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The Yankee Xpress

SOUTH EDITION: Charlton, Dudley & Webster

November 6, 2026

Troubled waters: Town, ski club clash over lake use

BY WALTER BIRD

A ski club's use of a lake with a 45-letter name, known more popularly by its much shorter name, has caused waves in the town of Webster.

The Nipmuc Water Ski Club, according to Board Member Jason Cadrin of Millbury, has been hosting ski lessons and shows on Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg, or Webster Lake, for more than 70 years. That use ended abruptly earlier this year after a trio of cease-and-desist (C&D) letters were sent to the club.

One came from the state Department of Transportation (MassDOT), dated June 26. The other two were from the town's Building Commissioner, two days before the MassDOT letter, on June 24, and the town's Conservation Commission, on July 1.

Now, the club is fighting to regain use of a piece of property it says it has been using the past 50 years at 235 Thompson Road as well as the lake, amidst a number of complaints about inappropriate use of the lake, including whether, in fact, the club is in violation of local town bylaws prohibiting commercial use.

The property is owned by MassDOT.

Town Administrator Richard LaFond told the Yankee Xpress that the issue came to light after public complaints.



Photo provided by Nipmuc Water Ski Club.

"There were some complaints of inappropriate behavior. We looked into those," LaFond said. "We learned they didn't own the property and there were some wetland and zoning issues."

MassDOT, he said, became involved after learning the club was using its property adjacent to Exit 1 off of Interstate 395 for parking and a shed to house equipment.

LaFond later clarified that the town had initiated contact with the state after several complaints, one written, and "probably a good half dozen verbal" about the club's activity at the lake.

MassDOT Chief Communications Officer Amelia Aubourg referred a reporter's initial inquiry to Director of Communications

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Dudley weighs priorities after voters reject tax proposals

BY RILEY FRANKIAN

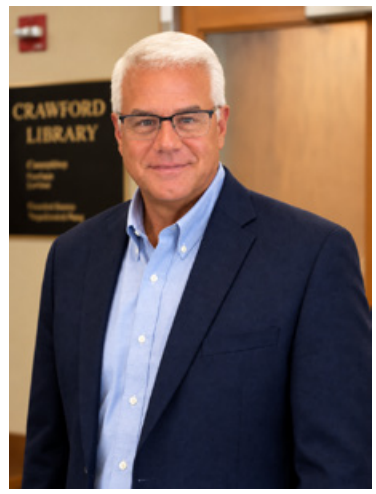
Following voters' rejection of a tax override for municipal services and a separate debt exclusion for school improvements, Dudley officials are emphasizing the need to prioritize spending as the town confronts rising costs and limited revenue.

Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda said the Sept. 29 results reflect the public's position on the proposed financial commitments, adding that officials must reassess their approach rather than repeatedly seeking approval for the same proposals.

"Government's responsibility is not to keep asking the same question until it gets a different answer. It is to listen, reassess, and respond," Ruda said.

Dudley voters rejected a property tax override of $717,630 intended to support police, fire and highway operations. Voters also rejected a debt exclusion associated with the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District's proposed capital improvement plan, which would have required approximately $5 million in other school-related debt for Dudley.

Ruda said the override would not have restored all previously reduced services or resolved the



Dudley Town Administrator Jonathan Ruda

town's long-term financial challenges.

Dudley entered fiscal 2027 with a balanced budget after reducing expenditures, leaving positions unfilled, limiting departmental spending and using stabilization funds. However, Ruda said rising health insurance costs, retirement obligations and other municipal expenses continue to put pressure on finances.

"A balanced budget is not necessarily a healthy budget," Ruda

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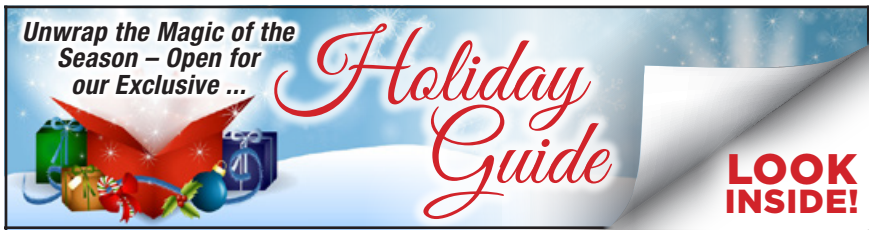




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Marshall Hook, who did not respond to multiple email requests for comment and information for this story.

An email to Karissa Hand, Deputy Communications Director for Gov. Maura Healey, also went unanswered.

In his June 24 C&D letter, Webster Building Commissioner Sebastian J. Mroczka noted the land was state-owned and was within a Lake Residential Zoning District.

MassDOT, in its letter to the club, said it had reviewed and discussed with Webster officials the club's "current and proposed use of the property." Based on that review, MassDOT said it had identified "substantial safety, operational, and property-management concerns."

In an emailed response to Yankee Xpress seeking more information and comment, a MassDOT representative referred the matter to a colleague, who did not respond to a follow-up email.

The Conservation Commission, meanwhile, in its C&D letter to the club, cited multiple alleged violations "within a wetland resource area and/or buffer zone."

One of the complainants who has spoken against the club is Felicia Wood of 243 Thompson Road. In written testimony submitted to the town, Wood laid out 18 specific grievances, including, but not limited to, having "purposely headed towards boats to force them out of the cove" and leaving broken pieces of Styrofoam, used under ski jumps, in the lake. The club has created wakes that have left Wood and her husband unable to put their ski boat in the water. She also complained about the residence of those participating in the club. "The people that belong to the club are not from here," Wood wrote.

Wood spoke at an October 6 ZBA meeting, where she provided documentation of her complaints to Webster's Director of Planning & Economic Development, and Conservation Agent Joseph Wigglesworth.

"What's going on over there is they are teaching people to do show skiing, and they are competing and they are using our lake to do that, and they aren't even from here," Wood said. "They say they're a nonprofit … When they park over there, they're literally jammed into that lot. Cars are parked on the side of the road. It's an accident waiting to happen. They have outgrown that spot."

According to records provided by the club, the IRS recognized the organization as a 501(c)(3) in August 2019.

Of the complaints, Ski Club Secretary Sara Mosely said, "I have heard the claims. It's one neighbor.



A vintage Nipmuc Water Ski Club jacket and club memorabilia are in a display case at Point Breeze Restaurant in Webster. Photo by Martha Akstin

We have several other neighbors that love us and were upset we were not there to ski this summer.

"What I would say," she continued, "is it's Webster Lake. We personally don't go out on our boats on the weekends. It's chaos on the lake. There are lots of boats … driving close to shore. To point the finger at the Ski Club, it's just not true. Our boat drivers all have a ton of training."

In response to Wood's claim that members are not from the area, Cadrin noted his parents own a house on South Pond.

Wood also contended the club uses the lake seven days a week, morning to night.

Cadrin said the club's scheduled nights are Mondays and Thursdays, as well as Saturday mornings. On Wednesdays, normally from mid-July through mid-August, they would host a free show at Memorial Beach.

The club has met with Webster officials, including the Zoning Board of Appeals, and has another meeting with that board scheduled for Nov. 4 as Yankee Xpress was going to print.

SKI CLUB

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CHARLTON

Angle Hair Salon ..... 96 Worcester Road
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Charlton Fire Department ..... 10 Power Station Road
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Charlton Laundromat ..... 9 City Depot Road
Charlton Nails ..... 109 Masonic Home Road
Town Hall ..... 37 Main St.
Cornerstone Bank ..... 2 Center Depot Road/Rte 20
Country Bank ..... 37 Worcester Road
Country Farms ..... 57 North Main St.
CVS ..... 142 Worcester Road
Dad's ..... 417 Worcester Road
Family House of Pizza ..... 105 Masonic Home Road
Francsco Staline Bakery ..... 14 Power Station Road
George Pizza ..... 9 City Depot Road
Hunter & Son Barber Shop ..... 9 City Depot Road
Library ..... 40 Main St.
Oxbow Variety ..... 3 Oxbow Road/Rte 20
Savers Bank ..... 35 Trolley Crossing Road/Rte 20
Ted Package Store ..... 27 Worcester Road
USPS ..... 58 North Main St.
USPS ..... 11 Power Station Road
Webster Bank First ..... 29 Trolley Crossing Road/Rte 20
Yankker Dinner 2025 ..... 16 Worcester Road

DUDLEY

Big Al's Pizza ..... 23 Brandon Srreet
Boston Brunch Bits ..... 265 West Main St.
Town Hall ..... 71 West Hair St.
Cumberland Farms ..... 190 West Hair St.
Dippin Donuts ..... 32 West Main St.
Dudley House of Pizza ..... 206 West Main St.
Dudley Park & Shop ..... 14 Airport Road
Fire Bonds Bar and Grill ..... 8 Airport Road
Flynn Fine Wines ..... 81 Schofield Avenue
Golden Nails ..... 185 West Hair St.
Jimmy Pizza ..... 185 West Hair St.
Kwik Stop ..... 55 Schofield Avenue
Leoni's Brick Oven ..... 59 Schofield Avenue
London Barber ..... 185 West Hair St.
Marty's Liquors ..... 119 West Hair St.
Partior Gas & Liquors ..... 251 West Main St.
Paula Nail Design ..... 210 West Main St.
Pearl Crawford Library ..... 40 Schofield Avenue
Peter Hair Salon ..... 265 West Main St.
Sinni's Pub ..... 6 Chase Avenue
Sturbridge Coffee Pastry ..... 185 West Hair St.
The Wash Tub Laundry ..... 5 Oxford Avenue
Twin City Electronics ..... 147 West Hair St.
Upside Food & Drink ..... 59 Schofield Avenue
USPS ..... 124 West Hair St.
Webster First Credit Union ..... 16 Airport Road
Webster Five Cents Savings Bank ..... 208 West Main St.
West Main Liquors ..... 212 West Main St.
Yummy's Restaurant ..... 3 Center Road

WEBSTER

60 Minute Cleaners ..... 106 East Main St.
Afro Fusion Restaurant ..... 548 South Main St.
Alley Cat Diner ..... 117 East Main St.
Apollo Pizza of Webster ..... 170 Gore Road
Bank Hometown ..... 4 Gore Road
Barber Lounge ..... 12 East Main St.
Beacon Bank ..... 25 Worcester Road
Big Belly Café ..... 140 Gore Road
Bistro Eight Ates ..... 172 Gore Road
Book Lovers Gorumet ..... 72 East Main St.
Cakettes ..... 294 Thompson Road
Town Hall ..... 350 South Main St.
Cornerstone Bank ..... 86 Worcester Road
CVS ..... 112 East Main St.
E Main St. Café ..... 129 East Main St.
Empire Wok ..... 11 Worcester Road
Fire Department ..... 55 Thompson Road
Gilbert Market ..... 93 North Main St.
Gladys E. Kelley Library ..... 2 Lake St.
Hanks Liquors ..... 94 East Main St.
Himalaya Wok ..... 68 East Main St.
Holly Farms ..... 151 Thompson Road
Honey Dew Donuts ..... 113 East Main St.
Lake Pizza & Restaurant ..... 39 Thompson Road
Los Primos Barber Shop ..... 244 South Main St.
Mexicenli Fresh Grill ..... 41 Worcester Road
Monte Blanco Restaurante ..... 140 Main St.
Northeast Pizza ..... 29 Main St.
Orawa Deli ..... 60 East Main St.
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said. "When balance is achieved by reducing services, leaving positions vacant, and drawing upon reserves, the numbers may balance on paper, but the underlying problems remain."

The failed override leaves the town facing continued financial constraints as officials seek to maintain essential services. Ruda said the town must account for the consequences of any additional financial obligations rather than treating its operating budget as a source of unallocated money.

The school district's next steps will include evaluating its proposed capital improvements, identifying the most urgent needs and determining whether projects can be phased in or deferred.

Ruda said the vote should not be interpreted as a rejection of the need for school improvements. Instead, he said, it demonstrated that the proposal did not receive sufficient public support.

"Buildings age. Mechanical systems fail. Safety concerns must be addressed," Ruda said, noting that postponing necessary maintenance can ultimately increase costs.

He added that the district is best positioned to assess the conditions of its facilities and identify projects presenting immediate health, safety or operational concerns. Residents, he said, should receive clear information about project costs, potential funding sources and the consequences of delays.

Ruda also cautioned against interpreting opposition to borrowing as opposition to education, citing the rising household expenses that residents face.

"Every household in Dudley understands that when expenses rise faster than income, something has to give," he said. "Government is not exempt from that reality."

He said any future proposal should include a transparent capital plan, clear priorities, a realistic financing strategy and an explanation of how the costs could affect taxpayers and other municipal services.

Despite the setbacks, Ruda emphasized that Dudley remains committed to working with the school district and Charlton to address school facility needs while protecting essential municipal services.

"The easy thing for government is to identify everything that needs more money," he said. "The difficult thing is to establish priorities, make choices, and live within financial limits. That is where real leadership begins."

In the coming months, Dudley officials intend to work with the school district to evaluate school infrastructure needs and potential funding options while respecting voters' opposition to the proposed tax increases. ✶

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The club has laid out its point of view via a statement on its Facebook page, where a timeline of events notes town officials "officially contacted" them in March 2026 via certified letter regarding its use of the Thompson Road site. According to the post, the club "engaged in ongoing communication with both the Town and MassDOT."

Mosely said the town first constructed barriers on the property then posted "No Parking" signs there.

According to Mosely, the club has been working "very closely" with MassDOT and met them at the property after the barriers went up.

"They said they were not told this was going to happen," she said about the barriers.

LaFond, however, told Yankee Xpress that the town's highway superintendent contacted MassDOT and asked for permission to erect the barriers.

"Keep in mind," LaFond said, "the state doesn't want the club there."

Yankee Xpress has been unable to clarify the conflicting statements with the state because of a lack of response regarding the issue.

LaFond said the town's position is the club does not possess required permits to use the lake. There are also zoning issues, such as whether the club is operating commercially, something the club strongly denies.

LaFond insists the town has worked in good faith to resolve the issue, including an offer this past summer for the club to use an area near Memorial Beach.

"I had multiple conversations with Ski Club members," LaFond said. "Ultimately, I had offered a location on the town's beach, Memorial Beach, to run the program for the rest of the season. They declined. There were conditions attached. The one that seems to be the reason they rejected the offer is they needed to remove their property from the Thompson Road property they were operating from."

However, Cadrin said the reason why the club turned down the offer, was LaFond's requirement that members pay for passes to the beach.

"Here we are with a family of four, and they all want to water ski, and they would have to bear the cost," Cadrin said. "They wanted us to have everybody have a pass to the beach. We would have had to transfer the cost to our members."

As it is, he said, shutting down operations this past summer has had a negative impact on the club.

"Before this all happened, we had around 60 members," Cadrin said "Now it's dropped down. We have to give refunds, give a lot of money back. We had families that had three to four kids in the program. We had to give them refunds."

In its Facebook statement, the club said it has worked in "good faith and in compliance with requests from the town and MassDOT throughout this process."

The club states it was not afforded adequate notice or opportunity to participate in town meetings, "which may have allowed the club to preserve the 2027 season."

"While working to return to Webster Lake in 2027, the Club remains focused on its mission [of] providing free skiing instruction and community programming to the youth and families of Webster and the surrounding area," the FB statement reads. Nipmuc Ski Club is hopeful for a resolution that allows this 70-year community tradition to continue."

Asked whether the town was amenable to other solutions to potentially resolve the conflict, LaFond said the town tried to help the club, saying they remained focused on using the existing state-owned property.

"I think I've made enough overtures to the club," LaFond said. "I don't expect to be reaching out again. Certainly, if anybody calls me, I'll pick up the phone." ✶





Webster-Dudley Veterans Day Parade

The twenty-first Webster-Dudley annual Veterans Day Parade will be held on Wednesday, November 11. Webster resident Armand L. Jalbert will be honored as this year's parade Grand Marshal.

Jalbert was born in Worcester and raised in Southbridge. Active as a Cub Scout and Boy Scout, he attended Notre Dame School where he was on the basketball team. He graduated from Cole Trade High School in 1967, completing the machinist course of study.

Like his father Roland who served in an armored division during World War II, Armand became an Army man. He was inducted into the U.S. Army in Springfield, MA in September 1967. He completed basic combat training at Fort Bragg, NC and attended the helicopter mechanic course at Fort Rucker, AL.

Jalbert deployed to the Republic of Vietnam where he served a 14-month combat tour, assigned to the 335th Assault Helicopter Company known as "The Cowboys." His unit flew UH-1 Huey gunships in support of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. His units' operating areas were Long Binh, Bien Hoa, Dak To, Vung-Tau (Dragon Mountain) and Da Nang.

Jalbert was awarded the Purple Heart for wounds received when the helicopter in which he served as aircraft crew chief took enemy fire and crashed. His other awards and decorations include The National Defense Serviced Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

After completing his tour of duty, he rotated back to the U.S. and was separated from military service in May 1969, with the rank of Specialist 5.

Jalbert moved to Webster when he married his wife Deborah in 1973. They had a son, Jason. After 10 years of marriage Deborah sadly passed. Later, Armand married his wife Kathleen and they celebrated their 36th anniversary this year.

Armand was a truck driver his entire working career, owning A.L. Jalbert trucking for many years. He then drove for Marriot Distribution Services and Federal Express Freight until he retired. He is a member of Webster-Dudley Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 654.

Marching veterans should meet by 10:15 a.m. with their respective colors/weapons in the St. Louis School parking area located next to the gymnasium at the bottom of the entryway. Transportation by bus will depart at approximately 10:30 a.m. for the Municipal Complex in Dudley.

Upon arriving, participants will gather at the Veterans' Court of Honor. The ceremonies will begin promptly at 11 a.m. The chaplain will say a prayer, followed by a three-shot volley by the weapon detail and the playing of Taps. After that, guest speaker Lieutenant Colonel William Conley, Jr., United States Marine Corps, Retired, will deliver a brief message.



Armand L. Jalbert, Grand Marshal of this year's Webster-Dudley Veterans Day Parade.

After the Dudley ceremony, veterans will march in procession from the Dudley Municipal Complex to the Webster Veterans' Court of Honor for a similar presentation, including the chaplain's prayer, a three-shot volley, and Taps. The ceremonies are expected to conclude at approximately 12:45 p.m.

Information for this article was provided by Andy Kozlowski and Stephen Rogerson, district director of Veterans' Services, Veterans' Services Officer for Dudley and Webster. Rogerson can be reached at the Dudley office at 508.949.8010, the Webster office at 508.949.3855, or email him at stephen.rogerson@webster-ma.gov ✶

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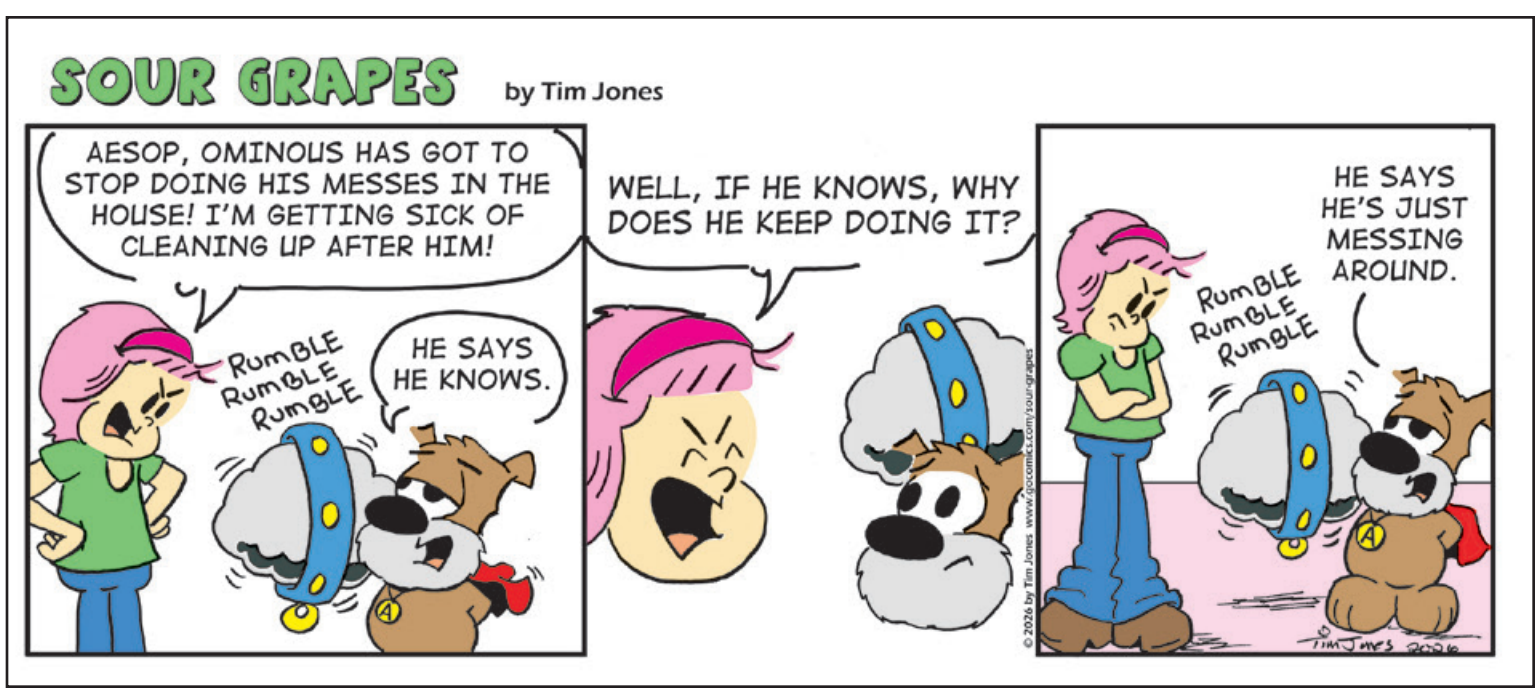
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Dudley's first-ever Poetry Slam



Poetry took center stage in the great outdoors on Oct. 15, as children and adults gathered in the wooded area of the Fun Zone Playground to share their creativity.

Sponsored by the Pearle L. Crawford Memorial Library and the Dudley Recreation Commission, the event brought together community members of all ages to share original poetry and spoken-word pieces in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

Surrounded by the colorful backdrop of autumn foliage, family members, friends and neighbors offered encouragement and finger-snapping applause.

The event showcased the newly constructed outdoor stage area at the Fun Zone Playground, providing a unique setting for artistic expression and community connection. ✷



The Annual Spooktacular Parade saw ghosts and goblins, witches and princesses, walking with cartoon characters, video game heroes and villains on Oct. 29 as everyone enjoyed the warm weather and police escort. Hosted by the Dudley Recreation Commission and Pearle L. Crawford Library, families enjoyed games, live music, a balloon artist and the always-popular Cauldron of S'mores at the library after the parade. Photos submitted

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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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November art exhibition

Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 East Main St., Webster, presents Jim Wilton and Laura Cenedella - Two Artistic Journeys in the cafe gallery from November 3 to 28. Their artwork can be viewed during business hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-5 pm, and Wednesday 10 am-6 pm. A public reception will be held Friday, Nov. 13, from 5-7 p.m.

Jim and Laura's artwork compliments one another seamlessly. Although each artist has traveled a different path, together they express their shared and individual experiences through photography and painting. For more information, call 508.949.6232.





Left: Jim Wilton's Seascape, right, Laura Cenedella's Lighthouse

Jim R. Wilton is an award-winning, largely self-taught artist who works in painting and photography. He has a passion for capturing nature and the intricacies of life, with a focus on lighthouses, outdoor scenes, landscapes, portraits, and plein air work. He began photographing in 2008, which opened up digital photography and wider accessibility for his practice. Jim is a member of the Ruth Wells Arts Center and Blackstone Valley Art Association. He has self-published two coffee-table photo books, been featured in magazines, and shares his work on Facebook and Etsy. His photography has appeared on book covers and calendars.

Laura Cenedella is a painter and photographer based in Brookfield, MA. Her artistic journey began in high school, and she has since developed into a semi self-taught artist. She works across various mediums, including oil, acrylic, watercolor, and pastels. Her work has been recognized by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Blackstone Valley Art Association and the Massasoit Art Guild. Laura is a board member of the Blackstone Valley Art Association, and member of the Massasoit Art Guild, the Worcester Art Museum, and the Ruth Wells Arts Center. Her art has been exhibited in libraries across MA, at a one-woman art show in 2025 and 2026 at the Ruth Wells Arts Center, and for a second year at the Worcester Art Museum. An avid photographer, her work was featured in the Small Stones 2025 and 2026 Art Catalogs. For more information, visit her on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. ✷

Dudley Town Hall will close to public two days a week

Effective October 20, the Dudley Town Hall will be closed to the public on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

The Select Board's decision to close two days each week followed the September 29 Special Election, in which voters rejected a proposed Proposition 2½ override earmarked for the Police, Fire and Highway Departments. As a result, the Town must operate within its existing recurring revenues, current appropriations, and available one-time resources.

Since the start of FY2027, several Town Hall positions have been eliminated.

The administrative assistants in the Select Board's Office and Accounting Office were laid off. An assistant position in the Treasurer/Collector's Office will not be restored. The administrative assistant in the Assessor's Office has been eliminated. The employee responsible for managing the town website, information technology, Dudley Cable Access TV and who served as administrative assistant to the Highway Department, has departed, and the position has been eliminated.

Given current staffing and budget limitations, closing the entire building two days each week is necessary to provide the remaining office staff with uninterrupted administrative time to keep Town Hall functions operating effectively. ✷



SPORTS

Shepherd Hill golfers better their season record

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER





Left: Chris Snow. Right: Dylan Snow. Photos submitted.

After venturing into the Sectionals two years ago, the Shepherd Hill golf team could not muster enough wins to qualify for the tournament last year. This year, however, the Rams golfers put together an 8-8 season that earned them a trip to the Sectionals.

"Making the Sectionals is always tough," Shepherd Hill Coach Nate Skermont said. "But it is always a goal of ours. Golf tournaments are not like any other sport. It's a .500 or better season or bust."

Different than any other MIAA sport, the .500 rule for golf allows the teams entrance into the post season. However, the MIAA is looking to rule out a power rankling system for golf, but with a bit of a twist. Schools with golf teams will have to provide the MIAA with schematics of their home course, which will aid the organization in its power rankings. Skermont believes this will bring some interesting aspects to the ranking system.

"Golf is the ultimate home field advantage," explained Skermont. "In basketball, the hoop is always 10 feet high and football fields are all 100 yards. In golf, you rely on your own course to provide you with that extra edge. It is really tough to win on your opposition's course."

The Shepherd Hill coach also noted that coming into this season, they were looking to obtain that .500 record or better so that they could continue to play post-season golf. Although that's the goal, he also realizes that the Rams play on some tough courses and against some really skilled golfers. Nonetheless he had high expectations with some experienced golfers returning to play.

Leading the Rams onto the course are twin brothers Dylan and Chris Snow. Dylan, a senior and a four-year member of the team, captured the Mid Wach B Championship this fall shooting a 71 at Juniper Hills in Northboro. His brother Chris, a Shepherd Hill basketball star, decided to join the team last fall and quickly took his game to a high level. He has become a solid cornerstone for the team while averaging a 42.6.

While Dylan made the team as a freshman, he didn't see all that much time on the course that year. However, he worked extremely hard over that summer and played in as many tournaments as he could to improve his game.

During his sophomore campaign as a starter, he not only helped the team advance into the Sectionals, but he was also awarded the Coaches Award for the season. Last fall, while the team did not qualify for the Sectionals, Dylan did as an individual (where half of his regular season scores had to be 4 over par or less). He was named the team MVP and also was named to the Mid Wach All-Star team for the first time in his career.

This season, Dylan was able to win the Mid Wach B Individual Championship, was once again named to the All-Star team and averaged a 39.75 (3 over par) for the season.

The Snow duo has been outstanding on the greens and help the younger golfers in any way they can. Over the years, Dylan has grown his game exponentially and according to his coach, he is the epitome of hard work.

Other golfers who have contributed to the Rams' success this fall have been junior Marshall Bercume and sophomore Aidan Belhumer. Together with the Snows they have been Shepherd Hill's top four golfers and continually contributed to the scoring on a regular basis.

As the Sectionals approached, Coach Skermont was allowed to send six golfers with the four top scores counting toward the team's performance.

"We have played well over the last few weeks and are looking to ride that momentum into the Sectionals," the Rams coach said prior to the Sectionals. "In golf, you're really not playing against the other golfers, you are playing the course."

The Sectionals were held Monday, Oct. 19 at the Northern Spy Golf Course in Townsend, Mass. where the golfers played all 18 holes in one day. A typical golf day includes only nine holes, so the Sectionals were a grind for all athletes involved. The Shepherd Hill golfers were familiar with the front nine holes of Northern Spy, but they had not played the back nine.

"Playing in the Sectionals is a totally different game," Dylan Snow said before the Sectionals. "I have been playing well and feel comfortable going in, so I am hoping that I can continue to play and advance to the States."

This, however, was the first Sectionals Tournament for Chris.

"Over my two years I have seen my game improve and I feel that I am more consistent with my game," Chris said. "Entering the Sectionals I am hoping that I can shoot under an 80 for the 18 holes and possibly move onto the States.'"

Unfortunately, the team did not play well at the Sectionals in Townsend, and no one was able to advance individually. However, the team can look back at its improved seasonal record of .500, and the coach looks forward to next year with Bercume and Belhumer returning to the team. ✷



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." ✷

Yearbooks of three local high schools are now digitized

The Charlton Public Library is pleased to announce the digitization of historic yearbooks from three local schools: Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School, Shepherd Hill Regional High School, and Charlton High School.

These yearbooks are available online through the Charlton Public Library's website, making these valuable pieces of Charlton's history accessible to former students, families, researchers, and community members – no matter where they live.

The digitized collections offer an opportunity to revisit school traditions, classmates, activities, accomplishments, and everyday life from earlier generations. By making these materials available digitally, the library hopes to help preserve and share the community's history for years to come.

Library Director Betsy Perry said, "We are excited to make these yearbooks more accessible to the community. These publications provide a wonderful glimpse into the people, places, and memories that have shaped Charlton and the neighboring communities."

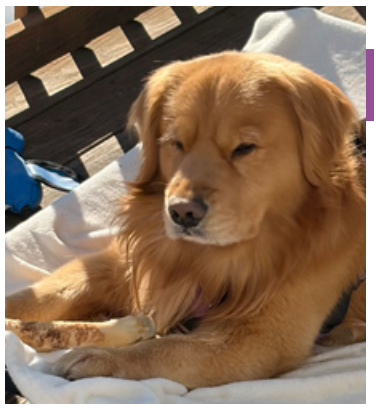
Whether you are looking for your own school memories, researching local history, or simply curious about Charlton's past, the library invites you to explore the newly digitized collections. The yearbooks are accessible through the Charlton Public Library website at charltonlibrary.org.

Charlton Public Library is located at 40 Main St. in Charlton. ✷









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 wellness 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.

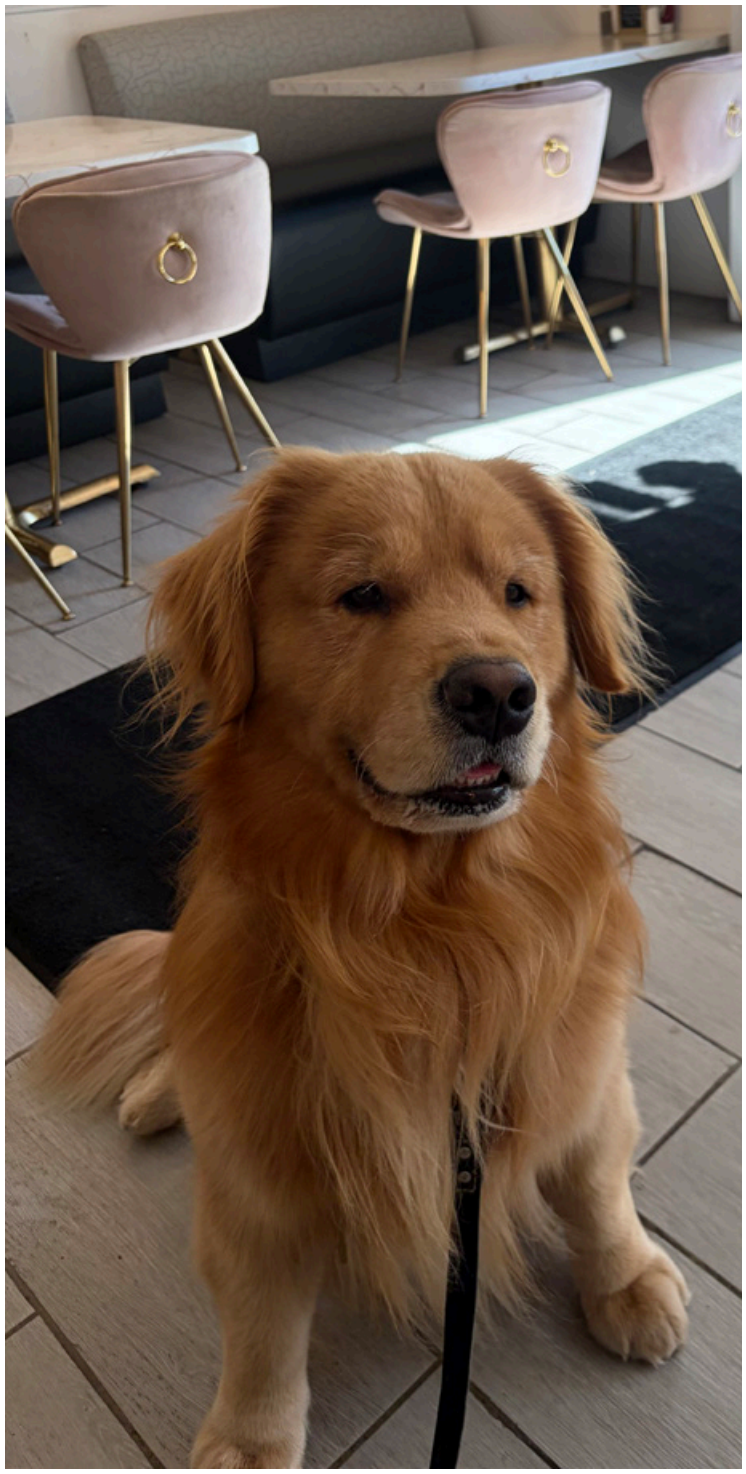
"You're all set, Mr. Luke Valentino."

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

Visit Luke on IG@livingwithluke-valentino

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. ✶




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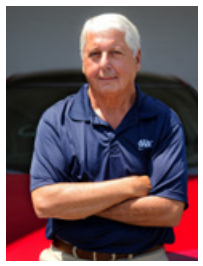
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THE CAR DOCTOR

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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

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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

CAR DOCTOR
continued on page 13

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TIPS ON FINANCIAL PLANNING

dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com

Is FIRE right for you? What early retirement really takes

The idea has never been more appealing: quit your 9-to-5 decades ahead of schedule and spend your days on your own terms. You may have heard of the FIRE movement, but what is it really and does the hype live up to reality?

FIRE stands for Financial Independence, Retire Early. While some FIRE advocates focus on retiring early, others are more interested in achieving enough financial independence to gain greater flexibility over their career, lifestyle and future.


DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

Wherever your goal fall on that spectrum, FIRE is typically built around three commitments: high savings, frugal living and disciplined investing. Proponents generally save from 50-75% of their yearly income, according to CNBC Select, live more frugally and invest those savings for growth potential over time.

Why FIRE resonates with some people

• It can help you prioritize. While you may want a long and successful career, you may instead prioritize earlier retirement or a path that allows you more time with family, a more meaningful job or a downshift from your current daily grind.

• It advocates for some sound financial principles. Living within your means, saving for your goals and investing for long-term growth potential can help build a solid financial foundation.

•It helps you set a strategy for the future. Achieving your retirement goal is easier when you've defined what you want retirement to look like and built a strategy to help achieve it.

What to consider before pursuing FIRE

• Your budget may change. Future expenses may look different than they do today. Family obligations, emergencies and other life changes can increase the amount you'll need in early retirement.

• You may need to bridge the retirement benefit gap. Medicare covers many healthcare costs for retirees 65+, but if you retire early, you'll need to find and pay for health insurance until you become eligible. You'll also need to rely more heavily on personal savings for longer before claiming Social Security benefits. Because Social Security benefits are generally based on your highest 35 earning years, retiring early may result in a lower benefit than if you'd continued working.

• Your flexibility may be limited. Market declines can be particularly challenging in retirement. One way to help weather a decline is by reducing spending, but a lean budget with more necessary expenses may leave you with fewer options to adjust your spending.

• Your strategy should be personalized. Many FIRE proponents advocate for rules of thumb like the 4% withdrawal rate and saving 25 times your annual expenses. However, retiring earlier than normal means your savings must support a longer retirement, and inflation has a larger impact. Therefore, your withdrawal rate may need to be lower and your planned savings higher than traditional rules of thumb, and those targets should be personalized to you.

Start planning now

Whether your goal is early retirement or a more traditional path, a financial advisor can help you with a plan for your goals and the path ahead. ✷

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

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CAR DOCTOR

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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?

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

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Pearle L. Crawford Library, 40 Schofield Ave., Dudley. To register for events or sign up for the newsletter, go to crawfordlibrary.org or call 508-949-8021.
Charlton Public Library, 40 Main St., Charlton. To register for events, go to charltonlibrary.org or call 508.248.0452.
Gladys E. Kelly Public Library, 2 Lake Street, Webster. To register for events, go to gladyskellylibrary.org or call 508.949.3880.

CHARLTON

Month of November: Artist Nancy Rosenberg exhibition will be on display in the Community Room at the Charlton Public Library.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

9 am-3 pm: A blood drive honoring Charlton Town Moderator Kenny Laferriere, who died Sunday, Oct. 25, will be held at First Congregational Church, 135 Center Rd., Dudley. The drive will benefit Boston Children's Hospital. At the Oct. 27 Charlton Select Board meeting, Acting Chair David Singer said about Laferriere, "He was just a good person, and he had an amazingly huge heart. He will be terribly missed in town."

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

6-7:30 pm: May the Odds Be Ever in Your Favor: Hunger Games Trivia in Dexter Hall at the library. Throw your hat into the arena and volunteer to join them for an evening of Hunger Games Trivia. Celebrate the upcoming movie release of Sunrise on the Reaping with pub-style trivia featuring five rounds, each with a unique twist. Participants should expect questions based on both the films and books across the series. This program is best suited for teens ages 12+ and adults. Registration required through the library's website.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

1-2:15 pm: Introduction to Safe AI & Emerging Digital Threats. Cybersecurity professional Gene Kingsley will be in the Community Meeting Room at the Library to talk about using AI safely and protecting yourself from digital threats. This session will cover how to use AI tools securely while understanding new risks. Registration appreciated.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

6:30-7:30 pm: Ballroom Dancing: Participants will dance the night away at the Library in this program in partnership with Bay Path Evening School. Join them in beautiful Dexter Hall for an enchanted evening of ballroom dancing. Everyone is welcome, come alone or bring a partner. No registration is required.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

12:30-1:30 pm: Navigating the settings on iPhone and iPad. In this class held in the Community Room at the Library, explore the Settings app, and examine ways to adjust your devices to suit your individual needs. Learn to access important information about your devices, update the software, and customize important features like Do Not Disturb, Face ID, and notifications.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21

5-6:30 pm: Annual Turkey Dinner at the Charlton City United Methodist Church, 74 Stafford St. On the menu will be their famous turkey dinner with all the fixings! Turkey, mashed potatoes with gravy, peas with pearl onions, stuffing, butternut squash, cranberry sauce and dinner rolls with butter, followed by homemade pumpkin pie topped with whipped cream. Tickets are $15/adult; $8 children 6-12; free for children 5 and under. There is a $50 max per family. Always a sellout, make reservations for eat-in or take-out by calling 508.248.7379. Leave your name and number in case they need to reach you. The church is accessible for people with disabilities and ample parking is available.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 3

6-7:15 pm: The Fright Before Christmas with Jeff Belanger. In Dexter Hall at the Library. Remember the famous Christmas song lyrics, "There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the glories of Christmases long, long ago"? So, what happened to the scary stories? Belanger brings the spooky back to the yuletide with this eerie holiday show. From the origins of the holiday to the monsters and ghosts that lurk in its shadows, Jeff will take you on a multimedia journey of this haunting holiday. Based on his "Creepy Christmas" PBS special and his best-selling book The Fright Before Christmas, this night may just save the holidays from ruin. This program is NOT for young children. Registration appreciated.

6-7:30 pm: Genealogy Speaker: Daughters of the American Revolution's Genealogical Research System. The Charlton Library Genealogy Group is a friendly group of people who share an interest in genealogy. They meet on the first Thursday of the month from 6-7:30 in the Community Meeting Room. Meetings alternate between general discussion topics and guest presenters. The meetings are free and open to the public

DUDLEY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

10 am-12 pm: Pearle's Picking Parlor Jam, a "mostly" Bluegrass-focused unplugged acoustic jam session in the Fels Room at the Pearle L. Crawford Library. This is the group that played at their 15-Year Celebration. All talent levels welcome, beginners and up! Don't want to play? That's ok - listeners are welcome too.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8

1 pm: Doors open for Pocketbook Bingo, the Dudley Woman's Club most popular fundraiser to be held at the PACC, 37 Harris St., Webster. Bingo starts at 2 p.m. Tickets are $35 pp for this fun afternoon of Bingo with the chance to win 10 designer handbags. Lots of laughs, giveaways and raffles. The DWC's voluntary Giving Project for this event is socks, hats and gloves for the Webster-Dudley Food Share. Tickets online at www.dudleywomansclub.org/pocketbookbingo

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9

4-5:30 pm: Pearle's Genealogy Group. The Pearle is looking to regrow its genealogy group! Facilitated by Patricia M. St. Marie, professional genealogist.

6-7:30 pm: The Missing Piece Puzzle Race. Teams will compete against each other, with the ultimate goal of completing a puzzle faster than their opponents. Registration is required- only one person from each team should register. Teams can have up to six members, and the first to assemble the puzzle wins. At the Pearle.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12

6-7 pm: Science Heroes – Digging it! Unearth your curiosity as we dig into the incredible science that's all around us. If you didn't already love science, you'll really 'dig it' after experiencing Science Heroes! Learn about pressure and energy with the Toilet Tornado. Or how about the effects of angles and trajectory with the Hydro-Cannon? Like all Science Heroes programs, "Digging It!" features tons of audience interaction and opportunities for your children to volunteer.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

11 am-12 pm: A Perky Pairing: Tea & Chocolate: A fun, educational talk on the history and health benefits of tea and dark chocolate (cacao), with insights from Kim Larkin, chocolatier. We will discuss how to brew a proper cuppa, how tea varieties differ, and the tenets of the Cha/Tea Ceremonies. Included are samplings of tea infusions paired with fine chocolates: a trivia quiz, fun poetry, and teapot displays. Larkin, owner of Klassic Kreations, is a licensed commercial chocolatier, holds certification from the Specialty Coffee Assoc. in Foundations and is a tea aficionado. In 2023, she completed her 200 hr. Kripalu School of Ayurveda Health Certification. Kim is a NAHA Certified Aromatherapist, a Usui Reiki Master, and has taught art to all ages for over 20 years. She is the author of "It's Easy Being Queen (When you know your worth)." At the Pearle.

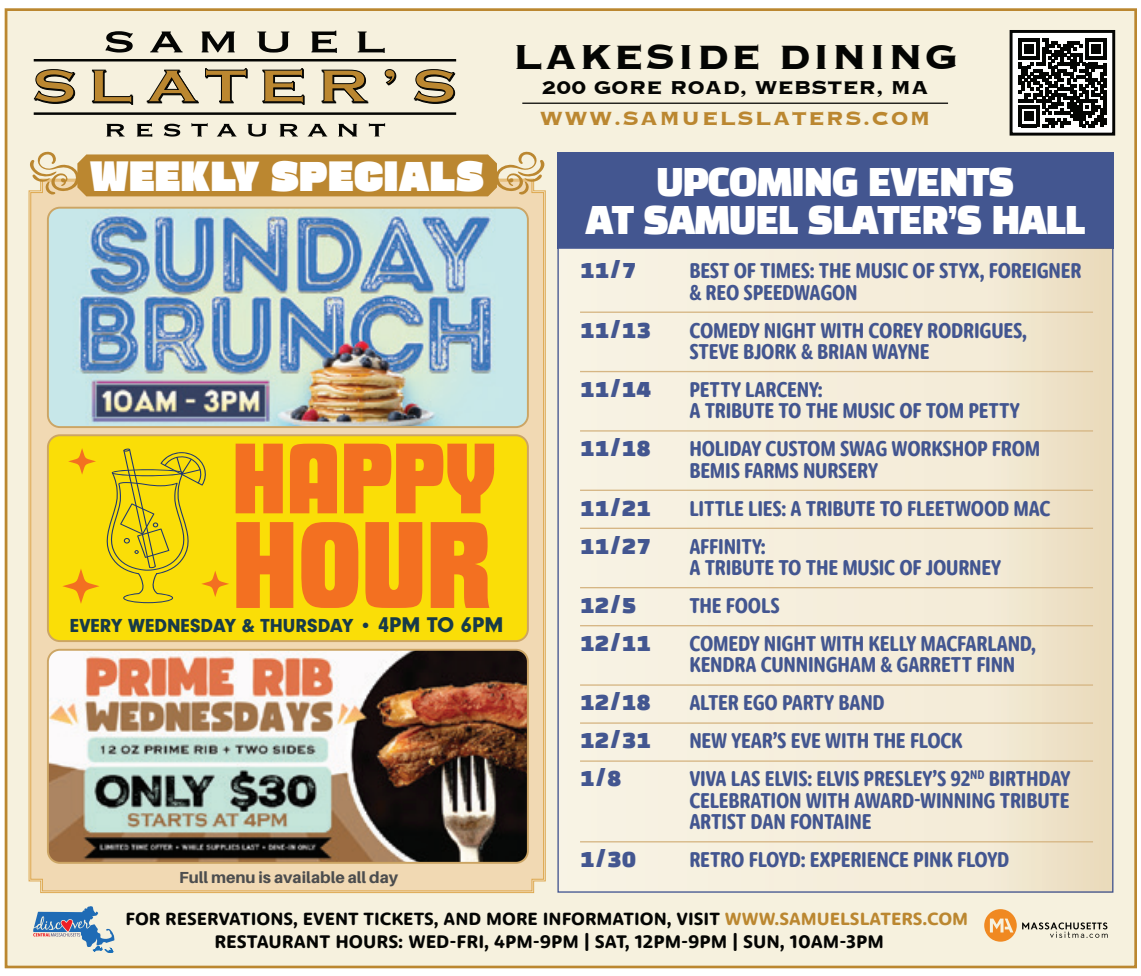
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16

6-7 pm: Bedazzled Books with Happy Arts. Join this latest creative craze—book bedazzling! Happy Arts will guide you through the process of transforming an ordinary book into a sparkling, one-of-a-kind creation. All supplies provided – just bring a book, paperback or hardcover. Come get creative and add a little sparkle to your favorite read. Registration required at the Pearle.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19

6-6:45 pm: Pokémon Club: Do you love everything Pokémon? Join this Pokémon Club at the Pearle where you can meet other Pokémon fans and trade cards if you want to. Best for ages 6 and up. No registration required. This is not a drop-off program.

6-7:30 pm: Threaded Together: Join the Pearle Crawford Library for a screening of their original film: Threaded Together: Mill Work and Life in Webster, MA, an original 40-minute film featuring stories and memories of working in the Webster mills from 1950-1975. A collaboration between the Gladys E. Kelly Public Library, Nichols College, Karen Warinsky, and the Webster Senior Center.





FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 20
11-11:45 am: Mindful Movement with Buffy at the Pearle. Get moving together with certified health instructor Buffy in this fun, 45-minute family movement class. Through playful movement, stretching, and mindfulness activities, caregivers and children ages 3+ will enjoy time together while building healthy movement habits. Registration required as space is limited.
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23
6-7 pm: "Cook the Book" Book Club-Texture Over Taste by Joshua Weissman. "Cook The Book" Book Club meets on the 4th Monday of every month at 6 pm at the Pearle. Pick one recipe from the book selected for the month - the dishes don't have to be complicated or fancy. Any recipe from the book is fair game, except alcoholic beverages - sorry! Prepare the recipe at home and share it at the library. We cannot reheat or keep food warm, so consider this when choosing your recipe. You are responsible for bringing serving utensils. We will provide paper goods and utensils for eating.
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25
2-3 pm: Peaceful Projects at the Pearle. Join Rileigh for a drop-in craft. Painting, slime making, doodling, and more. Every session will be a little different than the last. Best for ages 5-12. Registration requested. This is not a drop-off event.
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28
10 am-12 pm: Dudley Select Board Office Hours at the Pearle Crawford Library: Have a question, concern, or idea to share? Stop by for this informal opportunity to meet with members of the Board, ask questions, discuss town issues, and learn more about what's happening in the community. No appointment necessary - residents are welcome to just drop in. There might even be refreshments!

WEBSTER

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7
All day: Tiny Art Show Canvas Pickup. Calling all art lovers! The Gladys E. Kelly Public Library is hosting a Tiny Art Show, showcasing miniature pieces of art from the community. All creators are invited to participate -- no matter age or skill level. Pick up your 3 in. x 3 in. canvas from the main Circulation Desk or the Children's Desk. All mediums are strongly encouraged: if you want to submit a 3 in. x 3 in. photograph or a 3 in. sculpture that is welcome. Canvas Pick Up: November 2-21. Art submission deadline: Tuesday, November 24. Be sure to complete the submission form with your artwork. Artwork will be on display all of December.
2-4 pm: Author reception: Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 East Main St., welcomes back Mass.-based author Suzanne Strempek Shea. Her new memoir Compositions, is an extraordinary memoir about her early years in a close-knit 1960s and '70s Polish-American grade school and community, a life that revolves in a circle of faith and family. Written in the author's voice and point of view from her first eight years of school, the humorous and poignant essays show a past still fully present. The miracles that she prays for – a horse or at least a pony, her grandfather's health – never take place, yet something no less beautiful does as she spins childhood in a kaleidoscope of observations and stories. This event is free and open to the public. Signed copies of the book will be available for purchase. To RSVP, call 508.848.6232 or email deb@bookloversgourmet.com.
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10
6-7:45 pm: Urumqi Road Film Screening presented by Amnesty International Local Group 356 in the Community Room at the Library. This film covers the 2022 protests in China against zero-Covid lockdowns documented by Chen PinLin, who is currently being detained by the Chinese government. Amnesty International has adopted his case as a human rights defender on the grounds of censorship and freedom of expression. Following the film, there will be time for discussion and Q&A with Suzanne E. Wright, China Coordination Group Chair, as well as other members of the local Amnesty group. AI Group #356 meets monthly at Booklovers' Gourmet in Webster. For more information, call 508-949-6232.
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12
6:30-7:30 pm: Cat Moon Shadow Concert in the Nest at the Library. This is a heartfelt tribute to the iconic singer-songwriter Cat Stevens and is presented in an intimate, acoustic, singer-songwriter style. John Fuzek expertly connects with his audience, creating a musical journey through the timeless songs of Stevens. His voice is strikingly reminiscent of Cat in his prime and Fuzek pours raw emotion into each performance. The show, which includes a mix of beloved hits and hidden gems, lasts approximately two hours, offering an unforgettable experience of music and stories that pay tribute to the soul-stirring music of this legendary artist. Unfortunately, Cat Stevens canceled his October 2025 tour of the U.S. and there are no plans to reschedule. No registration required.
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14
2-4 pm: Author reception: Award-winning author Howard Mansfield, who writes about architecture, preservation, and history in his quest to understand the soul of American places, will be at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 East Main St. He will sign and discuss his newest book Invisible Monuments: Tribute, Memory, and the Summoning of the Past. The event is free and open to the public. Signed copies will be available for purchase. For more information or to RSVP, call 508.949.6232.
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21
11-11:30 am: Pumpernickel Puppets presents: The Three Bill Goats Gruff/The Lion and the Mouse in the Community Room at the Library. Two classic tales make up this wonderful animal-inspired show. In this modern adaptation of the famous Norwegian folk tale, three quick-witted goats outsmart the green, snaggletooth troll that lives under the bridge. In "The Lion and the Mouse," two unlikely friends – one very big and one very small – learn to help each other to solve their problems. Both tales are told with colorful friendly hand puppets, and feature lots of audience participation. Recommended for children three and over. No registration required.
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 21 AND SUNDAY NOVEMBER 22
Nov. 21 9 am-4 pm, Nov. 22 10 am-4 pm. Worcester Mineral Gem Fossil & Jewelry Show. Vendors with hundreds of minerals, fossils, gems, and jewelry. Live demonstrations and interactive activities. There will be door prizes, raffles, and free grab bags for children. Bring your finds to the rock and mineral identification table. There will also be delicious food and beverage concessions. St. Joseph School, 50 Lincoln St. Tickets at the door: Adults $6; seniors and students $5; children 12 and under free; Scouts in uniform free. For more info, worcestermineralclub.org/
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23
6-7 pm: Trivia Palooza 10 in the Community Room at the Library. Join Evan and his sister Carrie for General Knowledge Trivia. Assemble your team (up to 5 people) and put your thinking caps on. Registration is required. Please only register 1 person per team; you cannot complete the registration process online if you say there are more attendees. We do not need to know how many people are on your team, but the maximum is 5. The winning team gets a prize!

WEBSTER-DUDLEY

Need some extra help from Santa? Sign up for the Giving Tree during the first three weeks of November either in person Tues/Thurs 9-11 am and Thurs 4-7 pm at United Church of Christ, 4 Church St., Webster or by email: websterdudleygivingtree@yahoo.com. Sponsored by Threads of Hope at the church. For children 12 years old or younger who live with you and reside in Webster or Dudley. List three choices for gifts and one book when you email each child's information or at registration. Required: 1) Proof of child's age (birth certificate, passport or school registration and 2) Proof of Webster or Dudley residency. Both documents need to be attached to the email. There will be no exceptions to these two requirements. Like all of us, Santa is on a budget, too, so please no expensive toys such as video games. Pick up the gifts on Friday, Dec. 18 between 10 am and 7 pm at the church.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 11
Webster-Dudley's 21st annual Veterans Day Parade: Marching veterans should meet by 10:15 a.m. in the St. Louis School parking area located next to the gymnasium at the bottom of the entryway. Transportation by bus departs at 10:30 a.m. for the Municipal Complex in Dudley where participants will gather at the Veterans' Court of Honor. The ceremonies will begin promptly at 11 a.m. and include a chaplains' prayer, a three-shot valley, Taps, and remarks. After the Dudley ceremony, veterans will march in procession to the Webster Veterans' Court of Honor for a similar presentation. The ceremonies are expected to conclude around 12:45 p.m.

PHOTO FINISH





1. Agrifest: Dudley celebrated its agricultural heritage on September 12 with its first Agrifest that brought together local farmers and gardeners, food vendors, musicians and first responders at the Dudley Municipal Complex. Children enjoyed a scavenger hunt, a visit with an opossum from Ferncroft Wildlife Rescue, and the chance to explore a fire truck. Visitors browsed vegetables, perennials, cut flowers and prepared foods while enjoying live music by The Bad Tickers. Agrifest was sponsored by the Dudley Agricultural Advisory Commission and the Dudley Recreation Commission.

2. Antos Farm protected: The Dudley Conservation Land Trust and almost 70 neighbors gathered on October 3 to celebrate the protection of the DCLT's new 23-acre sanctuary at Antos Farm. "As an all-volunteer land trust, this victory belongs to our entire community," the DCLT wrote. "Thank you to Larry Antos, the late Chet Kulisa and Nancy Vajcovec, Mass Audubon's Megan, the DCLT Board, caretakers David and Charlie, and so many more. Antos Farm is now safe, wild, and free for the next 100 years and beyond."

The YankeeXpress welcomes your submission to Photo Finish. Please email your photograph to martha@localtownpages.com and include your name, address, and phone number (for verification).



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