

From petroleum to pollinators: Oxford project moves forward

BY RILEY FRANKIAN

A former gas station and town maintenance facility at 3 Barton Street in Oxford will soon be transformed into a pollinator park through a state-funded initiative aimed at improving climate resilience, supporting local wildlife, and creating new public green space.

The project, known as Petroleum to Pollinators, is a partnership between the Town of Oxford and Weston & Sampson and is funded through the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program. The proposed park on just over a quarter of an acre will feature native plantings, expanded tree canopy, stormwater management features, educational elements, and community gathering spaces.

According to Danielle Burney, Director of Communications for the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), the project stood out because it aligned closely with the goals of the MVP Program.

“The Town of Oxford’s Petroleum to Pollinators project embodies several of the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program’s core principles, which made it highly competitive for funding in both the FY25 and FY26 grant rounds,” Burney said.

The site will convert previous-



Photo by Martha Akstin

ly developed land into a public park designed to address multiple environmental challenges.

This effort is taking place to combat the decline of bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, which are critical to balancing ecosystems. According to the Xerces Society of Invertebrate Conservation, “of the foods and beverages that we consume daily,

over 30 percent rely on or benefit from a pollinator.”

With a lack of pollination, plants are unable to reproduce which not only decreases agricultural yields but also puts entire ecosystems at risk. Oxford’s polli-

POLLINATORS

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Auburn Town Manager Dori Vecchio: A year in review

BY JANET STOICA
jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com

“Customer service is our top priority, and it always will be,” said Dori Vecchio, Auburn town manager. “Our residents are our customers, and we are here for them.”

Vecchio then described a situation where she and other town personnel visited a resident’s backyard. The land was close to I-290 and the traffic drone was almost deafening, which impacted the neighborhood’s quality of life. After the town contacted the Mass. Department of Transportation, fencing was to be installed to help minimize the constant traffic noise.

Auburn residents who have concerns such as potholes, road hazards, streetlight outages, illegal dumping, graffiti, or overgrown vegetation or downed tree branches are encouraged to register and contact the town through the 311 site www.seeclickfix.com.

Vecchio described how the Assistant Town Manager Paul

Dell’Aquila works with the Planning and Land Use Developer Rose Russell to improve current and new business experiences. This department’s motto is “How Can We Say Yes?” The department’s goal is to have flexibility with all current, new, and poten-



tial businesses in town.

One of her proudest moments was seeing the completion of Camp Gleason for community

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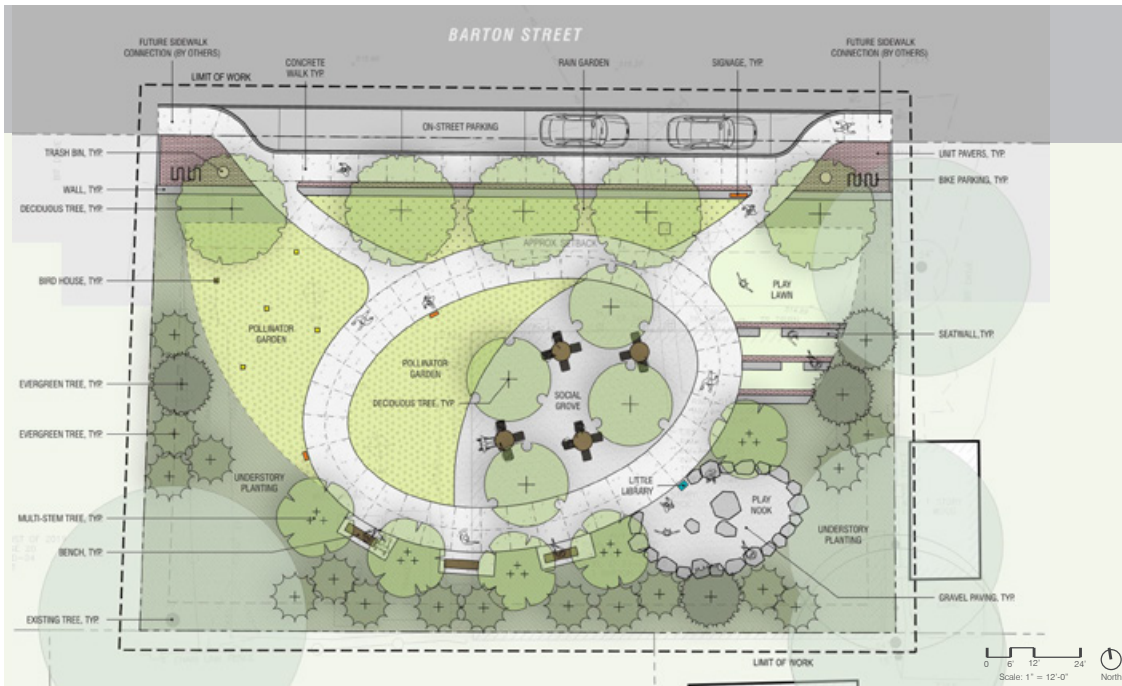
nator park will create a habitat for numerous pollinators and include new shrubs, trees, and perennial plantings that will help to reduce

Justice Neighborhood as “a group within a certain geographic location that experiences disproportionate environmental harms and risks and may share certain socioeconomic conditions.”

Community feedback has

final design, permitting, and continue outreach with residents.

Burney said projects such as Oxford’s pollinator park are an example for how communities can use nature-based solutions to address long-term climate



heat, improve air quality, and manage stormwater runoff.

“The project will transform a former gas station into a public park in an Environmental Justice neighborhood,” Burney said. “The project was designed in partnership with neighborhood residents to create a space that supports connections to nature and to one another.”

The State Climate Policy Dashboard defines an Environmental

played a significant role in shaping the park’s design, with residents expressing support for native plantings, pollinator habitat, educational features, seating areas, and a natural aesthetic.

Oxford received an MVP Action Grant totaling \$206,100 in Fiscal Year 2025 to fund the park’s site assessments, surveying, preliminary design work, and community engagement efforts. Additional funding was set aside in Fiscal Year 2026 to complete

concerns while improving quality of life for residents.

“Over the next five to 10 years, we hope communities will continue to implement and learn from projects like this one, incorporating opportunities to restore and integrate nature into the built environment,” Burney said. “These efforts can help cre-

POLLINATORS

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Oxford Farmers’ Market returns to the Common

BY JANET STOICA
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It’s back! One of the finest farmers’ markets returned to Oxford Common on June 19 and continues monthly on July 17, August 21, September 18, and October 16 from 2-6 p.m.

Main Street you’ve seen his work. Just beautiful.” She explained that Yacino postpones his appearance if it rains as that is “not the environment for his type of creations.”

There will be plenty of other activities for attendees to enjoy such as live music, children’s face painting, glitter tattoos, and balloons.

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There are themes for each of these family-friendly events which highlight the freshest vegetables, fruits, meats (such as chicken, beef, and port), eggs, maple syrup, flowers, seedlings, and floral bouquets. In addition, food trucks sell barbecue, ice cream, and other delicious offerings.

Event Coordinator Debi Ammenheuser has organized the fun event for the past three years. “We usually have about 20 vendors or so,” said Ammenheuser. “We’re still reaching out for new vendors and we’re currently looking for a cheese purveyor, that type of creamery would be a great addition to our offerings.”

She explained that while the market is agriculture based and is certified by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, talented local artisans offer stained glass, soy candles and other unique items, which give the site depth.

One of the market’s artists, Wayne Yacino, is a local wood carver whose creations focus on bird and nature carvings. “He carves on the spot,” said Ammenheuser, “and if you’ve ever walked or driven by the Oxford Library on

She hopes a local dance studio will perform at some of the markets, as they did last year.

Themes include a Fairy Day, a Berry Patriotic Day (creative displays of strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries), Dog Days of Summer, First Responders Salute, and a Happy Halloween fest.

The July 17 market will include a 250th Anniversary theme with a militia group joining the crowds. A pet resort will set up a Doggie Photo Booth for picture opportunities at the August Dog Days market. The September First Responders’ celebration will proudly feature the town’s police and fire department personnel and equipment.

“We’re looking forward to having our first responders making their presence known,” said Ammenheuser. “And in October, our last market will feature kids in their Halloween costumes, pumpkin painting, and bubble wands.”

Ammenheuser encourages potential vendors to contact the Oxford Community Center at 508-987-6002 if you would like to join this year’s farmers’ market.

VECCHIO

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use. At its ribbon cutting in October 2025, Vecchio said it was “a symbol of Auburn’s commitment to preserving our history, investing in our future, and building spaces that bring the community together.”

Another major goal that the town manager accomplished was developing strong relationships with the town’s unions. She called on her background in human resources to finalize nine, three-year contracts without legal assistance, which saved the town thousands in legal costs.

The new fire station project was begun under the former town manager, and a groundbreaking was held on June 4. “This building will provide a state-of-the-art facility for our fire personnel with room for future expansion. It’s all very motivating and encouraging for everyone involved,” said Vecchio, “and since funding was part of our town’s debt exclusion, that was very important, too.”

With feedback from town residents, Goddard Park was completed with new walkways, lighting, and benches. The original missile had broken apart and was given to Worcester’s Eco-tarium for display.

The town also installed a new

electronic payroll system and an electronic purchase order practice, resulting in additional savings by going paperless. “These new systems created new efficiencies for us, a huge help,” Vecchio stated.

She described the new budget and accounting system that was put in place to oversee departmental requests. “Now we are using actual prior expenditures from previous years as well as year-to-date numbers,” said Vecchio. Department heads submit requests, which are reviewed and justified at budget meetings. These are then delivered to the town manager for review where recommendations are made to the finance committee and select-board.

“It all makes for more transparency and an entirely new budget process,” said Vecchio. The town’s 2027-2028 budget is \$91,832,000, which was passed at its recent town meeting.

Vecchio stated, “I will only make a decision that’s good for the Town of Auburn. I am proud and humbled to be the town manager of Auburn. Although we have accomplished a lot in the past year, we still have much work to do. I look forward to this next year and all the challenges and triumphs it may bring.”

Community partners help local resident regain independence

The Oxford Lions Club partnered with other organizations to help one local resident regain her independence. Through a community-wide effort, funding was secured to provide life-changing adaptive vehicle modifications.

Since December 2019, Jenna Santos has lived with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), a condition that limited the use of her right leg and left her believing she might never drive again. While a Cecropia Strong grant helped her learn to use adaptive driving equipment, the cost of modifying a vehicle remained a significant barrier.

Funding for the project was made possible through a Lions Clubs International Foundation District Community Impact Grant and support from the Webster Lions Club, Oxford Lions Club, L&L Concrete, Webster/Dudley Veterans Council, DAV Chapter 53, Webster PAV, and Webster VFW.

Advance Wheels of Oxford completed the vehicle adaptations, allowing Santos to return to driving.

The project serves as a powerful example of how Lions Clubs help



their communities by identifying local needs and bringing together grants, businesses, organizations, and volunteers to create meaningful change. Through the combined efforts of community partners and dedicated Lions members, what once seemed impossible became a

reality for one local resident. “Because of your generosity, I have regained my independence, reconnected with my social life, and taken a major step toward returning to work. Thank you for giving me my freedom and my future back,” said Santos.

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Let your imagination run wild

BY MARTHA AKSTIN



From left: Branch reminds Nichole to choose a book at the Oxford Public Library; Trooper Kane, K-9 Branch, and members of the Oxford Police Department; Mass State Police Trooper Mike Kane, Library Director Brittany McDougal Bialy, and MSP K-9 Branch. Photos submitted



Massachusetts State Police Trooper Mike Kane and his K-9 Branch joined the kick-off party for the summer reading program at the Oxford Free Public Library on June 17.

Members of the Oxford Police Department including newly appointed Chief Jeromy Grniet also joined the party. OPD is helping to encourage summer reading: every child who checks out a book during the program will be eligible

for a chance to take a ride in an Oxford police cruiser and tour the department at a later date.

Branch wanted children to realize how the doors to your imagination are opened when you open the cover of a book.

If you could not make the party on the 17th but want to join the program, stop by the library. Staff are excited to show you how to register.



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SOUR GRAPES by Tim Jones

Panel 1: A woman with blonde hair is talking to a dog. She says, "YOU KNOW, AESOP, I THINK I'M A PRETTY CLASSY GUY. I'VE GOT GOOD MANNERS AND I CONDUCT MYSELF VERY WELL..."

Panel 2: The woman asks, "YOU SURE ABOUT THAT?"

Panel 3: The dog replies, "FOR INSTANCE, I DON'T USE FOUL LANGUAGE OR ANY SORT OF PROFANITY."

Panel 4: The woman says, "I SWEAR." The dog barks "Snack!" and the woman says "I SWEAR." The dog barks "Snack!" again.

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Managing risk at different stages of life



Catherine Harrington
Financial Advisor

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As an investor, you will always need to deal with risk of some kind. How can you manage the risk that accompanies the volatility of the financial markets? The answer depends somewhat on where you are in life.

When you're starting out ... If you're early in your career, with perhaps four or five decades until you retire, you can likely afford to invest primarily for growth, which also means you'll be taking on a higher level of risk – because risk and reward are positively correlated. But, given your age, you will have time to overcome the market downturns that are both inevitable and a normal part of investing. Still, even at this stage, being over-aggressive can be costly.

When you're in the "middle stages" ... At this time of your life, you're possibly well along in your career and working on at least a couple of financial goals, such as saving for retirement and your children's college education. You'll want to begin adjusting the balance in your portfolio between assets with higher growth and those with lower growth since there

will be progressively less time to rebuild losses. You'll need to decide on the balance between risk and growth that's right for you.

When you're a few years from retirement ... You may have already achieved some key goals – perhaps your children have finished college and you've paid off your mortgage. As a result, you may have more money available to put away for retirement. Growth still matters because your retirement could be 25 or 30 years long, and you'll need investments that can keep up with inflation. But you'll also need investments designed to help provide for your income needs in retirement and provide more stability. Also consider reducing your exposure to higher-risk investments and instead consider investing more in stable dividend-paying stocks, government and investment-grade bonds, and cash.

When you're retired ... Once you're retired, you might think you should take no risks at all with substantial assets held in cash. However, you could spend two or three decades in retirement, so you may need some growth potential in your portfolio to stay ahead of inflation. A more balanced mix between equities and fixed income is generally appropriate. Establishing a withdrawal rate that's appropriate for your lifestyle and projected longevity can help reduce the risk of outliving your money. Of course, if there's an extended market downturn during any time of your retirement, you may want to temporarily lower your withdrawal rate.

Managing investment risk is a lifelong process that evolves with your goals, responsibilities and time horizon. While you'll look for balance among your investments based on your life stage, having a balanced and diversified portfolio doesn't fully

protect against a loss. Still, aligning your strategy with your stage of life can help navigate market volatility and stay on track toward long-term success while avoiding emotional investment decisions. The key is staying informed and making intelligent choices that reflect your current income needs and future aspirations.

Personalized financial guidance starts with a simple conversation. Contact Catherine to get started!

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MIIA grant updates Oxford Fire/EMS facility

The Town of Oxford was awarded a \$10,000 risk management grant from the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA), the town's property and casualty insurance provider. These monies were used to support the replacement of deteriorated water lines that have placed Fire/EMS apparatus and specialty equipment at risk.

The funding allowed the town to expedite replacement of a failed fire suppression system water line and sprinkler heads above the garage bay at Fire/EMS Headquarters. The work helped to ensure reliable fire protection and reduced the risk of water damage to vehicles and equipment stored in the facility.

"This grant funding has allowed us to protect and safeguard the public safety assets that help keep our residents and businesses safe," said Justin Leduc, acting Oxford town manager.

Now in its 24th year, MIIA's FY2026 risk management grant program has awarded a total

of \$1 million to 146 members to support risk management practices and projects that help protect employees, buildings, infrastructure, and other public assets.

"This grant program is about helping members take practical steps to reduce risk and strengthen resilience," said Stan Corcoran, senior executive and MIIA executive vice president. "We are pleased to support Oxford's efforts to protect critical emergency response equipment, reduce property risk, and strengthen facility safety."

MIIA is a membership service of the Massachusetts Municipal Association. As a mission-driven, member-led nonprofit, MIIA focuses on providing Massachusetts municipalities and other governmental entities with insurance coverage alternatives, quality risk management, and wellness programs.



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Etiquette express: Making everyday interactions better

BY LEE-ANN BARKHOUSE

June is a season of new beginnings.

Across our communities, tiny kindergarten graduates proudly cross the stage, middle school students prepare for new adventures, high school seniors take their first steps toward adulthood, and college graduates launch into careers and opportunities that await them.

No matter the age, graduation is more than a ceremony. It is a milestone that marks growth, perseverance, and the start of a new chapter.

For graduates, this season often brings a mix of excitement, anticipation, uncertainty, and hope. While some people have a clear plan for what comes next, many do not, and that is perfectly okay.

One of the greatest lessons we learn in life is that our journeys rarely follow a straight line.

The world is filled with possibilities. Some opportunities arrive exactly as planned. Others appear when we least expect them. Be open to learning, exploring, and discovering what brings you joy and purpose.

As you move into your next chapter, be patient with yourself. New routines, unfamiliar environments, and changing responsibilities can feel uncomfortable at first. Growth often begins with uncertainty. Give yourself permission to learn, adjust, and find your footing.

For parents, grandparents, family members, mentors, and friends, graduation is a time of both celebration and reflection. We take pride in the accomplishments of those we love while

recognizing that a new journey is about to begin. It is a reminder to savor life's milestones, cherish the memories, and embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.

This graduation season, take a moment to celebrate how far you've come and embrace the opportunities that await in your next chapter. Whether you are receiving a diploma, cheering from the audience, or supporting someone you love, remember that every ending creates the opportunity for a new beginning.

Congratulations to the Class of 2026 and to graduates of every age! Your next chapter is waiting to be written.

Q. I am attending a graduation party for my friend's child, but I do not know the graduate very well. What is an appropriate gift?

A. Cash and gift cards are always appreciated because they allow the graduate to purchase what they need most. If you prefer something more personal, consider a journal, a quality pen, a book on personal growth or etiquette, or another practical item they can use as they begin their next chapter. Thoughtful and useful gifts are always appreciated

Q. My child's friends are graduating. Do I need to buy gifts for all of them?

A. No. There is no expectation that you purchase gifts for every graduate you know. It is perfectly acceptable to give gifts only to those with whom you or your family have a close relationship. A heartfelt card and sincere congratula-

tions are always meaningful.

Q. I am unable to attend a graduation party. Should I still send a gift?

A. A gift is not required if you cannot attend. Sending a congratulatory card is a thoughtful way to acknowledge the graduate's achievement. If you are particularly close to the graduate or family, you may choose to send a gift, though it is not expected.

Q. Is it acceptable to attend a graduation party without bringing a gift?

A. Yes. While many guests choose to bring a gift or card, your presence and good wishes are what matter most. Never allow concerns about a gift to prevent you from celebrating someone's accomplishment.

Q. What should I write in a graduation card?

A. Keep it simple and sincere. Share your congratulations, express your confidence in the graduate, and offer encouragement for the future. A few heartfelt words often mean more than a lengthy message.

Etiquette Tip of the Month

When congratulating a graduate, make it personal. A sincere message highlighting a strength, accomplishment, or positive quality is often remembered long after the gifts are opened.

Warm regards,
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 U (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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POLLINATORS

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ate healthier, more resilient places where people live, work, and play while building a stronger foundation for long-term climate adaptation.”

Once completed, town officials hope the park will serve as both a community destination and a demonstration of how underutilized properties can be repurposed to address environmental challenges.

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Art in the Yard transforms the library's front lawn

BY MARTHA AKSTIN

Eight sculptures seemed to sprout overnight in front of the Oxford Free Public Library the week of June 15.

"This will be our ninth annual Art in the Yard," explained Brittany McDougal Bialy, the library's director. Live music, an artist demonstration, and refreshments accompanied the exhibit's opening on June 20.

Gloria Hall, who initiated Worcester's popular Art in the Park, is the public call administrator for Art in the Yard. "Gloria does all the legwork," said McDougal Bialy, "and I'm very grateful for her."

Hall puts out a call for submissions in February with an April 1 deadline. The library's trustees and McDougal Bialy then review the 20-30 entries and make their final selections by mid-April.

This year the artists are Chelsea Bradway of Southborough, Jose Criollo of Worcester, Shelby Davis of Oxford, David Skora of New Hartford CT, Brendan Stecchini of Belchertown, Scott Strader of Lee, and Eric Troffkin of Grosse Pointe Park, MI.

After spending the summer and fall in Oxford, the sculptures will be dismantled and returned to their homes the first week of December. Sponsored by the Oxford Cultural Council and the Tast Charitable Fund, this perennial art exhibit has become a town favorite.



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SPORTS

Auburn girls' golf team: a solid core on the links

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Last spring the Auburn girls' golf team went 8-2-2 playing as an independent team after the Southern Worcester County League disbanded. This year Auburn played in the Central Mass Athletic Conference (CMAC) in the Central West North division with seven other teams. The Rockets added three more games to their schedule and concluded the season with an impressive 11-3-1 record.

The top three teams in the division move on to the sectionals and unfortunately both years Auburn finished in fourth place. Last year the Rockets were five strokes off the pace of third place and this year they were 18 strokes away.

Despite not playing in the sectionals, Coach Dave Cutler believes his team is built on a solid core of athletes, including the depth behind the top six.

Junior Sabrina Cooper, who picked up the game of golf a mere five or six years earlier, has been teeing off as the team's top golfer. According to Cutler, Cooper is a natural athlete who achieves a good game on the links while maintaining her composure and focus. Cooper shot in the low 40s this season.

Right behind Cooper is Molly Grandazzo, a three-year player who was the coach's go-to when he first arrived at Auburn.

"Last year as a junior when I first took over this team she was someone who would help me get things to the other girls," he said. "She was a steady player, the leader of the team. Prior to this season she decided to take her game to the next level before entering her senior year. She signed up to play in more tournaments and has been shooting in the low- to mid-40s."



Auburn girls' golf team. Photo submitted

Sophomore Alyssa Bonneau found herself in the third spot. She dedicated herself during the off season by getting a pass to the Blackstone Country Club to work on her game.

The fourth through sixth spots are interchangeable with Ava Rocheford, Ava Herrie and Callie Guertin. Rocheford made the biggest jump this spring, working steadily to make herself a much

better golfer.

Cutler calls Herrie "Mighty Mouse" due to her small stature, but she brings a perfect swing to the golf course, while Guertin has brought a lot of experience to the team this year.

"As a coach I have learned that one through six doesn't always matter where they play. More importantly, it's who they play with," Cutler said. "You need to make

In addition to the top six, Cutler has three other athletes who worked their way into the starting lineup. Senior Reece Leonard is a consistent player who accepted her role as an alternate this year. Leighton Romano and Sofia Dziubisk are freshmen who are learning how the varsity game works.


"They are still young so I tried to pair them up with different golfers so they can learn," the coach said. "Pace of play, not rushing, and how to score are some things they're picking up. I also want them to know putts are more important than drives."

With this season in the books, Cutler said goodbye to Grandazzo, Guertin and Leonard, his three seniors. Although the coach has a handful of replacements, he is going to recruit for next spring. Cutler said he will look for athletes who participate in other sports, but who may play golf on the side.

Having Cooper, Bonneau, Rocheford and Herrie coming back next year will give the Rockets a solid top four to try to push their way into the top three to get to the sectionals.

"Next year will be pretty much the same," Cutler said. "Staying with 15 matches seems to be a good number, especially playing in the spring when you never know how the weather will affect you over the first few weeks of the season."

With Cutler's guidance, Auburn will be looking to take their game to the next level while working hard during the off-season to be able to move up in the league and hopefully advance into post-season play.




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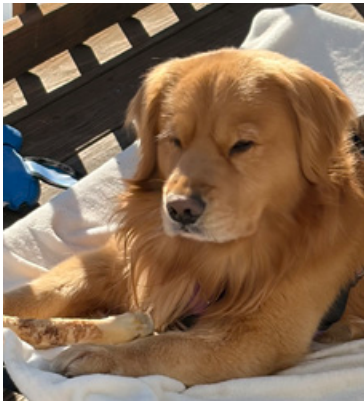
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LIVING WITH LUKE

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The moments we choose to keep

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Spring has officially arrived, and Luke is feeling it.

He announces the season with bold grandeur—shedding the cocoon of his blankets and bursting into the yard as if he’s been personally invited by the sun. Within seconds, he’s airborne in spirit if not in fact, tearing across the grass with the unmistakable swagger of James Brown.

“I feel good,” I imagine him singing. “You knew that I would.”

He tests the edges of the yard like a seasoned explorer, sprinting just shy of the boundary line, flirting with freedom but never quite crossing it. And just when I think he’s finished, he doubles back for more.

“Excuse me while I christen the grass with my extraordinary scent.”

He lowers his head to the grass and smears the grass with the side of his face. The result is equal parts impressive and foolish. Then he shakes the earth from his head and stares up at me. “Need something?”

“Luke,” I answer with a jangle of his leash. “Let’s go for a walk.”

He stops instantly. For a brief, hopeful second, I think I’ve won. Then his eyes narrow with the defiance of a confident Golden. “Freedom!”

Aretha Franklin channels in.

He darts toward the far edge of the yard and reappears with a Frisbee clamped triumphantly in his mouth.

“You’d rather play?” I try. “Okay. Drop it for mummy to throw.”

Somewhere in the background of my mind, my to-do list flickers to life—emails unanswered, errands undone, the quiet pressure



of a day already spoken for. Time, suddenly, feels accounted for.

“I dare you,” Luke seems to reply, leaning just out of reach.

My lower back offers another perspective. Enough of this. You’re too darn old.

“Mummy’s not going to play if you can’t drop it,” I tell him, extending an arm for a final scoop. “Give me the Frisbee, please.”

He considers my tone. Then, with perfect comedic timing, turns his head away.

Negotiations have ended.

I know this game—tug-of-war, keep-away, a test of endurance I didn’t sign up for today. I do the practical thing. I go inside.

From the bay window, I watch him. At first, he pauses, as if registering my absence. But it doesn’t take long. He lowers the Frisbee, paws at it, flips it, digs around it—transforming a nine-dollar toy into an entire universe of possibility. A new game blooms like a June rose. The writer in me considers potential titles: Bury-and-rescue? The improvisation of Joy?

Clearly, he doesn’t need me for this game.

And yet.

Standing there, separated by glass and intention, I feel the small, unmistakable weight of the choice I’ve made. Independence is a good thing—his and mine.



The list matters. The day moves forward whether I join him or not.

But watching him—fully absorbed, wholly present, asking nothing more of the moment than to live inside it—I begin to question my math.

Of all the tasks waiting for me, none feel quite as immediate as the one I declined.

The list will still be there when I return.

But this version of Luke—the one who believes spring is something to celebrate at full speed—won’t wait forever.

I step back outside, take the Frisbee from his eager mouth, and send it sailing—watching it rise and arc through the open air like a small, bright permission slip, reminding me that sometimes the highest things we throw are the moments we choose to keep.

Write to Amy – amyleclaire@hotmail.com

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REAL ESTATE

Did you try to buy a home last year but end up pressing pause?

Maybe you couldn't find a home that really fit your needs. Or maybe the ones you liked just weren't affordable. Those were the top two reasons



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

buyers gave up on their search in 2025. But this Spring, there's one trend that could help fix both of those frustration points: more homes are hitting the market. The number of fresh listings. Data shows there are nearly 2x as many new listings hitting the market today as there were just 3 months ago. Those are homes the seller just put up for sale.

This is a significant rise, and while we usually see an uptick as we head into the busiest time of the year, this increase was bigger than normal. New listings jumped 21.2% from February to 439,000, a larger-than-typical seasonal surge. March typically sees the biggest month-over-month jump in new listings of the entire buying season, averaging an 18% increase since 2017; this year it exceeded 20%. That means more sellers are jumping back into the market, and that's giving buyers more fresh options to choose from. So, if you feel like you have seen everything out there and still nothing was quite right, this may be your moment. With that many "just listed" homes, one of them could be exactly what you've been searching for. This trend is happening across most of the country, so you should have more options pretty much wherever you are.

Earlier this year, the Northeast had fewer new listings because winter storms delayed sellers from putting their homes on the market. But now, that region is catching up fast. In March, new listings jumped across nearly every state, especially in the Northeast, helping drive a strong national rebound.

What rising inventory means for you. Right now, there are almost a million homes for sale nationwide. That's up over 8% compared to last year. With that many homes on the market, there's a much better chance something will fit what you're looking for, especially with so many new options being added right now. One of the most encouraging signals heading into the spring home-buying season is the improvement in for-sale inventory levels compared with last year... More homes on the market give buyers greater choice

and, combined with improved buying power, expand the range of homes they can realistically consider.

More fresh listings are hitting the market right now, and that's creating real opportunity. If you put your search on hold last year, this Spring may be the time to

jump back in. Connect with a member of The Marzeotti Group or a trusted local real estate agent to see what's newly available in your area.



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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Blowing hot air, best tools, and the lowdown on gas additives

BY JOHN PAUL

Q. My wife's 2007 Honda Civic was blowing hot air when the A/C was turned on. I purchased a 12-ounce can of R134a refrigerant and recharged the system. It is working fine right now. However, this car's A/C was also recharged last year by my mechanic. How long should refrigerant normally last? I have never recharged my 2009 Volkswagen Jetta. I'm thinking there may be a leak in the Civic's air-conditioning system. Your thoughts?

A. There was a time, many years ago, when recharging an air-conditioning system every few years was fairly common. Today, because systems are much better sealed, some vehicles — like

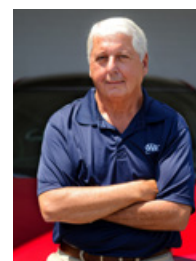
your 17-year-old Volkswagen — may never need refrigerant added. If your Civic needed refrigerant again after only a year, there is likely a slow leak somewhere in the system. Topping off the refrigerant will usually restore cooling temporarily, but eventually the system will become low enough that performance drops off again. Keep in mind that adding refriger-

ant can temporarily restore cooling if the system is low, but overcharging can also damage the system. At that point, have the system professionally checked for leaks. Common sources include leaking hoses, O-ring seals, condensers or compressor shaft seals.

can also help keep injectors and combustion chambers cleaner over time.

Q. My car's check-engine light is on. What should I do first?

A. Start with the basics and make sure the gas cap is tight. A loose or faulty gas cap is a common reason for a check-engine light. If the light is flashing, get the vehicle to a repair shop as soon as possible. A flashing check-engine light typically indicates an engine misfire that can quickly damage the catalytic converter. If the light is on steadily, have the computer scanned for diagnostic trouble codes. The code itself does not always identify the exact failed part, but it points a technician in the right direction. Some auto-parts stores will scan the codes free of charge and may even provide a basic AI-assisted diagnosis.



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I watch a lot of DIY videos and notice some people carry knives, multi-tools or mini pliers. What do you — or did you — keep in your pocket?

A. Although a bit geeky, for years I carried a pocket protector with a Phillips/flat-head combination screwdriver, flashlight, tire-pressure gauge and a decent-quality pen. Today, I usually carry a small pocketknife and keep a multi-tool nearby. Lately, it has been the TRUE Titanium Pocket Multi-Tool. For lighting, I replaced my old Streamlight with an OLight ArkPro Flashlight. It is compact, rechargeable and very bright. It also features a green laser pointer, which is handy for pointing out issues on cars without touching them, plus a UV light that can help track leaks when fluorescent dye is added to the system.

Q. Are gas additives to clean injectors necessary or recommended? I see lots of mixed answers. We have a 2024 Toyota RAV4 Hybrid that we really like and plan to keep for a long time, so I want to do right by it. If injector cleaners are worthwhile, what ingredient should I look for?

A. Based on testing I have seen over the years, using a fuel-injector cleaner periodically does make sense. In fact, some vehicle manufacturers now include injector-cleaning service as part of regular maintenance. For something like your Toyota hybrid, using a cleaner two or three times a year is reasonable. My preferred product is Chevron Techron because it contains polyetheramine (PEA), which is an effective combustion-chamber and injector cleaner. Using gasoline from stations listed at Top Tier Gasoline

Q. About two or three months ago, my son received notice that his 2004 Dodge Ram pickup has a faulty airbag that needs to be replaced immediately. The notice said the truck is dangerous to drive and should be parked until repaired. My son has called the number on the recall notice several times and left messages, but no one has responded. He also contacted a dealer who said he would order the part and call back, but he heard nothing. The truck has only 60,000 miles, is in good condition and is registered and insured. It really needs to be back on the road.

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 13



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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

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Five questions that could change how you see your retirement

Saving for retirement is important, but it's only part of the picture. If you're within five to 10 years of your target retirement date, it's time to start thinking about what you actually want your retirement to look like. After all, getting to retirement isn't the end



BY DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

goal — it's what you want to do once you're there that matters. Start by asking yourself these five questions.

When do you want to retire?

The age at which you retire matters more than you may realize. Retiring early sounds appealing, but it means saving more and having less time to do it. It can also create gaps in health care coverage and income before key benefits kick in. For example, Social Security benefits can begin at 62, but at a reduced amount. Full benefits are available between ages 66 and 67, depending on birth year, and waiting until

70 means the maximum benefit. Medicare doesn't start until age 65, and penalty-free withdrawals from retirement accounts generally aren't allowed until age 59½.

For couples, timing gets even more complicated. Staggering retirement dates can sometimes maximize benefits; in other cases, retiring at the same time works better.

A financial advisor can help you sort through these decisions and find the approach that makes the most sense for your situation.

How do you want to spend your time in retirement?

Many new retirees are surprised to find that having unlimited free time feels disorienting rather than freeing. Thinking ahead about how to fill the days with meaningful activity — whether that's travel, volunteering, pursuing hobbies or spending more time with family — can make the transition smoother.

It helps to sketch out what a typical week, month or even first year might look like. If there are big gaps, it's worth thinking now about what might fill them in rewarding ways.

Where do you want to live as a retiree? Some retirees stay put, while others downsize or relocate entirely. Either way, it's wise to consider whether a chosen location will work well as you get older, taking into account factors like proximity to family, access to health care, cost of living and climate.

What will your retirement lifestyle cost? It's not uncommon for retirees to discover that their travel, entertainment or leisure expenses were higher than expected. The more active and involved you plan to be, the more you will likely need to budget.

Does your retirement involve giving back?

Retirement often brings both the time and motivation to be more generous. Whether the goal is helping family members, donating to charity or volunteering in the community, it's worth defining those goals and building them into an overall plan.

Now that your vision is taking shape, turn it into a plan. Work with your financial advisor to align your savings with the life you want — and revisit that plan as your priorities evolve so your retirement

keeps pace with you.

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

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CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 12

AThis is especially frustrating when there is a “do not drive” warning and no one follows up. I would escalate the issue directly through Stellantis. The company has a dedicated number for “Stop-Drive” advisory notices: 833-585-0144. I would also contact multiple dealers instead of relying on just one. In addition, it would be worthwhile filing a complaint with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). This is a federally tracked safety issue, and the manufacturer is legally required to remedy the safety recall.

QI have a new Honda CR-V, and my neighbor has a small boat that I am interested in buying. The boat, motor and trailer weigh about 2,500 pounds. Can I tow it with my Honda?

AMost Honda CR-Vs have a towing capacity of 1000-1,500 pounds. Your CR-V may be able to tow that amount of weight, but it exceeds the vehicle's rated towing capacity and is not recommended. The concern is not just engine power. The bigger issues are the cooling system, transmission durability and, most importantly, braking capability. A CR-V can generally handle towing a Jet Ski, lightweight utility trailer or small camping trailer, but a 2,500-pound boat package is sim-

ply beyond what the vehicle was designed to tow safely.

TOPOGRAPH



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SATURDAY, JULY 18

- Northbridge Annual Fireworks Show. (Rain date July 19) Gates open at 5 p.m. Celebrate our nation's 250th birthday with an evening of music, activities, food and a spectacular fireworks display at Northbridge Middle School in Whitinsville.
- Come and celebrate America's 250th with St. Patrick's Parish, 7 East Street, Whitinsville on Saturday, July 18th from 5pm - 9pm. They will be serving dynamites and ice-cold beer prior to the Northbridge fireworks! The menu will also include hot dogs, chips, soft drinks, and treats. Take-out options will also be available. FMI 508-234-5656. Payment by cash or VENMO. The rain date for this

event is July 19th.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15

- The Whitin Community Center (WCC) is excited to invite all automotive enthusiasts and families alike to celebrate the 12th Anniversary of our highly anticipated "Cars In The Park" event. Join us for a day of automotive excellence and community fun from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the picturesque 7.5 acre Whitin Park, located at 60 Main St., Whitinsville. This year's Cars In The Park promises an unforgettable showcase of classic and contemporary cars, trucks, and motorcycles. Participants can vie for the prestigious Best In Show title and 25 other trophy categories, People's Choice

Auburn's Summer in the Park Concerts

The Summer in the Park Concert Series takes place at the Riley-Pappas Performance Pavilion at the Dr. Arthur and Dr. Martha Pappas Recreation Complex at 203.5 Pakachoag St. in Auburn.

Performances during the summer are on Thursday nights from 6-8 p.m. Rain dates are for the following Tuesday from 6-8 p.m.

2026 Concert Listing, July - September

- July 9 - Boys Gone Wild (80's Rock Tribute)
- July 16 - The Brat Pack (80's Tribute)
- July 23 - XS Band (Motown to Top 40)
- July 30 - She's Busy (Classic Rock)
- August 6 - Dock 10 (70's and 80's)
- August 13 - Below Deck (Yacht Rock)
- August 20 - 4EverFab (Beatle's Tribute)
- August 27 - Aquanett (80's Rock)
- September 3 - Petty Larceny (Tom Petty Tribute)

Award, with the first 100 registered vehicles again this year receiving exclusive Show Dash Plaques and Goodie Bags. The event will also feature a selection of food trucks, exhibit vendors, a 50/50 raffle, and live entertainment, ensuring a fun-filled day for the entire family. Entry is complimentary for all spectators, making it the perfect summer outing. Last year's event had a turnout of over 300 cars! Vehicle owners are encouraged to register early and take advantage of a special \$10 donation fee before July 15th, after which the registration donation will increase to \$20. Pre-registration closes on August 12, 2026. Registration for vehicles is available online at www.WhitinCommunityCenter.com, in-person at our Member Services Desk, or on the

day of the event. Additionally, we are now welcoming applications from exhibit and food vendors looking to be part of this exciting event. Funds raised during Cars In The Park will directly support the Whitin Community Center's mission as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to enhancing the health, well-being, and community spirit of the Blackstone Valley. For more information on vehicle and vendor registration, volunteering, or any other inquiries, please visit our website or contact Tammy Bodwell, Director of Operations, at Tammy.Bodwell@OurGym.org or call 508-234-8184 ext 118.

American Legion

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AUGUST 13 - JEDIAH
AUGUST 20 - STEPHEN GEORGE
AUGUST 27 - INTERSTELLAR
SEPTEMBER 3 - TONY GARCIA
SEPTEMBER 10 - JEDIAH
SEPTEMBER 17 - MISSY MAXFIELD
SEPTEMBER 24 - STEFAN COUTURE
OCTOBER 1 - TONY GARCIA

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JULY 10

COMEDY NIGHT AT SLATERS
FEATURING CHRISTINE HURLEY
SPECIAL GUEST JAMES DORSEY
HOSTED BY DAMEN SPERANZA
JULY 31

FOR RESERVATIONS, EVENT TICKETS, AND MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.SAMUELSLATERS.COM MASSACHUSETTS VISITMA.COM

The Historical Conjurer: 18th Century Magic Show at the Samuel Slater Experience

Step back into history for a one-of-a-kind experience of magic, illusion and mystery. The Samuel Slater Experience will be hosting a historical magic show by award-winning Professor D.R. Schreiber, the Historical Conjurer, on Friday, July 3rd, 2026 at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$16 per person.

As the Historical Conjurer, Professor D.R. Schreiber evokes the spirit of early magical performances and brings parlor magic back to the public. In the 18th century, conjuring (as magic was called then) emerged as a genuine art form and entertainment. Known as "professors of natural philosophy", magicians would rent taverns, legitimate theaters or lecture halls for the exhibition and displays of legerdemain, necromancy, or what would today be called "illusion" and "magic tricks." Top dollar would be paid by the citizens of Europe to see the latest discoveries in the science of "natural philosophy" presented by these conjurers. Today, Professor D.R. Schreiber presents an historic look at the beginnings of modern magic in his performances and exhibitions. Professor D.R. Schreiber leads his audiences on a stroll through the past centuries of conjuring entertainment. His unique presentations entertain while educating the audience about historical events, literary and cultural figures, and the science and art of conjuring.

The Samuel Slater Experience will be closing at 2:30 p.m. on July 3, to accommodate this special performance. Please purchase tickets online, at the box office, or by calling 508-461-2955. Buy both museum admission for Friday, June 3 and performance tickets for a discount. Email admin@samuel SlaterExperience.org with any questions. The performance will be held at the Samuel Slater Experience, 31 Ray Street, Webster, MA.

TALES FROM BEYOND

tomdagostino.com

Rachel Burton of Manchester, Vermont

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The New England vampire scare that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is widely known in some parts of the region. Public awareness of this strange time in New England history has grown with books, documentaries, movies on the subject. Some historians claim the panic and its related attempts to curtail the creatures of the night took place even into the twentieth century.

The first known recorded vampire case occurred in Willington, Connecticut in 1784. The case of Rachel Burton of Manchester, Vermont, took place nine years later and is one of the earliest recorded cases in the region.

In 1789, Captain Isaac Burton married Rachel Harris. She was a strikingly beautiful woman with a charming personality. About a year into their marriage, her health began to rapidly decline, and she grew more ill with each passing day. She was soon diagnosed with consumption (tuberculosis), which took her to her grave.

Within a short time following Rachel's death, the captain married

his second wife, Hulda Powell. She, too, was a good-looking woman with an affable nature. Soon, however, Hulda began to show symptoms of the same dreaded affliction that took Isaac's first wife. Hulda's strength and vigor were waning fast, and something had to be done without delay.

It was then that a strange belief took hold of the family and friends of Captain Burton. Based on other stories they had heard, they concluded that the first wife was coming back from the grave and feeding on the lifeblood of Hulda. Perhaps it was revenge for the captain remarrying so quickly, or it was, more likely, the work of a vampire. The word vampire was not used at the time. The dead were not thought to rise from the grave in the dark bowers of the night. It was their spirit or ghost that would leave the tomb and prey upon the living, then return to nourish the body that lay in repose. As long as the body remained in whole within its grave, the spirit would continue to make its nightly rounds.

The townsfolk feared that it was Rachel's spirit that was leaving the tomb and feeding upon Hulda before returning to the grave each

morning. Family and friends pleaded that Rachel's corpse must be disinterred and her vitals removed, then burned. This ritual, already practiced in a few other places in New England, would surely exorcise the demon that wreaked havoc upon the Burton family.

In February 1793, residents gathered at Rachel's grave and began the task of ridding the family of its vampire. Rachel had been buried for three years when she was disinterred. It is reported that almost 1,000 people showed up for the gruesome event. Her vitals were cut out and taken to the forge of blacksmith Jacob Mead, where they were reduced to ash. Timothy Mead, Jacob's minister brother, blessed the remains in an attempt to purge the demon that was sucking the life from Hulda. This form of medicine did not work, unfortunately, as Hulda succumbed to the dreaded consumption on September 6, 1793.

In many similar cases around New England, the sick were given a concoction of medicine mixed with the ashes of the cremated organs. It is not recorded whether Hulda was administered such a potion

to imbibe. Folklore and superstition played a vital part in the fear that gripped New England during this period. There was no cure for consumption, so when medicine failed, superstition took over, and several practices of exorcising sus-

pected vampires became common.

The ways of the New England vampire were strange, but not nearly as strange as the cures carried out in hopes of eradicating their deadly "bite."



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