



Sergeant Keith Gasco receives a significant honor

The Millbury Police Department is recognizing a significant honor bestowed upon one of its own.

Sergeant Keith Gasco of the Millbury Police Department was formally cited by the Massachusetts House of Representatives in recognition of his heroic actions following a February 2026 incident while serving with the CEMLEC SWAT Team.

The citation was presented to Sgt. Gasco during the Board of Selectmen meeting on Tuesday, February 26, where town officials and attendees formally recognized his service and sacrifice.

The citation serves as an acknowledgment from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts of Sgt. Gasco's bravery, resilience, and unwavering commitment to duty under extreme circumstances.

The Millbury Police Department extends its appreciation to Sgt. Gasco for his dedicated service, as well as to all law enforcement officers who continue to place themselves in harm's way in the line of duty to protect their communities.

Photo: Millbury Police Department Facebook page.



Sutton schools prepare for August 26 return; community service opportunities available for students

BY BRITTANY AMALFI

Before we know it, summer will be over, and school will be back in session! Students across Sutton Public Schools will head back to the classroom on Tuesday, Aug. 26, as the district prepares to welcome families for the start of the new school year.

Classes will resume at Sutton Elementary School, Sutton Middle School, Sutton High School, and the Simonian Center for Early Learning. School officials encourage families to review district communications and prepare for a smooth transition as students return for the 2026-27 academic year.

However, some students already got a jump-start on the new academic year! Back in June, Sutton students were already taking advantage of educational opportunities. Students who were currently enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) Biology, as well as those enrolled in AP Biology or AP Chemistry for the upcoming school year, visited Clark University for a



hands-on science field trip.

During the visit, students toured the university's campus, including its science building and laboratory facilities. They participated in a laboratory exercise that involved purifying a glowing protein derived from jellyfish, giving them firsthand experience with techniques used in biological research.

The day also featured interactive learning outside the lab. Students enjoyed lunch before using various milk products and liquid nitrogen to make ice cream, exploring how ingredients affect texture. The visit concluded with an introduction to Clark University, where students learned about the school's history, admissions process, and the importance of developing the communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills needed for success in college and future careers, particularly in the sciences.

Residents interested in keeping up with student achievements, school events, concerts, athletic programs, and other activities can visit the Sutton High School YouTube channel (@SuttonMemorialHighSchool), where the district regularly shares videos and updates from throughout the

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SUTTON

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The Third Annual Hometown Heroes/ Local Legends Concert

On Saturday, August 8, South Grafton's Mill Villages Park will be the site of the 3rd annual "Hometown Heroes/ Local Legends" concert, produced by Bob Jordan.

This year's headliners will be THE CONVERSATION, playing instrumental Jazz. The group

Patrons are encouraged to bring their own refreshments and chairs, etc. A limited number of shaded seats at the tables under the pavilion are available.

The concert runs from 2:30-5:30 p.m and is located at 61 Main St-Rte 122A in South Grafton.

The program is made possible with support from the Grafton Cultural Council and the Mass Cultural Council, with additional support from Homefield Credit Union of Grafton.

For more information, contact Bob Jordan at magundi@live.com or by phone at 508 8731767.

features Grafton residents guitarist Mitch Seidman and bassist Jerry Wilfong, with Kelly Clark joining as a guest saxophonist.

Also appearing are "Banjo Joe" Kuras and singer-guitarist Bob Jordan. The free concert showcases Grafton-based talent and has become an informal reunion of Grafton High School Alumni and their families with a special appeal to seniors.

Please note, music is the only attraction at this event. No vendors and no refreshments will be sold.

Town of Sutton early in-person voting

The early in-person voting for the September 1, 2026 State Primary Election will be held at the Municipal Center, 4 Uxbridge Road during the following hours:

- Saturday, Aug. 22: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Monday, Aug. 24: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Tuesday, Aug. 25: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Wednesday, Aug. 26: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Thursday, Aug. 27: 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- Friday, Aug. 28: 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

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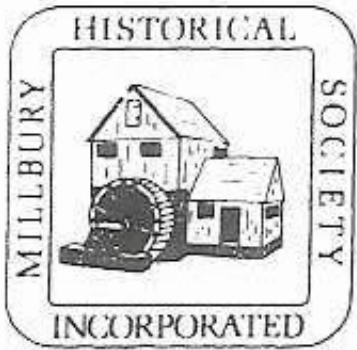
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The Museum of the Millbury Historical Society is open on Thursday, August 20

The Museum of the Millbury Historical Society will be open on Thursday, August 20, from 4-6 p.m. at the Asa Waters Mansion, and this coincides with the Farmers' Market being held outside, downstairs. Come in and see the new Millbury Police History Exhibit!

SUTTON

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school year.

As students begin planning



community service activities for the fall, the Sutton Senior Center is also seeking volunteers to assist local seniors with seasonal outdoor

chores. Opportunities include raking leaves, general yard work, snow shoveling, and snow plowing during the winter months.

The volunteer program is an excellent opportunity for students

participating in the National Honor Society, Student Council, Community Service Learning

Club, as well as anyone looking to give back while earning community service hours.

Students interested in volunteering or families seeking additional information are encouraged to contact Jeannine Crawford at the Sutton Senior Center by calling 508-234-0703.

The program provides valuable assistance to older residents while fostering intergenerational connections and encouraging civic engagement among Sutton's youth.

With the first day of school just weeks away, staff and students are looking forward to another successful academic year that will offer many opportunities for students to stay involved in the community while excelling in the classroom.

Photos: Sutton Memorial High School Facebook Page

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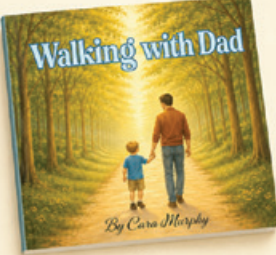
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Cara Murphy

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Geared for connection, this short & sweet bedtime story will surely become a family favorite.

AGES 1-5



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Grafton Fire Department puts on Big Truck Day at Millbury St. School on June 20!

Photos: From the Grafton Fire Department Facebook Page



BLACKSTONE VALLEY Xpress

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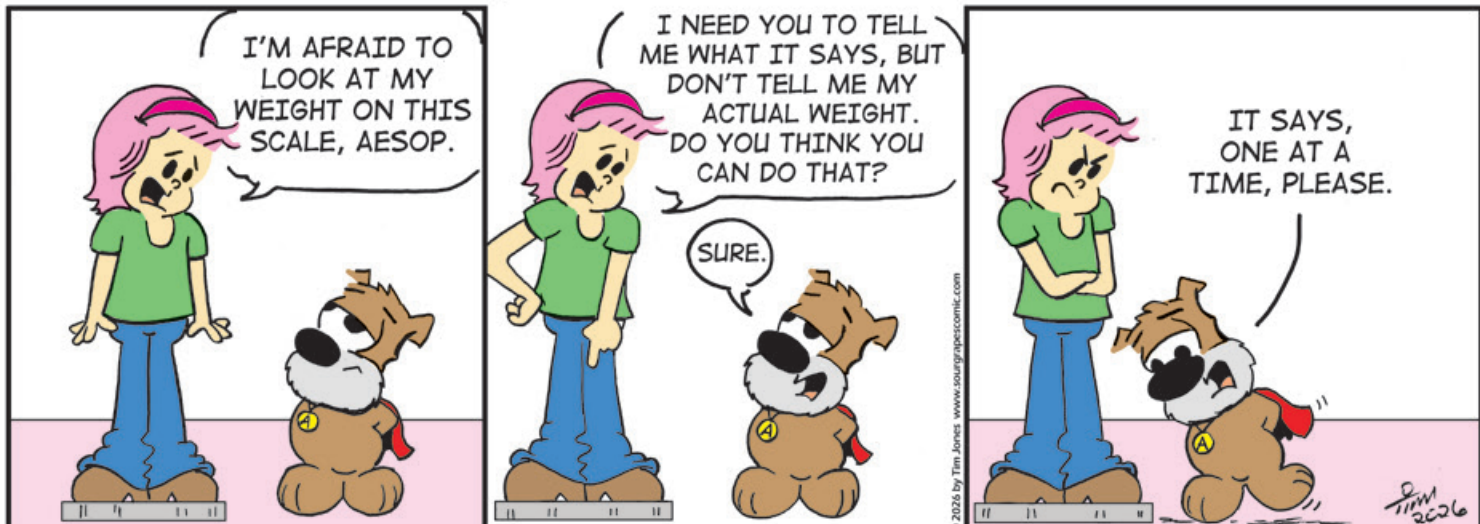
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by Tim Jones



Small habits help shape a stronger financial future



Jamie DeCaire

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Financial security doesn't have to come from a big salary, a lucky investment or some dramatic turning point. For most people, wealth is built more simply, through small habits repeated many times over.

If you're like many young people, you may feel you don't have enough money to start investing. The reality is that you're in a great position to build the small habits that will help you create lasting wealth.

Here are five tips to help you get started.

1. Automate savings before you spend. One of the most powerful financial habits you can build is among the easiest. Set up an automatic transfer such as by contributing to an employer retirement plan or exploring if you can direct part of your paycheck to a savings or investment account.

This helps remove the temptation to spend that money instead of saving it. Even setting aside 1% to 5% of your income can help build momentum over time.

2. Watch the small stuff. It's easy to dismiss a \$15-a-month streaming service or a \$6 coffee twice a week. But those small purchases add up. Forgotten subscriptions, food delivery fees and impulse buys can quietly drain your bank account.

"Just \$25 a week, if invested well, can grow into the thousands in a few short years." Scan your recurring charges regularly, cancel what you don't use and put that money to work instead.

3. Don't let your lifestyle outpace your income. When you get a raise or bonus, it's tempting to upgrade your apartment, car or everyday spending. This "lifestyle creep" can be a significant hindrance to building wealth.

Here's an alternate approach: Every time your income goes up, increase your savings rate before anything else. Even saving half of a raise while spending the rest puts you ahead.

4. Start now, even imperfectly. Don't wait to start investing. Even if you can only set aside a small amount each month, do it. Starting just five to 10 years earlier can result in significantly more wealth down the line, even if the early contributions are small, thanks to compounding.

Compounding means your contributions earn interest, and even that interest earns interest. Over decades, that snowball effect can make a world of difference.

5. Stay aware, not obsessed. You don't necessarily need to track every dollar you spend.

But you do need to be aware of your money habits. A quick weekly or monthly check-in on your accounts, spending patterns and progress toward savings goals can help you catch problems early.

Financial awareness also means protecting what you build. An emergency fund covering three to six months of total expenses keeps one bad month from becoming a financial crisis. Avoiding high-interest debt does the same. These defensive habits make everything else possible.

Your financial future likely won't be shaped by one big decision. Instead, it will prob-

ably be built by small choices you make every day. And the best time to start making good choices is now.

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There are plenty of reasons to call a junk removal service. Maybe walking through your basement has gotten difficult or there is no more room in the attic? Perhaps you are planning to move, and you need to declutter before your open house?

Figuring out who to call can be challenging. If you contact one of the big haulers, they route you to a phone center where they've never even heard of your town, plus their pricing seems vague and full of extra fees. No wonder you've let the stuff pile up—it's too much of a hassle to get rid of it!

Or you can call Affordable Junk Removal and let a local small business with deep community roots take care of everything.

Jay Schadler started his business in 2005. Back then, it was just him and a beat-up pickup truck taking small jobs and working nights and weekends when he could. As the years rolled on, his business grew, but his commitment to customer service never wavered. Now he's got a staff of ten, along with eight trucks, servicing eastern and central Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island.

Affordable Junk Removal specializes in house and estate cleanouts. If your garage, attic, or office is overflowing with stuff, take back your space and let the pros do the heavy lifting.

Jay and his team have handled it all. They've dismantled above-ground pools, hauled away ancient

Business spotlight

hot tubs, taken down old fencing, and stripped away worn carpeting. They'll come for a single item, or they'll clean out an entire house. And they can take almost anything. They can't accept hazardous materials, brush, dirt, or concrete, but everything else is fair game for them to take away.

Not everything ends up in a landfill—not if Jay can help it. He first tries to either recycle or donate items. Only after he tries to repurpose items do they end up at



the transfer station.

Working with Affordable Junk Removal is simple. First, you can load stuff yourself if you want by renting a 15-cubic-yard dumpster for a week and chucking up to a ton of your unwanted stuff. If you need to get rid of more weight, then Jay prorates that tonnage—you never pay for what you don't use.

If you don't want to be bothered with the dumpster, they've also got a driveway special where they'll take away a truckload of your unwanted things if you pile it up. Or if you don't want to lift a finger, then you can point at the items, and the team will fill up their truck and haul away your unwanted things. However you do it, you're left with more space and more peace of mind.

Jay and his team beat the big waste haulers on both price and customer service. When you call Affordable Junk Removal, you aren't connected to an anonymous call center. Your phone call goes right to Jay.

And speaking of pricing, Jay is upfront about it. His website shows the truck sizes and prices, so you can save time knowing your costs before you call for an

appointment. There aren't any hidden costs or surprise fees with Affordable Junk Removal.

Affordable Junk Removal is fully licensed and fully insured, and they'll treat your property with care and respect.

They also have a thriving commercial business, working with contractors and roofers to clear away debris and keep the job site clean. They can even handle commercial and residential emergencies with same-day service.

Jay and his family are deeply involved in the community. He and his wife, Christine, run the Corner Market restaurant in Holliston. It's not uncommon for someone to reach Jay at the restaurant, order a sandwich, and then schedule a junk removal appointment. Yes, the local small business really can handle everything!

Contact Affordable Junk Removal and Dumpster Rental and let a local small business take care of everything for you. Call Jay Schadler at (774) 287-1133 or visit us online at AffordableJunkRemoval.com.

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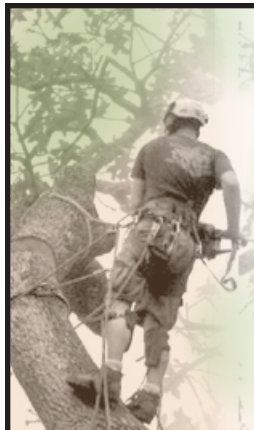




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BY LEE-ANN BARKHOUSE

Customer Service Begins with Connection.

In today's digital world, we can order almost anything online, check ourselves out at the grocery store, and communicate with the tap of a screen. While technology has made life more convenient, it has also made genuine human connection more valuable than ever.

Whether you're greeting a customer, answering a phone, serving a meal, or helping someone find what they need, every interaction leaves an impression. People may forget exactly what was said, but they'll remember exactly how you made them feel.

Customer service isn't just about completing a transaction. It's about building relationships, earning trust, and creating an experience that makes someone want to return. You never know when today's customer may become tomorrow's client, business partner, employer, or friend. Our paths have a way of crossing again.

Being mindful of your words, your body language, your tone, and even your facial expressions can make all the difference. A smile, a warm greeting, or simply acknowledging someone when they walk through the door costs nothing yet can completely change someone's day.

Here are a few etiquette questions I have recently received about customer service and everyday interactions.

Q. I work in customer service. What are the biggest etiquette mistakes employees make without realizing it?

A. Often it's not what we say, but what we communicate without words. Failing to acknowledge someone who walks in, avoiding eye contact, appearing distracted, or looking inconvenienced can leave a lasting impression. Great customer service begins with self-awareness. Be present. Smile. Make eye contact. Remember that every customer deserves to feel seen, welcomed, and valued.

Q. I often see children roughhousing in stores while their parents are shopping. Is it my place to say something?

A. Unless someone is in immediate danger or you're responsible for the store, it's usually best not to intervene. If

safety is a concern, quietly notify an employee. Parents, however, have a wonderful opportunity to teach children how to behave respectfully in public. Those lessons build confidence, consideration, and respect for others.

Q. Someone introduced themselves by saying, "Hi, I'm Ellen," but never asked my name. Should I introduce myself anyway?

A. Absolutely. A simple, "Nice to meet you, Ellen. I'm Lee-Ann," keeps the conversation comfortable and helps build rapport. Never hesitate to introduce yourself. It's a small gesture that often opens the door to a meaningful connection.

Q. I walked into a small business and felt like I was interrupting the owner. They weren't very welcoming and were actually very rude. Should I take it personally?

A. Probably not. We all have difficult days, and you never know what someone may be dealing with. Extend a little grace. At the same time, remember that first impressions matter. If a business consistently makes customers feel unwelcome, it's perfectly reasonable to choose to shop elsewhere.

Q. I was verbally invited to a casual cookout. Do I need to RSVP?

A. Yes. Casual doesn't mean inconsiderate. Your host still needs to plan for food, seating, and supplies. A quick text or phone call to let them know whether you'll attend is always appreciated.

Q. I interviewed for a position that would require me to relocate across the country. I haven't heard anything. Should I follow up?

A. Yes. If a hiring timeline was provided, wait until after that date. If not, a follow-up about a week after your interview is appropriate. Thank them again for the opportunity, express your continued interest, and politely ask if they have an update. If you don't hear back, one additional follow-up a week or two later is perfectly acceptable. After that, let the process unfold.

ETIQUETTE TIP OF THE MONTH

People may not remember every conversation they have with you, but they'll remember how you made them feel. Whether you're the customer or the person providing the service, choose to leave others feeling welcomed, respected, and appreciated. Courtesy is contagious, and it often comes back to us when we least expect it.

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 the founder of Invest in U, where she helps individuals and organizations build confidence, professionalism, and meaningful connections. She is a certified etiquette trainer, board-certified health & wellness coach, and workshop facilitator who inspires people to communicate with confidence, strengthen relationships, and show up as their best selves. Learn more at www.investinuma.com

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Celebrate community pride with first-ever Grafton Day event

The Town of Grafton invites residents and families to come together for a new summer tradition celebrating community spirit, the start of the new school year, and pride in the town. Grafton Recreation will host its first-ever Grafton Day on Friday, August 21, from 4 to 8 p.m., featuring an evening filled with fun activities, entertainment, and community fun. The event will feature a variety of attractions for all ages, including a car show, inflatable activities, food trucks, a beer-and-wine

garden at GCTV, free giveaways, games, and additional surprises throughout the evening. The inaugural Grafton Day car show will be a free, welcoming event open to all types of vehicles. Organizers say the show is designed as a friendly gathering for car enthusiasts and community members, with no formal awards or judging — just a chance to show off unique vehicles and enjoy a fun competition among neighbors. Grafton is excited to offer a brand new family fun event this

summer to celebrate the start of a new school year and the pride everyone has for their town. The event is presented by Homefield Credit Union and supported by Jackie Crawford-Ross, Realtor; Tony's Automotive Service LLC; Lincoln Precision Machining; and Mathnasium of Auburn. Residents are encouraged to follow Grafton Recreation's event page for updates and additional details as the celebration approaches.

Millbury Public Library events

Cribbage Club: Every Thursday from 6:00-7:30 p.m.
Story Time: Every Wednesday from 10:30-11:30 a.m.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
Foam Party! 4:00-5:00 p.m.
Pokémon Club: 6:00-7:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5
Flower Blossom Soaps: 6:00-7:00 p.m.

The Millbury Writers' Society: 6:00-7:45 p.m.
Dungeons & Dragons for Adults: 6:00-8:00 p.m.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 11
Welcome to Kindergarten Storytime: 6:00-7:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12
The Blackstone Poets Society: 6:00-7:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19
The Millbury Writers' Society: 6:00-7:45 p.m.

MONDAY, AUGUST 24
Adult Book Club: 4:00-5:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26
The Blackstone Poets Society: 6:00-7:30 p.m.

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Town of Grafton named a recipient of the 2026 SMILE Mass Floating Beach Wheelchair Grant

The Town of Grafton has been named one of six New England Communities to be awarded a 2026 SMILE Mass Floating Beach Wheelchair Grant. This grant will provide the community with a floating beach wheelchair at Silver Lake Beach to increase accessibility. Small Miracles in Life Exist (SMILE Mass) is a 501(c)(3)

non-profit organization that is dedicated to helping children and adults with disabilities enjoy happy and healthy experiences through education, vacation, and recreation. Since the inception of this program, SMILE Mass has donated more than 180 floating beach wheelchairs to public beaches and ponds across New England. This initiative was pursued by the Grafton Recreation Department under the direction of Adam Lapointe, Recreation Director. When asked about being named a recipient of the grant, and what it means to the Rec Department, he stated: "This is another great step in our continued efforts to promote inclusion and accessibility in our programs and spaces around town." Lotte Diomede, Founder and President of SMILE Mass, stated that Grafton's application was selected "because of our community's commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and ensuring that individuals of all abilities have the opportunity to enjoy our community's natural resources."

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BVT students earn 132 medals at SkillsUSA Competitions in 2025-26

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) students demonstrated their vocational-technical abilities at the SkillsUSA National Leadership & Skills Conference (NLSC), held June 1-5 in Atlanta. The annual event is the world's largest gathering of career and technical education students and highlights the critical role of career-ready skills.

The national conference marked the third and final stage of the SkillsUSA competition series. BVT students earned five bronze medals, while contestants who earned medals or met a threshold score for their event were also awarded skill point certificates representing achievement in demonstrating proficiency and workplace readiness.

"Our students welcome the opportunity to compete against themselves and other highly skilled students at the SkillsUSA district, state, and national championships," said Superintendent-Director Anthony E. Steele II. "During the 2025-26 school year, our students proved their technical skills are among the best in the country by earning 132 medals at all three levels."

The following BVT students placed among the top 30 competitors at the 2026 SkillsUSA National Leadership and Skills Conference. Additional information is available at www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/skillsusa.

BLACKSTONE

4TH Place: Hunter Savard and James Thibault, Additive Manufacturing.

DOUGLAS

Bronze: Devin Drumheller, Mechatronics.

GRAFTON

Bronze: Robert Lazo, Mechatronics.
24th Place: Caroline Brown, Advertising Design.

HOPEDALE

Bronze: Ella Foster, Career Pathways Showcase Engineering.

MILFORD

National Voting Delegate: Maria De Oliveira, also the outgoing Western Region Vice President.
13th Place: Emily Kee, Health Occupations Portfolio.
15th Place: Dominic Quintino, Cyber Security.

MILLBURY

Bronze: Allison Garden, Career Pathways Showcase Engineering.
26th Place: Jonathan Tremblay, Diesel Equipment Technology.

NORTHBRIDGE

5th Place: Autumn Gromelski, Restaurant Service.
15th Place: Tarek Bensellam, Cyber Security.

UPTON

State Officer Elect: Madison Denise, also a National Voting Delegate.

UXBRIDGE

Bronze: Gabrielle Gannon, Career Pathways Showcase Engineering.

About Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT):

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School serves the towns of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Mill-

bury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge. Located in the heart of the Blackstone Valley, BVT creates a positive learning community that prepares students for personal and professional suc-

cess in an internationally competitive society through a fusion of rigorous vocational, technical, and academic skills.



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 - Stay off phones while supervising
- BEFORE YOU SWIM**
 - Ensure gates and fences are secure
 - Remove toys from the pool when not in use
 - Check that rescue equipment is available
- IN THE WATER**
 - Walk, don't run on pool decks
 - Never dive into shallow water
 - Follow posted pool rules
 - Learn basic swimming and water safety skills
- EXTRA PROTECTION**
 - Consider U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets for inexperienced swimmers
 - Learn CPR and emergency response

LAKE SAFETY

- KNOW BEFORE YOU GO**
 - Check weather conditions and water quality advisories
 - Swim in designated swimming areas
 - Watch for changing water depths
- STAY ALERT**
 - Be aware of currents, drop-offs, rocks, and underwater hazards
 - Avoid swimming alone
 - Stay close to shore if you're not a strong swimmer
- BOAT & DOCK SAFETY**
 - Wear a life jacket when boating, kayaking, paddleboarding, or fishing
 - Never dive from docks into unknown water depths
- WEATHER SAFETY**
 - Get out of the water immediately if:
 - Thunder is heard
 - Lightning is seen
 - Severe weather approaches
 - Wait 30 minutes after the last thunder clap before returning to the water.

BEAT THE HEAT

- Drink plenty of water
- Apply SPF 30+ sunscreen and reapply every 2 hours
- Wear sunglasses and seek shade during peak sun hours

HYDRATION

- Drink water before, during, and after swimming.
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SPORTS

Millbury High School's softball pitcher exceeds all accomplishments

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

As a three-sport athlete, Brielle Brothers remembers playing town softball as early as she possibly could, and it wasn't too long after that she hooked up with a club team. Playing softball was something that she really enjoyed, especially when she was pitching.

"I got involved with pitching at a young age because it was a position that was involved in every play," the Millbury resident said. "Pitching allowed me to be engaged throughout the game. It was around the seventh grade when I began taking pitching lessons (with St Paul's Amy Lee), and my confidence began to grow."

Upon entering Millbury High School, Brothers was hoping to



have success in the circle for the Woolies.

"I just wanted to have a .500 record, nothing crazy," she said. "That year I had 99 strikeouts and hit .300 while the team made the Sweet 16."

The near-100-strikeout campaign put the young pitcher on the path to becoming a powerful force in the circle. Completing her senior season with Millbury, Brothers fanned 225 batters, shattering the school's single-season record of 153 strikeouts set by Abbie Gilbert in 2018. The 225 K's concluded her career with 667 strikeouts, breaking Jodi Cronin's 1989 record of 464 career strikeouts. Against Bay Path earlier in the year, Brothers struck out 19, breaking yet another Millbury school record. While she was just looking to help the team, Brothers never expected to accomplish as much as she did in her

high school pitching career.

"That was something that I never thought about, never mind accomplish so much pitching," the Millbury pitcher said. "The strikeout record was a huge accomplishment, but I never had any thoughts of breaking any type of school records, but to have 667 strikeouts makes me happy and

proud because I put so many hours into it."

Despite having etched her name into the Millbury record books, Brothers is very hard on herself when she doesn't have success.

"When I allow a hit to the seventh, eighth or ninth hitter, it lowers my confidence, and I need to regroup and focus on hitting my spots," she said. "I don't consider myself one of the best pitchers, but I do work hard."

In addition to her success pitching for the Woolies, Brothers also had herself an overall phenomenal senior campaign. The senior hurler batted .526 with four home runs (Millbury had only one other home run from the rest of the team), had 26 RBI, and ended her career with 155 hits.

"She didn't have any home runs previously," Millbury Coach Kim Cadrin said. "Her batting really came through this year, and with her pitching sometimes she was a



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Tiffany George named Massachusetts TERT Central Region Telecommunicator of the Year

The Sutton Police Department is proud to congratulate Dispatcher Tiffany George on being named the Massachusetts TERT Central Region Telecommunicator of the Year.

During the 2025–2026 season, Dispatcher George responded to four live deployments in Nashoba, Uxbridge, Acton, and Littleton. Since becoming a member of the Massachusetts Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT), she has responded to five deployment requests, providing critical communications support to agencies and communities across



the Commonwealth.

Dispatcher George's enthusiasm, reliability, and unwavering commitment to serving both her home agency and communities throughout Massachusetts make her an outstanding representative of the TERT team.

The Sutton Police Department congratulates Dispatcher George on this well-deserved recognition and thanks her for her continued dedication and service.

Photo: Sutton Police Facebook Page

SPORTS

continued from page 10

one-woman show."

With high school now in the rearview mirror, Brothers hopes to take her skills to the next level, but it wasn't that long ago that she first realized she had a special talent.

"My jump from my freshman to my sophomore season was unbelievable," she said. "I had more strikeouts, fewer walks, hits, and runs scored on me my sophomore year, and I realized that my talent could possibly allow me to play college softball."

The Millbury pitcher was just about to commit to Clark University to play softball when she got a last-minute call from the College of the Holy Cross. The Worcester school was at the top of the psychology majors' colleges to

attend, but she never thought that she'd get in.

Although she will now be attending Holy Cross come September, she will not be playing softball for the Crusaders right away.

"Softball was something that didn't come with the package. I'll have to try to play for the club team the first year," Brothers said. "Then I'll start introducing myself to the coach and go from there and hopefully walk on my sophomore year."

When college is all said and done, about four years down the road, the Millbury native would like to become a coach in the Millbury youth program to give back while staying connected to her town.

Photos submitted by Brielle Brothers





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Nikki Erskine Appointed Director

ValleyCAST, the arts and culture arm of Open Sky Community Services, today announced the appointment of Nikki Erskine as Director following the upcoming retirement of Director of Community Outreach Cristi Collari.

Erskine has over two decades of experience in arts administration, marketing, and event planning to support independent artists and accessible cultural programming. As Director, she will spearhead arts and gallery administration, event management, community engagement, grants, and communications for ValleyCAST. Through collaboration with local partners and creators, Erskine will aim to further sustain and expand the region's diverse cultural opportunities.

David Wolfe has been appointed to the position of Coordinator, and will support Erskine with community outreach, arts programming, and event management to connect the Blackstone Valley with the arts. He has nearly a decade of experience working with nonprofit, community-focused organizations as a graphic designer and communications specialist.

In her nearly two-decade tenure at ValleyCAST, Collari served as an Artist-in-Residence and in various administrative roles, ultimately taking the reins as Director in 2015. She consistently prioritized art as a pathway to inclusion, expanding gallery exhibits, diversifying the summer concert series, and launching community initiatives like the Whitin Mill Mural Project and the Freestyle Weaving Studio.

“We hope the community will join us to celebrate Cristi’s legacy and send her off in style,” said Erskine. “Taking the helm of ValleyCAST, with its rich history of breaking down bar-

riers through the arts, is truly a privilege. I'm looking forward to meeting our neighbors, collaborating with local creators, and finding new, accessible ways to bring people together – starting with a great night of art and live music!”

Collari's final event as Director of Community Outreach will be held on Thursday, June 25, 2026, at Alternatives' Whitin Mill. From 5 to 8 p.m., ValleyCAST will welcome the general public for a gallery reception and kick-off to its summer music series:

INFORMAL – an art exhibit running through August 20, 2026, at the Spaulding R. Aldrich Heritage Gallery, will feature the works of a wood sculptor, a metal sculptor, and two painters: Michael Bourque, Nathan Bourque, Madeleine Lord, and Derrick Te Paske. They each have distinctive styles, influences, and outcomes, yet the artists have discovered intriguing commonalities through sharing exhibit space. Find more details at <https://www.openskys.org/event/valleycast-presents-informal/>.

The 17th Annual Summer Concert Series, free and open to the public, kicks off with singer-songwriter duo Ash & Eric, followed by the Blackstone Valley Community Concert Band. Through September 3, 2026, local bands, dancing and food trucks will fill the Dennis H. Rice Community Plaza for an inclusive community event every Thursday night. For the full season lineup, visit: <https://www.openskycs.org/event/valleycast-presents-the-2026-free-summer-concert-series/>.

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Reuben Jenckes's Black Horse Tavern Ghost

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

This is an old ghost story dating back a few centuries. It is typical of the romantic tales of haunted places that Rhode Island has become famous for. This account has been told and retold in several antiquated tomes. A tavern called the Black Horse once stood in the middle of Scituate Village in north-western region of Rhode island. A man named Reuben Jenckes owned the establishment and was cordial to all who entered its door, whether it was food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty or lodging for the weary.

As the story goes, the ghost of a Narragansett Indian haunted the building out of embarrassment for an event that took place many years before while he was alive and visiting the hostelry. Some claim he also haunted the Black Horse Tavern because he preferred the nearby Pine Tree Tavern in life and haunted the Black Horse in hopes their patrons would migrate to his once preferred drinking establishment.

The ghost haunted the family

in the form of strange dreams. He would be seen by various family members while they slept, pointing to someplace on the property before slowly walking toward where he was pointing. The vision was often followed by some sort of horrific nightmare. One of the main recipients of the ghostly dreams was Reuben Jenckes's daughter, Lucy. He often appeared to her in her nightly slumber, pointing toward the carriage house. In her dream, she would be compelled to follow him, but he would either vanish before reaching the destination of his quest, or she would suddenly wake up.

One night, she saw the man in her dreams, but this time, she did not wake up and followed him as he moved toward the carriage house, with each turn, pointing the way. The ghost led Lucy Jenckes to a loft in the carriage house where a coffin lay in the rafters. The next day, Lucy ventured into the loft where she spied the coffin she had been led to in her nightly vigil. She slowly ambled toward the box and opened it. Inside she found a

dressmaker's doll with its hair cut off. That is when an old tale came to light.

It was rumored that the Indian scalped the doll in an angry drunken state, thinking it was a rude person who would not return his conversation. When he realized it was a doll, he became thoroughly embarrassed by the act. That was when the Narragansett chose to take his business down the road to the Pine Tree Tavern.

That night, the ghost came to her in her dreams and requested that she remove the doll from the attic where it had been stored for many years. The next morning she followed the ghost's wish and removed the doll. The haunting supposedly ceased, yet guests of the tavern still insisted the Indigenous man was making his presence known. Many who spent the night at the tavern were jolted out of a sound sleep in the dead of night by frightening war cries. Some claimed to be pulled out of bed by the hair. Still, others claimed that the ghost was appearing to them in their rooms at night, sometimes in their dreams.

Soon the tavern saw fewer guests and over time, the inn became obsolete. Perhaps the Indian ghost fulfilled his mission of scaring customers of the tavern to the point where they transferred their business to the Pine Tree Tavern.

Although the structure is no longer a tavern, various owners

have experienced some strange unexplained occurrences. Whether the Indian's ghost still wanders the confines of the building, or perhaps the spirit of another person who was once involved in the history of the edifice, is a matter of conjecture. The story has stood the test of time, almost as long as the old tavern has.

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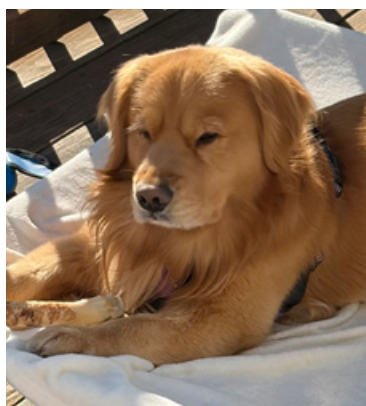


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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Tales of the river, circa 2026

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

The annual New Hampshire trip wouldn't be the same without a good old-fashioned adventure— or two. Our beloved river, a tried-and-true source of refreshment, proved no exception.

As though he'd sniffed out the aroma of sizzling bacon, Luke lifted his nose and bulldozed forward. If he were getting ready for a date, I swear he'd be a hairy bachelor wearing a robust cologne called River.

The bitches are wild for my River vibe.

I tugged him back, nearly losing my footing.

"Luke!"

A dog's instinct to run free is powerful – especially when it involves a body of water.

"Go easy."

For a firm two seconds, he went easy.

Then the scent of a different cologne wafted through the air: Childhood Flower. The fragrance left me nostalgic. Less enchanting, a black fly circled my sweaty brow. I swatted at it, flicked the tiny corpse from my hand, and sighed. A creature the size of a freckle should not be allowed to cause massive distress. But it could be worse, I told myself.

I was about to eat my words. We reached the shoreline.

Luke froze. I could see he was overwhelmed by a breathtaking realization: the picture he'd carried in his mind while we hiked



matched this one. Deep creases formed across his boxy head. The river shimmered beneath the sunlight, reflections dancing across its surface like a flock of birds.

Luke sat surprisingly still, overcome by a sense of peace. I followed his meditative stare. The two of us seemed entranced by the river's aura. We inhaled mountain-fresh air that tasted of freedom and goodness. My hand rested on the clip of his harness.

Dog's territory.

Quietly, and under the river's spell, I set him free.

What could go wrong?

Luke bathed in the drink of a cold-water river refreshment.

He drenched himself in a sea of bubbles. Unrestricted, he reminded

me of a toddler licking a dripping ice cream cone. He paddled. He whimpered. He resumed the bizarre habit of biting at the bubbles he created.

All was well.

But would it end well?

My son's hand floated to his forehead.

"Mum. I knew this would happen."

What had happened?

Within a minute, Luke was still paddling happily, but something had changed. He wasn't swimming in place anymore. The current had quietly claimed him. Every stroke carried him farther downstream and, judging by the blissful look on his face, he hadn't noticed a thing.

Pardon the cliché, but Luke

was flowing like a river—with the oblivion of a dog paddler. A victim of a dog's mantra to live in the moment, he adapted easily to the invisible current. Ironically enough, he was going with the flow—my favorite lesson.

"Don't panic."

I faced my son and his fiancée with the feeble confidence of a bug-bitten Dog Mom propped against a stick lest she slip down the eighty-degree riverbank incline.

"I'll go in."

My future daughter-in-law, an athlete and caregiver at heart, stepped up as well.

"I'll grab him. I don't mind."

She removed her sandals, a posh pair of Birkenstocks that had no place here.

My son, Ben, twice our size in both bulk and attitude, commanded the two of us like Moses.

"Stay here. I'm going in."

I faced Allison and grimaced.

"What about the bloodsuckers?"

Ben took off his T-shirt, handed me his phone and wallet, and issued a firm warning.

"Do NOT drop this in the river."

The pain of hearing a Verizon employee state the obvious—your phone's brain is wet and it's going to cost eight hundred dollars—was legitimate. I wrapped the phone in his T-shirt and stumbled forward. The threat of losing our dog downstream was one thing. Now we also had to fight physics to stay upright and save our phones.

Allison, a natural problem solver, came up with an ingenious plan.

"Pappas!"

Standing ten feet behind us, she shouted in Luke's favorite language and hurled giant stones into the water near him like oversized dog toys.

Luke perked up, pitching his ears like little tents so that his head and neck rose above the water.

What's that sound? A giant toy?

He began swimming back toward us.

"He's coming back! Keep up the great work, Ally!"

My heart lifted.

"Come on, Pappas!"

He swam against the current, taking two paddles forward and one paddle back. Would he be able to keep chasing the rocks toward shore?

Perhaps.

But not with a brotherly line-backer charging after him.

Elbows lifted, Ben shuffled through the water, gaining ground until he was about twenty yards behind Luke. Spooked, Luke resumed his downstream swim, paddling



Above: Allison cares for Luke after a cold-water swim.

Below: Ben and Ally share a peaceful moment in the wake of adventure.



even faster.

A game of Keep Away had emerged.

You're not holding me down, Brosie.

Luke charged ahead, but Ben stayed the course. He had to move twice as fast against the current to reach him. Finally, Luke was within grabbing distance. Ben bear-hugged the paddling dog, who squirmed and resisted like a seal caught in a net, then power-lifted his soaking-wet eighty-five-pound body above the water.

The feat was admittedly Herculean, even from a distance.

Finally, Ben carried Luke to the stony bank on the opposite side of the river, restrained him for a few seconds, and then guided him back to us. He shook wildly, looked up at me and smiled. The river wouldn't be the same without another adventure.

Stay tuned for more Living with Luke stories.

Write to Amy. amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Visit Luke on IG@livingwithluke-valentino

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Waves & well-wishes

A Summer of Projects at BVT

The final morning of the school year brought sunshine and smiles. On June 15, Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) teachers, administrators, and support staff gathered

projects, and routine maintenance during the eight-week summer break.

"Our annual task list is always ambitious by design," said BVT's Facilities Manager Robert Dolegiewicz. "We maximize every

tion, and a 60,000-square-foot roof replacement project."

These seasonal projects are supported by in-house talent and grant funding, helping reduce costs while protecting and maintaining the facility.

Blackstone Valley Tech will welcome the Class of 2030 and their families at a cookout for incoming freshmen on Thursday, Aug. 20. Freshmen Orientation Days will be held Aug. 20 and 21. The first day of school for all BVT students is Aug. 24.

Until then, have a fun, sun-soaked summer!



BVT administrators, teachers, and staff waved goodbye to students and bus drivers on the last day of school, wishing them a happy summer as the final buses of the school year rolled out. Photo submitted

outside to wish students a happy summer. With cheerful waves, they watched the last school buses roll out.

At BVT, the Last Day Wave is an annual tradition that marks the end of a successful school year. It also signifies the start of summer projects. As teachers and students embark on a well-deserved respite, administrators, support staff, and the facilities team will tackle numerous tasks,

minute to address routine preventive maintenance and capital projects. A few projects on this year's list include renovations to the boys' locker room, continued site work behind the MRS building, baseball field irrigation improvements, an Automotive Technology air system upgrade, phone and fire alarm system upgrades, the HVAC building project, a renovation of a Science Room, a Culinary Arts renova-

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Q. My 2007 Ford F-150 air conditioner switch only works on high; it will not work on low. The air is cold, but I don't always want the fan blowing at full force. What is wrong, and what will it cost to fix?

A. The issue could be a faulty switch, wiring, or, most likely, the blower motor resistor. On many vehicles, when the fan only works on high speed, the blower motor resistor is the most common failure. If it is the resistor, replacement usually takes about 30 minutes, and the part typically costs between \$20 and \$65. Lately, some inexpensive online replacement parts have not been the best quality, so try to buy from a reputable supplier or manufacturer.

Q. I have a 2011 Infiniti G25x. It was involved in an accident on the driver's side front. It was not a very major hit, but it affected the radiator support arm, headlamp assembly, radiator, and front bumper. I had to take it to a body shop for repairs and replacement of those parts. The car was driving and running fine before I brought it to the body shop, but after the repairs were completed, I discovered it was running sluggishly, rattling, and hesitating when leaving from a stop. What do you advise?

A. The repairs actually sound fairly extensive. Since the car was operating normally before the accident repairs, something may have been overlooked during reassembly or calibration. Possible causes could include a damaged sensor, loose wiring or ground connection, an air intake issue, or drivetrain damage that

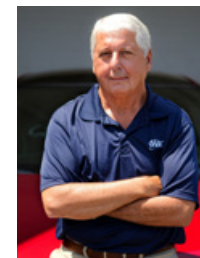
was not initially apparent. Normally, I would say to return to the original repair shop, but since they returned the vehicle in this condition, I would first get a second opinion on the repair quality and have a third-party shop perform a complete diagnostic evaluation. Depending on what is found, you can then return to the original body shop and ask them to correct any issues related to their repairs.

Q. My grandson has a 2017 Jeep Compass Trailhawk with less than 40,000 miles on it. He recently entered the Army and came home, and although we tried to drive it regularly, the battery was always dead and we had to jump-start the car. He had the main battery replaced, and it was fine while he was here. We now have a start/stop message showing on the dashboard. I took it to the dealership and was told it needed the auxiliary start/stop battery replaced, so I replaced the smaller battery. It is back at the dealership now, and I am being told it still needs to be diagnosed to find out what is wrong. He is stationed in Germany and wants to have his car shipped to him. I am at my wits' end. Any thoughts about what is going on?

A. This Jeep uses two batteries: a main 12-volt battery for starting and an auxiliary battery for the automatic start/stop system and accessories when the engine shuts off at a stop. If either battery becomes weak or if the vehicle sits unused for extended periods, the charging and battery monitoring systems can set warning messages and fault codes. The problem could involve the intelligent battery sensor, poor cable connections, charging system issues, software updates, or another fault within the start/stop system. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer at this point. The Jeep will need to be properly diagnosed with factory-level scan equipment by the dealer or a qualified repair shop.

Q. I have a 2013 Toyota Yaris with about 50,000 miles on it. My check engine light

keeps coming on. It's been doing this for almost a year. I borrowed a car code reader diagnostic tool, and it gave me this reading: CODE: P0138 oxygen



BY JOHN PAUL

sensor circuit high voltage. It was suggested that I add Techron Complete Fuel System Cleaner to a tank of gas and drive the car on the highway for 30 to 60 miles. This worked for a little while, and I was able to get an inspection sticker, but the check engine light eventually came back on. I tried using the fuel system cleaner again, and it worked, but now the light has come back on. A friend told me not to worry about it unless the car started sounding funny. I'm worried that if I don't have this taken care of, I might do more harm to my car in the long run. Could you give me your opinion on this problem?

A. Driving with the check engine light on for an extended period could reduce fuel economy, increase emissions, and potentially damage the catalytic converter if the engine is running excessively rich. Code P0138 generally indicates a high-voltage condition in the downstream oxygen sensor circuit, often caused by a faulty oxygen sensor, damaged wiring, or, less commonly, an engine running condition. Fuel system cleaner may temporarily affect the readings, but it is unlikely to permanently solve the problem. At this point, a technician using

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 17



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REAL ESTATE

That house that's been sitting could be your best shot at a deal

Open up a home search and you'll see them. Listings that have been on the market for two months. Three. Some longer.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

Most buyers scroll right past them, assuming something's wrong with the house. But that instinct could be costing you, since the longer a home sits, the more motivated the seller usually gets.

Here's where some buyers are finding better deals. If affordability has been your #1 hurdle to buying, here's a surprisingly simple strategy that could help you finally get your foot in the door. Start with the homes that have been sitting the longest. That's often where the best deals are. Here's why. Statistics show that there's a connection between longer time on the market and lower sales prices. Basically, the longer a house sits, the more

likely it is that the seller will reduce the price. If you focus on these homes that are just sitting and waiting, the opportunity for you is bigger than you may think right now.

Data shows there's \$347 billion worth of stale listings on the market right now – more than ever before for this time of year. So, ask a member of The Marzeotti Group or your trusted agent to filter listings for you from oldest to newest. The home that fits your budget might already be there. Just further down the list than you thought.

Lingering doesn't always mean something's wrong. Let's say you do that and something catches your eye. Still, you might be questioning why the home has been sitting in the first place. Just remember, sometimes it has nothing to do with the home itself. Common causes are: The asking price was set too high to start or the home didn't show well online or there are a lot of homes for sale in the area, so it just got buried. So, nothing that's necessarily a deal breaker, or even anything that's wrong with the home itself. If there's a real issue, a thorough inspection will sur-

face it and that's information you can use to negotiate. Not a reason to assume it's a house worth skipping over.

How to turn a lingering listing into a win. So how do you capitalize on a lingering listing? Essentially you have two big cards to play. The first is price. Work with your agent to study what comparable homes recently sold for, then build an offer around that. Coming in below asking price is fair game when a home has been sitting. The second is concessions. If a seller won't budge much on price, they may still help in other ways, like covering some closing costs, repair credits, or even a mortgage rate buy down that lowers your monthly payment.

A member of The Marzeotti Group or your local trusted agent has the experience to tell which homes are the real opportunities and which are ones you should skip. A house sitting on the market isn't always a red flag. In today's market, it may be your best opportunity yet. For help deciding which lingering listings are actually worth a second look, connect with a member of The Marzeotti Group.

CAR DOCTOR

continued from page 16

a professional scan tool should be able to determine whether the sensor, wiring, or another issue is causing the fault.

Eight years ago, I purchased a 2013 Ford Edge with the 2.0L turbo engine. After having 700 miles on it, I took a trip. When I came back and checked the oil, very little showed on the dipstick. It was low by about two to three quarts. The tailpipe extensions were loaded with black soot. However, to this

day, the engine still runs fine, although there is still soot on the pipes. What do you think happened?

It sounds as though the engine may have experienced higher-than-normal oil consumption during its initial break-in period, possibly because the piston rings had not fully seated yet. Some black soot on the tailpipes is also fairly common on modern direct-injected and turbo-charged engines because they tend to run richer under certain operating conditions. Since the vehicle has continued to perform well for many years without apparent engine problems, I would simply

continue maintaining it properly and monitor the oil level regularly between oil changes.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over forty years' experience and is an ASE-certified master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your questions to jpaul@aaanortheast.com. Follow John on X @johnfpaul and Facebook at [mrjohnfpaul](https://www.facebook.com/mrjohnfpaul).

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Happenings!

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.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15
• The Whitin Community Center (WCC) is excited to invite all automotive en-

thusiasts 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 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

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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.

cert. Local Legends Featuring The Conversation, with Special Guest Mitch Seidman (Guitar) and Jerry Willfong (Bass), Kelly Clark. 2:30-5:30 p.m. Mill Villages Park 61 Main St. (Route 122A) South Grafton. Patrons are encouraged to bring their own refreshments and chairs etc. A limited number of shaded seats at the tables under the pavilion are available. For more information call 508-873-1767.

• Community Cat Connection will present Keys for Kitties, featuring Alley May Coté Dorgan (she/her/hers), an accomplished composer and multi-instrumentalist, in an exclusive piano performance. The performance will be held at Webster Federated Church of Christ, 4 Church Street, at 4 p.m. on Saturday, August 8. The public is invited to join for an afternoon of music for all tastes and times. Attendees can enjoy neo-classical musical compilations featur-

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8
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HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 19

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Grafton's 4th of July parade!

Photos from Grafton 4th of July Parade and Grafton Public Library's Facebook pages



HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 18

ing renditions of Green Day, Red Hot Chili Peppers, and Metallica in a whole new way. The concert will feature two 45-minute sets with a brief intermission, and light refreshments will be available. Audio or video recording and flash photography are not allowed during the performance. All proceeds support Community Cat Connection, a no-kill nonprofit shelter. Tickets are \$10 each and can be purchased at the door the evening of the event or at Community Cat Connection (289 Thompson Road in Webster) during open hours. The shelter is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 4 to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and you can call (508) 949-0779 for more information.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

- Grab a teammate and join Open Sky

Community Services for an afternoon of friendly competition, live music, great food, and community spirit at the 12th Annual Valley Bag Toss, Saturday, September 19, 2026, at the historic Alternatives' Whitin Mill in Whitinsville. This inclusive cornhole tournament welcomes players of all abilities, ages 14 and older, and has become a favorite annual tradition in the Blackstone Valley. Whether you're competing for the championship or cheering from the sidelines, the Valley Bag Toss offers a fun way to connect with friends, family, and neighbors while supporting a meaningful cause. The tournament will take place from 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. at 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville, MA. Team registration is limited, and advance registration is required. To register a team, become a sponsor, or learn more, visit www.openskycs.org/valleybagtoss.

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