

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

Becket, Blandford, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Otis, Plainfield, Russell, Sandisfield, Westhampton, Williamsburg, Worthington

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BLANDFORD

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

Looking back at the previous 12 months, Blandford has seen some remarkable incidents and some changes.

The weather has played tricks on Blandford – beginning in January. One day golfers were on the course, the next day, snow. Weather wreaked havoc on the gardens; some products thrived while others did not. But zucchini can always be counted on.

The Belle Fleur group has continued to work on their buildings and production has started. Two greenhouses are up and running and a third is under construction; the business is creating some revenue for the town.

January saw the beginnings of the Porter Memorial Library's expansion planning with the first of many focus groups and meetings.

February saw Library Director Nicole Daviau officiating at the West Springfield Library Legislative Breakfast as the immediate past president of Western Mass Library Advocates.

Jasmine Ortega came on board in March as the new administrative assistant for the Water Department and the Annual Town Caucus



Golfers enjoy a day on the course at the Country Club.

File photo

produced two contests: Select Board and Municipal Light Board. The COA held the annual St. Patrick's Day luncheon.

Members of the 53rd Western Massachusetts County Correctional Officers Academy, all recruits for the

Hampden County Sheriff's Department, spent Friday, March 28, in Blandford focusing on beautifying the area around Town Hall, Town Common and Watson Park.

In April the town first began to learn about Battery

Energy Storage Systems proposed for two locations on North Blandford Road and repercussions rebounded throughout the year.

Pickles took on new meaning as the Pickle Ball

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HUNTINGTON

PFAS fallout continues on Basket Street

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

Representatives from the Board of Health and Water and Sewer Department met with the Huntington Select Board at their Dec. 17 meeting to address current progress with the Per- and Poly-Fluoroalkyl Substances leaching into residential wells on Basket Street.

Select Board Chairman Roger Booth, selectmen William Hathaway and John McVeigh, and Town Administrator Jennifer Pelouin were all present. Also attending this portion of the meeting were Karon Hathaway, Kat Peterson, John Bergeron, George Peterson and H. Daniel Oliviera from the other boards.

PFAS are human-made contaminants that have been dubbed "forever chemicals" because they are very slow to break down in the environment. Exposure to PFAS at cer-

tain levels has been found to have adverse health effects. Well water from homes on Basket Street have tested positive for PFAS, a result of the former landfill once located near the juncture of Basket Street and Bromley Road.

One well at 51 Basket Street has tested above levels allowed by the state, which required the town to provide bottled drinking water. The town applied for and secured, a grant to bring the town water line up Basket Street and tie that home into the town supply. To date, \$475,000 of the \$700,00 cost reimbursement grant has been spent. By law, surrounding houses continue to be tested every six months; all are testing positive for PFAS but have not yet exceeded the legal limit.

Any of the remaining houses that show high enough test results will

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CHESTER

Railway car clears underpass

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

In a breathtaking set of executions, three rotators from Red's Towing, Recovery and Transport slowly but confidently moved the former Bernie's Diner railway car down Main Street, through the railroad underpass and onto the grounds of the Chester Railway Station and Museum on Monday, Dec. 22.

The operation was underway a few minutes after noon, when a school van exited Prospect Street after a morning drop-off. The Chester Highway Department then closed Emory and Prospect Streets and the lower section of Main Street to through traffic.

Bernie's Dining Depot in Chicopee had long been famous for its generous portions of roast beef, but had closed in 2022. When the new owner of Bernie's decided to remove the historic dining car, the Chester Railway Station and Museum expressed interest and an agreement was reached.

The move was months in the making. The Chester Foundation, which raises funds and oversees the station/museum, contracted

with Tom Szirbik, Sr. of Iron Mountain Iron in Vermont, who has done lots of work moving railroad cars for museums all over the northeast. "I thoroughly enjoy, deep down in my heart and soul, railroad history and railroad preservation," Szirbik said.

The first move from Chicopee to Chester on Nov. 25 was memorable, Szirbik said. It started with a police escort as the town of Chicopee bid farewell to its historic landmark Things hit a snag at the other end when they tried to get the car to its first stop next to Chester Common Table. Main Street would have been the best option, but that bridge had been de-rated to 18 tons and the car and Szirbik's truck were over 50 tons. They soon realized that an effort to go down Maple Street from Route 20 was also going to fail, as the two vehicles were too long to make the corner onto Main Street Szirbik reached out to Chad Willard at Red's Towing for a solution and an hour later the railcar was on its way. "I liked Chad the minute I talked to him," Szirbik said. "He was conscientious. I'm glad I hired them."

The next issue was moving the railway car over to

the museum grounds, on the other side of the active railroad line. Two applications to CSX to bring the car over the tracks were denied. The only other option was to go under the railroad pass. Szirbik said several proposals were shot down by the Select Board, with concern over weight, possible damage to a fairly new catch basin under the bridge and doubt over clearing telephone poles and lines. Szirbik again reached out to subcontract with Red's and together the men came up with the plan that was utilized.

In accordance with a Select Board meeting held Dec. 8, personnel from the Highway Department, Chester and Middlefield Fire Departments—including a rescue truck on each side of the underpass—and police were on hand in the event of an emergency. The only egress from Emory and Prospect Streets in Chester was that same underpass onto Main Street.

Before the move, museum president Dave Pierce and board member Chet Bret went door to door in the area to explain the road closure, which they had expected to take up to two hours and the safety services that



The first rear rotator has been disconnected. A second rear rotator (already aligned to the road through the tunnel) has replaced it to help push the 70,000 pound car through the tunnel.

Turley Publication photo by Wendy Long

were being put into place for residents. They left written notices if people were not home. It explained that the underpass had been extensively measured for over 2-hours by Iron Mountain Iron, which found it to be 13-1/2 feet not the 12-1/2 feet it is marked. The railway car is 11 feet 4 inches high and 85 feet long

"Two of our members live, and our facility is on the far side of the bridge, so we have skin in the game; the

notice to area residents said. The museum also offered shuttle service on both sides of the railroad tracks to anyone who needed to get to the store, post office, or other downtown destinations during the event.

On the day of the move, station treasurer Barbara Huntoon was on hand with the museum's checkbook, having moved money from the museum's investment accounts to cover the cost of the town details, Red's

Towing and Iron Mountain for the event. She explained that the new owner of Bernie's Diner gave them the railcar or this never would have been possible. She confirmed that all costs would be borne by the Chester Foundation, the fundraising arm and board of the museum and railway station. The November move from Chicopee to Chester cost \$22,000 and Huntoon

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HILLTOWNS

State announces Community Development fund awards

The Healey-Driscoll Administration announced nearly \$33.5 million in federal Community Development Block Grant awards to support housing, infrastructure, social services and economic development projects in 52 communities across Massachusetts.

At the same time, the administration is updating its Housing Choice Initiative to launch a new Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community designation, giving smaller and more rural communities a clearer path to state recognition and resources for pro-housing policies.

Together, these initiatives reflect the administration's commitment to listening to communities of all sizes and working alongside local leaders to deliver the tools, funding and policy support they need to expand housing options and strengthen their downtowns and neighborhoods.

Community Development Fund award recipients are Chester Prospect Street Phase 4 \$850,000;

Chesterfield (joint with Cummington, Goshen, Plainfield, Savoy, Westhampton, Williamsburg

and Worthington) Housing rehab program (12 units) and social services \$1,233,522; Great Barrington (joint with Egremont and Stockbridge) Housing rehab program (14 units) \$1,250,000; Huntington Design for Blandford Hill Road infrastructure improvements, Stanton Avenue improvement project phase II and ADA self-evaluation and transition plan \$850,000 and Lenox (joint with Sandisfield) Housing rehab program (12 units) \$1,050,000.

"From our smallest hill towns to our Gateway Cities and regional hubs, we are listening to local lead-

ers and making sure they have the resources they need to deliver for their residents," said Governor Maura Healey. "These Community Development Block Grants will support housing and economic development in cities and towns across the state, and the new Rural and Small Town designation will make sure that no community is left behind. Together, these initiatives are about giving communities the tools they need to grow their economies, build more housing to lower costs, and deliver the high-quality services their people deserve."

The federal fiscal 2025

CDBG awards, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, will help small cities and towns undertake projects that benefit low- and moderate-income residents. Eligible municipalities applied individually or as part of a regional application. This year, HLC is issuing 27 competitive Community Development Fund awards totaling \$25.7 million, along with \$7.75 million for nine Mini-Entitlement communities, for a combined \$33.47 million in funding.

In addition to these investments, HLC will launch a new Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community (RST-HCC) designation in the 2026 round. Municipalities with 7,000 or less year-round population or under 500 persons per square mile qualify as "Rural and Small Towns."

The 2026 Housing Choice and Rural and Small Town Housing Choice designation application round is expected to open in January 2026, in time for newly designated communities to participate in the Community One Stop for Growth.

GOSHEN

Goshen Council on Aging announces news and events

GOSHEN – On Wednesday, Jan. 7 games group now meets from 2-4 p.m.

They have a variety of games to choose from and they will also have cards. They are planning to have a puzzle making contest in the near future and possibly lessons in Mahjong. People should let the COA know if they'd be interested in joining either or both.

On Thursday, Jan. 15 Technology Help in the Library will be available from noon-2 p.m. Seniors can ask questions regarding their computer, phone, tablet or any other technology related question and they will do their best to help.

On Tuesday, Jan. 20 and 27 Highland Valley Elder Services delivers

grab and go lunches to Goshen COA on the third and fourth Tuesdays of the month. Participants pick up their hot lunch at the Goshen Town Hall from 12:30-1 pm. The lunch for Tuesday, Jan. 20 is a choice of pasta primavera or lasagna rolls and the choice for Tuesday, Jan. 27 is chicken corn chowder or chicken broccoli casserole. The meals also include milk, vegetables, and dessert. There is a suggested \$4 donation given to Highland Valley to offset the cost. People may call 413-268-8236 extension 118 or email coa@goshen-ma.us if they would like to sign up to get these nutritious and delicious meals. The COA would love to increase participa-

tion in this program.

On Wednesday, Jan. 21 crafts group meets from 2-4 p.m. Crafts group this month will meet on the third Wednesday in the library or dining room, adjacent to the library. They will have hot drinks to share while creating.

Exercise classes with Joan Griswold continue on Wednesdays at 10:15 in the Goshen Town Hall. The focus is on functional movement, which enhances physical strength and balance. Participants should wear supportive footwear and bring water and free weights if they have them. This class is also offered simultaneously on Zoom, if they prefer. People may email Joan at joan@byb-health.com to sign up.

MONTGOMERY

Music in Montgomery performers list upcoming January programs

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

MONTGOMERY – Performers for the Music in Montgomery program have been announced for January.

Co-hosted by the Montgomery Public Library and the Gray Catbird Pottery Studio, Music in Montgomery takes place at Montgomery Town Hall, 161 Main Road, every Thursday, starting at 3 p.m.

Kara and Jerry Noble will perform on Thursday, Jan. 8. This husband-wife duo has Jerry on piano and guitar with Kara on bass. Their performances are dubbed, "We are the people our parents warned us about."

Doug Pi and the Harmonics are up next on Thursday, Jan. 15. They are regular performers

at the Hilltown Memory Cafe in Huntington and Northampton Country Club. Doug Pi and the Harmonics have performed at the O's in Sunderland, Fishtails in Hatfield and Papa Bob's in Becket.

Singer, guitarist Larry Southard returns to Montgomery on Thursday, Jan. 22. Southard can also be seen around the area when he performs with Papa and Friends, a rock-country-folk band who include Lesley Friedman Rosenthal (violin, harmony), Terry AlaBery (Terrance Hall on drums), Mike Patoniac (bass and harmonica), and Andy Gordon (pedal steel and banjo). Can be seen at the Knox Trail Inn.

Rounding out the month is Eva Cappelli and Friends on Thursday, Jan. 29. Likened to Bonnie Raitt and K. D. Lang, Capelli has

performed with groups Lil Eva and the Studebakers, Eva Cappelli and the Watershops Band and Wild Heart-a Fleetwood Mac tribute band. She has performed at the Hard Rock Cafe, Iron Horse, Big E and Majestic Theatre and was the musical coordinator for the Academy of Music's production of Sojourner Truth.

Attendees are invited to bring baked goods to share. Donations are accepted for the refreshments with money split between the Montgomery Volunteer Firemen's Association and the Town Library.

Donations are also accepted to tip and thank the fabulous musicians who perform each week. This event is open to all who are interested. For more information, people may call Dale Rogers at 413-875-5205.

MIDDLEFIELD

COA offers various activities for seniors

MIDDLEFIELD – The Council on Aging will host senior lunch on Wednesday, Jan. 7.

The menu includes tomato basil quiche or butternut squash soup, green beans, French bread and pudding.

They sponsored a cookie swap. Winners of the cookie swap were Tim Parker, who made some delicious peanut butter Kiss cookies and Ray Schneller, who teamed up with his wife, Susan, to make some yummy almond cookies.

Dodie Guyette celebrated a December birthday. She and fellow seniors enjoyed a birthday cake that Sharon Barry baked.



Char Gero helped Dodie Guyette blow out her luscious birthday cake that Sharon Barry baked. Submitted photo

OTIS

COA lists January events

OTIS – Council on Aging Director Karen Yvon announces the upcoming January events.

The regular COA events will continue on Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the month except on Monday, Jan. 19 when the Center is closed for Martin Luther King Day. It will be open on Tuesday, Jan. 20 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

Exercise class is every Monday at 10:30 a.m. at the COA center at Town Hall. Haircuts will be available on Monday, Jan. 5. Mat Yoga is every Saturday at 9:30 a.m. and Chair Yoga is every Thursday at 10 a.m.

Wednesdays are Food Pantry days from 9-11 a.m. People should be sure to pick up their items on time.

Thursday, Jan. 8 is the Out To Lunch program, which will be at The East in Great Barrington.

On Monday, Jan. 12, there will be a Hip Hop Square Dance Class at 11:30 a.m.. The class is open to

everyone, but people should let the COA know they will participate by calling 413-269-0100, extension 5. The class is free.

The Foot Nurse is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 14. People should call the COA for an appointment.

Brown bag lunch will be ready for pickup on Friday, Jan. 16 at 11 a.m.

The special event for January is a noontime Pizza Party on Wednesday, Jan. 21. The menu includes pizza, salad, drinks and dessert, all for \$10. Those who want to attend must RSVP to the COA by Wednesday, Jan. 14. An added feature will be an actor from the Susan B. Anthony Museum who will reenact Mary Surratt's part in the Lincoln assassination.

If people have any questions about any of the COA programs or need assistance, they may call either Kendra Rybacki or Director Yvon at the COA at 413-269-0100, extension 5.

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The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com.

Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-paid.

HUNTINGTON

Library announces schedule change

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – The Huntington Public Library announces a change in their Wednesday schedule starting in January.

In 2026, Wednesdays will move to morning hours. The schedule will now be on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-6 p.m.

Library Director Amanda Loisel also announces a special activity for anyone thinking of setting a new course for 2026. Do it Yourself Vision Boards will be offered for all ages on Thursday, Jan. 8 at 4 p.m. They will create their vision

board to help them focus on what matters most in the year ahead, as a great way to spark motivation in a fun and friendly environment.

The monthly Friday Playgroup is scheduled for Jan. 16 at 10 a.m. This fun-filled morning is offered by the Hilltown Community Health Center's Family Center for children ages five and under.

Speaking of children, Kid Inventors' Day will be celebrated on Saturday, Jan. 17 at 11 a.m. Parents and guardians of young creators to the invention station for hands-on fun and imaginative activities. Spark curiosity and watch their ideas come to life.

Artists are sought for the library's Artist of the

Month series. This is a fantastic opportunity to share creativity with fellow community members, showcase their talent, and inspire others with their work. For more information, people may call Loisel at 413-512-2506 or email librarydirectory@huntingtonma.us.

The Book Club pick for January is "The Giver of Stars" by JoJo Moves. This historical fiction novel is inspired by the real-life pack-horse librarians, who delivered books via horseback during the Great Depression. Soon to become a motion picture, the story is set in 1930's Kentucky and covers a group of women, who deliver books to remote Appalachian towns. It is an example of the transforma-

tive power of books. Copies will be at the library while available, may be ordered through interlibrary loan or borrowed through Libby. "The Giver of Stars" will be discussed on Feb. 5 at 4 p.m.

Regular monthly activities will continue, with story hours every Monday and Saturday at 10:30 a.m. Crafternoon will be held on Thursday, Jan. 8 at 4 p.m. People may bring something they are working on or try some of the library's materials out. The Book Swap Club will meet on Tuesday, Jan. 13 at 4 p.m. Instead of everyone reading the same book, this is a chance to share their favorite book(s) with others. Finally, Game Night will be held on Thursday, Jan. 15 at 4 p.m.

DV Task Force presents 'In Her Shoes' on Jan. 14

HUNTINGTON – The Hilltown Safety at Home Program and the Southern Hilltown Domestic Violence Task Force present the acclaimed "In Her Shoes" training on Wednesday, Jan. 14 from 3-4:15 a.m.

Participants should arrive at 2:45 p.m. for sign-in and snacks at Gateway High School, 12 Littleville Road. Participants will walk through real-life scenarios faced by survivors of domestic violence and gain insight into the bar-

riers and tough choices survivors encounter every day. They will consider how power and privilege intersect with class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and status and learn how to support and advocate for those affected by abuse.

The program is open to all and is ideal for professionals, volunteers and community members committed to making a difference. People may email southernhillsvtaskforce@gmail.com by Thursday, Jan. 8 to reserve a spot.

FALLOUT

have to tie into town lines immediately. Current grant money can only be used to tie in homes whose levels exceed state/federal limits. The Select Board asked the group to seek out other sources of funding that will cover the remaining homes tying into the town water line before they exceed contamination levels.

Booth would like to see the other houses tie in. While they are testing at levels not requiring remediation, they are higher than other wells in town. He feels that owners will be unable to sell their homes.

EKI Environment and Water, Inc. was hired by the Board of Health to do the PFAS sampling of drinking water, as required by the state. EKI sends a Licensed Site Professional, to take the samples that are tested. The contract signed with EKI also required the LSP to discover where the "plume" or groundwater may be going from the former landfill. According to Select Board Chair Roger Booth, who has a background in this field, that water will not necessarily flow downhill. This knowledge will determine where additional monitoring wells for PFAS will be located.

Booth would like the contract with EKI examined to see if it goes beyond the plume study. If it does, he feels that the work needs to go out to bid. He also requested a copy of communication between the LSP and Department of Environmental Protection pertaining to this, with any regulations that are being cited. He also said that the

select board should be copied on any further communications, and the town lawyer consulted.

At this point, tying in the other houses has to wait until spring unless there's an emergency order. "Once all of the homes are on town water, the town won't have to pay thousands to monitor them," Booth said. Hathaway further noted that re-paving Basket Street from the new water line has to also wait until spring. "The ties have to be done before we mill and repave," he said. The three groups will discuss this issue again on Wednesday, Jan. 14 at 6 p.m.

In other business, Town Accountant Richard Buley presented the FY'2025 end of year budget transfers and said he believes that free cash will come in over \$400,000 this year, according to preliminary numbers. Buley also asked for an increase in salary, saying that the Select Board's efforts to bring town salaries up in recent years had put him "on the short end salary-wise." Peloquin agreed and noted that he is on the low end compared to area town accountants. Booth said he would recommend an increase from \$17,851 a year to \$24,000 as long as Buley would agree to move to a contract for his position. The motion was voted unanimously and included \$3,000 coming from savings in the assistant line when the position was unfilled and the rest from free cash, contingent on a contract agreement to be approved by Jan. 30.

A lengthy discussion took place between the Select Board and



Select board Chairman Roger Booth addresses the Board of Health and Water and Sewer Department, over continued PFAS issues on Basket Street. Shown from left, are William Hathaway (Select Board), George Peterson and John Bergeron (Board of Health), H. Daniel Oliviera (Water and Sewer) and Kathleen Peterson (Board of Health); Booth is in the foreground. *Turley Publications photo by Wendy Long*

Planning Board members Linda Hamlin and Karon Hathaway, regarding a DLTA Grant through the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Discussed were use of the grant to create a town master plan and update the permitting guide. Following a long back and forth and consideration of many issues, the select board took two votes to approve two applications-one for creating a master plan for the town and the other for updating the permitting guide.

Town Clerk Michelle Fieldstad-Booth and Board of Health members discussed non-compliance issues over the town's new dog licensing bylaw. She has one individual, who applied for a dog license, but did not give a copy of a rabies certificate. A second issue is rabies certificates coming in from veterinarians for dogs that are not licensed. It was

agreed that the Select Board should follow up on the unlicensed dogs and the Board of Health on any lacking rabies certification.

The final 2026 liquor license application for the Rapids restaurant on Route 112 was also discussed. There is a Zoning Board issue, as they granted a five-year special permit that required that the restaurant open within two years. If it did not, they have to reap-

ply. In the end, the board approved the liquor license but the owner will receive a letter saying they need to contact the ZBA to see whether or not his permit to open is still active.

An application for a 2026 Class II Motor Vehicle Dealer License for Jackalynn's Auto Sales will be held until the building's owner can be contacted to verify that he gives permission to allow that business to

be run from his property.

A request to use Stanton Hall twice a month at no charge from a local homeschool group was unanimously voted down. Peloquin was asked to follow up and find out if they are from Huntington and affiliated with a non-profit; if not, the town would need to charge \$100 per day for use of the building to help cover heat, lights and electricity, in accordance with its policies.

Peloquin resigned from her role in processing electrical, gas and plumbing permits. George Peterson is willing to take this on, as it's a building department function. This role is paid \$15 per permit.

After discussion, it was determined that a proposed sand shed for the public at the Norwich Hill Fire Station was not feasible as it would require the highway department to use a truck and loader and take about two hours to get sand/salt into the proposed area. The idea has merit, however and the town will continue to look at other sites. The next meeting for the Huntington Select Board will be Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2026 at 5 p.m.

from page 1

WORTHINGTON

Quilting basics sessions offered

WORTHINGTON – The Friends of the Worthington Library will host two quilting basics sessions on Saturdays, Jan. 17 and 31 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Worthington Town Hall, 160 Huntington Road.

Ellen DeGrave will teach the two sessions. Participants will learn the basics, experiment with color choices and fabric. Session 1 will get participants started on a block to finish at home. Session 2 will include how to create a small

item using their square.

Cost is \$50 and includes all materials and will help support youth programs. Class is limited to ten adult participants. People may register at the Worthington Library, 1 Huntington Road.



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OPINION

GUEST COLUMN



I'm on SS disability; should I switch to regular Social Security?

Dear Rusty:

Should I take my Social Security now at age 62, or wait till I am 65?

I've been collecting SS disability due to health issues and was curious if I should wait or claim my regular Social Security retirement benefits now.

Signed: Disabled but Wondering

Dear Disabled but Wondering:

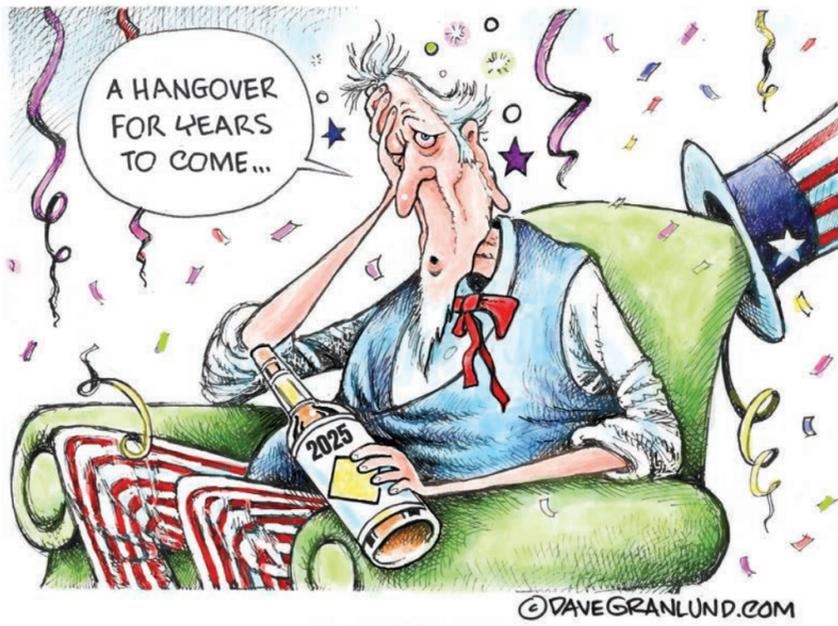
If you are now collecting Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and you are still disabled, it would be a disadvantage to claim your SS retirement benefits at this time age 62 or even at age 65. That's because your SSDI benefit is the same as your Full Retirement Age amount, as calculated for you at the point you became disabled. Born after 1959, your FRA is age 67, but you are already receiving your FRA benefit while on SS disability even though you have not yet reached your full retirement age. That full SSDI benefit will automatically convert to become your SS retirement benefit when you reach your full retirement age.

If you were to claim your normal SS retirement benefit any earlier than your SS full retirement age of 67, the amount you get would be reduced for

claiming early. At your current age, you would likely get between 75% and 80% of what you are now receiving on SSDI (depending on your exact age in the month you claim and at age 65 you would get about 87% of what you are now receiving on Social Security disability.

In other words, as long as your disability continues and you remain eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits, you should not switch to your normal SS retirement benefit, because you would get less money. And the resulting benefit reduction would be permanent.

The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.



GUEST COLUMN

Testing and taking seed inventory is a good practice to start the new gardening season

I don't know about you, but I have been caught up in spirit of the holidays. It's been fun to indulge in family time and try and get caught up on much-needed rest.

I have given myself this last week of the year to continue to take it easy before I hit the "to do" list.

One of the big things I have been procrastinating on at work is taking inventory of all the seeds I have left from the last couple of years. The box holds a hundred or so different varieties of seeds, mostly heirloom, open-pollinated types.

There is something refreshing about accomplishing this task soon into the new year; a seasonal habit I've had for the last four decades give or take. To me, it means spring is not far behind.

I begin by organizing the seeds first by category: vegetable, flower or herb, then alphabetically. After those piles have been made, I go back and decide which packets are no good or no longer of use.

No matter how well they are stored, some seeds won't germinate well past the year in which they are sold for. Based on my experience these include hybrid onions and parsnips. Carrots can be iffy.

In the herb category dill, caraway, parsley, angelica and chives come to mind. Year old garden heliotrope,

feverfew and bellflowers can be stubborn germinators as far as flowers go.

As a general rule I keep seed that is less than three years old, unless the variety in question is rare. Even spotty germination is better than nothing when it comes to seed that is hard to find.

You can save yourself disappointment at planting time by performing a simple germination test on questionable seed.

Place a few seeds in a moist paper towel. Roll it up and seal it in a plastic bag in a warm location.

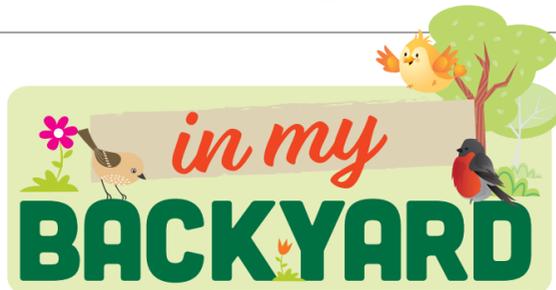
Instructions in the seed catalog or on the packet should tell you how long it takes for germination to occur, as well as inform you of the initial germination percentage. Once the necessary amount of time has elapsed

GARDEN, page 5

The Massachusetts Audubon Society reported a sighting of a sora on Nauset Beach in Orleans on Cape Cod between Dec. 10 and 16.

Soras are small, chubby, chicken like birds with long toes and between eight to ten inches tall. Their stubby bill distinguished them from other rails in the United States and Canada, which have longer bills. They also frequently hold their short tail cocked up showing their white patch under the tail.

Soras are mottled gray and brown with white-edged feathers, but the feature that



By Ellenor Downer

stands out the most is their yellow candy-corn bill. Other field marks include a black mask, throat patch and vertical white lines on the sides. Females tend to be less brightly colored than males

and have less black on the face and throat. Juveniles also lack the black mask.

Soras have a distinct walk pushing their head forward with every step while nervously flicking the tail upward, exposing the white under tail feathers. They tend to forage in dense vegetation, but also venture into open areas from time to time. Their long toes help them walk on top of floating mats of vegetation. Soras make their homes in freshwater wetlands with emergent vegetation such as cattails, sedges and rushes. During migration and winter, they also use brackish marshes, flooded fields and wet pastures.

The Sora makes its presence known with plaintive whistles and whinnies rising from the marshes

all across North America. Despite its abundance, it is not often seen: As with other rails, it spends most of its time hidden in dense marshy growth or wet meadows. Occasionally it will walk about in full view at the edge of a pond, delighting any birders, who happen to be nearby. Although Soras might seem like weak fliers when seen fluttering over the marsh, they regularly migrate long distances, many going to South America for the winter.

Cape Cod bird sightings
Besides the sora, the following sightings were reported between Dec. 10 and Dec. 16. A western tanager was found at Mass Audubon's Wellfleet Bay sanctuary. The male painted bunting continued at a feeder in Brewster. Other bird

sightings included a clapper rail and six western willets in South Chatham, two common terns in North Chatham, a blue-headed vireo and a yellow-breasted chat in South Orleans, a common yellowthroat and for northern shovellers in Harwich and a short-eared owl.

Birds seen at Race Point in Provincetown were a black guillemot, 200 razorbills, 13 dovekeys, three common murrelets, 45 black-legged kittiwakes, six Iceland gulls, a red-necked grebe and 75 northern gannets.

Other sightings around the Cape included two continuing Eurasian wigeon in Yarmouth Port, two Barrow's goldeneyes at Loop Beach in Cotuit, a great egret at Mass Audubon's Skunknet River

BACKYARD, page 5



Sora

Corrections policy

If you notice a factual error in our pages, please let us know, so that we can set the record straight. Email information to countryjournal@turley.com, or call us at 413-283-8393.

Corrections will be printed in the same section where the error originally occurred.

Country Journal welcomes Election letters to the editor

The Country Journal welcomes readers to participate in this year's election campaigns by writing letters to the editor for publication on these pages. Letters of up to 250 words from local residents endorsing candidates on the ballot or discussing campaign issues should be sent to The Country Journal, care of Turley Publications, 24 Water St., Palmer, MA 01069, faxed to 413-289-1977 or emailed to countryjournal@turley.com.

Please include a daytime telephone number for verification purposes (it will not be printed). Letters must be received by **noon Friday** to be considered for the following Thursday's newspaper. No attack letters will be printed. No letters written by candidates supporting their own candidacy will be printed. If the volume of letters received is larger than the space available in the newspaper, or if the letters become repetitive, the

newspaper reserves the right to print a representative sample. No endorsement letters will be printed in the last edition before the election. For more information, call 413-283-8393.

Campaign news

As part of its election coverage, the newspaper plans to print stories about contested races for Congress, state Senate, state House, district attorney and Governor's

Council during the weeks leading up to the election, as well as a question-and-answer voters guide. In order to ensure fairness to all candidates, no political press releases will be printed, nor will reporters cover political rallies or fundraisers.

Candidates who wish to further publicize their candidacy, beliefs and events may contact advertising, 413-283-8393 about paid advertising in The Country Journal.

Country Journal TEAM



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Letters to the editor should be 500 words or less in length. We require letter writers to include his or her name, town of residence and home telephone number. We must authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions deemed to be libelous or contain unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, defamation of character and offensive language. All unknown or alleged facts and quotations offered by the author need to cite credible, unbiased sources.

Mail letter to Country Journal, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069 or mail your letter to: countryjournal@turley.com.



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SCHOOLS & YOUTH

Gateway students compete for bragging rights

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – As usual, Gateway’s Reindeer Games took place on the half day before the December holiday break.

The freshmen, sophomores and juniors each entered the gymnasium and took their spots in the bleachers. Holiday themed music swelled and the senior class entered with Santa, aka senior Jeffrey Antonellis, in a reindeer-drawn sleigh. Gateway saw close results between the classes in this year’s highly competitive series. After a number of contests and with five to go, the sophomore, junior and senior classes were all tied at 425 points each.

Reindeer Games is a long tradition. It is organized by the student council and executed with the assistance of staff, who serve as judges, referees and counters. Mathematics teacher Cheryl Wright played holiday music to keep things festive and science teacher Josh Mason was the Master of Ceremonies. Assistant Principal Val Zeh said that students had clearly been anticipating the games for days. “Even seeing the enthusiasm as each class decorated their section of the bleachers was amazing,” Zeh said.

Contests included hands-free eating a donut hanging from a string, gingerbread house decorating, tug of war and three-minute volleyball heats. One entry was “Hungry, Hungry Gator,” where one student lay on a rolling plank and a second student held their feet to



Student Council President Eliza Mueller and Secretary Lily Peloquin, both seniors, helped keep things organized on the sidelines, making sure the events ran smoothly.



Hungry Gator strategy: carry the balls in your hat!

“wheelbarrow” them around the gym. One pair from each class competed to pick up the highest number of small, colorful balls from the floor and

return them to their basket in a corner of the gym. Several different strategies were used. The ‘hungry gator’ on the event’s only female



The seniors section of the bleachers was decorated with warm weather wishes that included palm trees and had class members wearing leis.

Turley Publications photos by Wendy Long



Jackson Renaud jumps to spike the ball, helping the junior class win the volleyball heat.

team had her arms close to the floor in a wide stance and plowed up a lot of balls on each pass. Another gator used his hat to hold more than his hands alone could have held.

After the final contests, which included wrapping a present (um, person) and the grand finale snowball fight (dodge ball), the junior class won with 725 points, edging out the seniors and sophomores which each had 700 points. The freshman class took last place with 375 points.

It’s not only a way to kick off the holidays but the highest scorer earns points for the school’s highly coveted Spirit Trophy, which is awarded at the end of the year. The classes compete all year long in spirit weeks and events and the winning class is announced at the final awards ceremony. The class year is engraved on the trophy for posterity.

OPINION

GARDEN

from page 4

unroll the paper towel and determine how viable your seeds are by observing the sprouting that has occurred.

Based on the results you may decide to sow the seed more thickly or just start over with a fresh batch.

Last year I did my own version of a germination test by sowing few seeds of questionable varieties in pots, and placing them on a shelf near my wood stove. I learned which seeds were worth the effort of sowing in the garden and which I needed to discard and order new.

Although viability decreases as seeds age, proper storage can insure that you will get at least

three years worth of sprouting out of many of your favorites. It is important to fold over used seed packets and seal them with tape after use, and if you are just getting to it now, it’s better late than never. Put them in a location that is cool and dry.

Since temperatures around 37-41 degrees are ideal, many people assume that storage in the refrigerator is preferred. It is, as long as the seeds are first placed in an airtight container along with a desiccant to absorb moisture. Desiccants such as silica gel are available in the floral section of craft shops, or you can reuse the pouches of silica that come in vitamin bottles or

shoe boxes.

If you’d rather not take up space in your fridge, storing the container of seeds in a cabinet in a dry part of the house will also work.

Whatever you do, don’t put them in a hot attic or damp basement! It is also not a good idea to purchase seeds from stores that have their seed displays in greenhouses. Temperature and moisture extremes can affect viability even if the seeds are brand new!

Some seed companies sell their seed in foil-lined packets. These are very good at keeping them fresh for the longest amount of time – especially if they are unopened.

BACKYARD

from page 4

sanctuary in Barnstable, a Nashville warbler reported at a house in Yarmouth, continuing unseasonably large numbers of tree swallows in various places including over 50 in Falmouth, two western willets in Chatham and an American golden plover in North Truro.

Christmas bird count

From Dec. 15 to Jan. 5, the Christmas Bird Count will commence in the U.S., Canada and 18 other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Countries are divided into geographical regions with 35 in Massachusetts and each region will pick a single 24-hour period to count birds. Data from the CBC can be utilized in many ways, including to monitor trends in bird populations, document range shifts over time and examine how climate change may impact the winter distributions of birds.

CBC data has been used in hundreds of analyses, peer-reviewed publications and government reports over

the decades.

Birds likely seen in Massachusetts are chickadees, titmice, many species of woodpeckers, bluebirds, Carolina wren and many raptors. Migrants from the north include kinglets, some raptors, snow bunting and some sparrows. Waterfowl seen mostly along the coast are dabbling and diving ducks. Irregular species that are only present in some years are evening grosbeak, red crossbill, white-winged crossbill, redpoll, pine grosbeak and

red-breasted nuthatch.

Helping birds

People may help birds by participating in the Christmas Bird Count. It is an important source of data on birds.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by calling me at 413-967-3505, leaving a message at extension 100, emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005.



Bluebirds

Now that you have inventoried your seeds, it will be a whole lot of fun to order exactly what you need. That’s what I will be doing after one more family game night and that last

Christmas movie.

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 33 years she has held the position of staff horticultur-

ist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with “Gardening Question” in the subject line.

First Congregational Church of Blandford

Pastor Ciprian Droma
91 Main St., Blandford, MA 01008
413-848-2052
Sunday service 10 a.m.

First Congregational Church of Chester

334 Skyline Trail, Chester, MA 01011
Pastor Susan Borsella
Service with Live Music: 10 a.m. - Sunday
Coffee and Sweets Social:
10:45 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

First Congregational Church of Williamsburg

Rev. Jack Kraaz
4 North Main St., Williamsburg, MA 01096
413-268-7557
burgychurch@gmail.com • burgychurch.org
Facebook:
First Congregational Church of Williamsburg
YouTube Channel: www.youtube.com/channel/UCdyH1EA-fduamqHYeekxw5w
Office Hours: Tues. - Fri. 9 a.m. - 12 noon
Days and Hours of Services: Sun. at 10 a.m.

Hilltown Community Church

Rev. Dr. Robert Perreault
55 Main St., Russell, MA 01071
413-275-3232
Office: 413-862-3341
hilltownchurch3341@gmail.com
Sunday Mornings 10 a.m.

Holy Family Parish

Rev. Ronald F. Sadlowski, known as Fr. Ron
5 Main St., Russell, MA 01071
413-862-4418
Office Hours: No set times.
Please call, leave a voice message or email: holyfamilyrussell.org
parish@holyfamilyrussell.org
Saturday Vigil: 5 p.m.
Sunday Masses: 8:15 a.m. & 11 a.m.

CHURCH DIRECTORY



Your Community Church

New Boston Congregational Church

4 Sandisfield Rd., PO Box 81
Sandisfield, MA 01255
Services held twice monthly, check website:
www.newbostoncongregationalchurch.org

Pioneer Valley Assembly of God

Pastor Javier Melendez
63 Old Chester Rd., Huntington MA 01050
413-667-3196
pvaglfe@gmail.com
www.pioneervalleyag.org
Facebook: Pioneer Valley Assembly of God
Sunday service: 10:30 a.m.

Pioneer Valley Mennonite Fellowship

Deacon Jerald Reinford
400 Huntington Rd., Russell, MA 01071
(413) 297-6037
Sunday worship at 10 a.m.
Visitors appreciated.

BLANDFORD

REVIEW

from page 1

Ladies Group played in the gym at Town Hall. A regular occurrence; all picklers welcome.

Ryan Keach of Montgomery and Michael Carr of Blandford both joined the Highway Department giving the department three employees including Mario Godbout.

Jeff Allen resigned from the Select Board effectively limiting choices on the Annual Town Election ballot.

May was almost fairly quiet with praying mantises hatching at the library. The first Select Board meeting in May drew a standing room only crowd as the board adopted a resolution in opposition to the siting of the

BESS units. A tractor trailer truck, a semi, got stuck on a lawn on North Street creating huge ruts. It was eventually removed.

On the last day of May, Transfer Station attendant Glen Besette, Select Board member Ted Cousineau, Board of Health Chair Bret Hartley, Board of Health member Jennifer Girard, and Transfer Station attendants Chris Cappa and Nate Soares celebrated the opening of the Swap Shack. The Memorial Day Parade and Annual Town Picnic were enjoyed by many.

The Town Meeting Monday, June 2, saw 61 registered voters turn out to approve 34 articles in just under 45 minutes. Election

June 14 gave the town Jackie Coury as the new member of the Select Board.

The Historical Society received a grant to replace the roof on The White Church. The work started just before the July holiday weekend as the old roof was removed and the new underlying plywood and water sealant were put in place. The 30th Annual Bel Canto Opera performance continued the long-standing successful event with Maestro Eve Queler and Douglas Martin at the piano.

The Citizens to Enlighten Blandford presented their petition to the Select Board seeking to halt the proposed 4.04 MW solar photovoltaic array and BESS

at 89 Chester Road...the 2.8 MW on 30 Huntington Road proposing as well as the large BESS expansion project to 50 MW on North Blandford Road.

In August, Mission Clean Energy presented their case to the town for BESS along with Eversource with their proposed expansion of the North Blandford Road substation. And the Fairgrounds had new drainage ditches dug and the new pavilion went up in time for the Labor Day Weekend fair. The weather held and crowds visited the Fairgrounds. Mission Clean Energy hosted an open house for resident to ask questions. And a ferocious windstorm Sept. 6 did some consider-

able damage which kept the Fire Department busy with wires down.

The largest number of registered voters attended the Sept. 22 Special Town Meeting which asked voters for guidance for the Select Board regarding all things solar and \$200,000 budget item for research and expert information regarding solar and BESS.

There were two major events in October. The first, Oct 11, saw the Jethro Jones Historical Marker officially dedicated. The second was the Ghost Walk at the Old Burying Ground at the top of Main Street on Oct. 18. This featured the town's ghosts of the American Revolution.

The COA hosted the

annual Veterans Dinner on Nov. 8. The Poop Museum visited on Nov. 15. The Nov. 17 Special Town Meeting again brought out a crowd to vote for a moratorium for solar projects and BESS.

The Dec. 9 Special Town Meeting brought out again a large number of registered voters who unanimously approved the library's expansion project. A second STM on Dec. 19 corrected a budget error. The Select Board reopened the Tax Classification hearing with fewer people attending; possibly due to the inclement weather.

As an extra, the Finance Committee really needs another member.



Sheriff recruits clean up in March in Blandford.



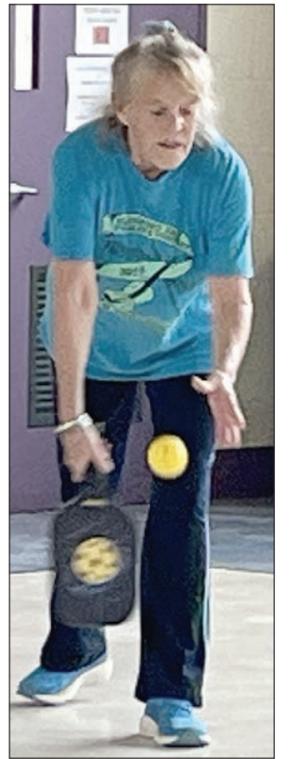
Henry Knox Regimental Color Guard of the Sons of the American Revolution give a musket salute at Jethro Jones Historical Marker dedication in October.



The largest crowd in recent history attended the Sept. 22 Special Town Meeting.



A grant covered the cost of a new roof for the White Church in July



Pickleballer Mary Mangini is shown in action.



The new pavilion and staging area at the Fairgrounds in August is getting ready for the Blandford Fair.



Swap Shack Ribbon Cutting May.



A semi and trailer got stuck on a North Street lawn.

BLANDFORD

Blandford Select Board reflect on 2025 big events

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – Responding to the question on what in your opinion were the things that had the biggest impact on the town, members to the select board replied.

Chair Cara Letendre said that the most “uplifting moment of the year was at the special town meeting on Dec. 9 when the town unanimously voted to move forward with the expansion of the Porter Memorial Library. Nicole was passionate and her pleas for this expansion to build a stronger sense of community clearly resonated with residents.”

She also found the opening of the Swap Shop at the transfer station uplifting. Since it opened, she has “witnessed children excited to come to ‘the dump’ with their parents to trade in gently used toys and shop for something new. I am thrilled to see that items in town are being passed on to neighbors who need them rather than being thrown out.”

A significant moment for Letendre was the size

of the turnout at the August 11 meeting for the Mission Clean Energy presentation. “Whether there in support or otherwise, people clearly care a great deal about the effect this project may have on the town. It is my hope that when it is time to go back to special town meeting to discuss our next steps in building a safe and modern fire department, residents show up with the same amount of support.”

She was proud to watch “residents, both young and old, enjoy our Memorial Day celebration. Our recreation committee works so hard behind the scenes to help create these core memories.”

“And lastly, seeing the old stage area at the Fairgrounds being torn down and replaced was emotional. Sitting under the new pavilion and listening to local talented musicians as my nearly grown children wandered the fair on their own felt surreal.”

Board member T.J. Cousineau found inspiration in two things that “brought our town together.”

The expansion of the Porter Memorial Library, “a very positive move for-



Blandford Select Board are shown from left, T.J. Cousineau, Cara Letendre and Jackie Coury.

File photo

ward.” And the generosity of Sumner Robbins for the benefit of the library.

And the other one is the solar and battery movement in the state and the “total disregard the state holds for the small towns like Blandford, in the western part of the state.”

He also included the appointment of the new Highway Superintendent, Ray Hultay, “who is doing a superb job on maintaining our roads and equipment” and the efforts on the part of the Historical Society, citing the Ghost Walk and the upcoming John Knox re-en-

actment on Jan. 11 at the Fairgrounds.

Board member Jackie Coury thought there were two major events that stood out for her. First, the impact of Governor Healey’s Climate Bill on Blandford. “Blandford is uniquely

affected due to the presence of an Eversource substation within the town. This infrastructure has attracted increased interest from commercial solar and battery energy storage system developers seeking to locate projects nearby to reduce interconnection costs. The resulting influx of proposed commercial energy facilities has generated significant controversy and concern among residents, particularly regarding public safety and the preservation of Blandford’s rural character.

For Coury, the second most meaningful event was “the approval of the Porter Memorial Library expansion.” This long-anticipated project became possible through the dedication and hard work of the Library Project Team, the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners grant award, the generous contribution of the Sumner and Sally Robbins Trusts, and the support of Blandford residents. The Porter Library will continue to be an integral part of Blandford’s character and community life for many years to come.

Town Administrator reflects on our strong community

BLANDFORD – Asking Town Administrator Cristina Ferrera to consider 2025, her first full year holding the office, she responded with the following observations.

“One of the most impactful realizations for me in 2025 was seeing just how deeply the Blandford community has always stepped up to support and sustain the town. That spirit of involvement, residents, who genuinely care and actively participate, is what truly defines a strong community.”

She is certainly aware of the town’s volunteers. “So many of Blandford’s essential boards and committees rely on the dedication of resident volunteers to keep the town running smoothly, and that commitment does not go unnoticed.”

She added that she is



Cristina Ferrera

“deeply grateful to all of our volunteer board and committee members, past and present, for the time, energy, and care they give to our town.”

As Blandford moves into the new year, she said, “hope we continue to see that same spirit of service, along with new faces who are excited to step forward, get involved, and help shape Blandford’s future.”

Open burning season begins

BLANDFORD – Open burning begins Thursday, Jan. 15 and continues through Friday, May 1.

Permits are available through the Fire Department online by visiting the town’s website at townofblandford.com. No permits are issued in advance due to the potential for changing weather conditions.

Requests for burning permits must be made every time anyone wants to burn.

The following regulations must be observed: People may only burn

brush. All other materials are illegal. No leaves, grass, hay, stumps, building debris or any other materials may be burned.

All open burning must be a minimum of 75 feet from buildings or structures.

Burning starts at 10 a.m. and must be extinguished by 4 p.m. Any open fire must be attended at all times by the permit holder.

No person shall set, maintain or increase a fire in open air at any time except by permission. People must be 18 years

or older to apply for a permit and/or set, maintain or increase a fire once permission has been granted by the Fire Department.

People must have an appropriate means to extinguish an open-air fire completely at the end of the day or if requested by the Fire Department. The Fire Department can refuse or cancel a permit at any time such as violation of permit regulations or change in weather conditions. Permits are only issued between 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and only on the day anyone wants to burn.

Conservation Commission has new agent

BLANDFORD – At the Dec. 15 Select Board meeting, the board appointed Sabrina Pooler as the Conservation Commission Agent.

She will begin her new position soon. This is a five to ten hour a week part-time position for providing technical and administrative assistance to the Conservation Commission. She is currently

the Conservation Commission Coordinator for Southwick. She reviews all the Wetlands Protection Act applications, works up all the appropriate documents and works with the applicants while conducting inspections, etc. She also is responsible for general office duties.

In her letter of interest, she said she would be a good

fit for this position because of her experience running the Conservation Department and understanding its many layers. She has had three years with Southwick’s Conservation Commission and has volunteered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Connecticut River Conservancy regarding invasive aquatic species removal; certifying vernal

pools and documenting threatened species and is a past member of the Southwick Land Trust board.

Her education includes a Bachelors Degree in natural resource studies from UMASS Amherst; additional environmental science coursework at Arcadia University in Granada Spain and Holyoke Community College.

HS hosts Knox Trail program

BLANDFORD – The Historical Society will again re-enact a pivotal moment in the town’s history on Sunday, Jan. 11 from 3:30-5 p.m.

This marks the day, when 250 years ago, Blandford met Gen. Henry

Knox as they brought cannons from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston to help Gen. George Washington.

There will be a bonfire with hot chocolate or cider and donuts. There will be a cast of characters retelling the story.

Tax rate set at \$12.57 per thousand valuation

BLANDFORD – A Special Town Meeting had to be held on Friday, Dec. 19 to correct an error in the budget approved at the June Annual Town Meeting.

The error duplicated

some “raise and appropriate” line items and needed to be reversed. The original vote gave the town \$1,260,213 in certified free cash. Of that amount, voters approved moving \$370,000, correcting

the error.

The Tax Classification hearing then re-opened and the Select Board approved a uniform tax rate for the town. All classifications of property will be taxed at the same

rate of \$12.57 per thousand dollars of evaluation. The rate has been approved by the Department of Revenue and is on their website.

Ten registered voters participated in the meeting.

PUBLIC NOTICES

Town of Worthington Conservation Commission

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 131, Section 40, the Worthington Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing in response to a Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA) regarding proposed work associated with the upgrade to an existing septic system at 58 Patterson Road

The Hearing will be held **Thursday, January 15, 2026, at 7:20 PM** in the Selectboard meeting room at Town Hall, 160 Huntington Road. 01/01/2026

SOUTHERN HILLTOWNS Public Hearing –

Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 6:00 PM

FY 2022/2023 Construction Progress Hearing &

FY 2026 Application Forum

The Town of Russell, on behalf of the Towns of Chester, Huntington and Middlefield, in association with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, will conduct a performance hearing regarding the town’s ongoing FY24 Community Development Block Grant Programs. The hearing will take place at **6:00 PM on Tuesday, January 20, 2026**, in person at the Town Hall, 65 Main Street, Russell, MA 01071.

The hearing will review the projects funded through the town’s FY22/23 Community Development Block Grant Program including Valley View Avenue infrastructure improvements, public social services, and housing rehabilitation. These activities received funding through the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, Massachusetts CDBG program.

This hearing will also serve as the first public forum to solicit community input on potential activities to be included in a potential Southern Hilltowns FY26 Community Development Block Grant application. All community members and stakeholders are invited to share thoughts on potential CDBG-eligible activities to be included.

All persons with questions or comments regarding the performance hearing will have an opportunity to submit comments up until and through the public hearing. Please submit comments to Joe Hagopian at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission @ jhagopian@pvpc.org or 413-781-6045. Persons who require

special accommodations should contact the Town prior to the hearing date at 413-862-6200. 01/01/2026

Town of Worthington Conservation Commission Notice of Public Hearing

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 131, Section 40, the Worthington Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing in response to a Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA) regarding proposed training by Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee at 102 Clark Road on the proper way to remove various invasive species.

The Hearing will be held **Thursday, January 15, 2026, at 7:00 PM** in the Selectboard meeting room at Town Hall, 160 Huntington Road. 01/01/2026

WESTFIELD

Westfield Bank promotes Harrington to Senior Lender

WESTFIELD – James C. Hagan, President and CEO of Westfield Bank, announces the promotion of Michael Harrington to Senior Vice President and Senior Lender for the state of Massachusetts.



Michael Harrington

President and Chief Lending Officer of Westfield Bank.

With over thirty-three years of banking and commercial lending experience, Harrington joined Westfield Bank in 2007. Prior to that, he

served as a commercial lender and credit analyst at the former Westbank. Harrington is a lifelong resident of West Springfield. People may visit the bank’s website at www.westfieldbank.com for more information. Westfield Bank, headquartered in Westfield is a federally chartered savings bank organized in 1853 and is the largest publicly traded bank headquartered in Western Massachusetts. Currently, the bank has twenty-five branch offices, forty-nine ATMs, and an additional thirty seasonal ATMs and serves Hampden and Hampshire counties in Western Massachusetts and Hartford County in Northern Connecticut.

“Michael has been instrumental in growing the Bank’s commercial lending portfolio for the past eighteen years,” said Allen J. Miles, Executive Vice

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This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate that is in violation of the law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertising in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis. To complain about discrimination call The Department of Housing and Urban Development " HUD" toll-free at 1-800-669-9777. For the N.E. area, call HUD at 617-565-5308. The toll free number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-927-9275.

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29 Base Price \$30.50	30 Base Price \$31.00	31 Base Price \$31.50	32 Base Price \$32.00
33 Base Price \$32.50	34 Base Price \$33.00	35 Base Price \$33.50	36 Base Price \$34.00
37 Base Price \$34.50	38 Base Price \$35.00	39 Base Price \$35.50	40 Base Price \$36.00

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MONTEREY

Library and Bidwell Museum host Henry Knox programs

MONTEREY – The Monterey Historical Society, Monterey Library and the Bidwell House Museum will hold a celebration of the 250th anniversary of Henry Knox's Noble Trail of Artillery through the Southern Berkshires on Friday, Jan. 16 and Saturday, Jan. 17, 2026.

Beginning in December of 1775 from Fort Ticonderoga in New York, twenty five year old Henry Knox led an expedition to move 60 tons of captured British artillery to the Continental army in Boston in order to force the British to evacuate the city. Knox's journey took three months and came through the Berkshires in January of 1776, during the depths of winter, using little more than ox and horse-drawn sledges and manpower.

To commemorate the

250th anniversary of this remarkable achievement, The Monterey Historical Society, the Monterey Library, 452 Main Road and the Bidwell House Museum are collaborating on a series of Knox trail related programs on Jan. 16 and 17, 2026. The weekend begins at the Monterey Library on Friday at 6 p.m. with the opening reception and program for the exhibition The Knox Trail through the Greenwoods.

On Saturday the program will continue with talks, a guided walk and a panel discussion. Rob Hoogs will present Henry Knox and the Noble Train of Cannons Through the Greenwoods at 10 a.m., followed by Jonathan Barkan at 11 a.m. and his Knox Trail Media Show. Barkan created a traveling slide show about Henry Knox for the 1976

Bicentennial which has been updated and remastered for today's audience. Both of these talks will take place at the Monterey Library.

After lunch the celebration moves to the Bidwell House Museum, 100 Art School Road, at 2 p.m. for the start of a guided walk on the Knox Trail, with Rob Hoogs. Attendees will gather around the fire with hot cider while Hoogs introduces the walk and then carpool to Brett Road for a one mile guided walk. Visitors will certainly be able to imagine the struggles of Knox and his team as they pulled 60 tons of cannons through the woods of the southern Berkshires in mid-winter.

Finally, the celebrations will conclude back at the Monterey Library at 7 p.m. with a panel discussion with several Knox Trail historians including Rob Hoogs, Ron

Bernard, Bernie Drew, Gary Leveille and Tom Ragusa about their new book "Ye Trodden Path."

The Knox250 exhibit at the Monterey Library will continue through Feb. 28. Additional talks and programs will be scheduled during the exhibition run and will be posted on the website. For more information and a full schedule of events, people may visit the Bidwell House Museum website at <https://www.bidwellhousemuseum.org/event/knox-trail-250th-celebration-in-monterey/>

The exhibit and programs are sponsored in part by grants from Housatonic Heritage and the Friends of the Monterey Library. All programs are free and open to the public. Parking for the Monterey Library is limited and visitors can also park in the public lot behind

the Monterey Town Hall. Weather related updates or cancellations to the program will be posted on the Bidwell House Museum Facebook page.

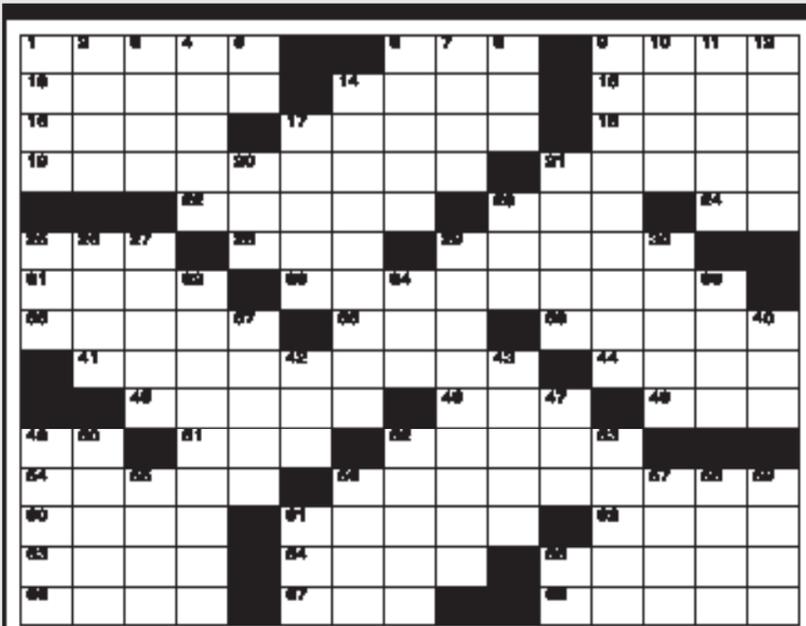
The Bidwell House Museum grounds-194 acres of woods, fields, historic stone walls, self-guided trails and picnic sites-are open every day, dawn until dusk, free of charge. The house is open for guided tours from May to October by appointment only and will reopen on Memorial Day, 2026. The program of events can be found on the museum's website: www.bidwellhousemuseum.org.

The library is open Monday through Saturday and closed on Sunday. A full list of Library hours and programs can be found at their website <https://www.montereyhistoricalsociety.org/>

The Monterey Historical Society is a private, non-profit volunteer organization founded in 1963. Throughout the year, they host lectures and programs, usually at the Monterey Library. Collection materials are available for review by appointment. More information can be found on the society's website at www.montereyhistoricalsociety.org.

NOTICE

ERRORS: Each advertiser is requested to check their advertisement the first time it appears. This paper will not be responsible for more than one corrected insertion, nor will be liable for any error in an advertisement to a greater extent than the cost of the space occupied by the item in the advertisement.



CLUES ACROSS

1. Lake
6. Electricotive train
9. Insects in Illinois
10. Bird yellow Dutch chicken made in India
13. Laughing Irish Jazz coach
14. Small sailboat
15. Actor idios
16. Mild yellow Dutch chicken made in India
17. System that attracts objects under water
18. Harsh, grating noise
19. Steward
21. A leaching sound
22. Infections
23. Actress Ryan
24. Soldiers
25. Swedish carlin
28. A large oil lamp
29. African antelope
31. Insurance providers
32. Charoy

CLUES DOWN

26. Ringworm
28. Upland bird
30. Dinosaurs
41. Park style
44. Sea of flesh
45. Spiritual being
46. Upland bird
48. Journalist Turbot
49. Popular sports highlight show
51. Born of
52. Rich poetry
54. S. China export
56. State of being uncolored
60. Surrounded by
61. Rocks
62. Away from wind
63. Dried up
64. Voluntary
65. A very large body of water
66. Garden beds
67. Screen type
68. Archer
- Scandinavian past

CLUES DOWN

1. Mountain
2. Spanish city
3. A certain very hard animal
4. "The Indian Jones of Texas"
5. Tin
6. Sea eagle
7. Volcanic crater
8. Type of coal
10. Woman's sportsman in Olympic games
11. Develop a crust
11. Norwegian playwright
12. "It's a Wonderful Life" director
14. Poisonous perennial plant
17. 18-year astronomical period
20. China
21. Places to sit
23. Family of a popular game
25. New York hotdog
28. Impression in stone or soap
29. Jacques ____, French

CLUES DOWN

29. One from the Big Apple
30. Name of wealthy owners
32. Songs to one's interest
34. Indigenous person of N.E. Thailand
35. Supplemented with difficulty
37. Forecast
38. Investment account (abbr.)
42. One from India
43. Angels
47. A male child
48. Book sport
50. Bird appearance
52. Partner in "Foster"
53. A light informal meal
55. Fabric with usually shiny surface
56. One fifth of a second
57. Ancient Indian-Greek colony
58. Close tightly
59. Bird out
61. Language
65. Computer characteristic

THIS WEEK'S HOROSCOPES

ARIES

Mar 21/Apr 20
If you are feeling half-hearted about what you are working on, then put it off for a little bit and focus on something more interesting this week, Aries. You can use the rest.

CANCER

Jun 22/Jul 22
Cancer, you may have the courage and the confidence to deal with whatever life throws at you right now, but not everyone is as dedicated as you. Make allowances for others this week.

LIBRA

Sept 23/Oct 23
You have reason to be suspicious of someone's motives this week. Just don't go to extremes and start reading into every message or nuance, Libra.

CAPRICORN

Dec 22/Jan 20
Capricorn, usually you couldn't care less what other people think about you. But this week it seems important to get another person's approval for your actions.

TAURUS

Apr 21/May 21
Make it your business to remind others not to take life so seriously this week, Taurus. The best way to do that is to show them how to laugh by example.

LEO

Jul 23/Aug 23
Sensitive feelings are coming to the surface and you are not sure what to do about them. You won't find peace of mind until you have dealt with them.

SCORPIO

Oct 24/Nov 22
Scorpio, you might look super confident on the outside, but underneath you get anxious like everyone else. At some point this week you may need to ask for some help.

AQUARIUS

Jan 21/Feb 18
Aquarius, be careful when dealing with someone in a position of power. They may have sights on a promotion you also hope to earn. Keep your cards close to the vest.

GEMINI

May 22/Jun 21
Your thoughts are on an important decision that you need to make, Gemini. It's best to wait a few days before you get into the thick of things. You need to mull all possibilities.

VIRGO

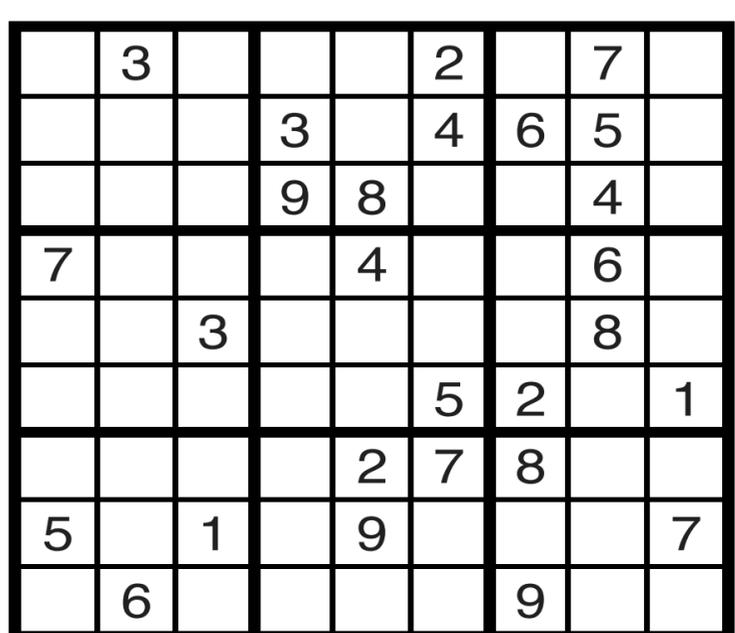
Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, some unexpected news could come your way between now and the weekend. It may seem like a lot, but in the grand scheme of things, it will only be a minor issue.

SAGITTARIUS

Nov 23/Dec 21
It is easy to believe you have enemies around every corner, Sagittarius. Although you might have rubbed a few people the wrong way, most people actually are on your side.

PISCES

Feb 19/Mar 20
Pisces, some people believe the world is full of doom and gloom, but you know that every day is what you make of it. Brighten the days of others with your positivity.



SUDOKU

Fun By The Numbers

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Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

answers

Q	T	V	K	R	Q	O	T	R	E	O	H
N	V	E	O	U	E	R	E	R	E	R	E
E	E	T	Y	E	H	V	C	I	N	V	Y
R	E	N	O	V	N	N	V	O	V	N	
B	V	R	H	V	E	N	O	R			
V	O	I	T	I	O	A	L	I	E	D	
N	R	H	S	E	A	O	N	P	O	R	O
K	X	V	O	S	M	V	R	V	E	N	I
E	A	I	O	E	T	E	R	E	O	D	E
V	T	V	A	N	R	E	O	D	E	N	
Y	N	B	E	M	S	E	H	O	S		
N	R	V	E	M	N	X	V	L	E	V	O
A	S	V	Y	E	N	O	S	M	V	O	
Y	B	T	E	L	V	U	P	N	V	O	T
C	I	R	S	J	R	S	E	R	R	N	

5	2	9	3	1	4	7	6	8
7	3	4	6	9	8	1	2	5
6	1	8	7	5	2	9	4	3
1	9	2	5	3	7	6	8	4
4	8	7	6	9	2	3	5	1
3	6	5	8	4	1	2	9	7
2	4	3	1	8	6	5	7	9
9	5	9	4	7	3	8	1	2
8	1	7	2	5	6	4	3	9

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CHESTER

Chester Railway Station host Christmas party

CHESTER – The Chester Railway Station hosted their annual Christmas party on Sunday, Dec. 7.

The Chester Railways Station's party featured Santa and Mrs. Claus, who arrived by police cruiser and visited with a large crowd inside the station.

Partygoers were treated to homemade cookies and other goodies along with cocoa, coffee and hot cider while listening to music provided by The Pitoniak Brothers Band.

Guests also got to enjoy the model train circling the Station's vintage Christmas tree with a pass outside by the real Lake Shore Limited just for fun.



The two elves at the Railway Station are Chester resident Tom Huntoon and former Chester Foundation Vice President and his granddaughter, Emily Cortis, who has volunteered at the Station since she was seven.



Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive at the Chester Railway Station for their annual Christmas party on Sunday, Dec. 7.



Christmas party attendees enjoy a long table of treats at the Chester Railway Station.

Submitted photos



The Pitoniak Brothers Band provided musical entertainment.

Tree lighting ends with cookies, cocoa and craft

CHESTER – About 40 people, who braved the cold and wind, attended the town sponsored tree lighting on Friday, Nov. 28.

Cookies, cocoa and crafts at Town Hall sponsored by the Chester Recreation Committee

and Mel's Kitchen followed the lighting of the tree. Many thanks to the Chester Fire Department, the Chester Blandford Police Department and Chester Municipal Electric Light Department for their support.



On Friday, Nov. 28, the community came out for the annual Chester tree lighting.

Submitted photos



Santa made an appearance at the tree lighting.

RAILWAY

estimated that the cost to the contractors and town on Dec. 22 would reach \$20,000.

According to Zachary LaPorte, the driver of the first rotator that towed the front of the 70,000 pound rail car, the operation went better than expected. Red's Towing had brought additional equipment that they hadn't needed to use. LaPorte said that this was one of the most complex jobs he'd been on.

One rotator towed the front of the car and a second rotator pushed the rear of the car by going in reverse, reminiscent of the mythical "Pushmi-Pullu" from Dr. Doolittle.

When the front rotator was well into the underpass, it stopped and the rear rotator pushed the back of the car into alignment with the road going through the tunnel. The rail car was then supported with I-beams and wooden timbers so that the rear rotator could be disconnected. This was necessary, LaPorte said, because the second rotator was never going to be able to make the corner into the underpass.

A third rotator, already lined up for the underpass and positioned on the property of John and Diane DeMoss, then connected to the rear of the railcar. The beams and timber were removed and the two pieces of equipment pulled and



Chester Railway Station and Museum President David Pierce watched the operation from the granite saw site, opposite the underpass.

pushed the car through the tunnel, which it cleared at 1:04 p.m. They moved the three connected pieces onto the side of Emory Street where it remained while things were set up for the final phase onto the museum grounds.

LaPorte explained that the use of the rotators allowed them to adjust the angle on the railway car and keep it low enough to clear the tunnel. The car appeared to have a top buffer of 5 to 8 inches in the tunnel as it went through.

About a dozen onlookers, board members and well wishers braved the cold temperature and prevailing wind to watch the operation from the Prospect Street side of the underpass. Smiles and a



The railroad car is out of the underpass.

Turley Publication photos by Wendy Long

collective sigh of relief may have momentarily added to the wind speed in the area, just after 1 p.m.

As it cleared the underpass, his rotator appeared to have let air out of the rear tires as a strategy to get everything through. But LaPorte clarified it was the heavy weight of the railway car that gave his tires their flattened appearance.

Museum president Dave Pierce was, of course, looking on. "It feels amazing. But I didn't have any doubt. When the mover and Red's said it would go, I knew it would."

Szirbik said that at the end of the day, it's done. "It's not a textbook job," he said. "It never was."

Michael McCormack, who runs the live cam at the Chester Railway Museum, was on hand to film the

move live. It can be viewed on YouTube, at "Historic Railway Dining Car Move at Chester Railway Station, Massachusetts." About 100 people watched live online as the move took place.

The railcar's final position will be behind the blue caboose, which serves as an industrial kitchen for the museum grounds for public and catered events. According to Pierce, the "trucks" that the car will finally rest on needed to be adjusted. In railway terms, trucks are the chassis structure that rail cars sit upon. Wheels can be attached to the trucks for cars moving along railroads. By the time the railway car was on the museum grounds, he said, there was concern over the fading light.

Pierce said local welder John Marcoullier "cut a few things off the blue caboose and we measured everything precisely, so we can have it all ready to go when they come back." Red's towing will return after the first of the year with a crane to lift the car onto its trucks.

LaPorte credited the success of the day with, "All the great work that everybody did ahead of time, that made everything go smoothly, without a hiccup."

Pierce added, "I'm just very happy that it's on our own property. That's huge."



Onto the grounds: Red's towed the railway car onto the museum grounds. Photo by Barbara Huntoon