

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, January 23rd, Jen and Marty Schofield, new owners of Our Town Publishing, celebrated a grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony at their new location at 9 Industrial Road, Ste. 107, Milford, Mass. The full-service printing 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 showcasing 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

RIBBON CUTTING

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H. Bruce Webb (left) and Justin Lapham. Photos submitted

Two New Faces in Dudley Town Hall

H. Bruce Webb was welcomed to the Dudley Town Hall on February 18 as a Town Planner shared with the Town of Blackstone. Mr. Webb is a Land Use and Environmental Scientist with extensive experience in municipal planning, conservation, and environmental and zoning permitting.

"I grew up in a rural town next to a farm, so this kind of area is my comfort zone," Webb said. "I really value the sense of community and public participation found in places like Dudley. So, the opportunity to use my experience and education to help contribute to that success, while also furthering my career, was an attractive draw."

He holds a Master of Science in Environmental Science -Soil and Water Science, a Graduate

Certificate in Wetland and Water Resource Management, a Bachelor of Arts in History and Sociology, and Bachelor of Science studies in Environmental Geology.

He is also a Rhode Island Class IV Licensed Soil Evaluator and Massachusetts Certified Tree Warden. He most recently held the position of Land Use & Planning Director for the Town of Fairhaven.

Webb described his top three job responsibilities as supporting the Planning Board in evaluating applications for new development to ensure standards of the zoning bylaws are met; to support residents by helping them navigate our zoning bylaws thereby making the

DUDLEY

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Webster's Bartlett High Renovations On Display at May Town Meeting

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Mark your calendars and get ready to see your tax dollars on display. The date is Monday, May 11, time is 6:30 p.m. The Town Meeting will be held in the newly-renovated Bartlett High School auditorium located at 52 Lake Parkway, Webster.

According to Lisa Kontoes, Webster School Department's Business Manager, "The newly opened BHS Auditorium has become a centerpiece of the renovation effort and is a state-of-the-art performance venue that elevates the school's programming and community events. Since its open-

ing in November, the auditorium has impressed students, staff, and visitors with its advanced audio-visual technology, professional-grade lighting and sound systems, and a dedicated theater balcony that enhances both viewing and performance capabilities. Its debut marks a major milestone and restores a vibrant cultural space to the school and Webster community. We are excited to host the Annual Town Meeting at this modernized venue to showcase it for the community."

Ms. Kontoes also provided the following school renovation schedule:

Renovation Progress and Updated Timeline

- Phase II – B Wing

- Projected for completion in April 2026

This section includes the administrative offices, classrooms, media center and an innovation studio

Remaining Phases

- Phase III – A Section: Next interior renovation phase from April to November

- Phase IV – Removal of modular classrooms and completion of all site work

Phase I was completed in April 2025 which included the renovation of C section. This section was the most significant undertaking as the infrastructure was established in this phase. C section is considered the community wing as it contains the gymnasium, cafeteria



and auditorium. The full renovation project is expected to conclude by June 2027, delivering modernized academic and community spaces across the campus.

In 2022, the Massachusetts

School Building Authority awarded a \$51 million grant to the town for the high school renovation which covers approximately 50% of the total cost.

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process of getting things done as painless as possible, while making sure standards of those bylaws are met, and to support town administration and other town departments in providing the best service possible residents and to find opportunities to improve services

while keeping costs down.

"My top three goals for my first year are to speak with residents and stakeholders to understand what people would like to see for the town's future; to find grant programs that allow for implementing that vision without unduly burdening the taxpayers or Town, and to make doing business in Dudley as simple as possible, while striking an appropriate balance with the

characteristics and feel that make Dudley a place people want to call home," he said.

"I encourage residents to come in and say hi, give a call, or send me an email, whether with planning questions, or just to say hi and talk about the town," he said, adding, "The more I know about Dudley and the people who call it home, the better job I can do for those people!"

Webb's appointment follows that of the town's Health Agent Justin Lapham in late December. The Dudley Health Agent serves as the town's lead enforcer of public health, environmental, and safety regulations by conducting inspections, investigations, and ensuring compliance with both state and local health codes. The Health Agent also serves as the primary representative and liaison for the Board of Health.

Lapham said he was drawn to Dudley because his background in public health, environmental oversight, and residential development can make an immediate and meaningful impact here.

"In my 31 years with Shea Engineering and my 12 years of service at the Douglas Board of Health, I've worked closely with many towns across Central Massachusetts, both a consultant and a Title V inspector. That exposure has given me a deep appreciation for towns like Dudley that value strong public-facing services, responsive permitting, community health protections and a unique perspective of both sides of many

issues," he said, adding, "Dudley is the right fit because its needs align perfectly with

my expertise, and it's a place where I can contribute immediately, while also building long-term relationships with residents and local departments."

For key objectives in his first year, Lapham said he plans to strengthen compliance and inspection efficiency, build strong working relationships across the town and agencies, improve administrative systems and reporting, support public health programs and emergency preparedness and strengthen transparency and accessibility with residents.

"My first objective would be to ensure all required inspections—Title 5, housing, food service, wells, and tobacco—are performed consistently, documented properly, and brought up to current state and local standards. I'll focus on building a predictable inspection schedule and tightening follow-through on enforcement and correction orders" he said.

Both the Town Planner and Health Agent positions had been vacant for some time. Webb and Lapham are bringing both roles up to date and are ready to serve the residents of Dudley.

"Professional, staffing of our town departments is critical in supporting our elected and volunteer boards and establishing clear lines of communication across departments," Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda said, adding, "I look forward to supporting Justin and Bruce in their missions."

Town Planner Webb is available in the Dudley Planning office from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, and 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Fridays. He can be reached at 508 949-8014 or by email at planner1@dudleyma.gov.

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Dudley Awarded Green Communities Grant

The state Department of Energy Resources (DOER), Green Communities Division has awarded \$204,195 for projects proposed in the Town of Dudley's Green Communities Competitive Grant application.

State DOER staff select grant applications to fund based on many factors, including energy impacts, emissions reductions, utility incentives, a reasonable budget, and efficacy of measures in terms of energy savings. DOER also looks

favorably on projects that exhibit innovation and consistency with the Commonwealth's stated clean energy priorities.

- The grant-funded projects are:
- \$173,574, Town Hall — Hybrid Heat Pump RTUs
 - \$4,950, Mason Road Elementary School — Walk-in Cooler Controls
 - \$25,671, Mason Road Elementary School — Air Sealing

This award demonstrates how patience and persistence in pursu-

ing grant opportunities pays off," Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda said. "The HVAC system serving the Town Hall and Police Headquarters dates back to the original building renovation and replacing it will be a multi-phase effort over several years. Grants like this allow the town to address major infrastructure needs, while limiting the burden on Dudley taxpayers."

In a March 4, 2026 letter, Green Communities Division Direc-

tor Joanne Bissetta wrote, "The Division reviewed Dudley's grant application and has determined these are viable projects that meet the eligibility requirements of our Competitive Grant program. We congratulate you on your grant award and applaud your efforts to create a cleaner energy future for your community and the Commonwealth as a whole.

"I thank everyone who contributed to securing this award, including our town staff who stepped-up

during the absence of a Town Planner, the state Department of Energy Resources staff, and our CMRPC partners who helped develop these projects," Ruda said, adding, "Their collaboration and attention to detail made it possible for Dudley to successfully compete for this funding, and we appreciate the continued partnership in helping our community improve energy efficiency and modernize our facilities."

RIBBON CUTTING

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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 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



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

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.ourtownpublishing.com.

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

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



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Disability Organization Rebrands

In a step towards enhancing accessibility and support for people with disabilities, Center for Living & Working (CLW), located in Worcester announces its rebranding as Your Access Advocates. This change reflects its ongoing commitment to listen to consumers and better represent the people it serves, especially in today's landscape where inclusivity is more essential than ever.

"As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, we recognize that the name «Your Access Advocates» better encapsulates our mission and vision for the future. After engaging extensively with our community, we have designed this new identity to signify our dedication to consumer-directed services and to empower individuals across all disabilities," said Meg Coffin, CEO of Your Access Advocates.

Coffin further stated that, «This name change is not just a rebranding; it represents our evolution as an organization.

We listened to the voices of our consumers. Our goal is to create an inclusive environment for all individuals."

With the new name, the purpose of the organization is clearer, making it easier for people in need to find them. The new logo also helps to broaden their reach, without the visual reference to just one type of disability.

"Our team of dedicated professionals that the community has come to trust is intact, working tirelessly to ensure that every individual has the access they need to lead fulfilling, independent lives," said Noelle Balutis, Independent Living Manager. "As Your Access Advocates, we will continue to offer the same comprehensive resources, advocacy, and support services that have become synonymous with what we represent."

Your Access Advocates is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing advocacy and support for individuals with disabilities. With a rich history of 50 years, we are committed to empowering individuals to live independently and ensuring that they have access to essential resources and services within their communities.

Charlton Receives Certificate of Excellence for its Financial Reporting

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Town Manager Andrew Golas and Town Finance Director/Town Accountant, Ashley Obrzut, are pleased to announce that the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA) has awarded their Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting to the Town of Charlton for its annual comprehensive financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024. The report has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program, which includes demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report.

The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) advances excellence in government finance by providing best practices, professional development, resources, and practical research for more than



25,000 members and the communities they serve.

"We applied for this review in January 2025," said Finance Director Ashley Obrzut, "and the process takes six months for approval by the GFOA Committee. Basically, all financials and additional town information is provided along with all financial statements. After their extended review into all details of the records provided, the award is given. It's a first for us. Many pieces of background information were prepared in great detail. There is also a 10-year look back, a process where our town auditors, Roselli & Clark, put all of the town's financials into the approval process which follows accredited Generally

Accepted Accounting Principles."

These principles are the standard, authoritative rules for financial reporting in the U.S., developed by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) to ensure accuracy, consistency, and transparency. The rules cover revenue recognition, expense matching, and asset valuation to ensure comparability. Above all, they help ensure accuracy and transparency.

"Our previous Town Accountant, Donna Foglio, was also deeply involved in preparing and submitting our town's information to the Government Finance Officers' Association," said Ms. Obrzut.

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SOUR GRAPES by Tim Jones

Panel 1: A dog looks at a clock. "OMINOUS, WAKE UP! WE OVERSLEPT AND WE'VE GOT A BUSY DAY!"

Panel 2: The dog looks at the clock. "WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME LEFT IN THE DAY, SO WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITIES?"

Panel 3: The dog looks at the clock. "YEP. NAPTIME IS PRIORITY ONE."

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Walking through Charlton on the Midstate Trail

Little River, the Cow Tunnel, William T.G. Morton, and the Marquis de Lafayette

BY THOMAS J. MCLAUGHLIN

Charlton has a lot to offer nature lovers and history buffs alike, whether you're hiking the Midstate Trail or enjoying a short stroll.

The Midstate hike across Oxford ends and begins in Charlton just northeast of Buffumville Lake on Buffum Road, where a stone marker sits at the border of the two towns.

Fulling Mill Ruins at Little River is a half mile oasis connecting the Buffumville Lake trails to the Midstate Trail. It's less than a mile down the road where you can park nearby and walk a short distance to the river.

I walked there in May and unintentionally startled (the feeling was mutual) what I think was a Great Blue heron. It squawked loudly and soared over me, quickly flying down the river with its giant wings flapping away. It was like stepping into the Land of the Lost and waking up a Teradactyl.

The Charlton Heritage Preservation Trust (CHPT) maintains this site, along with eighteen additional properties totaling over 200 acres. Additional information regarding their organization and these important nature preserves can be found at charltontrust.org.

The Midstate continues under U.S. Route 20 through what is known as the Cow Tunnel, which was built one hundred years ago this year. When I walked through this it was a walk through a small stream, which judging from online comments about the tunnel, is more often than not the common experience. But wet or dry it beats the alternative of crossing multiple lanes of traffic on the road above.

Exiting the tunnel you walk a short distance to Carroll Hill Road and then back into the forest going past an abandoned factory, eventually coming out to Northside Road, which goes over the MA Pike and brings you to the historic Old Northside Village.

The Old Northside Village is a pre-Revolutionary War section of Charlton (originally part of Oxford) that's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. There are more than a dozen historic buildings in this district, the oldest of which is the Jonathan Wheelock House that was built nearly 300-years ago in 1735.

Jonathan Wheelock ran a tannery and distillery. His son, Eli Wheelock, built the Rider Tavern on Stafford Street in 1797.

Wheelock and his brothers Paul and David were the grandsons of



Fay Mountain. Photo by Thomas J. McLaughlin

one of the founders of the Town of Mendon, Benjamin Wheelock. They were among the earliest settlers of the Northside Village. Several of their sons served in the Revolutionary War. Their family history can be found in the voluminous compilation, The Wheelock Family of Charlton, Massachusetts at wheelockgenealogy.com.

Today the Rider Tavern on Stafford Street is the home of the Charlton Historical Society, but it was once a regular stop on a major stagecoach route. The Worcester-Stafford Turnpike opened in 1810 as a private toll road that ran from Worcester to Stafford, Connecticut where it connected to other turnpikes in Hartford.

The Rider Tavern's most notable visitor was Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier de Lafayette, also known as the Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette was a French nobleman inspired by the Enlightenment and the principles and ideas that led to our Revolution.

He first came to America as a teenager and became a close friend and aide to General

Washington. Lafayette helped secure crucial French support for the American cause. He became a major general at 19 and commanded American troops in their victory at Yorktown. He also played a large role in the French Revolution.

Almost fifty years after our Declaration of Independence, Lafayette returned to the United States in his late 60s and embarked on a 13-month farewell tour of twenty-four states, which was the entirety of our nation in 1824-25. Thousands turned out and gave him a hero's welcome across our new and growing nation. It was a whirlwind of visits to cities, to towns, to villages, to the tomb of his old friend, George Washington who died 25-years earlier, to Monticello to visit 81-year-old Thomas Jefferson, to Quincy to visit 88-year-old John Adams, to Montpelier to visit James Madison, to the White House to visit President James Monroe, and to his old battlefield at Yorktown.

According to the American Battlefield Trust, "In New England alone, Lafayette made more than 170 stops." One of his stops was at the Rider Tavern, which had recently been renamed Wilson's Coffee House. Today, the Midstate Trail runs along the side of this historic property and crosses Stafford Street to a field

where, according to the Charlton Historical Society, the local militia assembled and was inspected by Lafayette.

This site across the street from the Rider Tavern also commemorates the life and contributions of the father of anesthesia, William T.G. Morton, who was born and raised in Charlton's Northside Village. Morton successfully used ether on a patient in 1846, with a painless tooth extraction. This garnered a lot of attention as he advanced the new concept of it being preferable for patients to be unconscious while undergoing surgery.

Just a short distance from here is the scenic 65-acre Fay Mountain Farm, owned by the Town of Charlton. The town leases the property for its acres of orchards and other crops. Across the street on Cemetery Road is the beautiful Snows Pond and Northside Village Antiques. It's a nice slice of New England living, especially on a beautiful Sunday morning in the Summer.

The Midstate goes up and over Fay Mountain toward the back of the Northside Cemetery before hitting pavement. The trail continues for several miles along paved and dirt roads to the Four Chimneys Wildlife Management Area in Spencer.

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Woodstock Building Associates — Where Thoughtful Design Meets Craftsmanship

BY JENNIFER RUSSO

Home projects don't start with blueprints — they start with conversations.

Founded 48 years ago on the belief that building or renovating a home should feel collaborative, transparent, and even inspiring, Woodstock Building Associates has quietly built a reputation for doing things the right way. The company's work can be seen in thoughtfully designed additions, carefully renovated kitchens and baths, and custom homes that feel as livable as they are beautiful.

Architect and Principal Steven Keene's path into the building world started long before blueprints and job sites. As a kid, Keene was fascinated by how things came together, the structures, spaces, and the way thoughtful design could shape how people live. That curiosity eventually turned into a career, and together with his amazing team, it continues to inspire every project.

"Recently, we worked on a multi-phase home remodel on a modest, 1950s Cape-style house. I purchased the home as-is, and while the structure showed signs of age, it offered solid bones and a strong potential for expansion. We removed the entire upper level and rebuilt it, allowing for three bedrooms, a full bath, a walk-in



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Business spotlight

closet, and a front porch. We also included a 400 sq foot addition on the first floor, which made a huge difference and allowed us to be able to host large gatherings," shares Steven.

What makes Woodstock Building Associates stand out isn't just technical skill — it's their team design-build approach, which keeps everything under one roof. From the first conversation to the final walkthrough, clients work with

one coordinated team. Design, estimating, project management, and construction are all connected, allowing ideas to evolve realistically and budgets to stay grounded from the start.

If you have ever been through home renovation, you know that it can sometimes feel overwhelming. The team approach WBA takes is especially appealing to homeowners who value thoughtful direction during a renovation or build. WBA works hard to understand each client's goals and help guide them through decisions big and small, from the overall layout and flow to materials and finishes. There will never be any surprise costs because their focus is on clear communication, realistic expectations, and bringing out the home's full potential while keeping it comfortable and functional.

"One thing that really sets us apart is that we have our own de-



WBA has its own Franklin showroom, so homeowners can see the products going into their renovation.

sign showroom, where clients can see everything from cabinetry to flooring, bathroom fixtures, and more," Steven shares. "It helps when you can see the products before buying them, and every brand and item we have there are those that we stand behind completely. They are from vendors we trust, top quality, and made to be durable and long-lasting."

WBA offers a wide range of

residential needs, including custom home design and new construction, kitchen and bathroom renovations, home additions and expansions, outdoor living spaces, finished basements, accessibility and aging-in-place modifications, and more. No matter what the scope, whether it's a wow-factor moment or replacement windows and doors, the goal remains the same: create spaces that feel intentional, comfortable, and built to last.

Clients often remark on the sense of trust that develops throughout a project. That trust is earned through careful planning, honest timelines, and a team that treats each home as if it were their own.

In a world where construction can feel rushed or transactional, Woodstock Building Associates offers something refreshingly different: a relationship-driven experience rooted in craftsmanship, care, and thoughtful design.

Woodstock Building Associates has offices in Franklin, MA and Woodstock, CT. To learn more or start a conversation about your next project, visit www.wbahomes.com or call (508) 570-4853 to discover what's possible when design and building work together.

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Programs & Events at the Pearle L. Crawford (Dudley) Library

40 Schofield Avenue, Dudley
508-949-8021

For as full list of events and to register for events or sign up for the newsletter go to www.crawfordlibrary.org or call 508-949-8021.

GENTLE YOGA

Every Monday, 10-11

Join yoga instructor Patricia, for a traditional "on the mat" yoga class with chair yoga modifications. This truly is a one size fits all class. Bring your own mat. Wear layers, do not eat heavily 1.5-2 hours before class. Registration is required.

MAHJONG AT THE PEARLE

Every Wednesday, 10:00-12:30

Fels Community Room

The game consists of players competing to form distinct sets or pairs of tiles, similar to gin rummy. Everyone is welcome, registration is not required.

QUILTING GROUP

Every Wednesday, 1:30- 3:30

All quilters and would-be quilters are invited to join our new group. Bring your projects!

KNIT & CROCHET GROUP

Every Thursday 5:30-7:45 and Friday 10-12

All stitchers are welcome for this informal group. Bring your project, enjoy the company

AI FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

Saturday, March 14th, 11-12

If you don't know what AI is, this program is for you! Join us for a 60-minute beginner's session designed to demystify Artificial Intelligence. We will explore two topics: how to use simple, free AI tools to make daily life easier and how to spot and protect yourself from the new wave of AI-enhanced scams.

CREATE A TREASURE JOURNAL

Monday, March 16th, 5:30-7:30

Happy Arts Events will be onsite to teach you various art journal making techniques to create your own unique and beautifully inspired keepsake or gift. This event is sponsored by the Ages 14+ Registration is required. This program is supported in part by a grant from the Dudley Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

BAY PATH RTVHS (CTI) PROGRAM

Thursday, March 19th, 6:00-7:00

This presentation is designed to give community members a clear and comprehensive overview of the CTI program and the opportunities it offers. During the session, we will cover: An overview of the Career Technical Initiative (CTI) program, the admissions process and eligibility requirements, how candidates qualify for admission, the interview and candidate selection process, the nine career-focused programs we will be offering for the upcoming school year, career-readiness resources available to participants. In addition, we will be providing informational hand-outs for attendees to take home. More about the

program here: <http://baypath.net/web/content/page/334>

"COOK THE BOOK" BOOK CLUB

No cook book this month- Bring a Family Favorite - Monday, March 23rd, 6-7

Any family recipe is fair game, except alcoholic beverages-sorry! Prepare the recipe at home and share it at the library. We cannot reheat or keep food warm, so consider this when choosing your recipe. You are responsible for bringing serving utensils. We will provide paper goods and utensils for eating. There will be a place to include your recipe selection in the reservation form. Registration required.

THE MUSIC OF MCCARTNEY: THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL SONGWRITER

Thursday, March 26th, 6:00-7:00

This program will explore the music of Paul McCartney as he developed his songwriting through the 1960s with the Beatles and beyond. From the influences of his father, a jazz musician in the 1920s/30s, his incorporation of those sounds of ballroom and dance-hall big bands in his music, to his successes as a pop and rock performer in Wings and as a solo musician.

CRAWFORD LIBRARY BOOK GROUP

Thursday, March 26th, 6:00-7:30

Yellowface by RF Kuang

Books are available at the circulation desk for checkout one month prior to discussion. No Registration Required.

ALL ABOUT MUSHROOMS

Saturday, March 28th, 10:30-12:00

They're all over the web, all over the news, and if you're lucky (and in the right season), all over your local woodlands. They're mushrooms, the mysterious eruptions from an otherwise hidden world of life and death. When they emerge, they can delight us with beautiful colors, strange shapes, and curious aromas.

CRAFTEVENING-SPRING SHADOW BOX

Monday, March 30th, 6:00-7:00 OR

CrafterNOON-Spring Shadow Box

Tuesday March 31st, 1:00-2:00

Create a beautiful spring-themed wooden shadow box guided by staff member Jubille! Choose from a variety of fun embellishments — flowers, butterflies, gems, and more — to design a piece that's uniquely yours. Layer textures, play with color, and add the perfect finishing touches to celebrate the season.

Space is limited, registration is required.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMMING

PRE-K POWER

Every Tuesday, 10:00-10:45

For ages 3-5 and their caregiver (siblings always welcome!). Join us for stories, songs, fingerplays, scarves, shaker eggs, moving our bodies to music, activities, bubbles, a craft, and free play! No Registration needed

TODDLER STORYTIME

Every Wednesday-10:00-10:45

Best for children 6 months - 36 months and their caregiver (siblings always welcome!).

No Registration needed.

TINKER PLAYGROUP

Every Thursday in March, 10:30-11:30

Join YFCP and the Pearle L. Crawford Library for a FREE 4 – week Tinkering Playgroup series. Children, ages 3 – 6, with a parent/caregiver, will be introduced to hands-on activities to practice and develop foundation STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) skills including problem solving, fine motor, and working together through tinkering activities designed by the Boston Children's Museum. There will be family sheets to extend playgroup activities at home. Registration is required. Please register for each class separately.

BABY OPEN PLAY

Every Friday, 10:00- 12:00

Open play for babies! Parents and caregivers can let babies play while getting to know others in the community. Come anytime between 10-12 or stay the whole time! No Registration Required

POKEMON CLUB

Thursday, March 19th, 6:00-6:45

Do you love everything Pokemon? Join us for Pokemon club! Each month we will have exciting crafts and activities! Best for ages 6 and up. No Registration Required. This is not a drop off program.

YOGA FOR CHILDREN

Friday, March 20th, 10:00-10:45

Join certified Yoga instructor, Patricia (also known as Buffy), for a 45-minute yoga class for children ages 3-5 and their caregivers! Caregivers are encouraged to participate in the class, but it is not required. If you will be participating, please bring your own mat. (Yoga mats will be provided for the children.) Registration is required as space is limited.

DEB'S SING & SWING-HELLO SPRING!

Friday, March 27th, 10:30-11:15

Pre-K Music & Movement offers a 45-minute interactive program featuring singing, guitar music, dancing, rhythm instruments, stories, and a variety of fun props, including a parachute, beanbags, scarves, and pom poms. These programs are theme-based, and cover everything from holidays and seasons to dinosaurs and bugs! Registration is required.

TEEN PROGRAMMING

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS GAME

Every Thursday, 6:00-7:30, Ages 14-19

Are you looking to play a game that contains action, adventure, and drama? Come play the world's number one role-playing game.

CLAY SEA TURTLE BOWL FOR TEENS

Friday, March 27th, 1:00-2:30

Create your own unique turtle-themed bowl with air dry clay! Pop Up Art will be here to guide you step-by-step to craft and paint a finished piece that's truly your own! Ages 12-17 ONLY. Registration is required

Mass. RMV Redesigns Disability Placards

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

According to the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV), they have recently announced the introduction of a newly redesigned Disability Placard, created to improve security, curb fraud, and expedite delivery. Current placards will remain valid until their expiration date.

The updated placard features several key improvements:

- A modern design incorporating the widely accepted universal accessibility logo
- Durable material embedded with security features to deter fraud
- Bilingual instructions in both English and Spanish

"This redesign reflects our commitment to improving services for residents with disabilities while modernizing our operations," said Interim MassDOT Secretary and MBTA General Manager Phil Eng. "The new placard is not only easier to read but also reflects current design standards nationally. I want to thank Registrar Colleen Ogilvie and the entire RMV team for their leadership on behalf of the people we serve."

The RMV's Medical Affairs division issues approximately 140,000 disability placards annually to

qualified residents on a temporary or permanent basis. Previously, the placard production process was a multi-step, labor-intensive process. The new placards eliminate the need for individual lamination, cutting processing time by 25%.

"The updated design of the disability placard reflects the RMV's ongoing commitment to accessibility and safety," said Registrar Colleen Ogilvie. "I'm pleased that we can get the placards to customers sooner using a new and innovative process. As a reminder, disability placards are issued to an individual and are not transferable to family members or friends."

While the disability placards will feature a new design, the application process, certification requirements, and parking benefits have not changed, and the placard remains valid for the time it is medically necessary. Residents will continue to provide medical certification of health condition(s) with their application. Once approved, residents will be able to park in designated accessible parking spaces and meters without paying fees or penalties when displaying the placard until such time as it is no longer medically necessary.

For more information, please visit mass.gov/RMV.



On Monday, 16 February, the Veterans Council of Webster and Dudley, along with the District Veterans Services Director of Webster and Dudley, Stephen Rogerson, presented a citation to the Polish National Alliance of Dudley for all the support they render to the Veteran community through the Veterans Services office annually. The PNA support is substantial and makes a difference to the needy Veterans and their families throughout the year. Regarding the PNA, the Veterans in our community regard this organization with high esteem.

From left: Victor Jankowski; Webster and Dudley Veterans Council Commander; Stephen Rogerson; Webster and Dudley Veterans Services District Director; Andy Kozlowsky, Veterans Council Adjutant; and Joe Sendrowski, Veterans Council Chaplain. Also pictured are the PNA board members. (Photo submitted)

SPORTS

Shepherd Hill Wrestling

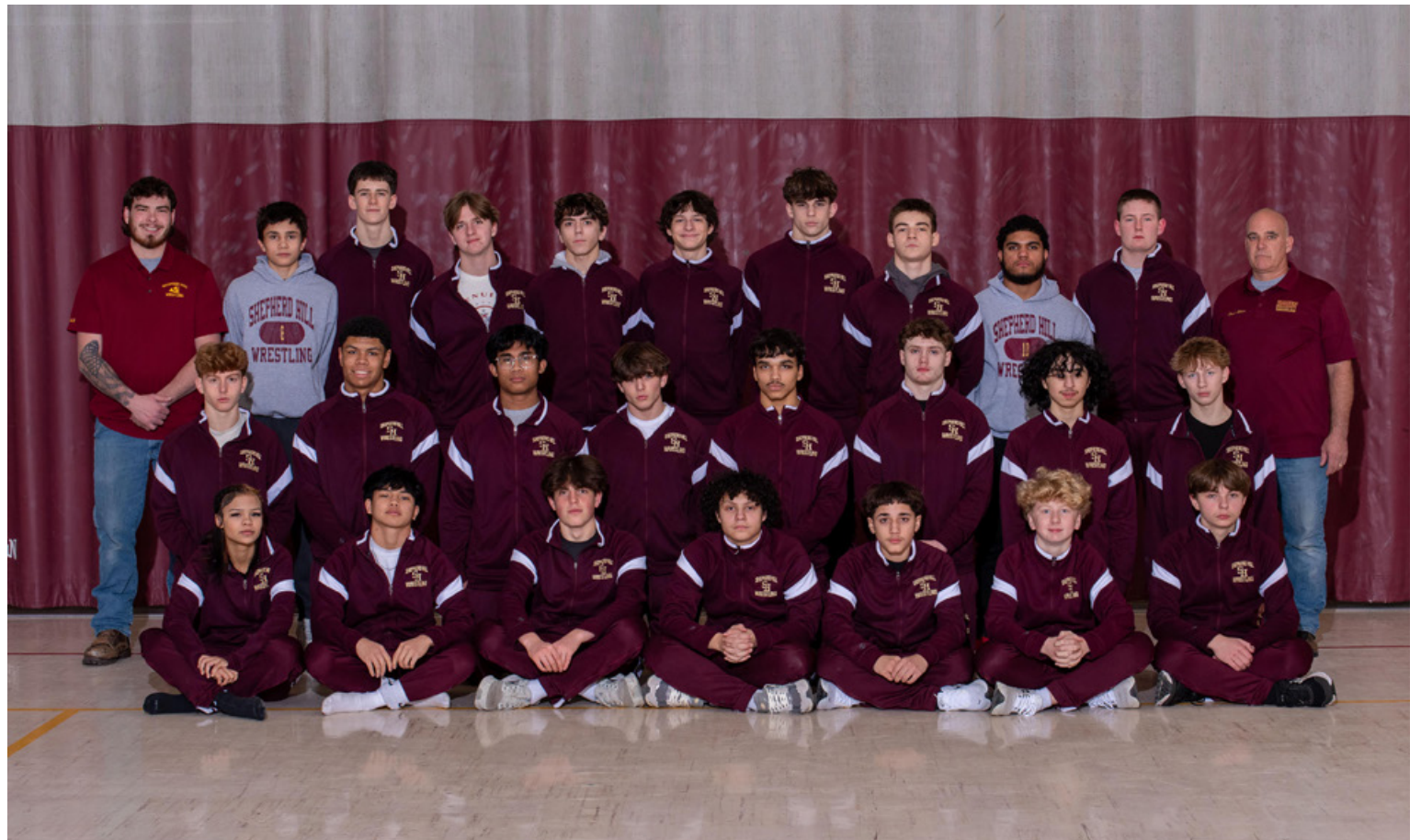
BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTSWRITER

In the past the Shepherd Hill wrestling team has had at least one standout wrestler gracing Ray Ayotte's squad. This year things are different for the Rams – for one they do not have that one standout and unfortunately have a couple of weight classes that do not have anyone to fill those holes.

While Shepherd Hill is lacking in those points Ayotte believes his team is solid throughout the rest of the weight classes. Freshman Brodie Kaplan comes to the high school with youth wrestling experience and has done quite well in the 113-pound weight class.

"I didn't know anything about him, he just showed up at tryouts this year," the Rams coach said. "He has been fantastic and impressive thus far; being an unknown wrestler they have no knowledge or past experience, so he goes into his matches unseeded, but has continuously placed in the top four."

Senior captains Liam Kay (132-pounds) and Logan Pecore (144) as well as junior captain Trevor Blair (126) have provided



stability and knowledge of the sport to the other wrestlers. Other wrestlers for the Rams are Jacob Ferguson at 150 pounds, Graham Zimmer at 157 pounds, Josiah Rijos at 165 pounds and Brody Rose at 175 pounds.

Zimmer and Rijos are both sophomores who have shown skills on the mat and the two battle in the weight room. Ayotte calls the duo scrappy wrestlers and sees Zimmer as a solid and tough individual who could really become something special with experience.

Siblings Jean and Autumn Bardier also found their spot on the team wrestling at 190 and 106, respectively. Autumn, a sophomore who has been with the team for a few years now seems to have come into the season more committed than in the past and is trying to give it her all on a boys' team.

Paul Ceppetelli rounds out the team wrestling in the 215-pound weight class although only 190

pounds himself.

"With Jean already wrestling at 190 Paul had to move up to the 215-pound weight class," the Shepherd Hill coach said. "As a first-year wrestler for us and given the circumstances he was put into he continues to come in with a great attitude and goes about his business."

While the Rams may be a relatively young team, the Shepherd Hill coach finds them very solid and willing to learn.

"Coming in I knew that we were going to be a young team, but I knew that we'd be pretty competitive, despite not knowing about Brodie (Kaplan)," he said. "We've had some injuries and some JV athletes had to step up in their place and they have done well. We are not going to be number one in the league, but this team will battle."

Although the team has a solid team to take to the mats on any

given night, Shepherd Hill is still lacking in two weight classes, and it continually puts the team behind the eight ball before they even begin their matches. One vacant weight class is 138-pounds where the team has no one to take part in, so they are continually forfeiting that class.

The Rams lost their starter in the 120-pound weight class due to an injury, so freshman Evan Blair has been filling the opening for the time being and according to Ayotte he has been placing here and there for the team.

As the season winds down the Shepherd Hill wrestlers are all looking to perform well at Sectionals and hopefully earn a right to move onto the States and then even further.

"I expect most of these kids to get through the Sectionals and into the States," Ayotte said. "From there it's anyone's guess and any one of them could advance into the All States, it all depends on the seedings that they get."

The coach went on to say that this is the most solid team that he has had and all of them are there to wrestle.

"This is the first time that there is not a single kid that I have to worry about," he said.

The Ram grapplers may be young, but they are all looking to continue to perform at a high level and make their coach proud as they go through the rest of the year and into the post-season.

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SPRING 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.



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

This kind of multigenerational 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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SPRING HOME REVIEW

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 insurance, and homeowners 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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SPRING HOME REVIEW



Expenses to expect upon buying a home

Homeownership is often characterized as a fulfillment of a dream. Indeed, many homeowners feel their ability to buy a home is a reflection of their discipline and commitment to saving money. That discipline and dedication can set homeowners up for long-term financial health, providing a unique sense of security along the way.



First-time home buyers may not know what to expect upon buying a home, and since each home is unique, it's impossible for even long-time homeowners to say with certainty exactly how things will unfold once those new to home ownership get the keys to their first house. Various expenses might be the only common variable when it comes to homeownership, and some of those expenses may surprise first-time buyers. With that in mind, the following are some expenses first-time buyers can expect once their offers are accepted.

- **Down payment:** Conventional wisdom long suggested home buyers should submit a down payment of at least 20 percent of the overall purchase price upon buying a home. Buyers who want to follow that advice would need a down payment of \$80,000 when buying a \$400,000 home. But many home buyers now submit down payments considerably less than 20 percent, particularly in the modern real estate market, which is characterized by high prices and low inventory. The lower the down payment, the higher your monthly mortgage payment will be, so it's best to save as much as possible toward a down payment.
- **Primary mortgage insurance (PMI):** Buyers who cannot come up with a down pay-

ment of 20 percent or more will have to pay for primary mortgage insurance, which is typically a set fee that is incorporated into the mortgage payment each month. PMI fees are typically waived once the balance on the mortgage reaches 79 percent or less of the purchase price, though

some lenders may waive PMI prior to that if the value of the home increases considerably before the loan balance reaches the predetermined marker.

- **Closing costs:** The amount of closing costs varies widely depending on a host of variables, but Bankrate.com notes it's not uncommon for these costs to come in at somewhere between 2 and 5 percent of the loan principal. Closing costs must be paid no later than when the sale becomes official and buyers sign on the (many) dotted lines. Application and credit fees, title fees, underwriting fees, appraisal fees, and transfer tax are among the various fees that fall under the umbrella of closing costs.

- **Moving:** It's also important that first-time home buyers budget for moving costs. Moving costs vary and may depend on how much buyers already own and how far they're moving. The home renovation experts at Angi estimate that local moves typi-

cally cost somewhere between \$883 and \$2,568, while long-distance moves may run buyers anywhere from \$2,700 to \$10,000 or more.

These costs are some of the upfront fees aspiring homeowners can expect when buying a home. Long-term costs, including

homeowners insurance (which is separate from PMI), property taxes, homeowners' association fees, and maintenance are some additional expenses buyers can plan for as they try to determine their home buying budgets.

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SPRING HOME REVIEW

Pros and cons of open concept floor plans

Open floor plans that make it easy to move through primary living and entertaining areas have been popular for decades. Open concept floor plans join the dining room, kitchen and living (great) room into a communal space where sight lines are maximized and walls are minimal.

According to JJones Design Co., the origins of open concept floor plans may be traced to the deaf community. An open layout allows for better visual communication and awareness of one's surroundings, and some deaf individuals modified their kitchen and living spaces to facilitate more room for social gatherings and signing. Nowa-



days, it's nearly impossible to find a new construction with closed-off rooms. Here's a look

at some of the pros and cons of having an open-concept home.

Benefit: Open concept plans make small spaces feel bigger. When smaller homes are broken up by walls, they can seem even smaller. By tearing down walls, one can trick the mind into thinking there is more square footage.

Drawback: The space may feel too large. An open concept floor plan in a large home can make interior spaces feel cavernous. A cozy home can be

difficult to achieve with fewer walls.

Benefit: Open concept plans facilitate the flow of natural light. Without walls to break up rooms, homeowners can maximize light coming in through their windows. This also may help to brighten darker rooms that do not get as much natural light.

Drawback: Privacy can be hard to achieve. Unobstructed views from windows and doors can make it more challenging to create privacy when desired. When window shades are open, passersby can see into a home. Also, sunlight may end up wearing out flooring and furniture throughout the home.

Benefit: Open floor plans allow more space to spread out when entertaining. One of the biggest pluses of open floor plans is that it makes it easier to host crowds. Guests can enjoy the communal space, while hosts can still interact with friends and family even while preparing meals in the kitchen.

Drawback: Homeowners will likely need to do more

cleaning ahead of hosting guests, as multiple rooms will be on display. Also, cleanup afterwards may be more arduous since guests have spent time in multiple spaces.

Benefit: Open concept plans can improve property value. The home renovation experts at The Spruce note open floor plans are desirable and increase the value of a home by up to 7.4 percent a year.

Drawback: Some home buyers are beginning to shy away from open floor plans. This may have been prompted by stay-at-home requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, when multiple family members were working and doing school work at home. In that environment, an open-concept layout didn't provide the privacy or distraction-free spaces residents may have needed.

Open floor plans have been around for more than 30 years, but they aren't everyone's cup of tea. The pros and cons of this design style merit consideration when renovating or shopping for a home.

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Did you know?

Outdoor living spaces are a good investment for homeowners seeking to enjoy their home exteriors to the fullest, and that investment continues to pay dividends when homes are put on the market. According to Remodeling magazine's Cost vs. Value report, a number of outdoor living upgrades provide a sizable return on investment (ROI) when homeowners put their properties up for sale. According to the report, a wood deck could recoup up to 82 percent of the original cost at resale, meaning a job that comes in around the national average price of \$17,000 could net \$14,000 at resale. An outdoor kitchen could prove an even better investment in terms of ROI, as Remodeling magazine indicates such a feature nets a return between 55 percent and 200 percent at resale depending on the location of the home and the materials used for the project.





SPRING HOME REVIEW

Renting vs. buying: Know the pros and cons

People typically have two options when they need a place to live: rent or buy. There are pros and cons to each option, and what is best depends on the person and the situation.

Choosing to rent or buy is a decision with many moving parts, says NerdWallet. Although buying a home is often

Home ownership has some disadvantages. It's a large financial investment that requires a potentially sizable down payment up front. Owning comes with an inherent, though not ironclad, lack of flexibility, as a person cannot simply move to a new geographic location on a whim. There's also responsibility

involved in home ownership. Homeowners are required to pay for all maintenance and handle any additional issues that arise.

There's no clear-cut answer as to which is better, renting or buying. People must identify their own priorities and needs

during the decision-making process.



presented as a fulfillment of the "American Dream," home ownership is not the right fit for everyone. A careful consideration of owning versus renting can help people decide which option is best for them.

Homeownership

Purchasing a home is a large undertaking that requires a significant financial investment. People often buy a home because they want stability and an asset that maintains value and even appreciates in the long run. There's also more freedom over the living situation when a person buys, as he or she is not beholden to the rules of the landlord. This affords more freedom to decorate and fewer restrictions regarding noise. Homeowners also may not be restricted by rules regarding pets. People may be drawn to buying because they know precisely what they will pay each month in living expenses, provided taxes remain relatively stable. Furthermore, setting down roots can help a person feel like part of a community.

Renting

Renting can be a more affordable short-term option than buying. Renting enables a person to get a residence at a lower monthly expense and with no down payment. Those who rent have more flexibility if they want to change homes frequently. There's much less responsibility required to rent, as landlords will handle repairs and other concerns. Expenses may be less because there's no need to pay property taxes, and some utilities may be covered by the property owner.

There is a sentiment that renters are throwing away money each month because they are not getting any equity with each monthly rental payment. Rental costs also may not be fixed, as a landlord can increase rent with each lease renewal. Renters also must abide by the rules and regulations of the landlord while renting. This may mean restrictions on parties, noise after a certain time, pets, and more.

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SPRING HOME REVIEW

How to boost home value before selling

People considering buying or selling a home are facing a unique market. The real estate market has been in flux for several years, and high interest rates have made it more expensive to borrow.

The Mortgage Bankers Association is projecting that 30-year mortgage rates will level out to 6.5 percent for the foreseeable future. That means that people who have been waiting for changes in the real estate market could be disappointed, and hesitant buyers may finally just bite the bullet and buy even if mortgage rates are not where they hoped they'd be in 2025. Homeowners with properties they are considering listing for sale would be wise to make certain changes that will help garner the best prices from buyers.



Homeowners also should look to bathroom updates as smart investments that can improve home value. Katie Severance, author of *The Brilliant Home Buyer*, characterizes kitchens and baths as “money rooms” that add the most value to a home.

Make kitchen and bath improvements

The kitchen is the heart of many homes. Real estate agents may recommend that homeowners make minor to moderate kitchen upgrades like resurfacing cabinets, upgrading countertops and changing fixtures or hardware to give the room an overhaul.

Declutter the home

Homeowners should clean out items they no longer need. Decluttering can make a space feel bigger, which is beneficial in a market where open concept floor plans remain popular among home buyers.

When buyers walk through a prospective home, they want to envision themselves liv-

ing there, something that is more easily done if the home isn't overrun with the current homeowner's belongings.

Get to painting

Painting a home is a cost-effective renovation with a lot of oomph. Freshly painted rooms appear clean and updated, says HGTV, and that can appeal to buyers. Homeowners should choose neutral colors to accommodate the widest array of potential buyers.

Improve the landscaping

The exterior of a home is the first thing potential buyers will see as they roll up to view a property or look at a listing online. Homeowners should start by evaluating and enhancing the landscaping. Ensure the lawn is well-maintained and add plants that provide color without a lot of maintenance.

Expand usable space

Homeowners can think about adding to the usable space in a home. This translates into finishing basements or attics or even converting garages to rooms. Or it may involve adding a three-season room.

Homeowners can consider a number of improvements to increase the resale value of their properties.



Simple tips to improve your status with mortgage lenders

Owning a home is a dream shared by millions of people. Investing in property that can be owned within 15 to 30 years of closing on the home makes more financial sense to many than continuing to rent and having little to show for it over time.

The first step to take when planning to enter the real estate market is to ensure that your finances are in order. Various factors will influence individuals' ability to secure a mortgage, and these are some ways to make yourself more attractive to prospective lenders.

down credit card balances to reduce your credit utilization ratio. A high utilization occurs when there is a high balance in relation to the credit limit, says Business Insider. Also, it may be wise to avoid any credit inquiries through new credit card applications for several months before applying for a loan, as these inquiries can affect your score.

- Check your credit report. Lenders will check your credit report before deciding if you are a risk or a safe bet for a mortgage. So it makes sense to check your credit report prior to speaking with a lender. The Federal Trade Commission says everyone can get one free credit report a year from each of the three credit reporting bureaus. If you split it up, you can get a credit report every four months so you are aware of anything that may adversely affect your ability to get a mortgage loan. A credit (FICO) score that's too low may disqualify you from a mortgage. Each lender sets its own thresholds when they price and approve loans, but the higher your credit score, the better.

- Be realistic about what you can afford. Do your homework and determine your target interest rate and monthly payment as well as what down payment you can afford. It will help you research potential lenders and provide an idea of what may be offered to you.

- Pay bills on time. Paying bills promptly not only helps you avoid late fees, but also positively affects your credit. The financial resource *The Mortgage Reports* urges diligence when paying rent, as late rent payments can bar you from getting a mortgage. Lenders look at rent history as the biggest indicator of whether you'll make mortgage payments on time.

These are some of the ways to make a prospective home buyer look better in the eyes of mortgage lenders. Individuals can speak with financial professionals about what else they can do to improve the possibility of securing mortgages at the best rates possible.

- Improve credit standing. One way to improve your status in the eyes of lenders is to pay

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SPRING HOME REVIEW

The basics of home inspections

The process of buying a home involves a number of variables that present at various times throughout buyers' search for a home. For instance, real estate professionals typically advise buyers to receive a mortgage preapproval prior to beginning their search for a new home. Once such preliminary measures have been taken care of, buyers can then search for a home and ultimately make an offer.

One of the more critical steps buyers can take when making an offer is insisting that the offer is contingent upon a home inspection. Home inspections offer a measure of protection that can save buyers from investing in properties that may look nice to the naked eye, but feature a host of costly problems beneath the surface. Individuals new to home buying may not know what to expect of the inspection process. In such instances, the following rundown can shed light on home inspections.

- Recognize inspection may be mandatory. Though it's not always the case, home inspections may be required

by mortgage lenders. Lenders want to ensure borrowers can repay their loans, which might prove difficult if a home is in need of considerable repairs. That's why home inspections tend to be mandated by lenders, even if they're paid for by buyers. Estimates from HomeAdvisor indicate home inspections cost between \$279 and \$400 on average, but that cost is well worth the peace of mind of knowing you won't unknowingly be buying a money pit.

- You choose your own inspector. Buyers will choose their own home inspector, so it can pay dividends to start asking people you trust for recommendations even before you begin searching for a new home. Realtors also may recommend inspectors they've worked with in the past. The International Association of Certified Home Inspectors® (nachi.org) also can help buyers find a home inspector.
- You can, and should, attend a home inspection. It's wise for buyers to attend a home

inspection. Doing so allows them to see potential issues firsthand. Some seasoned home inspectors even prefer clients to attend an inspection so they can point out issues as they go through the house and answer questions directly rather than later on over the phone or via text or email. Though inspectors typically will answer questions off-site, it's easier for both buyer and inspector to discuss issues in person on the day of the inspection. And for buyers, this can be a great way to become more informed about the home inspection process.

- Expect to spend a good deal of time at the inspection, and not necessarily with the sellers present. The National Association of Realtors indicates inspections can take as long as three hours, so this won't be an in-and-out excursion. Buyers don't want to rush the process, so block out ample time on your schedule to attend the inspection. In addition, sellers typically are not home during an inspection,

though it can happen. Buyers who don't want sellers present can request that they are not on the premises while the inspection takes place. There may not be anything to compel sellers to be off-site, but it can't hurt to ask.

Home inspections are a vital component of the home buying process. It's imperative that buyers take inspections seriously so they can feel confident they are not investing in a flawed property.

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Did you know?

A well-manicured lawn appeals to homeowners when they look out their windows. But such a view also can look nice when homeowners peruse their bank statements after selling a property. According to the "2023 Remodeling Impact Report: Outdoor Features" from the National Association of Realtors®, standard lawn care service yields an estimated cost recovery of 217



percent. Landscape maintenance, with an estimated cost recovery of 104 percent, and an overall landscape upgrade (100 percent) also yield great returns for homeowners. The NAR® report also noted the effects of such projects related to homeowners' desire to spend time on their property. Among homeowners who participated in the NAR® report and committed to standard lawn care service, 58 percent indicated they had a greater desire to be at home since completing the project, while 46 percent indicated they have an increased sense of enjoyment when spending time at home.



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BY LEE-ANN BARKHOUSE

WINTER ETIQUETTE: KINDNESS WHEN IT MATTERS MOST

Winter has a way of amplifying everything. Weather, stress, uncertainty, and emotions. In moments like these, etiquette becomes less about rules and more about kindness.

Winter storms and turbulent times tend to squeeze people's patience right when compassion matters most. What I'm seeing lately are not failures of manners, but moments where people are tired, overwhelmed, or carrying more than they let on. The through line for navigating this season well is simple. Be kind, do not press, and assume people may be dealing with something unseen.

Below are a few common winter etiquette challenges, with thoughtful ways to respond.

Q. A friend or colleague has gone unusually quiet during recent storms. I want to check in, but I do not want to pressure them to explain or be okay.

What is the kindest approach?

A. Kindness in uncertain times means offering presence without demanding disclosure. A simple, low-pressure message such as "Thinking of you. No need to reply" often means more than repeated check ins asking what is wrong. Avoid phrases that require reassurance or emotional labor, such as "Are you okay?" or "You should talk about it." Let people know they are remembered without being obligated to perform wellness. True etiquette honors both connection and privacy.

Q. Is it rude to cancel plans last minute during winter storms or when I am feeling emotionally drained?

A. It is not rude. It is reasonable. Modern etiquette recognizes that safety, mental health, and unpredictable weather matter more than rigid commitments. What is polite is clear communication. Cancel as soon as you know. Express regret without over apologizing.

Avoid oversharing to justify yourself. "I am going to stay in due to the weather. I hope you understand, and I look forward to rescheduling." is gracious and sufficient.

Q. Driving feels tense during winter storms. Slow drivers, bright headlights, sudden stops. What does good etiquette look like on dark, icy nights?

A. Winter driving etiquette is about patience over pride. Slower drivers are not inconveniencing you. They are protecting themselves. Leave extra space. Dim your brights. Signal early. Resist the urge to teach someone a lesson. Courtesy on stormy roads is quiet and unflashy. Let someone merge. Avoid unnecessary honking. Remember that everyone is navigating limited visibility and frayed nerves. Getting there safely is the win.

Q. Is it fair to expect normal productivity from coworkers, employees, or students

during storms and winter disruptions?

A. Good etiquette adapts to reality. Power outages, childcare issues, transportation hazards, and emotional strain are real barriers. Leaders and colleagues show kindness by adjusting deadlines, offering flexibility, and trusting people rather than demanding proof of difficulty. Compassionate expectations build goodwill and often result in better work once stability returns.

Q. I want to help neighbors during winter storms, but I do not want to overstep. What is the polite way to offer help?

A. Offer, do not assume. A simple "If you need anything, I am nearby" respects autonomy. Shoveling a shared walkway or checking that an elderly neighbor has supplies can be thoughtful. Avoid insisting or drawing attention to someone's vulnerability. The best help preserves dignity and allows people to say yes or no comfortably.

ETIQUETTE TIP OF THE MONTH

Winter etiquette is not about perfection. It is about generosity of spirit. Assume people are doing the best they can with what they have. Move a little slower. Judge a little less. Let kindness be the default, especially when the nights are dark and the world feels uncertain.

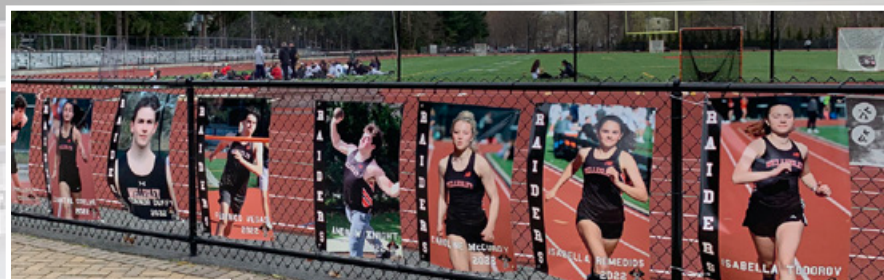
Lee-Ann

Have a situation you'd like help with? Write in or email (info@investinuma.com) and your question may be featured in a future column. Let's build a kinder, more respectful world, one interaction at a time.

Lee-Ann Barkhouse is a certified etiquette and leadership coach who helps people show up with confidence, kindness, and credibility. At Invest in You (www.investinuma.com), she shares practical tools to make everyday moments more thoughtful and meaningful—whether at work, at home, or right here in the community.

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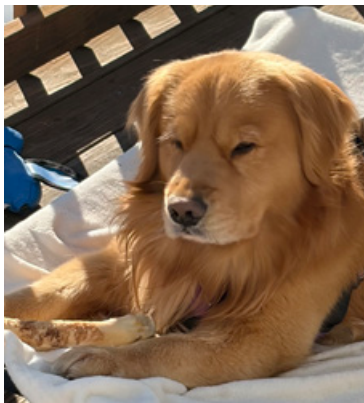
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Zoomies in a Snow Globe

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Winter may seem overly long for New Englanders, but for Luke, the season is a built-in playground. He wholeheartedly loves the cold and the snow. Sometimes I can't help but

"Luke. It's three degrees out." Allowing my dog to sit outside in extreme cold feels somehow abusive. What if a flying drone spots him and broadcasts a story about the poor dog who suffered frostbite because his owner neglected him? Did you hear about that dog hospitalized with hypothermia? Yes! He's the dog in the paper—and they're saying his owner had some kind of a— I reach for his collar, but he slips away and flops dramati-

about resilience, play, and good old-fashioned fun. Deep snow works wonders.

"I-gotta-get-to-the-bottom-of-this."

Luke digs furiously into a towering snowbank. His massive paws churn like a small motor while powder sprays into the air, crowning his head in a halo of white. Unlike his spring excavations, there are no consequences now—no shredded lawn, no muddy craters, no mess to clean

outside. My usual dance class had been canceled, bringing forth a rare pocket of unclaimed time, an intangible gift for the two of us. In the backyard, beneath the soft glow of string lights, a gentle snowfall drifted down around us.

Our backyard glistened, illuminating the oval racetrack that had been carved out with the snowblower. I perched on a snowbank and breathed in winter-fresh air while Luke did the same. We were living inside our own snow

visible in the air, watching my dog race joyfully through falling snow.

And it struck me then—Luke isn't just playing in winter. He's inhabiting it. Fully. Fearlessly. Without complaint or count-down.

While I measure winter in weeks until spring, he measures it in moments—one stomp, one sprint, one snowbank at a time.

Standing there in our glowing backyard, I realized the season



wonder if he's part sled dog. "Are you okay, Luke?"

I open the front door to find my pup, quite literally, chilling on the front step.

cally onto his side, posing like a supermodel on a winter-themed magazine cover. "Luke," I sigh, defeated.

Dogs, I've found, teach us

up. Winter digging is pure and harmless, as natural as the snowfall itself.

"Are you having fun, Luke?"

He looks up, eyebrows and chin dusted in white, eyes sparkling. He resembles a canine Santa Claus—jolly, bright, utterly delighted with himself for choosing to be happy about the weather. We have shared more than a few magical moments this winter, but one stands above the rest.

We had just finished a neighborhood walk. My cheeks glowed from the sharp air, and my body felt energized enough to linger

globe, it seemed. I was tempted to stretch back into a snow angel, but Luke had other plans. He grabbed his frisbee and shot me a look that clearly said, *Bet you can't catch me, Momma.*

I stomped once to signal that I was ready for a game.

That single stomp launched him into a frenzy of zoomies. He became the world's happiest golden retriever and its greatest show-off—galloping in powerful loops around the track, flinging snow behind him, reveling in speed, youth, and the simple thrill of being alive.

I stood there, laughing, breath-

doesn't have to be endured. It can be entered. It can be chased. It can be celebrated in wild, breathless laps around a snow-blown track.

Eventually, the snow will melt. The racetrack will disappear. The lights will come down. But the image of my dog—unrestrained and circling the yard like it's the greatest arena on earth—will stay with me.

Winter may be long.

But joy, if we let it, runs endless laps.

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The #1 Regret Sellers Have When They Don't Use an Agent

Want to know the number one thing homeowners regret when they sell without an agent? It's that they didn't price their house correctly for their



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

current market. According to the latest data from the National Association of Realtors (NAR), those sellers agree pricing

their home effectively was the hardest part of the process.

Top Five Most Difficult Task for Sellers Who Didn't Use an Agent: Getting the price right; Preparing or fixing up the house; Selling within the desired time frame; Handling all the legal documents; Finding the time to manage all aspects of the sale and that makes sense. Pricing isn't as simple as picking a number from an online estimate or copying what your neighbor got last year. It takes real insight into: What buyers are actually willing to pay today! How much competition you have in your area? What similar

homes nearby are really selling for? How desirable your area or neighborhood is! And finally, the condition of your house Without that context, it's easy to be wrong about price, especially now that buyers can be more selective and in today's market, that'll backfire.

Overpricing Isn't a Small Mistake, It Snowballs. Your price is part of what shapes a buyer's first impression and when it's too high, a chain reaction begins. If buyers think you're asking too much, they're going to turn the other way and when buyers bypass your house, you'll get fewer showings. Fewer showings lead to fewer offers and fewer offers usually mean making a price cut to try to draw buyers back in. That's happening a lot lately, especially on homes sold without a pro. The same NAR report shows most homes sold without an agent (59 percent) had to reduce their asking price at least once. The trouble is, price cuts don't always fix the problem. They can attract bargain hunters rather than strong, confident buyers. That's because many buyers see a price drop as a sign there's something wrong with the house and that assumption can turn buyers away too. By the time your house finally sells, you may net less than if you'd priced it cor-

rectly from the start. Again, the data backs this up.

NAR shows that homes sold with an agent sell for nearly 8 percent more than homes sold without one, not because agents magically add value, it's because they have the expertise needed to get it right. The price. The prep. The presentation and the paperwork. Nail all of that from day one, and you'll be set up to get as much money as you can out of your sale.


So, even though you thought selling without an agent meant saving money, that's not necessarily true. The facts show selling on your own can mean selling for less in the long run and that may be enough to totally change your perspective. Today, the biggest risk of selling without an agent isn't the paperwork or the hassle. It's the price and once pricing goes wrong, it's hard to course correct. So, if you're thinking about selling and want to understand what your home would realistically go for in today's market, connect with a member of The Marzeotti Group at Lamacchia or a local trusted Real Estate Professional. A quick pricing conversation now can save you from much bigger regrets later.



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Tea anyone? It was a full house for the annual Valentine's Tea at the Dudley Senior Center Thursday, February 26. Spirits were high throughout the large gathering as they enjoyed sandwiches, desserts, lots of good cheer and of course...tea. Senior Center Director Deb Johnson, members of the Dudley Council on Aging and their team of volunteers made all feel welcomed and celebrated. Learn more about the Dudley Senior Center at www.dudleyma.gov/senior-center



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THE CAR DOCTOR

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Flushing Transmission Fluid on 20 Year Old Car

Q. I bought a 2006 Mazda 3 with 50,000 miles on it a few years ago. It now has 66,000 miles. Well I never checked the transmission fluid and just had it checked. It was black. The garage drained it twice and refilled it. They said to come back in 10,000 miles and they would do a flush. Well there is plenty of talk online about the pros and cons flushing transmission fluid. I wanted to get your opinion on this. Is the flush the way to go with a new filter or do a drain and refill with a new filter?

A. If the transmission is shifting correctly I would just do one more drain and refill. As odd as it sounds, the old-seasoned fluid with some of the friction material held in suspension can help with shift quality. Now if there was a code, shifting issue or contamination due to a leaking transmission oil cooler or an odd vibration, yes flush the fluid and hope for the best.

Q. My daughter brought her 2019 Subaru Crosstrek to the dealership for an oil change and a tire pressure

light check. They came back with about \$1600 worth of work. I'm not questioning the integrity of the dealer but was wondering if the pricing seemed okay or if she could get it done more cheaply somewhere else. (She doesn't have a regular mechanic as she's always taken it to the place where she bought it. One of her TPMS sensors threw a code (twice) in the left rear tire, and they recommend replacing all four sensors for \$890. Also the control arm bushings are cracking and wearing. Need to be done in near future. At a cost of \$725. What do you think?

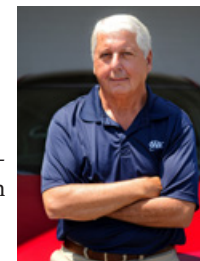
A. This issue with the control arm bushings are pretty common. In fact Subaru states that surface cracks are normal and don't have any effect on ride or handling. Yes, in the future someday they will need replacing but functionally they are fine. Regarding the tire pressure sensors, they are correct if one or two are bad, the other two are not far behind. Depending on the labor rate, the price is pretty typical. At my virtual garage where I use \$165

per hour labor rate and the factory sensors the total would be \$701. An independent shop or quality tire store could likely be less expensive, since they would be using aftermarket pressure sensors.

Q. I was a certified mechanic many years ago. I bring my vehicles in for service either the dealer or local mechanic. At my trucks last oil change my mechanic noticed the anti-freeze reservoir was a little low on my 2018 GMC Denali 1500 pickup. He asked if I checked and I admitted I hadn't. It has 75,000 miles on it. The temperature gauge reads fine and I see no leaks or puddles under the truck. I just added another inch or two to the reservoir can the antifreeze be evaporating or is there something that's going on?

A. There could be a leak, maybe, but antifreeze is half water and water evaporates even in a closed system. At this point, I would do just what you did, top it off and check it periodically. If you start adding coolant more often, have the system pressure checked. The common leaks are the plastic connection to the heater core and plastic radiator tank. On some of these engines, the cylinder head is porous and can leak at the outer head bolt boss on the cylinder head. You can usually see it and smell it. If you are not smelling coolant, probably just maintenance (or lack of it).

Q. I have a 2015 Kia Optima, which has currently 60,000 miles on it. The car has been maintained and is in like-new condition. I have been concerned about the procedure on cleaning the valves. What are your thoughts on the process, and should I have the dealer handle it?



BY JOHN PAUL

A. The combustion chamber (valves, pistons) can be cleaned with chemicals using a special tool that adds a concentrated cleaning solution to the engine. In more extreme carbon issues, the engine is partially disassembled and cleaned with a sandblaster like device that uses walnut shells. The walnut shells clean the carbon without damaging the engine. At this point if the engine is running well, I would use TopTier fuel (go to www.toptiergas.com) and periodically use a quality fuel additive that cleans fuel injectors and combustion chamber.

Q. Next month I will have owned my 2025 V6 powered RAM pickup truck for a full year. The check engine light comes on from time to time. The dealer tells me Chrysler has yet to

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 21

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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com

Ease the squeeze on your retirement income plan

Rising prices may not dominate headlines the way they did a year or two ago, but if you're retired, you're probably still feeling them. Even when overall inflation cools, the costliest expenses — like



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

health care, utilities, insurance and property taxes — tend to rise faster than broad inflation numbers suggest. That creates a squeeze that can make

you question whether your income plan is built to last.

Fortunately, you often can adjust without drastic cuts that affect your lifestyle. Start by understanding where the pressure comes from and how to build more flexibility into your plan.

Inflation hits retirees differently. You've likely noticed your

grocery bill, prescription drug costs and heating expenses haven't returned to "normal." Even small increases compound over time and can chip away at your buying power.

If your income plan was created years ago, it may assume lower inflation or relatively stable price increases over time. Recent years have shown that's not always the case.

Why some income plans feel strained. Any plan relying on fixed withdrawals or rigid budgets can feel tight when living costs rise. If you're drawing from investments, you may hesitate to increase your withdrawals because of market volatility. And if you depend on fixed income sources like Social Security or a pension, yearly cost of living increases may not keep pace with your expenses. You might live 25 to 35 years in retirement, giving small annual cost increases decades to add up.

What you can do without sacri-

ricing stability. A few adjustments can help you stay ahead of rising costs and maintain your financial confidence.

First, review your withdrawal strategy. Ask your financial advisor about flexible approaches that increase income when markets and portfolios perform well and pull back during tougher times. This protects your long-term plan with room to respond to rising prices.

Next, rebalance your portfolio. You may uncover opportunities to shift toward investments with more consistent income or better tax efficiency. Sometimes a small tweak can generate extra cash flow without increasing overall risk.

Finally, look at your income sources. You may be less affected by rising costs if you delay taking Social Security, work a part-time job, add inflation-protected bonds or create predictable lifetime income with annuities, if they're appropriate for your situation.

Don't overlook health care: Health care costs often grow

faster than general inflation. Medicare premiums and out-of-pocket expenses can rise annually, and the need for long-term care remains a big financial uncertainty for retirees. Building health care-specific inflation into your plan now can help prevent surprises later.

Any savings you have in a health savings account can help you cover health care costs. And many pharmaceutical companies offer financial assistance programs to help pay for costlier medications.

Stay flexible and informed: Today's retirements look different from those of even a decade ago. The key is staying flexible, review-

ing your plan regularly and making small adjustments before pressure builds. A financial advisor can help you find the right approach to navigating rising costs without disrupting the life you've worked hard to build.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Please contact Dennis Antonopoulos, your local Edward Jones Advisor at 5 Albert Street, Auburn, MA 01501 Tel: 508-832-5385 or dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com.

Edward Jones, Member SIPC

Dudley Senior Center March Events

Thursday, March 19: Memory Café features a St. Patrick's Day celebration. Thanks to the Dudley Cultural Council, Roger Tincknell will entertain us with music from Ireland to America. We will be serving Irish Bangers, mashed potatoes, Irish soda bread, vegetable and dessert. The cost for this event is \$5 per person. Please RSVP calling 508-949-8015 or sign up in the Dudley Senior Center.

Thursday, March 26: Potluck lunch of ham, baked beans, potato salad and homemade hot fudge sundaes for dessert. Cost for this event is \$5 per person. Please RSVP calling 508-949-8015 or sign up in the Dudley Senior Center.

Due to the cost of food for the Brown Bag Lunch, Memory Café and Potluck lunch, you must sign up and give 24-hour notice if you are unable to make it. Seating

is limited and no shows will be charged \$5.

Monthly Activities at Dudley Senior Center:

Tuesdays at 1 p.m. – Pitch League

Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. – The Dudley Senior Center Knitters Tri Valley lunches are served Monday and Thursday.

Ask about our Book Club

CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 20

figure this out in small percentage of similar vehicles. Any thoughts on this?

A There have been some issues with a code generated for random engine

misfire. I suspect that this is an issue that will eventually be fixed with a software update, rather than mechanical repairs. The bulletin that I read stated engineering is looking into the issue. I would keep working with the dealer to find a solution. Also, if you can keep a log when the light comes on, noting fuel level, engine temperature and

speeds driven. This logbook may help with finding a solution.

Edward Jones > edwardjones.com | Member SIPC



Unsure whether you can retire? Let's review your strategy.



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

FRIDAYS THROUGH MARCH 27

• Back by popular demand, St. Patrick's Church, 7 East Street, Whitinsville will be offering delicious Fish & Chips Dinners again this year during Lent on Fridays (Feb 20- Mar 27) from 4:30pm to 7pm. Dinner options are baked fish/baked potato & coleslaw or fried fish/fries & coleslaw dinners for \$18. Vegetable Soup or Clam Chowder for \$8/bowl. In-house dining includes drink/dessert. Place orders to go by calling 508-234-5656 after 4pm. Payment by Venmo or Cash. Thank you for supporting the Youth in Action Summer Service Trip to Bowling Green, KY

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

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

Choice. Judges will award a separate prize.

• St. Peter's, 39 Church Ave., Northbridge will hold a Lenten Day of Reflection entitled "Praying the Psalms as Part of our Lenten Journey." Please call the parish office to register for our Lenten Day of Reflection. Stations of the Cross are every Friday during Lent at 6:30 p.m. For more information on any of our Lenten events, please contact our parish office at 508-234-2156 or visit our website: stpeterrockdale.org.

• The historic Asa Waters Mansion at 123 Elm Street, Millbury invites you to an unforgettable evening of hushed passwords, Irish flavors, with a Prohibition-era feel. Clover Meets Contraband: A Speakeasy Supper at the Mansion. The doors will open with secret password (given when you purchase your ticket) only at 5 p.m. Guests are invited to step beyond the gates, past the velvet rope, and into the shadows of the Mansion for a unique dining experience inspired by the intrigue of the Roaring Twenties, with the warmth of Irish hospitality. This unique evening will feature an Irish-inspired buffet supper, coffee and sweet indulgences, live entertainment throughout the evening, a speakeasy-style cash bar and more! Guests are encouraged to embrace the spirit of the evening by dressing in vintage attire; tweed, flat caps, lace, and timeless glamour are all welcome! Register online at <https://unipaygold.unibank.com/transactioninfo.aspx?TID=37072>. The cost to attend is \$65 per person, with limited seating available, and advanced ticket purchase is required. For more information, contact Traci Parath at 508.865.0855 or email Traci at, tparath@millburyma.gov.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14 & SUNDAY, MARCH 15

• Thimble Pleasures Quilt Guild will hold their biennial quilt show on Saturday and Sunday, March 14th and 15th at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School from 10:00-4:00 P.M. Visitors to the show will have the opportunity to view the TPQG Raffle Quilt and to purchase raffle tickets to win this beautiful quilt. The quilt measures 74.5" by 74.5" and is named Dresden Bloom. The quilt was created by TPQG members Karen Pierce, Glory Torres, and Rita Partridge. Their focus in creating this quilt was to find a pattern that showcased both applique and piecing techniques. Once the pattern was determined fabrics were selected that were bright and cheerful. The quilt was custom quilted by Kimberly Cloutier of Blooming Quilts.

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

• The Grafton Garden Club and The Grafton Public Library are co-sponsoring a presentation called "Gardening for Biodiversity with Native Plants: Providing Habitat for Pollinators, Birds, and Other Essential Wildlife" with Amy Meltzer, from the Massachusetts Pollinator Network, on Tuesday, March 17, 2026 from 6 p.m.-8 p.m. at the Grafton Public Library, Grafton Common, free of charge. Amy will focus on the current biodiversity crisis; the evolutionary history among native plants, insects, birds and fungi, and how these Interdependent relationships among diverse species are necessary for their survival. She will show how growing native plants and using ecological landscape practices can simultaneously reverse biodiversity loss,

increase resilience in our landscapes, and slow climate change - all while creating a beautiful garden! You will learn about the kinds of shelter needed year-round for pollinator health and reproduction, and how to manage your landscape to provide it.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

• The Museum of the Millbury Historical Society in the Asa Waters Mansion will be open from 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Some of the recently renovated museum's holdings are 100 years of "Aftermath" yearbooks, photos, churches, schools, downtown and sports.
• St. Peter's Parish in Northbridge is having a Corned Beef Dinner at 5:30 pm in the parish hall. Bring your family and friends for a wonderful meal and meet some new friends. Tickets are \$17 per dinner and include salad and dessert. To go meals will be available for pick up at 5 p.m. All orders must be purchased in advance by Tuesday, March 17. Please call 508-234-2156 or email the parish office: parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

• Regional musician and singer Dan Kirouac will bring his program THE MUSIC OF McCARTNEY: The World's Most Successful Songwriter to the Fels Community Room at the Pearle L. Crawford Memorial Library at 6pm. The program, delivered on piano and vocals, will explore the music of Paul McCartney from the Beatles years through Wings and into the 1980s, highlighted by informational commentary. The program is free and open to all. The library is at 40 Schofield Ave in Dudley. For more info, please see www.crawfordlibrary.org. For more about the artist, search DAN KIROUAC MUSIC on Facebook. This program is sponsored in part by a grant from the Dudley Cultural Council, a local agency, which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

• On Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 6 pm author Chuck Collins will speak about his latest book "Burned by Billionaires: How Concentrated Wealth and Power Are Ruining Our Lives and Planet." He is a senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC., and a co-founder of Wealth for Common Good. This event is in collaboration with: Merrick Public Library in Brookfield, Charlton Public Library, Pearle L. Crawford Library in Dudley, Oxford Public Library, Joshua Hyde Library in Sturbridge, and Merriam-Gilbert Public Library in West Brookfield. Everyone is welcome, no registration is required. Additional parking is available at the Charlton Town Hall and at Charlton Elementary School on Burlingame Road. Charlton Public Library is located at 40 Main St., Charlton.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5

• Easter Sunrise Service at Millbury Federated Church, 20 Main Street, Millbury. 6:45 am sunrise service outside the church on the front lawn. 9am Coffee Fellowship, 10am Worship Service to follow.

FRIDAY, APRIL 17

• Join the Friends of the Auburn Public Library at a Fundraiser to support the library titled "Herbs and the Art of Healing in the Middle Ages" presented by Professor Giovanni Spani, Professor of Italian and Medieval Studies in the Department of World Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the College of the Holy Cross. This presentation examines medieval healing techniques for the cure of multiple diseases. 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm at The Pakachoag Center, 203 Pakachoag St., Auburn, MA. Doors open at 6 pm and admission is \$20 (Cash, Check, PayPal). Seating is limited so Pre-registration is required by emailing friendsofauburnlibrary@gmail.com

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MARCH 20

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THE PEACHEATERS: AN ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND EXPERIENCE • April 25

MOTHER'S DAY BRUNCH • May 10

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Midnight Mary

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

One of the most endearing Connecticut legends is that of Midnight Mary. Very little is known of the life of Mary E. Hart. One small line is printed in the New Haven Register on October 17, 1872 under deaths. It simply reads, "In this city, Oct 16th, Mary E. Hart, aged 47. She may have not been known much in life, but in death, her legend endures.

In New Haven, Connecticut's Evergreen Cemetery, just beyond the wrought iron spiked fence, the grave of Mary E. Hart can be seen. It is a modern looking pink granite gravestone, not too uncommon at first glance until the beholder reads what is written on the stone.

"AT HIGH NOON/JUST FROM, AND ABOUT TO RENEW/HER DAILY WORK, IN HER FULL STRENGTH OF/ BODY AND MIND/MARY E. HART/HAV-

ING FALLEN PROSTRATE:/REMAINED UNCONSCIOUS, UNTIL SHE DIED AT MIDNIGHT,/OCTOBER 15, 1872/BORN DECEMBER 16, 1824."

If that is not enough to make one wonder, the line above reads, *"THE PEOPLE SHALL BE TROUBLED AT MIDNIGHT AND PASS AWAY."*

Because of the above inscription, many legends and stories have surfaced in regard to Mary, her demise and a subsequent curse that now affects all who trespass upon her grave. The above inscription is actually part of a biblical passage from the book of Job, chapter 34, verse 20 of the King James version.

Somehow the passage became urban legend and thought to be a curse. One of the legends is that Mary was buried alive and her ghost haunts the grave looking for revenge. According to the tale, after Mary was committed to

the earth, one of her aunts had a nightmare that Mary was not dead, but instead woke up in her coffin frantically screaming for help. The family had Mary's body exhumed. When they opened the coffin, Mary's face was horribly contorted and her fingernails bloody and broken. Deep grooves were ripped into the lid where she desperately tried to claw her way out. Mary had suffered a stroke which caused her death at midnight. The legend, however, states that she did not actually die, but was in a state of suspended animation at the time of her burial.

The curse is simple, anyone who ventures to Mary's grave at midnight and slaps it or stands upon it will die an untimely, horrible death. The stories are abound. One tells of three friends who visited the grave at midnight and decided to strike her grave at the stroke of midnight. Seven years to the day, one of the friends was found with

his throat ripped out. Seven years later the same happened to another and the last seven years after that.

Another tale tells of three sailors who went missing and their hats were later discovered at Mary's Grave. The three were found impaled by the pickets on the iron fence surrounding the cemetery. It appears they somehow became spooked and ran in haste, trying to leap the fence, only to get caught in the deadly spikes. Or, did something else more supernatural bring upon them their demise?

Two teenagers decided to visit the grave at midnight and defy the curse. The next day one was killed in a traffic accident and the other was gravely injured in a fall down a flight of stairs. Two other brave souls decided to spend the night at the grave. One of them became so afraid, he flew from the cemetery never looking back. The other was found the next day near the grave looking as if he had been fright-

ened to death. Perhaps it was his imagination that got the best of him when his pant leg got caught on a thorn bush, thinking Mary had risen from the grave to fulfill the curse.

A horse and carriage had the unfortunate fate of passing by the grave at exactly midnight. The horse, carriage, and driver were never seen again.

A man driving down Davenport Ave picked up a female hitchhiker who looked rather disheveled and desperate. When asked, she gave the name Mary. He dropped her off at the address she gave and drove off. The next day he visited the house to see if the woman had gotten inside safe. The residents of the house had never heard of a Mary. Confused, the man looked around him, making sure it was the right address. He then noticed the Evergreen Cemetery across the street and the grave of Mary E. Hart just inside the gate.

Who Were These Old People at the Ronstadt concert?

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

Several weeks ago, I was asked by friends if I wanted to attend a Linda Ronstadt Rewind event in Sturbridge MA. Of course, I said yes! Linda Ronstadt was one of my favorite singers of the 70's, 80's, 90's, and beyond. You know her hits: Blue Bayou, You're No Good, When Will I Be Loved, Heat Wave, and so many more. The featured singer of Ronstadt's hits was to be American Idol star, Katherine Winston, along with a backup band. There was to be a buffet dinner served along with a cash bar and the venue was relatively small, maybe 250 attendees seated at tables of 10. My friend's relatives and friends were in attendance too so it was a nice evening to meet new people and socialize. I was so looking forward to hearing all those songs live. After all, I hadn't been to a "live" concert since Bryan Adams at Mohegan Sun Casino and that must've been at least 10

years ago. I very much enjoyed his concert listening to his signature songs such as (Everything I Do) I Do it For You, Run to Me, Summer of '69, and Heaven. It was going to be a great night out.

As I sat enjoying my tasty buffet meal of salad, a seafood medley, and veggies along with meeting and trying to remember the names of all my new acquaintances, I began to notice the movements of others in attendance. Many people walking from the buffet area to their tables. Others standing and mingling. I thought, Wow! There's lots of OLD people here tonight.

I began to simply observe those in attendance. Yes, they were old people all right but they also seemed to have a pep in their step almost bouncing along. It was then that it hit me that "I" was one of them. Oh my gosh, where am I, what am I doing here, how did I get to this age? What the heck.

The years have flown by faster than a speeding bullet and there is no better spot to recognize this

than at a concert for those people in their 60s and 70s who want to relive the carefree days of their teens and 20s listening to the throwback songs from their youth.

I looked around the room, looked at the different sizes and shapes of those in attendance and imagined them 50 years younger. Ah yes, the days of our youth, driving our parents' cars down our hometown streets, summer wind and sunshine making us feel alright and carefree. Friends piled into the car, windows rolled down, our ra-

dios playing Ronstadt, Adams, Cat Stevens, Stones, Doors, Cream, the Temptations, Four Tops, Jackson 5, and many others. We would drive from one end of town to the other settling into a supermarket parking lot with everyone meeting up. Then, when bored, we'd drive three or four miles to the next town's supermarket parking lot and see other friends. Summer nights that never seemed to end. They were great times and great memories. Sweet innocence.

But now, back to reality. The

show began with Ms. Winston's best renditions of Ronstadt. It was great. Blue Bayou was a real blast from the past, she crushed Heat Wave and When Will I Be Loved. It was one of the best evenings ever. And I so enjoyed meeting Felicity and Dave, Glenn and Lisa and Martha too. Everyone was so enamored by the songs. We were back in our youth and reveling in our past so we could take the good feelings into our future. It was good to appreciate and realize how far we've come!

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