

Open Sky Names New Director

Open Sky Community Services, a nonprofit behavioral health and human services organization, today announced the appointment of Levi Ekstrom as Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB).

“Levi has established himself as a highly effective member of the DEIB team at Open Sky, and we are thrilled to welcome him into this new leadership role,” said Ken Bates, President and CEO of Open Sky. “Levi’s expertise and his genuine passion for making positive change will enhance Open Sky’s efforts to celebrate diversity and foster a sense of belonging for all employees.”

As Director of DEIB, Ekstrom will bring new insights and strategic thinking to the agency to uphold its commitment to inclusion. The role enriches Open Sky’s culture of acceptance

by celebrating, engaging, and leveraging the diverse backgrounds



and perspectives of all employees. Ekstrom will helm DEIB initiatives, partnering with leaders across the agency to ensure the

implementation of best practices and strategies to advance diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

In his previous role as DEIB Manager, Ekstrom ensured DEIB-related policies, procedures, and guidelines were aligned with organizational values and commitments. He organized and facilitated organization-wide events, led diversity training, and managed all communications on department initiatives. Previously, he was a Race and Gender Equity Advocate for another human services organization in Central Mass., and a Men4Choice Youth Fellow.

Ekstrom, a Northbridge native, earned bachelor’s degrees in ethnic and gender studies, and criminal justice from Westfield State University. Ekstrom was named to Pulse Magazine’s 2026 People to Watch and Worcester Magazine’s 2025 Hometown Heroes. He was also appointed as a Youth 250 National Advisory Bureau Member with Made By Us.



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.

Our Town Publishing Changes Hands, Celebrates Relocation

Tri-County Regional Chamber Facilitates Milford Ribbon-Cutting Event

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

RIBBON CUTTING

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Whitin Community Center Breaks Ground on Child Care Expansion in Former Aldrich School

The Whitin Community Center has begun construction on a project that will transform the former Aldrich School in Whitinsville into a new childcare center, expanding access to early education and after-school programs in the Blackstone Valley.

Community leaders and families gathered Feb. 19 for a groundbreaking ceremony marking the start of renovations to the historic building. The project is part of the nonprofit organization's broader \$10 million capital campaign and aims to address the growing demand for



childcare in the region.

U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern visited the site to announce that more than \$1 million in federal funding has been secured through the congressional appropriations process to support the renovation. The funding will help convert the building into expanded childcare and after-school space.

"We are living through a nationwide childcare shortage," McGovern said during the event. "Parents are juggling shifts, calling center after center and sitting on waitlists that feel like they never move. Projects like this break through those barriers and help families stay rooted in their communities."

When completed, the renovated facility will create space for 85 additional childcare slots — including 20 preschool placements and 65 school-age program spaces — with at least half available to families using child care vouchers. The expansion is also expected to create approximately 15 local jobs.

The Whitin Community Center currently serves 237 children across four sites and maintains a growing waitlist for programs.

Executive Director Heather Elster said the project will both preserve a historic local building and strengthen services for families.

"By renovating this historic building, we are not only preserving a vital piece of our town's heritage — we are opening doors to families and supporting local businesses,"

Elster said. "Expanding access to child care in this space reflects our deep commitment to building a stronger community in the Blackstone Valley."

The project gained momentum after the Town of Northbridge committed \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to support the effort. Additional funding was secured through state grants and other sources. The Whitin Community Center purchased the property from the town for \$50,000 after being selected through a request-for-proposals process.

Under the plan, the town will move municipal offices currently housed in the building to another location while retaining ownership of the property and leasing it to the community center.

Rubicon Builders is overseeing construction, which will include renovations to classroom spaces along with new parking, landscaping and accessibility improvements. Project leaders anticipate completing the work in the fall.

Once finished, the restored building will once again be filled with activity — this time serving young children and families across Northbridge and surrounding communities.

"I can't wait to come back when this renovation is complete," McGovern said. "Seeing this building full of life again — full of kids, full of learning and full of opportunity."

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RIBBON CUTTING

continued from page 1

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 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



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

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

retirement - hopefully they are enjoying their free time somewhere sunny and warm.”

The Tashjians said they could not be happier to entrust the company they built to Jennifer and Marty.

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

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

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



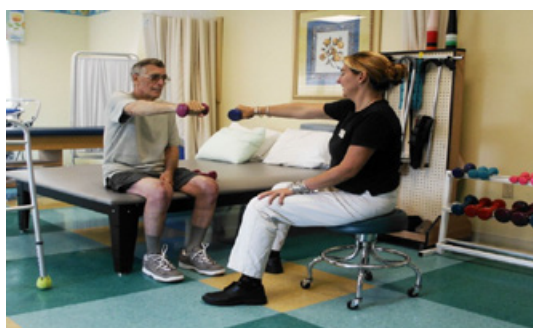
Nicole Tashjian, former owner of Our Town Publishing, along with her husband, Chuck, chat with Attorney Laurie Fowles.

For more information on the Tri-County Regional Chamber,

visit tricountychamberma.org.



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Blue Zones Programs Promote Healthy Living at Plummer Place

Over the past year, Plummer Place, home of the Northbridge Senior Center, has expanded its programming with a series of Blue Zones-inspired classes aimed at helping local seniors adopt lifestyle habits linked to longevity, wellness, and happiness.

Led by Program and Volunteer Coordinator Amy Cowen, the programs introduce participants to research-based practices observed in communities around the world known as “Blue Zones,” where people tend to live longer, healthier lives. The classes combine education, discussion, and social

engagement, offering seniors a welcoming environment to explore ways to improve their health and well-being.

In April 2025, Plummer Place launched a four-week course titled “Introduction to the Blue Zones.” Meeting on Thursday mornings, participants learned about key principles associated with longevity, including finding purpose, staying physically active, maintaining a healthy diet, and fostering strong social connections.

The program included a companion book, guest speakers, community challenges, and interactive discussions designed

to help participants translate Blue Zones concepts into everyday habits.

Encouraged by the strong turnout and enthusiasm from the spring session, Cowen introduced a second program in September and October 2025 titled “The Blue Zones Kitchen: 100 Recipes to Live to 100.” The course focused on the nutritional and culinary aspects of the Blue Zones philosophy, emphasizing plant-based foods and healthy kitchen practices associated with longer lifespans.

Highlights of the program included discussions on the role of plant-centered meals in sup-

porting overall health, a cooking demonstration, and conversations about the importance of enjoying meals as a social and community experience.

Both programs were designed to be interactive and inclusive, giving participants the opportunity not only to learn about healthy lifestyle choices but also to practice them together. Through weekly participation and peer support, seniors explored ways to incorporate the Blue Zones framework - purpose, movement, plant-based eating, social engagement, and stress reduction - into their daily lives.

“The Blue Zones classes are part of the Senior Center’s commitment to helping seniors age with vitality, joy, and connection, while encouraging habits that research suggests support longer and more fulfilling lives,” Cowen said.

Residents interested in learning more about future Blue Zones programs at Plummer Place may contact Cowen at 508-234-2002, ext. 1305, or watch for announcements in upcoming Plummer Place newsletters.

BLACKSTONE VALLEY Xpress

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SOUR GRAPES

by Tim Jones



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YEAH, HE DREW A BLANK ON THIS ONE.

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Ease the Squeeze on Your Retirement Income Plan



Mark Freeman, CEPA

FINANCIAL FOCUS®
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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 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 sacrificing 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 con-

sistent 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, reviewing 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.

Contact Mark today to discuss this topic or any of your financial goals.

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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



Fay Mountain. Photo by Thomas J. McLaughlin

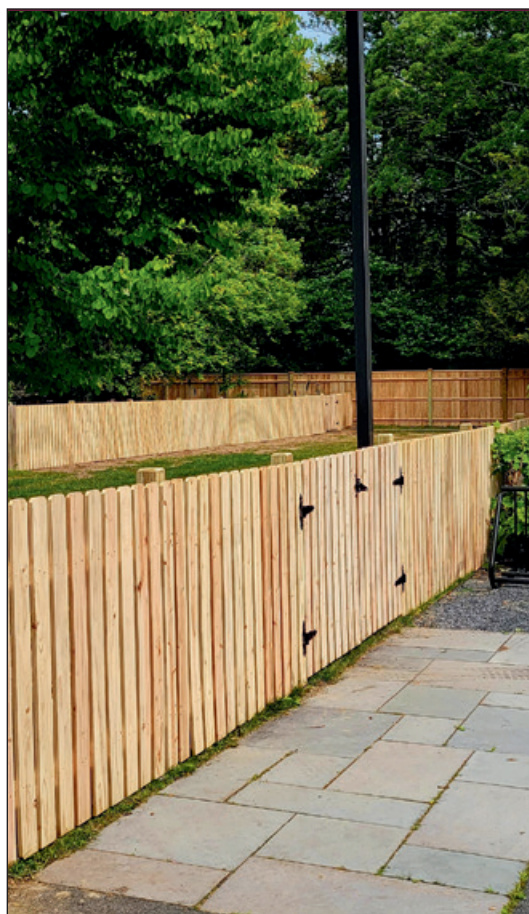
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I walked there in May and unintentionally startled (the feeling was mutual) what I think was a Great Blue heron. It squawked loudly and soared over me, quickly flying down the river with its giant wings flapping away. It was like stepping into the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

ing 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.

MIDSTATE TRAIL

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 Wed, 04/01 @ 4:00 - Book Wizards (Grades 5-7), Heidi by Johanna Spyri
 Wed, 04/08 @ 4:00 - Young

Readers (Grades K-2), Boxes for Katje by Candace Fleming

CHILDREN'S HAPPENINGS

Tue, 03/17, 04/07 @ 11:30 - Music & Movement with Deb Hudgins
 Wed, 03/18 @ 5:45 - Reading to Bryce (Registration Required)
 Mon, 04/06 @ 10:00 - Spring Storytime (Registration Required)
 Tue, 04/07 @ 3:30 - Lego Club I (Registration Required)
 Thu, 04/09 @ 10:00 - Spring Storytime (Registration Required)

TEEN HAPPENINGS

Tue, 03/17, 03/31 @ 4:00 - Dungeons & Dragons Club (Full)
 Tue, 03/24, 04/07 @ 4:00 - Battletech Club
 Sat, 03/28 @ 11:00 - Book Nerds, They Both Die at the End by Adam Silvera

ADULT BOOK CLUBS

Tue, 03/17 @ 6:30 - SciFi Book Club, Record of a Spaceborn Few by Becky Chambers
 Thu, 03/19 @ 6:00 - Cookbook Collective, Celtic Kitchen
 Mon, 03/23 @ 6:30 - Plot Twisters, Good Sister by Sally Hepworth
 Thu, 04/02 @ 6:30 - Greatest Book Club Ever, The Mountain Between Us by Charles Martin

ADULT HAPPENINGS

Mon, 03/16, 03/23, 03/30 04/06 @ 6:30 - Writer's Accountability Group
 Wed, 03/18, 03/25, 04/01, 04/08 @ 10:00 - Fiber Arts Friends
 Wed, 03/25, 04/08 @ 5:45 - Fiber Arts Friends in the Evening
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 Tuesday – 9 a.m. Shuffleboard; 9:30 a.m. Dull Men's Club (4th Tuesday); 10 a.m. Painting; 10 a.m. Mat yoga; 11:15 a.m. Chair yoga; 12:30 p.m. Pokeno; 12:30 p.m. Bridge
 Wednesday – 9:30 a.m. Brew Crew (1st Wed.); 10 a.m. Low impact aerobics; 10 a.m. Blackstone Valley Strummers; 10:30 a.m. Book Club (3rd Wed.); 2 p.m. Ukulele class; 2:30 p.m. Tap class
 Thursday - 9:30 a.m. Meditation; 10 a.m. Women's Collective (2nd Thurs); 11:15 p.m. Chair Yoga; 12:30 p.m. MahJong; 2 p.m. Writing Your Way (2nd and 4th Thurs)
 Friday – 9 a.m. Stretch and Strengthen

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Free Annual Kids Fair on March 28

The Whitin Community Center (WCC), Blackstone Valley Children's Place (BVCP), and Beginning Bridges CFCE are thrilled to announce the Annual Kids Fair, taking place on Saturday, March 28 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. This free event will be held at the Whitin Community Center, located at 60 Main Street, Whitinsville and promises a morning filled with activities, interactive learning, and excitement for kids and families alike.

The FREE Kids Fair is a celebration of fun, family, and community, featuring Informational Booths to learn about regional resources and programs for children and families. Enjoy tasty and nutritious treats to fuel the fun. Engage in activities and giveaways from interactive games to creative crafts, there's something for everyone! Last but certainly not least, enter to win a free bike! Don't miss your chance to take home this exciting prize!

Returning this year is the theme, "Passport to Healthy Communities," encouraging children and families to explore health and wellness in a fun and engaging way. With support from WCC's Blackstone Valley Children's Place (BVCP) and Beginning Bridges CFCE, the FREE Kids Fair highlights the importance of building a healthy, connected community.

"Ginny Alicea, WCC's BVCP Director, shared her en-

thusiasm: "The FREE Kids Fair is a fantastic opportunity to bring families from all over the Blackstone Valley together in a fun, supportive environment. It's all about creating connections, fostering wellness, and celebrating the vibrant community we're so proud to be part of."

This event is free and open to the public. Families are encouraged to join us for a memorable day of fun and learning at the Whitin Community Center, the Blackstone

Valley's most comprehensive family and recreation center. A very special thank you to our sponsors, UniBank, Koopman Lumber & Hardware, Gaudette Insurance Agency, and the Osterman Family Foundation.

For more information about the Kids Fair, please contact Ginny Alicea, BVCP Director at 508.234.8184 ext 105, contact Emily Murray at 508.278.5110, or visit www.WhitinCommunityCenter.com.

MIDSTATE TRAIL

continued from page 6

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 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 volumi-

nous 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 whirl-

wind 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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Financial Advisor Mark Freeman Focuses on Clients' Success

Financial advisor Mark Freeman enjoys getting to know his clients. His aim is to help them clarify their objectives and then, working as partners, to create a financial plan that achieves their goals.

"I love this career because I love helping people," said Freeman. "I work for my clients because I care about them."

A Certified Exit Planning Advisor (CEPA) working for Edward Jones at his 77 West Main St., Hopkinton office, Freeman offers financial advice to business owners and individuals.

I spend a lot of time getting to know my clients. We talk about their financial challenges, and their proposed solutions. Many times I find people are focused on the wrong problem," Freeman said.

A frequent problem is minimizing taxes. He noted many clients, while saving for retirement, inadvertently create, "a tax time bomb." Freeman explained, "If you invest in a diversified portfolio year after year and don't deal with taxes while saving, it could come back to bite you in retirement," in the form of large tax bills. For other clients, "once you establish some type of wealth, taxes become an important part of the discussion since the best way to increase wealth is by keeping more of it," said Freeman. He added, "Helping people avoid tax issues is a primary focus. I work hard to keep a client's money in their pockets and out of Uncle Sam's.

Another issue faced by many of Freeman's clients is being in a "job prison," working in a position they dislike because they feel they need the income. "But after reviewing their finances, we often find they can change careers or do something else," he said. Freeman noted he was in that same situation himself until he realized he could afford to change careers.

Freeman added, "I am also trying to make sure that my clients' money outlasts them." One of his first tasks when meeting a new client is to run an analysis of their finances to make sure their funds will support them for their lifetime.

With a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Freeman worked in two other industries before establishing his finance career in 2017. Even though his first two jobs were outside his training, Freeman said he was hired by Edward Jones, "one, because I have the ability to analyze data quickly and, two, because I always try to figure out a better way to do things. I bring those skills to my finance clients."

Freeman also tries to understand his clients' motivations. "When I propose a plan, I ask 'how do you feel about it.' If there is something bothering you, I need to fix that," he said.

Much as he partners with his clients, Freeman has developed relationships with the towns where he works and lives. Part of the Hopkinton business community, he has supported many local organizations and nonprofits.

Making their home in Holliston since 2005, he and his wife have raised their now college-aged twins in the town. Freeman currently volunteers as a business advisor for the Holliston High DECA Club, an international nonprofit organization that prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management.

Summing up his work objective and the relationship he has with clients, Freeman said, "My job is to understand what is important to you and figure out how to make it happen."

For more information call Freeman at 508-293-4017 or



email him at Mark.Freeman@EdwardJones.com.

I think you already have the correct photo and caption but here is the caption again: The team of financial advisor Mark Freeman and office administrator MaryKate Morin of Edward Jones in Hopkinton helps clients define their objectives and develop a plan to achieve those goals.

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The team of Financial Advisor Mark Freeman and Office Administrator MaryKate Morin of Edward Jones in Hopkinton helps clients define their objectives and develop a plan to achieve those goals.

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Transforming Biotech Curricula

BVT Students Benefit from Grant-Funded Tools

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) has been awarded a grant from the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) through its BioLEAP Classroom Grant program. The competitive grant allowed the school to purchase 10 life-size rat models for its Biotechnology program, eliminating the need for traditional animal dissection and equipping students with modern educational tools.

The male and female rat models are detailed anatomical replicas designed specifically for educational dissection. Each model features interchangeable reproductive systems, detachable organs—including the heart, lungs, liver, and intestines—and a numbered key to support student learning. These tools allow students to explore anatomy thoroughly without the use of real animals.

“The reusable models are cost-effective, humane, and easy to manage,” said BVT’s Biotechnology Instructor Zoë Army, M.S.

“Introducing our students to the accessible rat models allows them to gain early exposure to animal anatomy without the pressure of a full dissection. This approach supports student learning and engagement, while fostering curiosity in career paths where lab animals are important components.”

Fiona Comeau of Millbury, a sophomore in BVT’s Biotechnology program, recently used the model in class. She said, “I liked them a lot more than if we had an animal dissection, which I think is rather off-putting. I think we got a lot of useful information about identifying rat anatomy via the dissection model.”

“The dissection model made learning anatomy less stressful and more interactive, and it encouraged more discussion and participation,” said MacKenzie Moran of Grafton, also a Biotechnology sophomore. “I would recommend that we continue using them for future classes.”

As part of the grant agreement, recipients are required to submit a video of the models in use. This requirement created an opportunity to collaborate with students in BVT’s Multimedia Communications program, who are producing a professional video for NAVS highlighting the benefits of the grant-funded models.

Logan Didio of Upton, a senior in the program, assisted with video production. “It was exciting to be part of this grant-funded initiative and see how our multimedia skills support humane science education,” he said.

Joseph Bache of Hopedale, also a senior in Multimedia Communications, participated in planning and filming interviews with Biotechnology students. “It was a great experience attending meetings, selecting equipment, and preparing interview questions to clearly communicate the purpose of the grant while keeping students comfortable on camera,” he said. “We used a Canon cinema



Biotechnology Students (L-R): Ella Drumheller, Mackenzie Moran, and Fiona Comeau.

camera on a tripod, an external clip-on microphone for clean audio, headphones for sound monitoring, and LED lighting to ensure consistent, well-lit shots.”

“The on-camera interview gave me a chance to reflect on what I learned using the rat model and how it applied to our biotechnology work,” said Ella Drumheller of Douglas, a sophomore in the Biotechnology program. “The model reduced the anxiety of traditional dissection while building my confidence and understanding of rat

anatomy, which will support my future labs, animal-based co-ops, and science fair projects.”

Once completed, the video will be shared with NAVS and available on the school’s website.

The BioLEAP Classroom Grant is awarded by NAVS to help teachers purchase humane, non-animal models that replace the use of specimen dissection. The goal of the grant is to support excellence in science education without harming animals.

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 environ-

ment 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.

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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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First-Ever Active Agers Health Fair Held at Plummer Place

Plummer Place, Home of the Northbridge Senior Center, proudly hosted its first-ever Active Agers Health Fair, a community-focused event designed to empower older adults

with resources, screenings, and information to support healthy, vibrant living.

The event brought together local health professionals, wellness experts, and community organiza-

tions for a day dedicated to senior health and well-being. The Active Agers Health Fair featured: free health screenings and wellness checks, information on fitness, nutrition, and preventive care, local vendors specializing in senior services, and giveaways and free raffles.

Kelly Bol, Director of the Northbridge Senior Center, said "We were proud to host our first Active Agers Health Fair and to see such a strong turnout. Events like this showcase the power of collaboration and our shared commitment

to supporting older adults. By offering direct access to valuable health resources in one convenient location, our Active Agers Health Fair promoted proactive, informed approaches to aging well."

Program and Volunteer Coordinator, Amy Cowen, shared, "We were thrilled to see so many smiling faces, engaged conversations, and community connections being made. From informative vendors to fun activities and valuable resources, the energy in the room was amazing, and it was certainly clear that events like this truly

make a difference in the lives of our seniors and older adults! We look forward to building on this momentum in the future!"

Plummer Place extends its sincere thanks to the many volunteers, vendors, healthcare providers, and community organizations whose participation and support made the inaugural Active Agers Health Fair an overwhelming success!

For more information about future programs and events at Plummer Place, Home of the Northbridge Senior Center, please call (508) 234-2002.



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SPORTS

Uxbridge Girls Basketball

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTSWRITER

Last winter the Uxbridge girls' basketball team had one of their best seasons ever in terms of wins when the Spartans went 18-6, marking the most wins during any season. In the Division 3 State Tournament Uxbridge made it into the Round of 16 where unfortunately they had to tip off against the number one seed in Cathedral, where their season came to an end. Adding to the miraculous season, the Spartans would also capture the prestigious Clark Tournament.

At the time of this writing the Spartans were riding a three-game winning streak and sitting at 8-6 with a shot at returning to the State Tournament. Leading Uxbridge this winter has been senior Lola Grube and sophomore sensation Bronwyn LaChapelle.

Grube, a four-year player and two-year starter is the team's center and co-captain. Having begun her basketball career in the eighth grade, she feels that this year she has become much more

confident in her game and has gotten a lot stronger, which has led to her playing tough under the basket.

Although the Spartans endured a rough beginning to season, she feels the team is on the right track to making a run.

"Everyone is back now and we can now play our fast-paced game," she said. "I would really like to help get this team back to the Clark Tournament, where we beat Hopedale, and win it again this year. It was a really close game with an exciting finish."

According to coach John Gniadek, Grube has progressed incredibly over the past few years as a player.

"Lola has become a force inside while protecting the middle and grabbing rebounds for us," the coach said. "If she continues to stay aggressive on the boards and keep putting up [some points] we should be able to make another deep run."

Currently Grube is averaging 10 rebounds and 5 blocks for the Spartans and is considered the Human Eraser by her coach for



her play down low. Although a good basketball player, the senior truly excels as a softball player and will take her corner skills to the collegiate level to play Division 1 Softball at Central Connecticut.

While Grube is holding down the defensive side of the ball LaChapelle, only a sophomore but has been with the team since the eighth grade, is the team's point guard and has taking her game to the next level.

"She took over the starting point guard position this year, and I am confident when she has the ball in her hands," Gniadek said. "This year she has evolved into a complete player for us. Earlier in the year I needed her to score when we had some girls get injured; she did that and has continued to score for us."

The coach went on to say that

the young player has become clutch and has been able to close out a few games with her free-throw shooting to secure the wins.

As an AAU player with the Central Mass Fundamentals since the seventh grade, LaChapelle took that skill to the high school where she was just looking to fit in with the older girls.

"As an eighth grader I just wanted to fit into my role and contribute to the team," she said. "Now as a sophomore I feel more confident in my game and hope that I can help the team win as many games as we can to get back into the playoffs."

While making a run in the tournament last year was an amazing and fun environment for the sophomore she would also like to get back to the Clark Tournament.

"Having another opportunity to focus on playing in the Clark Tournament would be great and would love to have another chance at winning the girls small division again," LaChapelle said. "We had never won it until last year and that was big for Uxbridge. Now we want to do it again."

While she is all in for the Clark Tournament she is also looking to play her best basketball down the stretch so that the Spartans get back into the tournament. Along with her counterpart in Grube the duos is gearing up to play in the post-season one more time together and hoping that they can get further this year.

"We are focusing on playing our best so that we, as a strong team, can get back in the post-season and give it all we have to go far."

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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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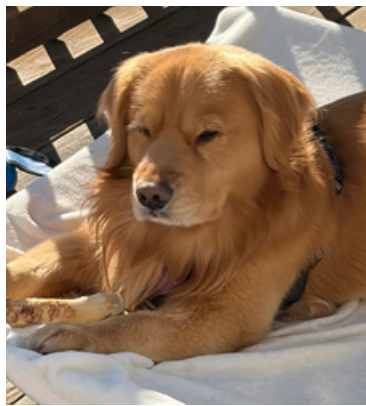
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LIVING WITH LUKE

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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 whole-

heartedly loves the cold and the snow. Sometimes I can't help but 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.

"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

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



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

Dogs, I've found, teach us about resilience, play, and good old-fashioned fun. Deep snow works wonders.

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

white. Unlike his spring excavations, there are no consequences now—no shredded lawn, no muddy craters, no mess to clean 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 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

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The Northbridge Historical Society

The Northbridge Historical Society will meet Monday, March 9, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. at the Singh Performance Center at Open Sky/Alternatives on Douglas Road.

The meeting will open with a short business meeting, led by Society President John W. Walker, Jr., and an update on the assessment by JVV Architects of our headquarters at the Fletcher House at One Elm Place with funding from the Town of Northbridge Community Janet Parnes of Historical Portrayals by Lady J. so entertained and informed the group in October that she is

back with Frances Perkins - part 2 as requested. Frances Perkins, a Worcester native, was FDR's Secretary of Labor and the Greendale Branch of the Worcester Public Library is named to honor her memory and accomplishments.

Frances, the first woman to serve in a U.S. Cabinet, spent twelve years dealing with Washington politics. Members and guests will learn the stories behind her trials, trip-ups, and triumphs during those years which encompassed the Depression, New Deal and World War II.

Topics will include the list

of demands Frances presented to Roosevelt before accepting the appointment: personal and professional repercussions of the Depression and World War II, Frances' largely unacknowledged role in developing New Deal programs such as Social Security,

unemployment insurance, forty-hour work week and minimum wage, her near impeachment, war refugee immigration issues, overwhelming family difficulties, gender bias, and more.

The program is open to the public and free of admission

charge. Funding for the presentation is provided through a grant from the Northbridge Cultural Council through the Massachusetts Cultural Council

LUKE

continued from page 22

were living inside our own snow 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 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 countdown.

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 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.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

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THE CAR DOCTOR jpaul@aanortheast.com

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.

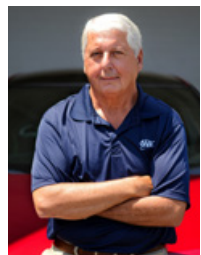
Q. My daughter brought her 2019 Subaru Crosstrek to the dealership for an oil change and a tire pressure light check. They came back with about \$1600 worth of work. I'm not questioning the integrity of the dealer but was wondering if the pricing seemed okay or if she could get it done more cheaply somewhere 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,



BY JOHN PAUL

CAR DOCTOR
 continued on page 25

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REAL ESTATE

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 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 correctly 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.

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.

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.

CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 24

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?

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

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 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



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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 friendsfauburnlibrary@gmail.com

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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/HAVING 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.

Somewhat 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 frightened 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.

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