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BLACKSTONE VALLEY Xpress

South Edition: Douglas, Northbridge, Uxbridge

November 6, 2026

Northbridge High School's fantastic fall updates

BY BRITTANY AMALFI

Fall has been a busy season at Northbridge High School, where students have been showing off their school spirit, celebrating the people who have made a difference in their lives, and raising money through student-led activities.

Homecoming week brought a little extra excitement to the halls as the Student Council executive board organized a spirit week with themed dress-up days. After a day off on Monday, students returned Tuesday for class color day, followed by soccer mom versus football dad day on Wednesday, twin day on Thursday, and Rams pride day on Friday.

Homecoming on Oct. 17 was also an opportunity to recognize the teachers and school employees who have helped Northbridge student-athletes along the way.

Through the school's IMPACT program, each athlete chooses a Northbridge Public Schools employee or educator who has inspired them, supported them, challenged them or helped shape the person they are today. The recognition is a way for students to thank the people who have gone above and beyond for them, both in and out of the classroom.

The program celebrates the connections students build with the adults in their school community and the lasting difference those relationships can make.

The Unified Basketball Team also had a fantastic game vs. the Bartlett/Oxford team on Oct. 21! The thrilling game ended in a

NORTHBRIDGE
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Pamela Siderewicz – Uxbridge Common Building. Courtesy photo.

Ninth Annual Uxbridge Sketchfest

BY THE BVAA

The BVAA Uxbridge SketchFest is back for its ninth year! Grab your pads of paper, pencils, and pens, for it's SketchFest time!

Here's the plan.

Sometime between November 1 and November 30, 2026, head out to your favorite locations in Uxbridge. Make sketches of whatever catches your eye. Send them to info@bvaa.org. Each person can send up to five sketches. Please have the last JPGs in to us by midnight on November 30, 2026. Participation is completely FREE!

If you can also send a photo of what you were sketching, or its location, that would be lovely. That way, people can tour Uxbridge and see the locations of the artwork.

The BVAA will create a virtual gallery of the sketches and a YouTube virtual presentation! They will share all the beautiful artworks for the entire community to enjoy.

All ages and abilities are warmly encouraged to participate. This is open to the public!

What Is a sketch?

Just what is a sketch? They're glad you asked!

For the sake of SketchFest, a sketch is a quick representation of a scene done with pen or pencil on paper. It can then be colored in with colored pencil or watercolors. A beautiful example is Pamela Siderewicz's drawing of a lawyer's office building on Uxbridge Com-

SKETCH WALK
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Northbridge Holiday Food Basket Drive 2026

A partnership between the Northbridge Fire Department and NAC Food Pantry

Dear Northbridge Businesses and Community Members,

Help us make the holidays brighter for Northbridge families!

Northbridge Holiday Helping Hands began at Thanksgiving 2025, when one of our firefighters and his wife generously donated 100 meals to families in need. Seeing the tremendous need, we expanded to Christmas baskets. This year, our goal is to provide meal baskets for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, including a new toy or small gift for each child at Christmas.

We are seeking business sponsors, financial contributions, and donations to help provide holiday meals for local families.

Donations Needed:

- Financial contributions and sponsorships
- Turkeys and hams
- Grocery gift cards
- Non-perishable holiday meal ingredients from our approved donation list
- New toys or gifts for children at Christmas

To ensure every family receives an equivalent basket, food donations must follow our approved list.

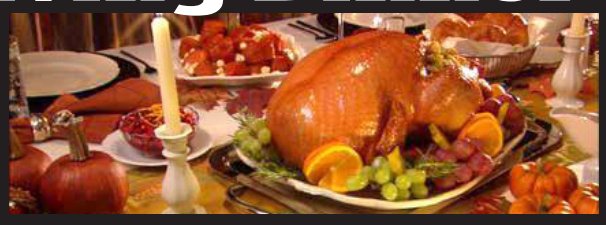
Prefer to make a monetary donation? You can donate directly through Givebutter, our nonprofit fundraising platform, or through Venmo at @NFDA01588

Interested in helping? Please contact Erin McKeown at emckeown@northbridgemass.org or 508-234-8448 (option 4) to discuss sponsorship opportunities, request our food list, or coordinate a donation.

Every contribution makes a difference. Thank you for helping us bring hope and holiday cheer to families throughout Northbridge!

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NORTHBRIDGE

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neck-and-neck 54-54 tie!

Halloween brought another round of festivities to Northbridge High School on Oct. 21, when the Student Council hosted its annual Halloween Fest.

Student Council members helped bring the event to life by setting up tables and games throughout the hallways for children to enjoy. Costumes added to the fun, as attendees arrived dressed for the occasion. The event was especially rewarding for the student organizers, who raised more than $1,000, making it one of the group's most successful Halloween Fests yet.

There is still another opportunity for the school community to get involved this fall. Northbridge High School will host a blood drive on Nov. 16 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the field house. Community members who are eligible to donate can participate, and 16-year-old donors must have permission from a parent or guardian.

Between homecoming traditions, student-organized celebrations, and opportunities to give back, Northbridge High School students have found plenty of ways to make the fall season memorable while celebrating the people and connections that make their school community special.

Some information for this story was drawn from The Ram Report, Northbridge High School's student publication.

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Grafton's celebrates the Holidays Craft Fair will be held on December 6, 2026

Grafton Celebrates the Holidays returns for its 31st year with over 20 businesses, churches and organizations as 'Frosty Stops', a craft and vendor fair and other holiday happenings. Look for the 'Frosty Stop' snow bear logo at participating locations. Many stops are perennial favorites such as the Polar Express Trackless Train Rides at UniBank, photos with Santa at Homefield Credit Union, and the Craft and Vendor Fair.

Many other stops return year after year, including Bushel 'n Peck serving up complimentary chicken noodle soup and a stop at the Municipal Center, where the Girl Scouts will be offering a Winter Wonderland at 11 a.m..

New this year is that the Craft Fair will be expanding, and we will have 120 vendors, making it one of the biggest craft and vendor fairs in the area. The Craft Fair will run 10 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. at Grafton High School, 24 Providence Road, Grafton, MA. Enjoy products like jewelry, ornaments, wood crafts, and so much more.

Special holiday performances will also be taking place at the Unitarian Universalist Society, which will be doing an artisan and jewelry sale.

Head to the Common at 3:55 p.m. to join the Grafton Girl Scouts in singing winter songs, with a symbolic lighting of Grafton's first community Menorah to follow. Then, as always, Santa will be making his arrival on the Common at 4:15 p.m., followed by the lighting of the Common. The lighting of the Common this year is sponsored by Grafton Recreation and CSR Financial Services.

Follow Grafton Recreation on Facebook at @GraftonRec for highlights leading up to the big day and a live feed on the day of. For detailed times, event descriptions, and locations, view a brochure at GraftonRec.com.

For questions, more information, photos, etc,. please contact Town of Grafton Recreation Director, Adam Lapointe. E-mail: lapointea@grafton-ma.gov. Phone: 508-839-8507

SKETCH WALK

continued from page 1

mon.

Sketching inspiration

There is a map of wonderful locations in Uxbridge, but it's just a starting point. You can make your sketches anywhere in Uxbridge.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions, and they look forward to seeing your artwork!



Freelance Writers Wanted!

Love writing and telling stories about your community? Blackstone Valley North and Blackstone Valley South are looking for freelance writers to cover local news, community events, people, and the stories that make our towns special. Have a knack for storytelling or connections to local organizations and businesses? We'd love to hear from you! Email us at editor@ashlandtownnews.com to learn more.

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Whitinsville Library has gnome-themed fun, crafts and more!

The library is celebrating "Gnomevember" this November with a month full of creative activities, book clubs, family programs, and opportunities for readers of all ages to connect. From decorating gnome ornaments and building miniature homes to reading with therapy animals and joining adult craft nights, there is something for everyone. Check the library's hours and registration requirements before attending programs!

LIBRARY HOURS
Monday-Thursday: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Friday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Holiday Hours: The library will be closed Wednesday, Nov. 11, for Veterans Day. It will close early at 2 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 25, and remain closed Thursday and Friday, Nov. 26-27, for Thanksgiving break.

GNOMEVEMBER PROGRAMS
Tiny Art Show
Artists ages 8 and older can create a miniature canvas for the library's Tiny Art Show. Mini canvases will be available after school Nov. 2-7. Participants can create their artwork at the library or take a canvas home. Completed pieces must be returned to the library by Nov. 14. The Tiny Art Show will be on display Nov. 23-28.
Gnome Ornaments
Tuesday, Nov. 10, at 4 p.m.
Visitors of all ages can decorate a gnome ornament for the library's tree using the craft materials provided. Ornaments will also be available to take home.
Builders & Makers: Gnome Homes
Thursday, Nov. 12, at 4 p.m.
Builders ages 6 and older can put their imaginations to work creating a better gnome home during this drop-in program.
Reading With Therapy Animals
Practice reading aloud to gentle therapy animals in a calm, supportive setting. These programs are open to children ages 6 and older, and registration is required.
Reading With Icarus the Cat: Thursday, Nov. 19, at 4 p.m.
Reading With Casper the Dog: Saturday, Nov. 21, at 11 a.m.

WEEKLY YOUTH PROGRAMS
Library Littles & Playgroup
Mondays at 10:30 a.m.
Stories, songs, and playtime are offered for children ages 0-2 and their caregivers. The program is a great opportunity to introduce young children to the library and meet new friends.
Preschool Storytime & Playgroup
Thursdays at 10:30 a.m.
Join the library each week for stories, songs, movement, and fun. Designed for preschoolers but open to everyone, the program helps build early literacy skills through play, imagination, and social interaction. Drop-in.
Builders & Makers
Thursdays at 4 p.m.
Kids ages 6 and older can drop in for an hour of LEGO, building challenges, and open-ended creative construction. Participants can bring an idea or invent something completely new each week.

ADULT PROGRAMS AND BOOK CLUBS
Friends of the Library Meeting
Monday, Nov. 30, at 6:30 p.m.
All are welcome to attend and contribute to the exciting plans of the Friends of WSL. The Friends serve as the library's fundraising and advocacy group and meet on the last Monday of each month.
Craft Night for Adults
Tuesday, Nov. 10, from 6-7 p.m.
Help decorate the library's tree for the Festival of Trees and create a gnome ornament to take home. Drop in while supplies last.
Adult Writers' Group
Tuesday, Nov. 17, at 6 p.m.
Join "Writing Alone Together," a writers' group that offers a supportive space for creativity and mutual encouragement. Whether participants are working on creative stories or journal entries, the group provides time to write alongside others. No prior writing experience is required; participants should bring their preferred writing materials. This volunteer-led group meets monthly on the third Tuesday. Registration is required.
Get Help With Jenna
Thursday, Nov. 19, from 10 a.m.-noon
Register to receive assistance from Jenna Gouin of the Blackstone Valley Partnership for Public Health. She can help connect visitors with referrals and resources.
Craft Supply Swap
Donations: Monday, Nov. 30, through Friday, Dec. 4
Swap: Saturday, Dec. 5, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Give craft supplies a second life by donating like-new materials at the library from Nov. 30 through Dec. 4. Accepted donations may include unused yarn, crafting tools, scrapbook paper, tape, glue, stickers, markers, colored pencils, notepads, paintbrushes, and more.
On Saturday, Dec. 5, visitors can browse the donated supplies and bring materials home for their next creative project.

BLACKSTONE VALLEY Xpress

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4th Friday: Blackstone Valley North: Grafton, Millbury & Sutton

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Douglas residents win Valley Bag Toss Cornhole Tournament





Worcester-based Open Sky Community Services raised over $26,000 at its Valley Bag Toss cornhole tournament on September 19 at Alternatives' Whitin Mill in Whitinsville. Karen McNelly and Jaime McNelly, of Douglas, won the tournament, which supports individuals in Central Massachusetts facing complex challenges.

Top: The three placing teams of the 2026 Open Sky Community Services Valley Bag Toss come together for a photo. Pictured from left to right are the third, first, and second place teams: The Corne Identity's Tim Lang, of North Attleboro, and Mike Thompson, of Ashland; Wixtead Wonders' Karen McNelly and Jaime McNelly, of Douglas; and Tele Tubbies' John Johnson, of Upton, and Jim Cowen, of Mendon. (Photo courtesy of Open Sky)

Bottom: Wixtead Wonders team members Karen McNelly and Jaime McNelly, of Douglas, won the 12th annual Valley Bag Toss at Alternatives' Whitin Mill in Whitinsville on September 19, 2026. The inclusive and accessible cornhole tournament raised over $26,000 to support Open Sky Community Services' health and wellness programming for individuals in Central Massachusetts facing complex challenges. (Photo courtesy of Open Sky)

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Representatives Soter, McKenna, and Senator Fattman announce $1.8 million for Hecla Street Bridge in Uxbridge

State Representatives Michael Soter (R-Bellingham) and Joe McKenna (R-Sutton), along with State Senator Ryan Fattman (R-Sutton), announced that the Town of Uxbridge has been selected to receive $1,836,203.20 in state funding for the rehabilitation of the Hecla Street Bridge (Bridge No. U-02-014).

The funding was awarded through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's FAIR Program and will support both construction and design work for the bridge rehabilitation project. The current Hecla Street bridge is both narrow and aged, leading to concerns from residents about safety. These improvements will undoubtedly improve the daily travel of residents in the area as well as address safety concerns of neighbors.

"This investment represents an important commitment to Uxbridge and the infrastructure our residents rely on every day," said Representative Soter. "I am pleased to see significant state resources coming back to our community to support this project, and I look forward to seeing the improvements move forward." Rep. McKenna added, "Small towns like Uxbridge struggle to independently fund major infrastructure projects, but safe bridges and roads aren't optional. Residents deserve to know that the bridges they cross every day are safe, and I'm grateful to MassDOT for stepping in to close that financial gap. I'm glad to see this much-needed project move forward."

Senator Fattman also shared thoughts on the news, "I'm proud to have advocated for the improvements to Hecla Street and its bridge with my legislative colleagues. These infrastructure improvements are long needed, will improve access and safety issues, and we are happy to support the town in this endeavor."

Under the award, MassDOT will reimburse the Town of Uxbridge up to $1,710,703.20 for construction costs, including construction engineering and a 10% contingency. The Town will receive an additional $125,500 for design engineering, bringing the total project reimbursement to $1,836,203.20.

The Town of Uxbridge and its consultant will now advance the project through final design while completing necessary permitting and right-of-way requirements.

Chair of the Uxbridge Select Board, John Wise, shared his thoughts as the Town moves forward: "For years, the closure of the Hecla Street Bridge has been a source of frustration for our residents. This funding is a major step toward restoring an important connection in our community and reflects years of persistence and collaboration. We are deeply grateful to Representatives Soter and McKenna, Senator Fattman, the Healey-Driscoll Administration, MassDOT, Town Manager Steve Sette, DPW Director Benn Sherman, and all town staff who helped move this project forward. We also thank our residents for their patience throughout this long process." Town Manager Steve Sette commented, "The residents of the Town of Uxbridge have been frustrated for quite some time with the condition of the Hecla Street Bridge, and with the announcement of the funding for this project, a blight on the Town will be fixed."

Representatives Soter and McKenna and Senator Fattman thanked MassDOT, the Town of Uxbridge, and the Uxbridge Department of Public Works for their work in advancing the project.

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Debunking five common Social Security myths



Mark Freeman, CEPA

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Provided by Edward Jones

Social Security is often one of the most important income sources in retirement. Yet widespread myths about how it works can lead to confusion, unnecessary worry and poor planning decisions. Here's the truth behind five of the most common misconceptions.

Myth 1: Social Security is going broke. You've probably heard this one, but the full picture is more nuanced. According to the 2026 Social Security Board of Trustees Report, if Congress does nothing, the program would need to reduce benefits starting in 2032, paying roughly 78 cents for every dollar owed.

But that's just one scenario. Congress could raise the combined payroll tax from 12.4% to 16.65%, which the trustees estimate would secure full benefits through 2100. Other options include eliminating the earnings cap subject to payroll tax or adjusting retirement ages. Lawmakers have tools to address this.

Myth 2: Social Security will cover all your retirement needs. Think of Social Security as a financial foundation, not the full building. According to the Social Security Administration, benefits replace only about 40% of pre-retirement income for a median earner. That means you'll likely need to account for most of your retirement income yourself. Building a strong personal savings strategy now can help close that gap.

Myth 3: You lose benefits permanently if you keep working. Not true. Social Security does have an "earnings test" that can temporarily reduce benefits for people who claim early and keep working. If your earnings exceed a set annual cap – which changes each year – Social Security will withhold a portion of your benefits. But once you reach full retirement age, the Social Security Administration adjusts your monthly check higher to repay those withheld amounts over time.

Myth 4: An ex-spouse's benefits come out of your own. If you were married for at least 10 years and are currently unmarried, your former spouse may be eligible to collect on your earnings record, or you may be able to collect on theirs. Divorced spouse benefits can be up to 50% of the other person's full retirement benefit. But those payments don't affect yours. Your monthly benefit is not reduced by anything paid to an ex-spouse or even a current spouse.

Myth 5: Social Security benefits are no longer taxed. Recent legislation caused some confusion here. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act did not eliminate taxes on Social Security benefits. If your combined income exceeds certain thresholds, you'll still owe taxes on a portion of your benefits.

The law also created a temporary deduction (available through 2028) for people 65 and older. Eligible taxpayers can deduct $6,000 per qualifying filer if their modified adjusted gross income is $75,000 or less for singles or $150,000 for couples. The deduction phases out at $175,000 for singles and $250,000 for joint filers.

The more you understand Social Security, the more control you have over your retirement outcome. Grounding your decisions in facts rather than assumptions can make a meaningful difference in your long-term financial security.

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

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TALES FROM BEYOND

tomdagostino.com

The ghostly graves of Killingworth, Connecticut

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The story of a grave where nothing will grow over it is not uncommon. Almost every state has some sort of legend or tale regarding barren grave sites where grass or lichen refuses to sprout. This account would certainly give good reason why the tale of the bare graves of Union District Cemetery on North Roast Meat Hill Road would harbor natural covering.

Sarah Blatchley (August 31, 1746, to October, 1779) and Samuel Higgins were married on November 9, 1769. They moved to an old cottage on what is now Wolf Hill Road. The couple had five children between 1771 and 1779. Sarah was a bit outspoken with a quick and violent temper, yet Samuel (born December 19, 1742, and died June 30, 1811) was very patient with her sudden rages.

This went on for several years until October 14, 1779, when Samuel came home to see the most shocking sight. Three of his young children were slain by Sarah and she was about to take her own life by slitting her throat with a dull knife. Samuel came in just in time to stop her.

A newspaper account from the Boston Evening Post and General Advertiser October 30, 1779, tells much of the story.

"The following tragic affair happened at the North Parish in Killingworth on Wednesday last, viz. The wife of Samuel Higgins of that parish, being disordered in her reason, and being left in the house with three of her children, she called the son of seven years old to her, telling him she wanted to pin his collar, and immediately cut his throat, she then cut the throats of her daughter five years old, and her infant which lay on the bed…"

William age 7, Sarah, age 5 and Jane, just 2 months old at the time, were buried in the Union Cemetery with simple stones, as the cost of more elaborate markers were at the time beyond the financial reach of the Higgins. Samuel went on to marry Temperence Parkhill Kelsey in 1781. They moved to Benson, Vermont where they lived out the rest of their lives. The other two Higgins children, Martha and Reuben lived to a ripe old age before passing on to the world of spirits.

Legends abound in regard to Mrs. Higgins living out the rest of her life repenting her sin. Oddly enough, she was never prosecuted for her crime. She waited in hopes of her husband to return and provide her with three more children. One account, as written in J.H. Beers, The History of Middlesex County is presented below:

"About a mile and a half north of the Congregational church, in Killingworth, on the old road which runs parallel with the main street, is a group of dilapidated houses. In one of these ancient dwellings there formerly lived a Mrs. Higgins, who was possessed of a most violent temper. October 14th, 1779, after having quarreled with her husband, she grasped a common case- knife and cut the throats of her three children. The victims of this bloody tragedy were buried in the old cemetery, in the Union District. There was at that time a belief almost universally indulged in that grass would not grow over the grave of a murdered person; and it is said that for a long time the lot where they laid these children was barren as a desert. The natural sterility of the soil, however, is a sufficient explanation of the phenomenon. Mrs. Higgins subsequently resided in the Pine Orchard District, near the Union Church. On that edifice there was a clock dial with stationary hands, and she was heard to say: " When those pointers come together and stand at twelve, my sins will be pardoned." She also cherished the strange hope that her husband, who was separated from her would return, and that she would again be the mother of three children in place of her dead offspring. She is reported to have made an attempt on her own life at the time of killing her children, but was prevented by her husband, and in after years always wore a black ribbon about her neck to cover the ugly trace of her savage rage. The story of her terrible deed was versified by a local poet, and within the memory of the living the aged women have been heard to sing in a mournful minor the sad song of this unfortunate woman. She was doubtless buried in the old cemetery in Pine Orchard District, but her grave, like that of her children, is still unlettered, and the historian looks in vain for the last resting place of her whom in charity he fain would call a maniac, not a murderer."

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State Representative Soter Announces $85,000 in Career-Connected Learning Grants for Local Schools

State Representative Michael Soter (R-Bellingham) is pleased to announce that Bellingham, Medway, and Uxbridge have been awarded a combined $85,000 in grant funding to support career-connected learning opportunities and help students plan for their futures.

The Town of Medway has been awarded $32,000, the Town of Bellingham has been awarded $7,000, and the Town of Uxbridge has been awarded $46,000 through grant programs supporting My Career and Academic Plan (MyCAP) and career-connected learning initiatives.

MyCAP is a student planning process designed by district and school leadership teams to help ensure that every student graduates with an authentic and personalized postsecondary plan. Through established learning objectives, lessons, and activities, students work toward both state-required and locally identified milestones as they prepare for life after high school.

The Middle School Career Connected Learning Grant helps begin the MyCAP process by giving students opportunities to identify their strengths, skills, and interests and explore careers that align with those attributes. Through relevant, real-world, and interactive learning experiences, students can develop the knowledge and skills needed to pursue pathways of interest in high school.

Rep. Soter said in a statement, "Preparing our students for success means giving them opportunities to explore their interests and understand the educational and career pathways available to them. I am pleased to see Bellingham, Medway, and Uxbridge receive this funding to expand career-connected learning and help students develop meaningful plans for their futures. These investments will help connect what students learn in the classroom with opportunities beyond it."

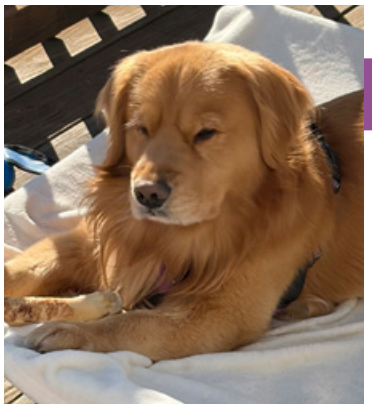
The funding also supports efforts to connect students with work-based learning experiences, providing hands-on opportunities across the career development spectrum, from career awareness and exploration to more immersive experiences.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

The Island of Misfits: Luke's spa day

BY AMY PALUMBO LECLAIRE

The home renovation was beginning to lose its luster. A revolving door of friends who smelled of sawdust and grease had been entertaining at first, but their visits came at a cost. Screeching drills and pounding hammers sent Luke's ears peeling back as he retreated to the front door.

Get me out of this funny farm.

My dog wasn't far off the mark.

I surveyed the damage. Thick protective paper lined the floors, much like tissue rolled over a doctor's examination table. Coffee mugs, plastic silverware, and take-out containers sat recklessly atop a feeble utility table.

We're on the Island of Misfits, the characters in my mind declared.

Luke needed a spa day, a well-ness retreat to help him forget about his broken home. First stop: the local groomer.

"Luke, you're going to look so handsome!"

We drove off with the glee of independence and the promise of a fresh perspective. Luke gazed out the window. The grass truly was greener outdoors. He lifted his head as though opportunity itself rested on his nose.

Since we hadn't booked an appointment, he was eligible for a nail trim and little else. Still, it was something, I told myself. I pulled into a prime parking spot and opened his travel crate.

Thank you for taking me along, Mom!

Luke leaped onto the pavement, but his curiosity ran suddenly stale. This wasn't exactly what he'd had in mind. He buried his nose in a potent collection of scents best categorized as ALL OTHER DOGS.

I imagined generations of canine descendants gathering to share Luke's primal wisdom.

We're not stupid. A ground scented with this many dogs means one thing: *YOU'RE SENDING US TO AN ORPHANAGE!*

"Come on, Luke. You get to see Rebecca today!"

I tugged at his leash as his paws skidded across the threshold. At the sound of his favorite groomer's name, his heart light switched on. His ears lifted, squaring off an already box-shaped head. Then he tap-danced, struggling to contain a blend of enthusiasm and embarrassment.

It's not you, Rebecca. Or your glamorous salon. It's just that, well…

Once, a groomer had shaved the hair inside Luke's ears so close to the cartilage that his inner ears became inflamed and eventually infected. I knew I wasn't supposed to enable his anxiety. Luke was four now. The past was over. The incident had been isolated, and we had long since parted ways with that salon.

He needed to move forward.

"Hello, handsome boy."

Rebecca cupped his face until it crinkled like a Shar-Pei's and kissed his nose. Luke softened and trotted



beside her. Together, we managed to hoist him onto the grooming bench.

He stood there, wobbly and frozen, shaking from nose to tail. His entire body became one unified vibration. The scene was absurd, a full-blown production over a simple nail trim.

Rebecca didn't skip a beat. She clipped with grace, soothed him with gentle pats on the head, and finished with a smile.

"You're all set, Mr. Luke Valentino."

Shaky shook off his anxiety with a vigorous wet-dog maneuver, wiggled a little more, and made a beeline for the door. On a mission to escape the orphanage where Other Dogs go, he yanked me forward while I struggled to activate the hatchback.

The door had barely reached its full height when Superman made his entrance. He launched himself into his travel crate and spun in ridiculous circles, as if escaping a burning building.

Our next stop, I suspected, would be less traumatic.

We were off to the coffee shop, where a slice of muffin and a gathering of Good Dog People awaited Luke like a beacon of hope. Perhaps this was the restorative experience his troubled soul needed.

"Want to go grab a muffin, Luke?"

He lifted his head higher and gazed out the window, where the grass continued to grow greener.

For the first time that day, I saw his body relax. The renovation could wait. The floors would eventually reappear, the cabinets would find their place, and the Island of Misfits would someday become a kitchen again.

For now, Luke had survived his spa day. His ears were intact, his nails were shorter, and his faith in the world had been restored by the prospect of baked goods.

As for me, I was reminded that sometimes a change of scenery is all it takes to put things back in perspective.

Even if you're a dog.

Especially if you're a dog.

And if there happened to be a few crumbs left in the hatchback, well, that would be between Luke and his conscience.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

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Etiquette Express: making everyday interactions better

The power of the pause: A little kindness goes a long way

BY LEE-ANN BARKHOUSE

Have you noticed how quickly we react to things these days? We expect immediate answers, instant responses, and everything to happen on our schedule. Whether we're sitting in traffic, standing in line at the grocery store, spending time with family and friends, or scrolling through social media, patience sometimes seems to be in short supply.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the power of the pause. Just taking a moment before we react can make such a difference. Maybe the person who cut us off in traffic is rushing to a family emergency. Maybe the cashier who isn't smiling is having a difficult day. Or perhaps someone we love is carrying a worry they haven't shared.

We simply don't know what others are going through.

That doesn't mean we have to accept rude or disrespectful behavior. It does mean we can choose how we respond. Sometimes a little patience, a kind word, or even a genuine smile can turn someone's day around. And the wonderful thing about kindness? It costs absolutely nothing.

Q. I was at the grocery store when a customer's credit cards kept getting declined. He became very frustrated and was rude to the young cashier. I felt terrible for her. Was there something I could have done without paying for his groceries?

A. What an uncomfortable situation for everyone involved. The customer may have been embarrassed or overwhelmed, but that doesn't make it okay to take his frustration out on someone else.

Sometimes the best thing we can do is offer a little reassurance. A warm smile to the cashier, followed by a simple "Take your time, you're doing just fine," can make a difference. If the customer becomes aggressive, asking a manager to assist may be the best approach.

And before leaving, consider telling the cashier, "You handled that difficult situation really well." We often underestimate how much a few encouraging words can mean, especially to someone having a tough day.

Q. During a Zoom meeting, several participants kept interrupting the facilitator, using inappropriate language, and posting nasty comments. The facilitator was unable to mute the offenders. Could I have done something to help?

A. Absolutely. Just because we're behind a computer screen doesn't mean good manners go out the window!

You could politely speak up and say, "I'd really like to hear what the facilitator has to share. Can we give them a chance to finish?" You could also send a private message of encouragement or contact the meeting host for assistance.

What I wouldn't recommend is getting into an argument with those being disrespectful. That usually adds fuel to the fire.

Remember, you don't have to match someone's behavior to make your point. Sometimes being the calm, respectful voice in the room is exactly what's needed.

Q. Between school fundraisers, community organizations, friends, family, and people collecting donations outside stores, I'm constantly being asked to give. I want to help, but I can't give to everyone. How do I politely say no?

A. First, please know that it's perfectly okay to say no! You can be a generous, caring person without saying yes to every request.

A simple "Thank you for asking. I'm not able to contribute this time, and I wish you much success" is all you need. No lengthy explanation or apology necessary.

I also encourage people to remember that giving isn't always about money. Sometimes sharing your time, lending a hand, or simply helping spread the word about a good cause can be just as meaningful.

Give where your heart leads you and within your means. Kindness should never come with guilt.

Q. With everything happening in the world, conversations with family and friends can quickly turn into disagreements. How do I handle someone who has strong opinions that are very different from mine without creating tension?

A. Here's a perfect opportunity to practice the power of the pause! Before jumping in with your own opinion, take a moment to listen. You might even learn something about why that person feels the way they do.

It's perfectly fine to say, "I see things a little differently, but I respect your perspective." And if the conversation starts getting heated, there's nothing wrong with saying, "Let's agree to disagree and enjoy our time together."

We don't have to agree on everything to care about one another. Sometimes the relationship is far more important than winning the argument.

A Little Warmth Goes a Long Way

Here in New England, we are starting to feel those colder temperatures, and the holidays are right around the corner. While this can be a wonderful time of year, it can also be a difficult season for many.

Someone may be facing their first holiday without a loved one. Someone else may have recently received a medical diagnosis, lost a job, or be struggling to make ends meet. Even those who appear happy and have a smile on their face may be carrying something heavy.

We never really know.

So, as we head into the holiday season, I encourage you to slow down just a little. Hold the door for someone. Let a car merge into traffic. Check in on a friend. Offer a helping hand. And don't underestimate the power of a genuine smile. It may be the only one someone receives that day.

As the temperatures drop here in New England, let's make an extra effort to spread a little warmth. You never know whose day you might brighten, simply by being kind.

Etiquette Tip of the Month

Before you react, pause. Before you judge, consider what someone else may be going through. And whenever you can, offer a smile. A little kindness can make a bigger difference than you realize!

Until next month, be kind, be thoughtful, and remember that the smallest acts of consideration often leave the greatest impression.

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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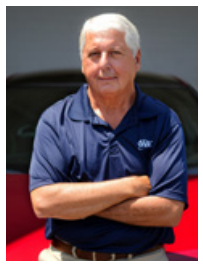


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THE CAR DOCTOR

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A used Miata, Florida car washes, read those owners' manuals, a Honda Accord, an Acura RDX, and more



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. Over the winter I am thinking of buying a used Mazda Miata. My thought is perhaps someone does not want to store it over the winter and the price could be less. Is the Miata a good investment and something I won't spend a lot of money on?

A. In my experience, a Mazda Miata is a fun, simple, and dependable sports car. Buying during the winter can sometimes save you money since some owners do not want to store or drive a convertible in cold weather. I would not think of any car as an investment, however. While some Miatas hold their value well, they still cost money to own and maintain. If you find one with a good maintenance history and little or no rust, it can be an affordable and enjoyable car to own. Just remember the old saying: if it flies, floats, or you can drive it, it is going to cost you money.

Q. I spend several months in Florida over the winter, and I noticed many of my neighbors will move their cars out of the garage when there is a chance of rain. When I asked, they called it a Florida car wash. I was always told it is a good idea to wash a car after the rain. Thoughts?

A. In my experience, whether rain helps or hurts depends on where you live. In the Northeast, acid rain and airborne pollutants can leave water spots and, over time, damage a vehicle's finish if left on the paint. In Florida, rain is typically much closer to neutral, so a "Florida car wash" can actually rinse away dust and pollen. If it were my car, though, I would still dry it afterward and use a quick-detail spray such as Mother's Quick Detailer or Bling Speed Sauce to help prevent water spots and keep the paint looking its best.

Q. Hi Doc, you had a question about noise, and the answer was found in the owner's manual. I had something similar and the answer was in my new Kia owner's manual. What percentage of people do you think really read or look at it? I'm guessing it's in the single digits.

A. In my experience, you may be right. I have always said a vehicle owner's manual is both the least-read book ever published and the best-looking part in a junkyard. These days, many manuals are available online, making them even easier to ignore. Yet when I have a question about an unusual new feature or warranty coverage, the owner's manual is often the first place I look.

Q. I own a 2008 Smart car. It has very low mileage (approximately 25,000 miles) and is in excellent condition. However, it is 18 years old and problems are beginning. My battery does not hold a charge, and the AAA technician suspects it's something electrical. What is the average cost of electrical repairs? How should I proceed? Do you have any recommendations, other than the Mercedes dealership, that may be able to do the required electrical work?

A. In my experience, the first step is to have the battery, charging system, and alternator tested. If those check out, the next test should be for a parasitic draw to determine whether something is staying on and draining the battery after the car is shut off. On Smart cars, one common culprit can be the SAM module, which acts as a smart fuse box and communication center for many electrical systems. Until the problem is diagnosed, it is impossible to estimate repair costs, which can range from a simple wiring repair to replacement of a module. I would start with an independent European repair shop that has experience with Mercedes-Benz vehicles and Smart cars. That may be a better choice than the dealer, especially since some dealerships are less interested in working on older Smart models.

Q. This week I brought my 2021 Acura RDX in for a Massachusetts state inspection and had the shop look for a slow leak in the left rear tire. The shop said that the tire couldn't be repaired and suggested I replace all the tires as the vehicle has 41,000 miles, however the car would still pass inspection. I told them to complete the inspection, but I got to thinking the shop never took the wheels off the car because they never asked for the key to the wheel locks. I decided to check the brakes myself and what I found was the left rotor was not only heavily pitted, but also corroded. Have you ever seen this before and should the car have passed inspection?

CAR DOCTOR
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REAL ESTATE

Is now a bad time to downsize?

Consider these pros and cons before moving to a smaller home in today's market.

Downsizing to a smaller home, condominium or apartment shortly before or in retirement can reduce your housing costs, free up cash and lessen the burden of home maintenance.



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

But many older adults aren't eager to move. Nearly one in three boomers who own their homes say they'll never sell, according to a May 2026 survey by real estate company Redfin and 33 percent of silent generation homeowners don't even plan to sell.

One reason homeowners aren't moving is because they don't feel financially motivated to do so. They don't have a mortgage payment hanging over their heads. Nearly 60 percent of boomers who own a home have paid off their mortgage. With 30-year mortgage rates hovering near 7 percent and the median existing home sale price hitting $429,100 in August, staying put might seem like the financially savvy choice.

However, several signs indicate that today's real estate market may offer a great opportunity for some older homeowners to trade in a larger home for a smaller abode.

If you've paid off most or all of your mortgage, downsizing now could free up cash at a time when home equity levels are at a record high. The average homeowner has $212,000 in potential equity.

Downsizing in this market can also mitigate other rising costs of homeownership, such as homeowners insurance, property taxes and maintenance. Wondering whether now is the right time to downsize? Consider these benefits and drawbacks before making a decision.

Pro: It's not a bad time to buy. After several years of housing shortages and soaring home prices, buyers are gaining the upper hand. The supply of homes for sale is at its highest level since 2020, and nearly 60 percent of homes sold below their original asking price in August, according to Redfin. It's especially a buyer's market for condominiums in popular retirement destinations such as Arizona, Florida and Texas.

Pro: It's not a bad time to sell either. Home values in many cities have risen so fast over the past five years that you may have enough equity to sell your home and buy a smaller place with cash, eliminating the need for a mortgage. No mortgage means improved and more reliable cash flow for those on a fixed income. It also provides the freedom to engage in hobbies, travel and pursue other retirement interests. Also, if you choose to rent rather than buy, you get the added benefit of having a management company maintain your property, giving you back more time and money.

Another reason now could be a good time to put your house on the market? Homes are still selling relatively fast — properties that sold in August were on the market for 60 days on average, the same number of days as the year before. If you decide to rent instead of buy, you could slash your insurance premium by thousands of dollars - the average cost of renters insurance is just $151 per year, compared with an average of $2,395 per year for homeowners insurance.

Pro: You could reduce your property taxes. Your property tax bill has likely risen over the past few years. Median property taxes in the U.S. increased three percent from 2024 to 2025, reaching $4,427, according to Realtor.com. Moving to a lower-priced home or condo could cut your tax bill significantly.

Pro: You could save on maintenance costs. Maintaining a larger home becomes more difficult as we age and with home maintenance costs on the rise, moving to a smaller place might result in significant savings.

Con: You could get hit with a hefty capital gains tax. If your home's value has soared since you purchased it, you might face a big capital gains tax bill when you sell. Home sale profits above $250,000 for single filers and $500,000 for married couples filing jointly are taxed at a 15 to 20 percent capital gains rate, depending on your taxable income.

Con: Downsizing could be more expensive, depending on where you want to live. A lot of people don't downsize to save money. Instead, some move to 55-plus active-living communities for the amenities they offer, such as pools, pickleball courts or fitness centers. These services typically come with larger condo fees, etc.

Con: Condos typically don't appreciate as much as single-family homes. If you're considering downsizing to a condo, be aware that it might not appreciate as much as your single-family home would. If you're worried how much it will be worth when you eventually pass it on, then that might be something to consider. However, downsizing could be a way for you to give your kids their inheritance early by sharing the profit from the sale of your home.

So, this should give you some things to ponder as you navigate your next move. Check in with a member of The Marzeotti Group with additional questions or a trusted real estate professional.







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@theyankeexpress.com

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

• Our popular, annual Harvest Fair fundraiser to benefit Our Lady of Hope Parish will be held at St. James Church Hall, 89 Main Street, S. Grafton on Saturday, Nov. 7, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. There will be something for everyone. We've increased our top Money Raffle prize to $1,000 and the White Elephant area, plus our expanded 'Kids Zone' this year as well! Come browse, buy, have breakfast or lunch, meet friends, and have fun!

• St. Peter's Parish will hold its Annual Holiday Fair on Saturday, November 7th, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the parish hall at 39 Church Avenue, Northbridge.
The community is invited to come out with family and friends for a fun-filled day featuring tables, raffles, food, and holiday shopping. Visitors can browse the popular White Elephant, Baked Goods, Holiday, and Craft Tables, with the Craft Table featuring beautiful handmade items and quilts. The fair will also offer numerous opportunities to try your luck, including raffle tables, a scratch ticket raffle, a quilt raffle, and a gift basket raffle. With a wide selection of raffle items, attendees never know what they might discover. Food will also be available throughout the day. St. Peter's Parish welcomes everyone from the Northbridge community and surrounding area to come enjoy the Annual Holiday Fair and help support the parish. For more information, contact the St. Peter's Parish Office at 508-234-2156 or email parishoffice@stpeterrockdale.org.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

• Ladies Night Out. The Millbury Women's Club will hold its annual fundraiser, "Ladies Night Out," on Friday, Nov. 13, at 6 p.m. This year's event will feature the Delvena Theater Company and actress Lynne Moulton in the one-woman play "Thirteen Things About Ed Carpolotti." The play follows Virginia Carpolotti, a devoted wife whose husband has died, leaving her with extensive debts that must be repaid immediately. Tickets are $45 per person, and space is limited. For reservations, contact Mary Lou Mulhane at 508-865-9831.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

• Pasta and Meatball Dinner & Music Concert: Join us at Saint Peter's Parish in Northbridge for a wonderful evening of delicious food and music. A Pasta & Meatball Dinner & Music Concert on Saturday, Nov. 14, starting at 5:30 p.m. in the parish hall. Tickets are $20 per person for the dinner & concert. All orders must be purchased in advance by Tuesday, Nov. 10. Come enjoy a great evening while supporting the care and maintenance of our parish organ! Please call 508-234-2156 or email the parish office: parishoffice@stpeterockdale.org for tickets.

• Douglas PD and Fire Annual Food and Toy Drive - November 14, 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., at the Fire Station.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21

• The Armenian Church of Whitinsville, Soorp Asdvadzadzin Armenian Apostolic Church, will celebrate the season with its annual Fall Festival on Saturday, November 21, bringing together friends, families and members of the community for a day of Armenian food, shopping, fellowship and fun. The festival will be held at the Christian Reformed Church Hall on Cross Street in Whitinsville. Doors open at 10:30 a.m., with food service beginning at 11 a.m.
Visitors will find something for everyone, including: Ladies Guild Food Table featuring homemade Armenian specialties; Dessert Table with an assortment of sweet treats; Armenian Vendor offering Armenian-inspired gifts and merchandise; Craft Table featuring handmade items; Silent Auction with a variety of items to bid on; White Elephant Table with gently used treasures and surprises; Post Office: purchase a shipping box filled with surprise items.
The Fall Festival offers an opportunity to experience Armenian culture and hospitality while supporting the Armenian Church of Whitinsville's activities and programs.
The public is warmly invited to attend.
Come hungry, browse the tables, discover something special, and enjoy a day of community and Armenian hospitality.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

• Holiday Fun at Unitarian Universalist Church 3 Grafton Common - December 6, 12-3 p.m. Warm apple crisp, cocoa, and coffee; specialty items for sale; s'mores kits and fire pit in the churchyard; free kids' crafts.
1 p.m. Festive Handbell Choir and Community Sing-a-long with dramatic reading of "Twas the Night Before Christmas".
All are welcome.



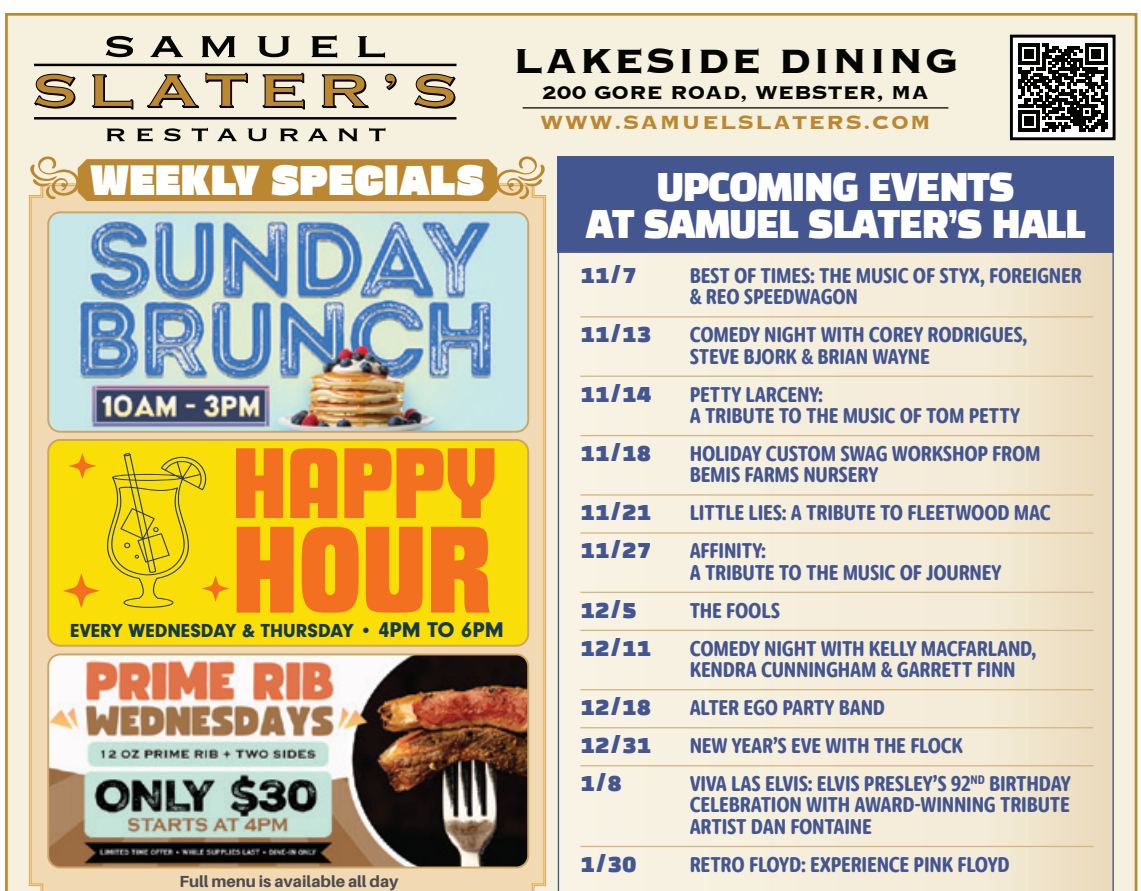
Santa is coming - Sat. Nov. 28

BY BONNIE LEPAGE,
DOUGLAS COMMON
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Santa Claus is coming to Town and will be at the Douglas Common Preservation Society's Holiday Tree Lighting Celebration held at the Douglas Common on Saturday, November 28th, from 4-6 p.m.

Festivities begin at 4 p.m. with the spectacular lighting of the trees at the Common, as well as the beautifully lit tree in the gazebo, followed by Santa's exciting arrival via fire truck – all of which will provide ample photo opportunities with Santa and the reindeer herd. The lights and decorations will be fantastic and sure to put you and your family in the holiday mood. Holiday music will be provided this year by a DJ for the entire event, and children's involvement, as well as adults', will be encouraged. During the celebration, hot chocolate and baked goodies will be served in the warmth of the meeting room of the First Congre-

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continued on page 15







SANTA

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gational Church across the street from the Common.

This free festive Community event is made possible thanks to the generous donations from our major sponsors, UniBank, Bright Factor, and Kearns Collision Repair, along with donations from individual and business contributors throughout the year.

There is plenty of parking for this event. For your convenience, a shuttle bus will be available from 3:30-6:30 p.m. from the parking lot at the Highway Department, or parking is available behind the VFW on Route 16 -- just a short walk to the Common. Handicapped parking is available in the Church Parking lot for those with handicapped plates or decals, or on one side of Church and NW Main Streets.

The Douglas Common Preservation Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization formed to preserve, maintain, rejuvenate, improve, and beautify the Town-owned Douglas Common, and its volunteers work year-round to accomplish its mission. If you would like to support our organization and help with our activities at the Common, submit your tax-deductible donation to Douglas Common Preservation Society Inc., 76 NW Main Street, Douglas, MA 01516, or via Venmo @Kathleen-Sugrue-Richards. If your donation is received by November 30th as part of our Fall Donation Drive and Thank You Drawings, your name will be entered (15 entries for each $25 donated) into your choice of drawings for three fantastic prizes, including $750 of "$2,500 a Week for Life" Scratch Tickets, a one-night stay at the Williams Inn, Williamstown (Berkshires) and a one-night stay at Bayside Resort Hotel, W, Yarmouth (Cape Cod).

Donations are tax-deductible, and 100% of your donation will be used to benefit the Common.

Please follow Douglas Common Preservation Society, Inc. on our FB page.

CAR DOCTOR

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A. In my experience, what you found is not uncommon, especially here in the Northeast where road salt and moisture can cause brake rotors to rust and corrode. Massachusetts inspection stations do not remove wheels during a routine safety inspection, so there would be no reason for the inspector to ask for the wheel lock key, although perhaps they should have for the tire repair. If the brakes operated properly, the vehicle stopped straight, and there were no obvious safety concerns, the vehicle could still pass inspection even with a rusty or pitted rotor. That said, a heavily corroded rotor should be inspected more closely. Surface rust is not a problem, but severe corrosion could affect braking performance and should be addressed.

Q. My 2002 Honda Accord is going to the shop for a timing belt and water pump replacement. The car has 91,000 miles on it and runs very well. What else should I be doing? Tires, battery, and brakes were replaced in the last two years, spark plugs were replaced, and we change the oil every 3,000 to 4,000 miles.

A. In my experience, you are doing an excellent job keeping up with maintenance. While the timing belt and water pump are being replaced, I would consider replacing the drive belts, inspecting the radiator hoses, and possibly replacing the crankshaft and camshaft seals if there is any sign of leakage. Other than that, with a 24-year-old car that has only 91,000 miles, I would focus on regular maintenance and keeping an eye out for age-related issues such as fluid leaks, worn rubber components, or corrosion. Honda Accords of that era are known for their longevity, and with the care you are giving it, there is no reason it should not continue to provide many more years of reliable service.

Do you have a car question? Email the Car Doctor for a personal reply at jpaul@aaanortheast.com



2026 Sutton Chain of Lights

Saturday, Dec. 5 • 10am-4pm

The Sutton Chain of Lights Committee is pleased to announce the ***2026 Sutton Chain of Lights*** will take place this year on **Saturday, December 5**, from 10 am to 4 pm.

Spend a day with your family and friends at the Town of Sutton's Annual Holiday Chain of Lights event.

Free buses will transport visitors over rolling countryside to participating locations throughout historic Sutton.

Farms, unique specialty stores, church fairs, and area businesses welcome the holidays with musical entertainment, children's activities, food, fun and Holiday characters.

Route information, maps, location descriptions and brochures are available at www.suttonlights.com







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OPEN MIC NIGHTS

Learn and collaborate with other musicians!

6:00-8:30pm



Saturday, November 14, 2026
November's theme:
Harvest Harmonies

Saturday, January 9, 2027
January's theme:
Moonlight Melodies

Open Sky COMMUNITY SERVICES

Sign ups begin @ 5:30pm
Singh Performance Center, 60 Douglas Rd., Whitinsville, MA
Hosted by Open Sky's Community Membership Dept.
Questions? Michelle.Benjamin@openskycs.org or visit openskycs.org/openmic

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