. Using a scraper tool, participants will follow the outlines of a design to reveal the engraved picture beneath. At the end of the class, participants will receive supplies to finish the piece at home. Space and supplies are limited and registration is required.

Boston Marathon at 130 with Paul Clerici, Monday, March 23, from 6 - 7:30 p.m. Join bestselling author Paul Clerici for his new multimedia presentation "Boston Marathon at 130." The award-winning writer takes participants through the colorful and historic 130 years of the Boston Marathon, mile by mile, town by town, story by story. With his unique vast array of experience and knowledge as one who has run Boston 23 times and has been covering it for nearly 40 years, he brings the great race to life through informative, humorous, and enlightening detail of the many stories from the very beginnings of the race in 1897 to the various moments along the way. Registration is required.

Crochet Snoopy, Wednes-



day, March 25, from 3 - 4:30 p.m. Start a crochet journey with this cute Snoopy project! This class is geared towards complete beginners. Each kit comes with access to instructional videos that will be used. The class will focus on holding the yarn, and crochet hook, and learning the single crochet stitch. This class is for adults and registration is required.

A Day in the Life of a Land Court Judge, Monday, March 30, from 6 - 7:30 p.m.: March is Massachusetts Judicial Outreach Month. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Trial Court, the Morse Institute Library will host Robert B. Foster, associate justice of the Land Court. He will discuss the kinds of cases the court hears, the issues he needs to consider, and how cases are resolved. No registration required.

Morse Institute Library, 14 East Central Street, Natick, is open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1 - 5 p.m. For more information and to register for programs, visit morseinstitute.org.

Eliot Church Names New Minister

The Eliot Church of Natick has announced that by a unanimous vote at a recent meeting of its members, Reverend Adam Isbitsky has been named its next minister.

Rev. Isbitsky led his first worship service of the year on Sunday, Jan. 18, and will continue to lead services on Sundays thereafter. He will be working with the congregation over the next three years to deepen individual and collective spiritual journeys, and further connections with the wider Natick community.

Rev. Isbitsky earned his Master of Divinity from the Andover Newton Theological School in 2017, where he served in roles including Student Association President and Treasurer.

Rev. Isbitsky has served as Legacy Pastor for the Second Congregational Church in Beverly and as Pastor for the Ballard Vale United Church in Andover. Leading up to that, he performed a variety of roles including in-



Rev. Adam Isbitsky has been named minister of Eliot Church of Natick.

terim minister, sabbatical minister, seminarian, music director, and organist for many local area churches including Reading, Wellesley Hills, Whitman, East Weymouth, Middleboro and Holliston.

Before entering theological school, Rev. Isbitsky earned a bachelor of arts degree in music and music education, and worked in various capacities in music education, musical theater

and nonprofit management. "After serving ministries in several area churches, it's clear to me that the place the Eliot Church is positioned in is one of real possibilities for a new chapter," said Rev. Isbitsky. "One we will write and edit together along the way." "The unanimous vote by the members capped a six-month search process on the part of the church Search Committee," said Rosemary Driscoll, Moderator of the Eliot Church. "We are excited to welcome Rev. Isbitsky to our community." The historic Eliot Church is a community church in the Christian tradition, with ties to both the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association. Services are held on Sundays at 10 a.m. and visitors of all faiths are welcome. For further information visit www.theeliotchurch.org or contact info@theeliotchurch.org, or 508-653-2244.

SENIOR CENTER

continued from page 17

Learn to Weave on a Floor Loom, Wednesdays March 11 to April 8, at 3 p.m., \$100.

Learn the basics of handweaving and create a colorful sample of 8 weave structures on a 4-shaft floor loom. Learn the parts of the loom, principles of color and design, and how to read a weaving draft. No weaving experience necessary.

Spanish is in the air, Thurs-

days March 12 to April 30, at 11:30 a.m., \$40.

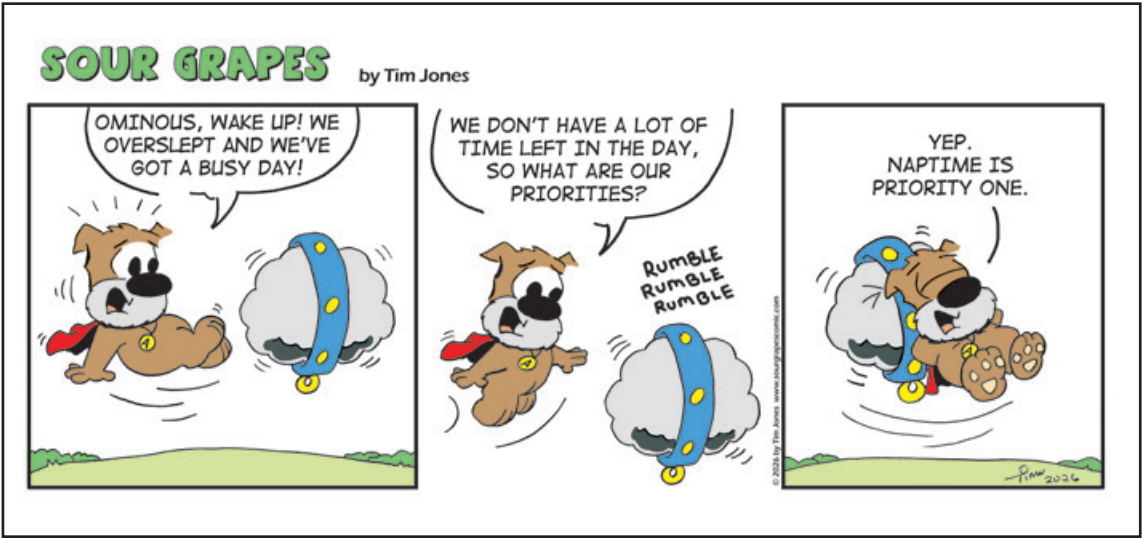
In this beginner Spanish class, no experience is needed and learning is fun and relaxed. By the end, feel confident making small talk in Spanish, all in a friendly, supportive environment.

For the final class, practice your new skills at a local restaurant.

Pot O'Gold Party, Celebrating Patrick's Day Thursday, March 12, at 12:30 p.m.,

Wear green and get ready for a shamrockin' St. Patrick's Day celebration. Enjoy great vibes, big smiles, food, and live music from Slainte.

The Natick Senior Center is located at 117 East Central St. For more information, call 508-647-6540.



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Sports

Volleyball Clinic Serves up Fun Time for Middle Schoolers



Participants learn a variety of skills. *Courtesy photo*

They're back in full swing.

The Natick Parks and Recreation Department's middle school volleyball clinic is underway. Participants have been working on the fundamentals of passing, setting, serving, and attacking, and have been improving steadily over the first few weeks of the program. There is plenty of space available for the next session of the clinic beginning in April. For more information, call 508-647-6530.



Fundamentals of passing, setting, serving, and attacking are on display. *Courtesy photo*



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Players beat the winter blahs with an indoor workout. *Courtesy photo*



The next clinic starts in April. *Courtesy photo*

Sports

Natick Boys Swim and Dive Team Makes a Splash by Winning Conference

BY MATT HYLEN

For the first time since 2020, the Natick High School Boys Swim and Dive team has won the Bay State Conference.

Coaches Christian Hamer and Hailey Huff led the team to new heights this year, exceeding all expectations after what was an historic regular season.

"It was so great for the kids," Hamer said. "It was fantastic to see their hard work rewarded."

Coming into the season, both Coach Hamer and Coach Huff were in a similar boat.

"This was new for both of us," Hamer explains. "We had some idea of what the team might be like, but the expectations were more about working hard, being good teammates, and seeing where that takes us because good things will happen."

However, as the season went along, the expectations started to expand as the team's success grew. "In a few of our first meets, we had people saying we could win the conference. We didn't really think much about it until the team kept winning and kept doing well," Huff said.

What is so impressive is that the Natick team was able to win the conference while at a severe disadvantage, since points from swimmers and divers are combined.

"We don't have any divers this year," Huff commented. "Every other team in the conference had at least one diver... we often

started meets in last place. So the fact we were still able to win [the conference] by the margin we did was all credit to" the swimmers.

With nearly ten swimmers having moved onto the postseason, both coaches were in awe of the hard work and dedication the team put in all season long. "They really swam their hearts out all season," Huff noted.

What makes this team truly special is the unity and chemistry the swimmers share.

Both coaches were adamant about how crucial the team's chemistry was to their success.

"They all hang out together," Huff said. "They all work hard but work together; they cheer each other on... we introduced coach trivia this season where they could win prizes if they get a question right but swim a lap if they get one wrong. I have never seen teenagers so excited to win a rubber duck."

The boys' chemistry and unity also shine through the traditions the team holds, with one example being their annual snow day activity. The swimmers will take a video of themselves, in their swim gear, diving into the snow.

"I am not sure when it started but it certainly is great," Hamer noted. "It is something they can do that is different and unique and just have fun with."

As the regular season came to a close, both coaches were able to reflect on what they hope the

swimmers take away from such an amazing season.

"We're looking to build confident, reliant, respectful athletes... swimming is a lifetime sport. So, if we've helped to improve their confidence, their reliance, and their respect and the way they interact with people, that's what coaching is all about," Hamer said.

Huff added, "It's important to be that kind and caring and compassionate person, no matter what level you are at. Giving them the foundation, like promoting positive language, cheering for the other team, or shaking hands after every meet no matter win or lose... you have to win with humility and lose with respect."

With all the success that the team has had, Huff and Hamer were not shy to shout out those who have helped the team along the way.

"We have really passionate parents who love their kids and want them to do well," Huff said. "We've had a pretty good turnout of friends and family at close-by meets. Swimming is a hard sport to watch if you don't understand it, so seeing the Natick community come and watch them succeed anyway and congratulate them... the community has really banded around them this year."

Hamer also added, "People come together here [in Natick] and they care. The school has



The swim team looks to have a strong season. Photo courtesy Paradise Photo & Video/Patrick Sullivan

been extremely supportive as well as the athletic department. We really appreciate all the folks who have given us this support."

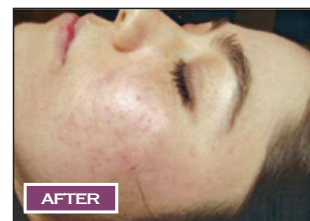
With the regular season over, both coaches understand what got them to this position and the village it took to bring this team back to the top.

"This didn't just happen over-

night," Hamer emphasized. "Caitlin Powers coached the team for a long time and she left us with a really strong team and a good foundation."

Regardless of the result of the playoffs, what this team has accomplished this season is truly remarkable and exemplifies what it truly means to win as a team.

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Sports

Play Ball: Natick Baseball Springs into Action

BY MATT HYLEN

With the 2026 season right around the corner, the Natick High School Baseball team will look to build off last year and reach new heights.

Led by Manager Jason Hoyer, the team's expectations are high after what was a 14-9 season.

"We had a really great year last season," Hoyer said. "They worked really hard and they put themselves in a position to compete with the top-notch competition."

Reflecting on last year, Hoyer believes a lot of positives can be brought over into the upcoming season. "We showed last year that we can really hang with anybody," he explains. "The question has never been the talent on this team."

Speaking of talent, the team will be led by a number of senior players, including five captains: Catcher Alex Jacques, Shortstop Cam Gobeille, and Outfielders Luke Dougherty, Braeden Homer, and Jack Weierman.

Hoyer believes the senior leadership, captain or not, will be crucial coming into the season. "We have expectations of our seniors that are not captains to be senior leaders as well," he explains.

The Natick skipper pointed to players such as Cole Miceli, Max Bonavire, Gavin Weddle, Alan Steinman, Landon Sullivan, Will Wright, Henry Kinchla, Brauer Malcom, Jesse Gagliardi, and Henry Claudio all as players that could make a serious impact in

terms of leadership on and off the field.

As for the season itself, the team has made sure to spend their offseason working as hard as possible to prepare for what's ahead. "They know the competition level and what it takes to get to the playoffs," Hoyer explains. "I think the guys are chomping at the bit and they're ready to go now."

Hoyer is confident in his players, knowing this year could be a huge one for everyone involved. That being said, Hoyer emphasized the importance of remaining focused on one game at a time.

"The motivation and talent level is there... This group is as poised and ready to go as any group we've ever had here," Hoyer said. "But we have to be mindful. I just don't want to let that excitement build into us, losing sight of what we need to do each day. It's great to be excited, but we all know we still have a lot of work to do to get to where we want to be."

With a team that is so senior-heavy, Hoyer also acknowledged the challenge of the natural distractions that come with being a senior.

"Spring is always super tough in that way. So one of the challenges we're going to have to navigate is making sure they stay focused while enjoying the events the seniors will have in the spring."

Throughout his time coaching for Natick, building connections



Baseball team members honor the national anthem. Photo courtesy Faisal Betti

with his players has always been something Hoyer tries his best to do.

"I work in the building every day, which I am fortunate to do," Hoyer discusses. "So I am able to see them in the hallways every day and check in on how they are and how classes are going. They're not just baseball players to me, they're young men that I care about deeply and want to see succeed in all aspects of life."

Hoyer's hands-off approach to coaching stands out as quite unique and a big contributor to the success of his teams. He said, "Ultimately, it's their team. It's their experience. My job is not to get in the way of what they are trying to do, but rather to help them steer it. Of course, there are boundaries a coach and his players have to draw, but at the



Running the bases. Photo courtesy Faisal Betti

same time, it's important to listen to the players, who are the pulse of this team."

With the season just a few months away, time will tell what the 2026 season will look like for Natick Baseball. Yet, regardless of the result, Hoyer hopes that the players are able to remember why they started to play the game in the first place.

I want to make sure they have

a blast out there playing for themselves and each other... because at the end of the day, it's just a game. So I hope they have as much fun playing as I do coaching them. We as a team have to make things fun, but also compete our tails off at any given moment."

Natick will begin its season against King Philip Regional on Friday, March 20.

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Real Estate Corner

Spring 2026: Natick's Real Estate Market Awakens



John McHugh

REAL ESTATE INSIGHTS

As March arrives, the spring real estate season in Natick is here and gearing up for what promises to be one of the most active—and possibly most balanced markets we've seen in

years. Over the past year, Natick has shown steady strength. At the time of this writing, the average sale price is just over \$1.2 million, with 296 homes sold in the past 12 months. Inventory remains limited—but improving; thanks to a gradual rise in listings. The average list price is just over \$1.4 million.

Taken together, these data points signal a market that's loosening just enough to give buyers more breathing room while still rewarding sellers who price strategically. Housing supply continues to be the story nationally. The National Association of Realtors notes that the months' supply of existing homes is around 3.3 months—significantly below the 5–6 months that define a balanced market. NAR's 2026 priorities emphasize boosting supply by streamlining regulations and en-

couraging long-term homeowners to list, which could help local markets like Natick where tight inventory mirrors the national challenge.

Natick remains highly competitive. Research shows that many homes receive multiple offers and often sell for around list price, with the average property going under agreement in 24–35 days depending on season. So what does that mean for spring 2026? For sellers, it's still your time to shine. Demand is strong, and Natick's excellent schools and commuter-friendly location continue to draw Boston-area buyers. Correct pricing is essential, though; today's buyers are informed and cautious.

For buyers, there's finally a bit more breathing room. Inventory is rising modestly, and Greater Boston forecasts show

mortgage rates holding in the low 6% range, which stabilizes affordability and softens bidding wars compared to recent years. Several quick insights help paint the picture: Natick homes generally sell in 26–35 days, keeping the market brisk. The town currently has 52 active/contingent and under agreement listings, a meaningful improvement for buyers hungry for options. Buyers can try to gain a competitive edge by touring mid-week, when competition is typically lighter. Sellers can boost curb appeal with small, high-impact updates like fresh landscaping, power-washing, and new house numbers.

As the market awakens, now is the time to make your move. Whether you're prepping to list or gearing up to buy, this season offers all the signs of a fresh, active market—one with

just enough balance to make everyone feel optimistic. With strategic pricing and preparation, Natick's spring 2026 market promises energy, movement, and opportunity for both sides of the transaction.

Let's connect to discuss how we can help you achieve your real estate goals in this vibrant market.

John McHugh has been a Senior Agent with Coldwell Banker for 24 years.

He can be contacted at JohnSellsNow@gmail.com and 978.902.5646.

Visit his website for home-buying/home selling tips and to search all properties: JohnMcHughRealEstate.com

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Real Estate Corner

Considering 55+ Living? Sable Homes Makes It Simple



Nina Sable helps to guide clients through the process of downsizing and exploring 55+ community living.

BY JENNIFER RUSSO

There’s a quiet but powerful shift happening in New England real estate. More homeowners are choosing to simplify, trading in large, maintenance-heavy family homes for thoughtfully designed spaces in 55+ communities.

For many longtime homeowners, the idea of downsizing can feel emotional. This is the house



Business spotlight

where holidays were hosted, where kids were raised, and where many memories were made. However, as homeowners age, become empty-nesters, and start thinking about what’s next, they also need to consider that home’s upkeep - the snow removal, roof repairs, lawn care, and unused rooms collecting dust. And that is where 55+ communities come in as an appealing option.

In the past, people may have just pictured 55+ communities as a group of mobile homes in Florida, or a dull neighborhood where nothing interesting happens. Today’s 55+ communities are different. They’re vibrant, active neighborhoods designed specifically for connection and convenience. Homes are typically single-level or feature first-floor

primary suites, open floor plans, and modern finishes. Landscaping and exterior maintenance are often handled by an association, freeing up more time for travel, hobbies, or simply enjoying a slower pace.

There’s also a strong social component. Many communities offer clubhouses, walking trails, fitness centers, golf courses, and organized activities. For buyers who may be newly retired, or close to it, that built-in sense of community can be invaluable. And many 55+ communities are also pet-friendly.

Financially, downsizing can also make sense. Selling a larger home in today’s market may unlock significant equity. Moving into a smaller, more efficient property can reduce utility costs, property taxes, and maintenance expenses. It can simplify finances as much as square footage, and a sale can increase savings to be used for more things the seller enjoys.

Of course, 55+ living isn’t for everyone. HOA fees are usually part of the equation, and some communities’ rules may feel restrictive depending on lifestyle. Storage space is often reduced, which requires thoughtful planning, and they aren’t ideal for multigenerational living. So, it is important to weigh everything out - that’s why having the right guidance matters.

Downsizing isn’t just a transaction; it’s a transition. Nina Sable understands that deeply. Through Sable Homes, she approaches each client relationship with patience and education first.

The process often begins with a comprehensive home evaluation. Nina helps homeowners understand current market value, timing, and what improvements (if any) are worth making before listing. For many sellers, the biggest hurdle is simply figuring out where to start. Nina walks them step-by-step through decluttering strategies, staging guidance, and pricing decisions. Her goal is to remove uncertainty and replace it with clarity.

On the buying side, she takes time to explain how 55+ com-

munities differ from traditional neighborhoods - reviewing HOA documents, explaining fees and restrictions, and ensuring buyers understand what they’re stepping into. That educational approach helps clients feel confident rather than rushed.

What sets Sable Homes apart is the recognition that this life stage deserves care. Downsizing isn’t about “less.” It’s about choosing what fits NOW. It’s about trading maintenance for freedom. Square footage for simplicity. Responsibility for flexibility.

That transition can feel daunting. But with the right guidance, it can also feel empowering.

For homeowners considering a move into a 55+ community or simply wondering whether it’s time for a change, Nina Sable offers more than market expertise. She offers steady support, local knowledge, and a plan designed to make the next chapter feel not just manageable, but exciting.

Learn more at www.sablesellshomes.com or reach out to the team at 508-733-8935.

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02/06/2026	3 Vale St. #B	\$1,590,000
02/06/2026	6-6B S Lincoln St.	\$975,000
02/05/2026	56 Fisher St. #B	\$760,000
02/04/2026	12 Nancy Rd.	\$950,000
01/30/2026	1 Winter St.	\$1,480,000
01/30/2026	13 Sheffield Rd.	\$710,000
01/30/2026	287 Bacon St.	\$655,000
01/30/2026	5 Oakridge Ave.	\$1,780,000
01/29/2026	51 Highland St.	\$1,100,000
01/28/2026	10 Sundance Wy.	\$1,650,000
01/27/2026	16 Peterson Rd.	\$713,000
01/27/2026	51 Village Brook Ln. #16	\$314,900
01/27/2026	39 Davis Brook Dr.	\$1,680,000
01/26/2026	26 Walden Dr. #4	\$332,000
01/23/2026	17 Harwood Rd.	\$1,850,000
01/22/2026	15 Wyndemere Ln.	\$2,830,000
01/16/2026	7 Sheffield Rd.	\$730,000

Source: zillow.com

Compiled: Local Town Pages

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The 3-bed, 2-bath, 1,661-square-foot house at 31 Marion Street in Natick recently sold for \$735,000. Image credit: www.zillow.com

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