

A Christmas miracle ... Betsy the bulldog returns home

BY AMY LECLAIRE

On Saturday, November 19th, Leah Rainville, a resident of the town of Millbury, and a UMASS medical nurse, filled her dog's water bowl as she usually does, and went to work.

Later that day she called a friend to check on Betsy, an English bulldog described as a sweet love. Her friend confessed that Betsy was "not acting herself" and Leah, thereafter, advised her to let the dog be.

Hours later, a neighbor, came over to let Betsy outside. This time, the stout, short-legged dog fled like a greyhound from her backyard deck. Off three-year-old Betsy went, down the road, and into the woods of South Oxford. Neighbors watched in disbelief.



Betsy's return after too long away from home is considered a Christmas miracle by her owner, Leah Rainville.

"I left work and sobbed the whole way home. I couldn't sleep and woke up searching for her at the first light of day. It was extremely hard for me to tell my son, Hunter, the news. Betsy was his birthday present back in 2020. He was hysterical. He went right out looking when he heard. We were both a mess. I cried through many shifts at work. This was the first time in fourteen years that I didn't do Christmas cards. My heart just wasn't in it."

Still, the devoted Dog Mom never lost hope. "I kept telling my son she was going to come home. I just knew she would," she said.

Leah set in motion a search effort that spiraled throughout her neighborhood and reached surrounding towns across the state. Missing Dogs of Massachusetts advised that she put a light on outside and leave Betsy's things,



"I've never seen her run that fast," one later admitted. The bulldog most likely to snuggle up on a human's lap was on a mission, it seemed. No one would have guessed what was about to happen amid the holiday season of

2022. No one will ever know what passed through the sweet bulldog's mind during that run-away, but one thing remained constant. Her Dog Mom never lost faith.

Leah reflected recently on the day, and weeks that followed.

BETSY

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Signage at the entrance to Pleasant Valley Crossing at Rt. 146 northbound points to some of the businesses that have taken up occupancy in the complex.

Urgent Care facility coming to Pleasant Valley Crossing?

BY ROD LEE

The breaking news coming out of the town of Sutton during the week of January 9th was the sale of Pleasant Valley Country Club from the Magill family to partners Michael O'Brien and Jay Kunkel for \$4.1 million.

This overshadowed a revelation by Mr. O'Brien at around the same time of the latest steps he is taking as principal of Galaxy Development LLC to expand Pleasant Valley Crossing, just a few miles away on the eastbound side of Rt. 146.

Asked what's new with the complex, which has witnessed steady growth since its inception with a Market 32 and UniBank as major components, Mr. O'Brien said "there is an urgent care in planning right now for the parcel

between Starbucks and the car wash. We don't own that. We continue to speak with large retail tenants. We need an 'anchor' to kick [the next phase] off but nothing yet unfortunately."

The addition of an Urgent Care would add another important piece to the mix of businesses now operating at Pleasant Valley Crossing. It would come as no surprise to people who have followed Mr. O'Brien's work as a commercial property owner and development, which has been extensive throughout the region. Galaxy has completed projects totaling \$300 million and 500,000 square feet in the last ten years.

Such national name enter-

PLEASANT VALLEY

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BETSY*continued from page 1*

along with her own clothes, at the front door. Over fifty people went out looking the moment they received word. Where was Betsy hiding?

Speculation arose while the bulldog became the talk of the town. Leah's daily Facebook posts garnered widespread concern, support, commentary and prayer. "We are praying for Betsy. Stay positive! Let's bring her home!" The lost bulldog with an endearing pushed-in face and white stripe on her head had won over hearts of a caring community.

Leah was deeply touched by the outreach of so many caring people, many of whom she had never met

before. "People I didn't know offered to help Betsy. The support of the community has been amazing."

She hiked and hiked. Amongst the quiet of the woods, surrounded by deer and birds, she cried and cried. "Please come home, Betsy." She prayed.

Long days turned into longer weeks. Search efforts continued to roll forward. Leah sustained her belief that Betsy would come home. She posted daily pleas to help bring her pet home. Her worst fear was becoming a nightmare. "I researched that 80 percent of dogs return after the first week gone."

After a few weeks, Leah lost hope that Betsy was in the woods, and considered the possibility that, instead, she had been taken. "I started to think that she hopped

into someone's car." She offered a generous reward for the safe (no questions asked) return of her beloved bulldog. She kept praying.

"I prayed and prayed. My godmother, Aunt Deborah, used to tell me to pray to Saint Anthony when something is lost. I found the prayer card, and couldn't believe what I saw. There, on top of the card, was Betsy's registration tag. "Please bring my girl home." Leah squeezed the card with the dog tag attached and prayed every night.

She searched the Internet to see if, perhaps, someone had taken Betsy and was going to sell her online. Amid her searches and scrolls, her eyes rested on Bailey, a pudgier bulldog whose expression moved Leah. "Something about her just spoke to me. I felt in my



heart that she was going to bring Betsy home."

On December 13th, nearly four weeks following Betsy's disappearance, Bailey entered Leah's home. More incredibly, the stars, it seemed, had lined up. Had Betsy sensed her new sibling?

On Wednesday, December 21st, at 2:24 pm, four weeks following that stout bulldog's peculiar run-away, Leah received a phone call from Alli Reynolds, a neighbor who revealed news that was about to become a Christmas Miracle.

"I have Betsy. She's in my yard."

Alli, reportedly, noticed Betsy after her own dog had been barking incessantly. She lured the emaciated dog onto her deck with treats. Although she did not know Leah personally, she had been reaching out to her throughout the search process with kind words and support. "The fact that someone who had been tracking her posts and reaching out to me ended up being the very person

to find Betsy was amazing to me. I was at work when she was lost, and then again when she was found. The stars aligned."

Leah's dad was the closest in proximity to Betsy and, therefore, the first to reunite with the beloved family pet. She barked at first but, within moments, recognized her grandpa's distinct scent. Then she accepted his Milkbones and lapped his face. "Time to go home, Girl."

Neighbors and friends drove to Leah's home to see Betsy. A friend reported looking down at her phone to see the emblem, Believe, posted on Leah's Facebook wall, along with the sudden news about Betsy. At that very moment, Josh Groban's song, Believe, had been blaring out of the radio speaker while she drove. Betsy's return had become a true Christmas Miracle.

"I sobbed the whole way home from work and just kept calling people. I walked in the door and broke down hysterically. Then I saw how skinny she

was. I couldn't believe she survived," Leah recalled.

Home veterinarian care began immediately, the findings of which confirmed what seemed the impossible. Amongst the coyote, bear, fisher cat, and cold temperatures, Betsy had survived the South Oxford woods for thirty-three days, evidenced by extreme weight loss, discoloration and particular spots on her paws (to indicate the impression of leaves) along with several cuts on her body. Due to plentiful streams, rivers and dams in the area, Betsy, reportedly, had plenty of water.

A prescription, high protein diet designed to support the gradual return of her original dog food, daily labs, B6 vitamins and weight checks are to name a few measures set in place by Dr. Jocelyn of Happy at Home Vet Care. "I completely trust my vet," Leah admitted. "She's the best." Leah is currently working on adapting Betsy to her former routines in regard to going outside with her electric collar on. "She's an animal. I still want her to have the freedom she needs."

A bulldog that survived the woods for thirty-three days has been spending her days snuggling beside her new baby sister, Bailey. "They are two peas in a pod," Leah said.

Dog Mom Leah Rainville no longer cries herself to sleep. Instead, she nods off each night with a bulldog named Betsy asleep at her chest.

And she continues to believe in miracles.

Write to Amy at amyl-eclair@hotmail.com

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prises as Price Chopper, Walgreens, Chili's, Kohl's, Advance Auto, Tractor Supply, Panera Bread, Bank of America, Domino's, Five Guys, Great Clips, Planet

Other stores have since set up shop at Pleasant Valley Crossing, making the complex second only to The Shoppes at Blackstone Valley in Millbury as a prime retail destination on the highway connecting Worcester and Providence.

With the acquisition of

Pleasant Valley Country Club, Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Kunkel are investing in an eighteen-hole golf course and banquet facility that has a storied history in the Blackstone Valley. "PV" has hosted thirty-two PGA Tour events and thirteen LPGA Tour events, the

most recent being an LPGA Tour stop in 1999. Such illustrious golfing personalities as Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Phil Mickelson and Kathy Whitworth have played there.

Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Kunkel have expressed a determination to restore PV to its former glory, but they have made no commitment to trying to attract another professional tournament to the club. Their immediate focus is to improve the course and the clubhouse.

Mr. Kunkel has been described as an accomplished golfer and he was a member of Pleasant Valley for fifteen years before joining Quin-natisset CC in Thompson, Connecticut.

In that sense he would appear to be a perfect successor as an owner of the club to John Magill Sr., who also belonged to PV for many years before building Highfields Golf and Country Club in Grafton in 2002. Mr. Magill bought PV from Bank of New England at a foreclosure auction at the club in November of 2010 for \$5 million. Mr. Magill died in 2012. His son Jay Magill and Jay Magill's daughter Beth Shropshire managed PV and High-

fields.

Pleasant Valley Country Club has long been a go-to facility for the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, particularly for the Chamber's annual meeting; it has also been a popular choice for weddings with its

manicured, scenic grounds and spacious ballroom.

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



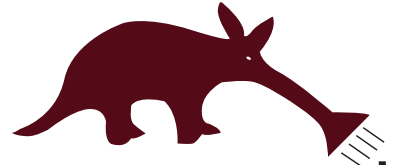
Above, an aerial view of the golf course at Pleasant Valley Country Club. The club was recently purchased by Michael O'Brien and Jay Kunkel. Below, UniBank was one of the first retailers to sign on as a tenant of Pleasant Valley Crossing.

Fitness and Verizon "have been the beneficiaries of projects built by Galaxy from the ground up," Mr. O'Brien has pointed out.

The 57,000-square-foot Market 32 at Pleasant Valley Crossing opened in October of 2015 and was quickly followed by the arrival of Five Guys, Verizon, Starbucks, UniBank and Q-Nails.



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Signs of the Times

New signs are popping up around Sutton thanks to the Sutton Historical Society, and their efforts to keep history alive in town. As the finishing touch to the Sutton Center Cemetery Restoration Project begun in 2019 by the Sutton Historical Society Cemetery Restoration Crew, and continuing for three long, labor-intensive years, signage was installed to clearly identify this historic cemetery which is the oldest in Sutton. This cemetery is the final resting place for several of Sutton's founding settlers/families, Revolutionary War, and Civil War veterans, with most burials occurring during the 1700's and 1800's. The last burial was in 1936. The primary aspiration and goal of everyone who participated in the cemetery's restoration was "to help preserve Sutton's heritage, to honor those who came before us, and for all generations to cherish and have pride in our community". This project received generous financial support from the Dudley Gendron Post



414 American Legion, for which we are very grateful, as well as several accolades from the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Volunteer-in-Parks program.

The custom bracket and sign were designed and manufactured by Bob Rochon, Creative Signworks, and the 10-foot granite post was purchased from Swenson Granite in Shrewsbury. The final installation of the sign was completed in December. This sign is very impressive, clearly identifying this historic cemetery. In addition to the great efforts of Historical Society members, John Belculfine, Dave Pizzi, Brian Stevenson, and Ross Weaver, special recognition is given to Bob Rochon, Jim Smith, Sutton Town Administrator, and Matt Stencel, Manager, Sutton Highway Department, for their support in making this project a success.

A second sign installed in the cemetery on a donated 6-foot granite slab contains a QRcode which directs visitors to a landing page on our website

linking them to a map of the cemetery and burial information on Find-a-Grave. The QRcode signs throughout town were made possible by a grant from the Sutton Cultural Council, a local agency, which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency, and Historical Society Secretary, Christine Watkins, who designed the signs and added the historical content to our website, suttonhistoricalsocietyinc.org. These QRcode signs are on all six of the historical properties owned and/or maintained by the Society as well as ancillary properties of interest, including the Manchaug Diorama, created by Gene Zabinsky, located in the Manchaug Mills, and the WWI memorial in the vestibule of the Town Hall. These signs allow visitors to complete self-guided tours.

With the completion of the Sutton Center Cemetery, as well as the full restoration of the Dodge Cemetery located on Leland Hill Road, the Restoration Crew is

moving on to the Armsby Road Cemetery in the Spring 2023. As a kick off, repairs to the Armsby Road Cemetery sign were made by Society member, Dave Pizzi, which included installation of pressure treated wood posts, vinyl post sleeves and caps, and PVC trim on the back of the sign to make the sign weather and rot resistant.

Finally, thanks to Dan Desjardin, of Dan's Carpentry, for recent repairs made to the Society's sign hanging at the M. M. Sherman Blacksmith Shop.

The Sutton Historical Society is a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to preserving the history of Sutton. New members and volunteers of all ages are always welcome. With over 30 cemeteries in town, this Cemetery Restoration Crew is always looking for help. Donations are generously accepted. For more information, visit suttonhistoricalsocietyinc.org or reach out to us at sutton1704@gmail.com.



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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

The Oxford Free Public Library and bank robbers?



Dan Prouty of the Oxford Business Association and the new "Gateway Park" in town is one of those people any journalist would appreciate for the tips they pass along that turn into good story material. Recently, Mr. Prouty sent me this email.

"Try to read this about Oxford bank robbers from the 19th Century. When I was a kid, old-timers told me that the \$\$\$ for the library came from the Larneds who were infamous bank robbers. Thus the Larned library in Oxford. Several years ago I came across a short story about an 1850 bank robbery in Charlestown, NH (boyhood home of Carleton Fisk). The Larneds were supposedly tied to other robberies in NH, VT and NY State. Clara Barton's brother Stephen was an accomplice and a biography about Clara included in her correspondence about Clara having to reimburse an insurance company after the Larneds and her brother were accused of burning down a textile mill... They were evidently great entrepreneurs..."

A separate email, forwarded to me by Mr. Prouty and headed "Monadnock Moments No. 34: The Bungling Bank Robbers—Historical Society of Cheshire County," describes an incident that occurred

the evening of June 11, 1850, when "Abijah Larned and an accomplice broke into the bank at Charlestown, New Hampshire. By midnight they had loaded nearly \$12,000 in gold, silver and bills into their carriage and drove peacefully out of town." The report goes on to say that eleven miles to the south they came to a long hill between Drewsville and Marlow and got out of the carriage so their horse would have less weight to carry. They somehow managed to lose the horse and the carriage, which were discovered by Horace Gee of Marlow, who returned the money to claim a reward.

"Abijah Larned was later arrested and agreed to return to Charlestown to stand trial, probably in part so that he could learn what happened to his carriage of riches. He asked to be taken before the bank officers where he confessed to the crime and apologized for the trouble he had caused. It was also discovered that the horse had turned off on a side road halfway up the hill and wound up at Mr. Gee's house.

"Larned's apology so impressed the local officials that they returned his burglar's tools and allowed him to leave Charlestown after posting a small bail. Needless to say, Larned jumped bail and never returned to stand trial. He did continue to use his burglar's tools, however, and was later arrested and jailed for robbing the bank at Cooperstown, New York."

In trying to pin this down, and Clara Barton's brother's actual role, I could find no mention of the Larned family in a "Centennial Celebration" report written by Gilbert Asa Davis for Windsor County,



A photograph of the Oxford Free Public Library taken on June 6, 2018.

Vermont. The information was voluminous, however, so I might have missed it.

In an effort to clear the matter up, Mr. Prouty sent me another email with a photo of the cover of a biography of Clara Barton entitled "Clara Barton/Professional Angel," written by Elziabeth Brown Pryor.

Mr. Prouty wrote: "This is the book that I learned of the Larned Bros. and Stephen Barton's involvement in arson fraud. Also the first source that I came across (about) the Charlestown bank [robbery] was from a book of short stories, 'It Happened in New Hampshire,' published by the Pequot Press. In that story, the authorities found a coat with an owner's tag on the inside that said Stephen Barton, North Oxford. Oxford authorities told their NH counterparts that Barton was at a public function that weekend but he 'runs with the Larned Brothers!'" That was the connection and of course one of them landed in Sing Sing for the Cooperstown job. He died in prison according to the NH story."

The only reference to the Larned family I initially found came from The Oxford Free Public Library's own website, which states that Charles Larned, a former resident, donated money in memory of his mother, Clarissa Larned, for construction of what was called the Larned Memorial Library "on the former Hyde lot." The building opened in 1903 and featured a stained glass window at the top of the stairs in the front foyer, depicting the

arrival of the Pilgrims with a caption "Let there be light."

Jacob Lotter (I misidentified him in a previous column) was good enough to send me information he obtained that corroborates much of what Dan Prouty has discovered. Brittany McDougal Bialy, director of the Oxford Free Public Library, describes Jacob Lotter as "a history buff" and said he "knows a good amount of Oxford history." Mr. Lotter is the library's cataloging and technology person.

Mr. Lotter sent me clips from "Oxford, Massachusetts: 300 years of history 1713-2013" published by the Oxford Business Association. Included in this book is an item entitled "1859 How Not To Rob A Bank" and a reference to Governor Henry Hubbard (who served as the Charlestown bank's president) dispatching lawmen to "Oxford, Massachusetts when it was discovered that the 'S. Barton Jr.' who owned a buffalo robe that was among clothing discarded after the robbery was "a well-known bank robber who lived there. Barton had

a good alibi for the time, but the two Larned brothers, who also lived in town and who were known for their criminal activity," were both missing."

Given Clara Barton's sterling reputation, which is enshrined at the Clara Barton Birthplace Museum in Oxford, it is hard to believe she had a brother who was up to such no good. The museum's website lists as family members her father, Capt. Stephen Barton (1774-1862), "a prosperous businessman, captain of the local militia and a selectman in Oxford;" her mother, Sarah Stone Barton (1783-1851), "an independent woman who was known for her thrift, eccentricity and volatile temper;" and siblings Dorothea Barton (1804-1846), Stephen Barton (1806-1865); Capt. David Barton (1808-1888); and Sarah "Sally" Barton Vassall (1811-1874).

Which leaves Stephen Barton as something of a mystery man, in the scheme of things.

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BV Education Foundation aims for a momentous 'new' year

BY ROD LEE

There was unmistakable pride in Jeannie Hebert's voice when she told those in attendance at a breakfast meeting of the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce in Millbury on September 29th that "we are the only [such organization] in the U.S. to build our own education training center."

Ms. Hebert, president and CEO of the BV Chamber, was speaking of course of "the Hub," which recently celebrated a third anniversary. A center for workforce development situated in the Chamber's offices in the Linwood Mill, the Hub has come far in a short time. It is now offering expanded curriculums in workforce training for high school students and adult learners, and custom retraining for Chamber members' incum-



A BVEF field trip. Sen. Ryan Fattman was a guest speaker.

bent employees.

The Chamber has also forged "a new and stronger connection with the Blackstone Valley Education Foundation," or BVEF, Ms. Hebert pointed out. This is reflected in "jointly writing grants, sharing events, supporting Innovation Pathways programs, and funding scholarships for high school students."

No one is more excited

about the role the BVEF plays than Danielle Wence, the Education Foundation's outreach director—recently promoted to that position. She joins a growing team that includes the BVEF's new executive director, Joscelyn Young, Associate Director Holly McNeil, Partnership Coordinator Lauren Barrett, Internship Consultant Tom Belland, Grant Administrator Annie



BVEF Outreach Director Danielle Wence says the organization is looking toward a host of new possibilities for growth in 2023.

Photo by Jonathan Rochleau

Kerins and BV Youth Leadership Academy Instructor Chelsea Swan.

Several of these key principals are new, as is the incoming executive director of the Hub, Ashley Bregman.

Ms. Wence said during a conversation in the Chamber's conference room on December 13th that she was hired to "do marketing last October." That job has now turned into something more: establishing a stronger connection with schools and businesses.

"How can we reach down to teachers and families," she said. "We already have a relationship with superintendents and principals."

She welcomes the challenge, with obvious enthusiasm.

"I was home with children for the last seven years," she said. "I worked in golf at Pleasant Valley

and Cyprian Keyes. That was seasonal."

A graduate of Holy Name High School in Worcester and Anna Maria College in Paxton, Ms. Wence has already witnessed what "connecting education with experience"—the BVEF's mission—can mean in inspiring children to think about their futures.

"We did an event with FLEXcon in Spencer and we went into a second and third grade classroom in Uxbridge, to get the wheels spinning (for those children) at a young age to find a career they can enjoy," she said.

Ms. Bregman, who began as the Hub's executive director on January 2nd, shares Ms. Wence's enthusiasm for the BVEF and the Hub as twin pillars.

"I have been in the education sector for many years, mainly teaching at Quinsigamond Community College," she said on De-

cember 19th. "I trained as a biomedical engineer. I have taught in high school and I also teach online chemistry through the University of Southern New Hampshire's global campus."

Ms. Bregman said she was hired to do some reorganizing of the Hub and to "increase access. They've done a phenomenal job, it's time to grow. I kind of have a case of 'I love what I do,' to break down barriers in education and I look for other than traditional avenues and this is a good fit for me in terms of workforce development."

Lee Gaudette who succeeded his father, Gerry Gaudette, as president of Gaudette Insurance, says the growth of the Education Foundation has been "a very long road. What's happening with the Foundation now is really exciting, but not so much change as enhancement."

"The Foundation was started by myself and Marty Green in 1999. Early on we were trying to build connections between the school community and the business community. But the overarching goal was a competitive curriculum that would prepare kids for real-life jobs."

Mr. Gaudette said the student who complains that he doesn't like geometry but who wants to become a carpenter and build a flight of stairs has to understand that "that's geometry!"

"We have come a long way from classroom grants," Mr. Gaudette said. "Back then it was twenty \$250

BVEF

continued on page 7



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BVEF*continued from page 6*

grants for teachers. What's that, \$5000?" Today's BVEF parcels out many thousands of dollars, a third of which come from "our public schools that sign up. The rest of our revenue comes from the state."

Mr. Gaudette said he had been with his father's agency "only weeks or months" when his dad informed him that "the Mendon-Upton district doesn't have a representative so guess what?"

Tara Bennett who is interim principal at Douglas High said the Foundation has been working on a collaboration with the Chamber and the Hub to provide more opportunities "for our Valley students. Joscelyn Young has done work with the Foundation previously and is looking to expand our programs, looking to build on the great 'Foundation' we have with our schools and industrial partners."

Ms. Bennett has been in education for more than twenty years and with the Foundation for the last eight or nine. She said Douglas students have benefitted and not just at the high school level; through the Leadership Academy,

BV Excel programs, middle school and up, and our staff has benefitted too."

Ms. Wence said "this year the Foundation has gained tremendous momentum with the support of Central MassHire Connective Activities program, regional business partners, and supporting organizations and private community members. We all look forward to collaborating and increasing programming with our primary partners, Ashley Bregman, executive director of the Hub for Workforce Development, and Jeannie Hebert, executive director of the Chamber, in the coming year."

Ms. Wence said new programs such as the Internship Program and Innovation Pathways Program "are growing by leaps and bounds. We have been working with the majority of our seventeen school districts to add or grow existing programs."

Significantly, the Foundation added three school districts as members this past fall: Auburn, Bellingham and Whitinsville Christian.

The Foundation, the MassHire Central Career Center and Connecting Activities recently announced

completion of Phase 1 "of our NextGen Project. Wondering 'where are the well-paying jobs in Central MA?' Check out our new labor market literacy tool at <https://public.tableau.com/.../WherearetheGoodJobsinCentr...> It's been soft-launched with CCR and Internship Coordinator groups. Scheduled training and demos will be available in the new year. Not to mention...work has already begun on the searchable database portion of this exciting new project."

Two professional development series will start in January.

Also in January, on the 25th at 5:00 p.m. there will be BV Partnership Open House in the shared offices of the Foundation, Hub and Chamber. The evening will highlight the elevated partnership between the three organizations and celebrate new staff, new opportunities, new programs, new partnerships, new endeavors and new possibilities. Those interested in attending should RSVP by January 16 to Kristen at kkearnan@blackstonevalley.org.

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

Holiday central



Rosemarie De Gaetano, with Michelle Edelstein (director), Tim Annis and Michelle Saucier, welcomed visitors to the Sutton Senior Center for a holiday market event on December 10th. The celebration included gift baskets for all ages, knitted items, jewelry, a scratch ticket raffle and grab-and-go meatball subs with homemade turkey soup.



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Abigail Epplett named Suzanne Buchanan Volunteer of the Year Award winner

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (BHC) hosted a volunteer recognition celebration for its Volunteers-In-Parks program on December 15, where the first recipient of its Suzanne Buchanan Volunteer of the Year Award was named.

This prestigious award was created to honor the legacy of BHC's former volunteer program coordinator, who served in that role for a combined total of twenty-three years with the National Park Service and the nonprofit BHC. The special event also marked the eighth anniversary of its partner, the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, created on December 19, 2014.

Abigail Epplett of Uxbridge earned the

distinction of receiving the inaugural Suzanne Buchanan Volunteer of the Year Award through her varied and consistent volunteer efforts with BHC and Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park.

"Suzanne Buchanan inspired volunteers to imagine the possibilities of historic preservation and natural resources conservation. She showed us that these resources can be the basis for exciting recreation and a vibrant quality of life," said Molly Cardoza, BHC's Director of Volunteer and Community Engagement. "When looking towards our volunteers, there is no one who better embodied Suzanne's welcoming spirit and enthusiasm as a Volunteer-In-Parks volunteer with

the Blackstone Heritage Corridor than Abigail Epplett."

According to Ms. Cardoza, Abigail volunteered across the VIP program, with the National Park Service in Pawtucket, at special events, and with BHC's partners. "When we put out a call for volunteers, Abigail is always one of the first to respond and always arrives with infectious energy and enthusiasm," Cardoza said. "Abigail started volunteering with the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in 2019 and has served as a volunteer and an intern with us. This year Abigail has greeted visitors to the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark, helped with maple sugaring crafts at Maple Sugar Days, showed

visitors the stars at a Night Sky program, cleaned up the Blackstone Valley as part of ZAP50, and did so much more. We know when Abigail signs up to volunteer, she will be there and will give her all! Volunteers like Abigail are what make this program so successful."

Volunteers with the Volunteers-In-Parks program, including several partner organizations throughout the Blackstone River Valley, served a total of 30,607 volunteers hours for the Fiscal Year 2022 (October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2022) at a value of \$916,679. The national average value of a volunteer's time is currently \$29.95. Reported hours are considered an in-kind donation and can be used toward matching grants.

Three of BHC's volunteer partner organizations received Partner of the Year Awards this year, including Waters Farm Preservation, Inc. of Sutton; East Providence Historical Society of East Providence, RI; and North Smithfield Heritage Association of North Smithfield, RI.

"Volunteers are literally worth their weight in gold!" said Richard Moore, BHC's Board Chair. "That statement isn't false praise by any means when, according to calculations from Independent Sector, our Blackstone Heritage Corridor volunteers contributed the equivalent of nearly one million dollars as a key part of



Abigail Epplett's continuous efforts on behalf of the Corridor have earned her the Suzanne Buchanan Volunteer of the Year award.

the Heritage Corridor team! For an organization that receives only limited federal and some private funding, BHC could not be as successful as it has been without the time and talents of our volunteers."

Volunteers who serve 250 hours earn a complimentary America the Beautiful Pass, providing them free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites. The pass covers entrance fees at national parks and national wildlife refuges as well as standard amenity fees (day-use fees) at national forests and grasslands and at lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Thirteen of BHC's volunteers earned an America the Beautiful Pass in the Fiscal Year 2022, including Norma Bedrosian, Sue Ciaramicoli, Bonnie Combs, Bill Ela, Ken Ethier, Pam Gurney Farnham, Keith Hainley, John Marsland, Albert Menard, Betty Mencucci, Alan Salemi, Paul Schaefer, and Edward Walker.

"BHC's award-winning volunteers are essential to the mission of the Heritage Corridor beyond the valu-

able time they donate," Mr. Moore said. "They are often among our most loyal donors of financial support, provide contacts for grants from businesses and foundations, and represent the public face of the Corridor. They collectively make a positive impact and ensure the long-term vitality of their communities and the region!"

According to Mr. Moore, BHC's Volunteers-In-Parks volunteers embody the mission of the Blackstone Heritage Corridor to work with community partners to preserve and promote the Valley's historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources for current and future generations. "Our actions today support and promote development which, in turn, supports and promotes our environmental systems and enhanced recreational opportunities, as well as our social and cultural heritage," he said.

To learn more about the Volunteers-In-Parks program, contact Molly Cardoza at mcardoza@blackstoneheritagecorridor.org or call 508-234-4242. To learn more about BHC, visit Blackstone-HeritageCorridor.org.

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National Heritage Area Act extends life of the Corridor

With the full support of the Congressional delegations from Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Senate Bill 1942, known as the National Heritage Area Act, was approved by Congress and sent to President Biden for his signature. The bill passed the House on December 22 by a bipartisan vote of 326 yes and 95 no.

Thanks to the leadership of Congressman Jim McGovern, who chairs the House Rules Committee, no Democrat voted against the measure, and a majority of Republican House members supported the bill.

A day earlier, the bill was approved unanimously in the U.S. Senate, with Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island leading the four senators who represent the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor (BHC).

The bill requires a standard for the designation of National Heritage Areas. It also establishes a National Heritage Area System through which the Department of the Interior may furnish technical and financial assistance to local coordinating entities, such



Matt Villamaino and Tansy Remiszewski of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) registered about two hundred people for a First Day Hike from the River Bend Farm Visitor Center on Oak St. in Uxbridge to Stanley Woolen Mill, on January 1. First Day Hikes were taking place across the Commonwealth, Ms. Remiszewski said, "from the Blue Hills to the Berkshires."

as Blackstone Heritage Corridor Inc., to support the establishment, development and continuity of National Heritage Areas.

The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, which spans twenty-five communities from Worcester to Provi-

dence, was established in 1986 and recently observed its thirty-sixth birthday. While the passage of S.1942 continues to make BHC eligible for federal funding, appropriations for the Corridor have declined in recent years.

There are currently fifty-five National Heritage Areas across the U.S. and four others in Massachusetts—Essex, Freedom's Way, The Last Green Valley and the Upper Housatonic. With the passage of S.1942, forty-five NHAs have been extended for fifteen years, through September 30, 2037, seven new NHAs were designated, and robust protection for private property rights was included.

The Blackstone River, the spine of the Corridor, is so much cleaner today than it has been in many years, with dramatic reductions in pollution. Paddlers now have seventeen put-ins to access the scenic beauty of the river. The well-used Blackstone River Bikeway/Greenway between Worcester and Providence is nearly half complete. BHC Inc. is coordinating efforts in both states to

finish the project. These natural byways are tremendous assets to the quality of life in the communities of the Blackstone Valley. BHC's many programs provide paddling and biking experiences for people of all ages and abilities.

BHC tells an unmatched story of cultural evolution in partnership with dozens of local organizations and communities. Through wayfinding signs, interpretive panels, brochures, exhibits and five heritage centers, BHC recognized the past and points the region to the future.

BHC was a driving force behind the creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, one of the country's newest national parks. This unique park celebrates the story of innovation that literally changed how people worked and lived from the earliest days of the nation to the present. BHC manages the Park's award-winning Volunteers-in-Parks program and is the only federally-designated partner to the new Park, which is based at the Old Slater Mill National Historic Landmark in Pawtucket,

Rhode Island.

To learn more about BHC, visit blackstone-heritagecorridor.org.

BLACKSTONE SECTION OF TRUNKLINE TRAIL UP NEXT

The Baker-Polito Administration announced just before departing office that the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will break ground on the Blackstone section of the Southern New England Trunkline Trail (SNETT) this spring.

The project is estimated to take approximately three years to complete. The \$11.3 million project runs from the Saint Paul Street Bridge in the town of Blackstone to the Massachusetts/Rhode Island state border and is the final half mile of an a roughly 4.2-mile section of DCR's Blackstone River Greenway.

Additionally, this section of the Greenway is critical to the connection with Rhode Island's Blackstone River Bikeway and also provides a regional link to

CORRIDOR

continued on page 11

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Former Governor Charlie Baker and Secretary of Public Safety and Security Terrence Reidy recently announced that FY23 grant funds for the Student Awareness of Fire Education (S.A.F.E.) and Senior SAFE Programs have been awarded to two hundred sixty-six fire departments across Massachusetts.

These programs promote fire and life safety education for children and older adults who are most vulnerable to burns, injury, and death from fire and related hazards.

"Funding programs that keep the Commonwealth's most vulnerable safe during emergencies is one of the best investments we can



Senator Michael Moore

make," said Senator Michael Moore (D-Millbury). "I'm pleased to hear that SAFE programs have received funding in every town in my district. I'd like to thank my colleagues for their diligent work in funding important programs like this, as well as the fire departments across the Commonwealth for their work keeping their communities safe."

"Congratulations to the Shrewsbury and Westborough Fire Departments," said Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury). "These important grant programs enable local fire education for children and older adults and will help to keep our communities safe. I am grateful to our local first responders for their selfless work and know how helpful these education programs are to Shrewsbury and Westborough residents."

"S.A.F.E. is a shining example of a successful and valuable program that the Commonwealth provides to its citizens," stated Representative David Muradian Jr. (R-Grafton). "Teaching children, and now seniors, two of our more vulnerable populations, how to handle emergency situations with less anxiety will help keep all members of the community safe. I know that these funds will surely go to good use within our community."

The grants awarded to the towns contained within the Second Worcester District are as follows:

AUBURN FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$4,381
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,277

GRAFTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$4,381
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,277

LEICESTER FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$3,781
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,077

MILLBURY FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$3,781
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,077

NORTHBRIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$4,381
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,277

SHREWSBURY FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$5,481
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,477

UPTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$3,781
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,077

WORCESTER FIRE DEPARTMENT

S.A.F.E Grant: \$10,481
Senior SAFE Grant: \$2,877

The S.A.F.E. program was first funded in FY1996 and has since correlated with a decline of about 80% in Massachusetts child fire fatalities and the longest period without a child fire death in the history of the Commonwealth. The Senior SAFE program was launched in FY14 to provide Massachusetts' seniors with the knowledge and tools to live safely.

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CORRIDOR*continued from page 9*

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The Blackstone River Bikeway has become an increasingly popular spot for outdoor enthusiasts in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.

ready! The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park invite all interested residents to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. This event starts Friday, February 17 and ends on Monday, February 20.

There are multiple ways to share your bird sightings:

- Tag your photos on social media with the hashtag #BRVBirds.

- Email your photos to birding@blackstone-heritagecorridor.org.

- Share your eBird checklist with BirdingtheBlackstone.

Learn more about this worldwide initiative and how to participate at BirdCount.org.

NATURE EXPLORATION WALKS AND MORE

Save the dates of Saturday, February 18 and Wednesday, February 22 for Nature Exploration Walks with Ranger Allison of the

Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park and Molly Cardoza. Watch for info on social media, the Park's events calendar and in the Park's next newsletter.

Also, Maple Sugar Days returns on Saturday, February 25 and Sunday, February 26 at River Bend Farm, 287 Oak St., Uxbridge

A Bark, Branches and Buds Winter Tree and Shrub ID Walk will be held on Saturday, March 25 from 10:00 a.m. to noon at the Blackstone River State Park, 1075 Lower River Road, Lincoln, Rhode Island.

On Sunday, February 5, Slater Mill will be featured on "Treasures Inside the Museum," a production of Rhode Island PBS. Tune in at 7:00 p.m. EST.

From Rhode Island PBS: "Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI is recognized as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. In this episode, learn more about the people who made the area what it was and how the machines changed the face of manufacturing everywhere. Plus, discover what makes some of the machines on exhibit so rare, and examine some of the artifacts from the 1890 Cotton Centennial. Learn more at www.ripbs.org.

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State Police Museum welcomes a famous 'Runaway'

BY ROD LEE

John H. "Jack" Crawford, who was instrumental in the recent relocation of the Massa-

chusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center to the former Whitinsville Bank Building, cannot say with certainty how long the operation will be

housed there.

"We're on a two-year lease but our goal is to go back to Grafton, I think. We'll see," Mr. Crawford said on December 10th,

while waiting for Ed Locke of Norman Rockwell painting fame to make an appearance.

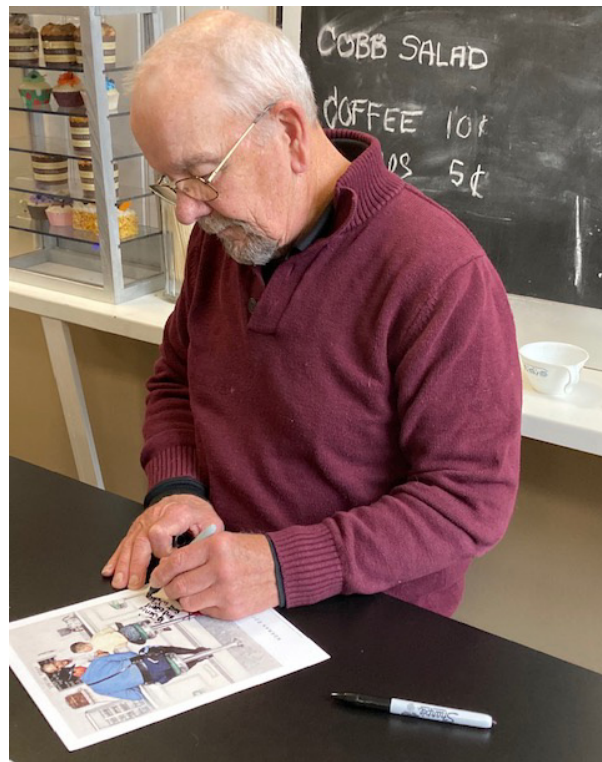
Meanwhile, those responsible for setting up the exhibits on the first floor of the well-preserved structure at Memorial Square are grateful to Vincent Osterman of Osterman Propane for providing them with the space they need to display a varied assortment of Massachusetts State Police memorabilia. Clothing, collectibles and a town of Northbridge 250th anniversary commemorative coin are available for purchase at the museum.

The museum is open Tuesdays and Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and is already drawing encouraging patronage (admission costs just five dollars and children get in free).

This was especially the case on the second Saturday in November, when troopers from around the state joined members of the public in welcoming Mr. Locke for pictures and autographs. He was eight years old in 1958 when asked to pose with a trooper—the late Richard Clemens—for Mr. Rockwell's "The Runaway," which became a Saturday Evening Post cover.

State Police Col. Christopher Mason was among those who showed up for the proceedings.

The Massachusetts State Police began as a state constabulary in 1865 to



Ed Locke signs a poster-sized replica of Norman Rockwell's painting "The Runaway" on December 10th at the Massachusetts State Police Museum and Learning Center in Whitinsville. He was chosen by Mr. Rockwell as the boy for the illustration, which became a celebrated Saturday Evening Post cover.

enforce liquor laws that went largely ignored by the populace and local authorities. The need for a statewide law-enforcement agency grew due to an increase in crimes that crossed the jurisdictional boundaries of the Commonwealth's cities and towns.

A focus on child labor laws and the advent of the automobile brought changes to the force. This included the formation of a uniformed State Patrol in 1921.

Today the Massachusetts State Police is a full-service law-enforcement

agency consisting of over two thousand personnel including patrol, investigative, administrative and tactical resources.

With the Learning Center component now up and running as an educational link, the museum is an asset to the town of Northbridge and the Whitinsville historic district.

Understandably, many area residents are hoping it stays that way.

Go to mspmlc.org for more information.

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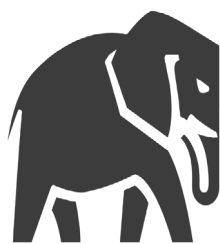
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Sutton Historical Society Announces Speaker Series

Mark your calendars!! The Sutton Historical Society is excited to be hosting the following events in 2023. Presentations will be located at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton, MA and are made possible by a 2023 grant from the Sutton Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

APRIL 4, 2023, 7 P.M.
The Nipmuc Lithic Trail
Joe Iamartino, Thompson Historical Society

MAY 9, 2023, 7 P.M.
Vintage Tweets: A Book of Suffrage Era Postcards

Carol Crossed, Curator, Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum

SEPTEMBER 5, 2023, 7 P.M.
Bathsheba Spooner: A Revolutionary Murder Conspiracy
Andrew Noone, Author

NOVEMBER 7, 2023, 7 P.M.
The Mass 15th of the Civil War and Wilder Holbrook, Sutton
Mark Savolis, Thompson Historical Society

All presentations are open to members and the general public of all ages. Updates to events can be found at suttonhistoricalsocietyinc.org.

Samuel Slater Experience to host a basic weaving workshop in February

The Samuel Slater Experience museum will host a three-session rigid heddle loom weaving workshop in Webster on Saturday, February 4, 11 and 18, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Local fiber artist Sharon Geyer will lead the workshop, which is structured for beginners and those who need a refresher course. In the first session students will warp their loom and start weaving a table runner. In the next session, they will plan another project and warp the looms again. In the last session, students will design

their own weaving project.

Students will learn all basic weaving skills: how to do a project planning sheet to calculate yarn requirements, how to use a warping peg, how to use the direct warping method, and weaving tips and techniques that will lead to success.

Fee for the course is \$150, payable in advance. The fee includes yarn for the first project. For more details and to register, email admin@samuel Slater Experience.org or call 508-461-2955.

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SPORTS

New Grafton High swim coach in building mode

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY, STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Kevin Saleeba has been coaching swimming for about 17 years, but when Covid hit and his club team decided to close down, he was out of a job until recently. Grafton High School was in need of a coach and Saleeba decided to put his name in the hat.

"They were looking for a coach, I talked to Athletic Director Kevin Anderson, and I guess he liked what I could bring to the team in terms of experience," the new Gators coach said. "The swimmers have a stable background and I'm looking to build a solid foundation within the program. Grafton has a talented group of swimmers returning who have shown promise in practice and I'm hoping to build upon what they already have."

Although the new coach is optimistic about his swimmers he also knows that it is very tough to win with a rather small team.

While the girls are in a decent position with 19 swimmers, the boys team only consists of 6 athletes to get into the pool.

"Winning in swimming is a numbers game, if you don't have the numbers it makes it tough to win overall," Saleeba said. "You can have the most amazing athletes winning every event but if you don't have that depth to capture the other places in the event it makes it extremely tough to win."

With that said, Saleeba is looking to build depth while creating a program that the kids will want to join. They currently are trying to get the word out and eventually hope that some athletes will be interested in giving the sport a try.

"At my past coaching jobs in Southern Massachusetts and Rhode Island I may have been well known for my ability," he said. "Unfortunately, it's like starting over and I need to build my reputation, while I am still trying to learn everyone's name and what they are

capable of doing here."

Senior Co-Captains MacKenzie Hannah and Ava Martin will lead the girls team into the pool this season. According to Saleeba, from day one these two have not only exhibited a strong dedication to the sport but they have also provided the leadership that the team needs. Thus far Hannah has taken the bull by the horns and given the coach optimism in her ability to swim distance events, Martin on the other hand has yet to give the new coach a glimpse of what she is capable of doing.

"I haven't really seen too much of her in a meet yet as she was hit with the flu pretty bad and just getting back to normal," the coach said. "Although she has not been able to get into the pool she has been helping out with the team until she is ready to come back. I am relying on her in practice, she is a strong leader and a coach to the other girls."

In addition to the captains, Grafton seniors coming back are Maddie Bodor,



The Grafton High swim team for the 2022-23 season. Photo courtesy of Coach Saleeba

Deja Colon, Eilidh Deans and Julia Megna. Grafton also has five juniors and another five sophomores on the roster in addition to four freshman taking on the sport this winter. Saleeba is hoping that freshmen Mary O'Brien (distance) and Marissa Pedorella (butterfly and sprints) will be a major

factor during the season for the Gators.

Junior Allie Shroyer is probably Grafton's most talented swimmer and the Coach plans on using her versatility in whatever event he happens to need her during a particular event. Although she can swim in just about any event, she is

best suited as a sprinter.

While the girls have a chance to take home some wins during the regular season, it is going to be a giant hill to climb for the boys team only having six active members. Senior DJ Jovin is taking on the sport for the first time and although he has not taken to the wa-

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ter in the past competitively, Saleeba said he is working hard and hanging in there.

Boys senior captain Cole Dunne is a very dedicated swimmer and has provided great leadership to the rest of the boys team right off the bat.

"Since I do not have an assistant, I rely heavily on him to keep the boys moving in the right direction," the Coach said. "All three captains I know that I can count on and trust them to help me out."

Dunne, who only began his swimming career when he entered high school and now swims for a club team out of Lincoln RI, can swim just about anything. The other four members of the boy's team are junior Ethan LaRue and sophomores Jacob Hanna, Kellan Shave and Simon Turcotte.

While the coach is not overly concerned with meets at this time he is looking to put a versatile and balanced team into the pool at all times.

"I am looking to see who I can rely on and who I need to work on so that we can develop the depth on this team. We need swimmers who can swim in multiple events, not just specialize in one," he said. "It's not that we are not

trying to win, but honestly its going to be hard with are lack of numbers. We will be looking to win as much as we can, but the main goal is to develop these swimmers to be ready come February."

If Saleeba can get his swimmers to not only learn multiple events during the season, they can not only be successful they should be a roll when the League, the Central Mass Sectionals and the State Championships begin in February.

Thus far in the early part of the season where the girls are 3-2 and the boys are 1-4 the following swimmers have qualified for the League Championship, Central Mass Sectional Championship and/or the State Championship Meets in February.

Girls:
Maddie Bodor (Sr.) – 200 Free (2:17.95) – League Championship
200 IM (2:36.39) – League Championship
100 Back (1:12.77) – League Championship
Brooke Castellano (Jr.) – 200 Free (2:31.75) – League Championship
100 Back (1:14.44) – League Championship
200 IM (2:50.52) – League Championship
Chloe Chofay (So.) – 500

Free (6:15.94) – League Championship
100 Breast (1:20.50) – League Championship
Ava Martin (Sr. Capt.) – 50 Free (30.03) – League Championship
Mary O'Brien (Fr.) – 500 Free (6:30.09) – League Championship
200 Free (2:22.89) – League Championship
Marissa Pedorella (Fr.) – 50 Free (28.59) – League Championship
100 Free (1:05.33) – League Championship
100 Fly (1:12.91) – League Championship
Allie Shrayner (Jr.) – 50 Free (27.02) – Qualified for both League and Sectional Championships
100 Free (1:02.22) – League Championship
200 IM (2:40.59) – League Championship
Isabelle Sullivan (So.) – 50 Free (28.88) – League Championship
100 Fly (1:15.85) – League Championship
Girls Relays who qualified for Sectionals:
200 Free Relay (Shrayner, Pedorella, Castellano, Bodor)
200 Medley Relay (Bodor, Chofay, Pedorella, Shrayner)
Eildh Deans (sr.) 50 Free (29.97) League Championship

Boys:
Cole Dunne (Sr. Capt.) – 50 Free (24.32) – Qualified for both League and Sectional Championships
100 Free (57.53) – League Championship
200 Free (2:05.95) – League Championship
100 Breast (1:08.32) – Qualified for both League and Sectional Championships
100 Fly (58.87) – Qualified for both League and Sectional Championships
200 IM (2:20.98) – League Championship
Jacob Hanna (So.) – 200 Free (2:23.27) – League

Championship
Ethan LaRue (Jr.) – 50 Free (26.19) – League Championship
100 Free (59.96) – League Championship
100 Back (1:05.53) – League Championship
100 Breast (1:15.03) – League Championship
200 IM (2:31.70) – League Championship
Kellan Shave (So.) – 50 Free (27.59) – League Championship
100 Free (1:01.25) – League Championship
200 Free (2:20.72) – League Championship

100 Back (1:12.91) – League Championship
Simon Turcotte (So.) – 50 Free (26.47) – League Championship
100 Free (59.57) – League Championship
500 Free (5:55.68) – League Championship
100 Breast (1:15.63) – League Championship
100 Fly (1:16.22) – League Championship
Boys Relays that qualified Sectionals
200 Medley Relay (Shave, LaRue, Dunne, Turcotte)
400 Free Relay (LaRue, Shave, Turcotte, Dunne)



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BVT Announces First Trimester Commendation List

Acknowledging Academic and Vocational Achievements

Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) has released the Superintendent-Director's Commendation List for the first trimester of the 2022–2023 school year. To be named to the Commendation List, students must meet rigorous standards, such as maintaining a grade point average of 88 percent or above in each technical, related, and academic course for the trimester. To view the complete list, visit www.valleytech.k12.ma.us/1tcommendationlist.

The following students, grouped by grade level and hometown, were named to the first trimester Commendation List:

BELLINGHAM

Class of 2023: Nicholas Cummings, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Hailey Davis, Construction Technology; Tyler Morin, HVAC&R; and Kaitlyn Mullen, Health Services.

Class of 2024: Ellen Franco, Information Technology; Sara Lewis, Engineering & Robotics; and Aiden Simpson, Information Technology. Class of 2025: Isabella Brancato,

Electronics & Engineering Technology; Abigail Noyes, Plumbing; and Kiele Sarnie, Construction Technology. Class of 2026: Madyson, Voss, Biotechnology; and Justin Walsh, Biotechnology.

BLACKSTONE

2023: Evan Bouvier, Multimedia Communications; Daniel Cardone, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Brock Chapman, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; and Sophia Mazzuchelli, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication. 2024: Darshannie Francis Drackett, Dental Assisting; Brandon Labonte, HVAC&R; Julia Matson, Plumbing; and Luke Tellier, HVA&R.

2025: Nathaniel Cook, Biotechnology; Braedon Ando, Culinary Arts; Paige Connolly, Culinary Arts; Mia DelVecchio, Culinary Arts; Keira Kelliher, Health Services; and Matheus De Carvalho, Plumbing. 2026: Jack Marino, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication.

DOUGLAS

2023: Griffin Beaulieu, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Kyle Forget, Engineering & Robotics; Murphy Potter, Painting & Design Technology; Megan Roe, Multime-

dia Communications; Brett Staples, Electronics & Engineering Technology; and Julia White, Cosmetology. 2024: Laney Beahn, Engineering & Robotics; Zachary Beaudry, Culinary Arts; Jack Dooner, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Jonah Rosenkrantz, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Baron Sherry, Engineering & Robotics; Sorcha Twohig-Mann, Health Services; and Chloe Vescio, Engineering & Robotics.

2025: Haley Chamberlain, Cosmetology; Kaylie Ciccone, Health Services; Justin Dooner, Engineering & Robotics; Tyler Grybowski, Information Technology; Cassady Hackett, Cosmetology; Braydin Levesque, HVAC&R; Emily Muniz, Engineering & Robotics; Om Patel, Engineering & Robotics; Samantha Pinto, Health Services; Evan Pupka, Culinary Arts; Jaden Roddick, Multimedia Communications; Addison Taylor, Health Services; and Willow Windoloski, Electronics & Engineering Technology. 2026: Jayce Boyko, Automotive Technology; Maddison Dos Santos, HVAC&R; Caitlin Kelly, Health Services; Zachary Mitchell, HVAC&R; Sophie Rivard, Engineering & Robotics; and Bryce Sheldon, Engineering & Robotics.

GRAFTON

2023: Juliana Errara, Health Services; Noah Mariano, Engineering & Robotics; Owen Mathieu, HVAC&R; and Henry Warfield, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

2024: Caitlin Brown, Dental Assisting; Danica Fiore, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Skyla Jack, Construction Technology; Carlie Jensen, Painting & Design Technology; Soumith Madadi, Information Technology; Grant Purcell, Engineering & Robotics; Haleigh Reynolds, Dental Assisting; Ryan St. Angelo, Culinary Arts; Lily Turcotte, Construction Technology; and John Wingate, Engineering & Robotics.

2025: Steven Caya, Engineering & Robotics; Raghav Dave, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Rowan Hackett, Multimedia Communications; Nora Iadarola, Multimedia Communications; Christopher Joiner, Biotechnology; Ella McCann, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Brodie Remillard, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Carly Simpson, Health Services; and Daniel Warfield, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

2026: Logan Black, Electrical; Douglas Kennedy, Engineering &

Robotics; Kevin Magill, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Benjamin Miller, Engineering & Robotics; Cooper Often, Engineering & Robotics; and Delaney Waldo, Biotechnology.

HOPEDALE

2023: Hayle Orta, Health Services; Jay Patel, Information Technology; and Jackson Staheli, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

2024: Ashlyn Leonard, Health Services; John McShane, Construction Technology; Eleanor Poitras, Health Services; Avery Sanosi, Culinary Arts; and Mikayla Sanosi, Multimedia Communications.

2025: Kallie Allen, Biotechnology; Nathaniel Allen, Information Technology; Anthony Bucchino, Engineering & Robotics; Benjamin Catalogna, Information Technology; Eric Deppe, Engineering & Robotics; Connor Griffin, Electrical; Gabriella Griffin, Health Services; Declan Reilly, Information Technology; and Christopher Russell, Biotechnology.

2026: Jason Abbruzzese, Engineering & Robotics; Isabella-Marie Adriko, Engineering & Robotics; Ella Foster, Engineering & Robotics; Evan Griffin, Information Technology; Ethan Novelli, Multimedia

Communications; and Shiv Patel, Engineering & Robotics.

MENDON

2023: Amanda Pajak, Multimedia Communications; Naomi Tsuda, Culinary Arts; and Natalia Vazquez, Engineering & Robotics.

2024: Tyler Clare, Information Technology; Noah LeFave, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Ava Lozeau, Construction Technology; and Arthur Tusoni, Multimedia Communications.

2025: Kalyann Bellefontaine, Health Services; Samantha Fairhurst, Health Services; Leila Leyvas, Health Services; Kyle Miller, Electrical; and Abigail Scharnagle, Health Services.

2026: Matthew Brennan, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Phoebe Burke, Engineering & Robotics; Yasmin Freitas, Health Services; Charles Lozeau, Engineering & Robotics; and Jacob MacDonald, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

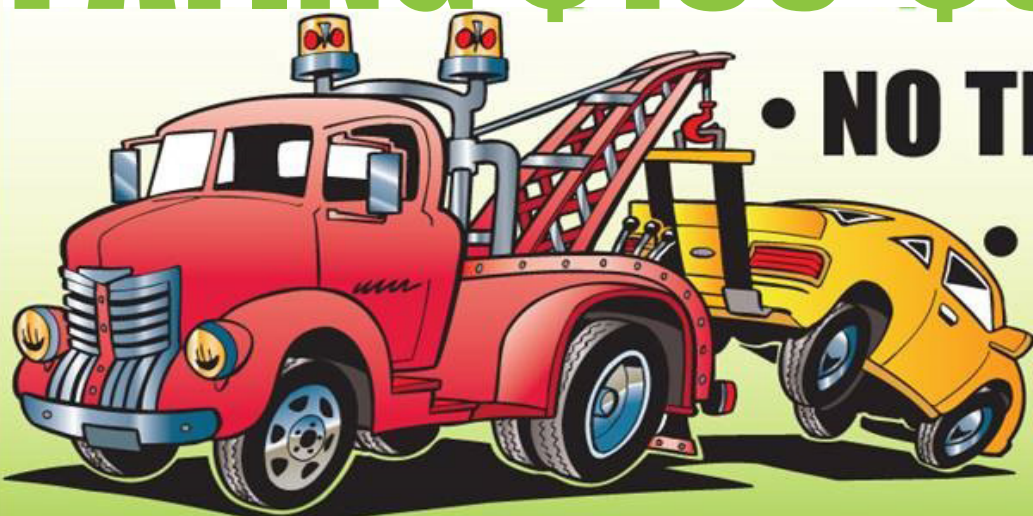
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2024: Igor Freeman, Engineering & Robotics; Ashly Guaman, Dental Assisting; Benjamin Kinsella, Multimedia Communications; Joseph Manzi, Electrical; Hannah Murphy, Multimedia Communications; Leah Neves, Construction Technology; Anthony Persico, Information Technology; Thamyres Salviano, Health Services; Emma Sanborn, Painting & Design Technology, and Lizmary Vidal-Sanchez, Dental Assisting.

2025: Lacey Coffman, Multimedia Communications; Adriana Hawkins, Culinary Arts; Matthew Hunter, Biotechnology; Charbel Jebara, Electronics & Engineering Technology; and Joel Puri, Engineering & Robotics.

2026: Ethan Dahmer, Biotechnology; Cecelia Dualu, Dental Assisting; Arieta Flanagan, Biotechnology; and Myles Guikema, Engineering & Robotics.

MILLBURY

2023: Samuel Bazydlo, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Brianne Laudani, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Brooke Maguire, Health Services; and Natalie Rutkiewicz, Cosmetology.

2024: Ava Lawton, Engineering & Robotics; James Richert, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Isabella Rose, Health Services; and Emma Shum, Dental Assisting.

2025: Mason Diosomito, Engineering & Robotics; Ethan Ikeda, Construction Technology; Gianna Konisky, Engineering & Robotics; Maya Lorion, Automotive Technology; Maeghan Plourde, Health Services; and Jayden Quang, Engineering & Robotics.

2026: Allison Garden, Engineering & Robotics; Lily Kelley, Multimedia Communications; Giana Piscitelli, Construction Technology; and Isabella Raymond, Health Services.

MILLVILLE

2023: Joshua Platt, Information Technology.

2024: Violette Durand, Culinary Arts; and Trey Kovolyan, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

2025: Julia Trujillo, Health Services.

2026: Genevieve Kovolyan, Health Services; and Ayden Mendes, Painting & Design Technology.

NORTHBRIDGE

2023: Riley Driver, Electrical; Sam

Grilli, Drafting & Design Technology; Emily Hourihan, Culinary Arts; Maya Laydon, Construction Technology; Noah Malkasian, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Gradie Sanford, Drafting & Design Technology; and Emily Wildfeuer, Drafting & Design Technology.

2024: Logan Feehan, Painting & Design Technology; Izamar Laboy Villegas, Information Technology; Lily Marshall, Dental Assisting; Ella Rogozenski, Engineering & Robotics; Bridget Roy, Culinary Arts; Brandon Spiller, Electronics & Engineering Technology; and Jonathon Spiller, Painting & Design Technology.

2025: Perry Derkosrofian, Construction Technology; Sosie Derkosrofian, Health Services; Zabel Derkosrofian, Information Technology; Abigail Dineen, Dental Assisting; Faith Ellis, Multimedia Communications; Conner Gomez, Engineering & Robotics; Haden Houatchanthara, Plumbing; Mara Keane, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Dylan Leeds, Engineering & Robotics; Haley Marston, Dental Assisting; Markas Petone, Health Services; Isabella Reed, Biotechnology; Sean Russo, Information Technology; Eva Schairer, Health Services; Scarlet Sergel, Dental Assisting; Alexa Seward, Engineering & Robotics; and Addison Snow, Culinary Arts.

2026: Isabelle Balon, Biotechnol-

ogy; Aidan Naughton, Information Technology; Benjamin Rivelli, Plumbing; Allegra Sadik, Health Services; and Adalynn Wooster, Cosmetology.

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2024: Kylie Carlsen, Multimedia Communications; Christopher Gubbins, Construction Technology; Julianna Hawley, Multimedia Communications; and Peyton Nolan, Multimedia Communications.

2025: Emma Cliadakis, Culinary Arts; Morgan Gervais, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Benjamin Hicks, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Tyler Houlihan, Health Services; William Kelly, Construction Technology; Madison Malo, Dental Assisting; Caroline Martin, Engineering & Robotics; and Jaren Peckham, Construction Technology.

UPTON

2023: Julia Bern, Construction Technology; Jack Dunham, Health Services; Bradley Lyon, Drafting & Design Technology; Jason Nguyen, Dental Assisting; Amelia Rouleau,

Construction Technology; and Katelyn Steele, Engineering & Robotics;

2024: Andrew Adams, Drafting & Design Technology; Jacob Giancola, Engineering & Robotics; Brian O'Connell, Automotive Technology; Robert Poirier, HVAC&R; Logan Rae, Health Services; and Laith Shloul, Electrical.

2025: Samantha Carroll, Information Technology; Eric Dunham, Engineering & Robotics; Kylie French, Painting & Design Technology; Cassidy Lyon, Health Services; Jack Nealley, HVAC&R; and John Simas, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

2026: Thomas Bailey, Automotive Collision Repair & Refinishing; Justin Fransen, Engineering & Robotics; Jack Lupien, Electrical; Ryan May, Electronics & Engineering Technology; and Van Richard, Engineering & Robotics.

UXBRIDGE

2023: Isabel Cahill, Multimedia Communications; William Crosby, Painting & Design Technology; Isabella Gannon, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Maxwell Guyton, Engineering & Robotics; and Sunny Moscatelli, Cosmetology.

2024: Yara Alomar, Health Services; Kali Bly, Cosmetology; Savannah Brodeur, Cosmetology; Noah Cahill, Engineering & Robotics;

Caterina Corapi, Engineering & Robotics; Micah Deary, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Trevor Horgan, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Sean Knox, Advanced Manufacturing & Fabrication; Grace Mathieu, Engineering & Robotics; and Marissa Osimo, Health Services.

2025: Alexi Cox, Electronics & Engineering Technology; Samuel Kirby, Electrical; Mikaela Swanson, Biotechnology; and Stephanie Zaitoun, Engineering & Robotics.

2026: Gabrielle Gannon, Engineering & Robotics; Veronica Jordan, Health Services; Daniel Noel, Engineering & Robotics; Khari Torku, HVAC&R; and Parker Waugh, Electronics & Engineering Technology.

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NE Steak and Seafood evolves and grows with the times

BY ROD LEE

Today, more than ever, the Quirk family's New England Steak and Seafood in Mendon is not just about the fare in its name by which the restaurant has thrived for almost sixty years. Famous for its old-fashioned atmosphere, New England Steak and Seafood is also becoming known for such things as partnering with the Mendon Police Department on a "stuff the cruiser" campaign to benefit struggling families in the Blackstone Valley. And, recently, "Christmas dinner to go," featuring Roast Prime Rib of Beef, pumpkin bread, cinnamon rolls and onion rolls. Whitinsville Realtor Jack Walker is among those who regularly frequent New England Steak and Seafood for lunch or dinner. Strong patronage is not uncommon!

- Anticipation continues to build for the opening of Reunion Tap & Table's second location, in the Whitinsville Plaza, in a spot formerly occupied by Jube's. Described by the Phan-



New England Steak and Seafood has become a go-to source for holiday takeout meals.

tom Gourmet as "a big, fun eatery," Reunion's first restaurant in North Grafton was started by brothers Josh and Sean Briggs, Sargon Hanna and "lots of family and friends." The new Reunion site will be a smaller version of the first store but with many of the signature elements including the popular Pork Belly Poutine, Grilled Chicken Wings tossed in a house-made garlic parmesan sauce and French Onion Soup. Look for a launch this month or next; hiring for staff positions is ongoing.

- The Villatico family has a good thing going at J Anthony's Italian Grill in North Oxford and part

of the reason for that is the lounge where "Game Day" including the Patriots' regular season-ending game in Buffalo on January 8 will attract a throng—as will Red Sox games just around the corner. With a Garden Room, a Deck Room and a Terrace Room, J Anthony's is a popular choice for private events.

- Many area residents may not be aware that in addition to such staples as Fried Chicken and Short Rib Shepherd's Pie, Samuel Slater's Restaurant at Indian Ranch in Webster also plays host to events, like a celebration of Elvis Presley's 88th birthday on January 7th—and Comedy Night

fun, which will resume the evening of January 26th.

- Nowhere is "Yankee hospitality" on better display than at the Publick House Historic Inn in Sturbridge, where outstanding cuisine can be accompanied by an overnight stay. The Publick House is also a favorite jumping off point for sightseeing, shopping for antiques, golf and skiing.

Restaurant and food-industry news is welcome for this column. Please submit material to rodlee.1963@gmail.com, or call 774-232-2999.

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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.

February 24th from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Voting ends at the end of the day on Friday, February 17th and the exhibit will end right after the closing ceremony on February 24th. For more information visit opensky.org. To schedule a visit to the gallery, call 508-234-6232 or



Standing tall at Shop Small... Joan Nydam, Kathy Tonry, Keegan Tonry and Lauri Young represented Ms. Tonry's Katalina's Boutique at this year's edition of Shop Small 01588 in downtown Whitinsville. "We are the shop for every beautiful woman there is..." Ms. Tonry says of her store, which recently celebrated another anniversary.

THROUGH FEBRUARY 24

• ValleyCAST, the arts and culture arm of Open Sky Community Services, is partnering with the New England Sculptors Association for the second annual Inside and Out Exhibition. Seventeen sculptors from around New England have created over thirty works that will be on display in the Spaulding R. Aldrich Heritage Gallery, 50 Douglas Road, Whitinsville, and outside on the grounds of the Whitin Mill complex at the same address. The inside exhibit opened with a wine and cheese reception on Friday, January 13th. The public is encouraged to attend the closing reception, which will include announcement of three People's Choice Awards, on Friday,

email Cristi.Collari@opensky.org.

THROUGH JANUARY 31

• "Lights and Icons: A Study in Acrylics," paintings by Jim Wilton, will be on display and for sale at Booklovers' Gourmet, 72 E. Main St., Webster, during regular business hours, Tues.-Sat., 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the café gallery. Artist's Statement: "I have been photographing and painting for years, in fact all my life. I'm mostly self-taught. I have photographed lighthouses as well as other subjects for inspiration for my art. I spent many years painting portraits but have switched it up to trying lighthouses after a hiatus to raise children but

also found myself return to portraits. I began photography of outdoor scenes and wildlife in 2008 after finding digital photography, making it more accessible. A few years ago I began painting again after a friend painted from one of my photos, thus inspiring me to try again. I haven't stopped but also got into crafts such as seashell jewelry boxes, Christmas trees and lighthouses. I hope folks enjoy my work as much as I enjoyed painting it."

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20

• Comedy Night at Samuel Slater's Restaurant, 200 Gore Road, will feature Frank Santorelli from "The Sopranos" with special guests Chris Zito and Mitch Stinson. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. This is a 21+ event.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22

• The New England Country Music Club presents the Rhode Island Rednecks at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge. Doors open at 12:15 with dancing and live entertainment from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

JANUARY 24 & FEBRUARY 21

• "Take a Hike" with the Plummer Place Walking Club, 10:00 a.m., weather permitting, call the Northbridge Senior Center at 508-234-2002 for locations.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

• A Blackstone Valley Partnership Open House will be held at the shared offices of the Blackstone Valley Education Foundation, the Hub, and the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, 670 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville, at 5:00 p.m. RSVP to kkearnan@blackstonevalley.org.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

• An "Alzheimer's Association

Lunch & Learn" program will take place at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. "The 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's & Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia" will be discussed. Sandwiches and salad will be served. Sign up in the main office.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 29

The Samuel Slater Experience, 31 Ray St., Webster, will host an Open House for residents of Dudley with free admission for up to two people from noon to 4:00 p.m. Proof of residency is required.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2

• "Taxes and Retirement," how to optimize your tax strategy and gain control of your taxes in retirement, a seminar, will be presented by Greg Lavelle, CEO of Retirement Advisors, at the Northbridge

Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Coffee, tea and light refreshments will be available. Sign up in the main office.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5

• A New England Country Music Club dance will be held at the Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., Uxbridge, featuring the band "Crossfire." Doors open at 12:15 p.m. with live music from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. www.facebook.com/NECountryMusicClub.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9

• "Going for the Goal," a Super Bowl party and luncheon, will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from noon to 2:00 p.m. Come hear about the historic first Super Bowl from Philip Vandersea, a former Northbridge High football

player who played in the inaugural AFL-NFL championship game as a member of the Green Bay Packers. A welcome and introduction will be offered by Ken LaChapelle, current head football coach of the Northbridge High Rams. This event is sponsored by FINE and the Northbridge Police Association. Cost is \$10 per ticket, two-ticket limit. FINE will be raffling off a 65" TV during this program. Obtain raffle tickets upon signing up at the main office, or at the luncheon.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

• Enjoy a BVT buffet breakfast that includes waffles, pancakes, bacon, sausage, home friends, scrambled eggs and toast, 65 Pleasant St., Upton. Cost is \$7.50 per person plus gratuity. Doors open at 8:30

HAPPENINGS

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SCHULTZY'S PLACE



Webster Five steps up for African Community Education

Webster Five recently donated \$25,000 to African Community Education (ACE), a Worcester organization dedicated to assisting African refugees and immigrant youth and families in achieving educational and social stability. The donation will go towards ACE's campaign to renovate the new ACE Center and expand program access.

ACE's programs include after-school and family education programs, mentorship opportunities, community outreach and more. ACE currently serves 6.3% of African-born immigrants and their children living in Worcester within 200% of the poverty line. With their 2022 move to a larger headquarters, ACE looks to expand its programs and grow its reach to serve even more families.

"Webster Five is proud to support the important work African Community Education is doing to increase access to resources promoting personal growth and stability in our community," Don Doyle,



Pictured in front of ACE's new building are Biodun Akande, board chairperson, and Kaska Yawo, executive director and co-founder of ACE. (Photo courtesy of the organization).

president and CEO of Webster Five, said.

"African Community Education is extremely grateful for Webster Five's generous contribution to our organization," Kaska Yawo, executive director and co-founder of ACE, said. "This gift will have a tremendous impact as we renovate the new ACE Center and expand access to education, outreach and workforce development programs for thousands of African refugees and immigrants in Central Mas-

sachusetts. We are thankful Mr. Doyle and the Webster Five leadership team recognize the important role this project has in our local community and believe in our work at ACE enough to be an early supporter of these efforts."

To learn more about ACE's mission and programs, visit <https://www.africancommunityeducation.org>. To learn more about Webster Five's charitable giving, visit web5.com/about-us/our-story/our-news/.

HEALTHIER BAKING

Berry apple crisp brims with heart-friendly ingredients

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

My original idea for this month's column was different. But it's been difficult not to notice all the germs swarming in the air lately. And while this recipe is just as crave-worthy as the one I'll postpone featuring until next month, it's an ideal breakfast, snack or dessert to eat while you're sick.

Berry apple crisp is probably one of the healthiest desserts you can bake. It's brimming with heart-healthy ingredients, including apples, blueberries, oats and walnuts. Cinnamon also has antioxidant properties. And apples are believed to also be beneficial for lung health. Additionally, having less added sugar and less fat makes this a dessert that can easily double as breakfast.

Blueberries are a super-

food for many reasons. They're certified by the American Heart Association to be a heart-healthy food – which, naturally, is great to eat while you're sick. Loaded with antioxidants, they're also believed to be beneficial in fighting

there aren't many apples to peel, so it even requires less effort to make the berry apple filling.

BERRY APPLE CRISP

Ingredients:

2 Large Apples
2 Cups of Blueberries
¾ Cup of Rolled Oats
½ Cup Chopped Walnuts
1/3 Cup of Sugar
2 Tbsp. Flour (Plus 2 Tbsp. for fruit mixture)
2 tsp. Cinnamon
¼ Cup of Olive Oil

Directions:

Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees. In a bowl, mix together everything except the apples and the blueberries.

Rinse, peel, core and slice the apples, and rinse the blueberries, and spread both, with 2 Tbsp. of flour on the bottom of a 9X9" baking pan/dish.

Distribute the crisp mixture evenly over the apples, and bake at 350

BAKING

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HAPPENINGS

continued from page 19

p.m. Sign up on the main office no later than February 1st. This is a self-drive, self-pay program.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16

• A "Women's Health Forum with Dr. Maggie Lunch & Learn" program will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 11:30 to 12:30 p.m. Lifestyle choices impact the aging process. Come and learn about diet, nutrition, exercise, cognitive activity and social engagement for older adults. Space is limited. Priority will be given to those who have not yet attended one of Dr. Maggie's health forums. Sign up with Amy Wednesday-Friday to attend.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

• "The Violin Kat," music by Violinist Kathryn Haddad, will be presented at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Kat is an eclectic freelance violinist based in the Worcester area. She has performed to many crowds. Light

BAKING

continued from page 20

degrees for 35-40 minutes. Let it cool a little, but serve it warm.



Java King... Jim Hogan of Hogan Brothers Coffee Roasters addresses a meeting of the Webster Dudley Business Alliance at Booklovers' Gourmet in Webster on December 6th. Mr. Hogan has been Store Owner Deb Horan's coffee provider for years and once operated out of a location at 55 E. Main St. in Webster. He has been in business since 1995.

refreshments will be served. Sign up at the main office.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

• A CPR, AED and Epipen Training Class will be held at the Northbridge Senior Center, 20 Highland St., Whitinsville, from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Instructor Scott Celikbas from the Northbridge Fire

Department will train participants in these important lifesaving techniques. A heart-saver certification will be awarded at the end of the course. The cost is \$55 per person, check or cash due to the instructor on the day of training. Sign up at the main office.

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LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Luke finds the Merry in Grinchmas

BY AMY LECLAIRE

Christmas shopping 2022 has been interesting, especially alongside a puppy named Luke Valentino. The retail industry is short staffed, short fused, and short on certain sizes. Not enough help. Not enough patience. Not enough hours in the day to curb long lines of shoppers who sneeze into their elbows, yet still leave us suspicious. Which variant might she be carrying? Tis the season to stay home, I thought to myself one Tuesday, December afternoon, despite managing a To Do list that seemed do-able.

1. Return an oversized rug purchased at Amazon at Kohl's.

2. Shop for a few Christmas gifts.

3. Vacuum my car. (I've found the process of sucking up dirt and washing windows to cleanse my attitude as well).

Like most zealous Christmas shoppers, I wanted to

Get Things Done. Little did I know that a series of unfortunate events were about to foil a well-laid plan.

"We can't take that rug back. You'll need to bring it to Michael's for the return. The label is for UPS." The Kohl's Sales Associate wore a nametag claiming her title. She stated the rule with knowledge, though I couldn't help but notice the glimmer of smile at her lips. Perhaps, she secretly didn't want to help me. Truthfully, who could blame her? My fixation with area rugs (buying and changing) was becoming a problem.

"Okay," I sighed. The rug sagged heavily on my shoulder, compromising a reserve of energy I typically have for shopping mayhem. I felt like a scrawny Santa carrying a sack, and who was soon to ride in a dirty sleigh. Others waiting in line gazed up from their phones to eavesdrop. Their concern, I knew, lay in being first in line.

I hauled the rug back to the car, popped the trunk and stuffed it back in. Luke popped his head out of the sunroof and smiled. "I'm so glad you're back!" My puppy found joy simply upon seeing me. "We have to go to Michael's now, Luke."

Keys in ignition; I backed

up and made my way to Michael's. Slow-moving pedestrians crossed the street. I waved them by and found a snug parking spot.

The 6' x 9' sack hung tiredly over a weakened shoulder. "I was just sent here from Kohl's," I huffed. "Apparently you're able to take returns with UPS labels?"

The employee, as one might guess, did not come with the softness of her store's silk flowers. "We can't take a rug without a box."

My eyes settled on her grey roots. My upper body slouched to the dead weight of an unwanted rug. More productively, my mind wandered to the Michael's storage room, where I imagined castles and castles of cardboard boxes stacked wide and high amongst spools of satin ribbon. The sales associate did not read my mind. Instead, she said, "I can't take that."

"You don't have one cardboard box to spare in this entire store?" With my free arm, I gestured to the store's abundant decorations. Hadn't these items been delivered to the store in boxes?

"Unfortunately we don't," she spat back. "You need to bring it to UPS and have it fully taped up. There's a UPS in Auburn," she added, as though traveling to a third location was helpful. I contemplated a third trip. Then I was struck by an ironic memory—that of my puppy attacking the missing box as would a lion his prey. He enjoyed every moment of dominating that box as it popped and bounced about the floor like a geometric cartoon. Back then it was funny, but now—

"Thank you," I said, and hauled the rug back to the car. Luke popped his head out of his box and smiled. "Hi there! It's such a nice day outside! Love you, Momma!"

It still was funny.

"Guess where we're going, Luke?" I needed to align my attitude with my puppy's optimism. His head squared. He smiled and listened intently.



Luke Valentino is perfectly fine with a photo op; here he poses for the camera while on a Christmas shopping spree.

"We're going to get Luke a present!"

"No way!" He did a puppy dance on the floor of his crate. He understood the majority of my message. "We're going to get Luke" was a phrase he knew, as was "going to get." Lastly, he knew his baby name. "I can't believe this is happening!"

I drove to the opposite side of the Mall, parked, and walked my puppy to the Mall's sidewalk. The Cookie Crumb'l storefront sign sailed into view. We followed the warm aroma of freshly baked cookies to an outdoor bench and sat down.

"What's your puppy's name? Can I pet him? Oh my gosh, this puppy just made my day!" Person after person came over to pet Luke. I broke off warm pieces of a peanut butter cookie to share with my social pup. We told dog stories and laughed. Holiday music filled the air. Luke listened to every person, and lifted his paw. He understood.

He validated. He loved unconditionally. The bitter edges of shopping turmoil crumbled away like pieces of cookie. Luke Valentino had offered the public a special dog's gift, that of Presence.

Then came a Christmas miracle.

There, across the street, in front of Longhorn Steakhouse to be exact, I saw it with my very own eyes—a massive, brown UPS truck. My legs wobbled as I grabbed Luke's leash. Within seconds, the two of us floated towards the truck. The UPS driver, amused by us, rolled down his window. "That is the cutest pup I've ever seen."

"Thank you." I struggled to breathe. "I'm so happy to have found you." Luke looked up at me, then at the driver. "We're so happy to have found you!"

"I have a rug," I huffed. "In my car. That way," I gestured. "We have a rug!" Luke said, sitting proudly at my heels. "I brought it to Kohl's, then to Michael's," I went on. "Wrong size. I was

told I'll need a box in order to return it to you." My problem spilled from me.

He nodded to the back of his truck. "I don't have a ton of room back here."

My heart sank.

"Wanna' play chase?"

Then the driver chuckled like Saint Nick and his cheeks became rosy. "I can make room for your rug. Where are you parked?"

"Seriously? That is so kind of you!" I said. "I have a stuffed cherry pie in the car!" Luke added, trying to keep up.

Minutes later, the three of us congregated at the trunk of my car, where we fumbled to squish the rug into a well-behaved square and seal the deal. "You know what? I can do this in my truck." The driver seemed skeptical of my packing ability. Nonetheless, the Saint Nick of UPS hopped back up into a tall seat and waved good-bye.

Meanwhile, Luke and I made one last stop. Shopping wouldn't be the same without a present for Luke Valentino.

The PetSmart sweater fit him perfectly, and the inscription said it best.

"Merry Grinchmas!"

Thanks to my puppy, I was able to put the Merry back in Christmas that day.

Write to Amy at amyleclaire@hotmail.com

Find Luke on Instagram @livingwithlukevalentino

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Peter Rugg's eternal search—Part II

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

The stage made it to Polly's Inn just as the storm hit and soon a wet peddler entered and sat by the fire. When conversation turned to the phantom chaise, he admitted that he had seen the spectral carriage and its occupants four times in four different states in the last few weeks. Each time, a serious storm followed the sighting. He then, half jesting, remarked how he needed to take out marine insurance on his merchandise if this was going to keep up. Dunwell would encounter the wraith one more time some years later in Hartford, Connecticut while on a business trip. He immediately recognized the glowing countenance, commenting to the alarmed throng that the ghost was further from Boston than ever.

A toll operator on the Charles Street Bridge in Boston had many run-ins with the ethereal carriage. On several occasions, around midnight, the

wagon raced through the booth never even slowing to pay the crossing fee. At one point the operator got so angry he threw his stool at the speeding rig. Imagine the look on his face when the stool passed right through the manifestation and bounced off of the guardrail on the other side of the road.

Mrs. Betsey Croft, who later owned the Rugg house, claimed that a man once came to her door soaking wet with a scared, pale looking child by his side. The sight gave her a start, as she knew he was not of the present. His clothes were at least a century old and he spoke in an old English dialect. As she glanced over his shoulder in the moonlight, she saw a decrepit antique carriage at the curb with a massive black horse harnessed to it. When the man asked for Mrs. Rugg she told him Mrs. Rugg died many years ago at a very old age, and that she has owned the house for a half a century. The odd-looking man told her he

was in haste and needed to get to Boston. She told him that he was in Boston, but he did not acknowledge her insistence on the matter. He spoke of roads and people from years past and maintained his need to get home. As she looked them over intensely she knew beyond any doubt by their eerie shade that they were not of this world, but instead, ghosts of the past revisiting their former home.

William Austin wrote the accounts of Peter Rugg from 1824 to 1826 and claimed to have met the ghost himself when Rugg flagged down his carriage. The man identified himself as Peter Rugg and asked for directions to Middle Street in Boston. When told he was near Hartford, Connecticut, Rugg became irritated and argued with Austin before speeding off in furious skepticism at Austin's statement. The rig, horse and riders all vanished before the road turned.

Solid proof of Rugg's eternal journey exists in

North Kingstown, RI where Route 1 crosses over Route 403, also known as Devil's Foot Road. It is there where Reverend Samuel Nickles encountered the wraith of Peter Rugg while returning to Providence from the village of Wickford. Near dusk, the preacher and his old nearsighted nag, Romeo, were caught in a sudden thunderstorm as they rode through Quonset. As they entered a narrow passage between a steep hill and a rock ledge, he heard the thunderous sound of hooves in front of him. He looked up and saw a man frantically pulling at the reins of an immense horse and a frightened child gripping his arm for dear life. The horse drawing the speeding chaise had eyes glowing red like coals from a blacksmith's fire.

The reverend's nag became spooked and threw him from his saddle onto the great ghost bay. The preacher let out a scream of mercy and the horse bolted up the rock ledge in a flash of lightning, throwing the

priest to the ground, unconscious.

When the preacher awoke, the sun was shining and Romeo was grazing in the grass nearby. As he glared at the rock, he saw cloven hoof prints embedded into the edifice. He sped from the sight but for years to come, people from all over flocked to see the rock with its footprints that still sits behind a row of trees near a gravel parking lot immediately after the

bridge on Route 1 South.

What holds Rugg eternally bound to wander the earth? A tavern keeper once suggested that Heaven has a way of setting trial or judgment on a man for his actions or words. Peter Rugg, when he failed to fulfill his oath, cursed himself and his daughter to eternally ride the New England roads searching in vain for home.

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REAL ESTATE



BY MARK MARZEOTTI

Planning to retire? It could be time to make a move

If you're thinking about retirement or have already retired this year, you may be planning your next steps. One of your

goals could be selling your house and finding a home that more closely fits your needs.

Fortunately, you may be in a better position to make a move than you realize. Here are a few things to think about when making that decision.

Consider how long you've been in your home. From 1985 to 2008, the average length of time homeowners typically stayed in their homes was only six years. But according to the National Association of Real-

tors (NAR), that number is rising today, meaning many homeowners are living in their houses even longer.

When you live in a home for a significant period of time, it's natural for you to experience a number of changes in your life while you're in that house. As those life changes happen, your needs may change. And if your current home no longer meets them, you may have better options waiting for you.

Consider the equity you've gained. Also, if you've

been in your home for more than a few years, you've likely built up significant equity that can fuel your next move. That's because the longer you've been in your home, the more likely it's grown in value due to home price appreciation.

While home price growth varies by state and local area, the national average shows the typical homeowner who's been in their house for five years saw it increase in value by over 50%. And the average homeowner who's owned their home for

30 years saw it almost triple in value over that time.

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THE CAR DOCTOR

jpaul@aanortheast.com

Timing chain in VW engine should last the life of the car



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. After reading your recent article, I was wondering whether my car has a timing belt or a timing chain. I own a 2017 Volkswagen Passat SEL Premium with a 1.8 Liter Turbo. It is an absolutely great vehicle and has been a joy to own.

A. Over the years Volkswagen has gone back and forth between timing belts and timing chains. In your vehicle with the 1.8-liter engine it uses a timing chain. Volkswagen did have some issues with timing chain failure in earlier years due to the timing chain guides. With your car if the engine is well maintained, there is no reason to think the timing chain shouldn't last the life of the car.

Q. I have 1986 Dodge Aries that is running poorly. I am trying to get a scan tool for this engine, but all I find is the OBD 1 (on-board-diagnostics) to OBD 2 adapter wire. Can use that with the OBD2 scanner for 1996- 2022 cars on my Dodge? My mechanic already changed the computer and cap, rotor and spark plugs. Although, that did not fix the running condition, it has a high idle,

and bad fuel mileage.

A. These cars had pretty good on-board diagnostics that didn't require a scan tool. Cycle the ignition key ON-OFF-ON-OFF-ON within five seconds. Then count the number of times the "check engine" lamp flashes on and off. The number of flashes represents the code. A code of 55 is the end of the code string. If you only get a code 55 there are no hard error codes stored in the computer. It has been my experience that if there are no vacuum leaks and the idle speed control motor is operating normally, the issue is a poor electrical ground. The main grounding point is near the thermostat housing and over time these connections get corroded and cause a host of drivability problems.

Q. I'm looking for a big SUV for my growing family, not something quite as big as a Chevrolet Suburban or Ford Expedition XL. I have narrowed my choices to the Nissan Armada, GMC Yukon or Tahoe and Toyota Sequoia, any thoughts on these?

A. They are all good choices if a large SUV is what you are looking for. In the spirit of full disclosure, I only have driven the 2023 Sequoia a short distance, the hybrid drive seemed to work smoothly but I found the ride a bit stiff. The

Armada is a good choice and a bit cheaper than the competition. Recently I evaluated the 2023 Chevy Tahoe which is very similar to the GMC Yukon. I found the performance from the big V-8 engine impressive and 10-speed transmission was a great match to the engine. There is seating for up to eight and even in the third-row adults can be comfortable. The second and third rows fold flat, and the cargo space is cavernous. Fuel economy was with the 6.2-liter V-8 was according to the EPA 14 MPG in the city and 18 MPG on the highway. My road test was mostly city driving and I averaged 15.2 MPG according to the on-board computer and premium fuel is recommended. Like all new vehicles it is important to road test the tech and I found all of the controls simple and easy to use. Of the vehicles you are looking at I would put the Chevy Tahoe/Yukon, first, Toyota Sequoia second and Nissan Armada in third place.

Q. I own a 1991 Ford Mustang ragtop, with only 91,000 miles on it which is garaged in my winter home in Florida. I installed four new Cooper Cobra tires about 3000 miles ago. I returned once in summer and once in fall to check on things. When I got there two tires were flat. I went to two different tire shops to check for leak and nothing was

found. Could the original rims be the problem. Can I add a sealant to stop the leak?

A. Although tire sealant may work it would be my last resort. I would rather the tires were removed from the wheels, then the wheels cleaned, and a bead sealer used to get a better seal. Corrosion on the wheels can over time can be the problem and sometimes the cleaning and sealing solves the problem. But yes at 32 years old the wheels could even be starting to get porous or are beyond the point of sealing and may need replacement.

Q. I brought my car into the garage, and they replaced the two front wheel bearings and hub assemblies. When I picked the car up it seemed okay then I started hearing a slight whistling sound, didn't think much of it so I just shut my window and continue to drive within 10

minutes I was slowing to a stop to take a right hand turn I was going very slow as a residential neighborhood I slightly pressed on the brake as I was taking my right hand turn and it just started clanging and rocking really loud with the lightest pressure on the brakes. I never had any issues of that nature prior to bring my car into the garage. What should I do?

A. Don't drive the car and have it towed back to the garage to be inspected. From your description it sounds as if the mechanic may have not se-

cured a brake caliper. When the brakes are applied the caliper may be jumping off its mount and hitting the inside of the wheel.

John Paul is an AAA Northeast's Car Doctor. He has over forty years' experience and is an ASE-certified master technician. He will answer readers' questions each week. Email your questions to jpaul@aanortheast.com. Follow John on Twitter @johnfpaul and friend him on Facebook, jrjohnfpaul.

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Are you SAD? There's a good reason for it

BY JANET STOICA

Do you have Seasonal Affective Disorder (otherwise known as SAD)? Although I am not a psychiatrist nor do I hold a medical degree, I wanted to write an article about

the emotions we all experience during the holiday season. The term that has been used over the past many years to describe our low points has come to be known as SAD. It is a reference to the low energy levels and mood changes

that occur when sunlight diminishes beginning in September. For some of us, this slowly encroaching low point in our states of mind happens once annually beginning in the fall season and lasting until the spring. The sun sets

sooner, the days shorten, holidays approach, anxiety sets in, and maybe loneliness begins to nudge us during the early onset of the season's darkness. We become less active and staying in bed later seems like a better choice than

jumping out from beneath those cozy blankets to greet the day.

Sydney Zatz of Rochester, Minnesota's ABC news interviewed Dr. Craig Sawchuk of the Mayo Clinic and wrote the following: "For some people, they may experience this in early fall in mid-late September when the weather is still fairly pleasant. For other people, this might not hit until mid-January," said Dr. Craig Sawchuk, a psychologist at Mayo Clinic. SAD happens because of a chemical change in the brain when your body naturally makes more melatonin because it's dark. Melatonin is a sleep-related hormone released by the pineal gland to the brain at night that has been associated with sleep/awake cycles.

"Some folks might be more vulnerable to that. In return, with more exposure to light, that helps to regulate the system more. Most are probably familiar with Winter Seasonal Affective Disorder, but it can also happen in summer. Those symptoms include trouble sleeping, weight

loss, and increased irritability. But how do you know these feelings are seasonal, rather than a sign of long-term depression?

"When it's more the seasonal pattern, usually what we see is this happening for a person over a course of two years so that starts to establish more of a pattern. And then what you do actually find are individual differences of when these symptoms come on or the onset of those symptoms.

When those symptoms do hit, it's recommended you stay social, get regular exercise, and use light therapy. A light box mimicking outdoor light to help boost your mood. It can especially be helpful for those who work overnight shifts. They may experience more variability in their sleep patterns but if there's an opportunity to regulate those patterns that would be great. However, when you do wake up in the morning, having to go with the artificial light is the way to go. And hav-

SAD

continued on page 27



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SAD*continued from page 26*

ing a good, established wakeup routine. It's normal to have days when you feel down. If you can't get motivated to do things you normally enjoy that's when you should see a doctor."

SAD is also experienced



when we are completely stressed out by the holidays. You know the feeling. Rushing around to get tasks completed before a family gathering and even

the stress of buying gifts for those who won't really appreciate them. Who among us hasn't returned at least one holiday gift we've received? Then, of course, as we grow older we lose family members who always gathered with us during the holidays. One by one the jovial, the

comedians, the shy, and even the grumpy of the large family we remember from holidays past become the ghosts and tender emotional moments of our

lives. Suddenly, we realize, the joyful family celebrations have evaporated. We can still replay those gatherings in our minds but those happy times certainly can bring on melancholy not to mention tears to our eyes. The smiles, laughter, and sounds of glasses clinking in toasts to the holidays are but a distant memory. It is just so difficult for some of us to get through this dark time but most of us do get through it with hopes and forward-looking thoughts of a new year and how spring is not far behind with its promise of crocuses poking their beautifully vibrant heads through the fresh damp soil, trees in bloom, warmer days, longer days, beautiful sunsets, and the traces of snow that are nearly melted away like the past unhappy moods of winter. Soon, the spring and summer sun will be smiling upon us once again.

Contact Janet: jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



The Worcester Bravehearts have officially released their 2023 schedule, which includes 64 games, 32 of them to be played at Fitton Field. For the first time in team history, the Bravehearts will host an "Opening Morning" game on May 24th at 10:30 a.m. for a kids-only Baseball in Education Day in which schools from across Central Massachusetts can take a field trip to see the Bravehearts play their first game of the year. The team will then host its Opening Night on Friday, May 26th against the reigning Futures League Champion Nashua Silver Knights. This game will feature ceremonies marking the team's tenth anniversary. The team will host two more "You-Choose-The-Rules" games on their Baseball in Education Days on June 6th and 7th.

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