

*"Let us learn together and laugh together and work together and pray together, confident that in the end we will triumph together in the right." – Jimmy Carter, 1977 Inaugural Address*

# 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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**HILLTOWNS**

## Valiant effort to save sled dog fails

By Wendy Long  
Correspondent

"What is true is that we tried everything. And whether he went to surgery or did't, the reality is his living body would not have made it. I can only hope his spirit follows us and comes home," wrote Marla BB, who operates Hilltown Sleddogs in West Chesterfield.

Her business breeds and trains Alaskan sled dogs, as well as humans, in sled dog



Vox, 9, was a world traveler, accomplished athlete and beloved sled dog.

Photo by Elyse Heise



Vox with owner Marla BB of Hilltown Sleddogs.

Submitted photo

racing and touring. She races sled dog teams in snow and over dry land. She also runs a summer camp and school vacation workshops for youth ages 8 – 15.

Each January, BB and a team of dogs head to Wisconsin in search of snow. This year Vox, one of the dogs, stopped eating after they arrived. On Tuesday, Jan. 7 Marla brought him to the vet and learned that he had a mass on his spleen,

but he might survive if the spleen was removed. She vacillated between having him euthanized or going for the surgery. Marla opted for the surgery, which was estimated to cost up to \$10,000. Val Finkel set up a "Go Fund Me" page called "Vox Needs Surgery: Help Us Save Him."

On Friday, Jan. 10 Vox went into surgery. Marla said she'd had a bad feeling all day and almost called it off several times. But, as she

wrote on the Go Fund Me site, the signs had been positive. "His x-rays were clear. His scans were clear. His blood count was better. His fever was down. His vitals were all stable." Both her vet at home and the Emergency Room doc said he was a good candidate for a successful outcome.

"He woke up the most energized he had been all

**SLED DOG**, page 2

**COMING SOON**  
**NEW LOOK**  
Same Local News.  
Same Local Stories.  
Same Local Advertisers.

**HUNTINGTON**

## Select Board hears fire chief proposal

By Wendy Long  
Correspondent

At their Wednesday, Jan. 15 Select Board meeting, Fire Chief Josh Ellinger recommended increasing the Chief's position to full-time.

Select Board Chair Roger Booth and Board members Bill Hathaway and John McVeigh along with Town Administrator Jennifer Peloquin heard Fire Chief Josh Ellinger's proposal.

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**BLANDFORD**

## January snowstorm blankets the Hilltowns

By Mary Kronholm  
Correspondent

Storms are no strangers to Blandford and have put the town in the headlines on more than one occasion. There were significant storms, with significant damage. In November 1921, an ice storm; in December 1942 Blandford was isolated by an ice storm and then hit again in January 1943 with another ice storm. In 1958 snow paralyzed Hilltowns, and again in January 2002. More recent storms include the most memorable 2008 ice storm and the 2011 Halloween snow event.

Snow announced itself Sunday afternoon in the cen-

ter of town at 1:12 p.m. Yet there were two golfers on the tee of the sixth hole at The Blandford Country Club. Amy Turcotte and Joe Walsh

of Russell; Walsh said, "We get out here as often as we can." Sports enthusiasts can

**SNOWSTORM**, page 7



A group of people get ready to slide down the hill by South Street School on this double-runner toboggan known as the "Double Ripper."

Blandford Historical Society Courtesy photo



Joe Walsh swings at the ball as Amy Turcotte looks on, clubs at the ready Sunday afternoon just as snow flakes began to fall. Turley photos by Mary Kronholm



What a difference a day makes. This is sixth tee at The Blandford Country Club the day after Amy Turcotte and Joe Walsh played the course on Sunday, Jan. 19. No one was golfing Monday morning, Jan. 20.



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## HILLTOWNS

# Local police and MassDOT warn of smishing attempts

By Mary Kronholm  
Correspondent

Russell/Montgomery Police Chief Kevin Hennessey said, “We are looking into several instances of scams.” That was his response to the question about recent smishing attempts.

According to Google, “Smishing is a social engineering attack that uses fake mobile text messages to trick people into downloading malware, sharing sensitive information or sending money to cyber-criminals.” Chester/Blandford Police Chief Jen Dubiel said, “There have been no complaints, but plenty of people are aware it is a scam.”

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has issued another warning about the scamming attempts.

Worthington Police Chief Robert Reinke said while he had no reports from anyone, he himself did receive a burst of three texts within minutes of each other looking for payments.

“I don’t know what we can do to prevent people from sending money to someone they don’t know,” he said, and added, “When in doubt, call the local police.”

On Tuesday, Jan. 21 Worthington Police Chief just got another text requesting payment for tolls. He said, “Just wanted to let you know it’s still going on...they (the scammers) must have gotten a lot of money last time.”

Otis Police Department nor Westhampton have received word of any smishing instances. Huntington Police Chief Robert Garriepy said, “We have nothing to report, yet, but the more information that is out there for people, the better.”

“It’s such a wide spread scam, I posted a warning up on our Facebook page,” said Goshen Police Chief.

Not all Hilltown police depart-

ments responded.

Smishing is, according to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), a text message-based scam. Scammers claim to represent the tolling agency, EZDriveMA requesting payment for unpaid tolls.

The text message says that EZDriveMA is looking for \$6.99 in unpaid tolls. Although the amount can differ between \$4.99 and \$14.99.

According to MassDOT, targeted phone numbers seem to be chosen at random and are not uniquely associated with an account or usage of toll roads. Customers who receive an unsolicited text, email, or similar message suggesting it is from EZDriveMA or another toll agency should not click on the link.

MassDOT reminds residents that EZDriveMA will never request payment by text and all links associated with EZDriveMA will include www.EZDriveMA.com.

The EZDrive smishing scam is part of a series of smishing scams that the Federal Bureau of Investigation is aware of. The FBI recommends that anyone who receives fraudulent messages do the following:

File a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov), be sure to include:

The phone number from where the text originated.

The website listed within the text.

Check your account using the toll service’s legitimate website.

Contact the toll service’s customer service phone number at 877-627-7745.

Delete any smishing texts received.

If people clicked any link or provided their information, take efforts to secure their personal information and financial accounts. Dispute any unfamiliar charges.

MassDOT encourages all customers to stay alert to these types of scams and

to contact them at [www.EZDriveMA.com](http://www.EZDriveMA.com) with any questions about EZDriveMA notifications.

The Los Angeles fires and other disasters have also produced fraudulent donor sites.

The FBI issued an announcement Thursday, Jan. 16 warning the public that scammers exploit mass casualty events and disasters, such as the New Year’s Day terrorist attack in New Orleans and the ongoing wildfires in Los Angeles. Scammers commit fraud by soliciting fake charitable donations to support victims or their families. They may pose as disaster relief agencies to collect personal information, conduct charitable fraud schemes or commit fraud against disaster assistance programs.

According to the FBI announcement, scammers may also impersonate official entities, celebrities, influencers, or other individuals. For example, a scammer might pose online as a high-profile victim to solicit donations. Artificial Intelligence may be used to increase perceived legitimacy of a fraud or impersonation.

Charitable fraud schemes associated with natural disasters are a common occurrence online as well as through in-person collection drives.

Last year alone, the FBI IC3 received more than 4,500 complaints reporting approximately \$96 million in losses to fraudulent charities, crowdfunding accounts and disaster relief campaigns.

The announcement offered several suggestions for protecting individuals from scammers.

Most important, would-be donors should research before donating to anything by confirming the validity of any charitable opportunity. Best practices include, but are not limited to:

Verifying charities by researching the charity online to see if there are news

EzDriveMA Reminder: Your bill for \$6.99 is due soon. Please visit <https://ezdrivedw.xyzfi> to pay and avoid additional fees. (Please reply with a Y, then exit the text message and open it again to activate the link, or copy the link into your Safari browser and open it)

The sender is not in your contact list.  
Report Junk

This is a screen shot of a smishing attempt. It is a scam.

Submitted photo

articles, reviews, or posts linking the charity to fraud; checking to see if the charity is registered with the state’s charity regulator, if available and visiting the Internal Revenue Service’s website at <https://www.irs.gov> to see if the charity is registered.

Validating that crowdfunding efforts are supporting the beneficiaries advertised; researching who is behind the crowdfunding request; researching who the request is intended to benefit and if the need is legitimate; and reverse searching images and stories associated with the request, as scammers will often copy and paste material stolen from others.

Be suspicious of online communications claiming to be from individuals affected by the events and seeking immediate financial assistance.

Recognize that pressure to “act fast” might be a sign of a scam.

Do not send payments to unknown individuals or organizations asking for financial assistance.

Do not communicate with or open texts, posts, emails, attachments, or links from unknown individuals posing as entities soliciting charitable donations or humanitarian aid.

## Task force to hold training on DV legislation

HUNTINGTON – Southern Hills Domestic Violence Task Force will hold free training on the new domestic violence legislation on coercive control on Wednesday, Feb. 12 from 3-4:45 p.m. at Gateway Regional High School, 11 Littleville Road.

Snow date is Wednesday, March 12. Speakers are Esther Tutu, Esquire – Community Legal Aid; Erin Aiello, Assistant District Attorney and Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse Unit and Katie Rosewarne, Director of Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse. Other speakers are Assistant District Attorney Catherine Joyce of Domestic Violence/Sexual Abuse and Tina Simmons, Director of Domestic Violence Victim Services, both from Hampden County District Attorney’s Office.

People should RSVP or send questions by emailing [SouthernHillsDVTASKFORCE@gmail.com](mailto:SouthernHillsDVTASKFORCE@gmail.com) no later than Sunday, Feb. 9. Refreshments will be offered.

### 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](mailto:countryjournal@turley.com), or call us at 413-283-8393.

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

## SLED DOG

week, wanting to eat. So I took that as a sign that he wanted to live. To go home,” BB reported. Marla brought Vox’s sister, Vi, with her to the veterinary hospital in case a blood transfusion was needed. She and Vi were with Vox until late morning. Vox entered surgery at 5 p.m. and, despite those promising signs, the surgery revealed that the tumor was connected to his spleen, intestines and lymph nodes. Removing it would have caused him to bleed to death. Marla was able to be with the unconscious dog before he died.

“I lost my mooring and my anchor line was cut. I am adrift,” she said, opening her announcement to donors on the Go Fund Me page. “I am struggling to forgive myself. This is not how we say goodbye to our most beloved Hilltown Sleddogs,” she wrote, explaining that her dogs at their end of life have visits from the rest of the pack. People, who are close to them, are invited to come to say goodbye. And Marla herself lies with them at the end, until they are gone.

Despite the fact that Vox did not get that, BB reports that they did have the “best four days together.” He slept on the bed cuddling with Marla, who spent the days with the team and the nights devoted to Vox. He ate inside, what he could, which she said wasn’t much. He had high doses of prednisone and gabapentin, which seemed to help him feel better.

Born on Aug. 19, 2015, Vox was nine years old and scheduled to retire from the sled team this spring and become an “inside dog.” He was a world traveler and accomplished athlete. In 2017, he and former Hilltown Sleddogs camper Quinton Romer were Bronze Medalists in the International Sled Dog Racing Association’s Cani-Cross race.

In 2019, he traveled with Marla

to Nybro, Sweden to take part in the Dryland World Championships where they earned a gold medal. He was also part of a four-dog team to win a Bronze Medal in rig racing. In 2020, Vox served as “wheel dog” on a 12-dog team that took part in the 750 mile Serum Run Trail Expedition from Nenema to Nome Alaska, a route which follows the Yukon River and Bering Sea. This experience is recounted and Vox is included in Marla’s book “Our Serum Run Story: By the T’s, U’s, V’s and Me,” available on Amazon. Finally, in 2021 Vox took part in the Summit Quest 300 mile and 2 Rivers 100 mile races in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Vox was one of her biggest dogs and Marla said he was named for his habit of using his voice to communicate. He once howled to alert her to a distant fire. Whenever she brought him indoors, he would get on her couch and rest his head in her lap and begin to hum. “In that moment all was right with the world,” Marla reflected. “I thought we would have years of those moments not days.”

On the Hilltown Sleddogs website, Vox is described as “The hands down most responsible, earnest and peaceful dog in the pack.” This description was affirmed by one of Marla’s summer campers, Cassie Matoney, aged 13 from Amherst. Matoney participated in the Go Fund Me site, donating her Hanukkah money for his care.

“Vox was always very sweet,” Matoney said. “I’ve had a lot of tears this weekend. But oh my God he was the sweetest boy.”

Matoney is a junior handler in training, who donated money because her family really cares about Hilltown Sleddogs. She also volunteers and is training to be able to eventually help out and assist with campers. She explained

that, thus far, she has learned about dog care, how to exercise the team, observed pack behavior and has learned to brush their coats and care for their paws. They also get to take the dogs out on hikes. Matoney said they really get to bond with the dogs, describing Vox as the male alpha of his litter. He has three other siblings at Hilltown Sleddogs, and she said they are all wonderful. She plans to keep going to the camp for many more years and learn to manage or “mush” a team and sled.

Her father, Gabriel Reif, said that BB welcomes and involves the families, as well as the campers. “As soon as I drop Cassie off or pick her up, Marla says, What are you doing? Pet these dogs.”

While Marla teaches others, she is also candid about the lessons that Vox taught her this month. First, do not wait to show those you love that you love them. Time may be on your side, but it might not be. Second, dogs live in the moment and when Marla thinks like a dog, she thinks about “now.” Vox’s now was all about being with Marla and living today. Finally, Vox taught her about community. “When I reached out to my community and they responded immediately, I realized I need to reach out more. I am content in my solitude. But I can receive even more if I let people I trust in. Vox is teaching me the wholeness, healing of my time with pack and people.”

Even though the community responded and raised \$6,475 for the veterinary bills, in the end it could not save Vox. And, taking Vox’s lessons in hand, Marla posted her heartfelt appreciation to Vox’s community, “As I hold my head low, I thank you from the bottom of my broken heart.”

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# HUNTINGTON

## Sneaker giveaway at Village Closet

By Kathryn Koegel  
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – On Tuesday, Jan. 14 from 5-7 p.m., It Takes a Village gave out 120 pairs of new sneakers to children.

The giveaway was held at their basic needs center, the Village Closet and the line snaked out the door. Eager children picked out their new kicks with parents happy for their children to have new sneakers. The staff of Steve Lewis Subaru, who sponsored the giveaway, was on hand to help the them try on the shoes.

“We are thrilled to work with Subaru on this important initiative,” says It Takes a Village executive director Lisa Goding. “Sneakers are a huge part of a child’s identity and having a new pair is a boost to confidence for

families who struggle.”

The giveaway was part of Subaru’s Loves to Help program in conjunction with Operation Warm. A spokesperson for the program describes it as: “Operation Warm provides warmth, confidence, and hope through basic need programs that connect under-resourced children to community resources they need to thrive.”

Operation Warm’s mission has always been focused on the whole child. “Our tagline, ‘more than a coat’ means that the coats and shoes we provide don’t just provide physical warmth, but also emotional warmth, the confidence to socialize and succeed, and hope of a brighter future. We’re proud to say that over the last 23 years, these gifts have become a bridge between our partners and families in need to access critical resources,” says the spokesperson.



The staffs of Steve Lewis Subaru and It Takes a Village worked together on the shoe giveaway.  
Turley photo by Kathryn Koegel

## SELECT BOARD



Fire Chief Joshua Ellinger presented a proposal to increase his position to full-time at the Huntington Select Board meeting held Jan. 15.  
Turley photo by Wendy Long

He recommended increasing the Fire Chief’s position to full time due to increased response times over the past five years and expanded regulations from Occupational Safety and Health Administration for 2026.

Currently, Ellinger is employed full-time outside of town. He gets an annual salary of \$23,000 and completes his administrative duties as Fire Chief on evenings and weekends. New regulations from OSHA, which they say are designed to protect the wellbeing and safety of firefighters, will significantly add to the administrative requirements of the Chief when they go into effect. These update an earlier set of “fire brigade” regulations that were once considered adequate for small, rural fire departments.

The proposed revisions were released last year and require four different written plans: emergency response, risk management, pre-incident, and standard operating procedures for every fire department. They also impose new standards for fitness for duty for firefighters to be assessed and compiled annually and list new training require-

ments that must be met by firefighters, vehicle operators, crew leaders/officers, search and rescue and hazmat.

Ellinger reported that another thing that has changed significantly for Huntington is that there are far fewer firefighters that can respond to a day-time incident than in years past. Most of Huntington’s firefighters now work outside of the town, which is resulting in longer response times and more missed calls.

Chief Ellinger cited a recent example, luckily, a false alarm, where Huntington Fire was dispatched through 911 for a carbon monoxide alarm. After three tones with no response, dispatch called for Russell Fire, again three times with no response. Dispatch toned out Westhampton, which said that they were enroute nine minutes later. Thirty seven minutes had elapsed from the alarm to the Westhampton department arriving on scene. National Fire Protection Association standards for maximum response time is 20 minutes.

The Fire Chief presented data over five years showing the growth in missed calls. Ellinger also said the fire department has been unable to fulfill requested programs with groups like school children or senior citizens. He oversees the largest number of employees in the town and every firefighter who has joined since Ellinger became Chief has stayed. He also has the largest number of fire academy-trained personnel in the hilltowns.

Four other communities in the region have recently increased their part-time Fire Chiefs to full time positions: Ashfield, population 1,687; Erving, 1,665; Williamsburg, 2,504 and Hatfield, 3,352. Huntington’s population is 2,094. Two of the full time chiefs submitted letters of support to Ellinger’s proposal.

Ellinger added that a full time chief could work on improving Huntington’s Insurance Service Office Public Protection Classification rating. Huntington currently has an ISO rating of 5 out of a possible 10, which can negatively impact insurance costs to the town, its businesses and homeowners.

There are also new fire threats to consider. Batteries in electric vehicles, for example, can take days to weeks



Two Huntington residents and diesel technicians at Advantage Truck Group in Westfield, Kaleb Legrand and Nick Perry recently earned Western Star trucks expert-level certification. Shown from left are ATG Network Trainer Matt McCuin, ATG Training Director Rob Lynds, diesel technicians Angel Diez, Kaleb Legrand and Nick Perry of ATG Westfield, Sean Drummond of ATG Shrewsbury, Ian Schulte of ATG Lancaster and diesel technicians Dave Bauer and Daniel Gillis from Freightliner of Maine.  
Submitted photo

## Diesel technicians completed expert-level certification

HUNTINGTON – Diesel technicians from Advantage Truck Group including Huntington residents Kaleb Legrand and Nick Perry recently earned the Daimler Trucks North America expert-level certification for Western Star trucks.

The technicians earned the Western Star expert certification by completing a series of web-based training modules, the professional-level certification and the expert-level classes focused on basic diagnostics, air and ATS diagnostics, fuel systems diagnostics and major repairs.

“Achieving this certification is an important milestone that distinguishes a technician’s expertise and ensures a high level of service for our customers,” said ATG Training Director and certified dealer-trainer Rob Lynds, whose classes at the ATG training center in Shrewsbury often include technicians from other dealer companies. Lynds, along with ATG Network Trainer Matthew McCuin, leads training for ATG technicians throughout the company’s locations in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont.

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to fully extinguish, requiring hands-on monitoring. Further, insurance data from Moody’s shows that Massachusetts had 15 wildfires in October 2023. One year later, with September posting the third driest month since 1895, the state had to manage 212 wildfires. October’s annual rainfall in the state averages 4.19 inches; this past October saw .02 inches.

“I’m not against this at all,” said Chairman Booth. “I’m just trying to think of the best way to move forward.” Ideas to fund the \$80,000 salary proposed plus increased benefits included using a 2-½ override to fund the increase, putting a non-binding question on the municipal election ballot or making it a stand alone warrant article at annual town meeting. The board also discussed the availability of state money to help with regional planning and possibly using that to create a full time regional fire chief. But McVeigh, himself a deputy fire chief, was concerned that regional planning is not already underway. Booth agreed, adding that it could be a slow process.

Discussion will resume at the next Select Board meeting; the board expects to decide their way forward by mid-February. In the meantime, they asked Town Administrator Peloquin to consult with administrators in Russell, Blandford, Montgomery and Chester to see if they have begun looking at this issue or at potential regionalization.

### Westfield River Wildwater Races

Harry Rock and Kathryn Koegel announced this years canoe and kayak races mark 70 years since the race began. This year’s race will be held on Saturday, April 19 (Easter weekend). The 5-mile expert race will begin at Knightville Dam at 9:30 a.m., ending by the Hilltown Community Health Center, with the classic race beginning at the DOT maintenance yard at 11 a.m. and ending in Woronoco.

Instructional clinics will be offered on April 5 and April 12 at 11 a.m., starting at the Mass DOT yard. Experienced racers will be paired with newcomers and the clinics and taught how to manage the portages and run through the “Hill and Dale” rapids section. Permits, insurance and emergency personnel

are in place and their volunteer force of about 100 people are all expected to return. Rock said they have asked the Army Corps of Engineers to release the same amount of water as last year, so conditions should be comparable. Koegel also said that information would be out soon on a series of three talks about the river and local history coming up at Stanton Hall.

### Other business

The board held their public hearing to consider opting out of no-excuse early voting by mail for the May 10 municipal election. Town Clerk Michele Fieldstad-Booth explained that this vote must be taken every year for town elections only. Mail in voting requires about 1,700 pieces of mail and the town does not receive reimbursement for town elections. Opting out is not allowed for state or federal elections, which reimburses the town for some of their expenses from mail-in voting. Absentee ballots will still be available for the municipal election.

Finance Committee members Peter Simko, Eric Jensen and Andre Alguero had their first meeting with the Select Board to look at rough budget numbers for the coming fiscal year. Preliminary numbers prepared by Town Administrator Peloquin showed the town at about \$110,000 over the levy limit. However, department budgets are due in two weeks and firmer numbers will be in place after that.

The board moved to proceed with installing the new Pisgah pit gate, made by the welding department at Gateway Regional High School; approved a new multi-year contract with Republic Services Disposal through June 30, 2028; decided to submit for a Division Local Technical Assistance grant to plan for downtown revitalization; and to expand the new security card system going into Town Hall for use with the door to the copy/mail room.

Peloquin announced a “Town Hall” event with Senator Paul Mark and Representative Nick Boldyga on Tuesday, Feb. 11 at 5 p.m. at Stanton Hall, and a River Access Rally is planned May 25. The board adjourned at 7:54 p.m. and will next meet on Wednesday, Jan. 29 at 5 p.m.



# OPINION

## GUEST COLUMN



### When to claim Social Security and taxation of benefits

Dear Rusty:

*I am 65 and currently working full-time.*

*Can I apply for and start receiving my Social Security benefit? I'd expect to have to pay income tax on it if/when I do.*

Signed: Curious Worker

Dear Curious Worker:

If you are working full time, you should likely delay claiming Social Security at this time. At age 65, you haven't yet reached your SS Full Retirement Age, so you will be subject to Social Security's "annual earnings test" which limits how much you can earn from work while collecting early benefits. The earnings limit for 2025 is \$23,400 and if you earn more than the annual limit, SS will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit.

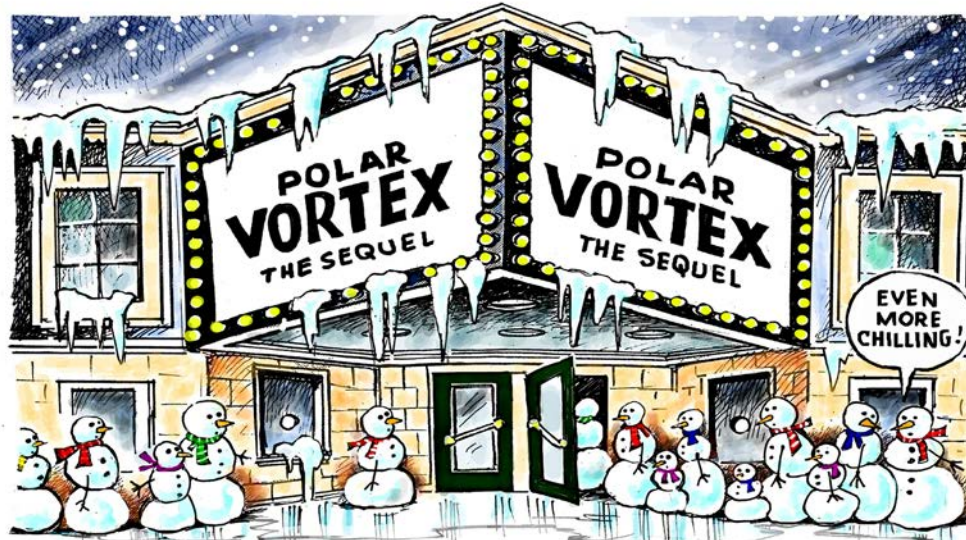
If you earn significantly over the limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to collect SS benefits. FYI, the annual earnings limit goes away when you reach your full retirement age, which for you is 66 years and 10 months, or March 2026.

As you obviously already know, a portion of your Social Security may be subject to income tax after you start collecting. The threshold for taxation of SS benefits depends on your IRS filing status – if you file your taxes as a single and your combined income from all sources (including half of the SS benefit you received during the tax year) exceeds \$25,000 then 50% of your received SS benefits are taxable.

But if you file taxes as "married/jointly" and your combined income is over \$32,000, then up to 85% of your received SS benefits are taxable. Thus, whenever you claim SS, you may wish to consider having income tax withheld from your SS benefit. This is optional, and you can do this by submitting IRS Form W-4V to your local Social Security office, or you could choose to increase your income tax withholding at work or, alternatively, pay estimated income taxes quarterly.

So, whether you can claim Social Security now depends entirely on how much you will earn from working full time prior to your FRA. If you exceed the annual earnings limit before your FRA, SS will take away some of your benefits or, if you greatly exceed the earnings limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to get benefits until you either reach your FRA or earn less. But note, if you decide to claim early and any SS benefits are withheld because you exceeded the earnings limit, you will get credit for that in the form of a slightly increased benefit after you reach your full retirement age.

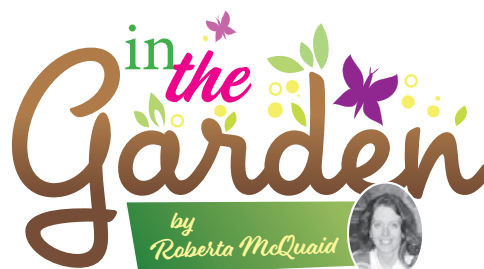
*The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations 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](http://amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at [ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org](mailto:ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org). Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.*



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com

## GUEST COLUMN

### Catching up on gardening questions



This column will be used to play catch-up. I received a couple of questions a few weeks back on Christmas plants and then another looking forward to the new gardening season.

Read on as I do my best to answer them!

Connie is the keeper of her mother's poinsettia and it's become tree-like! "We read your article about poinsettias in the Country Journal. I have been caring for my mother's poinsettia she purchased three Christmases ago. She is hoping you can help us as I never cut it back because I didn't know to do that. Now it is a small tree. There is bark on it. I had one red bract last Christmas but no yellow center. I did try to put it in a dark room but as you can see, it is too big now to do that. Any suggestions?"

Many years ago when I joined my brother on a trip to St. Thomas, I became fully aware of the poinsettia and its true, tree-like form. It looks like you are well on your way to replicating that in your house!

First, congratulations, from the picture you provided you are clearly growing a healthy specimen. The leaves are a beautiful shade of green. I would recommend that, if you want to make it more manageable in size, you do try to cut it back.

It looks as if there is a lower "tier" of leaves. If you can cut it back to those stems, I think that is a good place to start. Do that in April when it will be in active growth.

At that time, I would also transplant it into a container one size bigger. So, if it's in a six inch pot now, try one that is seven or eight inches, but not any bigger.

Fertilize with an all purpose houseplant fertilizer once a month. New growth should appear by the end of May.

After the danger of frost has passed, move the plant outdoors. Continue to water but increase fertilization to every two weeks. Pinch plants in late June or early July to promote bushy growth. Bring the plant indoors as temperatures fall in September.

The poinsettia is photoperiodic, and long nights of uninterrupted darkness encourage it to bloom. Bracts will turn red and the small yellow flowers in the center will form. Most people get on a 5 p.m.-8 a.m. schedule beginning on Oct. 1 and continue it for eight-10 weeks until color shows on the bracts.

Placing the plant in a closet or basement with no light interruption will work fine. It is a commitment, that's for sure. Night temperatures should be no higher than 70 degrees or flowering may be delayed.

Good luck; I bet you will be successful this year!

Beverly has me stumped!! She wrote in with this question: "After my Christmas cactus has bloomed, I get very tiny buds (like pimples) all over the plant. However, they quickly fall off so no more blooms. Can you explain what to do about this?"

This is a tricky one, Beverly! I am wondering if this is a newer breed of Christmas Cactus that is expected to bloom over a longer period of time than the old-fashioned types.

Usually buds fall off if there is a change somehow. Overwatering, underwatering? Perhaps a change in location whereby the plant is now near a heater when it wasn't before. Or maybe a change in fertilization practices?

That's about all I can come up with. I do hope that once blooming is over your plant remains healthy and provides many flowers for years to come!

This came to the Garden Lady from Gary: "I enjoy reading your articles.

Is there value or harm mixing old coffee grounds into your flower or vegetable gardens? Thanks!"

Thank you for your compliments on the column! My dad used to sprinkle coffee grounds around our blueberry bushes when I was a kid.

It was his theory that the acidic grounds would be good for blueberry bushes which by nature are acid-loving. Well, it turns out that most of the acid from the coffee grounds is leached into the water when the coffee is brewed, leaving a near neutral product that aligns with pH of most common vegetables and flowers!

Coffee grounds are high in nitrogen and have lesser, but still respectable amounts of

GARDEN, page 7

## EDITORIAL POLICY

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.

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## Election letters to the editor welcome

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](mailto:countryjournal@turley.com). Please include a daytime telephone number for verification purposes (it will not be printed). Letters must be received by noon Monday to be considered for that

Friday'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 news-

paper 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.



# SCHOOLS & YOUTH

## Colleges and universities announce President's and Dean's List

### PRESIDENT'S LIST

#### Dean College Franklin

Raeana Edwards of Westfield

#### Fitchburg State University Fitchburg

Owen T. Bonney of Pittsfield,  
Ashley L. Farina of Pittsfield

#### State University of New York at Potsdam Potsdam, New York

Samir Ghalayini of Westfield

#### Southern New Hampshire University Manchester, New Hampshire

Dominique Rogers of Westfield,  
Tashia Penrice of Westfield, Lee-Anne

Cronin of Montgomery,  
Michelle Rodriguez of Westfield,  
Craig Ward of Westfield, Raphaella  
DUPRAS of Westfield, Kale Carter of  
Westfield, Justin Shatwell of Huntington  
and Jason Ilnicki of Huntington

### DEAN'S LIST

#### Dean College Franklin

Abigail Flood of Easthampton,  
Gracia Jorgensen of Westfield and Skylar  
Raskevitz of Easthampton

#### Eastern Connecticut State University Willimantic, Connecticut

Margaret Barr of Easthampton, a  
sophomore health science major' Maggie  
Rubeck of Easthampton, a senior health

sciences major and Sydney Goyette of  
Westfield, senior health sciences major

#### East Stroudsburg University East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

Waverly KaneLong of Easthampton,  
early childhood education major (Pre-  
K - 4)

#### Fitchburg State University Fitchburg

Neveeah L. Williams of Pittsfield,  
Benjamin K. Adams of Southampton and  
Damian F. Defalco of Worthington

#### Le Moyne College Syracuse, New York

Eastyn Davis of Huntington, a junior  
political science major

#### Roger Williams University Bristol, Rhode Island

Dominic Monti of Westfield

#### Southern New Hampshire University Manchester, New Hampshire

Shaelanna Buchanan of  
Easthampton and Dominick Nomakeo of  
Easthampton

#### Stonehill College Easton

Lauren Campbell of Westfield,  
Madeline Jenkins of Westhampton, Jack  
Keeny of Westfield and Ella Lund of  
Westfield

## RUSSELL

# Board waits for mill demolition plan from owner

By Kathryn Koegel  
Correspondent

RUSSELL – As of Jan. 20 the Select Board had not received a demolition plan for Mill #1 from mill owner Donald Voudren, Sr.

In a Dec. 12 meeting, the Select Board had expressed concern about asbestos covered bricks having fallen into the river. Select Board Chair Thomas Kulig was also particularly concerned about the potential impact of the mill collapse and future demolition on the adjacent dam.

When reached for comment about the mill and the river, Mark Damon, president of the Westfield River Watershed Association, speaking for himself not the association, said, "Obviously we would be concerned with pollutants getting into the river. We know there is asbestos at the site; we don't know what else might be there." The Watershed Association was founded in 1952 to advocate for the health of the river and to clean up the pollution from the mills on it. Damon is an adjunct professor of biology at Westfield State.

"Asbestos and other materials, including ordinary dust could clog the gills of fish and other animals like mussels and could block sunlight, interfering with photosynthesis. Should asbestos become airborne, it might present a direct health hazard to humans and any other species which inhale it. We also don't know if there are any old paints, solvents, lubricants or other chemicals still left in the building," said Damon.

Damon also said, "It would help to have a comprehensive list of what was stored there. We would like to know what measures, if any, are being taken to block runoff from the site. Are there hay bales or other mitigation of the type which ought to be at a demolition site adjacent to a body of water?"

The concern is not just the river being compromised.

"The integrity of the dam is also a serious concern," said Damon. "When the dam was first built, that substantially changed the ecosystem, for instance by blocking migration routes upstream for fish and blocking or at least slowing the movement of water and nutrient-rich sediment downstream. Since that time, however, the ecosystem will have settled into a new state, with what amounts to a large shallow pond above the dam, populated by species adapted to that habitat. Should it breach, that would have a profound effect on the local ecology, because there would be much more rapidly flowing water. This may be more like the natural

state of the river, but the transition would be very disruptive."

"A second concern is the composition of the sediment, which has accumulated behind the dam since it was built," he continues. "When water flowing downstream reaches the dam it slows and drops much of the sediment it is carrying. The dam probably dates to a time when paper mill waste and other materials were often dumped directly into the river. These may be in the sediment. Should a break occur, the much faster flow of water could scour that out, potentially sending a plume of pollutants downstream."

When Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, which operates the hydroelectric power plant at the dam was reached for comment, Todd Nash, a spokesman, said that they were not working on the dam but were waiting on the demolition plan from Voudren. "He is being very cooperative," said Nash.

The Low Impact Hydropower Institute, a hydroelectric power advocacy firm, states that the plant dates to 1913.



Strathmore Mill #1 is adjacent to a dam and hydroelectric power plant.

Turley photo by Kathryn Koegel

Submissions are always welcome.

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## FLORENCE

# Florence Bank pledges \$75K to Cooley Dickinson Hospital project

FLORENCE – Florence Bank pledged \$75,000 to Cooley Dickinson Hospital's \$26 million Transforming Emergency Care Campaign to renovate, expand and enhance the Emergency Department and improve the standard of care.

Diane Dukette, Chief Development Officer at the hospital, said the ED is 40% undersized to meet the community's needs, given that the number of patients and the severity of their illnesses has steadily increased over the years, more than doubling since the 1970s. The hospital is also treating more patients with behavioral health concerns.

Cooley Dickinson broke ground on the extensive project to transform the ED in 2023. Project goals include reducing wait times, increasing patients' comfort and privacy, enhancing staff communications, and improving the standard of care.

The undertaking is one of the largest capital investments in the hospital's history and this is the final year of the campaign.

Florence Bank President and CEO Matt Garrity said, "Cooley Dickinson plays a vital role in the health and well-being of the communities we both serve. We're proud to support this trans-



The ongoing construction at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton to expand the Emergency Department. *Submitted photo*

formational project and the benefits it will provide to people and families in the Pioneer Valley and beyond."

Dukette said Florence Bank is a loyal supporter of Cooley Dickinson, and over the years, has donated to many campaigns, most recently the new Childbirth Center, North Building and Cancer Center and has supported many programmatic needs, such as nursing develop-

ment.

"In the last four decades, Florence Bank has given over a million dollars to Cooley Dickinson," Dukette said. "Florence Bank has been a longstanding community partner, investing in the fabric of our society and recognizing the unique role we play in the community and for their customers. We are so grateful we can count on Florence Bank to get

behind initiatives that are critical to the community."

Construction in the ED is ongoing with a new addition in the works and pods being constructed and renovated in phases.

Dukette said ED staff have adeptly worked around the construction, reassessing and realigning workflows as necessary.

"They are so skilled at doing whatever needs to happen to take care of patients in the moment," Dukette said, noting project completion is expected in roughly a year. "Our ED is open and our wonderful providers are there to do everything they can to take care of our community."

The Transforming Emergency Care campaign has raised \$11.5 million of the \$26 million project. To make a gift, people may call 413-582-2255 or visit [cooleydickinson.org/giving](http://cooleydickinson.org/giving).

Florence Bank is a mutual savings bank chartered in 1873. Currently, the bank serves the Pioneer Valley through 12 full-service branch locations in Florence, Northampton, Easthampton, Williamsburg, Amherst, Hadley, Belchertown, Granby, Chicopee, West Springfield and Springfield.

## GOSHEN

# Goshen Council on Aging announces upcoming news and events

GOSHEN – A Valentine's Day themed Council on Aging luncheon will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 11 at noon at the Goshen Town Hall in the downstairs area.

will be a variety of dishes from the Panda Garden in Williamsburg, including vegetarian and gluten free options. This month, seniors should call Henrietta at 413-268-7465 by Tuesday, Feb. 4 to let her know their choice of dinner.

After lunch, if people are able to stay for an hour or so, the Goshen Community Engagement Committee would like their input and ideas to better the Town for the future. They have designed an interactive game to play to learn about the love and hopes for Goshen. Gift cards will be given to those who participate in the game.

Firefighters and Friends February Fest to prevent fires and falls will be on Saturday, Feb. 15 from 8:30-10:30 a.m. at the Goshen Town Hall. The Goshen Fire Department and the Goshen COA will host an interactive event to engage, educate and promote the safety of older adults. Lieutenant Steve Estelle

will review fire safety including smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. He will also discuss ways to help prevent falls. COA Coordinator Kerry Normandin will lead a fall prevention Bingo game and multiple prizes will be awarded. There will be hot coffee and doughnuts and free giveaways. Older adults from all of the Hilltowns are welcome.

Exercise classes continue with Joan Griswold are held on Wednesdays at 10:15 a.m. in the Goshen Town Hall. The instructor will continue to focus on functional movement, which enhances physical strength and balance, allowing for ease and comfort with daily tasks. Participants should wear supportive footwear and bring water and free weights if they have them. There is a brief health questionnaire Joan will have people fill out. This class is also offered simultaneously on Zoom, so if people prefer this method, they may email Joan at [joan@bybhealth.com](mailto:joan@bybhealth.com).

Crafts Group this month meets in the Goshen Library or in the adjoining dining room on Wednesday. This month

Roxanne Cunningham and Pat Wheeler will be leading a class on Quilling. Quilling has deep roots in history and started in the Renaissance when nuns and monks used to quill to decorate book covers. It consists of rolling paper into various shapes to create a design or a picture. The group has kits with enough materials so everyone can make something. Or, if people prefer, they may bring their own craft project to work on. Doing creative projects is good for brains and bodies.

Community Connections Group will be held on Friday, Feb. 7 from 10-11 a.m. in the Goshen Town Hall upstairs dining room. This month the group welcomes Deb Hollingworth, recently retired from her position as a care coordinator with the Northern Hilltown Consortiums of COAs. She will speak about healthcare, insurance and how to be prepared and she has a wealth of knowledge to share. All are welcome.

On Tuesdays, Feb. 18 and 25 Highland Valley Elder Service delivers grab and go lunches to Goshen Town Hall from 12:30-1 p.m. The lunch for

Feb 18 is a choice of lasagna with meat sauce or breaded fish with tartar sauce and the choice for the Feb. 25 is beef goulash or cheesy ratatouille. The meals also include milk, vegetables and dessert. There is a suggested \$4 donation given to Highland Valley Elder Services to offset the cost of the meal. People should call Kerry at 413-268-9354 if they would like to sign up to get these nutritious and delicious meals.

Games Group will meet in the library on Wednesday Feb. 19 from 2-4 p.m. This is a fun way to spend an afternoon. Games are available, but if people have a favorite game they would like to play, bring it along. The group is always open to learning new games, as well as playing old favorites.

Technology help is available in the library with Goshen resident Stephen Morley who volunteers through the Tech Connect Program. He will be there on Thursday, Feb. 20 from noon-2 p.m. People should bring any and all questions regarding their computer, phone or tablet to Stephen and he will help problem solve with them.

## CHESTERFIELD

# Hilltown CDC seeks board members

CHESTERFIELD – The Hilltowns of western Massachusetts are often referred to as hidden gems in the state.

Well, there is another hidden gem in the Hilltowns, the Hilltown Community Development Corporation, 387 Main Road and it's looking for talented people to join the Board of Directors. The HCDC has been working tirelessly and effectively for over 40 years to spur local economic development and provide services and programs for people in the Hilltowns, including towns in Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire and Berkshire counties. Some of their recent projects have included providing administrative support and grant funds to: Worthington, investing \$2 million for development of a Senior Center; Chester, invested over \$8 million in redevelopment of the old high school preserving the library, museum and 15 affordable housing units and Cummington, investing \$1 million into a Commercial Kitchen/Food HUB trans-

forming the vacant elementary school into a mixed commercial and municipal use redevelopment.

This is just a sample of HCDC's recent successes as the catalyst for many needed local economic development projects. Equally importantly, it also delivers a wide variety of other programs such as in-home senior services, food delivery and transportation for shopping and medical appointments. And if that's not enough it supports small businesses, arts and cultural organizations.

The CDC is currently recruiting Hilltown residents to join the Board of Directors who have diverse backgrounds including, but not limited to: finance/accounting, law, fundraising, human resources, non-profit management, real estate law and housing. For more information people may visit <https://www.hilltowncdc.org>, call Executive Director, Dave Christopolis at 413-296-4536 extension 118 or email [Davec@hilltowncdc.org](mailto:Davec@hilltowncdc.org).

## LENOX

# The Mount hosts nine artists

LENOX – The Mount and Western Massachusetts' Straw Dog Writers Guild announce the nine writers selected for the 2025 Residency for Emerging Writers.

The 2025 Writers in Residence are Lizzy Beck, Michele Bombardier, Zite Ezech, Melenie Freedom Flynn, Thaddeus Haas, Irene Jiang, Michael Jerome Plunkett, Brenton Zizwe Zola and Mason Wray.

The 2025 residents will be working on developing their respective works at The Mount, 2 Plunkett St. for one week each, between Monday, March 3 and Friday, March 21. Submissions were reviewed anonymously and ranked based on quality of writing, originality of voice and the potential for growth as a writer.

"It was here at The Mount that Edith Wharton hit her stride as a novelist, writing "The House of Mirth," the novel that launched her to new heights of literary success. We are honored

to welcome these nine writers to The Mount to work on bringing their own unique voices and stories to the world," says Susan Wissler, The Mount's Executive Director.

Patricia Pin, Straw Dog Writers Guild's Executive Consulting Director adds, "I am struck by the creative diversity of the residents in the fourth year of the program and the partnership between The Mount and Straw Dog Writers Guild. This year's residents are multi-disciplined, and their writing speaks to their lived experiences in varied careers. I look forward to reading more of their work."

This is the eleventh year The Mount has offered writers an opportunity to create at The Mount and its fourth year partnering with Straw Dog Writers Guild. The revamped residency now focuses on writers, who are developing their craft. Applications open in September each year and are available by visiting [onedithwharton.org](http://onedithwharton.org).



# BLANDFORD



This water color painting is of Peaceful Meadow, Vermont.

## Blandford artist exhibits at library in Connecticut

BLANDFORD – Water color artist Susan Racine will have a one-woman exhibit at the Kent Memorial Library in Suffield, Connecticut from Saturday, Feb. 1 through Tuesday, Feb. 25.

This solo exhibit features many of Racine’s paintings and is titled, “From New England to Europe.” All of the paintings, water colors, are for sale.

Racine will be in the library on

Thursday, Feb. 6 from 1-3 p.m. to speak with visitors.

Refreshments will be served at a Thursday, Feb. 13 reception from 5 to 8 p.m. at the library.

Kent Memorial Library is at 50 North Main St. in Suffield, Connecticut. Hours are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10 a.m.-8:30 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.



Water color artist painted this urn in Paris.

### SNOWSTORM

from page 1

be undaunted.

The first flakes fell, intermittently at first but an hour later, flakes fell in earnest.

It’s true, snowfall is not nearly as significant today as it was in years past.

Before Route 23 was paved, that is prior to the 1955 flood and Hurricane Diane, it was possible to take a crowd on a double-ripper sled from the top of the hill closer to the White Church all the way to Russell.

A Blandford winter tale was passed along by Pros(per) Montovani. His family owned a farm at the end of George Millard Road and later they lived at the top of Main Street in the house now belonging to Patricia Hebert.

At an October 1986 Historical Society program, he told of owning a giant toboggan, a Double-Ripper – as long as two eight-foot tables – which carried 15 to 18 riders. “First, Warren Bedurtha would drive his big Pierce Arrow truck down the hill (Main Street). Then about ten minutes later, we’d start at The White Church. This is a fact,” he said, “we would go all the way to the package store, without stopping.

When we went by Fowler Farm down here, we were traveling. He’d (Bedurtha) be waiting with the truck. We would hitch on the Ripper and he would haul us back. We were good for about two slides a night.”

No one today would probably send folks down a very long hill on such a sled. The double-ripper, in lieu of a giant toboggan, was often also two sleds put together to make a longer single sled using a board.

Then later, there were Pecks’ Bad Boys who took turns dragging each other in a tractor-size inner tube behind a pick-up truck in the snow. Allegedly North Blandford Road was the road to ride. It was also possible to hang on to a bumper and just slide along on one’s feet.

In the early 1970s a dead give-away to local snow fall was the ten-foot-tall butterfly plow at the Highway Garage.

Winters were not easy times in Blandford. There was a lot of snow and often, ice. Winter started early and ended late. The coldest part of Blandford was out Chester Road, beyond Martin’s...the Maples.

### GARDEN

from page 4

the other two major nutrients, phosphorus and potassium, as well as many of the micronutrients. The nitrogen is “tied up,” however, and not readily available to plants.

It must be composted first to make it available. So, I would recommend you either add it to a compost pile or mix it in with other mulches you may be using on top of the soil.

It can be combined with wood chips, grass clippings or chopped leaves to make a great and fertile mulch, that, as it breaks down, will add organic matter to the soil and be a nutritious food for your plants and the earthworms. In fact,

folks who vermicompost (keep a worm bin) notice just how much the worms love coffee grounds mixed in with other food waste.

You’ve encouraged me to get a bit more serious about putting our household coffee grounds to good use!

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



This water color depicts a trio of elephants.

Paintings by Susan Racine

## CHESTER



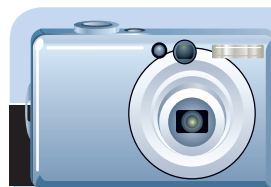
Children at the Hamilton Memorial Library story and fun time created their own craft paper mug of cocoa with marshmallows. Submitted photo

## Story and fun time enjoyed hot cocoa

CHESTER – At the most recent story and fun time at the Hamilton Memorial Library, 195 West Main St., library staff read the story, “Winter is the Warmest Season” by Lauren Stringer.

The story explores all the ways in

which winter actually makes us cozier such as sitting by a warm fire and snuggling under thick quilts. The children enjoyed a cup of hot cocoa and created their own craft paper mug of cocoa with marshmallows.



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## WESTHAMPTON

# Westhampton Public Library lists February programs

WESTHAMPTON – The Westhampton Public Library, 11 North Road, will be closed on Monday, Feb. 17.

Library hours are Monday and Thursday from 2-8 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday from 9 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. To place a request for curbside pickup, patrons may email [westhampton@cwmar.org](mailto:westhampton@cwmar.org) or call 413-527-5386.

Ongoing programs except holidays are computer classes with Bob Miller on the second and fourth Mondays from 10 a.m.-noon, knitting group Mondays at 6 p.m., Scrabble group Tuesdays at 2 p.m., Book group court Tuesdays at 7 p.m., walk-in wellness clinics with Westhampton's Public Health Nurse first and third Wednesdays 10-11:30 a.m. and coffee and chat Wednesdays from 10

a.m.-noon. There will be no Monday evening yoga sessions in February.

Programs for children and teens include FCE Playgroup Tuesdays at 10 a.m., story time Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. after school fun Thursdays at 3:30 p.m., LEGO Club first Thursday, Craft Club second Thursday, Nintendo Switch Happy Hour third Thursday, comics club fourth Thursday and Teen Craft Night third Thursday, Feb. 20 at 6 p.m. This month's craft is a cord buddy. Materials are limited to eight participants and registration is required by emailing Emily at [ewayne@cwmar.org](mailto:ewayne@cwmar.org). Special thanks to the Friends of Westhampton Library and the Lyn Keating Program Fund for sponsoring all teen crafts.

An Opening Reception will be held Thursday Feb. 13 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. for February/March artist Jim Crowell of

Hatfield. Now retired from professional cabinetry and finish carpentry, he continues to make, creating sculpture, vessels and bas relief wall pieces that reflect his deep interests in nature and the natural world. Birch bark is his primary material.

Breakfast and a movie will be held Saturday, Feb. 15 from 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. There will be a family-friendly movie in celebration of Black History Month. The children will choose from "The Princess and the Frog" (2010), "Soul" (2021) or TBA. Breakfast pastries and juice will be served. Pajamas and stuffies are welcome and encouraged. Special thanks to the Friends of Westhampton Library and the Lyn Keating Program Fund for sponsoring this event.

On Saturday, Feb. 22 at 10:30 a.m. there will be music with Mr. Liam (Liam

Hurley). He has been singing, dancing, and educating in the Pioneer Valley for eight yrs and toured the world drumming for Josh Ritter and the Royal City Band before that. This is a fun-filled performance utilizing ukuleles, drums, puppets, and bubbles. This program is geared towards preschool aged children and funded by EEC (Early Education and Care) and the CFCE grant (Coordinated Family and Community Engagement).

Open Needle Felting for adults with Jo Martin will take place on Thursday, Feb. 27 from 6-8 p.m.

People will join Jo to design their own needle felting project with guidance from an experienced felter. All materials will be provided. Materials are limited and registration is required by either calling 413-527-5386 or email [westhampton@cwmar.org](mailto:westhampton@cwmar.org) to sign up.

## NORTHAMPTON

# Forbes Library announces upcoming news and events

NORTHAMPTON – On Tuesday, Jan. 28 from 1-2 p.m. Forbes Library, 20 West St., a virtual event "An Inside Look at Working with a Literary Agent: A Conversation with Seth Fishman" will take place. People should register for this event by calling the library at 413-587-1011.

This program is presented by the Library Speakers Consortium and provides an inside look into working with an agent and the beginning stages of the publishing process with Seth Fishman, Vice President and Literary Agent at The Gemert Company.

The Silent Book Club meets on Tuesday, Jan. 28 from 6:30-8 p.m. in the Reading Room. The group spends an hour of quiet reading followed by optional sharing and socializing. All are welcome to come read in community with other; no library card is needed.

On Tuesday, Jan. 21 from 4-6 p.m. teens ages 12 plus only meet in the Teen Gaming Lounge

They are invited to play our Nintendo Switch. There are enough controllers for eight players at a time. The library has a separate game time for players under the age of 12.

On Thursday, Jan. 23 from 3:45-5 p.m. Magic: the Gathering Club meets for tweens and teens.

This is a casual meetup for those interested in the tabletop card game Magic: The Gathering. They may bring their own cards to use if they have them or Forbes will provide pre-made decks to use at the library. They also have free cards to take and use for deck building. This program is for ages 10+ and meets biweekly in the Community Room. Any questions, please email [jvrysen@forbeslibrary.org](mailto:jvrysen@forbeslibrary.org).

Monthly Family Game Time with Northampton Public School's Early Childhood Center will be held Tuesday, Jan. 21 from 4-5 p.m. People are invited to drop in to play games and meet other families. They enjoy collaborative games like

Snug as a Bug and Busy Town, as well as turn-taking games like Spot It!, Hiss, and Zingo. This monthly family game night is geared toward families with children ages 3-8 years old. This event is hosted by the NPS's Early Childhood Center. People may email Ashley Miller at [AsMiller@northampton-k12.us](mailto:AsMiller@northampton-k12.us) with any questions.

On Tuesday, Jan. 21 from 4:30-5:30 p.m. Virtual Middle Grade Book Club "A Strange Thing Happened in Cherry Hall" by Jasmine Warga will be discussed. They meet on Zoom and should email [sjohnson@forbeslibrary.org](mailto:sjohnson@forbeslibrary.org) to sign up.

On Wednesday, Jan. 22 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. children may read to Sunny, the dog. They can book a 15-minute appointment to read to Sunny. To register, people should call 413-587-1010 or sign up at the Children's Desk. This program is great for children ages 4-10.

Kids' Gaming Club meets on Friday, Jan. 24 from 4-5 p.m. Every Friday, children ages 7-12 can hang out with other

young gamers and play the library's Nintendo Switch. They generally play Super Smash Bros., Mario Kart 8, Super Mario: Wonder, and Mario Party. Teens ages 12 and up meet in the Teen Gaming Lounge on Tuesdays.

LEGO Club meets Monday, Jan. 27 from 3:30-4:30 p.m. in the Community Room. The library has bricks, baseplates and minifigs. This program is great for ages 4 plus.

Baby story time for babies 18 months and under and their caregivers meets Tuesday, Jan. 21 from 10-11 a.m. for stories, songs and puppets

Preschool story time meets Thursday, Jan. 23 from 10:30-11:30 a.m. for ages 3 to 5. It includes books, songs and puppets and an open-ended art activity designed to encourage creativity.

Toddler story time meets Friday, Jan. 24 from 10:30-11 a.m. for ages 1.5 to 3 years and their caregivers. They sing songs, read stories and have fun.

## BECKET

# Becket Athenaeum lists news, events

BECKET – The Becket Athenaeum, 3367 Main St., holds baby and toddler playgroup on Tuesdays from 10-11 a.m. for birth to age 3.

Babies and toddlers participate in circle time, hear stories and music, play and enjoy movement. Siblings are welcome. There is coffee and tea for caregivers and snacks or children. Parents and caregivers should RSVP by visiting [BecketAthenaeum.org/events](http://BecketAthenaeum.org/events).

Story time with stay and play takes place Saturdays with story time from 10:30-11:30 a.m. and stay and play from 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Children will hear a story, make a craft and have time to play and enjoy a snack. RSVP is appreciated by visiting [bit.ly/BA-storytime](http://bit.ly/BA-storytime).

The Athenaeum hosts Nature

Journaling for the New Year with Lara Tupper on Sunday, Jan. 26 from 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served. Space is limited; registration is required by visiting [bit.ly/BA-winter-words](http://bit.ly/BA-winter-words). This program is made possible by a grant from National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.

Free movie night will be held Saturday, Feb. 1 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. The movie starts at 7 p.m. The movie, which has the most votes will be shown. Popcorn, candy and non-alcoholic beverages will be provided. People are welcome to bring their beverage of choice including alcohol.

Older children 13 plus may come with an adult at the discretion of their guardian. People must RSVP by Saturday,

Jan. 25 to vote for the movie of their choice by visiting [bit.ly/BA-Feb1-movie](http://bit.ly/BA-Feb1-movie).

Flower and Cookie Bar with blooming table events will be held Thursday, Feb. 13 at 6 p.m. at the Becket Athenaeum. This program is open to adults and older teens. They will create a flower arrangement to bring home alongside sweet botanical small bites. All materials and treats are provided at no cost to participants. Space is limited. Registration is required by visiting [bit.ly/BA-flower-bar](http://bit.ly/BA-flower-bar).

Mindful making, an evening of crafting and connection for local teens, will be held Thursday, Feb. 27 and Thursday, March 13 from 6:30-8 p.m. at the Athenaeum. Teens may bring their own project or enjoy a craft provided. Snacks will be available.

# Art Center holds coffee bag art contest

BECKET – The Becket Arts Center, 7 Brooker Hill Road, launches its second annual coffee-bag art contest.

Participants, adults over 18, are encouraged to pick up a large burlap coffee bag, generously supplied by Barrington Coffee Roasting Company and create a sculpture, a wall-hanging, a piece of clothing, a portrait, anything and return the art work to the Becket Arts Center by Sunday, March 2.

Only entries received by that date will be eligible for the \$100 cash prize.

The BAC will accept only two entries per person. All submitted coffee-bag creations will be on display at the arts center from Wednesday, March 5 through Friday, March 28, when they will be auctioned off to raise funds for children's art programming at the BAC. People may visit [www.becketartscenter.org/coffee-bag-art](http://www.becketartscenter.org/coffee-bag-art) for more information.



# MassDOT announces I-90 bridge painting

BECKET – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation announces bridge painting operations on I-90 eastbound and westbound at mile marker 18.4.

The work will take place from now through Friday, Jan. 24, from 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m. each day. Drivers traveling through these areas should expect delays, reduce speed, and use caution.

Appropriate signage and messaging will be in place to guide drivers through the work areas. All scheduled work is weather dependent and subject to change without notice.

For more information on traffic conditions, travelers are encouraged to: dial 511 and select a route to hear real-time conditions and visit [www.mass511.com](http://www.mass511.com) to view live cameras, travel times, real-time traffic conditions and project information before setting out on the road.

Users can subscribe to receive text and email alerts for traffic conditions. Follow @MassDOT on X, formerly known as Twitter, to receive regular updates on road and traffic conditions.



# OTIS

## Select Board to discuss new regional school agreement

By **Mary Kronholm**  
Correspondent

OTIS – The Select Board have on their agenda for Tuesday, Jan. 28 at 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall a discussion of a new Regional District Agreement for the Farmington River Regional School. The new agreement will shift the financial burden for both Otis and Sandisfield. After the discussion, a date and a warrant for a special town meeting will be set.

The board directed the School

Committee members in attendance that the informational meetings about this were their purview. Larry Southard asked to put the topic on the agenda for the next meeting so as “to have a coherent conversation” and “look at the process as a whole.”

The board approved moving forward with an outside legal firm to go after back taxes owed the town. Brown Legal PLLC of Boston will take on the responsibility of recovering unpaid property tax debt using the tax title process. According to Town Administrator Brandi Page, the firm

has provided a list of property taxes that are recoverable, partially recoverable, eligible for low value process and any not worth pursuing. This will not cost the town any money; the firm takes its fees from the collection process. Everything will go through the outside firm. “It’s kind of a good scenario for us, I think,” Page told the board.

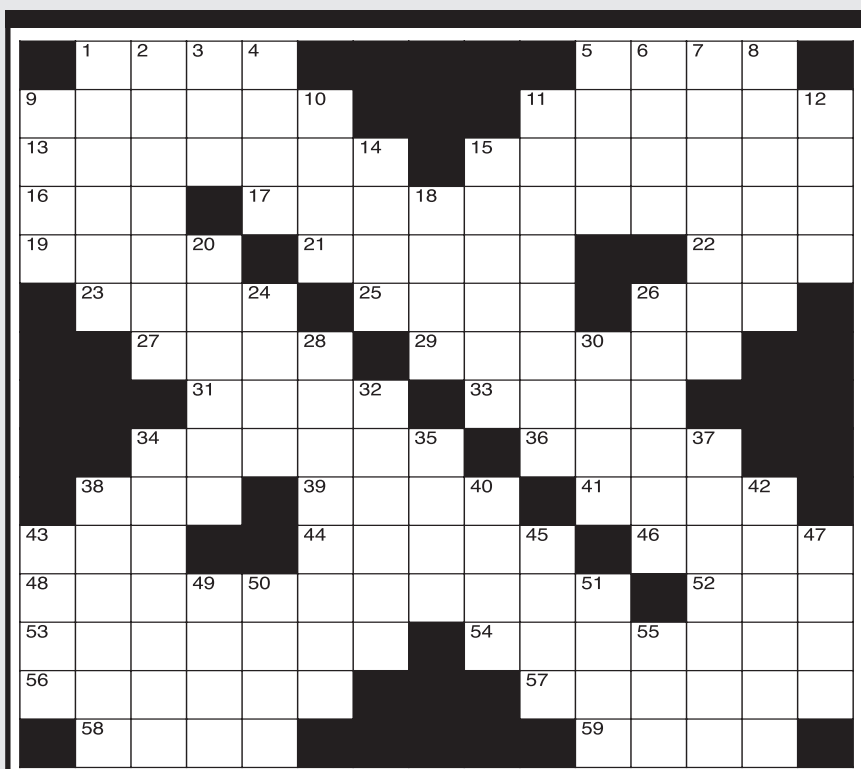
In other business, the board approved a utility pole placement for Verizon on Ed Jones Road and made appointments for a “Revitalization Committee.”

## Open burning season now open

OTIS – The burning season opened on Wednesday, Jan. 15.

A burning permit is required and can be obtained the morning the burning will take place by visiting [bcburnpermits.com](http://bcburnpermits.com).

Burning can be shut down at any time by the Fire Chief due to hazardous weather conditions that make burning brush unsafe to the public.



**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. “Loser” rocker
- 5. Partner to relaxation
- 9. Mixing
- 11. Winged nut
- 13. Expression of blame
- 15. Vast ocean
- 16. Comedienne Gasteyer
- 17. Multiply
- 19. Meat from a pig (French)
- 21. Related
- 22. Rocker Stewart
- 23. Surprise completely
- 25. Loon
- 26. Canister
- 27. Large, deep-bodied fish
- 29. Takes forcefully
- 31. Oil cartel
- 33. Palmer and
- Hepburn are two
- 34. More than one purposefully
- 38. Pitching statistic
- 39. Type of sword
- 41. Witnesses
- 43. Body part
- 44. Mixes slowly
- 46. Satisfy
- 48. Strong belief
- 52. One’s physique (slang)
- 53. More frightening
- 54. Soup cracker
- 56. Teaches
- 57. One who carries something
- 58. Actor Sean
- 59. Changes
- CLUES DOWN**
- 1. \_\_\_ Aires, city
- 2. Coarse grass
- 3. Type of gene
- 4. Door handle
- 5. Competition
- 6. Muslim ruler
- 7. Hunting expeditions
- 8. Large mollusk
- 9. Bind securely
- 10. Former U.S. presidential candidate
- 11. 2-point plays in football
- 12. Breezed through
- 14. Type setting
- 15. Felt for
- 18. Codified rules
- 20. Small dome
- 24. Chevrotain
- 26. Male reproductive gland
- 28. Controversial beliefs
- 30. Z Z Z
- 32. One who confines another
- 34. Bishop
- 35. Garlands
- 37. Bird that flies by the coast
- 38. Optical device
- 40. Greek goddess of discord
- 42. Some are “Rolling”
- 43. Formerly (archaic)
- 45. Thrust a knife into
- 47. German river
- 49. Atomic #26
- 50. Make a grotesque face
- 51. Primordial matter of the universe
- 55. Chinese philosophical principle

## THIS WEEK’S HOROSCOPES

**ARIES**

Mar 21/Apr 20

Aries, you feel loved and appreciated this week and you would like to share those feelings with others by being supportive of their needs. Focus your attention on a close friend.

**CANCER**

Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, you are getting hungrier and hungrier, which makes you determined to get ahead. Just be sure this determination is balanced by a little reservation as well.

**LIBRA**

Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, although your creative juices are flowing, some type of roadblock pops up and restricts your path. Explore ways to work around this obstacle.

**CAPRICORN**

Dec 22/Jan 20

Be careful when listening to what another has to say, Capricorn. Read their body language instead of just their words. The two may not match up with one another.

**TAURUS**

Apr 21/May 21

Taurus, even if you do not have anything in common with someone, you can find a way to be friends. Open a dialogue to get the ball rolling.

**LEO**

Jul 23/Aug 23

Could it be that you are in the market for some romance, Leo? If so, make a plan for rekindling the flame with a current partner or finding someone new who also is looking for love.

**SCORPIO**

Oct 24/Nov 22

Take a deep look at yourself this week, examining all facets of your personality. Instead of being judgemental of others, you may need to make some changes yourself.

**AQUARIUS**

Jan 21/Feb 18

Opportunities you may never have expected are presenting themselves, Aquarius. Find time to process these unexpected developments and mull the best approach.

**GEMINI**

May 22/Jun 21

Gemini, accept that you cannot change some things and look for a silver lining. Soon enough you’ll come out on the other side.

**VIRGO**

Aug 24/Sept 22

Challenges may arise in your relationship. A serious approach to the partnership is required by both side. Work toward resolving the situation as a couple.

**SAGITTARIUS**

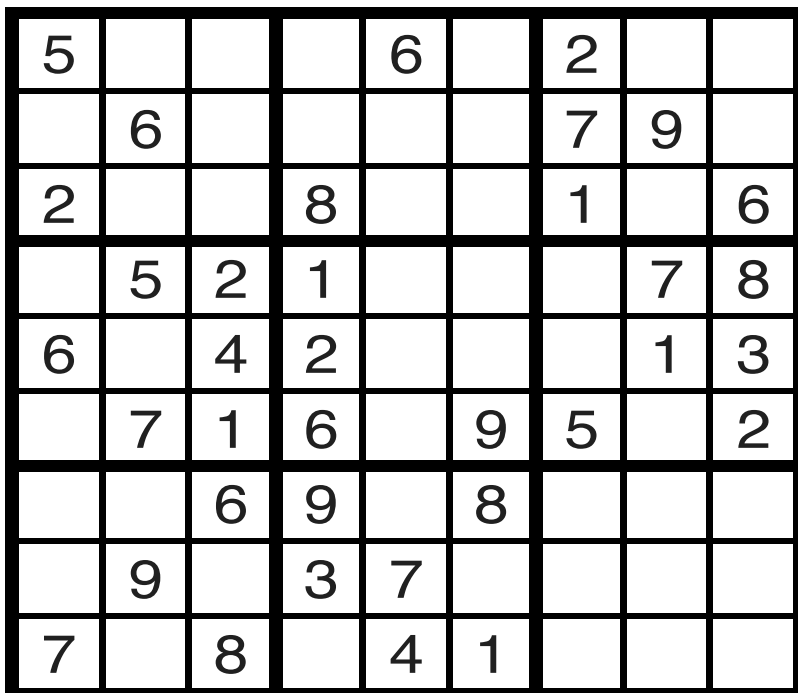
Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, emotions are running high for you and you may not be able to focus on what needs your attention most. If you can’t get a hold of things, try delegating some of your tasks.

**PISCES**

Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, resist hurried efforts to get to a destination without enjoying the journey. There is a lot to see along the way, so it’s best if you savor all of it while you can.



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**answers**

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

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# OBITUARIES

## Ronald E. "Ronny" Champagne, 88

Ronald E. "Ronny" Champagne, 88, of Blandford, passed away peacefully on Jan. 12, 2025. Ronny was born on Jan. 27, 1936, in Springfield, where he grew up before his family moved to Russell.



retired in 2011 at the age of 75, leaving behind a legacy of innovation and dedication.

Ronny is survived by his devoted wife, Viola; his sister, Roberta who will remember him as a loving and caring brother, and his beloved nieces, Donna, Nina, Rosalie, Marla and Yvonne. Known for his quiet strength, sharp intellect and unyielding work ethic, Ronny left an enduring mark on the lives of his family, friends and col-

leagues. His service to his country and his contributions to advancing technology, particularly in support of military efforts, will never be forgotten.

Following his military service, Ronny attended the Ward School of Electronics, part of the University of Hartford in Connecticut. He began his professional journey at F.W. Sickles in Chicopee, working on advanced electronic technologies. He later joined K&M Electronics, where he played a key role in the development of night vision goggles for the U.S. military. After a long and accomplished career, Ronny

leagues. His service to his country and his contributions to advancing technology, particularly in support of military efforts, will never be forgotten.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Dakin Humane Society, P.O. Box 6307, Springfield, MA 01101. Services were held on Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2025 at Westfield Funeral Home, 4 Princeton St, Westfield, MA 01085. To express condolences, to share photos or memories, please visit Ronny's memorial page at [www.westfieldfuneralhome.com](http://www.westfieldfuneralhome.com).

## Kiera A. Coon, 26

Kiera A. Coon, 26, passed away on Friday, Jan. 17, 2025 at Baystate Noble Hospital. She was born in Springfield to Trevor and Erica (Smith) Coon.



her brother, Joseph Coon of Wisconsin; grandparents, Linda and Phil Smith of Montgomery and Russell Coon of Somers, Connecticut. She is predeceased by her grandmother, Patricia Coon.

Kiera attended Gateway Regional Public Schools and was currently attending the Work Opportunity Center in Westfield (WOC). Kiera enjoyed theater class at Whole Children, Northampton' MCS activity club and was a longtime Special Olympian. She enjoyed good food and was an avid performer.

Calling hours for Kiera will be held on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2025 from 1-3 p.m. in Firtion-Adams Funeral Service, 76 Broad St., Westfield. Her burial will take place privately in Center Cemetery, Montgomery. In Lieu of flower's donations in Kiera's name

To cherish her memory, she leaves her parents, Trevor and Erica (Smith) Coon of Montgomery;

may be made to Whole Children Inclusive Community Center (Theater Program) 11 Village Hill Road, Northampton MA 01060. [www.firtionadams.com](http://www.firtionadams.com).

## DEATH NOTICES

### CHAMPAGNE, RONALD E.

Died Jan. 12, 2025  
Services held Jan. 22, 2025  
Westfield Funeral Home, Westfield

### COON, KIERA A.

Died Jan. 17, 2025  
Calling hours Jan. 25 from 1-3 p.m.  
Firtion-Adams Funeral Service, Westfield  
Burial private at Center Cemetery, Montgomery

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Find archives of this local newspaper at [www.newspapers.turley.com](http://www.newspapers.turley.com)

### HELP WANTED

Small church in West Brookfield seeking a **PART-TIME SECRETARY**. Approximately 5 hours/week. Candidate must have organizational and computer skills, social media experience, good communication and people skills a must. Starting paying \$16-18/hr. based on experience. Send resume to: [fccwbworship@gmail.com](mailto:fccwbworship@gmail.com).

#### TOWN ADMINISTRATOR Middlefield, MA.

Part-time, 960 hrs/yr, \$36-40,000 range. Email resume+ cover letter highlighting strengths/ flexibility to Administrative Assistant: [middlefield.assistant@gmail.com](mailto:middlefield.assistant@gmail.com)

**TOWN OF BLANDFORD HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT** The Town of Blandford is seeking a qualified individual for the position of Highway Superintendent. Salary range starting at \$75,000-\$80,000+ negotiable based on experience/skills. Please visit our website [TownOfBlandford.com](http://TownOfBlandford.com) or email [Administrator@TownofBlandford.com](mailto:Administrator@TownofBlandford.com) for more information.

**WILBRAHAM UNITED CHURCH** is hiring a sexton three evenings, 7-10 hours per week, \$16 per hour. Additional compensation for hours needed for weddings and funerals. Please send resume to [admin@wilbrahamunitedchurch.org](mailto:admin@wilbrahamunitedchurch.org)

More information found at [www.wilbrahamunitedchurch.org/about-us-2/](http://www.wilbrahamunitedchurch.org/about-us-2/)

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**GREEN STREET, PALMER** Newly renovated 1 bedroom apt. porch, off-street parking, coin-op laundry, \$1,500/ mo includes heat. No Pets. Call Tom 413-896-1555

**Classified Advertising DEADLINE MONDAY AT NOON**

## PITTSFIELD

# Pittsfield has cigarette waste containers at several locations

PITTSFIELD – Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. installed new cigarette waste containers in downtown Pittsfield with funding from Downtown Blooms and support from Pittsfield Beautiful and Mill Town Foundation.

Cigarette waste containers are located at the corner of Bradford Street and the corner of Linden Street, as well as at St. Joseph's Church, at the seating area by the Berkshire Family YMCA and there are two by the Ralph J. Froio Senior Center. The containers by TerraCycle allow for free cigarette waste recycling.

Once collected and shipped back to TerraCycle, the cigarette waste is cleaned and separated by material type. The materials are recycled into raw formats that manufacturers use to make new products. The ash and tobacco are separated out and composted in a specialized process.

Since 1983, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. has been the recognized leader, facilitator, and principal advocate for downtown. DPI is a membership organization consisting of property owners, businesses, residents, cultural and entertainment venues, restaurants and non-profit organizations who have joined forces to increase economic activity by promoting downtown as a great place to live, work, and play.

For more information, people may call Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. at 413-443-6501.



This cigarette waste container is located at the corner of Linden Street.

*Submitted photo*



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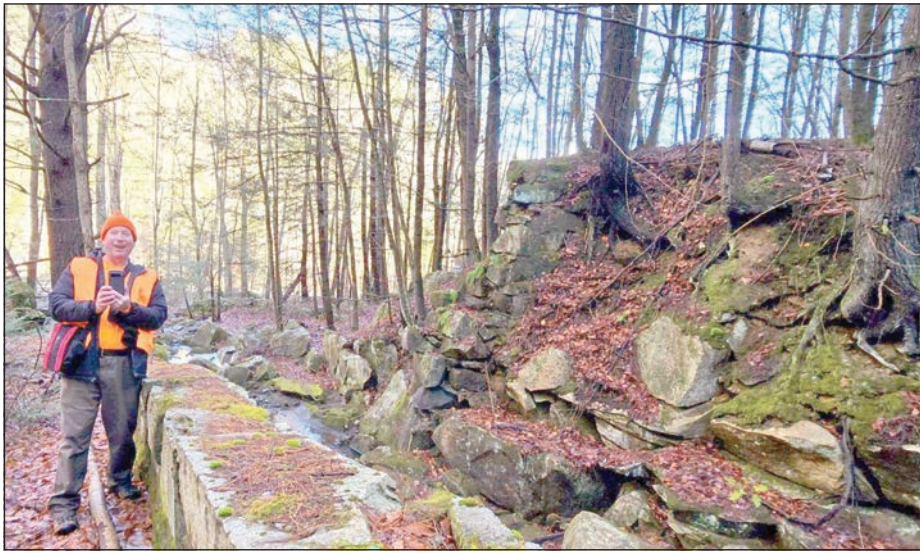
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# HILLTOWN HIKING ADVENTURES

## Hikers explore 'Granite Line'



Frank Kennedy of Hancock stands next to the Cushman Brook retaining wall with the old railroad bridge abutment rear right of the photo.

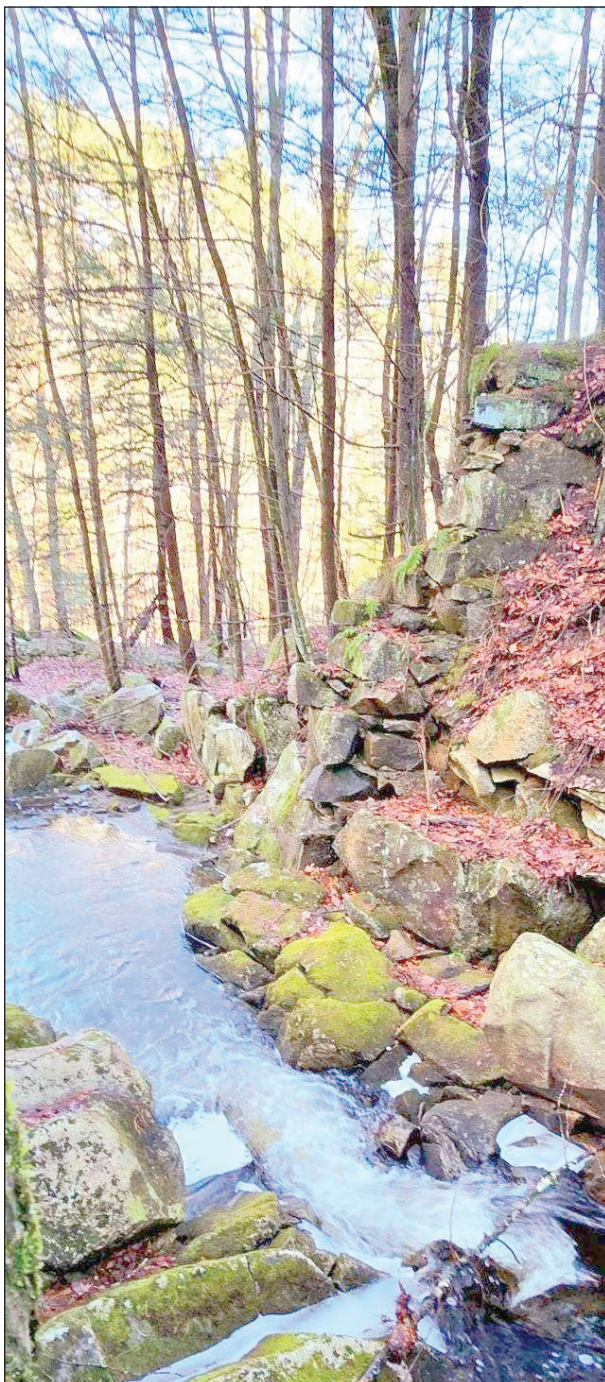
The Cushman iron truss railroad bridge once stood here over Cushman Brook in Becket. Amazing history lies along the short lived five mile spur off of the Boston and Albany Railroad called the Chester and Becket Railroad through both Chester and Becket, known as the "Granite Line" built to carry granite from the Hudson and Chester Granite Quarry in Becket to the Chester Granite and Polishing Works for finishing and shipping granite on the Boston and Albany Railroad.

On this site the old Mitchell Road and Cushman Road, pre Quarry Road in Becket, can also be found as these old roads were used before the railroad was built for hauling granite by team from

the Hudson and Chester Granite Quarry high up on the hill. Mitchell Road was badly damaged after the hurricane of 1938, in fact Route 20 was swept away in many places.

The Mitchell Farm up on Mitchell Mountain could no longer use the old Mitchell Road, so a new road was cut up the mountain from Blandford Road. This road is still used today.

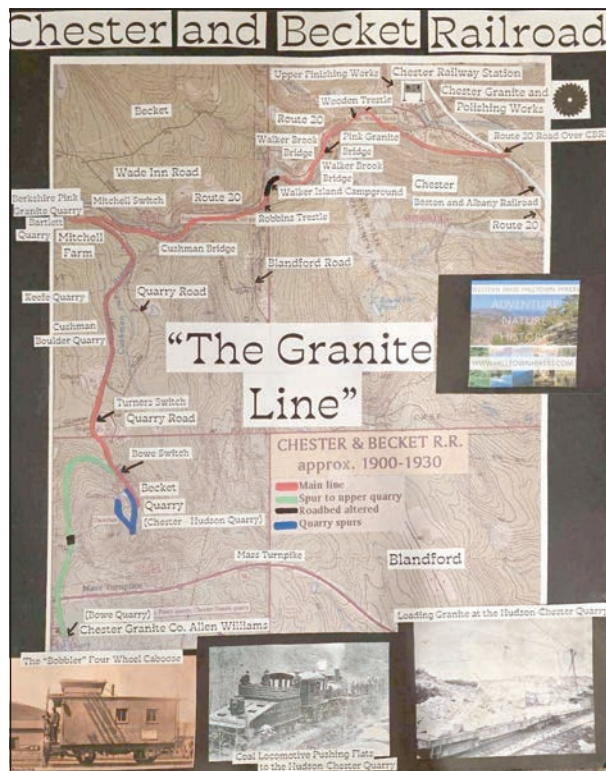
The Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers will have a booth at the Amherst Railroad Hobby Show on Saturday, Jan. 25 and Sunday, Jan. 26 at the Big E Fairgrounds in West Springfield in the Better Living Center for more Chester and Becket Railroad History.



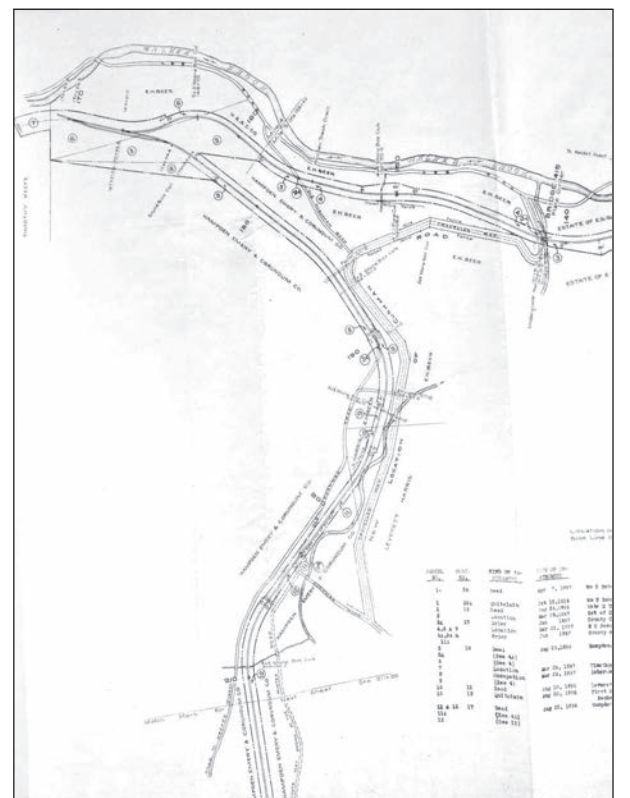
This is a view of the Cushman Brook and the railroad bridge abutment.



This is a view of the Granite retaining wall for Cushman Brook. The railroad bridge went over the over the brook at this point. Note the stone culvert built into this wall for old Mitchell Road on the other side of the wall.



The original map by Dave Pierce with labels by Liz Massa shows the full Chester and Becket Railroad with all points of interest.



The original Chester and Becket Railroad Survey showing the old roads and Cushman Bridge. Submitted photos

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