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CROSTOWN ADS AND BUSINESS NEWS

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July 22 - August 26, 2022



Koopman Lumber's first retail store, in Whitinsville, 1950.

Koopman Lumber adds ninth location in continued growth spurt

BY ROD LEE

Ambitious, industrious and community-minded as he was, Peter T. Koopman probably did not foresee when he launched his family-owned lumber and hardware company in Whitinsville in 1939 that the firm would eventually grow to nine locations.

With its recent purchase of Boilard Lumber in Indian Orchard (Springfield), Koopman Lumber now has a presence in Whitinsville, North Grafton, Uxbridge, Sharon, Milford (for paint), Hudson, Andover, Fairhaven and Indian Orchard.

Five of these stores have been added to the fold since 2011. The Koopman name has emerged on

a par with those of Gillette, Hood Ice Cream, Friendly Ice Cream, Polar Beverages, Boston Lobster Company and Herb Chambers as one of the most recognizable and respected in New England.

Peter's grandson Dirk, Dirk's

KOOPMAN
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Zap the Blackstone movement to mark a 50th anniversary

Nearly fifty years have passed since 10,000 volunteers gathered along the banks of the Blackstone River to remove tons of trash, including appliances, furniture and even cars and a school bus.

River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

Bonnie Combs, Molly Cardoza and others in the Corridor office are understandably proud of all of the happenings that are calling overdue attention to the region's



The Blackstone River today, much cleaner than in the past but still with challenges. A 50th-anniversary Zap the Blackstone cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, August 27th.

Thus began, in September of 1972, an initiative called "Zap the Blackstone."

Today, although many challenges still remain in the effort to "Bring Back the Blackstone," the waterway is much cleaner than it was half a century ago. It is also a focal point for many of the activities taking place in the Blackstone

prized national park. Recently, for instance, the Corridor issued a call for help in growing its "pollinator gardens;" asking, "do you have a green thumb? Want to volunteer for gardening projects?"

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KOOPMAN

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sister Denise and her husband Tony Brookhouse run an operation that boasts approximately two hundred employees in storefronts across Eastern, Central and Western Massachusetts.

"It's a great generational

story of a very hardworking family," Northbridge Selectman and former Northbridge Police Chief Thomas J. Melia said. "When I started in the police department in late 1969-70, working 12-8 (mids), I can remember the original owner Pete Koopman always being in early to start the long day rolling! Looks like a very

eager, intelligent and hard-working new generation at the helm now! Best of luck to them!"

A builder, volunteer and family man, Pete Koopman passed his values on to his son Don, who with his wife Doris carried forward the enterprise. Present-day Koopmans are just as dedicated to Pete Koopman's



Clockwise from above: The Koopman family, 1936; Boilard Lumber in the Indian Orchard area of Springfield. Boilard adopted the Koopman name on June 27th.; Peter T. Koopman, founder of Koopman Lumber, now a third-generation business.



legacy of honesty, integrity and unending hard work. Jeannie Hebert, president and CEO of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, is among those who applaud the success Koopman Lumber continues to enjoy.

"We do a lot with them," Ms. Hebert said on July 7th. "They are a big supporter of the Chamber and Tony used to be on my Board of Directors. We are happy to see them growing. Western Massachusetts is a great partner to us too. We have some companies from Western Mass and the Springfield area. We have a peer chain and exchange of ideas."

With Covid, Ms. Hebert said, many more connections are occurring virtually, but in no less vital a fashion. Koopman Lumber

is a good example of how to grow a retail business, she said.

"From a small beginning they have set the standard for quality. They have provided materials for my own home."

Koopman Lumber's signature stores in Whitinsville, Uxbridge and Grafton are convenient go-to stops locally for a clientele that includes contractors and builders and homeowners and do-it-yourselfers. Koopman Lumber's product line, featuring Benjamin Moore paints, is second to none, and staff members are knowledgeable and eager to assist customers.

Boilard Lumber's roots, like Koopman Lumbers, extend back to the 1930s.

"After eighty-six years of continuous family ownership, we are happy to have

found another business that shares our history and values to continue our legacy in Western Massachusetts," Mike Boilard said. "It was important to us to turn the reins over to people who are as committed as we have been to both our customers and employees. The Koopman family fits that bill."

Boilard Lumber adopted the Koopman name on June 27th. All Boilard employees were welcomed to remain on staff and Bob Boilard will stay on as VP and general manager as well.

"We are excited about the opportunities this merger presents," Dirk Koopman said. "It's an honor to partner with a business as well-respected as Boilard Lumber, and to expand our business into Western Massachusetts. We have an experienced transition team," assuring for a smooth changeover, he said. "We'll offer additional product lines, enhanced capabilities and greater resources, all in the capable hands of the same staff who know their customers and their business needs."

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Published on 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month.
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2nd Friday: Auburn, Charlton, Dudley, Oxford and Webster, 1/2 all addresses.
2nd Friday BLACKSTONE VALLEY South: Douglas, Northbridge and Uxbridge.
4th Friday: Auburn, Charlton, Dudley, Oxford and Webster, other 1/2.
4th Friday BLACKSTONE VALLEY North: Grafton, Millbury and Sutton.

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The Newspaper Press, LLC / contents copyright 2022
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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

Mark Scamman takes on those supermarket thieves...



BY ROD LEE

Hello, friends, a word about Mark Scamman, who some of you might remember as store manager of the Market Basket in the town of Oxford, until his recent retirement to Cape Cod, where he and his wife Amy are running a B&B.

As he was preparing to bring to a close his forty five-year career in the supermarket business, Mr. Scamman mentioned to me that he was planning to publish a book. I had no idea at the time what the subject matter would be;



Mark Scamman, retired from the Market Basket store in Oxford, and now an author.

the assumption being that he would merely be reflecting on the vocation that helped him pay his way through college (the University of Lowell, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Management) and that he then embraced as his chosen method of employment.

Turns out he wanted to write about shoplifting, a crime he was thoroughly familiar with.

With the release of *Larceny in the Aisles/Stories* from a Supermarket Manager, Mr. Scamman has not only shed new light on an age-old scourge of retailers everywhere, he has done so with the touch of someone who sees the humor in many of the incidents he encountered along the way.

Maybe this was not so true when they occurred; but, as is the case with police departments across the Commonwealth, they can be now, in looking at them

in the rear-view mirror.

His book does in fact pay homage to members of the law enforcement community who are dealing with the same kind of misbehavior he saw from customers, day after day, month after month.

The cover of *Larceny*, designed by Destinee Almeida, and her illustrations inside, capture the hilarity that so often accompanies attempts to pilfer product. Ms. Almeida's cover artwork depicts a man preparing to stuff a Jack Daniels whiskey bottle into his coat.

I have to admit, I am a sucker for the kind of stories Mr. Scamman shares in *Larceny*. A typical example comes not from him, but one of his store-manager colleagues.

Entitled "Bloody mess," it reads as follows:

In the late 1970s, this future manager was bagging groceries while his store manager chatted with some

was coming from. A package of steak was concealed under there. Its seal had broken, and the liquid inside (called purge) was the extent of his injury.

Mark Scamman presents fifty largely comedic moments like the aforementioned over the course of approximately one hundred eighty pages. In Chapter 25, entitled "Pecans for Pie," he describes an encounter with an elderly woman during the holidays—"a tough time of year for many families." A manager, he relates, noticed the woman put a bag of pecans in her purse in the baking aisle. "I was absolutely not going to have her arrested, but I also wanted to speak to her about stealing, even though she was older than me," Mr. Scamman writes. "We did not go to the office, but I pulled her aside to talk. I quietly asked if she forgot to pay for the pecans she had in her purse. [She]



regular customers seated on benches in front of the store.

While talking to one, the manager noticed blood was trickling down the side of the man's face. The customer was wearing a fedora hat, and the blood was slowly trickling down.

"Are you okay?" The customer said yes and wiped the blood from his face. But it continued to trickle.

Concerned for the customer's health, the manager took the hat off the man's head to see where the blood

started to cry, and said she needed them for her pecan pie she was making for Thanksgiving. She couldn't afford to pay for them. The front-end manager and I were moved nearly to tears. He was the fastest in offering to pay for the pecans. He opened a register, deposited his money, and handed the pecans to the woman. "God bless you!" was her response. "Happy Thanksgiving," we told her. Her story is one of too many to count.

From "A Carriage Full of

Tide Detergent" to "Bubble Gum Theft in a Duffel Bag" to "The Jumper," Mr. Scamman relies on notes he took over the years to address shoplifting in a light-hearted but at the same time serious manner.

His objective, he explains in the epilogue,

"Thou Shalt Not Steal," is to point out that shoplifters should not get off unpunished—as, unfortunately, they so frequently do.

"Community restitution" or "community service" should be mandatory penalties, in his opinion.

In the Introduction to

Larceny, he says "during my career, I caught nearly one thousand shoplifters."

He knows, however, that there are more where they came from.

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Individuals interested in helping out in this capacity should email Ms. Cardoza at mcardoza@blackstoneheritagecorridor.org.

There is also an opportunity to take "the pollinator pledge" by going to <https://blackstoneheritagecorridor.org/protect-our-pollinators/>.

Also contact Ms. Cardoza if you want to become a volunteer. New people were met when the Corridor sponsored a table at the Worcester Tercentennial

Festival last month, and Corridor representatives then invited them to a New Volunteer Open House at the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Center in Worcester.

Re-enactment of Zap clean-up scheduled

Meanwhile, to mark the anniversary of the Zap the Blackstone movement, a re-enactment of the 1972 clean-up will be held on Saturday, August 27th. The goal of organizers of the twenty seven-town watershed-wide cleanup in Massachusetts and Rhode

Island is to have 10,000 volunteers again involved. It is being billed as "the biggest clean-up/green-up revival in fifty years."

And the beat goes on.

Butterfly Festival is August 13th

The Corridor just announced the 15th annual Barbara J. Walker Butterfly Festival, which is scheduled for Saturday, August 13th from noon to 4:00 p.m. at the Mass Audubon Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Area at 414 Massasoit Road in Worcester. "Where butterflies roam free in



Pictured are participants in an invasive water chestnut pull workshop: John Marshland, Bill Luther, John O'Brien, Kevin Burns, Josh Pontbriant and Presenter Katie DeGoosh.

their natural habitats."

Activities as part of the Butterfly Festival will include naturist-led walks, workshops, a display of live caterpillars, children's activities, garden tours, a plant sale and more. Anyone arriving in costume may win a prize.

On Wednesday, August 3rd, a Volunteer Appreciation Ice Cream Social

will be held from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at West End Creamery, 481 Purgatory Road, Whitinsville. This is scheduled as a tribute to "volunteers-in-parks."

Call 401-651-6316 for further details.

Battling the invasive water chestnut

The Corridor recently issued a thank you to Kate DeGoosh, environmental

analyst for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, who presented a skills workshop on the invasive water chestnut just days before the volunteer water chestnut pull hosted by the Blackstone River Watershed Council and the Friends of the Blackstone River. Eight cubic yards were pulled over two days.

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The Pewter Pot pumps new life into an old gem of a building

BY ROD LEE

An architectural oddity of a building at 670 Linwood Ave. in Whitinsville sits directly in front of a mill that was reclaimed as an apartment

owned by Mark VandenAkker and his family.

Unlike some of the ventures that have come and gone at the location in the past, The Pewter Pot may have staying power.

Talking about The Pewter

counting on “hand-built Amish furniture” to be an integral ingredient of the business—and an attraction for prospective patrons.

“We will be doing a lot of custom orders,” he said. “And we are hoping to open a small coffee shop on the first floor, and maybe have outdoor seating.”

“Ambitious” is a word that surfaces in describing what Mr. VandenAkker has in mind as the objective of the shop. Having grown up in town, he was aware of the building’s existence and optimistic about its potential. “We kind of like the building,” he said. “I like the location, right on the street. It was built in 1866, and has an ornate feeling.”

This goes hand-in-hand with the exquisite variety of tables and chairs, cabinets, cupboards, and curio pieces that are thoughtfully and tastefully arranged upstairs and down, many of which have been purchased from Amish dealers—“about five different vendors in Pennsylvania, and we are looking at others in Ohio.”

The VandenAkker family with an able assist from Joe Melo has made good use of

limited space, so that every possible square foot has been captured for display—but without looking cramped or overburdened. This is a tricky proposition but one that Mr. VandenAkker enjoys tackling.

“A lot of it is experience,” he said, in referring to the approach that has been taken. “We have some of the furnishings in our home in Sutton.

“We installed new flooring, new lighting and we 100 percent repainted the whole place,” he said.

“I also have a pest-control business. This is set up for my daughters to run.”

Mr. VandenAkker signed a lease in July. The Pewter Pot is already earning plaudits. One customer said “this is the nicest country store I’ve been in,” which is the kind of feel we wanted.”

A comment that has been heard too is “when is the coffee coming?”

Walls built “at an angle”—a feature that is not immediately apparent to the casual observer—present a challenge; but this has been dealt with by way of shelves built to fit the slant.

The Pewter Pot is going



Above, the building that The Pewter Pot now occupies has an “ornate feel” that appealed to Mark VandenAkker in choosing a location for his shop. Below, this chair with side arm for an antique telephone was reconditioned before being put on the floor; it hearkens back to the days of yore.



Mark VandenAkker and Diane Henderson have high hopes for The Pewter Pot, a new business on Linwood Avenue in Whitinsville.

complex, a liquor store, a restaurant and more a number of years ago.

Presumably used as a guard house or check-in station in its heyday, the interesting two-story structure abutting the street recently became the home of The Pewter Pot, a gift shop

Pot on the afternoon of June 23rd, Mr. VandenAkker said the store’s focus will be “primitive and country furniture, décor and novelty items.”

Mr. VandenAkker, his wife Diane Henderson and his daughters Tara Melo and Lauren Spada are



to be a seven-days-a-week operation with hours of 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., 11 to 7 on Thursdays and 11 to

5 on Sundays.

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North All-Stars prevail in game at Doyle Field

The Central Mass. North/South All-Star football game was held on Friday, June 17, at Doyle Field in Leominster. The All-Star team included players from South County and the Blackstone Valley.

South players included Tim Visbeek, Briant Johnson, Jon Carlos, John Mimawi, Ryan Boyce, Michael Nadeau, Colin Falconer, Trey Howe, Cam Ayotte, Brian Dillon, Kai Belanger, Matt Wildman, Alexander Siwik, Adam Hillerstrom, Bryce Patterson, Jordan Rivera, Noan

Ostrowski, John Furno, Trout Marnell, Charlie McMahon, Antoine Lacourt, Owen Fitzgerald, Andrew Lavoie, Joe Hennessey, Ricky Leach III, Nolan Legere, Kevin Cunningham, Kevin Paulino and Joe Maxim. South All-Star coaches included coaches from Oxford: Head Coach Jeff Clarkson,

Assistants James Royster, Jimmy Nolan, James Small and Pete Lewis. The final score was North 14, South 3. Congratulations to all.

Photos by Sally Patterson. See more photos on our Facebook page.



Clockwise from above: QB Cam Ayotte of Millbury; Jon Carlos Estrada of Shepherd Hill; John Furno of BVT; Briant Johnson of Sutton; the captains at mid-field for the coin toss.

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Clockwise from above: Adam Hillerstrom of Grafton; Jim Himawi of Grafton; Bryce Patterson (#35) of Bartlett; Tim Visbeek of Northbridge; Colin Falconer (#15) of Northbridge; Ryan Boyce (#12) of Northbridge; the coaches.



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Sutton parade, fireworks and more ‘blazes’ anew in 2022

BY ROD LEE

What the weatherman threw at the organizers of the town of Sutton’s dog-mayor parade, fireworks and other activities on June 26th in terms of broiling temperatures was no match for the event’s appeal to residents. They came in droves. They set up lawn chairs along Boston Road. They congregated in the center for cow-chip bingo tickets, food, beverages and ice cream from Julia Moriconi’s truck.

“It was a very busy, crazy

day (and HOT!!!),” Coleen Tarentino said. “Great attendance, awesome feedback—the fireworks were outstanding, just a great, great day!”

The newly elected mayor himself, Waffles, adorned in his “official” bandana, presided over the ceremonies.

The mood in the moments directly before the parade began around four o’clock was anticipatory, reflecting all that was worth looking forward to.

Gathered beneath a tent, Barry Marando, an eighty-year resident of Sutton, said “if anything goes on

in town, we know about it.” Joining Mr. Marando were Jan Marando (“I was born on Buttonwood Ave.”), Butch Marando and Cindy Marando.

On the Common, Megan Berg and Sarah Gillespie were busy selling cow chip bingo tickets and trying to ignore the heat.

“We’re with 4H, we’re Sutton preservationists,” they said. “Our kids are showing their cows in the parade. Our goal is six hundred tickets sold. We’re not there yet!”

Occupying a spot

alongside a line of food trucks, Julia Moriconi said “my business is in Tatnuck Square in Worcester. We make everything from scratch. I’ve been doing ice cream for two years. I’m more mobile than ever.”

Ms. Tarentino gave credit to Jonathan Rocheleau and April Eaton Brown as “the

two individuals who cooked up this whole affair. They first held the parade and fireworks in 2019, the next two years were delayed because of Covid, and so this was its sophomore year. I cannot say enough about how lucky Sutton is to have these two amongst the townspeople. They are

terrific people, dedicated, hardworking, the salt of the earth. This event would never have happened without all their hard work, heart and soul.”

Back for the first time since 2019, the town of Sutton’s parade and fireworks drew a large turnout despite 90-degree temperatures.



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Small Stones Festival announces art call, exhibit dates

Small Stones Festival of the Arts opened its Art Call on July 15 for submission of work. Calling all fine art artists and photographers to join the region's finest painters, photographers, water colorists and other two-dimensional artists in the fifth year of the festival.

The Festival returns to the Great Hall at One Grafton Common Oct. 14 for an opening ceremony announcing this year's winning artists. Five regional art organizations – Apple Tree Arts, The Worcester County Camera Club, the Blackstone Valley Art Association, Shakespeare Club of Grafton and Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra have collaborated to create a festival showcasing the art exhibition, artist and juror talks, music and literature programs.

Photography and all forms of two-dimensional artwork are welcomed, with a maximum of four entries per artist. The Art Call will remain open until midnight of the day, 500 entries are received. All artwork meeting acceptance criteria will be displayed online. Visit <https://smallstonesfestival.org/> to submit artwork.

A distinguished panel of six jurors will select 144 works to appear in the exhibit and cash prize winners in fine arts and photography categories. Awards include first, second and third cash prize winners and juror's choice (six awards). A popular choice award for each category will be voted by view-

ers online. Cash awards are \$500 for first; \$250 for second; and \$100 for third place. The hardbound exhibition catalog will feature the juried artwork and will be sold online.

The fine art painting category is juried by Jo Ellen Reinhardt, accomplished portrait, still life and landscaper artist, a signature member of the Copley Society of Art and award-winning artist. Joining her is Susan Termyn, a well-known representational painter and elected artist of several art associations including the Lyme Art Association and Rockport Art Association and Museum. The third juror is William Pope, a devoted advocate for visual arts, music and art education and executive director and curator of the Zullo Gallery Center For the Arts, Medfield, MA.

The photography category includes esteemed professionals. Al Weems is a renowned fine art portraiture photographer whose work is widely exhibited and published. Lauren Szumita, an accomplished curator of the Fitchburg Art Museum, who also has worked in the curatorial department of prints, drawing and photography of the Worcester Art Museum joins him. Juror David DeMelim is the managing director of the Rhode Island Center for Photographic Arts and a well-known photographer whose work is often exhibited at the Newport Art Museum, Mystic Museum of Art and Fitchburg Art Museum.

The Festival Chair Ken Crater of the Worcester County Camera Club is working with a committee of sixteen to offer a free festival slated to run Oct. 14 to 24 for the community featuring fine art, photography, music and literature programs at three locations – Apple Tree Arts at One Grafton Common, the newly expanded Grafton Public Library and the Congregational Church of Grafton.

The mission of the Small Stones Festival of the Arts is to elevate the practice and appreciation of fine art and photography in the Blackstone Valley and beyond. Grafton Arts Inc., a 501 (3) organization is the financial sponsor of the Festival.

The festival organizers appreciate the major donors of last year's festival including the Cultural Councils of the towns of Grafton, Millbury, Northbridge, Shrewsbury and Westborough; Homefield Credit Union, The Town House Tavern, One Grafton Common; and Yesod Foundation, Inc.

Sponsorships are available to help support the 2022 Small Stones Festival of the Arts. Please contact Chair Ken Crater at ken@graftonarts.org. For more information, visit <https://smallstonesfestival.org>.



Food Truck Festival in Millbury back with a bang

BY ROD LEE

To say that the Millbury Redevelopment Authority's Food Truck Festival & Craft Fair came back with a bang after a brief hiatus because of Covid-19 would be an understatement.

"Absolutely fantastic, the best festival we've had,"

Leonard Mort of the MRA said. "The weather was incredible, it was almost like being set up on a frying pan! We had the most trucks ever, twenty, and thirty-two craft vendors. Our volunteers were twelve hours in the hot sun."

The event, the fifth annual, was held in the rear parking area of Millbury

High School on Martin St. on May 22nd and it had something for everyone including a variety of American and ethnic fare, entertainment and raffles.

Proceeds from the festival benefit projects the Millbury Redevelopment Authority takes on, like the handsome clock it recently placed in the center of town.

"We have several projects that have been suggested, four or so," Mr. Mort said. These will be discussed at the MRA's next meeting, in August.

Mr. Mort was especially pleased that "a relative newcomer," Say Cheese, a Shrewsbury-based food truck, emerged as the People's Choice Best Food Truck for 2022.

Consisting of unpaid municipal employees, five members in all, the Millbury Redevelopment Authority was established in 1963 and raises money through donations from businesses and residents for community-betterment initiatives it tackles.

Submit your restaurant news for The Feisty Fork column to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.



Len Mort of the Millbury Redevelopment Authority congratulates operators of the Say Cheese food truck, winner of the People's Choice award at the MRA's fifth annual Food Truck Festival & Craft Fair.

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Happenings!

NOTE: Community bulletin board-type items are welcome for inclusion in the Happenings! section of the Xpress newspapers. Please allow enough lead time for publication. Email your calendar or event notice to rodlee.1963@gmail.com.

THROUGHOUT JULY

• "Beyond Blooms, Textures in Our Garden," photography by Don McCallister, will be on display and available for sale all month at

Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster. A meet-the-artist reception will be held on Saturday, July 23, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Viewing hours for the public are Tuesday-Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Call 508-949-6232 or email deb@booklovers-gourmet.com for further info. A statement from the artist: "Look beyond the blooms and you'll discover a never-ending variety of shoots and textures. And having

a talented gardener, such as my wife, to design the garden helps. I hope this collection will inspire its viewers to look for unexpected scenery in our yards and in the natural world."

• Classic Cars & Ice Cream. This event occurs every Wednesday from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Nor'easter Blizzard's Ice Cream, 278 North Main St., Uxbridge, hosted by Top Dog Entertainment.

Upcoming at Indian Ranch in Webster:

July 24, Three Dog Night; July 27, Phoenix Rising, Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddons, 6:00 p.m. July 30, The Pike Hairfest, 12:00 noon; July 31, Let's Get Real! TESLA, 1:00 p.m.; August 5, "Weird" Al Yankovic, 7:30 p.m.; August 6, Collective Soul and Switchfoot, 1:00 p.m.; August 12, ABBA The Concert, 7:00 p.m.; August 13, Badfish Summer Tour, 1:00 p.m.; August 20, Acapella Country Sensations Home Free, 1:00 p.m.; August 26, Get The Led Out, 7:00 p.m. September 2, Extreme, 7:00



The Hip Swayers will deliver a dose of Americana at the Asa Waters Mansion in downtown Millbury on Saturday, July 30.

p.m. September 3, Aaron Lewis and The Starliners, 1:00 p.m. September 10, The Pike Rok Fest 2023, 12:00 noon. September 11, Local Country Fest, 12:00 noon. October 8, Jamey Johnson Live in Concert, 1:00 p.m. Tickets are available at www.indianranch.com, by calling 1-800-514-3849 or at the Indian Ranch Box Office.

SATURDAY, JULY 23

• Primitive Goods, 146 Mendon St., Uxbridge, is hosting a Customer Appreciation Day from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Featuring new items arriving weekly: Home & Garden, Antiques to Farmhouse, Village Paint, Primitives & Country, Candles, Handmade Pieces, Patriotic Décor and More. • Exit 17th Band, a Rock & Roll Band, will perform at part of Douglas Orchard and Farm's Summer Concert Series, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00 p.m. Admission

is \$10 per person 16-and-older. Kids get in free, no rain date.

SUNDAY, JULY 24

• The New England Country Music Club will host a dance featuring The Farm Hands at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:30 p.m., live music 1:00-5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

TUESDAY, JULY 26

• The Auburn Historical Society and Museum is offering free lawn games for kids to play from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Historical Museum, 41 South St. Along with playing the games, participants will learn the history of games like croquet, bocci ball, cornhole, graces and more. Tours of the vintage toys and games exhibit inside the museum will be available and are also free to the public. (This event continues on Saturday,

July 30).

• The Mendon Lions Club is sponsoring two shows under the Big Top, presented by The Zerbin Family Circus, at 5:00 and 7:30 p.m. in the Fino lot at the intersection of North Ave. and Rt. 16. The shows are a one-ring production featuring performing camels, a liberty horse act and amazing trained dogs and rounded out with clowns, acrobats, aerialists and jugglers. Advance discount tickets are available at Charles River Bank (Mendon branch) and Willow Brook Restaurant.

THURSDAY, JULY 28

• A Summer Sun Hat Concert featuring Diane Pollard singing songs of the 70s will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. This event is

HAPPENINGS!

continued on page 11



The First Congregational Church of Millbury, 148 W. Main St., is hosting a donations drive on Saturday, August 20, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

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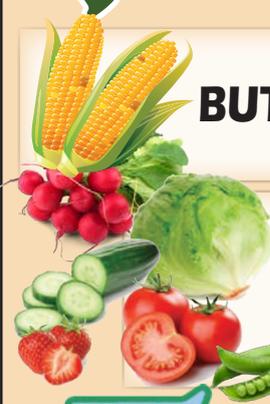
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"Texture," by Don McCallister, whose photographic artwork is being exhibited throughout the month of July at Booklovers' Gourmet in Webster.

HAPPENINGS!
continued from page 10

back by popular demand. Light refreshments will be served. Sign up with Amy, 508-234-2002.

- ValleyCast presents Michelle Canning as part of its summer concert series, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, JULY 29

- The Rockwell Valentine Jazz Trio

performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, JULY 30

- The Auburn Historical Society and Museum is offering free lawn games for kids to play from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Historical Museum, 41 South St. Along with playing the games, participants will learn the history of games like croquet, bocci ball, cornhole, graces and more. Tours of the vintage toys and games exhibit inside the museum will be available and are also free to the public.

- Douglas Orchard and Farm's Summer Concert Series continues with a performance by Petty Larceny, a Tom Petty Tribute Band, 5:30-8:00 p.m., 36 Locust St., Douglas. \$10 cash per person, kids are admitted free, no rain date. Visit douglasorchardandfarm.com for more details.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3

- The Simon Fairfield Public Library in Douglas will host Pumpernickel Puppets' presentation of Sir George and the Dragons at 10:30 a.m.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4

- The Hip Swayers will perform a summer concert at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm St., Millbury, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Free admission.
- ValleyCast presents Ash & Eric (formerly The Promise is Hope), 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5

- "New Leaves Duo," an outdoor concert featuring Cameron and Mary in a first-time appearance, is being presented from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. The duo will entertain with acoustic, classic country and folk cover songs from Bob Dylan, John Denver, Johnny Cash, The Everly Brothers and others. Light breakfast refreshments will be served. Sign up at the front desk to attend.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6

- 4 Ever Fab, a Beatles Tribute Band, will perform as part of Douglas Orchard and Farm's Summer Concert series, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 per person for those 16-and-older. Kids get in free, no rain date. Go to douglasorchardandfarm.com for

more info.

- "Donny and the Coyotes, a seven-piece Rock & Roll band, will perform on the lawn at the Dudley Grange, 139 Center Road, Dudley, at 7:00 p.m. Rain date is August 13th. This event is part of the Grange's Summer Music Series and is free to the public. Bring a lawn chair. Water and soda will be available along with homemade goodies from the Grange's bake table. This concert is sponsored by the Dudley Cultural Council and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 8

- The New England Country Music Club will host a dance featuring the Rustic Country Band at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:30 p.m., live music 1:00-5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9

- Judy Saves the Day, a puppet show, will take place at the Asa Waters Mansion, 123 Elm St., Millbury, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Free admission.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 11

- Northbridge Author Mark DerMurditchian will recap his real-life adventure roaming the country on his motorcycle with two friends

from September 8, 1976 to May 17, 1977, and the book that resulted from the trip: Four Strokes West, from 12:45 to 1:45 p.m. at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville. Sign up with Amy, 508-234-2002.

- ValleyCast presents the Clafin Hill Symphony Orchestras Summer Wind, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12

- The Evan Wood Trio performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 13

- Upton VFW Post 5594 is hosting a flea market from 8:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Post headquarters, 15 Milford St. (Route 140). Vendors and craftspeople can rent spaces for \$15 each. For more information call 508-529-3314. The Post's flea markets will be held the second Saturday of each month through October. Parking is free.
- Counterfeit Cash, a Johnny Cash Tribute Band, will perform at Douglas Orchard and Farm, 36 Locust St., Douglas, 5:30-8:00

HAPPENINGS!
continued on page 12

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HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 11

p.m. Admission is \$10 per person 16-and-older, kids get in free, no rain date. Go to douglasorchardandfarm.com for further details.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17

• Taking it to the Streets: The Ultimate Doobie Brothers Tribute Show, will be performed in Plymouth, New Hampshire at the Flying Monkey Theatre—a trip offered by the Northbridge Senior Center. Show and a buffet lunch are included at a cost of \$110 per person. Sign up with Amy at the

front desk. Call 508-234-2002 for more info.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 18

• ValleyCast presents Le'Mixx Band, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20

• The First Congregational Church of Millbury, 148 W. Main St., invites residents to bring donations of food, personal hygiene items, Goretty's or CVS gift certificates, to the church parking lot from 11:00

a.m. to 2:00 p.m. All donations will be taken to the Millbury Senior Center. Suggested items include canned tomato macaroni meals, fruit juices, canned has, Mimi hot dogs, jelly or jam, ketchup, mayo, mustard, relish, salad dressing, Pop Tarts, cracker snack packs and paper towels. A long row of tables will be set up for drive-by drop-off, or those donating can stay in their vehicle and pop the trunk or hatch back. Enter from W. Main St. and exit to Beach St. Please join us in celebrating the blessing of helping those in need!

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25

• ValleyCast presents Grayson Ty, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 26

• Joe Cicero performs at Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27

• The Auburn Historical Society & Museum presents the first annual Parking Lot Craft Fair, 41 South St., Auburn, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., rain or shine. For more information or to reserve a spot contact Helen Poirier at auburnmuseum@verizon.net, or stop by the museum Tuesdays or Saturdays between 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31

• Amy Cowen, a former resident of the island of Oahu, brings the Hawaiian Islands to Plummer Place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, for an end-of-the-summer party from noon to 2:00 p.m. Authentic Hawaiian entertainment and a themed luncheon with dessert will be served. Seating is limited. Sign up with Amy, 508-234-2002, to attend.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

• ValleyCast presents The Eagles



Michelle Canning will perform at the Whitin Mill complex in Whitinsville on Thursday, July 28 as part of ValleyCast's summer concert series.

Experience, 6:00 p.m., Whitin Mill complex, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville. In the event of rain the show will move indoors to the Singh Performance Center.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

• The Northbridge Senior Center is offering a "Lake Winnepesaukee Cruise & Castle in the Clouds Estate Tour," including lunch at Harts Turkey Farm, for \$151 per person. Sign up with Amy at the front desk. Call 508-234-2002 for more info.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

• Infinite Groove performs at

Andy's Neighborhood Center, 9 Frederick St., Webster, 7:00-10:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14

• The Rotary Club of Blackstone Valley will host its annual Rotary Scholarship Golf Tournament at Blissful Meadows in Uxbridge from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Cost is \$125 per golfer or \$500 per foursome, and \$40 for dinner only. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/unipaybvrotary> or send your payment to The Rotary Club of Blackstone Valley, PO Box 4, Whitinsville MA 01588.

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Healthier Baking in the Blackstone Valley

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Rhubarb plants have been a fixture in many New England gardens for generations. They're hearty and produce a bountiful harvest. But by this late in the plant's grow-

food for many reasons. They're certified by the American Heart Association to be a heart-healthy food. Loaded with antioxidants, they're also believed to be beneficial in fighting cancer and in improving brain health. According to

and let cool for about 15 minutes.
Makes about eight servings
Now, you no longer have to feel overwhelmed when you step outside and catch sight of your rhubarb jungle. You can donate some, swap some, and bake the rest into a crave-worthy dessert. Happy (healthier) baking!



ing season, you may be wondering what to do with all that rhubarb.

Despite how delicious strawberry rhubarb pie is, you may want to make something different after the ninth one of the season. In addition to donating some to a local food pantry and holding a produce swap with friends, family or neighbors, you could try a new recipe. Blue-barb crisp won't disappoint.

Although the majority of crisps call for butter and lots of added sugar, this recipe and similar ones prove that you can make a healthier version that still tastes great. Olive oil is used instead of butter. And you're only eating about 12.5 grams of added sugar per serving. Since most of us – myself included – can't resist adding a scoop of ice cream to this summertime dessert, having less added sugar in the crisp makes a difference.

This crisp is also loaded with heart-healthy ingredients, including blueberries, oats and walnuts. Cinnamon also has antioxidant properties. And although rhubarb is something that people who frequently get kidney stones should avoid, it contains an abundance of Vitamin K, which helps with blood clotting and bone strength and Vitamin A, which supports vision health, skin health, reproductive health and the immune system.

Blueberries are a super-

the American Institute for Cancer Research website, "Blueberries contain many phytochemicals and nutrients which show potential anti-cancer effects in laboratory studies."

BLUE-BARB (BLUEBERRY RHUBARB CRISP)

Filling Ingredients:
2 ½ Cups of Blueberries
1 Cup of Chopped Rhubarb
¼ Cup of White Sugar
½ tsp. of Cinnamon
2 tbsp. of Flour

Crisp Topping Ingredients:
¾ Cup of Quick or Old-Fashioned Oats
½ Cup of Chopped Walnuts
¼ Cup of Brown Sugar
3 tbsp. of Olive Oil
1 tsp. of Cinnamon

Directions:
Rinse the blueberries.
Rinse and chop the rhubarb.

Mix together the blueberries and rhubarb with the rest of the filling ingredients.

Spread the mixture evenly in a 9 X 9 baking pan.

Mix together the crisp topping ingredients, adding the olive oil last, so it can coat the mixture.

Sprinkle the crisp topping over the filling.

Bake at 350 degrees for about 35 minutes.

Remove from the oven

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Christmas in July heads summer fun at Southwick's Zoo

Temperatures are heating up and so is activity at Southwick's Zoo in Mendon.

Among the events scheduled in July and August are Christmas in July on July 30 and 31, Earth Awareness Day on August 6, Sounds of Africa on August 14 and the Summer Safari Scavenger Hunt on August 21.

Recently announced too was news that Southwick's Zoo's 2021 Festival of Il-

lumination Brochure was awarded two top design awards – 1st place in New England and 4th Place Internationally for 2021 Best Design, International Association of Visitor Information and the CTM Media Group. Scores of nominees were submitted from thousands of eligible designs from around the world including South Africa, Indonesia, Europe, and North America.

The original design and

elements of the brochure were created by Belinda Mazur of Images by Belinda Mazur, Sutton, MA.

Southwick's Zoo in Mendon is excited to be hosting the 2nd Annual Festival of Illumination beginning this September running through to January of 2023. This year's theme "Once Upon a Time" will showcase the fascinating and forgotten stories of legends, myths, and fairytales through the incredible art-



Modern and traditional African music, drumming and dancing will be part of Sounds of Africa at Southwick's Zoo on August 14. Courtesy photo

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istry of custom handmade Chinese lanterns. The four month long premier Chinese Lantern Festival is presented in partnership with the award-winning Zigong Lantern Group and is the largest of its kind hosted in New England.

From early September to January 1, 2023, Southwick's Zoo will again be

illuminated by breathtaking custom-built exhibits consisting of a multitude of Chinese lanterns constructed from silk, steel, and environmentally friendly LED lights. Guests will be immersed into epic journey and fantasy world of extraordinary beauty, magic, and mystery through the stories of leg-

ends, myths, and fairytales. Beginning on November 25th Southwick's Zoo's popular Winter Wonderland will be added where guests can enjoy a festive train ride through the enchanted holiday lighting

SOUTHWICK'S
continued on page 15

4TH OF JULY SALES CONTINUE!

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LG FRONT LOAD WASHER #WWM3400CW \$699⁹⁹ WAS \$899.99	AMANA WASHER OR DRYER #NED4655EW \$479⁹⁹ WAS \$599.99	MAYTAG WASHER OR DRYER #VEDC46HW \$599⁹⁹ WAS \$749.99	WHIRLPOOL FRENCH DOOR REFRIGERATOR \$2199⁹⁹ WAS \$2499.99
GE BOTTOM FREEZER #2299 \$1599⁹⁹ WAS \$1699.99	AMANA GAS RANGE #AGR1533CBAS STAINLESS STEEL \$599⁹⁹ WAS \$699.99	GE FRONT LOAD WASHER #GFWSS0SSNWW \$749⁹⁹ WAS \$999.99	WHIRLPOOL REFRIGERATOR #WRQA59CNKZ Counter Depth \$1999⁹⁹ WAS \$2399.99
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SOUTHWICK'S
continued from page 14

display.
The Zigong Lantern Group is the largest Chinese lantern festival group in the world with over 20 years of experience in creating these breathtaking events. Zigong has partnered with locations worldwide including the Dublin Zoo, RZSS Edinburgh Zoo, the Nashville Zoo, UK's Longleat House, and Magnolia Planta-

tion, South Carolina. The group's artisans will hand craft the lantern displays on-site at Southwick's Zoo in Mendon, MA.
"Festival of Illumination" will be open 5 days a week, Wednesday through Sunday, from September 1, 2022, to January 1, 2023. Beginning the middle of May, tickets for this must see experience will go on sale at www.festivalofillumination.com or www.southwickszoo.com,
Southwick's Zoo is a privately-owned zoo located at 2 Southwick Street in

Mendon, MA and has been a favorite New England destination for over 50 years. This zoo is home to over 850 animals, featuring more than 160 varied species, many of which are endangered. Southwick's Zoo's mission is to provide an extensive zoological collection and educational facility for their visitors, offering exciting family fun and entertainment for guests of all ages.

SUMMER CLASSES

at the Blackstone Valley Education Hub

Course tuition sponsored by grant funding through the Regional Economic Development Organization and Massachusetts Office of Business Development.

OSHA 10hr General Industry Certification Course
This course teaches a variety of required safety & health topics for everyday industry. Certification exam and card included.

Two sessions:
July 19-28, T/TH 5-8PM
or
Aug. 16-25, T/TH 5-8PM

Introduction to Welding
This training prepares students with welding vocabulary, techniques and basic operations of a welding gun using augmented reality welders.

Session:
July 18-Aug. 24, MON/WED 6-8:30PM

CNC Machinist Apprentice Course
This training is a commitment to 150 hours which includes topics on shop math, blueprint reading, quality assurance, safety, work readiness, CNC mill operations, CNC lathe operations and gcode. Upon completion of technical training, the apprentice will be placed with a cooperative employer to receive on-the-job-training for 1 year.

Session:
July 18-Sept. 28, MON/WED/FRI 9AM-3PM

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Explore the Blackstone River Bikeway with BHC's Bikeway Ambassadors

Blackstone Heritage Corridor's Bikeway Ambassadors will be leading guided bike rides along the Blackstone River Bikeway this summer. To learn more, visit BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org.

**Wednesday, July 27:
Lincoln, RI**

Meet at the Capt. Wilbur Kelly House Museum at Blackstone River State Park, 1075 Lower River Road, Lincoln, RI, for a guided ride along the Blackstone River Bikeway and Canal Towpath as we ride south to Lonsdale and back. The approximate round-trip

distance is seven miles.

**Wednesday, August 10:
Blackstone, MA**

Meet at the Blackstone River Greenway, 85 Canal Street, Blackstone, MA, for a guided bike ride along the Blackstone River Greenway to Uxbridge, MA, and back. The round-trip distance is just over seven miles.



**BLACKSTONE VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
SIGNATURE EVENT**

STEAMERS AT SUNSET

August 17, 2022

The Barn at Blissful Meadows Golf Club

801 Chocolog Rd, Uxbridge MA

5:30PM - 7:30PM



Celebrate summer with music, good food & great company.

Join the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce for our annual Steamers at Sunset event!

Dress to impress in your summer best and win the coveted Golden Lobster award.

Member Pricing*:

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- Steak: \$60
- Chicken: \$50
- Vegetarian*: \$40

Non-Member Pricing*:

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- Steak: \$70
- Chicken: \$60
- Vegetarian*: \$50

Presenting Sponsor:



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*Cash bar

*Lobster is market price

*Vegetarian meal is Beyond Burger

All attendees must indicate their choice of steamers or New England clam chowder at time of registration.

Register at www.blackstonevalley.org/events/

Please contact loneil@blackstonevalley.org with any questions!

**Wednesday, August 24:
Lincoln, RI to Old Slater Mill**

Meet at the Lonsdale Drive-In parking lot, 121 John Street, Lincoln, RI, for a guided bike ride to Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI. Much of this ride will be off the bikeway and on the street. The approximate round-trip distance is five miles.

To learn more about the Blackstone Heritage Corridor Bikeway Ambassadors, visit BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org. To

learn more about the Volunteers-In-Parks program, contact Molly Cardoza, Director of Volunteer and Community Engagement, at mcardoza@blackstone-heritagecorridor.org or call 508-234-4242.

Save the date of Saturday, August 27, for clean-up and green-up events throughout the Blackstone River Watershed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of ZAP the Blackstone. Learn more at ZAPtheBlackstone.com and BlackstoneHeritageCorridor.org.

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Toto the Tornado Kitten revisiting Grafton Public Library

The Grafton Public Library is pleased to welcome back Toto the Tornado Kitten. The hero cat and his companion, Johnathan, will be visiting Grafton on Friday, July 29 at 10:30 a.m. This program is for all ages: kids, teens and adults.

One of our favorite summer guests, Toto made headlines in 2011 when he was found clinging to life after a devastating F3 tornado struck Western and Central Massachusetts. Firefighter Jonathan adopted the tiny kitten, and later published a book about their adventure called "Toto the Tornado Kitten."

Together they visit schools and libraries, raising money for animal shelters throughout the state.

Johnathan and Toto have visited Grafton over half a dozen times. In honor of our favorite feline friend, the Grafton Public Library will be collecting pet food and supplies for the Grafton Food Bank in July and August. Bring your donations of new, unopened dog, cat or small animal food, litter or supplies to the Grafton



Public Library. Items particularly needed are dry cat food and canned dog food. There will be a collection box in the lobby.

Animals abound in the library's Summer Reading programs, GPL Director Beth Schreiber said. Signup is required. Register online at www.graftonlibrary.org/events.

This program is supported in part by a grant from the Grafton Cultural Council, a local agency, which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

Learn more about the library's Summer Reading Program at www.graftonlibrary.org/srp.

BRUINS' BLADES TO MAKE AN APPEARANCE

On Saturday, July 30th, at 10:30 a.m., the Bruins mascot, Blades, will visit to celebrate summer reading. Post for a photo with Blades in the hockey photo booth win Bruins trivia, make your own Bruins button, or take your shot at some fun and games. This free program is for all ages—kids, teens, and adults. Registration is not required but encouraged.

Check out all the fun programs for different ages at www.graftonlibrary.org/events.

Please adhere to age

guidelines when register.

STOP THE SUMMER SLIDE!

It's important to keep kids reading while school is out. If your child has a required reading list, we can help you order the books you need. If a title is older, there may be limited copies in our network, so please be patient if it takes a bit longer for us to find you a copy.

If your reading list is recommended, not required, or if you're looking for something a little different, we have some alternatives for you. Ask a staff member to suggest some titles for you, or peak at our new arrivals, located right at the entrance to the room.

There's nothing better than choosing your own books. Come in and let your children browse the shelves. Summer is a great time to explore their interests. Are they interested in Minecraft? We have a book for that! How about rockets? We have that, too.

Any reading can count towards our line Summer Reading Program! Have you signed up for it yet? Regis-

ter at <https://graftonlibrary.beanstack.com/reader365> to be eligible for your Davis Farmland discount coupon, and to keep a lot of minutes or pages read.

UNATTENDED CHILD POLICY REMINDER

With summer comes an uptick in foot traffic, so we'd like to remind parents and caregivers that the library cannot assume responsibility for the behavior or safety of children of any age left unattended at the library. Staff members are unable to watch children for parents or caregivers. The entire policy is online at www.graftonlibrary.org/home/policies.

WEED THE LIBRARY'S GARDEN BEDS

Volunteers are needed to weed the Library's garden beds on Wednesday, July 27 from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Pepperoni Express will donate pizza and documentation of volunteer credit hours can be provided. All ages are welcome; children under 14 must be accompanied by

a parent, on-site. Schedule daytime or weekend garden weeding time by call Beth at 508-839-4649 x1836.

JULY BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

On Monday, July 25, at 7:30 p.m., The Reads Well with Others group will discuss "The Island of Missing Trees," by Elif Shafak; on Tuesday, July 26, at 7:30 p.m., the Inspirational group will discuss "The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World," by NPR Correspondent Eric Weiner. Copies are available for checkout in regular and large print, eBook and eAudio. Contact Heidi Fowler, head of reference services, 508-839-4649 x1840.

KNITTING AND CROCHETING!

Saturday-afternoon knitting: experienced and novice knitters and crocheters are invited to bring their current projects in for yarn crafting on July 30th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. For more info, go to www.graftonlibrary.org.

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Samuel Slater's to host night of comedy on July 29

Veteran Comedian Jimmy Dunn will be headlining a night of laughs at Samuel Slater's Restaurant in Webster on Friday, July 29th. He will be joined by special guest Karen Morgan. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. for the 8 o'clock show, which is being hosted by Jeff Koen.

Tickets are available at www.samuelslaters.com.

Jimmy Dunn is an actor and comedian who is most recognized for the CBS

sitcom *The McCarthys*, in which he co-starred as Sean McCarthy. He got his start in comedy performing stand-up at a bar in Gloucester, where he was paid in beer and fried clams. Since then he has gone on to appear at some of the comedy world's biggest venues including Montreal's Just For Laughs Comedy Festival, *The Late Show With David Letterman*, *CONAN*, and *Comics Come Home* with

Denis Leary.

Karen Morgan was born and raised in Athens, Georgia but now calls Maine home. A former trial attorney, she began her professional comedy career as a finalist on Nickelodeon Television's "Search for the Funniest Mom in America." Since then she has performed in comedy clubs and theaters from New York to Hollywood.

Jeff Koen is a comedian and actor who stars in the



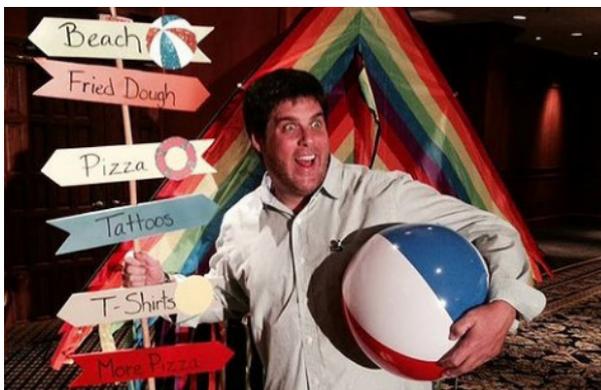
independent film *Heavy Times*. Released in 2011, the film has earned him fans all over the world, some of whom ask on his Facebook page if they can stay at his house with the visit the U.S.

He performs stand-up in and around the Boston area and has toured New England theaters as the opening act for Justin McKinney. He has also performed with the themed stand-up comedy show "How Men Think (Or Do They?)."

In 2011 he won the first O'Brien's Comedy Contest in Massachusetts. In 2015 he won \$10,000 on "America's Funniest Home Videos."

Indian Ranch, 200 Gore Road in Webster, is home to the Indian Ranch amphitheater, the Indian Princess paddle wheeler and the Indian Ranch campground.

See the Happenings pages in this issue of the *Yankee Xpress* for upcoming shows at Indian Ranch.



From top: Karen Morgan, Jeff Koen and Jimmy Dunn. Photos submitted.

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Dr. Rancourt will be splitting her time until a 2nd audiologist can be hired for Smithfield. She will remain in South Grafton.

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Grafton's Business Scene – July 2022

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Helen Keller once remarked, “Keep your face to the sunshine, and you cannot see a shadow.” Although she was speaking metaphorically,

Police Department on Tuesday August 2, for the 15th year and the first time since the pandemic began, the **GPD** will return to joining with many police departments across the country to hold a **National**

for it through a program offered by the **Western New England University Small Business Legal Clinic**. Applications can be submitted through Aug. 15, and more information can be found at <https://www1.wne.edu/law/centers/small-business-legal-clinic.cfm>.

For more information, visit the festival's website, smallstonesfestival.org.

Finally, for people who would like to try planting a garden, it's not too late. There are at least two Grafton businesses that have been having announcing summer sales on veg-

etable plants and annuals lately. **Perreault Nursery & Landscape Supply** in North Grafton and **Pete's Oasis at Blackstone River Farm** in South Grafton might have just what you're looking for.

Many Grafton businesses and organizations have

continued to stay focused on the sunshine. And while doing so, they've helped the community to do the same.

Contact Christine with your business news items at cmgaleone15@gmail.com.



Prior to the pandemic, Small Stones Festival of the Arts attendees enjoy the vast art exhibits by talented artists and photographers.

Courtesy of Small Stones Festival of the Arts website

her words seem particularly appropriate this summer.

Grafton has been soaking up the sunshine lately. And while some of those rays have been part of the season, some have emanated from recent community celebrations, the anticipation of future celebrations, joyful milestones, opportunities and more.

On June 20, **Town** history was made. The first official Grafton public celebration of **Juneteenth**, the holiday that celebrates the freedom won for people who had been enslaved before and during the Civil War, was held. It was held at **Mill Villages Park** in South Grafton. The event, which included music, games, food, kite flying and a public art project, was sponsored by **Grafton RISE (Racial Inclusion and Social Equality)**, a group focused on anti-racist actions and education, as well as intersectional racial justice.

In the coming weeks, two cultural celebrations will be held. The **Nipmuc Nation Pow Wow** will be held Sunday July 31 beginning at 10 a.m. It will be hosted by the **Nipmuc Nation Tribal Council** at 25 Main Street in Grafton. Then, on Saturday Aug. 20, the **Town** will commemorate **India's Independence Day** by hosting India Day festivities beginning at 9 a.m. in front of the **Municipal Center**.

From 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the grounds of the **Grafton**

Night Out block party to further strengthen the bond it has with residents. There will be family-friendly activities, kids' activities, safety tips, food and music.

A business that will be celebrating a milestone in August is **Koopman Lumber**. The hardware and paint store, which carries a wide variety of items for the home and backyard, as well as for contractors, is located at 82 Worcester Street in North Grafton. It was founded nearly 83 years ago by Pete Koopman. The family-owned company also has something else to celebrate. It just announced its ninth store, located in Springfield.

Dr. Mary Ellen Curran Rancourt, an audiologist, is enjoying her business's fourth summer in South Grafton. And she has some exciting news of her own. **Hear Joy Audiology**, which opened in July 2019, at 43 Main Street, offers a variety of hearing services and products for all ages (including infants). Recently, the business expanded by acquiring **Twin Rivers Hearing** in Smithfield, R.I. For appointments or more information, you can visit the business's website, www.hearjoyaudiology.com.

There are also opportunities available to people in Grafton and beyond. Small businesses that would like to receive free legal assistance can now apply

www1.wne.edu/law/centers/small-business-legal-clinic.cfm.

There are opportunities for artists and photographers as well. **Apple Tree Arts**, the non-profit performing arts school on the Grafton Common, the **Blackstone Valley Art Association**, the **Worcester County Camera Club**, the **Shakespeare Club of Grafton** and **Clafin Hill Symphony Orchestra** are calling for entries for their **2022 Small Stones Festival of the Arts**. Submissions of fine art paintings and photography will be accepted until the night that the 500th entry is received.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

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Luke's personality emerges; tales from the fox den

BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

Luke Valentino, at almost five months, is growing up before our eyes. I could write about how nicely he's acclimated to our family's routine or how he's already learned to swim, and walk on a leash. I could write about how he sits and lowers his head to the girls at the bus stop, adopting a child-like gentleness. "You're small and

playful just like me. Let's be friends!" I could write about his accomplishments over the past five months, but there's something even more noteworthy about Luke.

His dog personality is second to none! "Who Luke is" is so much more than "what Luke does." Every dog I've owned has had unique traits; special tendencies that have left a tattoo on my heart. Max was my cinnamon colored mongrel who followed me to school every morning. "Go home, Max!" A dog of the 70's, Max did not go home. Duke was my massive German shepherd. He was macho and reserved, a

90's man who carried a log around in the yard. Lincoln was The King, the inspiration for this very column. He was a robust athlete of a dog with paws as big as his heart. After he passed, I couldn't imagine loving another dog again.

I held off for some time, until my heart began to swell with longing. I missed the happy wiggle. I missed walking up the basement stairs to be greeted with the elation of a sibling parted at birth with her twin—to finally reunite. "It's been two hours! You haven't changed a bit! I've missed you so much!" A dog's love is unconditional and constant. They know you. They see you. They love you, no questions asked. I missed all that a dog brings. Never would I have imagined that a puppy named Luke Valentino was about to bring forth a whole new brand of love.

"What's that, Luke?" I follow the path of his gaze while we sit together on the front steps. Luke's latest study happens to be an ant, one foolishly tiny yet



Keeping up with the big guys.

surprisingly quick. The ant seems to sense my puppy's shadowy glare yet—caught in an ironic defense—the creature is too small to be caught. Luke stretches a slow paw across his moving body, but fails to grip the bug. Even more promising for the ant, Luke is not interested in killing him. Instead, he wants to learn more about him. Professor Luke is the most curious and intelligent puppy I've ever owned.

"How is it possible, Mom, for a living thing to be so small?" He looks up at me for a split second to acknowledge the discovery, the mystery of the ant. "That's an ant, Luke." The teacher in me points out the obvious while my puppy continues to watch and learn. His calm and curious temperament is a trait I've come to adore. He seems to study the way the world works and, alternately, lets me know when it's not working.

A hanging set of bells designed to teach a pup how to "tap and ring" to go pee outside are no exception. I hung them on the door-knob during early training

stages. Luke barked with the fury of a Chihuahua. I went on to explain my reasoning to a pup perhaps too intelligent for his own good. "Look, Luke. If you tap the bells (I demonstrated) you can tell Mommy you have to go pee-pee." My aim to teach a lesson was not lost on Luke. His bark faded to a grumble. He loves to learn. He aims to please. He simply didn't want to do either with the aid of bells. He dug in his puppy heels, and barked some more. "Those clinkers don't belong on a door! You can achieve the same result supervising me more closely!" I took the set off and let them fall to the ground. I took the jingle out of their jangle, hoping to appease my pup. He inspected them with a skeptical nose; poking the bells, backing off, and grumbling with irritation. "Let's put them away, Luke." The bells have long since become a play toy.

Luke has become a star student in our family, seated comfortably "at his spot" with an inquisitive lion cub face. "What's today's lesson going to be about?" One lesson happened to be

about how other dogs walk on a leash. Luke had been sitting outside on the front steps one morning doing what he loves—watching. There were birds, squirrels and, more pertinently, dogs of all shapes and size strolling by to watch. He narrowed his gaze. "The doggies are going for a walk, Luke." I capitalized on another teachable moment. "See how they don't bite their leashes." He broke into a miniature puppy smile. "I think I can manage that." My dog training wheels began to turn.

"Hey! Do you mind if we catch up with you?" Shamelessly, I invited myself to join the 8:00 a.m. dog walking group. My puppy needed friends. He needed to interact with dogs that don't think like him.

The dog moms welcomed us to join an eclectic mix of walkers: There is Oscar, a bashful Dachshund-Chihuahua mix; Lexi, a dainty Rescue who loves to play chase; Maui, a bossy Frenchie who makes her role in the group clear; and Okemo, a regal Husky with ice blue eyes and a territorial stride.

"Hi! My name is Luke Valentino!"

Luke fit right in. He trotted alongside the pack with confidence, boasting his best walking behavior. He even conformed to Maui's insistence that, ahem, he not accept any treats from her mom. "That is my mother and those are my treats," she snarled. Luke accepted Maui's sense of entitlement with a casual attitude. After all, he was the new pup on the block. "I got you, girl. Where we all headed?"

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operative on walks, Luke shows a different side while playing with other dogs. "Bring it on. I'll go easy on you." He jumps on the back of Mandy, a one-year-old Golden who's as patient as she is playful. He shows his teeth to Lexi, who dodges him in a game of chase. He



Luke and Mandy play rough.

barks playfully at Bruno, a Senior Golden who hasn't the energy for him. "C'mon! Let's wrestle!" He crinkles his snout and shows his teeth. He loves to play rough. His tenacity, though impressive, had me frightened a few times. Read on.

A new fox family had just moved into the hood, and built a den beneath the shed of my neighbor's home, then moved to another, as fox families do. Both dens bordered my backyard. Luke sensed their presence and meandered through the yard, nose lifted. Meanwhile, Wildflower Drive neighbors saw glimpses of fox parents dashing through yards and streets, often carrying a rodent. The wild animals became a source of intrigue. Still, they caused a stir. "Did anyone notice the chicken feathers? I think the fox are back. Whose house are they at now?"

My concern lied on the safety of my pup. What if little Luke (under twenty pounds back then) had simply wanted to play with pups unmistakably his own size? He had been more and more drawn to the fox den; wandering closer and closer to the forbidden area. His curiosity, I feared, could kill him. What if the parents had come home to find a zooming pup in the family mix? Worse, what if Daddy Fox, clever and wise, tried to lure my pup to his crib for a tenderloin feast?

I hauled the pitchfork out of the shed and set it down with the force of a Stephen King character. I even made eye contact with Daddy Fox. He stood pensive and skinny, standing twenty feet away from me to protect his young while I gave him

a piece of my mind. "Go Away."

My measure, even in its grand audacity, proved no comparison to Luke's confrontation with Daddy Fox. The incident, captured through the eyes and care of my son, Ben, has brought life to a family folktale, a

story told and retold about the adventures of a curious pup and sly fox.

Luke had been loose in the yard when Daddy Fox dashed across our driveway. All training bets were off for a three-month-old puppy who had already learned to protect his yard. "You don't belong!!" He barked and shot across the street after the fox. Ben followed and supervised an interaction that took place atop the hill of my good neighbor's lawn. Both animals, in ruthless opposition, stopped and stared at each other, a mere fifteen feet between them. Daddy Fox hissed. Little Luke barked and barked some more. He refused to back down. He lowered his puppy voice to that of a huskier, older dog. He stood his ground, unaware of his miniature size yet innately set on protecting. He puffed out his puppy mane, and did his job. Had the fox discerned the pup in the puff? Perhaps, but he still ran off, fluffy tail tucked between his legs. Ben was able to catch Luke in a follow-up race, and relieve himself of a gross, alternate scenario: the Choke Out between Fox and Puppy.

The incident had me spooked. A few days later, I opened the front door to haul in groceries. I placed them on the counter then went back outside to chase after Luke, who had dashed out when I came in. "Luke!" I called his name, but he didn't come back. This was out of character for a rule-abiding Luke. I ran to the back yard. My heart sank. An eerie quiet surrounded my home. I scanned the fox den area. Nothing. I moved to the other side of the

house. Still, nothing.

Visions of Daddy Fox caved in on me. I pictured him slinking beneath the shed to find Luke showing his teeth to the pups. "He just wants to play. He won't hurt them." Crazy enough, I found myself negotiating with the fox. I began to sweat. I cried out my pup's name some more. "Luke, come!" I jogged around my entire house a few more times. Finally, I decided to go back inside and take action. I needed to make a Call Out to the community on social media. "Dear Friends. My puppy, Luke Valentino, is missing. Please contact me if—" "Luke!!!" There he stood



Sutton fox. Photo by Meagan Fedigan

in the kitchen wiggling his puppy body and smiling up at me. He had never left the house! He must have dashed out then snuck back in without me noticing. "Momma, I heard you call-

ing and calling my name! I'm right here!" I knelt down, picked him up and flattened him to my belly like a frog (our signature hug). He licked my entire face as he always does. I felt

his little heart pump with pride. "Oh, Luke—I thought you..."

He smiled innocently. "I've been here the whole time, Momma. I heard you calling my name. I tried to find you, but I was door-blocked."

"I thought you—" I closed my eyes, grateful for my mistake, and squeezed him close. "Never mind, Luke." I kissed my puppy's head.

Dear Readers: Thankfully, the fox family has moved on while my own has practiced numerous training measures to keep Luke safe in the yard.

Stay tuned for more on Living with Luke.

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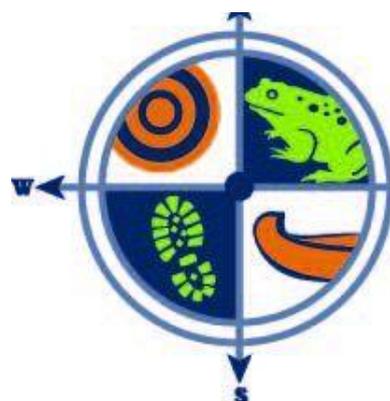
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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Gay City State Park Part 2: A ghost wandering in the woods

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

Part One began to tell of the ghosts of Gay City State Park in Hebron, Connecticut. Here is the

conclusion for anyone who might want to visit the ghost town and hopefully encounter one of its permanent residents.

The peddler's ghost, as

if seeking justice for his untimely demise, now roams the perimeter of the little hamlet. More than a few visitors have stumbled upon the old charcoal pit, where

they have witnessed the ghastly sight of a glowing skeleton hovering just above the ground. The spectral skeleton is not the only permanent phantom of the

old village. The spirit of a young man wanders among the thicket eternally trying to appease his employer centuries after they have both turned to dust.

A teenage boy became apprentice to the local blacksmith in hopes of someday becoming his successor. The blacksmith was a gruff, short-tempered man with not much patience for insubordination, but he took on the role as teacher to the young man. One day the apprentice decided he was going to take the long way to the shop, stopping and enjoying the morning every chance he could. When he arrived at the forge, the blacksmith, having expected him to arrive at work on time, was steaming with rage. No one knows what exact words may have been exchanged, but the blacksmith lost his temper and hacked the boy to pieces with a butcher knife. Legend has it that he even lopped the poor soul's head off. The blacksmith was never brought up on charges, and the ghost of the apprentice now wanders among the woods, hastily

making his way to some unknown destination, perhaps for fear of being tardy. Some have seen him running with his bloody head cradled under his arm.

Paranormal investigator and reporter Lauren Neslusen paid a visit to Gay City State Park in the winter to see if the legends of the haunts held any weight. Her account is as follows.

"When I was investigating there I saw and heard some very weird things. The strangest thing I saw was a black mist that disappeared quickly off to the side of a trail. The best way to describe it was about four feet off the ground and maybe three feet wide. It was solid in the middle but seemed transparent around the edges. The second weirdest thing was the other investigator and I were exploring the old mill site and rocks and debris kept falling from the top of the wall to the ground. (almost as if someone was standing there.)

TALES

continued on page 24

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THE CAR DOCTOR

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The DIY approach to getting car carpets clean



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I hope this isn't a silly question. What is the best way to vacuum the interior of the car? My home vacuum doesn't do a thorough cleaning. The car wash has vacuums, but still I can never get a good cleaning, there always seems to be some sand or dirt left over when I'm done.

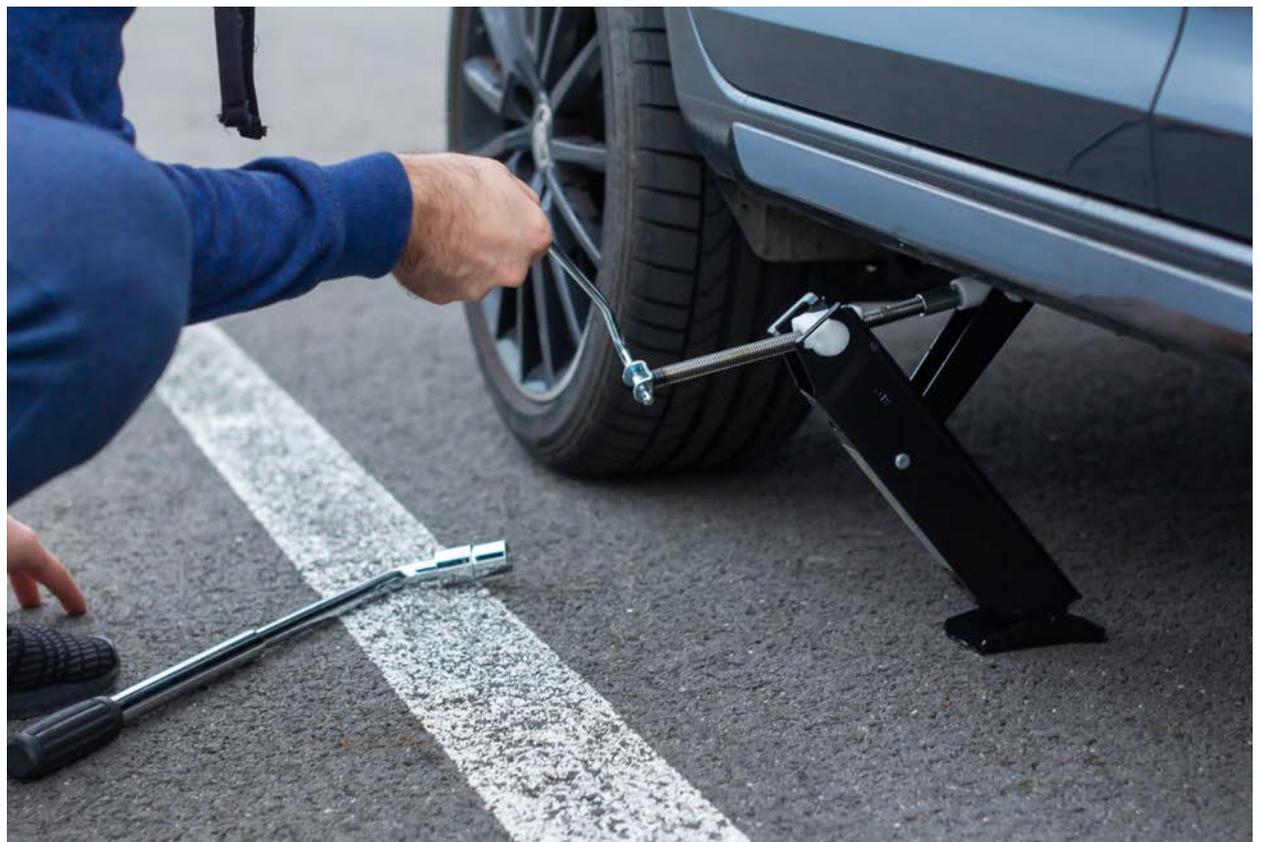
A. There are times you need to use a shampooer and extractor to get the carpets clean. Good detail shops will vacuum up the loose dirt and debris and then use a portable carpet cleaner. The soap and water loosen up the dirt and stains and the vacuum extractor pull out the water. As a DIY approach, mix up some water and dish detergent and then use the suds and a scrub brush. You don't want to get the rugs too wet, just damp. Once you are satisfied that the carpets are clean then vacuum with a wet/dry vacuum. If the carpets are still damp, leave the doors open for a bit or even put a fan in the car to dry out the interior. No such thing as a silly question.

Q. I have an older rear wheel drive car with a V-8 engine and automatic transmission. The car has only 55,000 miles on it. The issue is, the car has a high-speed vibration at 40 mph and 70 mph. I've had some shops look at this car and they just can't figure it out. The tires were checked and are in balance. In addition, I have had the water pump and fan clutch replaced as well as drive belts and harmonic balancer checked. The engine runs great, and transmission was rebuilt. The driveshaft was replaced with a new one, which did improve the situation, but the vibration is still there.

A. Since the vibration got better after the driveshaft was replaced, I would continue to focus in that area. I would look at drive shaft angle and also put a dial indicator on the drive shaft to see that it is running true. You could also try balancing the drive shaft while it is in the car. This can be accomplished with a couple of large radiator hose clamps using them as balancing weights. If you could find someone with a vibration measuring tool or even an old reed vibration meter it may help pinpoint the vibration. The issue could be an out of balance torque converter or even a poor fit between the engine and transmission.

Q. I recently purchased a Cadillac XT5 and discovered it has no spare or jack. The Cadillac dealer says a full-size tire won't fit in the tire well and compact tires which used to be an optional purchase are no longer available. I am very uneasy about driving a vehicle without a spare, even if these are run flat tires. Several tire stores I called say they don't deal with compact tires. Even some of the local junk yard, "pull-a-part" places were no help. Am I worrying for nothing? Any suggestions?

A. A run flat tire has a stiff sidewall that allows the car to be driven without air in the tire. True run flat tires will give you the ability to get home, generally 50-100 miles of driving at speed under 50 miles per hour is suggested. Some cars have conventional tires without a spare but include an air compressor and tire sealant. I drive all kinds of new cars, some without spare tires and although I would prefer a spare, knowing that I can at least get to a tire store to fix or replace the tire does make me feel better. Your Cadillac does have mobility kit, air compressor and seal-



Don't have a spare tire? A run flat tire has a stiff sidewall that allows the car to be driven without air in the tire. True run flat tires will give you the ability to get home, generally 50-100 miles of driving at speed under 50 miles per hour is suggested.

ant. This is handy if one of your tires has a slow leak at least you could pump it up to the proper pressure and hopefully get the tire repaired. Still, I would prefer a spare tire, in my opinion even a compact spare is better than no spare tire.

Q. I have an unusual problem with my 2012 Mercedes Benz E350 4Matic. The car performs great, rides fine and only has 60,000 miles on it. However, when I am driving and take my foot off the accelerator, and then hit the accelerator to resume my speed, there is a sight growl or vibration that lasts a second or two. This situation is intermittent. It seems to happen at any speed. What might be the cause of this situation? I am afraid to go to the Mercedes dealership due to potential costs. Am I in for a big repair bill?

A. I suspect an issue with the all-wheel drive system-transfer case which is an integral part of the transmission. The condition is sometimes referred to as a judder and will usually happen as you describe while turning slightly and accelerating. There is no easy or cheaper repair if this is the issue. You have two choices at this point, live with it or repair it. If you can live with it, the transmission may last a very long time. If you opt to repair it now, or even when it gets worse it will be expensive. Just to verify what I suspected, I called a local Mercedes dealer to try to get a price

and was told to expect to pay at least \$5000 for the repairs.

John Paul is AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over 40 years' experience in the automotive business and is an ASE-certified

master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your car questions to jpaul@aanortheast.com. Follow John on twitter @johnfpaul and friend on Facebook, mrjohnfpaul.

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REAL ESTATE

A closer look at what realtors/real estate agents make



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

Buying or selling a home is one of the biggest financial transactions that many people make in their entire lives. Realtors/real estate agents work with buyers and sellers during this process by getting their clients the best deal possible. A lot goes into the job, and there are many things to consider when determining how much real estate agents make.

How do realtors/real estate agents make their money? Most real estate agents work on commission and receive a set percentage of a home's total sale price

upon completing the sale. Therefore, an agent's annual income can vary based on how many homes they sell. Market fluctuations and full-time vs. part-time hours affect income range, but there are additional factors that impact how real estate agents make their money.

Shrewd negotiation skills maximize the value of a sale for clients and set the real estate agent apart from their competitors. Furthermore, real estate negotiation skills take on a whole new meaning in understanding the emotional components of both sides during any deal. Effective communication and responsiveness is a realtors/real estate agent's craft when assessing their clients' motivations and those of the other side.

Experience may be one of the best indicators of how much a realtor/real estate agent makes. Anyone can search home listings online, but an experienced realtor/real estate agent will likely know more about local neighborhoods and build-

ing codes, making them more marketable to clients.

An experienced real estate agent shouldn't have any issues checking off all the small details and marks on a sale contract, which also maximizes the deal value and, therefore, their commission.

How much do realtors/real estate agents make? This question covers a considerable range and therefore has a few different answers. As of May 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the average annual income for real estate agents is \$61,480. That's \$29.56 per hour, given a standard 2080-hour work year. However, most realtor/real estate agents have considerable control over their hours, and their dependence on commission leads to real estate agents having a wide spread of income.

Commissions generally vary from 5% to 6%, and the amount may be split among different parties including the buyer and seller's agent. The me-

dian price for home sales in the U.S. for 2021 was \$346,900. That leaves real estate agents with \$17,345 to \$20,814 per home sale. According to that same report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 10% of real estate agents made less than \$28,270. The bottom 25% brought in \$35,880 or less. The median income was \$48,340.

Most people probably agree that location is critical in how much real estate agents make. The top states for real estate agents are:

State, annual mean wage, Massachusetts \$90,390, New York \$81,020, Wyoming \$80,580.

Is being a realtor/real estate agent worth it? Numbers don't lie, and these financial statistics certainly make the profession seem worthwhile. However, there are additional aspects to look at a little more closely.

Realtors/real estate agents may have a large earning potential, but market fluctuations can directly impact those earnings. Agents only make money when they sell houses, so any housing market crisis



could see them out of a job. A prime example of this happened during the 2008 housing market crash, with over 10% of real estate agents losing their positions permanently.

Additionally, upfront costs come with being a real estate agent, such as license and franchise fees, business and home office equipment, marketing material and travel.

A realtor/real estate

agent's career can be lucrative, but much depends on how much effort an agent is willing to put in. Successful agents usually match certain skills and personality traits, leading to their success. Agents who do not communicate well, don't display a positive work ethic and fail to relate to their clients and those on the opposite side of the deal probably won't realize all of the financial potential.

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TALES
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We went in the middle of winter while the ground was still frozen so I don't think it could have been the ground thawing or anything. I took some EVPs (electronic voice phenomena, or ghost voice recordings) at the site but nothing came up on the recorder. As we were walking up to the pond though, we did hear distinct voices coming from the mill site. We ran back but found no one. We even called out and no one answered. The last thing I wanted to mention was we did hear something walking in the woods (you could hear crunching in the snow) but we saw no animal and no people; it was just very strange."

A few months after Lauren's encounter, we received an email from an investigator in regard to a visit he and his mother paid to the park. They were wandering the park just before closing, talking about being locked in if the gates closed. When they played their recorder back, there was a third voice accompanying them as they traversed the trails laden with old home foundations and other remnants of the past.

UniBank 150+2 anniversary marked in Northbridge Town Hall

UniBank, the largest mutual community bank headquartered in Central Massachusetts, recently held

many nonprofit organizations in town, year after year. It was a pleasure for the town to host Chairman Wickstrom,

that while the leaders of Northbridge were laying the groundwork for the town's growth in this hallowed building, we took the baton 152 years later and pledged to commit to the same core values of growth

and prosperity for the community established in 1870 for the next 152 years and beyond." Tim Wickstrom, a fourth-generation Whitinsville native, said "it was a great honor to have UniBank's annual

meeting in one of the most historic buildings in town, financed by one of our founders, John Whitin. It is our privilege and duty to serve the community and it was a great venue to communicate our

servitude. With roots in the Blackstone Valley, UniBank has assets of more than \$2 billion as of March 31, 2022, and branches throughout Central Massachusetts and MetroWest.



The crowd that gathered for UniBank's 2022 annual meeting, held in the Northbridge Town Hall.

its annual meeting in historic Northbridge Town Hall as part of the institution's 150+2-year anniversary.

Adam Gaudette, Northbridge's town manager, said "UniBank is the pillar of community excellence in town, [meeting] our population's financial needs and [providing] ongoing charitable support to the

Michael Welch (UniBank CEO), Chris Foley (UniBank president) and their dedicated team on this milestone anniversary.

"Since the pandemic delayed our celebration two years ago, we decided to hold our 150+2 anniversary annual meeting in the Northbridge Town Hall," Mr. Welch said. "We like to think

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SPORTS

Millbury's Cam Ayotte looks back at stellar baseball career

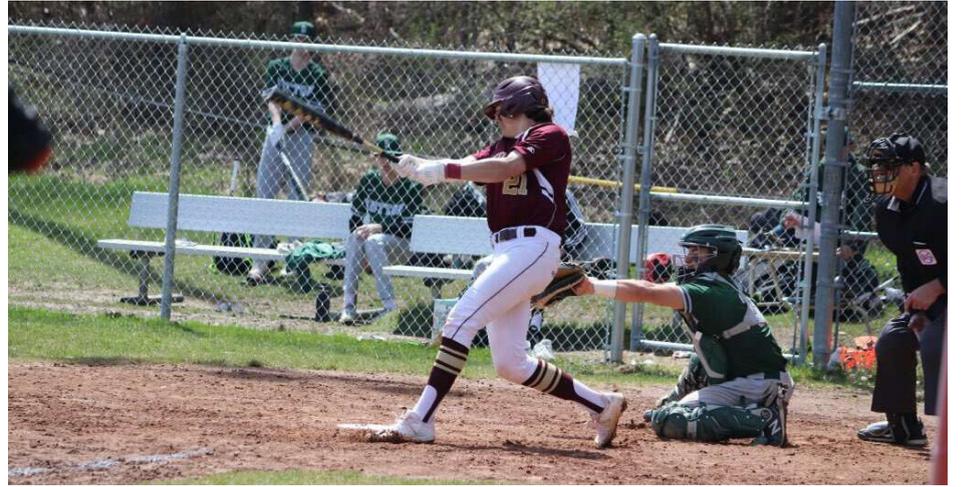
BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY, STAFF WRITER

With his high school baseball career coming to an end, Millbury's Cam Ayotte is getting ready to head onto his next adventure—collegiate football. Although football is his passion and now future endeavor, the Woolies senior will always hold a spot in

his heart for baseball. "I've played baseball my entire life, but once I got into high school my focus changed more toward football," Ayotte said. "The atmosphere within football is much different than baseball and I take a lot more pride in my game on the football field."

Ayotte will be heading to Worcester State to compete for the quarterback position

for the Division 3 Lancers and is hoping to be competitive when the fall rolls around. The now graduated Woolie was a three-sport star for Millbury and a four-time captain (twice for football and once each for baseball and basketball)



BASEBALL
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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.
 Believer

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BASEBALL

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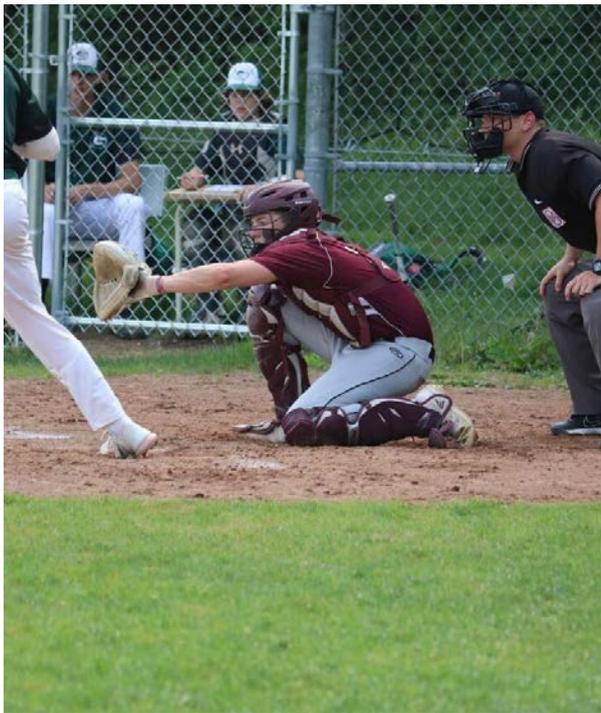
during his high school career.

“To be named a captain was a big honor,” he said. “To be able to represent all the younger kids on the teams [by] leading by example on the field as well as in locker room and in the community.”

When he crossed the lines and stepped onto the baseball field Ayotte for the majority of his playing time was a catcher and like the quarterback on the football field, he is the leader on the diamond.

“I began playing catcher because no one else wanted to and I figured that I’d try it out to help the team,” he said. “The first time that I actually played the position for my AAU team it was really hot and after the game I was not thrilled with it and didn’t plan on doing it again.”

Following his miserable start with the position Ayotte reconsidered and took control of a bad situation and turned it into a positive one. During his freshman year with Millbury, he suited up behind the plate for the junior varsity team to open the season but



come the end of the season he was sitting on the varsity bench.

“Going into the tryouts I was very confident in my ability to play the game and that I would be on the varsity squad at one point,” Ayotte said. “I knew that I could play at that level and when I was brought up, I was thrilled. I remember my first varsity hit was at Southbridge High School; it was a squib shot to shortstop that I beat out. A hit is a hit and that’s all that’s recorded in the books.”

After finally making it up to the varsity team Ayotte was all excited and ready for the following season. His goal was to once again be on the varsity team and be in the starting lineup every game, but unfortunately, he and his teammates didn’t have the opportunity to take to the field that season due to Covid.

“It was very disappointing especially as it would have been my first full varsity season and I was supposed to start and it was taken away even after all

the hard work that I did to get ready for the season,” Ayotte said

Baseball was originally halted right after the basketball season and the then sophomore decided to take a few weeks off to rest his body for the eventual return to the diamond. Eventually the Covid pandemic became much worse, and the season was postponed.

Things got a little better during his junior campaign. Football was moved to the Fall II season, which went from late February to late April and once that finished up the spring seasons would get under way (early May to June), but it would be an abbreviated season.

During the shortened season Ayotte managed to bat .372 and led the team with 16 hits and added 8 RBI. The abbreviated season got Ayotte hungering for more playing time on the baseball field. He wanted to go into his senior year and put together a solid season.

According to Ayotte, he wanted to hit over .400 during his final season with Millbury. He worked hard in the weight room and when the season came to an end early this year, he found himself with a .411 batting average with 30 hits and was named to the

Central Mass Super Team, a group of 12 baseball players throughout the area in all the divisions.

“Cam is a phenomenal athlete with a great leadership capability,” Millbury Coach Ron Silvestri said. “Being named to the CMass Super Team is a tremendous honor for a kid who comes from such a small school (Division 4) as they tend to pick athletes from the larger schools.”

The Millbury catcher was thrilled at the honor bestowed upon him.

“It is a big honor as I take a lot of pride playing baseball,” he said. “I worked really hard with my dad and to see that everything I did eventually paid off and was noticed as a serious baseball player was nice.”

Last spring the Woolies went 8-5 in the abbreviated season but fell to Uxbridge in the first round of the tournament. This spring Millbury improved to 12-8 and was awarded the number 16 seed in the Division 4 State Tournament, but once again lost in the first round, this time 5-3 to Blackstone Valley.

“It wasn’t the most successful season in terms of wins and losses as we would have liked,” Ayotte said. “But it was a fun season,

and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.”

With baseball now in the rear mirror for now, it’s time for Ayotte to put all his energy into his football playing days, in hopes of grabbing that starting quarterback position with the Lancers.

“He has a very strong arm and would have made a good baseball prospect at Worcester State,” Silvestri said. “He loves football more and it is very hard to do both sports in college especially if the football team has spring practices.”

Ayotte knows that it is all football but has not given up on the idea of baseball in the future.

“Football will be my main focus in college, but there is always the possibility of playing baseball again,” he said. “I believe in my ability and had I not been playing football I would have definitely been playing baseball in college somewhere.”

Coach Silvestri concluded that Ayotte is a rare individual and one of the better athletes that he has coached, and there have been over 1,000 athletes that have crossed the coach’s path.



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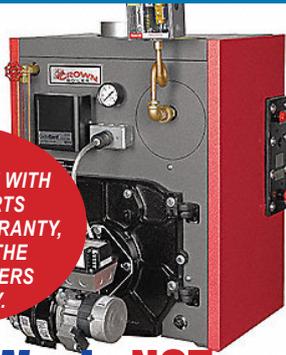
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