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February 12-March 12, 2021

Capitol Siding of Auburn Celebrates 70 years in business promoting customer service

By Janet Stoica

Imagine 70 years in business. Their beginnings go back to 1951. Were you around then?

That is when Capitol Siding was being established by Mark Sarkisian, Sr. on Pleasant Street in Worcester. He and his brother Bill Sarkisian used their trusty station wagon to transport product to customers' homes.

Back then the company was known as Capitol Aluminum Siding as aluminum was the siding material used at that time. The Sarkisian brothers also sold storm windows and storm doors, which were installed over the exterior windows and doors of homes.

So much has changed since the early 1950s and Mark Sarkisian, Jr. and his brother Dale are now the family members who have continued this successful business model. Their dad and uncle's legacy has flourished and grown successfully over the years and has kept the same family values that were instilled in the sons at an early age. "We were taught to be honest, to do a good job, and to satisfy the

customer," said Mark Sarkisian, Jr., "and that's what we strive for daily on each job our crews work on. We've been a member of the Better Business Bureau for the past 60 years and are proud of our A+ rating."

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Ryan Sabatalo, Dale Sarkisian, Mark Sarkisian, Jr.

Vanderburgh House emerges as a pacesetter in sober living

By Rod Lee

It appears that there is no slowing down Hunter Foote, Vanderburgh House and the communities the upstart nonprofit is creating throughout the city of Worcester, South County and beyond.

A new residence in Southbridge, set to open on Main Street this month, typifies Vanderburgh House's rapid growth as a provider of structured and certified sober living for men and women in a recovery-focused and peer-supported environment.

"It's incredible," Mr. Foote said during a telephone conversation in January, in testament to the success Vanderburgh House's business model is enjoying so far.

Mr. Foote had just returned from one of a couple of trips he has made to Nairobi, this time with his fiancé "and we met with her mother. Kenya has always been a big part of my life," he said.

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The Chamberlain Home in Southbridge is one of a number of sober living facilities Vanderburgh House owns and operates in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Maine. The company's business model is built on residents taking responsibility for their home and their recovery.

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VANDEBURGH HOUSE

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He relishes talking about the endeavors his company is undertaking to help men and women try to shed the ruinous effects of alcohol and drugs.

"We now have a home in Maine, in South Portland, for women; a home for men in Rhode Island, in Pawtucket; a new home in Greenfield, Massachusetts, a two-family for men and women, side by side. It's so cool to work with independent sober home operators. They carry the flag."

The Vanderburgh House concept is built on five principles: recovery, community, accessibility, independence and sustainability.

In terms of the first, Vanderburgh House's policies, leadership and culture are all intended to support residents on their road to recovery. On the second, Vanderburgh House homes are supervised by a house manager who is dedicated to providing service to the home's residents. As for accessibility, homes are open

"to every member of the global recovery community with a straightforward application process, transparent approval criteria and affordable costs." When it comes to the independence factor, Vanderburgh House does not direct its residents' actions; rather, "we coach, support and mentor our brothers and sisters in recovery." In terms of sustainability, residents are encouraged to be "good stewards of the earth and its resources."

The day-to-day workings of Vanderburgh House's homes are governed by a handbook and house rules.

Payment is weekly or monthly starting at just over \$100.

Vanderburgh House does not accept health insurance.

Homes Vanderburgh House has already opened or will be unveiling soon include the Germain Estate in Worcester, for women; the Kenwood Home in Worcester, for men; the Elm Home in Worcester, also for men; the Chamberlain Home in Southbridge, which is coed; the Dartmouth Home for women in Springfield; the Rogers Home for men in

Pawtucket; the Prospect Home for men in Springfield; the Calderia Home in Worcester, which is coed, and the Westville Home in Shrewsbury, also coed.

Chamberlain House is an example of the type of facility Vanderburgh House is looking for in its search for new properties that fit its needs. It is a restored Victorian on a large private piece of land with flowering fruit trees, fountains and gardens, two kitchens and "many updates."

"It's a challenge being able to work with independent operators who have experience," Mr. Foote said. "We attract individuals who are more serious" about being part of a life-changing initiative, he said.

COVID-19 "has not impacted us all that much," he pointed out. "Everyone needs a place to live, if we respect the safety protocols."

When he spoke, Vanderburgh House's new facility in Southbridge was in the process of being set up, and completely renovated.

As is true of other sober living facilities, Vanderburgh House requires abstinence

from drugs and alcohol. Residents are engaged in their personal recovery journey by attending meetings and working with a sponsor and the house manager for support and encouragement. Residents adhere to a curfew, submit to drug and alcohol screenings and participate in home and community events.

All of Vanderburgh House's actions are guided by "clinical research and best practices."

Expansion beyond Southbridge in South County is something Vanderburgh House is considering, Mr. Foote said.

"Indeed, we are opening the home in Southbridge in short order. We've looked into Webster as well. The rest (towns like Dudley,



A view of Vanderburgh House living space.

Oxford and Charlton, and Putnam and Thompson, for instance) are a bit too small to support a largely walking-only population. We would be happy to explore Connecticut as well," however, he said.

The growth of Vanderburgh House raises all kinds of

possibilities along this line, which is good news for individuals looking for a stable and supportive environment in which to get and stay sober.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

CAPITOL SIDING

Continued from page 1

The company is now known as Capitol Siding and Home Improvement Company, Inc. as not only do they offer siding, but also install windows, roofing, and gutters.

They are a Harvey Elite Dealer, which means that they are offered their best quality windows at a better price, which enables them to pass on the savings to their customers.

"When COVID first appeared, we thought our business would suffer," said Mark, "but we have been able to continue working through the entire situation using good safety guidelines. Because of the high quality of our siding, we also can continue to install this product through the colder months. We will install windows one unit at a time to keep our customer's home warmth at a respectable level."

The quality of window glass should be a major consideration when choosing windows said Mark. He listed the window types as double and triple-paned, Low E, and argon-gas-filled. "The lower the 'U Factor,' the better the

window, as this indicates the heat transfer through the window glass," he said.

Capitol employs 10 siding crews, 3 window crews, and 2 roofing crews. Each crew has 2-4 members.

The company enjoys educating its customers too by advising them that when using contractors: a customer should always ask for a copy of the installer's Construction Supervisor License as well as their Home Improvement Contractor Registration License and Insurance Certificates. Having these certificates means that the installer is obligated to take continuing education classes in their area of expertise. "Many people don't realize that they can be sued if the un-insured installer has an accident on their property. Having Workmen's Compensation coverage is crucial," stated Mark.

Capitol does not ask for a down payment like many other contractors. Once the job is complete, payment is expected.

"We have the best customer-oriented employees," says Mark. "Toni Faccini is our office manager and she's been with us for over 15 years. If it wasn't for Toni I would never be able to take a va-

cation. She's unbelievable with our customers on the phone. She goes above and beyond her responsibilities. She's the salt of the earth. We also have my son-in-law, Ryan Sabatolo, working here as our sales manager and he does a great job in his position. Always focused on the customer's satisfaction and that's what it's all about."

Capitol is proud of how it gives back to the community. They've donated to the Auburn Family Youth organization by providing and installing siding on their building, donated a defibrillator to the Auburn Fire Dept., and made donations to the local dog kennel. Mark is chairman of the Auburn Chamber of Commerce's Golf Committee. The committee has donated \$15,000 in scholarships annually to local high school students. "It's very rewarding," said Mark, "even though this year we could not have a golf tournament due to COVID, people still donated to this worthy cause."

Capitol Siding and Home Improvement Co., Inc., 30 Auburn Street, Auburn. Phone: (508) 832-5981. www.capitalsiding.com.

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Oxford's First Congregational Church celebrates 300th anniversary

By Janet Stoica

The history of our country is always fascinating, and it becomes more captivating when reading about our local area and how institutions came to be. Oxford's First Congregational Church has the distinctive honor of being the first place of worship in this area.

On the evening of Sunday, January 17, members of the church celebrated a very special milestone: three centuries of continuous parish life and for the first time in its history, the church's bell tower was illuminated. "Oxford has always done a great job of maintaining the town center and town common," said church historian Todd Sauter, "and now with the lighting of our bell tower, this serves to add even more attractiveness to the surrounding area. We've never had lighting in our bell tower and its beauty will be inspirational." The serenity and

graciousness that the lit bell tower will add to Oxford's handsome Main Street is immeasurable.

The 20-minute ceremony was attended by 50 members, all socially distanced, in an outdoor setting with others enjoying the formality from the safety of their cars as they parked along Main Street. After a welcome by Reverend Karen D. Fournier, an original hymn followed that was composed by Corbin and Alaina Callo-way Bolton. The new steeple light was then dedicated and lit, and an historical proclamation given by Todd Sauter. The steeple bell was rung 30 times with one ring for each decade of the church's life. A very proud and most enjoyable evening. A more extensive ceremony will, hopefully, be held in June.

If the church's first pastor, Reverend John Campbell, could see how his church has fared since 1720 he would be very pleased. In the early 1700s English settlers in the area looked avidly for a pastor for their church. The Massachusetts' Colony did not allow a town to be established unless four requirements had been met in the area: a grist mill, a sawmill, a minister, and a meeting house. The meeting house members began their search for a pastor in 1713 in the undeveloped frontier of New Oxford and it was no small task to find someone who wanted to establish themselves in this unfamiliar territory. Reverend Campbell served for 40 years until his death in 1761. Due to his privileged upbringing and education, he served as the de facto physician, judge,



Oxford Congregational Church's bell tower lit up.

counselor, and leader of the town militia. His grave is behind the church in south cemetery.

Many changes and anniversaries have been celebrated at the First Congregational, including the installation of their current and first female pastor, Reverend Karen Fournier. The first 32 pastors were men. "Church life was always essential to life in the colonies," stated Mr. Sauter. "It was intertwined with the town and supported by the town's tax dollars for the upkeep of the meeting house as well as to pay the pastor's salary. It was the same for all churches at the time. Oxford now has 12 Christian churches." Mr. Sauter enjoys history and has taken a special interest as his church's historian. "My job was made so much easier by those who served before me," he said. "There

was Dorothy Barrie and also Janice Moore. They were great historians for the church." Mr. Sauter owns his own business in the Worcester area, Audiology Associates, and is an avid student of history.

A video of the church's steeple lighting can be found on Facebook at "Facebook.com/firstcongregationaloxfordma/."

Their website is www.oxfordfirstucc.org, where a contributions link can be found for the additional and upcoming celebrations that will be held later in the year. Traditional worship services can be viewed every Sunday at 9:30 a.m. on their website. Church offices may be reached at (508) 987-2211. Email: officeadmin@oxford-firstucc.org.

Contact Janet at jstoica@theyankeeexpress.com

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Faith guided Tim Hare to success selling cars, and Chamber award

By Rod Lee

Mike Hare, who is one of his father's four children, recalls how the imposition of discipline went when he and his brother Mark misbehaved as kids.

"If we owned up to it, there would be minimal punishment. But if we tried to weasel out of it..." Mr. Hare said in a telephone conversation in December. There was a hint of a smile in Mike Hare's voice as he spoke those words.

We were chatting about Tim Hare of family-owned and operated Harbro Auto Sales in Whitinsville and Webster, who received the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's 2020 Gerry Gaudette "Extra Mile Award" at the organization's 42nd annual meeting on November 19. Mike Hare did not see the ceremony, which was conducted virtually for attendees who had pre-registered and which featured a keynote speech by Maj. Gen. Thomas E. Murphy.

Maj. Gen. Murphy is director of the Critical Technology Task Force at the Department of Defense and a product of Oxford High School and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

"That's really cool and a great credit to my father,"

Mike Hare said, of the honor bestowed on Tim Hare. "He didn't even tell me that he won that award."

With the humility he has long been known for (and which many would agree is uncharacteristic of a car salesman), Tim Hare attributed his success in a business he and his brother Dave Hare started on Linwood Avenue in 1973 to his parents, to people who have helped him along the way, and to fully embracing Jesus Christ. "I was raised on the words of Jesus," he said, after accepting the award from Gerry Gaudette's son Lee Gaudette of Gaudette Insurance. "In my younger years, I rejected them. Thirty-eight years ago, the Lord changed the course of my life and my wife's (Jane Hare)."

Mike Hare was not surprised to hear that his father pointed out in his brief remarks on November 19 that the phrase "extra mile" originated not with the Chamber but with Jesus Christ—in the Bible.

His dad's faith-based approach to business "just dovetailed into my brother and I's," Mike Hare said. "My grandfather was like that. My dad tells me a story about how he gave up drink-

ing and smoking and used the money he saved to buy a little lake cottage in the 80s that we all still enjoy.

"I remember my dad driving around in a muscle car and drinking with his friends," Mike Hare said. Turning completely to Jesus Christ, "it's changed him one hundred eighty degrees. He was never one to put up a cross or a big fish, he is quiet that way. He has always told me he doesn't want too many rewards on earth, they'll come in heaven."

Tim Hare has turned Harbro Auto Sales over to his sons (it is now a third-generation business with the addition of other family members). He and Jane Hare are involved with providing the battery-powered "Action Track Chair" to disabled veterans and others whose physical limitations prevent them from getting around. But when the pandemic hit last March and "none of us knew what was going on and we had to pretty much close the doors" for a time, "my dad saw what was happening and we talked it through. Even though he is not active in the business, we came up with the best plan we could, all things considered. Dad was more like a guiding light

person for us. He's a phone call away and he always answers his phone. Who better than the guy who founded it?" to seek advice from, Mike Hare said.

"He has most recently been helping us find cars. Many leases were expiring but being extended because of a lack of inventory. A lot of the vehicles we would normally buy are not there."

Mike Hare said that with his dad's help Harbro has survived the pandemic so far. "Eight staff did not want to



Tim Hare, a founder of Harbro Auto Sales, speaks after being presented with the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's "Gerry Gaudette Extra Mile Award."

come back. All in all it blended out. We gave the Salvation Army some money. We are so thankful and feel blessed, even though people

aren't driving as much."

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

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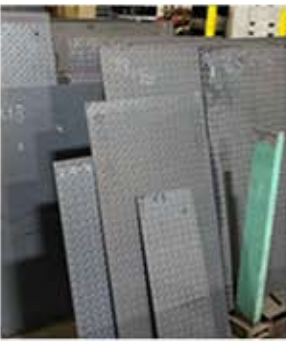
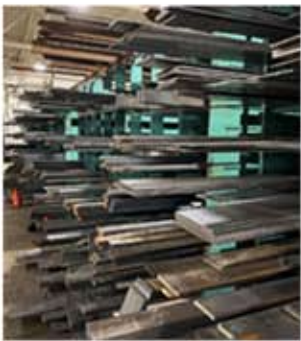
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The Hoyt Foundation Donates \$35,000 to The Center of Hope Foundation, Inc.

SOUTHBRIDGE - The Center of Hope Foundation, a non-profit agency serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, is pleased to announce a charitable contribution in the amount of \$35,000 from the Hoyt Foundation. This

contribution will help the Center of Hope to continue with its mission in providing services and opportunities so that the individuals who are served are achieving the most fulfilling, meaningful and productive lives possible.

"The Center of Hope's fundraising events have been put on hold due to the current pandemic," said Cindy Howard, CEO of the Center of Hope. "The funds raised from these events are necessary to continue offering opportunities such as Special Olympics, holiday giving, food distribution and offering help in emergency situations that happen within the community."

Erika Travinski, COO of the Center of Hope says, "One of my greatest joys

working at the Center of Hope, is the hope that surrounds the building. Hope for the well-being of those around us. Hope to continue offering services and opportunities that put smiles on countless faces. The joy that emerges from such hope is magical. We are grateful to have the support from the Hoyt Foundation, who share and believe in our mission to provide as many opportunities as possible to the disability community."



Even a pandemic cannot keep Dick Hoyt, founder of the Hoyt Foundation, away from personally delivering a sizeable donation.



MAPFRE recognizes N. Grosvenordale resident as 2020 Community Champion

MAPFRE Foundation recently named MAPFRE employee Jill St. Cyr of North Grosvenordale among its 2020 Community Champions, as part of its annual corporate volunteer award program. The program recognizes employees who are passionate about volunteering and participate in activities during the year to help their communities. St. Cyr, a senior manager at MAPFRE, was recognized for work with It Starts at Home, Inc., a nonprofit organization that she founded in 2019 to help children through fundraising drives, volunteering activities, etc., in the Thompson, Connecticut, and Webster areas.

Regional Microenterprise assistance grant program

If your business is located in Clinton, Douglas, Lancaster, Northbridge, Sterling or Webster, you may be eligible to apply for a Microenterprise Assistance Grant.

Grant awards of up to \$10,000 are available to eligible businesses within those towns that have experienced financial loss due to COVID-19 and the associated shut downs. Eligible businesses must have five employees or fewer (including the owner(s)), must have been in business since January 1, 2019 and must be able to demonstrate revenue loss caused by the pandemic. The business owner's family income must fall within certain limits. Other eligibility requirements apply.

The grants are made possible through a Community Development Block Grant

program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through the Federal CARES Act and administered by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

Preliminary applications will be reviewed for eligibility. All businesses deemed eligible for assistance will be entered into a lottery that will determine the order in which applications are processed. Separate lotteries will be held for each community. Applications received after the February 8 deadline will be added to the wait list on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information and a preliminary application contact Carol Cyr at the Webster Office of Community Development: (508)949-3800 ext. 4004 or e-mail: ccyr@

webster-ma.gov.

You can also visit www.webster-ma.gov, or the website of the municipality in which your business is lo-

cated: www.douglas-ma.gov; www.clintonma.gov; www.ci.lancaster.ma.us; www.northbridgemass.org or www.sterling-ma.gov.

Memorial Beach improvements with PARC grant

You may have noticed some activity down at Memorial Beach over the last week or so. Last year the Town of Webster applied for a grant through the state's PARC Grant Program. The town was awarded a grant in the amount of \$400,000 from the state to cover 73% of the cost of upgrades to be done at the beach.

The decisions on what upgrades to do came from various Beach Committee reports and was presented at town meeting. There are some great happenings going on.

A dog park will be erected near the animal shelter. On the far side of the dirt parking lot area there will be an all-purpose field and PickleBall Court.

Playground equipment will be updated, making it more ADA accessible. There will be play equipment for the water, and last but not least the beach house will see upgrades in the bathrooms and concession stand.

Officials would like to thank the residents of Webster for their support in this project.

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We are excited to welcome Pamala Holt from Dudley, MA to our team of insurance professionals at Goodrich Insurance Agency in Milton, MA. Pamala has over 20 years of insurance expertise and will be our Personal Lines Account Manager. Pam joined our office family on November 23, 2020 and will be working remotely from Dudley and in our main office in Milton. Help us give Pam a warm welcome! We look forward to providing our current clients and new clients with professional, personal, knowledgeable valued client services you expect from Goodrich Insurance Agency!

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Chief's corner

Penalties for removing no trespassing signs

By Chief Steven J. Wojnar
Dudley Police Department

As a follow up to an article about trespassing, I was asked another question. The person had experience with people removing trespassing notices posted on land. Hunters were suspected as the primary violators. The person asked if I could provide some information on the penalties associated with this activity.

The most common statute dealing with trespassing is Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 266 Section 120. It in essence defines a trespass as "entering or remaining upon property without right." A posted notice of "No trespass-

ing" is considered a proper means of notification to potential violators. The law does address the improper removal of these notices. Massachusetts General Law Chapter 266 Section 122 states in part, "Whoever willfully tears down, removes or defaces any notice posted on land, or other property described in section one hundred and twenty, by the owner, lessee or custodian thereof, warning persons not to trespass thereon, shall be punished..." The penalty for a violation is a fine of \$25.

In addition to this penalty, the person can be charged with trespassing, which car-

ries up to 30 days in jail and/or a \$100 fine. The person is also subject to arrest. Other violations may also be considered. If there is other property damage, if something is removed or destroyed, or other crimes take place during this time, the violators can face a variety of penalties. There are several reasons why people place these signs on their property. Others must respect the law on these cases and either ask permission to enter the premises or find alternate locations to travel or conduct business.

As the pandemic continues and cases rise, we ask everyone to stay safe and continue

to take the necessary precautions to protect yourselves. Anyone in need of vaccination information can find it at www.dudleyma.gov or by calling 508-949-8036. The work of the Town Officials, particularly our Administrator and most importantly, those from the Board of Health, is greatly appreciated. The rules regarding this virus seem to change constantly, and more pressure is placed on local governments to respond, all with limited resources. We continue to serve the people of Dudley and work with the community to improve the quality of life for everyone.

I thank the men and women from my department for their continued dedicated service to the Town during these trying times. Thanks also go out to the many Police Officers, Fire and Emergency Services members, public works, health care, government and all other "essential" personnel for their continued hard work and service. We greatly appreciate the support we re-

ceive from our community.

Thanks again for your questions and comments. Please send them to me at the Dudley Police Department 71 West Main St., Dudley, Ma. 01571 or email at swojnar@dudleypolice.com. Opinions expressed in this weekly column are those of Chief Wojnar only and unless clearly noted, do not reflect the ideas or opinions of any other organization or citizen.

H.A.N.D.S assistance available

The Dudley group H.A.N.D.S (Helping Address the Needs of Dudley's Seniors) is a local non-profit 501C 3 organization, which assists low-income town residents over age 60, with meeting their home heating needs. The group was formed in 2008. Since that time, they have provided more than \$84,000 to 174 deserving individuals. It is extremely taxing on those with insufficient means to decide between food, medicine, rent, and being warm. The pandemic has only added to these pressures. This group helps ease some of the burden on people and ensures they are kept warm during the cold winter months.

H.A.N.D.S distributes over 95% of all donations received directly to service providers who assist these residents. For the 2020/21 Heating Season, H.A.N.D.S granted 11 awards totaling \$7,207.90. This will go a long way toward helping these seniors in this time of desperate need. Fundraising in the time of COVID-19 has been challenging for many organizations. The Annual H.A.N.D.S Bucket Brigade fundraiser in the Spring of 2020 was eliminated. H.A.N.D.S' success is determined by the amount of donations received and the Board is grateful to every person, group, school, church, and business which supports this endeavor.

If you wish to learn more about H.A.N.D.S, including application or donation information, go to www.handsofdudley.org. It can also be found via email at HandsOfDudley@gmail.com, phone - 508-943-8517, or by mail at H.A.N.D.S P.O. Box 343 Dudley, Ma. 01571.

COVID vaccines for Dudley residents

The Town of Dudley announced that Dudley residents can now go to dudleyma.gov to complete a brief form to be notified when a local COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic becomes available for residents, business owners and employees.

As the vaccination becomes available, in accordance with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Phased COVID-19 Distribution Plan, enrollees will be contacted by the Dudley Board of Health and provided with the date, place and time to receive the vaccines. Residents who do not have the

ability to access the internet are encouraged to first ask for assistance from family members, caregivers or friends who will be able to go to dudleyma.gov and complete the form on their behalf. The entire online process takes approximately five minutes.

Additionally, a vaccination phone number has been established to enable residents that are unable to complete the online form to receive assistance from a Dudley Board of Health Assistant to complete the form over the phone. The vaccination phone number is

(508) 949 8036. Residents that call the vaccination phone number for assistance can expect to be asked to leave a message and to receive a call-back within five business days. Because of the volume of local vaccination requests that the Town is expecting, online form submission at dudleyma.gov is strongly encouraged.

The Town recognizes that members of the community may have difficulty in traveling to receive vaccinations, and different methods of delivering the vaccines locally are being developed through

a cooperative effort between health care providers, the board of health and the Dudley Fire Department Emergency Management Division.

The Town of Dudley does not have the ability to purchase additional vaccines or expedite the process. The phased approach which is being followed across the State has been developed by medical and health professionals at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) to best deliver the vaccine in a coordinated effort across the Commonwealth.

Open Sky Services achieves highest accreditation level

CARF International, an independent organization that provides accreditation services worldwide to health and human service providers, has granted Open Sky Community Services' Behavioral Health programs a three-year accreditation. This accreditation is the highest level awarded by CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) and was given after a rigorous evaluation process focused on quality and results.

In the report notifying Open Sky of the award, one of the areas of strength noted was the array of supports it provided to frontline workers through the COVID-19 crisis. The organization's staff was described as experienced and dedicated and persons served echoed that assessment with comments like "I didn't know how to trust, but now I trust staff" and "For the first time in my life, I feel safe."

Funders who were interviewed for the accreditation praised the quality of care provided by Open Sky, while peers at other Central Mass agencies recognized Open Sky for its success at building collaborative relationships to broaden the safety net of human services in the region. President and CEO Ken Bates was delighted by the accreditation team's findings. "I was particularly struck by the fact that a number of staff members mentioned how well we

handle conflict and differing opinions," said Bates. "This willingness to entertain different viewpoints is, as CARF noted, an important indication of Open Sky's commitment to continuous improvement."

Open Sky was formed through the 2018 affiliation of Alternatives Unlimited and The Bridge of Central Massachusetts. With over 100

programs throughout Central Massachusetts, the organization provides services and supports to more than 4,900 adults, young adults and youth with mental health challenges, developmental disabilities, brain injury, substance use disorders, homelessness or other complex challenges. Open Sky also provides services and supports for LGBTQIA+ youth

through its Safe Homes program, as well as expert training for human service professionals and school personnel on evidence-based practices and best practice treatment models through the Bridge Training Institute.

For more information about Open Sky Community Services, please contact Lorie Martiska, lorie.martiska@open-skys.org



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The Dudley-Charlton Education Foundation 12th annual appeal

The Dudley-Charlton Education Foundation (DCEF) is pleased to announce the launch of our 12th annual appeal with a \$2,500 donation from Cornerstone Bank. Cornerstone Bank has supported DCEF annually since

our inception. Each year, the DCEF awards grants to educators in our district to fund the implementation of creative and exciting ideas that enhance the school experience for our students. Although the classroom

and school year look different this year, the need still exists and all funds contributed to the DCEF are used to support education in the community.

Previous donations have made a significant impact

across all seven schools in the past 11 years funding 118 grants and more than \$300,000 for fresh and creative ventures in the classroom.

Please consider investing in the future of the Dudley-

Charlton Regional School district students by supporting our 12th annual appeal which is running through March 31st. Donations may be made securely, on-line at: www.dcedfoundation.org or by sending a check to:

DCEF, PO Box 92, Dudley, MA 01571.

On behalf of the thousands of students impacted, and the teachers who facilitate these learning opportunities, thank you for your support.



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Residents earn awards from WGU

SALT LAKE CITY - The following local residents have earned an Award of Excellence at Western Governors University. The award is given to students who perform at a superior level in their coursework.

Zaily Naranjo of Douglas, has earned an Award of Excellence at Western Governors University College of Business.

Mohammad Ghani of Oxford, has earned an Award of Excellence at Western Governors University College of Information Technology.

Dean's List at WIT

BOSTON - The following local students have made the Dean's List at Wentworth Institute of Technology for the Fall 2020 semester.

Nicole Marie Thackaberry of Douglas; Abagayle Paige Morin of Dudley; Madeline Rae Davis of Dudley; Brandon Scanlon of Dudley; Daniel Edward Vanderhoof of Webster; Adrianna T. Rocheleau of Webster.

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THE LAST GREEN VALLEY: Outdoors is answer to pandemic blues

By Rod Lee

Life these days is not much different for Assistant Director Fran Kefalas, Financial Officer Nick Velles and their fellow staffers at The Last Green Valley, than it is for other residents and businesspersons of South County and northeastern Connecticut.

Much of what would typically be happening by way of events in communities served by the Danielson-based organization have been scaled back or put on hold because of the pandemic.

There is a positive note despite the toll taken by COVID-19 that management at TLGV

is glad to witness, however, Ms. Kefalas said in a telephone conversation in January.

"We're seeing a lot more trail use, definitely a lot more people getting outdoors," she said, echoing remarks made earlier by Mr. Velles (one advertisement that TLGV has placed promotes the theme "green by day, dark by night!, come explore our wide open spaces and historic northeastern downtowns and villages").

"We have been running programs. We had a successful Walktober," Ms. Kefalas said.

This is not to say activity is anywhere near normal.

"Our nine Massachusetts towns (including Webster, Dudley, Oxford, Southbridge and Sturbridge), that has been one of our biggest challenges, operating in two states," she said. Under Massachusetts guidelines, "we cannot do a Massachusetts program because it's not considered essential." Also, "with COVID-19, not a lot of our volunteers are jumping up and down to do walks." A number of these volunteers are elderly and vulnerable to the virus. Between this and the restrictions the organization faces in Massachusetts, "we are not in Massachusetts

as much as we want to be," Ms. Kefalas said. "We are encouraging DIY hikes and stuff like that. We've worked with the Opacum Land Trust (in Sturbridge)."

TLGV's partnership with the Opacum Land Trust has been beneficial for both parties. Recently, TLGV awarded more than \$22,000 in a new grant program to a number of recipients "to help nonprofits build capacity during challenging times." Among these were the Avalonia Land Conservancy in Mystic, Chamberlin Mill in Woodstock, Click in Windham, Connecticut Daughters of the American Revolution in Lebanon and the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District in Norwich.

The Opacum Land Trust was allocated \$1500 of this money "to expand remote communications through its website and other digital platforms to better promote its properties," Ms. Kefalas said.

Meanwhile, efforts are being made to publicize events like a Bald Eagle Hike in Plainfield and Acorn Adventures in Woodstock.

"We had a great turnout for (one of) our Acorn Adventures programs, run by (Chief Ranger) Bill Reid at the Lead Mine Trail, twenty people that day," Ms. Kefalas said. "We had hoped to do that again but we can't."

Nevertheless, "it's important to us," she said, "to let people know we can provide



The Last Green Valley is saying "Opt Outdoors" for invigorating and scenic trail hikes, as the wait continues for an all-clear for regular programming offered by the organization.

the space. We did a winter solstice hike that drew nineteen people. The thing we can do is get people outside to enjoy the great outdoors."

The hope with the dawn of 2021, she said, is that things will "get better" so that TLGV's "Spring Outdoors" and other programs "from the spring equinox to the summer solstice" will be able to be held as scheduled.

"Guidance from the governors of Connecticut and Massachusetts is critical to us," Ms. Kefalas said. As TLGV awaits further instructions, "we are trying to strike that balance to keep people safe." One way of doing this, Mr. Velles pointed out, is to require pre-registration and to limit attendance to "twenty-five to thirty people," with masks and social distancing.

In Connecticut, events cannot be hosted on private property, he said, "but [they can] in public space. People are making their own decisions" in regard to what opportunities to take advantage of.

Normally, Ms. Kefalas said, "we have three hundred

different opportunities for people to get outdoors in the spring. Even if we have one hundred this coming spring—that would be good."

To the inevitable question "is The Last Green Valley (which is part of the National Heritage Corridor) okay financially?" Ms. Kefalas said, "oh yeah, we're fine. We shifted gears to a pay-what-you-can membership, to keep people engaged. Actually, our membership is climbing. It's working out. We extended our partner organizations a full year. We are able to do that because we get funding from the National Park Service. We are secure for the last fiscal year."

A brief pause in our talk prompted Ms. Kefalas to say, "Sorry! A red-tailed hawk just landed in a tree in front of me!"

That particular sighting is a sure sign that things are indeed good in The Last Green Valley.

Contact Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999.

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Charlton Optical's customer loyalty continues to rise

By Janet Stoica

There are approximately 200 optical stores in central Massachusetts, many of which are great places to have your eyes checked, contact lenses ordered, and eyeglasses chosen, but for the last five years, Charlton Optical has stood at the top of the list by being voted Best in Central Mass. by its loyal and happy customers.

Owner Peter Maly is understandably proud of his professional and customer-focused staff for all that they have accomplished in the areas of eye examinations, contact lens choices, eyeglass frame selection, and their own unique lens grinding lab for

customers' spectacles.

"It's our customer service," said Mr. Maly, "along with the longevity of our employees and our old-fashioned values. We want to make sure our customers are happy with our products. We stand behind what we offer our customers and honor all our warranties. Our crew and their personalities are what keeps our clients coming back. It's the teamwork."

Charlton Optical also has a new optometrist, Dr. Renee Gomez, who, according to their website, provides primary eye care for all ages, including contact lens examina-

tions and fittings, laser vision consultations, diabetic evaluations, pre-post cataract evaluations and general vision exams. Dr. Gomez is licensed as a Doctor of Optometry in Massachusetts and is a member of the American Optometric Association and the Massachusetts Society of Optometrists.

"We also have top-of-the-line equipment," stated Mr. Maly. "We offer Optos Retinal Imaging which captures a 200-degree high-resolution digital image of the retina in a single shot without using eye-drop dilation." Mr. Maly explained that his company chose to bump out their existing floor plan to accommodate their newest eye examination equipment.

The shop will be celebrating its 27th year anniversary at the same location this year. "We have a large selection of frames along with our ability to accept most insurances, making us one of the busiest shops around. The other very large advantage that sets us apart from our fellow optical shops is that we grind our own lenses here," Mr. Maly said. Charlton Optical also dispenses all major brand contact lenses along with rebates, if applicable.

Mr. Maly and his staff opticians actually create your eyeglasses right on the premises. The process involves blank generic power glass and/or plastic lenses that arrive in one-inch-thick formats. As pre-



Staff members (L-R): Shelley Smola, Peter Maly, Lynda Schultz, Jayne Deluca, John Verdolino, Dr. Renee Gomez, and April Swanson.

scriptions are accepted from customers, he and his fellow opticians use their lab equipment to grind the blanks to the proper power for each individual whether it's one power, bifocal, trifocal, or progressive lenses. One-stop shopping for sure.

Another interesting facet of this shop is its Chemistre line of sunglasses that includes the insertion of tiny magnets in the upper left and right corners of a customer's clear spectacles making those specs capable of accepting a flat pair of sunglasses with like magnets. Once those flat sunglasses are clicked on those tiny magnets, it is impossible to tell the wearer has clip-on sunglasses.

"We do almost all our own optical work," Mr. Maly stated, "grinding prescriptions with a computerized edger with most scrips done the same day presented. We also specialize in safety eyewear for companies."

Charlton Optical's customers hail from Massachusetts and Connecticut with their goal of purchasing contact lenses, eyeglasses, and frames—from designer to economy styles. Many of their regulars are local residents, coming from the Brookfields, Quinebaug and Thompson, as well as Webster and Dudley.

Mr. Maly began his career working at Gentex Optics of Dudley. He so thoroughly enjoyed working in the pro-

duction area making lenses that he decided to further his education in the lens grinding area. He is certified by the National Contact Lens Examiners, American Board of Opticianry, and the Opticians Association of Massachusetts.

Their two newest employees are Shelley Smola, a new optician who has been with the group for six months, and April Swanson, who began her career as a technician three months ago. They are also currently seeking another optometrist and a new billing employee.

Charlton Optical is open Monday – Saturday and is located at 109-6 Masonic Home Road, Charlton. (508) 248-1188. www.charltonoptical.com



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Storytime on Facebook Live Wednesdays at noon - Join Miss Lida for a live storytime on Facebook, every Wednesday at noon, and then stop by the library for a free take-and-make craft kit. No Facebook account is needed for this free program. Just point your browser to <https://www.facebook.com/crawfordlibrary> to access the video. Can't tune in at noon? Recordings of each week's storytime are available on the Facebook page beginning Wednesday afternoon.

Music and movement

First Friday of every month at 11:00 a.m. Join Deb Hudgins on Facebook for Music and Movement, one of our most popular programs. Nothing gets kids on their feet and having fun quite like songs, dance and silly stories. No Facebook account is needed for this free program. Just point your browser to <https://www.facebook.com/crawfordlibrary> to access the video.

Wingmasters birds of prey Friday, February 22, 6:00-7:50 p.m. Wingmasters will present

a children's program featuring educational videos and live birds of prey, with question and answer sessions. Meet a falcon and an owl and learn about them and other birds of prey. Free; registration is required. Participants will receive a link to the Zoom meeting 24 hours before the event. Sponsored by the Hugh W. and Harriet K. Crawford Endowment.

Hands on nature presents backyard birds

Monday, March 22, 6:00-7:30 p.m. Meet the birds in your backyard with this fun free program for kids. Free; registration is required. Participants will receive a link to the Zoom meeting 24 hours before the event. Sponsored by the Hugh W. and Harriet K. Crawford Endowment.

Tracing your immigrant ancestors

Thursday, March 25, 6:00-7:45 p.m. Most of us are here today because someone, somewhere, left everything they knew for something unknown. Find out how, find out why, find out more. This talk will give you the tools you need to identify the place of origin of your European ancestors. Margaret Fortier will cover

how to start, what to watch out for, and how to use the whole family to find what you are looking for. Case studies tracing local immigrants will

illustrate the method. Free. Registration required. Participants will be emailed a zoom link 24 hours before the program.



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Fridays from February 19 through March 26, St. Andrew Bobola Church, 54 West Main St., Dudley, will be offering take-out Lenten dinners with your choice of baked or fried fish from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and again from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Fried dinners include french fries, cole

slaw and tartar sauce. Baked dinners include baked potato, coleslaw and tartar sauce. Please note — take out only and please call ahead 508-943-5633 to order.

Cost is \$12pp for adults and \$6pp for children. If you have any questions or to order, please call the rectory, 508-943-5633, during regular office hours, Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m. to noon. During Lent, come take home a great meal and avoid cooking on Fridays.



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- 2 LBS. HAMBURG OR
3 LB. GROUND TURKEY
- 3 LBS. PORK CHOPS OR
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- 1 LB. BACON OR STEW BEEF

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2 LBS. NEW YORK SIRLOIN STEAKS
- 3 LBS. BEEF POT ROAST OR
3 LBS. BONELESS PORK ROAST
- 3 LBS. BONELESS CHICKEN BREAST OR
1 PKG. (1½ LBS.) MARINATED
CHICKEN BREAST OF YOUR CHOICE
- 1 WHOLE CHICKEN (3 LBS. AVERAGE)
OR 1 LB. SAUSAGE OF YOUR CHOICE

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- 3 LBS. BONELESS PORK ROAST OR
2 LB. NEW YORK SIRLOIN STEAK
- 1½ LBS. SIRLOIN TIPS OR 3 LBS. PORK CHOPS
- 3 LBS. HAMBURG OR 1 PKG. (1½ LBS.)
MARINATED SIRLOIN TIPS OF YOUR CHOICE
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February group art show

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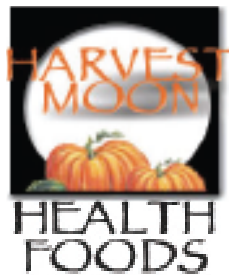
John Gaumond photo le coeur.

All works will be the artists' interpretation of "hope" and includes photography, acrylic, watercolor, collage and mixed media.

The show may be viewed during regular business hours: Tuesday-Saturday 10-5. For more information call 508-949-6232 or email deb@bookloversgourmet.com



A. Tisdell Arctic Polar Bear with Cubs watercolor.



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February means the Clark Tournament for the local boys' qualifying basketball teams that include eligibles in the likes of Bartlett, Shepherd Hill, and Oxford. The popular Worcester tournament will likely submit to COVID 19 precautions and continue reset for 2022. Let's hope the millennials don't forget how historic and exciting this annual event really is and make it a top priority to qualify and compete during the winter vacation week during Presidents Week. The MIAA is on the move and tradition is not a consideration anymore.

This space has not heard that this pandemic time is any fun for those attempting to play basketball although the unanimous sentiment is "the kids are together and competing" although handcuffed

Standing room only... no more bleachers at Memorial Athletic Field

by MIAA rule changes to the rules of basketball that hardly make any sense. You either go to war or you don't, meaning the MIAA is handicapping the rules of the sport in hopes that this invisible disease doesn't go into gymnasiums. You can't stop what you don't see. A lot of schools have opted out of playing because of the pandemic. Wait until you see "fall 2" starting up February 22 to April 25 for football and indoor track. The rules and constraints put in by the MIAA in basketball have schools opting into the geographical pod model which is like playing in a straight jacket. Anyone who is refereeing or officiating these contests should receive immunity for any bad calls in the future. Officials and referees today are like traffic cops at Kelley Square in Worcester during rush hour. Way too many moving parts and the biggest enemy is COVID-19 which is invisible. Go figure. The bottom line this winter is some schools opted in and some school opted out to play basketball. COVID-19 is the enemy and it is invisible and causes death. Unless the MIAA restricted playing rules are 100% guaranteed not to

spread the invisible COVID, then please wait until a vaccine is distributed as a safety measure and the COVID cases can be related to a safe environment. Are high schools really going to attempt to play football in February? We will find out soon.

Taking a recent tour of Ray Street in Webster brings an eye catching major change in the landscaping at upper Memorial Athletic Field. No, second base hasn't moved since 1983 and remains in its usual place. But, both grandstands or bleachers on each side of the football field have been taken down because of safety issues. The safety project affects both the football and baseball situations. Officials have indicated that only a 200-seat maximum seating capacity set of portable seats will be put on the home side of the football field while the visitors side of the football field will be left vacant to sideline standing for fans. It will be standing-room-only on the visiting sidelines and both end zones. Visitors can sit on the home side if they wish. The school bands are going to have to find their own way to be comfortable at games.

While the football grandstands or bleachers decision are just the sign of the times we are in, the baseball field just lost its personality by taking down the famed short porch in right field. The baseball field on Ray Street is an all time treasure in New England. One of the best high school venues ever. Its personality and layout make it as good as Fino Field in Milford and Tivnan Field at Lake Park in Worcester. Does anyone remember when Ray Street was a hotbed for learning how to compete and play all the sports of any season in the 50s, 60s, and 70s? When every kid settled his own differences in a world of playground pick-up games? Bloody noses and ripped pants were guarantees for the end of every day on Ray Street and we were better off for it. The lessons of LIFE on Ray Street became who we are today. Challenging yourself against older kids or more gifted talented kids were the best of times. The bloody noses and ripped pants measured where we were headed in life and we didn't even know it. Sadly today Ray Street is home to the pigeons and that unused second base that sits so proudly in the middle of the baseball diamond

waiting for some kid to slide into it one more time. Football and baseball will continue to be played at the Memorial Field in Webster under the watchful eyes of parents and officials and public address announcers and local cable TV. No more settling your own differences or bloody noses or ripped pants. No more limping home from Ray Street all alone thinking of going back to Ray Street tomorrow for another lesson in LIFE. Even the pigeons have nowhere to sit anymore.

Finally, Rusty Oleszewski's last excerpt on the French River Rivalry sadly ends in today's edition. Oleszewski captured everyone's imagination and soul over the last four months with his crystal clear remembrance of the Dudley students leaving Bartlett High School because of the local politicians and starting a bitter athletic environment between the two schools in 1974. A whole new world was made back in the early 70s and nobody knew that Shepherd Hill would become what it is today. Shepherd Hill grew by leaps and bounds over the last 50 years because of the real estate market in Dudley and Charlton. Shepherd Hill

Regional High School became a thriving educational and athletic institution. Oleszewski gave us his perspective on how Shepherd Hill established itself over 50 years ago. Time has passed and the common denominator of all Bartlett-Shepherd Hill athletic events in the early times of 1974 to the mid-80s proved to be personal for each school, meaning it was a true rivalry in every sense. Both sides brought their emotions to the athletic events between the two schools and it is safe to say that you either wore green or maroon on your sleeve at all times. Unfortunately, there is no rivalry today as both schools dimmed the rivalry down to memories only and thankfully Oleszewski raised the great Bartlett-Shepherd Hill rivalry out of its grave and wrote about how both schools handled their emotions during the French River Rivalry. Thank you Rusty on your outstanding insight about how it was and how it will never be again. You suited up in the maroon and gold in three sports and went onto Amherst College and played football and baseball. Your loyalty will forever be appreciated.

The "French River Rivalry" - short lived but with everlasting memories

Final chapter

By Rusty Oleszewski

Last month we explored facets of the French River Rivalry between Bartlett and Shepherd Hill students after graduation. We also acknowledged the camaraderie which formed between the rivals as they became teammates for different teams or institutions.

I have been away from the local area since 1995 but have visited many times in the 25 years since.

Now as an outsider, but someone who previously lived in Dudley or Charlton for 36 years, I see those two towns have not developed the social or commercial relationship that Dudley and Webster had, or in many cases, still has.

It seems, perhaps only to

me, that Dudley and Charlton are partners in a school system but not much more. In the 50 years or so since the Webster and Dudley school systems split, let us imagine how those officials responsible for making that decision might feel now.

Certainly, Dudley's farmland image has changed considerably with their population growth. So much growth that the town now has TWO stop light intersections. I used to joke when I was away at college that to find my house "you just turned right at the light!"

The latest figures I have found show a student population of 1217 for grades 9-12 at Shepherd Hill. In comparison, Bartlett High School has 443 students in grades 9-12.

If you recall, when the Webster School Committee decided to dismiss Dudley students from Bartlett, the high school was overcrowded, with upwards of 1000 students roaming the halls during the 1960s.

The Dudley-Charlton school district has a total enrollment of over 4200 students compared to the Webster school district which totals near 1850 students. Webster still has two parochial schools through grade 8 whose students may or may not continue their high school years at Bartlett. But do these numbers mean that Dudley has fared better than Webster?

From a fiscal view, the added tax dollars from a housing boom has benefitted the Dud-

ley-Charlton district along with the contributions of continued regionalization. Webster has built a new high school and junior high school, expanded and remodeled the former Park Ave. Intermediate school. Webster is also home to that lake with the long Indian name, and yes, I can still pronounce it correctly even today. The lake seems more popular than ever as many original summer camp homes have become million-dollar investments.

To yours truly Webster still has that tight knit, neighborhood community look and feel to it. I know the Main St. area has had its problems in recent times attracting commercial clients but a new library and police station seem to be helping spur new activity.

The neighborhood pubs may not be as abundant as in the 20th century but just across the street from Memorial Athletic Field in Webster, the **Polish-American Veterans Club**, commonly referred to as the **PAV**, is still a gathering spot for local sports enthusiasts. Just as old tales of baseball games between the Brooklyn Dodgers and Giants or football games pitting the Baltimore Colts against the New York Giants are rehashed, the battles between Bartlett and Shepherd Hill during their heyday are etched in time.

Names like **Jarosz, Kunkel, Bazinet, Bartolomei, Lindstrom, Daskowski, Miglionico, Stearns** etc. left

their mark on this rivalry. During a stretch in the 1990s the schools played each other twice during the football season. Both schools benefitted from the packed grandstands. Unfortunately the respective coaches had to plea with their athletic directors to end the double meetings because the games were taking a toll on the players. They were such emotional and physical battles.

Throughout this look-back at the French River Rivalry, the majority of my focus has been on the football and basketball programs of the neighboring schools. I wish to make mention of the many other athletes competing in sports such as soccer, field hockey, softball, cross-country, track, golf and cheerleading who also created their own memories of epic wins or losses.

I previously mentioned in an earlier chapter several coaches from both schools but I would also like to tip my hat to not only coaches at the high school level, but also, the junior high and intermediate levels and all the volunteer youth coaches. It is a huge commitment that these men and women make to teach our young athletes not only how to compete in their respective sports, but more importantly, how to do it the proper way. Sportsmanship and respect for an opponent are never misplaced by these two schools. I am proud to have been a part of helping to build from the ground up programs at a new



Rusty Oleszewski

school. Conversely, I cannot help but wonder how cool it would have been for many of us Dudley kids to have been part of the green and white tradition already in place at Bartlett High School.

In closing, I want to thank The Yankee Express and Peter Coyle for giving me the opportunity to relive and learn about some of the most formative years of my life. As we grow old, we take comfort in some of the simpler things during what has been a very disruptive, stressful and bewildering year.

Let us pray that 2021 brings a safe and effective vaccine to citizens of the United States so that life as we remember it can slowly return and local athletes can return to playing the games that they love. Stay safe and always try to do the right thing.

The Yankee Xpress note: our sincere thanks to you, Rusty, for your contribution of the French River Rivalry. Your walk down memory lane has been enjoyed by those of us who remember it well.

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Tales from beyond

The Ghosts of Pachaug State Forest

By Thomas D'Agostino

The ghosts of Pachaug are well documented and have attracted the curious and paranormal enthusiasts for years.

As the shadows grow long and darkness envelopes the terrain around Pachaug State Forest in Voluntown, Connecticut, unearthly shrieks permeate the wooded domain. They are the shrieks of an Indian girl who was killed by British soldiers over three centuries ago. The once flourishing village that is now deserted thicket is host to several creepy entities from colonial soldiers to the wraith of a little girl. There is even a black misty figure that stalks those who hike the trails and roads of the forest.

The ghosts seem to fall neatly into the history of the region. Pachaug is Indian for "bend in the river." The Narragansett, Mohegan, and Pequot tribes inhabited the area. Towards the end of the 17th century, the colonists began to settle there and convinced the Mohegan tribe to rid the others from the land. After they had gained the help of the Mohegans in successfully removing the other two tribes, the colonists then turned and pushed them out as well.

Around 1700, a six-square-mile expanse of land was given to veterans of the Indian Wars. They named the new settlement Volunteer Town due to the fact that they had been volunteer soldiers during the conflict. In 1721, they shortened the moniker to Voluntown. A community was quick to spring up along the fast flow of the Pachaug River. This tributary runs through the forest from Beach Pond to the Quinebaug River. Mills began to dot the river as early as 1711. Nearly every brook has some remnant of the many mill ruins in the forest preserve.

Like many other small New England farming and mill communities, progress and technology became their enemy and soon the small village of Pachaug was on the downward slide. By the Great Depression of the early 20th century, the village was nothing but overgrown roads and

crumbling homes. The mills, long dormant had also fallen into disrepair and were soon consumed by the ravages of time and nature. All that remained among the forest were the ghosts that still hold their vigil to this day amid the ruins of what was once their home.

There is a section of the forest called Hell Hollow along a road and pond of the same name. The name is not necessarily derived from the demonic forces that thrive in the area. The settlers named many parts of Connecticut with prefixes like "devil" or "demon," as the area gave them the feeling that there were supernatural forces at work. In the case of Hell Hollow, the land was rocky and poor. Farming was brutal and the area was prone to flooding. Such names have carried on through history. If they are haunted at present, it only adds to the mystery of the locale. A rock formation known as "Devil's Den" can be seen northeast of Hell Hollow Pond, on the southwest side of Flat Rock Road along the Quinebaug Trail. This may not be of ghostly significance but tends to reiterate the fact that the settlers were probably a bit superstitious.

Visitors to this patch of the forest have witnessed a dark entity that rushes out of the woods directly in front of them. The strange mist is reported to be about fifteen feet long and hovers a few feet off of the ground as it makes its way across the road. Hikers and hunters alike have given testimony to the strange fiend that lurks in the dark bowers of the forest. Many also get a fearful feeling of being watched while traversing the trails of the Hell Hollow section of the forest.

Another haunting in the Hell Hollow area is that of an Indian girl. In the late 1600s, an Indian woman was slain by English soldiers near the present Hell Hollow Road. Since then her vengeful screams of murder and brutality have saturated the air in a tormenting aria that eerily replays over and over. The screams send

even the bravest hunter on his heels for more hallowed ground. The local hunters will not venture far into that area according to the few I have talked to. They wished to remain anonymous for fear of ridicule but as one said, "When you hear that piercing scream come out of the woods, no one cares what anyone might think. Your hair stands up on the back of your neck and you are out of there!"

The ghost of a colonial soldier still makes his rounds at a section along Breakneck Hill Road. Locals have encountered the vigil spirit many times over the years as it marches back and forth along the side of the road. Some have actually almost hit the wraith as it crosses the road, still on eternal duty.

Author David Trifilo encountered the ghostly soldier once while traveling along the thoroughfare. He wrote of his experience in his book entitled, "The Hauntings of Pachaug Forest." The author was rounding a sharp bend of the road when he encountered a threadbare colonial soldier carrying a long musket over his shoulder. The entity marched into the road directly in front of Trifilo. When he hit the brakes, the ghost vanished into the void. The sightings of the soldier have been frequent over the years. Paranormal investigator and writer Lauren Nesluse has heard of others who have been startled by the ghostly guard as it crossed the road in front of them. Motorists have actually driven through the specter. Some have stopped for a moment to reflect on what they had just encountered while others do not stick around for a second meeting.

The ghost of this soldier has been witnessed for centuries. The first sighting recorded goes as far back as 1742. The description is the same as the present day witnesses accounts. The spirit is dressed in a tattered uniform holding a long musket slung over the right shoulder. He marches silent and dusty along the bend in the road, sometimes cross-

ing as if looking for something on the other side. The date of the first sighting definitely places him well before the American Revolution. Perhaps he is a remnant of King Philip's War (1675 to 1676) or Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), which was the second inter-colonial war between France and England. Some claim he is from the French and Indian War, yet that conflict took place from 1754 to 1763, several years after the initial sighting of Pachaug's sentinel ghost.

Another spot of spectral relevance is an area of the forest called Maud's Grave. The original site of her burial was on a rise next to the remains of the Reynolds home at the Sterling/Voluntown border.

Maud was the daughter of Gilbert and Lucy Reynolds. She died just before her third birthday after choking on an apple from complications due to diphtheria. The parents found her on the morning of October 12, 1886 with the apple by her side. They preserved the apple in alcohol because it had the impressions of her baby teeth in it.

She was the third child of the Reynolds to die within a few years, but she was not buried in the family cemetery. Mrs. Reynolds was so taken aback by the death of her daughter, that she buried her close to the home where she could see the cross that marked the grave. It is in this spot that her ghost is seen, perhaps trying to find her family or wondering why she is not at rest with her brothers. No one has an answer, as she has never spoken. Even after she was laid to rest in the family plot, her ghost has continued to wander the grounds which were once her home.

In 1965, a relative moved the remains of Maud to the family burying ground on the top of Bare Hill. A cross was fashioned from bricks over her grave and her original marker was taken to the church the family once attended and put in a closet. It remains there to this day as a reminder of one of Hell Hollow's most famous ghosts.



Maud Reynolds' grave marker.



Breakneck Hill Road where soldier's ghost is seen.



Hell Hollow Road.



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Living with Lincoln

The Senior Stroll

By Amy Palumbo-LeClaire

Every pet owner, at one time or another, has experienced the joy of going for a WALK. Some dogs even know how to spell the W-A-L-K. I don't know what's better: the build-up to the walk or the actual stroll itself. When it comes to living with Lincoln, I'd have to give each a fair shake. Now that he's a Senior Pet, walks have become even more interesting, and treasured.

"Want to go for a walk?"

The question passes through him like electricity while he relaxes in his preferred spot, the nook beneath our island countertop, his dog cave. He stiffens his posture, stretches his paws forward at an attentive numeral eleven, and tilts his square head. "Want to go for a walk?" I repeat the question just to plant that expression (a Dog Owner fave) in my mind.

The second request sells him. He springs from his cave and grabs the nearest dishrag, one of several used to clean dirty paws. "I love this idea!" He parades around the kitchen with the dirty rag.

It's a Retriever thing.

Dogs remind us that the simple joys in life are the sweetest. He waits for me to grab my coat from the closet and, since its winter, tack on a hat, scarf, and gloves. Leave it to a dog to give "his person" the charm of a butler. He observes my routine carefully. He grins while

I button my coat. He blinks while I wrap my scarf. Then he performs a happy dance, as though we've both just won the lottery. "Do you want to go see Gracie, Lincoln?" I keep the inspiration going. Naming other Golden Retrievers in the neighborhood turns on his heart light even more.

"Do you want to go see the new puppy?" He tap-dances and grabs a dropped glove. "Let it go, Lincoln." I'll admit, this particular habit has lost its luster. "Lincoln, please. I need the glove. Let it go." Refusal. He wiggles to the front door mouthing the glove like a magician with a dove. I resort to the obvious: use my bare hands as a scissor to pry open his upper and lower jaw. The slimed glove drops to the floor like a dead bird.

"Go ahead, Lincoln." Since he's already pushed his way through the opened doorway, I gesture that he GO first.

"A couple throws?" Before I have a chance to attach leash to collar, he's found a ball in the yard. Now that he's ten, I have to monitor the number of throws because we still have an entire three mile walk to manage. "Just a few," I say to him. He drops the ball by my feet and waits, the indent at his head creased with that expression again. I toss him a few and he completes the 40 yard dash to retrieve one of thousands of balls thrown over a decade. I

resist the opportunity to offer the Gronk-toss—a high ball thrown perfectly to allow him to spring like a dolphin on all fours, catch the ball on the hop, and carry it back with a celebrity smile. 2020 has been a year of worry. Test positive? Torn ACL?

"We're going for our walk now, Lincoln." He stares up at me, foam lining his black lips like the suds of an ocean shoreline. He secures the ball to one side of his mouth with big canines that have been filed flat by so much ball play. He drools. A new battle begins. "Let it go, Lincoln." He turns his head away from me—a subtle hint to let me know he'll be bringing along the ball, thank you very much.

"Give."

Refusal.

Our latest problem.

His breathing is already compromised due to age and, well, a few senior issues. I use gloved hands to pry a slurpy ball from a surprisingly strong, old mouth. In the process, the ball shoots off my hand and takes a bad bounce. The two of us scramble like football players for the fumble. "Leave it!" I shout. Too late. Lincoln recovers the ball, a close snag. A ghost from NFL Football Past announces the play while Lincoln celebrates the victory with a dance. Meanwhile, I produce Plan B.

Reverse Psychology.

I pretend I don't mind that he has won the battle and walk to the edge of the driveway, as though to desert him. "Bye, Lincoln. Have fun."

His expression softens. "You're really going to go without me?" He tip-toes toward the mailbox, ever so slowly, a lion studying his prey. "Can we talk about it?"

"I'll be right back, Lincoln," I lie, and keep walking. He comes closer to the driveway threshold, more vulnerable now. I spin around, dash towards my ball-obsessed dog and perform a quick, unexpected extraction. Then I jog back down the driveway, place the ball on a high garage shelf, return to his side, and snap on a leash. We cross over to the street. He pulls me back in the direction of the garage. "Cheap shot."

I tug him forward. Within seconds, the incident is a distant memory. Unlike humans, dogs forgive immediately, fully. They don't hold grudges. We go for a walk. Lincoln

wears a permanent smile that falls somewhere between the residue of ball play and the promise of new adventure. His trot is peppy, age-defiant. We pass kind neighbors, interesting shrubs, and the small, crabby pug whose bark is significantly worse than any dog's bite. He tailgates Lincoln's hairy butt with an obscene, gurgling rattle.

"Go home!" I turn around and stomp my foot. Lincoln shakes him off and proceeds, unaffected by bad behavior. "Hyper little fellow, isn't he?"

We pass the deserted apple orchard and Lincoln takes a shot at pulling me back to beautiful "off-the-leash" years when we'd tour rows and rows of apple trees long since cut down. The field, now overgrown and fenced in, is nostalgic for both of us. "You remember the orchard, don't you, Lincoln?"

I notice the memory emerge in his mind. He flecks me a knowing grin. Then, as quickly as it came, the memory morphs to a new sight. A friendly Human across the street walks a gorgeous German Shepherd pup. Normally, a tsunami could not hold me back from this pup. "What a beautiful pup!" I croon. Lincoln interrupts. "My name is Lincoln! I'm ten years old and have my own column! You can read about me in Living with Lincoln, of The Yankee Xpress!"

"I'm sorry. I'm on Day 10," the Human says, and we part like the Red Sea. Lincoln tosses a glance up at me. "He had the puppy smell, too."

It's a 2020 thing.

We make our way to the "home stretch" at Dodge Road, where a trot becomes a stroll.

The pep in Lincoln's step becomes a pause in his paws. "You want to take a rest, Lincoln?" He sits, lifts his head, and smiles proudly. Despite an already healthy self-esteem, I pour on praise. "You're doing such a good job walking." I massage his ears. "Most ten-year old dogs couldn't walk this far. You're so athletic. We'll get some water when we get home. Sound good?"

He listens to me - happy tongue out - and agrees. Always, there is inspiration between us while we put our best foot forward and count our blessings. Life is worth living. Especially with a dog like Lincoln.



More ball please.



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If you pray three times a day, three consecutive days, you will receive your intention, no matter how impossible it may seem. Praise and Thanksgiving please the Heart of God.

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Q. My car is due for state inspection soon and the horn doesn't work. The car is an older Toyota Corolla, and I don't want to put too much money into it. Can I wire a horn button to the dash and would that pass the inspection? I have checked the horn and fuse and they look fine.

Q I have a Subaru Legacy and the release for the trunk doesn't work. I can open it with the key but it is handy to open the trunk from the inside of the car. I have looked at it and know the cable is broken. Is there an easy way to fix this or does the cable need replacement? Can I do it myself?

A. Unless the cable simply jumped off its perch on the button or latch, the cable will need replacing. It isn't difficult work but does require a certain amount of disassembly of the interior and trunk to "fish" the cable through the car. If the cable moves with the interior lever, it may be the cable has stretched. You could try adding a couple of rubber grommets to the cable at the latch to take up the slack. If you decide you want to tackle the repair, budget out a half a day and the part can be purchased online for \$30-\$40.

Q. A few years ago, I had a front window replaced due to a crack in the window during the winter. While replacing the glass, the person from the company said he would give me a tip for winter defrosting. He said put it on

A. I would agree if the heat in the car was instantaneous, but it isn't. As the engine runs it warms the water in the heater and the air temperature of the defroster goes from cold to warm to hot and warms the glass slowly. One area that I have seen something like this happen is at a car wash on a cold day. The car is hot, the windshield is warm, and the car wash water is cold, and the glass has a defect/tiny chip. The interesting thing about glass is it has a memory, if there is a small chip or crack and the temperature changed quickly it could cause that crack or chip to spread.

Q. I am always doing projects around the house and I have a small SUV but sometimes I need to carry sheetrock or plywood and was considering a trailer. I don't really want to buy a pickup truck because the SUV although hardly new runs great. What do you think?

A ■ Certainly, a five-by-eight open trailer could work. Even a enclosed cargo trailer is a possibility and it could be used for storage. The problem with trailers is they also require maintenance, as well as having some place to keep them. I made a trailer once and it ended up being used so infrequently the wheel bearings seized up. Years ago, someone gave me this suggestion. As long as what you are carrying is not too heavy, the roof makes a great place to carry items. Use an eggcrate style mattress pad on the roof, this will protect the paint and cushion and hold what you are carrying. Use ratchet style straps run around the objects and roof. Tighten everything up and close the doors and off you go. This has worked for me for years.

Q. I think you answered this question before and hoping you will answer it again. I have a 2014 Honda CR-V and sometimes the hatch won't unlatch. Now this only happens when it is cold out (inconvenient for me and hard for a shop to check). Do you have any idea what the problem is?

A. Once you have checked the switch and wiring, the common problem is the latch. The latch/actuator

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Tips on financial planning



Dennis Antonopoulos

For many of us, the COVID-19 pandemic may be putting a hold on dinner at the charming local bistro, but the spirit of Valentine's Day cannot be extinguished. This year, perhaps more so than in the past, you may want to make your Valentine's Day gifts even more meaningful. So, for example, what can you give

Financial gifts for your Valentine

your loved ones to help them along on the road to financial security?

Here are a few possibilities:

• Contribute (indirectly) to an IRA

Virtually anyone with earned income can contribute to an IRA, which offers tax benefits and an almost unlimited array of investment options. Yet, most people never contribute the maximum amount allowable each year, which, in 2021, is \$6,000, or \$7,000 for those 50 and older. You can't contribute to another person's IRA, but you can give that person the money for that purpose. However, an individual can't contribute more to an IRA than he or she earned during that year. So, if you were

to give someone \$1,000 to be placed in an IRA, that individual must have at least \$1,000 in earnings. Be aware, though, that the recipient can use the money for any purpose.

• Give shares of stock

You probably are already familiar with the products your loved ones use – so why not give them shares of stock in the companies that make those goods or services? Most people enjoy being “owners” of businesses whose products they use. Furthermore, owning stocks for the long term can be a valuable component of anyone's financial strategy. If you are unsure of how to give stocks, you may want to consult with a financial professional.

• Stay protected

If your valentine also happens to be your spouse, you can give a gift of tremendous value by simply working to protect what you have. For example, if something happened to you, would your spouse be able to maintain the household, educate children, pay the mortgage and so on? A financial professional can help you find the protection you need, as well as suggest ways to defend yourself against the devastating costs of long-term care. A private room in a nursing home can cost \$100,000 or more each year, according to the insurance company Genworth, and Medicare typically pays few of these expenses, so you'll want to be prepared.

• Create (or revise) your estate plans

It doesn't sound very romantic but making sure your estate plans are in order is one of the best gifts you can give to all your loved ones. If you haven't created your plan yet, contact an attorney who specializes in estate planning. You may also want to involve your tax and financial advisors. And if it's been a while since you looked at your existing plan, take the time to review it – this is especially important if you've had changes in your family situation.

On Valentine's Day, the chocolate hearts and flowers are certainly always appreciated. But financial gifts can help you make a truly lasting impact on your loved ones' lives.

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 SPIC

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Home buyer statistics

- First-Time vs. Repeat Buyers:
 - o First-time buyers: 31%
 - o Median age of first-time buyers: 33
 - o Median age of repeat buyers: 47
 - o Median household income of first-time buyers: \$80,000
 - o Median household income of repeat buyers: \$106,700
- The typical home purchased was 1,900 square feet in size, was built in 1993, and had three bedrooms and two bathrooms.
- Among those who financed their home purchase, buyers typically financed 88% of the home price.
- 88% of buyers purchased their home through a real estate agent or broker—a share that has steadily increased from 69 percent in 2001.
- Buyers who would use their agent again or recommend their agent to others: 91%
- Where buyers found the

Market recap – good tips if you are planning to buy or sell

home they purchased:

- o Internet: 52%
- o Real estate agent: 29%
- o Yard sign/open house sign: 6%
- o Friend, relative, or neighbor: 5%
- o Home builder or their agent: 6%
- o Directly from sellers/Knew the sellers: 2%
- o Print newspaper advertisement: 1%

Home seller statistics

- The typical home seller was 56 years of age, had a median household income of \$107,100, and lived in their home for 10 years.
- 89% of sellers were assisted by a real estate agent when selling their home.
- Recent sellers typically sold their homes for 99% of the listing price, and 38% reported reducing the asking price at least once.
- The typical home sold was on the market for 3 weeks.
- 41% of sellers who used a real estate agent found their agents through a referral by friends or family, and 26% used the agent they previously worked with to buy or sell a home.
- Sellers who definitely would use same agent again:

74%

For sale by owner (FSBO) statistics

- FSBOs accounted for 8% of home sales in the past year. The typical FSBO home sold for \$217,900 compared to \$295,000 for agent-assisted home sales.
- FSBO methods used to market home:
 - o None: Did not actively market home: 46%
 - o Yard sign: 25%
 - o Friends, relatives, or neighbors: 22%
 - o Social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.): 14%
 - o Open house: 11%
 - o Multiple Listing Service (MLS) website: 6%
 - o Online classified advertise-

ments: 5%

- o For-sale-by-owner websites: 5%
- o Video: 2%
- o Print newspaper advertisement: 1%
- o Direct mail (flyers, postcards, etc.): 1%
- Most difficult tasks for FSBO sellers:
 - o Preparing/fixing up home for sale: 12%
 - o Understanding and performing paperwork: 10%
 - o Getting the right price: 9%
 - o Selling within the planned length of time: 6%
 - o Having enough time to devote to all aspects of the sale: 5%

* Source: 2020 National Association of REALTORS

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