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Hearts adorn the table occupied by state legislators at a Valentine's Day breakfast hosted by the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce at Galliford's Restaurant & Tavern.

'Be My Valentine' spirit prevails at Chamber breakfast

BY ROD LEE

The cozy relationship between the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce and its state legislative delegation might come as a surprise to some observers.

So too the warmth that exists between the elected representatives and senators themselves—a mix of Democrats and Republicans.

But it is real; and it is genuine, as those attending a "Love Your Legislator" breakfast at Galliford's Restaurant & Tavern at Southwick's Zoo in Mendon on Valentine's Day saw first-hand.

This chumminess is a direct result of the effort BVCC President and CEO Jeannie Hebert and her staff put into recognizing the work Sen. Michael Moore, Sen. Ryan

Fattman, Sen. Anne Gobi, Rep. Paul Frost, Rep. Joe McKenna, Rep. David Muradian Jr., Rep. Brian Murray, Rep. Mike Soter and Rep. David LeBoeuf do on behalf of the Chamber's membership—and those legislators' other constituents.

Liz O'Neil pinning hearts on people as they arrived at Galliford's on the morning of February 14th typified the welcoming mood that existed, as did the forthrightness of the legislators in fielding questions posed by Kevin Hayes and several persons in the audience.

Ms. O'Neil is director of programs, events and membership/marketing coordinator for the Chamber. Mr. Hayes is a senior vice president with Millbury Federal Credit Union and the

Chamber's current chair.

In just a little over an hour, once the business at hand began, much information was conveyed about pressing issues. From the revelation that the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Council (CMRPC) is updating its five-year economic development strategy—which may mean more funding for the Chamber—to what can be done about families moving out of the state, to the high school dropout rate, to whether state agencies will continue to be allowed to meet "virtually," the legislators produced the answers their interrogators were looking for.

CHAMBER
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New Grafton veterans service officer gets down to business

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

For a fairly small Massachusetts town, Grafton has had more than its share of inspiring people and organizations. Earlier this month, Grafton native Steve Spagnuolo inspired many with his achievement. The defensive coordinator for the Kansas City Chiefs just earned his third Super Bowl ring.

Such athletic achievements are exciting. But some Grafton businesses and organizations are inspiring people in other ways as well.

There's good news for area veterans. This month, Jeffrey Farrell, was hired to be a Veterans Service Officer for the **Central Massachusetts Veterans' Services District**, which includes Grafton. Farrell is a United States Marine Corps veteran who served in Operation Enduring Freedom in Bahrain and later served in Afghanistan. He encourages his fellow veterans to contact him at jfarrell@centralmassvets.org or 774-239-2208.

The **Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Women's Success Network** and some local banks have also been inspiring people. Sponsored by **Homefield Credit Union, Millbury Credit Union, UniBank, Whitin Community Center** and the BVCC, the WSN has been holding the **New Mother Collection Drive** to benefit local new moms in need. Through Feb. 28, people can drop off new baby items at the banks and other locations listed on the BVCC website, www.blackstonevalley.org.

One business that's helping



Marine Corps Veteran Jeffrey Farrell is Grafton's new veterans service officer.

inspiring Grafton nonprofits that serve seniors and others is Tufts University. Its Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine is located in North Grafton. Grants for \$3,000 from Tufts Community Grants program will be awarded to non-profit organizations in Grafton, Boston, Medford and Somerville that have volunteers who are or have been associated with Tufts (i.e. alumni, students, current employees, etc.) in the past year. Grant applications are being accepted through Monday March 1. Applications and more information can be found at go.tufts.edu/tcg.

Koopman Lumber, the hardware and paint store which has a North Grafton location as well as several others, continues to expand. In the spring, the store will open a Dennis location. The

VETERANS
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CHAMBER*continued from page 1*

Which is not to say everyone was completely satisfied. When Devon Kurtz who is executive director of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor told the panel “we are looking for state funding for the bikeway, wayfinding, signage and programming” and Sen. Murray suggested in reply that he “work through your legislator,” Mr. Kurtz said “that’s all of you.” The matter would have been left unsettled had not Sen. Gobi noted that a new entity—the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation—would likely play a role in helping the Corridor advance its goals. That, and Sen. Fattman pointed out that \$50,000 had been asked for, to continue building out the bikeway.

Addressing the specter of people leaving Massachusetts, Sen. Fattman pointed a finger of blame at the recently passed “millionaire’s tax,” and the estate tax, which together represent “a major problem,” he said. “People invest in what they are building their entire lives and when they die they get taxed. We don’t need this money. We have almost \$9 billion in the Rainy Day Fund,” Sen. Fattman said.

The subject that garnered the most attention was kids dropping out of school, at a statewide rate of 6-7%. The legislators were eager to tackle this one.

Rep. Muradian said the superintendent of schools in Northbridge told him that the system was implementing a “freshman academy model”—a Positive Behavior Intervention Support, or PBIS program—that has had “great success.”

Rep. McKenna said “the idea is to target students who may not go beyond four years of high school, and the Chamber and its education hub” figure actively in addressing this need to help young people on their career path.

Almost every legislator weighed in on the dropout issue.

“Our numbers are disproportionately high among the ELL student body in my community,” Sen. Murray said. Rep. Frost added “we should allow public schools to adopt a vocational component. Not everyone can go to Valley Tech. Millbury has started this with the carpenters union.” Sen. Gobi said “I taught high school for ten years. In Spencer, we are finding ways to get the business community involved.” Sen. Fattman said “COVID was devastating” and that in Southbridge, where the state came in to take over the school

system, an amount of “social angst” remains, but that this is being dealt with. Sen. Moore said “Chapter 70 money has been increased.” Rep. Soter said “when I went to high school you had certain trades. I am introducing a bill for satellite pop-up locations in all of our schools. We will tap resources in the community, which will start a four-year process as if a kid was going to a vocational school. This will prevent a [financial] hit to our schools” that is inflicted “when students move to a new school.”

The enormity of the challenges local legislators face in drafting bills was apparent when a question was posed about what can be done to ensure the safety of public buildings.

“As of last week about seven thousand bills have been filed, so I’m not sure,” Sen. Moore said.

What is certain is that the Chamber and its state legislators will stay on top of the situation.

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

Barry Bacon who recently opened Spicy Waters, a distillery in Millbury, asks legislators at the BVCC’s Valentine’s Day breakfast if they can help in a plan he and Bri Azier of Bri’s Sweet Treats have for pairing spirits and chocolates; “we can’t put them together in one,” right now, he said.

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VETERANS*continued from page 1*

shop will be its first on Cape Cod. And in addition to a retail space, it will feature a door and window showroom, a kitchen and bath showroom and a lumber yard.

Murphy Academy of Irish Dance has been preparing for one of its favorite times of the year. The dance school will once again share its love and talent for Irish

dancing with audiences at many St. Patrick’s Day celebrations in the area, including the **Worcester County St. Patrick’s Parade**. In the meantime, some of its dancers have also been delighting international audiences. This month, some of its students have been competing at the renowned **All Ireland Dancing Championships** in Killarney, County Kerry in Ireland.

These are just some of the lo-

cal businesses and organizations that have been inspiring people lately. Since we’re still in the first quarter of the year and most days of 2023 and our own goals are before us, it’s motivating to hear about their achievements!

Contact Christine with your business news items at cmgale-one15@gmail.com.



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Xpressly Yours ... a letter from the editor

Women's Success Network, BV Chamber spread a little love

February may be a short month, but it is also one of substance thanks to the Women's Success Network and its parent organization: the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce.



The first day of February marked the start of the Women's Success Network's "New Mother Collective Drive," with donations of such items as baby formula, diapers, wipes, baby toiletries, new clothes (size newborn-4T), new baby equipment (car seats, bouncy seats, pack and plays, etc.), gift cards, handmade items (blankets, hats, toys, etc.) and items to pamper mom being accepted at a number of convenient drop-off locations.

Homefield Credit Union is one of those and pleased to be a participating, according to President and CEO Karl Moisan and his managers and staff.

"This is our first time," Mr. Moisan said, of the second annual event, which runs right through the 28th. But giving back is nothing new for Homefield Credit Union, whose employees engage with community through such activities as the Frosty stop with the Grafton Fire Department, the Grafton PD's annual toy drive and night out initiatives, the UMass Cancer Walk and Family Night at the Bandstand in Milford.

This past fall, Homefield worked with the Grafton PD to collect seventy-five toys for the "fill-a-cruiser" campaign, and with the Post Office Pub to arrange for sixty meals for local senior citizens—complete with a slice of apple pie.

Homefield has been involved with the Chamber's Women Success Network for just under a year. The New Mother Collective Drive coincides with the start of the credit union's "twelve months of giving," Mr. Moisan said.

Day One of the New Mother Collective Drive was also a "Rewards Day" for Homefield employees, in which they are allowed to dress down in recognition of efforts they have made in the credit union's ongoing "quest for the best" push.

UniBank, Millbury Federal Credit Union, the Chamber and the Whitin Community Center are also all drop-off sites for the drive. Donations will be distributed to local food pantries and nonprofit community agencies serving new mothers in the Blackstone Valley.

In the case of the banks and credit unions, donations are being accepted at all branches. All of the banks and credit unions participating are active on the giving-back-to-community front.

Individuals and families that want to donate an item not listed among those that are being accepted for the New Mother Collection Drive are asked to email administrator@blackstonevalley.org or to call 508-234-9090.

Pat Hurton notes that the Women's Success Network is

Pictured from left: Karl Moisan, Jen Marble, Stephanie Antaya, Maureen Wojnar, Julie Tripp and Kelly Benoit prepare to accept donations at Homefield Credit Union in Grafton on February 1st as the Women's Success Network's month-long New Mother Collective Drive kicks off.

always looking for new members as a way for women to expand their business opportunities through access to prominent speakers, educational workshops and networking social events.

February and March are busy months for the Blackstone Valley Chamber.

On Friday, February 10th at 10:30 a.m. there will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Spicy Water Distillery at 108 Elm St. in Millbury. The new distillery specializes in creating unique handcrafted flavor experiences with such offerings as Caribbean-inspired rum, gluten-free vodka, a variety of gins and an American agave spirit.

A "Love Your Legislator" breakfast at Galliford's Restaurant & Tavern at Southwick's Zoo in Mendon will occur, appropriately enough, on Valentine's Day—Tuesday, February 14th—as a salute to the region's legislative delegation. The event will give attendees a chance to ask questions about pending bills in the Massachusetts House and Senate and other action taking place on Beacon Hill.

Then on Saturday, March 25th, the Chamber's annual Home and Community Expo returns for the twenty-third time at the North-



bridge High School Field House. rodlee.1963@gmail.com or 774-232-2999. Contact Rod Lee at

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AG supports Sen. Moore-filed bill to enhance community safety

Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell recently announced her support for legislation in the 2023-2024 session to create safer communities, build economic prosperity and stability and protect vulnerable communities. The five bills filed prior to the legislative filing deadline align with ongoing work in the Attorney General's Office as well as the priorities laid out in AG Campbell's inaugural address. One of the bills she supports was filed by Senator Michael O. Moore (D-Millbury).

The bills include proposals to bolster the tools used by the AG's Office to address abuse and neglect of elderly and disabled patients,

"I'm pleased to have the support of Attorney General Campbell for my bill An Act relative to silencers, and I look forward to collaborating on this issue throughout the legislative cycle," said Sen. Moore (D-Millbury). "This legislation will align Massachusetts' laws with the federal definition of silencers to close any loopholes. All Bay Staters should be able to feel safe in their communities."

"If these bills become law, they will ensure we have the tools to fully protect our residents and our

strengthen protections for consumers, electric ratepayers, victims of crime and better enforce the state's common-sense gun laws.

most vulnerable from abuse while holding bad actors accountable," Attorney General Campbell said. "Our office will continue to partner with the Legislature to pass laws that allow for greater economic prosperity for our residents while building safer, healthier communities so the next generation can do better than the last."

AG Campbell has signed on to the following bills:

SD1829, An Act relative to silencers.

SD968 / HD3662, An Act strengthening the Attorney General's tools to protect nursing home residents and other patients from abuse and neglect.

SD1829 / HD3258, An Act modernizing protections for consumers in automobile transactions.

SD648 / HD3214, An Act relative to electric ratepayer protections.

SD1511 / HD709, An Act to protect the privacy of crime victims.

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BY JANET STOICA

Last year, a teacher I know in my local school system asked me to be a judge at a competition for high school students at the DCU Center in Worcester. I

profession in-between.

The judges are seated in various large conference rooms awaiting pairs of student presenters who must use presentation standards established by DECA. Each presentation involves a scenario for

much like that in real life if one were presenting an idea/product to a business, the students have up to 15 minutes to make their pitch. They review what they are about to present for their marketing goals and then dive into the salient



enjoyed that competition so much that I enrolled as a judge again this year for the January 12th activity.

The event, entitled DECA ("Distributive Education Clubs of America") District 7 Competition, involves students who prepare business presentations while in groups of two. They are given their assignment after they have arrived at the competition venue and must use their prep time wisely team-collaborating to not only prepare their marketing techniques but also to practice their public-speaking skills. The students are bussed in from high schools as far as Palmer to Grafton and all towns in-between. Judges are teachers, sales reps, managers, lawyers, and every

marketing a product or service. These young women and men in attendance are dressed in business attire such as suits, business dresses, or jackets and ties. Do teenagers really dress like this? Is this for real? Yes, it most definitely is....seeing is believing, and immediately gives us judges a refreshingly excellent first impression of our future leaders of tomorrow. Most of these high schoolers are in their junior or senior years but a few are also freshmen and sophomores. I must give a large amount of credit to the freshmen and sophomores for their ability to qualify for this district event.

Once formal introductions are made by the students to the judges,

points of their presentation. One student will begin the presentation and hand off the next section to their partner. After their address, judges ask the team prepared questions and listen intently to their responses. Students are then thanked for their time while judges, using an e-tablet or laptop, must then score the students on a scale of 1-8 (with 8 being the high score) on various aspects of their presentation skills. Judges' comments are also encouraged and appreciated for the benefit of student review.

I was blown away, once again, by the professionalism and imaginations of these future leaders of our country. Not only were they exact and extremely proficient in their presentations but their courtesy to one another as they finished each piece of their report was truly exceptional. Their parent(s) and/or caregiver(s) are to be commended for their teenager's manners and mindset. Their instructors are to be praised for their coaching skills assisting our future leaders to stay

on course and to the point. I mean, these students were extraordinary, they were stupendous, they were rock stars! Of course I'm impressed and you would be too after seeing, reading, and hearing too much negative behavior that seems to permeate our society these days.

Listening to the words and watching the behavior of all the young men and women at the DECA competition will remain with me for months to come. I was astounded by their competence, their mannerisms, and their style. I have truly been DECA-fied and hope to continue judging at this most important event which will always serve to rejuvenate my faith in our best and brightest younger generation. "Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family." Kofi Annan

Contact Janet at jstoica@TheYankeeXpress.com



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Nursing students pinned at Valley Tech; promising careers ahead

It requires a solid education, skill, and compassion to become a nurse and care for patients. The Moonlight Program in Practical Nursing at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School (BVT) in Upton is challenging and rewarding. Its graduates will tell you that pursuing life-changing training takes perseverance, dedication, and hard work. The adult evening program recently recognized the achievements of the Class of 2023 during a pinning ceremony held at the school. Twenty proud graduates were pinned and received their nursing certificates, marking the culmination of one and a half years

and over 1,090 hours of instruction balanced with work and family obligations.

The ceremony began with a warm welcome from Practical Nursing Coordinator Joann L. Monks, MBA, MSc, RN-BC, RMA, who spoke highly of the program and the accomplishments of the graduates, faculty, and staff to meet the objectives of the program. Monks said, "This class is beyond prepared to test for the National Council Licensure Examination-Practical Nurses exam. We're proud of all you have accomplished in our time together."

Superintendent-Director Dr. Michael F. Fitzpatrick spoke about

the need for skilled nurses. He said "well-trained, you are a valuable resource for the residents, hospitals, and health care providers of the Blackstone Valley and beyond." He also recognized two students, who chose to attend BVT not once but twice, graduates of BVT's Health Services program, Amanda Scott (*Class of 2004*) and Emily Donnelly (*Class of 2019*).

Class President Mary Driscoll gave a Class Address. The guest speaker, Assistant Nursing Director at Sterling Village, Jonathan Boutwell, LPN, congratulated the graduates on their journey to becoming nurses and making a difference. In addition to the



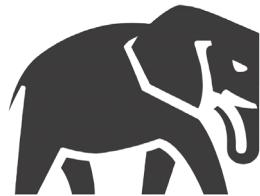
The PN Class of 2023 (from left to right by row): Back: Prosper Amoah, Mary Driscoll, Emmanuel Leke, Michaedis Ateawung, Emily Donnelly, and Jill Keddy. Middle: Tawanda Small, Jane Natabi, Kaleigh Ndawula, Amanda Scott, Ashley Cormier, and Lisa Barton-Ramos. Front: Kristen Perham, Kerry Devine, Dawn Atchue, Tracy Silva, Michelle Kluesner, and Catherine Kagunda. Not pictured: Jacqueline Eller and Kelly Schroeder-Mullett.

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presentation of the certificates and pins, faculty and legislative awards (the Massachusetts House of Representatives Muradian, Murray, and Soter) provided certificates,

and Prosper Amoah, Catherine Kagunda, and Tracey Silva received the Faculty Recognition Award. Representing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Senators Ryan Fattman and Michael Moore congratulated the graduates on their chosen professions and promising careers as nurses.

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THE PN CLASS OF 2023

(graduates, listed alphabetically by last name):

Prosper Amoah (Worcester); Dawn Atchue (Grafton); Michaedis Ateawung (Milford); Lisa Barton-Ramos (Clinton); Ashley Cormier (North Brookfield); Kerry Devine, (Uxbridge); Emily Donnelly (Millbury);

Mary Driscoll (Milford); Jacqueline Eller (Natick); Catherine Kagunda (Worcester); Jill Keddy (Shrewsbury); Michelle Kluesner (Milford); Emmanuel Leke (Milford); Jane Natabi (Natick); Kaleigh Ndawula (Northbridge); Kristina Perham (Douglas); Kelly Schroeder-Mullett (Bellingham); Amanda Scott (Northbridge); Tracey Silva (Framingham); and Tawanda Small (Norwood).

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Can You Plan for an Unplanned Retirement?



Mark Freeman

FINANCIAL FOCUS

Many people plan to take an early retirement, so when that day arrives, they're ready for it. But what if you were to face an unplanned retirement? Would you be prepared to deal with the financial issues?

It's something worth thinking about, because any number of factors — illness, a spouse's illness, downsizing, other issues

— could lead to an abrupt departure from the workforce. But taking action while you're still working may help you make the transition easier on yourself.

Your first move, of course, should be to at least consider the possibility of having to retire earlier than you planned. You can then move on to some concrete steps, possibly including the following.

Build an emergency fund. Under any circumstances, it's a good idea to build an emergency fund — but it's especially important if you want to prepare for an unforeseen retirement. Generally speaking, your emergency fund should contain three to six months' worth of living expenses, with the money kept in a liquid, low-risk account. But if you suspect an earlier-than-anticipated retirement may be in your future, and you have some time to prepare for it, you

should consider an emergency fund that contains a full year's worth of expenses.

Consider your portfolio's asset allocation. If you're concerned about an unexpected retirement, you may want to consider the equities allocation in your portfolio. If you think you may need to tap into your portfolio sooner than you expected, you may not want to be over-exposed to investments most vulnerable to market volatility. However, these are the same investments that offer you the most growth potential — which you'll need to help stay ahead of inflation. So, look for an investment balance that's appropriate for your needs. As part of this positioning, you may want to shift some assets into income-producing vehicles, while also adding to the "cash" portion of your portfolio to boost your liquidity.

Evaluate your Social Security op-

tions. An unplanned retirement may cause you to consider taking Social Security earlier than you had planned. You can start taking Social Security when you're 62, but your monthly benefits will be up to 30% lower than if you had waited until your full retirement age, which is likely between 66 and 67. If you have sufficient income through other sources, you may be able to delay taking Social Security until your checks will be bigger — but of course, if you need the money, waiting may not be an option.

Address your health care needs. If you take an unplanned retirement, and you have employer-sponsored health insurance, you'll have to look for alternatives. You might be able to get extended coverage from your employer, but this could be quite expensive. Of course, if you're already 65, you can get on Medicare, but if you're

younger, you might be able to get coverage under your spouse's plan. If that's not an option, you may want to explore one of the health care exchanges created by the Affordable Care Act. To learn more about these exchanges, visit healthcare.gov.

Taking an unexpected retirement can certainly be challenging — but the more prepared you are, the better your outcomes are likely to be.

If you would like to discuss your personal situation with a financial advisor contact:

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Edward Jones Financial Advisor
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NCTV, Charter locked in a stalemate over cable contract?

BY ROD LEE

Viewers of programming on Northbridge Community Television (NCTV) are well aware of the station's longstanding issue with cable service provided to the town by Charter Communications, also now known as Charter Spectrum.

Bill Tartaglia, who has been director of the local-access channel for almost twenty-two years, certainly is.

Mr. Tartaglia was front and center on the evening of January 24th at a public hearing held in the selectmen's chambers at Northbridge Town Hall to run down by way of a video presentation how NCTV contributes to townspeople's way of life—and to reiterate his concerns about Charter's failings as a cable provider.

His comments, and those offered by Harry Berkowitz who chairs the town's Cable Advisory Committee, and others in attendance, were timely; NCTV's contract with Charter is set to expire in May, and there is uncertainty as to whether a new ten-year deal is in the offing—and whether Charter will accede to NCTV's "wish list" going forward.

The rub comes in Charter's seeming unwillingness to engage in

any sort of dialogue with the town. That is worrisome as NCTV looks for an increase in both the amount of money Charter forks over for programming and for equipment.

"We are at 3.5% of what Charter grosses in Northbridge, and that's in the millions," Mr. Berkowitz said. "For us to stay in business we have to see that increased to 5 percent. For equipment, we are asking for \$130,000. The only money NCTV gets is from cable. Charter owns the fiber and we have no control over it; and Verizon is not interested in coming in (as a replacement cable provider)."

Over the years, NCTV has consistently upgraded both its equipment and the content it offers viewers—with a staff of just a few employed individuals, and "active volunteers." As Mr. Tartaglia noted, everything from Tai Chi to Days of Vinyl, Board of Selectmen and School Committee meetings and Memorial Day exercises are available—along with an App store, Google play, ROKU, live stream, video on demand and archives, for example.

Mr. Berkowitz, fighting a cold but fully engaged, said "the last contract allowed us to upgrade to where we are today."

Charter is an often unresponsive



"Women of Worth" is typical of the richly varied programming offered to viewers by NCTV.

partner, Mr. Tartaglia, Mr. Berkowitz and Town Manager Adam Gaudette said.

There is not much the town can do, Mr. Tartaglia said, echoing the thoughts of a woman in attendance who said "they have us over a barrel."

Charter was invited by certified mail to the public hearing, but was a no show. Charter's community rep doesn't return telephone calls, Mr. Gaudette added.

Compounding the situation is

that Charter is losing subscribers, which means the cost for the rest of its customers goes up; and with more and more people switching to streaming, Northbridge faces the dilemma of how to recoup those funds for regular cable.

One of NCTV's biggest complaints about Charter is that the company "changed our channels" from low on the dial to the 190s "without our input," Mr. Tartaglia said.

That happened a while ago

despite strong protest from local access.

Charter is a huge company with 32 million customers in 41 states and more than 93,000 employees.

Charter has an iron grip on its relationship with the town of Northbridge.

"It's a monopoly," Mr. Gaudette said, just before the public hearing—the first of two—ended.

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

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Valley Tech Superintendent's Dinner is March 16

Journey to the Polynesian Islands this spring by attending the 29th annual Superintendent's Gourmet Dinner held at Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical

begin with a social hour at 5 p.m. with champagne & hors d'oeuvres, followed by a multi-course dinner at 6 p.m.

The gala event is a significant

program and, by design, gives current students a taste of the skills necessary for success in the food, beverage, and hospitality industry. Tickets which are \$140 per person

forward to welcoming you to this special event, so don't delay; call

today. Aloha!



High School (BVT) on Thursday, March 16. The competition center will be transformed into a tropical dining oasis. "Polynesian" is the theme the students have chosen for this year's event. A variety of dishes on this theme will complement carefully selected wines. The evening will

fundraiser for the school, which invites the Blackstone Valley to celebrate quality career and technical education each spring with a lavish reception and an elaborate dinner. This five-star dining experience is planned, prepared, and served by students, faculty, and graduates of the Culinary Arts

or \$1,300 for a table of ten, may be obtained by calling 508-529-7758 x3020. After confirming your reservation, a check payable to Blackstone Valley Tech and mailed to BVT c/o Anne-Marie Colonero, 65 Pleasant Street, Upton, MA 01568, will hold your seat. The Culinary Arts students look

Manchaug Water Study Project

Meeting number #2: Thursday, March 16

The Town of Sutton received a \$75,000 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) (www.resilientma.org/ MVP) to assess and mitigate issues with the natural and manmade water flow systems in and around the Village. At Meeting #1 we discussed the overall project and received the knowledge and input of residents and stakeholders about these systems. We've used this input and completed the assessment of the water flow systems in the Village.

As recently as last July, the

Manchaug Mills flooded likely as a result of weather and maintenance issues at dams and in 2010 a significant section of Putnam Hill Road washed out due to weather, a huge beaver dam and culvert conditions. Measures studied and developed as a result of this project will also be able to be replicated to mitigate similar risks in other watersheds. This project is a result of a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant Sutton filed for from the MA Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs. The Town was awarded \$75,000 toward this \$100,000 project and Town meeting voted to

provide the balance of the funding needed to undertake the project. As the process and results can potential benefit everyone, we welcome the participation of anyone who is interested.

Meeting #2 will take place at Manchaug Mills, Blaxton Hall on Thursday, March 16th at 6 p.m.

Mark your calendars for Meeting #3 : April 27.

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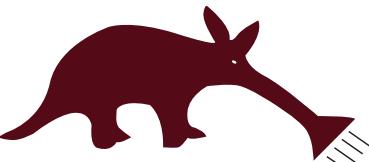
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It Takes a Village

Nothing brings back fonder memories of childhood as the unsupervised gathering spot of groups of children of all ages. Manchaug Village, Sutton, has that spot in the 3-acre plot of land, located at 7 Darling Lane, simply known by generations as the "Ball Field". This parcel, officially known as The American Legion Park, needs revitalization. Currently, the playground equipment is outdated, not meeting current consumer safety standards, the basketball court and softball field require maintenance, and there is no parking.

Sutton Recreational Resources, Inc., (SRR) a 501(c)3 organization founded in 2019 by local residents, has stepped up to lead this effort. With a mission of encouraging physical fitness for Sutton's youth by providing appropriate public recreational spaces, SRR successfully led the fundraising effort to revitalize Unity Park, 7 Boston Road, Wilkinsonville, as well as Jacob Van Dyke Memorial Park, 5 Hough Road, South Sutton, slated for groundbreaking by the town in July 2023. SRR is grateful for the financial assistance provided by local businesses, residents, and other charitable

organizations for these projects, and is once again looking for community support.

With project costs for the American Legion Park of \$435,000, SRR has an ambitious fundraising goal of \$200,000. A 2023 grant from the Sutton Cultural Council of \$1,000, as well as preliminary fund-raising, has the group on its way. The project is supported by the Town of Sutton, which has applied for a 50% project cost matching grant. Project information can be found at www.suttonma.org/planning/pages/american-legion-park-renovation.

This green space is the largest, open, public space in Manchaug—a 19th century mill village, named to the National Register of Historic Places, having most homes on small lots. Acquired in the 1940s by the newly-established John Mateychuk Post No. 390 American Legion Department of Massachusetts, Inc. for no fee from Joseph D. Bousquet, Sr. and his wife, Asterie, this property was intended to provide the returning WWII soldiers, who had given so much in service to their country, a place to gather with family and friends to make new, happier memories. Manchaug had two sons killed in action in WWII. John Mateychuk, age 22, Naval Electrician 3rd Class, June 1943, and Robert Manosh, age 21, Army Private

1st Class, April 1945. During Vietnam, the Village lost Dennis Benson, age 21, Army Specialist 4, December 1968. The Town of Sutton acquired the property in 2016 after the closing of the Mateychuk Post.

The park has succeeded in providing memories for generations. For all those living in the Village in the late 60s, the marquee event of the "Ball Field" has to be The Rex Trailer Show performing on an RV at the backstop and the community events which followed, including a greased pig contest. From summer recreation, to softball, little league, men's softball, soccer, basketball, ice skating on a flooded basketball court, tag, you name it, it happened in this little spot of land that was the whole word to hundreds of area children. This revitalization project will ensure the park continues to be a safe place for not only Sutton's children to run, explore and socialize, but for children around the greater Blackstone Valley area.

SRR needs a "Village" to ensure the success of this project. For information on how to donate, visit suttonrec.weebly.com, email SuttonRec@protonmail.com, or visit our Facebook page, Sutton Recreational Resources.

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Join Kristy Genga, AVP from UniPay by UniBank for a 45-minute webinar on Thursday, March 2, 2023 at 1 p.m. to learn how this solution can help your business or non-profit and enhance your revenue collections!

All attendees will be entered to win a \$250 UniPay Setup Fee

Coupon. Register at unibank.com. Sweepstakes to win UniPay Setup Fee Coupon is subject to complete official rules which are available at www.unibank.com. To enter, individuals must register and attend the meeting. No purchase or account required to enter or win.

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WCC announces first-ever Community Photo Contest

The Whitin Community Center is excited to announce its first-ever "Community Photo Contest" in honor of the facility's 100th anniversary!

Using the prompt "What does community look like to you?", participants are urged to share their best photos that celebrate community in the Blackstone Valley. The WCC's Community Photo Contest is accepting submissions through February 24th. There will be winners in the Kids, Amateur, and Professional categories, as well as a "Community Choice" winner and recipients of several special judges awards. There is no entry fee, although donations to fund a display for the winning photographs are accepted; click the "Donate" button at the top of the WCC homepage and select the photo contest from the campaign drop-down menu. Get creative, and remember that community comes in all different forms!

Submissions will be accepted online and in person. Email the submission form and one photograph in digital JPG format to Submissions@OurGym.org by February 24th; send a separate email for each different entry, including the

photograph and a new submission form. In person submissions can be turned in at the WCC Member Services Desk along with a printed submission form. Photographs submitted without submission forms will not be considered in judging. Submission forms and a detailed contest description can be found online at <https://www.whitincommunitycenter.com/programs/events/>.

Winners in the Kids, Amateur, and Professional categories will each win four discounted tickets to the Boston Museum of Fine Art, a gift card to a Boston restaurant, and WCC 100th anniversary merchandise. The Community Choice winner and special award recipients will receive WCC 100th anniversary merchandise. All entrants will have the opportunity to be featured in WCC promotional materials, social media, and in the WCC 100th Anniversary Gala photo display!

The WCC's Community Photo Contest is being launched to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Whitin Community Center, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, that is committed to the health and well-being of individuals and

families and to building a strong community in the Blackstone Valley. The Whitin Community Center has been serving the Blackstone Valley for 100 years offering social, recreational, educational, and outreach programs that bring community members of all ages and backgrounds together.

The Whitin Community Center is committed to enhancing the health and well-being of individuals and families and building a strong community in the Blackstone Valley. The Whitin Community Center is the Blackstone Valley's most complete family and recreation center with two swim-

ming pools, a gym, fitness center, early learning programs, summer camps and a seven and a half acre park. For more information call 508.234.8184 or visit www.WhitinCommunityCenter.com.

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Blackstone Valley Art Association Calling for Teen Art

The Blackstone Valley Art Association is sponsoring the 2023 Teen Self Expression Art Show – this art show is open to the public! All styles of teen-created family-friendly artwork are warmly welcome. Participation is FREE and is open to the public. The show is open to any person who is a teenager (aged 13-18). Each participant may exhibit up to three pieces of artwork. These will be judged for cash prizes. The show is completely free to enter. The artwork can be on any theme and in any medium. We have glass cases in which we can display sculptures and pottery. Please check out our Show Terms and Conditions. Note that some of the conditions about framing and wiring do not apply to this show. If you simply wish to bring in 5x7 printed photos or artwork, that is fine. We can handle matting those for you. If you wish to bring in other forms of art that is framed and/or ready for display, that is fine too. Ask with any questions. We should also make sure everyone sees this section

of the terms: "Works submitted to the BVAA must be original work created by the submitting artist. All entries must contain copyright-free material or material released with consent from the original source. Unauthorized use of any copyrighted images, text, or other material will not be accepted." We know teens love to copy online art and to represent favorite movie characters. For legal reasons, this show needs to feature original art only. To submit your entries use our BVAA Online Submission Form. The deadline to submit is 3pm on Saturday, March 4th, 2023. Work should be dropped off at the Open Skies Gallery at 5 S.Main St. Uxbridge by Saturday, March 4th, 2023 from 10-3pm. All work which is brought in will be hung (as long as it is family-friendly). If you can't make it by Saturday, contact us and we'll arrange a later drop-off for you. We hang the show on Wed, March 8th.



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It's never too late for heart-friendly 'candy'

BY CHRISTINE GALEONE

Did you miss your chance to try making candy hearts for Valentine's Day? Don't worry; it's not too late. Although the holiday featuring hearts and flowers has passed, it's still National Heart Month.

In fact, in this month of heart health awareness, there's no better time to make these dark chocolate cranberry crunch hearts. With only five simple ingredients, these treats are much better for your heart than most of the candy that you find on store shelves. And they taste just as good.

You've probably already heard that small amounts of dark choco-

Heart Association, dietary fiber can lower your risks of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and it can lower your chance of having a stroke. And it recommends choosing whole grains over refined ones because they provide important nutrients.

DARK CHOCOLATE CRANBERRY CRUNCH HEARTS

Ingredients:

½ Cup of Dark Chocolate Chips
½ Cup of Grape-Nuts
¼ Cup of Dried Cranberries
1 Tbsp. of Light Olive Oil
1 tsp. Almond Extract



late can benefit your heart. That's because the cacao in dark chocolate has heart-healthy antioxidants. It also contains flavonoids, magnesium, iron, fiber, zinc and copper.

Grape-Nuts cereal, which was introduced in 1897 as a health food, is one of the healthiest cereals you can eat. In addition to being high in iron and several other nutrients, including protein, zinc, vitamin B6 and folate, it's a great source of whole grains and dietary fiber. According to the American

Directions:

Pour the dark chocolate chips into a microwave-safe bowl, cover it with a paper towel, and microwave for 30 seconds.

Remove from the microwave, and stir in the olive oil and the almond extract.

Cover again, and microwave the mixture for another 30 seconds.

Remove and stir the mixture until it's completely smooth.

Stir in the Grape-Nuts and the cranberries.

Pour and press the mixture into small heart candy molds.

Let them become firm in the freezer for at least 30 minutes.

Gently pop them from the molds, and place them into candy or mini-cupcake liners. Enjoy!

Even though you can make these treats throughout the year, they seem especially appropriate for National Heart Month. And eating healthier candy might be the first step in a series of healthier choices. Happy (healthier) candy making!

Contact Christine at cmgale-one15@gmail.com

Sutton's General Rufus Putnam Building to Celebrate 200th Anniversary

The General Rufus Putnam building located at 4 Uxbridge Road, Sutton, will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2023. To mark this special occasion, the Sut-

ton Historical Society, which utilizes the building for the Society's Museum, will exhibit memorabilia from the building's long history as a Masonic Hall, a town school,

both high school and grammar school, the Daughters of the American Revolution hall, as well as the town library. Did you attend the school, do you have photos

of events at the building, special memories of events held there, or other memorabilia from ancestors who used the building you wish to share? A reunion of alumni who attended the school is also being planned for early June. Please

reach out to us at sutton1704@gmail.com or through our website, suttonhistoricalsocietyinc.org with items to share or if you attended the school. More information will be available on the website in the upcoming weeks.



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AN ORCHID EXHIBITION

FEBRUARY 11 – MARCH 19



Reunion Tap & Table ready for opening in Whitinsville

BY ROD LEE

Shawn Briggs was literally putting the finishing touches on a shelf behind the bar of the new Reunion Tap & Table restaurant in

a section of the Whitinsville Plaza on the morning of February 1st: a coat of black paint.

Taking up a spot formerly occupied by Jube's that had been vacant for a while, Reunion Tap



Shawn Briggs, with Paul Apkarian, left, is anxious to open the doors of the new Reunion Tap & Table restaurant in the Whitinsville Plaza.

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we use only 100% unsalted cholesterol-free vegetable oil.

& Table has been months in the making, with a complete rebuild of the premises undertaken and now finished.

"We'll be opening next week," Mr. Briggs, one of the partners, said. "The day we get our occupancy permit, we'll be open the next day."

Reunion Tap & Table is well known for its signature restaurant in Grafton; this one, though slightly smaller, is cut along the same lines. It will offer lunch Friday, Saturday and Sunday and dinner every day for starters. Plans are for takeout pizza too.

"We're just waiting for a delivery from Sunshine Sign," Mr. Briggs said. A banner has been strung across the front of the restaurant in the meantime.

Shawn Briggs, Josh Briggs, Sargent Hanna and Paul Apkarian are all principals in the operation.

closed at the moment but Galliford's Restaurant is going strong with lunch and dinner and most recently with a reintroduction of its popular "Sunday Brunch in Style at Galliford's"—through April 9th.

"Oh my gosh, great," Chelsea Daniels, restaurant manager at Galliford's, said on January 29th, in assessing response so far, just before the start of the brunch, which runs from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The buffet features "something for everyone" including savory breakfast dishes, creative twists on traditional favorites, "our popular Omelet Station, Carving Station, Waffle Station, Millionaire Cinnamon Rolls, Lox, Crème Brûlée French Toast, Braised Chicken Marsala, Parmesan Pesto Salmon, Eggs Benedict and so much more.

Reservations are recommended. Call 508-928-0928 or go to www.gallifords.com.

Submit your restaurant news to Rod Lee at rodlee.1963@gmail.com.

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Happenings!

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

ONGOING AS OF FEBRUARY 12

- The plight of American POWs in Vietnam is realized in an extraordinary exhibit on the 50th anniversary of their release, at the American Heritage Museum, 568 Main St., Hudson. Coined "the Hanoi Hilton" by



Harbro Auto Sales with locations in Whitinsville and Webster is among the many local businesses that are typically represented at the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Home & Community Expo. The 23rd annual edition of the event with UniBank as presenting sponsor is scheduled for Saturday, March 25th at Northbridge High School.

American POW Robert Shumaker, the Hoa Lo Prison became synonymous with the torture, isolation and malnutrition U.S. aviators were subjected to after being shot down over North Vietnam. Half a century later, the AHM has built a lasting tribute to these men, featuring the last two remaining cells that held Americans, first-hand accounts, and interactive displays, which provide a unique and intimate look at the physical and psychological challenges they faced.

MOST FRIDAYS DURING LENT

FEB. 24, MARCH 3, 17, 24 AND 31

- Lenten Fish Dinners, dine in or take out, are being offered at St. Denis Church, Douglas, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. (NOT on March 10 and NOT on April 6). Includes baked fish, coleslaw, tartar sauce and your choice of baked potato or white rice. For an additional cost, add a cup of homemade clam chowder. Prices to be determined; order online before 7:00 p.m. the Thursday prior, or tickets will be available at the door on Friday (while supplies last). SaintDenisChurch.com/fish-dinners. Cash, check or Square payments accepted on arrival.

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, February 24th from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Voting ended 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 email Cristi.Collar@openskycs.org.

center will be transformed into a tropical dining oasis. "Polynesian" is the theme the students have chosen for this year's event. A variety of dishes reflecting this theme will complement carefully selected wines. The evening will begin with a social hour at 5:00 p.m. followed by a multi-course dinner at 6:00 p.m. This gala event is a major fundraiser for the school. Tickets are \$140 per person or \$1300 for a table of ten and may be obtained by calling 508-529-7758 x3020. After confirming your reservation checks made payable to Blackstone Valley Tech can be mailed to BVT c/o Anne-Marie Colonero, 65 Pleasant St., Upton MA 01568, to hold your seat(s).

MARCH 17, 18 & 19

- The Uxbridge High School Drama Club

will present "Grease: School Version" with book, music and lyrics by Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey, with performances at 7:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday in the Uxbridge High School Auditorium. Grease: School Version is presented by special arrangement with Samuel French Inc., a Concord Theatricals Company. "Grease" is a turbo-fueled nostalgic musical road trip through the joys, relationships and dances—literally and emotionally—of the students of Rydell High in 1959. The UHS Drama Club boasts a cast and crew of sixty members, directed by Kathleen Penza and Mary Mangnall with assistance from Sue Hirtle. The production is a collaborative effort between several departments at UHS including Performing Arts, Visual Arts/Graphic Design and Technology and

Construction. Contact the Uxbridge High School office to reserve tickets; tickets are free but are required for admission and will be available to the public starting March 6.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18

- A Floral Arrangement Fundraiser Class presented by Sandy Michalak of Herbert E. Berg Florist will be held at the Millbury First Congregational Church, 148 West Main St., Millbury, at 2:00 p.m. Cost is \$25 for instruction and all materials. Beginners welcome. Advanced registration by March 14 is required by calling Janice Fortin at 508-826-6381.

HAPPENINGS!

continued on page 16



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www.AmericanHeritageMuseum.org
Open: Wed. - Sun., 10 AM to 5 PM**

HAPPENINGS!

continued from page 15

Irish Night will be celebrated at the Uxbridge Progressive Club, 18 Whitin St., starting at 6:00 p.m. Corned Beef dinner served at 6:30 p.m. Music by the Laura May Band 7:00-11:00 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for dinner and dancing and \$15 for dinner-only, takenout (5:30-6:30 p.m. at the kitchen door). Please purchase tickets in advance at the club. Call 508-278-9800 for

more information.

SUNDAY, MARCH 19

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

SATURDAY, MARCH 25

• The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Com-

merce's Home & Community Expo will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Northbridge High School, 427 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville. This is one of the area's premier events to advertise your business to residents and prospective customers. Single booths, double booths, nonprofit booths are available; a "golden egg" exhibitor add-on provides for a prime location on the floor with identification as part of the scavenger hunt. Small businesses from all over the Blackstone Valley will showcase their



Southwick's Zoo in Mendon with wildlife experience spread over two hundred acres is looking toward an early-April opening of its 2023 season.

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deadline is March 8. For more information, contact Liz O'Neil, loneil@blackstonevalley.org or 508-234-9090 Ext. 102.

ON OR AROUND APRIL 1

• Southwick's Zoo, 2 Southwick St., Mendon, opens for the season, with such attractions as a 35-acre deer forest, petting zoo, parakeet landing walk-through aviary, EARTH Discovery Center, Skyfari Ride, Woodlands Express Train, Rainforest Conservation Maze, Soaring Eagle Zipline and more. www.southwickszoo.com.

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Joe Iamartino of the Thompson Historical Society for a talk, "The Nipmuc Lithic Trail," at the First Congregational Church, 307 Boston Road, Sutton, at 7:00 p.m. Go to www.suttonhistoricalsociety.org for further info.

SATURDAY, APRIL 22

• Douglas's Silver Club is sponsoring a bus trip to New York City to see the new Titanic exhibit. Cost is \$120. There will be lunch at Ann and Tony's in the Bronx and time on Arthur Avenue (lots of Italian bakeries, butcher shops and delis). For more information call Sue at 508-476-5820.

TUESDAY, MAY 9

• The Sutton Historical Society welcomes Carol Crossed curator of the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, bot a talk,

Contact Bill at 774-289-5564 or by email at bcronan@theyankeexpress.com to learn how you can reach 172,000 households and businesses each month!

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LuLu's moves to new home, with the same flair for unique

BY ROD LEE

After four years as an anchor tenant in the Baker Building at 68 Church in downtown Whitinsville, Heather Glode of LuLu's Jewelry & Gifts has a new address, and she could not be happier.

The smile on Ms. Glode's face the morning of February 1st had as much to do with the prospects of success at the location on Providence Road as it did with the sunshine showering the windows of her store.

"Visibility and parking," she said, of her main motivations



Heather Glode, owner of LuLu's Gifts & Jewelry, is settling into the store's new home, on Providence Road.

LuLu's took up residence in a storefront in the strip mall on the north side of the Whitinsville Plaza a few weeks ago. There, her shop joins such established operations as King Jade and Postal Center USA, with the Reunion Tap & Table restaurant about to join the mix around Valentine's Day.

Reunion Tap & Table will be an extension of a popular family-run restaurant in Grafton (see The Feisty Fork column in this issue of the Blackstone Valley Xpress for more about Reunion).

for moving from what has long been considered the heart of the Whitinsville business district.

"It's a pretty happening little strip mall," she said. "The space is smaller than what I had but I was able to cram everything in."

Ms. Glode had actually looked at the main part of the Whitinsville Plaza as a future home for LuLu's, "pre-pandemic."

She will be missed on Church Street, not only as one of the quirkiest retailers around, but also as a strong promoter and



Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (intention), Amen.

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

supporter of Shop Small 01588.

The good news is that she remains in the same zip code, and with the same dedication to offering unusual giftware and jewelry, and for standing with community—as evidenced, for instance, by a recent donation to the Northbridge Middle School's

International Club event.

A quirky approach coupled with a sense of humor have been key ingredients for LuLu's from the outset.

Current hours are Monday-Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Her inventory including crystal gems and jewelry is better than ever.

"I'm all grown up," she says.

Visit lulusgiftsco.com for more information.

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

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Questions?
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BY AMY PALUMBO-LECLAIRE

There's something about Luke that has us talking. We can't put our finger on exactly what has us so crazy in love with him. Perhaps my son says it best. "He has an aura." Truth. His personality is full of innocence and curiosity, fragrance, and flaw. I've never met a puppy quite like him. He's about to celebrate his first birthday. I couldn't help but reflect on traits that have earned him a few nicknames.

PROFESSOR LUKE

Luke is a Watcher and a Thinker. He's the first pup I've owned who adores sitting on the front steps to watch what's happening in the



neighborhood. He's a thoughtful observer, seemingly ahead of his time for a puppy. Amid his research, he's drawn conclusions about who he will and will not accept. Chest puffed out, he sits regally on those steps, a giant teddy bear on the look-out. There he

LIVING WITH LUKE

amyleclaire@hotmail.com

The multiple-personality aura of Luke Valentino

has made dog friends and human friends. His tail senses good and bad vibes. Fortunately, he's experienced more of the former. He wears his love for others in a kind, "bear cub" expression. I've watched his nose twitch while a serious mouth breaks open to a casual smile every time a guest arrives. "Hi! My name is Luke Valentino." He lowers his head and wiggles, humbled by the goodness of Dog People, who happen to be one of the more understanding breeds, I've found. I trust my dog's instincts.

"Hi Luke!" Known for his columns and charisma, Luke has become popular in the neighborhood. "You wanna' play in my yard?" Dog walkers make their way onto our lawn. Luke can barely believe his luck. His tail wags. He fights to restrain his joy (not wanting to come on too strong) but his love for people and the various dogs that extend from people, explodes on that very step. "I'm so excited that you're here! I want you to know, I'm well trained. I have my moments, but for the most part, I know how to behave." The owner approves of Luke. Professor-style, he lifts his head, and the two dogs exchange sniffs. "Are you a dog? I'm a dog. Are you a boy? I'm a boy. Are you nice? I'm nice." Trust established, the owner unclips the leash and—BAM—two dogs rumble in my front yard.

I used to worry about Luke amid spontaneous play. What if the dog is more experienced? Overly aggressive? "I'll take you down if you keep it up." I've since watched my pup take a cheap shot at a loose collar. Needless to say; I'm over it.

Still, watching my pup develop the realization that not every dog likes him, or wants to play with him, is hard for a Dog Mom. He once approached a unique dog couple at the dog park. The dogs entered together,

side by side. They were obviously tight and their owners, also best friends, stated the obvious. "These two are boyfriend and girlfriend."

Luke, nevertheless, didn't understand the history or intimate nature of the long-term dog relationship. He trotted over to their side and used his famous shoulder move to greet them. "Wanna' play?" Boyfriend snarled and shunned my pup. "Get away from my girlfriend!! Just go away!" His growl was aggressive. Luke turned away from the dogs and joined me at the park bench. "Someone's having a bad hair day." I felt bad for my pup. He sees the best in every dog, despite the feeling not always being mutual. "It's okay, Luke. You're a good boy. They're be another dog to play with."

My concern faded upon watching him take a stand for bad behavior on future playdates. "I DON'T LIKE YOU ANYWAY!" I've seen him bark back in the face of a hater.

"Let it go, Luke." My pup's ego was bruised.

"YOU'RE UGLY and SO ISN'T YOUR MOTHER!!"

"Luke!" My pup's temper has warranted another nickname.

LUKEY V

Lukey V is the side of Luke known to show some sass—the "bark at me and I'll bark back louder" side, the Valentino (Italian) side that was suspicious of our front yard snowman. "You're cold and you're still and you don't belong here!" My son built the snowman with love, but Luke refused to accept him. He barked, backed away, and snapped his head around, as though paranoid of the snowman's next move. "Mess with me and I will destroy you, Frozen Man."

"Luke, be nice. The snowman can be here," I pleaded with my gangster pup. "He's a phony,



the confines of an enclosed area, a cave of sorts. "What a good boy you are, Luke!"

Weeks passed and Luke became more liberated to try out new sleeping spaces. He slept on his plush bed by the bay window. He slept by the front door. He toggled between spots. Then, to our surprise, he pooped on the dining room carpet.

"Ohhhh Luke. What happened?" Suspicious of his own accident, he inspected the mound with a stiff sniff. "How did my poop get in the house?" He couldn't help it. Nevertheless, the odor was horrible. I gagged, cracked a window, and began the unfun process of cleaning poop from an expendable area rug. My mind traced back through his diet. Admittedly, he had some junk food at a friend's house the night before, bones said to be "all natural" but they all claim such. He had also been chewing on rained-on sticks drenched in bacteria. Both ingestions, I knew, were a culprit to his maturing digestive system. Poor Luke. He can't hop onto a toilet when a bad stomachache strikes. I forgave my pup. Then I bagged his poop and threw it outside for him to see. "Poopy goes outside." I treated the stain with a small army of toxins. Digestion issues (and diarrhea) are not uncommon for puppies. He watched me scour the carpet, head over paws, as though to say, "I'm sorry, Momma. I know my poopy is stinky."

Luke's stools hardened with each passing day. He became more "regular" with clean eating, a close monitor on snacks (and sticks), and mounds of freshly cooked white rice. My family celebrated progress. "Lukey did poopies outside!" We visited the spot on the rug for gentle reminders. "Noooo." I stretched out the word and kneeled to a spot overly fragrant. "Lukey does poopy outside." He glanced up at me then looked away. "Can we move on, please?"

BABY LUKE

Baby Luke emerged, suitably, when my pup was about eight weeks old. I'd cradle him in my arms like a baby so that he could gaze into my eyes, then chew on a dangling sweatshirt tassel. The habit continued as he grew, and even until he reached a stocky sixty-five pounds. Baby Luke doesn't realize he doesn't qualify for the standard of a lap dog. I return home from teaching Zumba classes to find him

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**LUKE**

continued on page 19

REAL ESTATE

Where will you go if you sell? You have options



BY MARK MARZEOTTI
MARZEOTTI

consider where you'll go next.

In today's market, it makes sense to explore all your options. That includes both homes that have been lived in before as well as newly built ones. To help you decide which is right for you, let's compare the benefits of each. Regardless of which option you choose to explore, working with a trusted Realtor throughout the process is essential.

First, let's look at the benefits of purchasing a newly constructed home. With a brand-new house, you'll be able to:

1. Build your dream home. If you build a home from the ground up, you'll have the option to select the custom features you want, including appliances, finishes, landscaping, layout, and more. Building means customizing, instead of wishing your home had a certain kind of flooring, a sunroom or some other special feature, you'll

be able to tailor the property to your exact needs. You also won't be limited to a specific location or neighborhood.

2. Take advantage of builder concessions. In today's market, a lot of home builders are working hard to sell their current inventory before they add more to their mix. That means many of them are offering concessions and are more willing to negotiate with buyers. That could work to your advantage in the process.

3. Minimize home repairs. Many builders offer a warranty, so you'll have peace of mind on unlikely repairs. Plus, you won't have as many little improvement projects to tackle. If something goes wrong with your new home, not only are there likely some manufacturer warranties in place, but many builders also include additional home warranties.

4. Take advantage of energy efficiency. When building a home, you can choose brand-new, energy-efficient options to help lower your utility costs, protect the environment, and reduce your carbon footprint.

Now, let's compare those to the perks that come with buying an existing home. With a pre-existing home, you can:

1. Explore a wider variety of home styles and floorplans. With decades of homes to choose from,

you'll have a broader range of floorplans and designs available.

2. Appreciate that lived-in charm. The character of older homes is hard to reproduce. If you value timeless craftsmanship or design elements, you may prefer an existing home.

3. Join an established neighborhood. Existing homes give you the option to get to know the neighborhood, community, or traffic patterns before you commit. Plus, they have more developed landscaping and trees, which can give you additional privacy and curb appeal.

4. Move in faster. If you have a short timeframe to move or you just don't want the process to take several months while your home is under construction, buying an existing home might make sense for you. When thinking about where you'll go after you sell your house, remember your options. As you start your search, think about what's most important to you. By working with a trusted Realtor, you can be confident you're making the most educated, informed decision. If you have questions about the options in your area, meet with a team member of marzeottigroup.net, call 617-519-1871 or a local real estate professional to discuss what's available and what's right for you.



Visit Luke on Instagram @living-withlukevalentino

LUKE
continued from page 18

ready and waiting for our special routine in the family room. "Let's do Baby Luke!" He hovers about my gym bags and winter clothes, holding me to it. I collapse to the floor and maneuver Baby Luke onto my lap. He licks my neck and face. We cuddle like a pair of honeymooners, and I think to myself, "Of all of my puppy's sides, this just might be my favorite."

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SPORTS

Millbury High's Layce Hermans: A missed opportunity

BY CHRISTOPHER TREMBLAY,
STAFF SPORTS WRITER

Last winter junior Lacey Hermans had her best season for the Millbury girls basketball team despite finding herself a little behind the eight ball when the season began. Having injured her knee during the soccer season, Hermans found that she had a lot of work to do to get ready for the basketball season, but she wasn't going to let the injury hamper her upcoming season for the Woolies.

Millbury went 19-5, earning the school a 10 seed in the Division 4 State Tournament, where MHS defeated West Bridgewater, Northbridge, Mashpee and Lunenburg before eventually falling to Amesbury in the championship game. Hermans was a main cog in the Woolies success. The junior averaged 9 points per game (third

on the team), pulled down 150 rebounds (second), knocked down 28 3-pointers, had 15 blocked shots and led the team with a free throw percentage of 73.7 on the year. She was also named to the All-Star team for the first time.

"The (soccer) injury pushed me back a bit as I was not able to attend any camps prior to the basketball season, but I worked hard and ended up having my best season," she said. "This year I was able to be a big part of our success and making it to the State Finals. As for the All-Star recognition I didn't expect it at all, but it was very rewarding as I had worked so hard entering the season and it validated that I had earned my spot on the team."

Having such an impactful season for the Woolies last winter, Hermans had worked hard to get ready for her upcoming senior

campaign and was very excited to take the court with her teammates. Unfortunately, it would be a season that would not even get started before it was over.

"I blew out my right knee in our very first scrimmage and was told that I wouldn't be able to play at all this year," she said. "It was devastating and very heartbreaking not being able to play. We have a bond as players, and I realized that I would never be able to play with them again with this being my senior year."

Instead of helping her teammates to hopefully another tournament run on the court, Hermans would find herself sitting on the bench and watching. And although it was something that originally was very tough to do, Hermans eventually took solace in her fate and found yet another way in which she could help her teammates.

"At first it was really hard to watch your friends and teammates on the court, knowing that you should be out there with them, but it was nice to see them growing and working hard while having success," she said. "Although I was not able to be on the floor with the team I did find a way that I could help. By watching games from the bench I got to see things from a different angle and was able to tell them what I was seeing and they could make the adjustment on the floor."

Hermans began her basketball career back in the third grade when a bunch of her friends decided to take up the sport and her father became a coach. It was here she not only found a bond with the sport but was also able to form a bond with her father, who had played basketball just about his whole life.

Two years after beginning her



A knee injury has cost Millbury High's Layce Hermans her senior season on the court—a blow to her and to the Woolies.

basketball journey, she began to grow within the sport and soon found herself playing AAU basketball with the Shooters out of Charlton and then the Shockers out of Grafton. AAU would help to improve her game playing with the older girls who had a higher basketball skill level getting her ready for high school basketball.

With Millbury being a junior/senior high school Hermans got to play junior varsity basketball as a seventh grader for the Woolies and found herself swinging between the JV and varsity team as an eighth grader and although it was something that was not of the norm the youngster absorbed everything that she could during those two years so that she would be ready by the time she was a freshman.

"Playing those two years really helped me to get ready for the varsity season and playing against the type of talent that I would face during my freshman year," Hermans said.

As a freshman playing for the varsity squad Hermans found herself coming off the bench to help the team go 19-1 and earn the number two seed in the Division 3 Central Tournament where they eventually fell to Millis in the Semi Finals. According to Millbury Coach Steve Reno, the Woolies had a lot of talent on the roster ahead of Hermans that year, but the freshman did get her minutes and contributed when she was on the court.

"As a freshman I knew that I wasn't going to be a main contributor, but when I did get the chance to play I made it count; I knew that I had the potential to help this team," she said.

Being part of a team that went to the Division 4 State Championship game just a year earlier, Hermans and her teammates were looking to take that next step this winter.

"Layce was supposed to be a big part of our team this year, especially after the year that she had last year," Coach Reno said. "When she went down in that first scrimmage with a season ending injury I felt really bad for her being that it was to be her senior year."

Despite not being on the court for her senior season with her teammates Hermans is taking everything in stride and cheering her friends along each time they tip off.

"I would definitely love nothing more than to be out there with my teammates in this my senior year," she said. "But it's not as bad knowing that I'm on the bench each game helping them in whatever way I can."

Unfortunately, while Hermans' actual basketball playing days are over, she is hoping that her teammates can continue to play at a high level and go the distance this year and take home the Division 4 State title.

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Corridor springs into Maple Sugar Days and more

Maple Sugar Days return in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor on Saturday, February 25 and Sunday, February 26, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at River Bend Farm, 287 Oak St., Uxbridge. No reservations are required.

■ An EnviroScape Training Skills Workshop will be held on Wednesday, March 22nd from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. at the Corridor's office, 670 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville. The EnviroScape is an interactive tabletop teaching tool. Educators can demonstrate how pollutants affect a watershed. With food, sprinkles and other pollutants, the EnviroScape illustrates how fertilizers, pet waste, oils and toxins can be introduced into our watershed. Why learn how to use an EnviroScape? The Corridor has many requests for this program, and on World Water Day we want to build a cadre of knowledgeable volunteers so that the EnviroScape

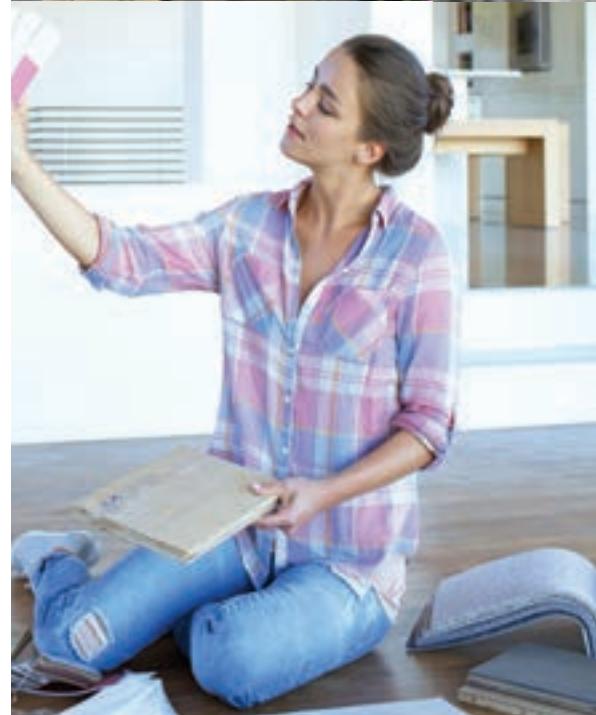
can visit elementary schools, public programs and scout troops. No previous experience with science is necessary. VIP Julie Riendeau will serve as trainer. RSVP to <https://bit.ly/EnviroScapeSW>.

■ 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 Blackstone River State Park, 1075 Lower River Road, Lincoln, Rhode Island. RSVP to <https://bit.ly/BarkBranchesBudsWalk>.

■ Volunteers as the backbone of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has never been more apparent than it was on January 16th when more than fifty worker bees came out for the MLK Day of Service at five different sites. The Asa Waters Mansion and the Grass Hill Schoolhouse in Millbury, Hearthside House in Lincoln, Rhode Island, the Woonsocket Historical Society and the North Smithfield Heritage Associa-

tion partnered to host a cleanup of the Mammoth Mill Ruins. To learn more about the history of the Asa Waters Mansion and the Grass Hill Schoolhouse, check out VIP Abigail Epplett's blog at <https://abbyeppletthistorian.blogspot.com/2023/01/MLKDay-ofService-AsaWatersMansion-GrassHillSchool.html>. Another Corridor volunteer, Angelo Mirello, helped with record keeping of volunteer files at the Corridor's office.

■ The Corridor is excited to announce acquisition of its new pop-up tent, banner and tablecloth to use at upcoming events. The equipment came from Displays2Go and was designed by H2 Design Studio and can be seen at the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce's Home & Community Expo on Saturday, March 25 at Northbridge High School.



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THE CAR DOCTOR

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Drive your Corvette regularly to help keep it fit



BY JOHN PAUL

Q. I have a question about my 2014 corvette which has 4,500 miles on it which I bought it new. Since I have owned it, I

have had nothing but problems. The transmission went at about 2,500 miles, the info center had to be replaced twice and the car needed to be towed to replace a spark plug. About six months later another plug went bad. The dealer tells me it is because I don't drive the car enough. I always let the car idle for about five minutes to get the plugs hot, are they right about

plugs fouling because the car is not driven enough? Recently I took my car for an oil change. After the oil change the white smoke was so intense coming out of the exhaust, I couldn't see the cars behind me. When I got home the hood of the engine was so hot, I could hardly touch it. I checked the oil and it was overfilled almost a quart of oil, I brought the car back and they drained the oil and put the right amount of oil, the car still smokes a lot and leaves heavy black carbon on the exhaust and leaves gray dust on the bumper and license plate

along with little black dots all over the bumper. My car was always at car shows and was cleaned

once a week and never had this problem. The dealer claims there is nothing they can do, and now I'm stuck with cleaning exhaust and bumper every time I use it. Help!

A. The dealer is correct, just letting the car just run is not good for it. Your Corvette and really any vehicle needs to be driven. Letting the engine idle will carbon up the spark plugs and cause them to fail. You are better off driving it every few weeks, if possible, for about 30 minutes and during this time some of the driving should be at highway speeds. If you put the car away for the winter, just leave it. Many owners are tempted to start their cars and let them run, which is not a great idea. You are much better off waiting for a nice dry day and going for a ride. Regarding the exhaust, I'm concerned about the white smoke which is typically from coolant be-

ing burned during combustion. It is also possible the exhaust is filled with the excess oil which should burn off over time. My suggestion is drive your car and enjoy it. \

Q. The drive belts on my car are six years old and have about 70,000 miles on them. Should I change them? There looks like just a bit of wear on the sides. Also, I'm thinking of going

with a controller relay. Can the solar charger with the controller remain connected while I drive the vehicle?

A. The controller of the solar charger should have diodes that only allow the electricity to go in one direction. I see people leaving them connected to boats and RVs without issue. That being said, I looked up two different solar battery chargers and both



stated the charger should be disconnected when the vehicle is being driven. So based on that, I would say, connect the battery with a quick disconnect plug and disconnect the charger when the vehicle is in use.

Q. I have a 2022 Hyundai Santa Fe and the manual states to use 0W-30 oil which I don't see on store shelves. Is it ok to use 0W-20 oil?

A. If the manual or oil cap states 0W-30 that is what you should use. Although interestingly my data base lists 0W-20 oil but I would defer to the owner's manual or oil cap on the engine.

John Paul is 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 at mrjohnfpaul.

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Q. My question involves connecting a solar charger to maintain the charge on my battery. The 12V charger port on my vehicle does not stay on with ignition key removed. This would require me to connect the solar charger directly across the battery

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TALES FROM BEYOND

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Dudleytown-Part 1: Demons, evil spirits, foreboding horrors

BY THOMAS D'AGOSTINO

A deserted settlement deep in the woods of western Connecticut has been the subject of writings, short stories and even movies. Owlsbury was once the more common name for what we today call Dudleytown. The abandoned settlement is said to harbor demons, evil spirits, negative energy, and a host of other foreboding horrors that have caused people to either shun the area, or at present, risk being arrested while searching for the now forbidden ghost town. There are many narratives regarding the area and the negative energy that abounds within. Many have sworn to the old tales while others brush them off as legends created to scare the meek.

Dudleytown is nestled on a plateau in the middle of three mountains and a hill. The original owner, Thomas Griffis, took deed to the area in 1738. Abiel and Barzillai Dudley, both soldiers in the French and Indian War, took title to a parcel of land in 1747, "on the road from the meeting house to Mr. Griffis." This would soon become known as Dudleytown.

The Dudley family was said to have brought a family curse over from England where several of their ancestors were executed for various plots against the government.

At one point thirty-five families called Dudleytown their home. Names like Carter, Jones, Tanner, Dibble, Rogers and others unknowingly made history by settling in the small town. The chief product was charcoal, for the area was heavily wooded.

It cannot be precisely discerned when the horror stories about Dudleytown began to circulate. The 1938 Federal Writer's Project book on Connecticut gives the abandoned village but a small paragraph within its pages and not much more. It mentions the trail where hikers traverse to "the dead end and mystery of Dark Entry...no other road, other than a pack horse trail ever penetrated this forbidding region."

The writer continues;

"Tradition tells of a man, who with his wife, built a cabin in this wilderness. After an absence of two days, in which he tramped to the village for supplies, he returned to find his wife a raving maniac,

driven mad by some terrifying experience which she was never able to relate."

The narrative most likely concerns Dr. William Clarke and his wife. The doctor bought a piece of land in Dudleytown and built a cabin as a summer retreat. He became one of the founders of the Dark Entry Forest Association, a group of people who bought land in and around Dudleytown to preserve the former settlement and woods around it. The entry in the book also states that there are graves deep in the woods of those who have gone in and died of starvation or an accident. The writer refers to the place as Dark Entry or Owlsbury but never once mentions it as Dudleytown. The term Dark Entry referred to a forty foot tunnel that ran from the road to the cellar of a home. Unfortunately, both are long gone but the name has stayed on, creating ominous visions for those who read of the lost town.

One very famous account is that of Richard Brophy, the last inhabitant of Dudleytown. Brophy left his land in 1901 after his house burned to the ground. Before that, his sons

disappeared after they were caught stealing sleigh robes, and his wife died of consumption shortly after. It is alleged that the man showed up at the local tavern half insane and jabbering about half man-half animal cloven hoof beasts chasing him off his property. After that, he was never heard from again.

People suffered strange calamities while living in the cursed village. One of the Dudley brothers was found hacked to death near his home, another mysteriously fell from a ladder, one more died while visiting a neighbor's home. These and many more were attributed to the curse and the demons, both visible and invisible that were said to inhabit the land.

Tales of people going insane ran rampant. Abiel Dudley was one of those who went mad, but he also was about ninety years old when he was considered feeble of mind. William Tanner was another Dudleyowner who was considered to have become feeble-minded. He lived to be one hundred and four years old. Several other accounts tell of Dudleyowners going mad after witnessing what they called wild half human beasts. Dr. William Clarke's wife was another as previously stated, but records indicate she died in a New York hospital from a physical illness.

Part II next month.



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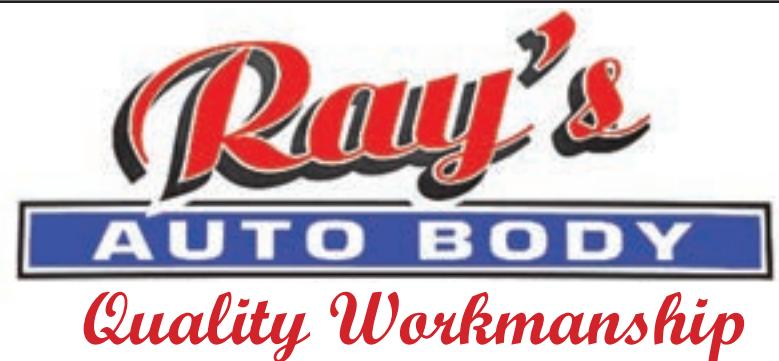
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