

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



Department of Public Utilities members of the Energy Facilities Siting Board are, from left, Analyst Shannon Dennehy, Assistant Director Wayne Wang, Presiding Officer Connor Tarr and Analyst Smitha Divakar. *Turley Publications photos by Mary Kronholm*

DPU hearing has many comments

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – The Department of Public Utilities held a public hearing for the state's Energy Facilities Siting Board on Tuesday, Feb. 3 at the Town Hall.

The purpose of the hearing was to take comments and questions from the public, Blandford residents, regarding the impact the renovation to the NSTAR/Eversource substation on North Blandford Road would have on the town. The DPU was represented by Connor Tarr Counsel II who served as the presiding officer. Smitha Divakar and Shannon Dennehy, also at the EFSB table, are Energy Siting Analysts.

All three serve as staff to the EFSB and will review

Eversource's petitions and investigate, through an adjudicatory process, issues for the project. The comments provided can inform some of the issues investigated. They will prepare a decision that the EFSB will vote on regarding the project, according to Wayne Wang, EFSB Assistant Director, also at the EFSB table at the front of the room.

A wealth of recording and filming equipment was brought in, as well as having David Arsenaault, a transcriptionist, from Cambridge. The hearing is due to Eversource's request to the EFSB to grant "individual and comprehensive zoning exemptions" from the town's zoning bylaws to allow for substation expansion.

Christopher Lombardi, Eversource Project Director for this project, gave a presentation detailing changes. They will replace existing transformers with two higher capacity transformers, install new foundations, trenching and conduits, new switch gear, circuit breakers, a new access road off North Blandford Road, expanding the substation fenced size from .65 to 1.13 acres and a new galvanized fence. The transmission grid is critical to ensure reliable electricity flow and the expansion will allow for up to 40 megawatts of Distributed Energy Resource, according to Lombardi's presentation. Replacing the existing transformers with two new 62.5 transformers will enable clean energy consistent with the state's climate change goals.

The average residential customer can expect a monthly cost impact of \$0.10 or \$1.34 annually while approximately 38% of the DER will be paid by interconnecting DER owners. Customers will benefit with an increase in reliable electricity supply, a decrease potential for negative environmental impacts from obsolete equipment and enable the expansion of the electric load due to the use of electric vehicles or the replacement of fossil fuels with electric based heating.

Eversource is seeking exemptions from the town's zoning bylaws through the EFSB and locally, a driveway permit from the Highway Department and an Order of Conditions from the Conservation Commission. A working chart indicated outreach began in October 2024 and an expected completion

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BLANDFORD

Kent Lemme to be inducted into WMass Runners Hall of Fame

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

One of Blandford's own is a member of the 2026 Class of Western Massachusetts Runners who will be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

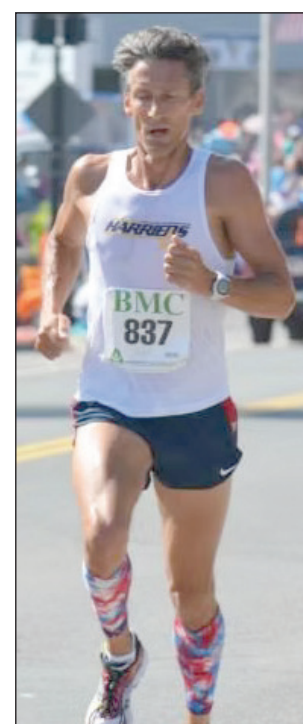
The induction ceremony will be Friday, March 6 at 6 p.m. at the Empire One Running Club at Ashley Reservoir, 250 Whitney Ave. in Holyoke.

Kent Lemme is a 1984 Gateway Regional High School graduate. While there he played the three seasonal sports, soccer in winter, basketball in the fall and golf in the spring.

"Golf was my favorite," said Kent. He competed at the Blandford Club as a junior player and won the Junior Club Championship more than once. When he was 18, he won the club's Men's Championship.

At that time, he saw running as a way to keep in shape. But that changed. Lemme completed the Boston Marathon in 2003 with a time of 2:44:56. And later that year, he won the Mohawk-Hudson River Marathon.

In 2006 he completed the Millennium Mile in Londonderry, New Hampshire and in 2008, won the Masters Mile



Kent Lemme

event at the New Balance Indoor Grand Prix in Roxbury. That same year, while running for the Greater Springfield Harriers, Kent and the Harriers won a number of USA Track and Field New England cross-country Grand Prix events, including one which qualified him for the 2008 Olympic Trials.

According to the Western Massachusetts Runners website, throughout his 40s, Kent rep-

LEMME, page 7

SCHOOL & YOUTH

Gateway Regional High School sends five ambassadors to Project 351

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

On Saturday, Jan. 17, Leah Boyer of Huntington, Ava Christie of Russell, Ella DeGregorio of Montgomery, Haylee Hussey of Middlefield and Parker McLaughlin of Blandford, along with staff mentor Hannah Sullivan, joined eighth graders from across the Commonwealth to begin their year as ambassadors for Project 351.

They spent the day in service to others and had the opportunity to connect with students from across the state and celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King. Staff nominate one eighth grade student ambassador from each of the district's six towns. This year's ambassador from Chester had to decline.

DeGregorio reported, "The day was really fun and we got to meet a lot of new people." Christie added, "It was cool to see how much we could accomplish together."

The ambassadors brought back 36 hygiene

kits and meal kits, both of which were assembled by ambassadors from across the state. Meal kits consisted of fortified rice and bean dinners. Hygiene kits each contained shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, soap and deodorant. They were donated to the Gateway Free and Sustainable Store.

According to Dr. Will Sullivan, Principal of Gateway Regional School, the GFSS was created to make resources available to students and the community. "Two years ago, we partnered with the Western Massachusetts Food Bank to expand access to essential resources for our school and surrounding community," Sullivan explained. "This initiative was combined with the Village Closet, which had already been established in the building." The GFSS is located on the first floor of the school.

The ambassadors will host a spring service project and look forward to supporting the Gateway Regional School community. They

intend to do a drive to support the GFSS, although specific plans have not been confirmed at this time.

The name "Gateway Free and Sustainable Store" was intentionally chosen to avoid the perception of the space as solely a resource for those in need and to promote dignity, inclusion, and sustainability over time. The GFSS has proven to be a valuable resource for students, staff and the wider community, Sullivan said.

Sullivan added that all students are able to access the store during the school day. The GFSS operates during designated hours to ensure accessibility and is staffed by a student intern or a Village Closet employee. Outside of these scheduled times, students may request access through a staff member. The store is also open to members of the broader community.

Sullivan added that the food pantry part of the GFSS is overseen by school staff, while clothing and additional supplies are managed by the Village Closet.



Project 351 student ambassadors, from left, Ella DeGregorio, Leah Boyer, Haylee Hussey, Ava Christie and Parker McLaughlin are shown with their principal, Dr. Will Sullivan, center.

Submitted photo



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HILLTOWNS

MassDOT announces funding for local transportation planning

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation through its Office of Transportation Planning announces the inaugural round of technical assistance for communities through the new Local Early and Actionable Planning Program.

The LEAP Program, launched earlier this year, is designed to help municipalities particularly rural and underserved communities initiate transportation projects by providing early-stage planning and design support.

Through LEAP, participating municipalities receive direct planning and

engineering assistance from MassDOT and its consultant partners.

The inaugural cohort of LEAP participants includes Becket High Street improvement project and Westhampton Montague Road speed analysis. The program is funded through \$1 million included in Governor Healey's FY 2026 Capital Investment Plan and administered as part of MassDOT's capital budget.

Municipal leaders interested in future rounds of LEAP assistance can find information about eligibility, application timelines and upcoming outreach events

on the MassDOT Municipal Planning and Support by visiting <https://www.mass.gov/massdot-municipal-planning-and-support>. For any additional questions, they can write to MuniSupport@dot.state.ma.us.

Requests from municipalities that were not selected to advance this round will be kept on file for consideration in state fiscal year 2027 beginning in July 2026. These communities are also encouraged to contact MassDOT's Municipal Planning and Support Team to express continued interest in assistance through the program.

HUNTINGTON

HCC announces FY 2026 awards

HUNTINGTON – The Huntington Cultural Council announces its awards for the Fiscal Year 2026 cycle.

Twelve recipients benefited from this year's state allocation of \$5,700. This year marks the 30th year of Huntington's participation in this state-wide program. More than \$120,000 has been awarded to applicants since its beginning, continually enhancing the town's cultural experience.

The Local Cultural Council Program is a grassroots cultural funding entity that has been in existence for more than 45 years and supports community-based projects in the arts, sciences and humanities. The state legislature provides an annual appro-

priation to the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency, which then allocates funds to each of the 329 Local Cultural Councils in Massachusetts.

Decisions on the submitted proposals are made each year by the local members, all volunteers, of our LCC. This year's grantees are: North Hall Association – Arts Festival 2026; It Takes A Village – Creative Movement for Families; Blandford Art Show; Huntington Public Library – Dungeons and Dragons – Live instruction; Huntington COA – Art Instruction and Music for the Memory Café and Entertainment for Seniors; Gateway Regional School – Beth Guertin – Guest Artist Series; Huntington

Community Events Committee – Free Summer Music Series; Hilltown Community Health Centers – Engineering Your World – Nature and science based learning experience for children entering kindergarten; Gateway Regional High School – Mark Donovan – Mass MOCA Field Trip and town of Huntington Recreation Department – Majestic Theatre Trip for Summer Camp.

For more information, people may visit <https://mass-culturalcouncil.org> or email Lynn Winsor at culturalcouncil@huntingtonma.us. To apply for a grant beginning in September 2027, people should visit <https://mass-culturalcouncil.smartsimple.com>.

CHESTERFIELD

Group hike heads to Chesterfield Gorge

CHESTERFIELD – The Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers plan a group hike treks to Chesterfield Gorge on Saturday, Feb. 21 at 11 a.m.

They will take the Chesterfield Gorge East Branch Trail. They should park at the Chesterfield Gorge, 150 Ireland St. Additional plowed parking is available with a nominal donation at the snowmobile club.

The hike is rated moderate due to length and winter conditions. It is flat ground with minimal incline/declines, approximately four miles in and back to mile marker two with an option for another two miles to the Baker Dam and back. Crampons/cleats/snowshoes are recommended. P

This hike along the East Branch Trail has an option to go to the Baker Dam and Saw Mill remains starting at the Chesterfield Gorge.

The East Branch of the Westfield River in winter is a unique sight with ice blocks lining the edge. Hikers will see animal tracks in the snow and experience the beauty of the woods in winter. Built in 1848 by Lemuel

Baker, a saw mill was erected here at mile marker three on the East Branch Trail in Chesterfield.

The mill used an under-shot waterwheel to produce its power. A dam was located here, but it no longer exists due to raging flood waters on the East Branch of the Westfield River. However metal pins can still be seen on the rocks at the waters edge. After 21 years of use both the dam and mill were destroyed by flood waters in 1869 and were never rebuilt.

Participants will hike along the wild and scenic East Branch trail along the river with rolling terrain into the Gilbert Bliss State Forest, passing an old quarry site to mile marker two with an option to add another two miles on to the old mill site.

The group will hike rain or shine. Registration is required. Participants should register per car by visiting www.hilltownhikers.com under the events tab. Maps and bottled water will be provided. Well behaved dogs are welcome. The event is volunteer lead. Suggested donation is \$15.

More details are on www.hilltownhikers.com.



This is a view of the Chesterfield Gorge in winter.

Submitted photo

People may email westernmasshilltownhikers@aol.com or call/text 413-302-0312 if they have any questions. As always be prepared for rocks, mud and roots, bring trekking poles and a snack

People who wish to hike every weekend can

sign up by visiting www.hilltownhikers.com under the membership tab. Tees, hats and hiker swag will be for sale by donation at the event. People may visit www.hilltownhikers.com to see all maps, photos, blogs, etc.

CUMMINGTON

Friday Night Cafe happens Feb. 13

CUMMINGTON – Elric Walker will perform at the next the Friday Cafe on Friday, Feb. 13 7-9 p.m. at the Village Church, located in the Cummington Cultural District from Songs Of Love and Other Revolutions.

Walker will perform new songs, poetry, flowers and door prizes. The event is free; donations are appreciated. Snacks will be provided. People should bring your own beverage. This is once again brought by the friendly folks at the Village Church

who believe music can be a powerful force for building community.

Friday Night Cafe receives promotional support from the Cummington Cultural District and is supported in part by grants from the Ashfield, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Hinsdale-Peru, Plainfield, Williamsburg, Windsor and Worthington Cultural Councils, local agencies, which are supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

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BECKET

Becket Athenaeum has new flag designed by students



The old flag letting people know the Becket Athenaeum was open shows wear.



The art work for the new flag was by the After School Kids Club members.



This new flag lets patrons know when the Becket Athenaeum is open. Submitted photos

BECKET – The Becket Athenaeum, 3367 Main St., now has a new open flag.

The new flag is really beautiful and also represents a labor of love and collaboration. The artwork on the flag was done by the after-school Kids Club students over the course of several of their Thursday afternoons at the library. They drafted, sketched, and created images of things from the natural world, which were then transferred to fabric by resident artist and catalog specialist, Dawn.

The children then returned to their designs to add vibrant colors before Dawn sewed it all together. It took a long time to do all of this. The Athenaeum could have ordered a new “OPEN” flag from an online retail giant. When people come to the library and look at the flag, they will understand why the staff did not take the easy path.

MassDOT continues I-90 bridge repairs

BECKET – The Massachusetts Department of Transportation announces bridge repairs on I-90 eastbound and westbound at mile marker 20 in Becket.

The work is scheduled now through Friday, Feb. 13 from 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m. each day and will require lane closures. Appropriate signage, law enforcement details, and advanced message boards will be in place to guide drivers through the work area. Drivers traveling through the affected areas should expect delays, reduce speed, and use caution.

All scheduled work is

weather dependent and subject to change without notice. For more information on traffic conditions, travelers are encouraged to: Download the Mass511 mobile app or visit 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. Dial 511 and select a route to hear real time conditions. Follow @MassDOT on X, formerly known as Twitter, to receive regular updates on road and traffic conditions.

Athenaeum lists upcoming events

BECKET – In celebration of Black History Month, the Becket Athenaeum will dive deep into the work of four Black children’s book illustrators and the art of storytelling through collage.

Books and art activities
Throughout February, story time books and art activities will feature the work of Black illustrators. Story time happens each Saturday at 10:30 a.m. In addition, adults and teens can join us on the last two Wednesdays of the month to enjoy casual evenings of collage and connection featuring materials and inspiration from these illustrators. Featured art-

ists will include Oge Mora, Christian Robinson, Ekua Holmes and Ashely Bryan.

Documentary
The Becket Athenaeum will screen a documentary about Ashley Bryan’s life on Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 6 pm. Each of these artists use bold colors, cut paper, and layers of texture in different ways to tell stories. On Wednesday, Feb. 18 from 5-7 p.m. people can browse their work, learn their histories, and try a hand at telling a story through collage. They should RSVP bwlbrary.org/events. Participants may bring old photographs, magazines etc of

their own that might help tell the story. There will be plenty of materials available at the library as well. Light refreshments will be served.

Puppeteer
The Athenaeum will host local puppeteer and naturalist Meredyth Babcock representing Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee on the Monday, Feb. 23 at 6:30 p.m. session of Maker Mondays at the Becket Arts Center to offer a Shadow Box and Puppet making activity for adults and teens.

Ongoing events
Ongoing events are: baby and toddler playgroup Tuesdays from

10-11 a.m. (visit bwlbrary.org/events); one-on-one tech support, 30-minute appointments available Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 p.m. and story time with stay and play Saturdays at 10:30 a.m. (RSVP appreciated by visiting bwlbrary.org/storytime).

Game night
Game night is Friday, Feb. 19 from 6-8 p.m. at the library. For more information people may visit bwlbrary.org/Feb19game

Movie night
Movie night for adults is Tuesday, Feb. 24 from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the library. For more information, people may visit bwlbrary.org/Feb24movie.

Art Center announces programs

BECKET – The Becket Arts Center, 7 Brooker Hill Road, offers on Tuesday, February 17 and 24, a “Learn to Meditate: Calming the Wild Horses of Your Mind.” Part of an eight-week course, the class is designed to help participants shift from “doing” mode, rushing from one task to the next, to “being” mode, providing a toolkit to navigate life’s challenges with grace and focus. Feel free to bring a meditation cushion or mat; chairs will be available. Suggested donation is \$15 and \$10 for members or pay what people can. Walk-ins welcome, though registration is encouraged. For more information, people may visit becketartscenter.org.

The Becket Arts Center will offer its weekly all-levels yoga class with Rima Sala on Thursdays, Feb. 19 and Feb. 26 from 9:30-10:30 a.m. Cost is \$5 to \$10 for members; \$15 for non-members.

On Thursday, Feb. 12, from 6:30-9 p.m., the Arts Center offers its popular

“Improv for All” class. Ken Cheeseman, an actor who is currently a guest lecturer at Columbia University and Paula Langton, an actor and Professor Emeritus at Boston University, will show how to build a narrative through improvisational games, exercises, scene-setting and story-telling. Both actors were mentored by Keith Johnstone, author of *Improv for Storytellers*. Those interested can drop in to the Becket Arts Center on Thursday evenings through Feb. 26, though prior registration is encouraged. \$45 a session; BAC members pay \$40 to \$20; Card to Culture members \$20. No prior experience is necessary and loose comfortable clothing is recommended.

On Saturday, Feb. 14, from 10:30 a.m.-noon, the center will offer a freestyle dance program with Delsie Dunn as the guest facilitator. This opportunity to discover ways to move to music with intention and openness

is guaranteed to warm up the body and lift the spirit. People should bring loose-fitting clothes, a towel, water bottle, and indoor shoes or go barefoot. Session fee: \$15 and \$10 for members. For registration and more information for any of these programs, people may visit becketartscenter.org.

The center will hold a Flannel Fundraiser Rounders Revival folk, roots and Americana on Friday, Feb. 20 at 7 p.m. Flannel is required and dancing shoes optional. Tickets are \$15 for general public and \$10 for members. People should bring a non-perishable item for the Becket Food Pantry.

They will host an evening of craft-making on Monday, Feb. 23, from 6:30-8 p.m. People should bring a current project whether it’s knitting, sketching, or something else entirely and work alongside other local makers, sharing ideas and inspiration. Participation in Maker Monday is free.

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OPINION

GUEST COLUMN

SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

Why is my Social Security retirement benefit so small?

Dear Rusty:

Can you help me understand?

I have paid into Social Security since I started working in 1978. I did have a lot of tax deductions, but I don't understand why I only receive \$350 a month from Social Security.

Signed: Befuddled Senior

Dear Befuddled Senior:

Your Social Security benefit is based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 years over your lifetime that you earned the most while contributing to the Social Security program; however, your benefit isn't based on your contributions to SS. Your average lifetime earnings amount is called your Average Indexed Monthly Earnings," which are adjusted for inflation for years before you turn 60. Your earnings, your net earnings if self-employed, are provided to the SSA by the IRS.

Your AIME is subjected to a formula which calculates your "Primary Insurance Amount," which is the SS benefit you receive if you start benefits in the month you reach your full retirement age. Your personal Full Retirement Age depends on the year you were born which, if you were born in 1960 or later, is age 67. However, if you claim Social Security before reaching your FRA, you will get only a percentage of your PIA, reduced from what you would get if you claimed at your FRA.

For example, if you claimed at age 62, you would only get 70% of the amount you would have gotten had you waited until age 67, or if you claimed at age 63 you would get 75% of your age 67 benefit. The reduction is less as you get closer to your FRA; if you claimed at age 65, you'd get about 87% of your full retirement age amount.

You can see your lifetime Social Security earnings record at your personal "my Social Security" online account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount (you will need to first create that online account), or you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to request an "Earnings Statement" be sent to you. That statement will show your lifetime earnings by year, the 35 highest of which were used to calculate your PIA (your

Social Security benefit at your FRA). Generally, your Social Security FRA benefit will be about 40% or less of your average indexed monthly earnings.

So, to recap, your SS retirement benefit isn't based on your contributions to the program; it's based on your average monthly lifetime earnings. If you had less than 35 years contributing to the program, SS would still use 35 years in the benefit formula by using zero dollars in earnings for some number of years, which would result in a smaller AIME.

Thus, if you claimed before your full retirement age of 67, your SS benefit was reduced because you claimed early. And if you had less than 35 years of SS-covered employment, your AIME was less, resulting in a smaller PIA. And that is likely why your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is low.

One other thought to consider: if you are married and your spouse's monthly SS benefit is considerably more than yours (e.g., more than twice as much as yours), you may want to explore your options for spouse benefits.

I hope this explains how your SS benefit is calculated, but if you still question your monthly SS retirement amount, I suggest you first obtain your "Earnings Statement" to review the lifetime earnings SS has on file for you. If there are any discrepancies in your Social Security's earnings record, there are correction remedies available to you. If that is the case, please feel free to contact us again for more information.

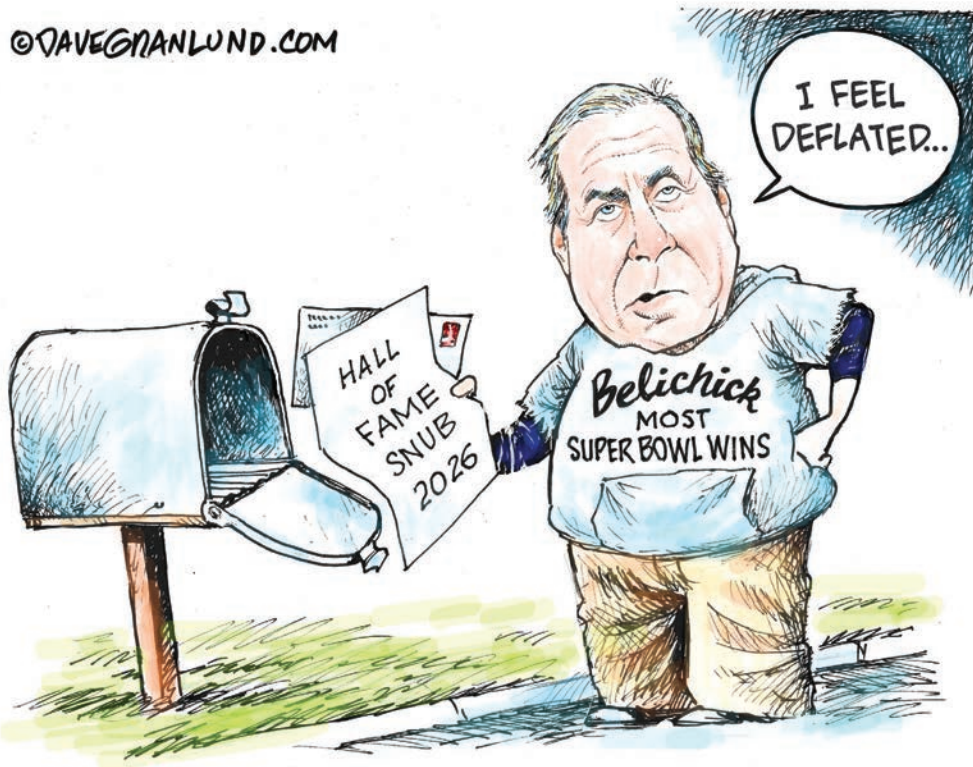
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Corrections will be printed in the same section where the error originally occurred.

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GUEST COLUMN

Online seed houses offer endless choices

It's been a fun couple of weeks in the realm of gardening! While I haven't yet gotten my hands into the soil yet, I have been on the hunt for all kinds of seeds for the Old Sturbridge Village gardens: those for obscure medicinal plants, unique heirlooms, and rare native plants.

That process has led me to some interesting mail order companies that I'd like to share with you.

My mail order "go to" for herb seeds has always been Richter's (www.richters.com) but when I couldn't locate a few of the items on my list there, a simple inter-

net search lead me to Thyme Garden (www.thymegarden.com). Their catalog boasts over 400 varieties of herb seeds and more. The text doubles as an herbal encyclopedia of sorts, providing the reader with cultural information in addition to loads of herbal lore.

you back \$2.50, but you can get a digital download for free. It's noteworthy to mention that many of the seeds are harvested on the farm in Oregon. The company has been in business since 1989, and clearly knows their stuff.

I purchased both Jimsonweed and Cotton for the Paul Roger's Herb Garden from this company.

Prairie Moon Nursery (www.prairiemoon.com) is an excellent source for native plant material and seeds. This statement from their website gave me some-

A paper copy will set

GARDEN, page 6



by Roberta McQuaid

On Dec. 20, compilers at the Athol Christmas Bird Count recorded a total of 58 species including a Gadwall, a first time for this species during a Christmas count.

Male Gadwall have grayish-brown heads, sometimes showing cinnamon on the forehead and faint purplish iridescence on the crown. Females resemble female mallards, but they have a thinner, darker bill.

Gadwall nest in tall vegetation near water and show a preference for nesting on islands. Their choice of nesting location gives them some protection from predators. Female Gadwall produce an egg a day and lay a clutch of seven to 12 eggs.

BIRDS, page 6



By Ellenor Downer



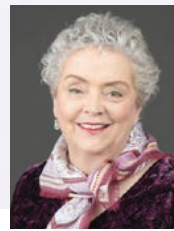
Male gadwall

Have a heart: Tips for Valentine's Day



your health

By Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, RN
Guest Column



We seem to love Valentine's Day. Americans are expected to spend \$27.7 billion on Valentine's Day this year, a tad more than last year, according to Capital One Shopping. The statistic I find most interesting is that 34% of that spending – \$9.5 billion – will be for gifts that are ultimately unwanted by their recipients.

So today, I will propose some Valentine's Day

HEALTH, page 5

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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.

OPINION

GUEST COLUMN

Town official speaks at DPU hearing about substation expansion and concerns

By **Jacqueline “Jackie” Coury**
Guest Columnist

Editor’s note: Coury is a Select Board member and Chairman of the town’s Energy Projects Sitting and Engagement Committee. She read this statement at public hearing conducted by the Department of Public Utilities on Tuesday, Feb. 3.

Blandford recognizes the importance of electric reliability and supports the Commonwealth’s clean energy and climate objectives. However, a substantial number of our residents are deeply concerned about the scale of change this substation expansion represents and the precedent it will establish for future development in our community.

Blandford is a small rural community with a limited commercial tax base and municipal resources. Our town operates on

an approximate \$5 million annual tax levy, with public safety, infrastructure maintenance, and emergency response already stretched across a geographically large and sparsely populated area. The majority of boards and committees are staffed through part-time volunteerism. Projects of this scale and those that will follow introduce risks, and infrastructure demands that our rural municipality is not structured or funded to absorb.

From an aesthetic standpoint our residents view this project, as well as future energy projects as comparable to introducing a large-scale electrical infrastructures. People live here because of the beauty of the landscape and the character of small-town living no different than Bostonians enjoying the beauty of the coast. However, our concern is not solely aesthetics — it

is the potential transformation of long-standing rural land use patterns and municipal service demands.

While this project is presented as a reliability upgrade, with a \$64M investment, it’s obvious the primary role is to enable infrastructure for large-scale solar facilities, battery energy storage systems, and high electrical demand uses such as the 156-acre hyperscale data center, currently under construction in Westfield.

Under the EFSB’s statutory framework, project approval requires demonstrating public need, minimizing environmental and community impacts, and establishing that no reasonable alternatives exist. Blandford respectfully submits that a cumulative impact analysis is critical to meeting that standard.

We seek transparency from the EFSB regarding anticipated interconnection

demand, projected scale of renewable and storage projects likely to follow, and the long-term regional build-out scenario supported by this infrastructure investment. Without this information, we are put in the seat of a “victim” of what is to come vs a seat at the table with the ability to influence Blandford’s future.

Public safety remains our most significant concern. Blandford faces unique emergency response challenges, particularly related to fire or the need for emergency assistance. We are proud of our fire department and our ambulance services; however, resources are limited and voluntary. And the ability to transport water to this site and other future sites via a fire hydrant is virtually non-existent. As you saw earlier, the substation sits in the middle of a forest, not in the desert of Nevada, a fire could be det-

rimental to our community.

Current application materials and draft guidance do not establish enforceable mechanisms ensuring that municipalities have the resources required to safely respond to potential incidents or long-term infrastructure aging risks. I’ve personally listened to a number of hearings and meetings discussing the challenges of rural communities and safety infrastructures, too-date we’ve received no communications addressing these concerns. We respectfully request a safety assessment of our community by the state relative to this potential growth so there is an actual understanding of the risks before us.

Additionally, Blandford remains concerned about the lack of defined post-approval oversight. Approval should not mark the end of regulatory accountability. Our municipality is left

managing the long-term impacts of infrastructure without formal roles in compliance monitoring or equipment lifecycle oversight. To be clear, the majority of our municipal positions are volunteers so I’m unsure how we will have the manpower or experience to oversee these large commercial operations.

Due to the challenges our town sees as it relates to the execution of these projects and others that are in our future, we are seeking to Intervene in order to ensure the challenges are addressed. It’s understood that the goal of the EFSB is to get these projects approved quickly to meet the 2050 Energy Goal, however, I’m not so sure that goal can and should be achieved without the State Legislatures taking the voice of the residents and the safety challenges we face under consideration from a practical standpoint.

from page 4

HEALTH

ideas that cost nothing and may well be more meaningful than candy, flowers or sappy cards. Have a heart, and try one of these “gifts” for yourself or a loved one.

Volunteer: Volunteering contributes to your community and to your own well-being. Research has found that giving of yourself reduces stress and blood pressure; promotes physical activity; helps cultivate emotional well-being; and promotes mindfulness and an attitude of gratitude.

You get as much as you give, in other words. Find opportunities near you at idealist.org or search “volunteer opportunities near me” on your web browser.

Listen: Research shows that two out of every five people who have had a major cardiac episode experience symptoms of clinical depression, according to Northwestern University

Medicine. The American Heart Association says 33% of patients who have had a heart attack experience depression.

The combination of depression and cardiac disease can lead to poor outcomes. If a friend or loved one is diagnosed with heart disease or has a heart attack, one of the kindest things you can do is listen carefully to them. If you detect signs of depression, you can suggest — gently — that they consider being screened by their doctor.

Learn hands-only CPR: Especially since the pandemic, people are hesitant to share germs with a stranger, and I can’t blame them. The good news is that compression-only CPR — or hands-only CPR — is the preferred form of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

While someone dials 911, bystanders can perform

quick, strong compressions in the center of the chest to the rhythm of “Stayin’ Alive,” the BeeGees song, until first responders can arrive.

If started immediately, hands-only CPR has been shown to double or even triple a person’s chance of survival. CPR classes are widely offered by the Red Cross and American Heart Association, as well as at YMCAs and recreation centers.

Take part in a clinical trial: This is a different form of volunteerism. Clinical trials offer an opportunity to help researchers find better ways of preventing and treating diseases, improving health for all. Without clinical trial volunteers, many of the medicines and scientific discoveries we enjoy today wouldn’t exist.

At any given time, there are tens of thousands clinical

trials taking place around the country and virtually. WGC CenterWatch (centerwatch.com) lets you browse study topics and find clinical trials near you.

Celebrate friendship: I’ve written before about the importance of social relationships, and friendships in particular, in keeping our spirits up, our hearts full and our brains working.

So whether or not you have a special someone to celebrate Valentine’s Day with this year, take time for alternate observances, such as Galentine’s Day or its gender-neutral variation, Palentine’s Day. They fall, technically, on February 13 — but you can pick any day in February to celebrate friendships, check up on each other’s health and well-being, share healthful recipes and swap health and fitness tips. Maybe share a glass of wine, too.

Thank a nurse: Nursing is my life’s work, formerly as a critical care nurse and now as a patient advocate who trains nurses to become advocates. I know how critical nursing is to good patient outcomes. According to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, though, more than 138,000 nurses have left the workforce since 2022 and almost 40% intend to leave by 2029.

Health-care consumers may not be able to do much about working conditions, pay and administrative problems, but we can help to make nurses’ lives better. When you’re in the hospital or doctor’s office, thank your nurses for their time and care. You can also show your appreciation by nominating a nurse for the DAISY Award, a program that celebrates and recognizes nurses by collecting nom-

inations from patients, families and co-workers. Learn more at daisyfoundation.org.

Valentine’s Day began as a saint’s feast day and now celebrates all forms of relationships. Make it yours.

Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, R.N., a registered nurse and board-certified patient advocate, is the founder of www.NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com, which trains medical professionals to become successful private patient advocates. A Monson, MA resident, she is the author of “How to Be a Healthcare Advocate for Yourself & Your Loved Ones” and her new book, “Advocating Well: Strategies for Finding Strength and Understanding in Health Care,” available at Amazon.com. Contact her at Teri@NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com to set up a free phone consultation.

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BOOK A CALL TODAY
WITH TERI FRYKENBERG

News, photo publication policy

As a community newspaper our focus has always been local news. While we try very hard to run upcoming events as a public service whenever space allows, space does not allow us to run an upcoming event repeatedly. Our policy is to limit publication of upcoming events to one article in advance of the event and, space permitting, a second brief reminder article the week prior to an event, and to run those articles in only one section of the paper, and not in multiple sections simultaneously.

All such public service announcements and photos are subject to space limitations and deadlines, therefore publication cannot be guaranteed. Whenever copy for the week exceeds allotted space, news copy will take priority, and public service copy is the first area to be cut. We also reserve the right to edit for style and space, and are under no obligation to print lists of sponsorships, or articles that arrive after deadline, unless time and space allows.

Deadline is Friday at NOON.



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

Dr. Robert Perreault, Senior Pastor
55 Main St., Russell, MA 01071
413-275-3232
Office: 413-862-3341
hilltownchurch3341@gmail.com
hilltowncommunitychurch.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/p/Hilltown-Community-Church-61580281487624/
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
pvagliffe@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.

CHESTER

Hamilton Memorial Library announces upcoming events

CHESTER – The Hamilton Memorial Library, 15 Middlefield Road, Suite 7, will host the movie “Frozen II,” rated PG on Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 3 p.m.

Popcorn will be served during the showing of this movie during school winter vacation. The Book Club meets Wednesday, Feb. 18, the third Wednesday of every month at 4:30 pm. The club will be discussing the New York Times best-seller, “Remarkably Bright Creatures,” by Shelby VanPelt. This is a story of friendship, reckoning and

hope that traces a widow’s unlikely connection with a giant Pacific octopus. Extra book copies are available.

Intrinsic Movement Let’s Play, Learn and Dance welcomes back special guest, Laurel Lenski, on Thursday, Feb. 19 at 11 a.m. during the regular Story and Fun Time. Lenski always gets the fun going with her contagious enthusiasm and energy. This is perfect for younger patrons.

Free Tai Chi and Qi Gong classes sponsored by the Hamilton Memorial Library welcomes all ages and abilities. These classes

will be held at Chester Town Hall at 15 Middlefield Road, in the auditorium. Classes will be held on the last Wednesdays of the months: Feb 25 and March 25 with a start time of 4:30pm and ending at 5:45 p.m. People may sign up by calling the library at 413-354-7808 or emailing the instructor at wellneseducation123@gmail.com. They should leave their name, email and phone number. If they have any questions about the content of the program, they should email the teacher at wellneseducation123@gmail.com.

Town Clerk announces census, dog license and election information

CHESTER – Town Clerk Terry Donovan informs residents of Chester the annual street listing (census) form and dog license forms have been mailed to each household and need to be returned to the Town Clerks office.

Dog licenses are required each year for any dog six months or older with the current licenses expiring on Tuesday, March 31. If residents have not received the census or have questions about either the census and dog license forms, they should call the Town Clerks office at 413-354-6603 or email townclerk@townofchester.net.

A rabies clinic will be held Saturday, March 21 from 1-3 pm. at the Middlefield Town Hall, on Skyline Trail in Middlefield. This is for all dogs and cats and is open to other town residents as well. The cost for vaccination is \$20. People should bring their rabies vaccination certificate. Middlefield dog licenses will be available as well.

Chester’s Annual Town Election is being held Saturday, May 2 at the town hall from 9 am.-1 p.m. To run for office, people must be a registered voter of Chester and obtain nomination papers from the Town Clerk’s office.

Nomination papers must be returned with at least 20 qualified signatures by Monday, March 30.

The following positions will be on the May 2 ballot.

The following positions will be on the ballot: Select Board member three year term, Board of Health three year term, School Committee three year term, Moderator one year term, Electric Light Commissioner three year term, two Library Trustees three year term and one Library Trustee for two years. People may call the Town Clerk at 413-354-6603 or email townclerk@townofchester.net.

WESTFIELD

Alzheimer’s Support Group set to meet on Feb. 25

WESTFIELD – Alzheimer’s Association Support Group meets on Wednesday, Feb. 25 at 6 p.m. in Armbrook Village Senior Living and Memory Support Community, 551

North Road.

Caregivers and family members are invited to enjoy a light dinner and to share their personal experiences and strategies for communicating with their

loved ones. The public is welcome. To join this group, people may call 413-568-0000 or email reception@armbrookvillage.com. Groups are held on the last Wednesday of the month.

St. Joseph’s to host winter picnic

WESTFIELD – St. Joseph’s National Catholic Church at 73 Main St., is again hosting their popular Community Winter Picnic on Sunday, Feb. 22 at noon. In the Social Center, located behind the church.

This indoor winter picnic will feature grilled ham-

burgers, cheeseburgers, hot dogs, baked beans, potato salad, potato chips and all the fixings plus coffee, ice tea, fruit punch and bottled water. Homemade Hawaiian Cake will be served for dessert.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for children under 12. For tickets, people

may telephone or text Cliff at 413-977-2007. The deadline for purchasing tickets is Feb. 18.

Dinners-to-go are also available as well at 12:30 p.m. People should specify when purchasing tickets if the meals are to go or for dining there. All are welcome.

Occupational therapist participates in stroke survivor research

WESTFIELD – Anna Collier, an occupational therapist and PhD Candidate at Western New England University, invites any and all stroke survivors to participate in a research project at the Westfield Senior Center in person or via Zoom.



Christopher Lombardi

The purpose for her

research is to provide health management skills, physical activity, self-care, mental health strategies, to stroke survivors.

Participants will benefit with the potential increased quality of life and social participation.

Requirements to participate include age 50 years old or older, two months or more post stroke, isch-

emic, TIA or cerebral and be a new or active member of the Westfield Senior Center. The time commitment is a total of six-and-a-half hours, which includes a one hour long group session for six weeks.

This is set for Tuesdays from 10:30-11:30 a.m. on Tuesdays starting March 3 through April 7.

For more information or questions, people may email Anna Collier, OT/s at anna.stewart@wne.edu or Alexix M. F. Morin, TO, TD, MOT, OTR at alexix.morin@wne.edu.

OPINION

GARDEN

from page 4

thing to think about: “Native plants co-evolved with native insects and wildlife; they are deeply dependent on one another. These plants provide food and shelter to insects, birds, and other small animals, which in turn support larger predators. Native plants are the fundamental stepping stones of a healthy eco-system.”

While many of us already enjoy growing native plants, the impact of doing so goes far beyond our ornamental gardens.

Prairie Moon offers seeds, blended seed mixes, plants and more, and their catalog is free for the asking. You can also download a catalog and cultural guide.

Growing native plants from seed often requires specialized treatments such as chilling or nicking and soaking, so I’d definitely recommend brushing up. I found Toothwort (at last!) and Late Horse Gentian, both for the herb garden.

Sometimes the tricky part about searching out heirloom seeds in the issue of cultivars. For example, I need a black flowered Hollyhock known scientifically as *Alcea rosea nigra*, yet what I discover are cultivars called “Jet Black” or “Black Watchman.” I want the original.

Here is where seed sales at Monticello (www.monticelloshop.org) come in handy. Thomas Jefferson was an avid gardener, and the display gardens around his estate highlight many of his favorite plants.

I was also able to secure seeds for unimproved versions of Rusty Foxglove and Black Eyed Susan Vine. Because of this good fortune, you will see authentic 1830s gardens when you visit the Village.

There is no printed catalog to my knowledge, but the shop has its seed sales organized in a friendly manner online. Some seeds are even harvested on site.

Speaking of authentic-

ity, it’s also important that we utilize heirloom vegetable varieties within our gardens, so that you, the visitor, see the real deal, 1830s style. I’ve often ordered heirloom vegetable and flower seeds from Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company (www.rareseeds.com) and this year is no exception.

Their big, beautiful Rare Seed and Whole Seed Catalogs are free for the asking and seed shipping is free, also. Search over 1,300 seeds.

If you can’t find what you are looking for there, hop on over to Victory Seeds (www.victoryseeds.com) and there will be more heirloom, open pollinated, non GMO varieties to choose from. I love the concept of Victory Gardens, and the company does a great job of explaining and promoting it.

Victory Seeds offers free shipping on all orders over \$30 and their website provides “quick links” to each main category for easy online shopping. They also encourage seed saving practices, which is neat.

This summer, look for China Rose Radish, Tall Telephone Peas, Boston Marrow Squash and Long Green Cucumber growing in our gardens and used in our households. These were all purchased from Victory Seeds.

If you are bored one afternoon, why not take a look at what these or any number of reputable seed houses have to offer. You will no doubt expand your plant knowledge while you expand your garden!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 34 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.

BIRDS

from page 4

To meet their demand for protein during this stressful time, female Gadwall eat more invertebrates than males during this period in addition to using reserves of nutrients they’ve stored in their bodies during the winter.

Their winter habitat is fresh and brackish wetlands with abundant aquatic vegetation on which they primarily forage. Gadwall often snatch food from diving ducks as they surface. Gadwall number have increased in North America since the 1980s. This is partly because of conservation of their habitat, wetlands and adjacent uplands.

The oldest known Gadwall was a male, and at least 19 years, 6 months old. He was banded in Saskatchewan in 1962 and shot during hunting season in Louisiana in 1981.

Christmas Bird Count

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts take place within a 22-day period, there are many state count circles and volunteers must be available. Despite snowy weather, compiler Jon Skinner said of the Groton-Ayer count on Dec. 14, “I was surprised that we were able to scratch our way to 81 species in such snowy conditions. It has to be a testament to the relentless nature of both our team and the birds.” Two new species were added 13 black vultures soaring over Lancaster and a killdeer at Devens. Some of the other high-



Bluebirds

lights were evening grosbeak in both Harvard and Groton, red crossbills in Townsend, Lapland longspur at Fitchburg Airport and in Ayer, chestnut-colored longspur at Fitchburg Airport, American kestrel in Groton, two Baltimore orioles in Groton, eastern Phoebe in Shirley, redpoll in Lancaster and a long-eared owl in Devens. Species seen three days before or after the actual count date and noted as such were chipping sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, Peregrine falcon and sandhill crane.

Bluebird

I received an email on Jan. 26 from Jeffrey Landry. He had a visit from a bluebird on Friday, Jan. 23. He thought it was either the male parent or one of its offspring from a previous summer. He said, “For several years I have called him, ‘Sunshine’ and he arrived at my feeder on a bright beautiful winter’s afternoon and this uncalled for visit was icing on my day’s cake.”

He offered to share this bluebird story. He

said, “I was sitting on my meditation cushion yesterday watching my breath emerge from a deep silence and then gently return back into it. There was no counting, no manipulation, only watching, only flow. After some time had passed, I opened my eyes because I felt I was being closely watched.”

“I have a bird feeder right outside of my window and sure enough a male bluebird or one of his offspring from a previous summer, was perched and staring directly at me. Two summers ago I named the parent bluebird, ‘Sunshine’ and last May he returned to the same nesting box in my front yard.

Quizzically, Sunshine leaned slightly forward. He was amazingly close.”

“It was beautiful, glorious to see his blue rust colored body outlined by a background of white snow still clinging to frozen lilacs and tall trees. The sight of this sent ripples of love, that became currents of joy, to course through me.”

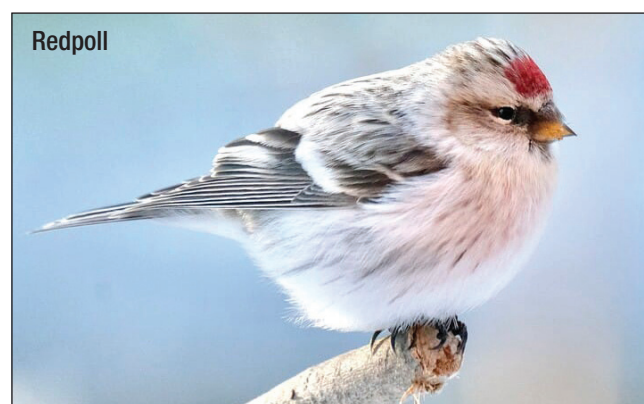
“I felt a smile stretch a

mile wide across my whole being. It was like being visited by a long absent friend. Within minutes this made me get up and fill another feeder with dried mealworms because bluebirds aren’t seed eaters like many of the other birds that seek nourishment here. Like my breath, the mealworms disappeared into a well of silence. A contented peaceful silence that then took flight.”

Evening grosbeaks

A Cunningham resident sent a photo of evening grosbeaks at her feeder. She said they are part of a flock that come to visit the feeders often.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005. The Palmer office has a new phone system and I will be getting an extension where messages may be left. I will publish the number as soon as it is set up.



Redpoll



Red crossbill

BLANDFORD

LEMME

from page 1

resented the Harriers in a number of Grand Prix events and once he turned 50, he proceeded to win three consecutive USATF National Grand Prix championship titles. The onset of Covid-19 ultimately called a halt to Kent's racing.

Kent has many running accomplishments to his credit, including competing in the Josh Billings RunAground for nine years, competing for the last time in 2019 as an Ironman racer. He won a total of nine Josh Billings competitions, and the last consistently for five years in a row.

"I ran as the Blandford Banana," he said, citing a locally christened nickname. "We all had nick-

names then," he added.

The Josh Billings RunAground is one of the oldest triathlons, second only to Eppie's Great Race in California. It has been held in Southern Berkshire County, Massachusetts since 1976. The race consists of a 27-mile bike ride, 5-mile canoe/kayak sprint, and a 6.0-mile run.

Kent and his wife Shiobean are both runners and opened the Berkshire Running Center in 2011; the first and only running specialty store and training center. The Center is located in the Allendale Shopping Center in Pittsfield and offers customized fittings and analysis for runners and walkers alike.

Speaking of the Hall of Fame induction, Lemme said, "It's great to be recognized for all the hard work you've put in." And he has.

As well as competing, he also coached cross-country running at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and track and field at Mount Greylock Regional High School.

The Pittsfield residents, now empty nesters, have five grown children and two grandchildren.

Lemme is the son of the late Dorothy and John Lemme, formerly of Kaolin Road.

To attend the event, tickets are available for purchase on line at <https://www.westernmassrunner-shalloffame.com/>.

Alex Rikleen to speak at Democratic Town Committee Feb. 14 meeting

BLANDFORD – The Democratic Town Committee meeting set for Saturday, Feb. 14 at 11 a.m. in the Blandford Town Hall will have a guest speaker, Alex Rikleen.

Rikleen, who is challenging long-time Senator Ed Markey, will address the group. He is taking on long-time incumbent Senator Ed Markey in the Democratic primary. According to his website, Rikleen is "a dad, a teacher, a volunteer, and a

Massachusetts native." He holds a degree from Boston College.

"I've studied how democracies fail when authoritarians face opposition parties that are too passive. I'm running for U.S. Senate because we need representatives, who don't just say the right things but do



Alex Rikleen

them."

The DTC invites everyone to attend the public meeting to listen to Rikleen and learn about his platform. The DTC will host other candidates over the next few months. Meetings are the second Saturday of the month at 11 a.m. at the Town Hall.

Water dept. receives \$1 million grant

BLANDFORD – On Friday, Jan. 23, President Trump signed H.R. 6938, the Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act.

Abby McGovern of Congressman Richard Neal's office announced

that the FY26 Interior and Environment appropriations bill now signed into law, the \$1,092,000 for the Blandford Water Treatment and Distribution System Upgrades project has been secured.

As this funding is earmarked under the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund,

the funds are reserved from the Massachusetts DWSRF appropriation and will be distributed directly through MassDEP.

McGovern thanked the Water Commissioners for their patience throughout this process, as well as all the invaluable work done for the community.



HEARING

from page 1

of the project and an in-service date the end of 2028.

Eversource will, according to Lombardi, use police details and implement traffic management; communicate and work closely with neighbors and nearby businesses with multiple resources and an opt-in email updates during construction. There will be a project specific site on the company's website.

Lombardi referred to the stakeholders, which include all levels of government officials, property owners, businesses and community-based organizations. Eversource plans briefings and presentations as well as email updates. All project information will be available, including a hotline and an email address for questions, on the project website.

One of those neighbors is Tina Andros. She was able to speak at the very end of the hearing

when Tarr opened the floor to anyone who had not either signed up to speak or had already spoken. Andros, a North Blandford Road resident, living beyond the substation, expressed her concerns about traffic. She spoke about problems that were created when utility poles were replaced. "There were dump trucks from 6 a.m.-6 p.m. and this had a huge impact on my summer. I couldn't sit on the porch. It's noisy and disruptive."

Lombardi said, "Construction does bring in additional traffic. This project is multifaceted. We have reliability projects as well as the DR projects; originally proposed as separate projects, together, (and they are) to happen at the same time so that we have less mobilization in and out of town." He added that the construction would be done at one time. He restated points from the presentation about traffic. "There will be no trucks on the road all day long.



Christopher Lombardi



Tina Andros



Jacqueline "Jackie" Coury



Richard "Dick" Gates

Andros countered with, "You're going to take out 4,000 (square) feet of trees – that's going to take logging trucks, dump trucks and fill. I can't keep my windows open because dust comes in. It's the impact on North Blandford Road – it's huge and I think it needs to be addressed."

Barbara Boulay, another North Blandford Road resident said, "I wish more residents had attended. I'm not sure everyone recognizes the impact this will have. I hope that the state and DPU are listening to our concerns for the future of Blandford and the lasting impact it will have on our rural countryside. I think there's still many questions that need to be answered."

All three members of the Select Board were present, Jackie Coury, T.J. Cousineau and Chair Cara Letendre, although Letendre did not speak.

There were about 35 residents in the audience and another ten to 20 on Zoom, according to Wang.

T.J. Cousineau was the first to speak. He asked about the makeup of the transformers that would be installed as part of the substation expansion. "Are they enclosed? ... oil base with ceramic resistors?"

John Zicko, the director of the Transmission Line engineering group at Eversource said that the transformers will be fluid, "but with ceramic bushings with a mineral oil base, and all PCB free."

Coury addressed the DPU as a member of the Select Board. She is also Chair of the town's Energy Projects Siting and Engagement Committee.

She spoke about the "scale of change the substation expansion represents and the precedent it will establish for future development." This presents the "potential transformation of long-standing rural land use..." Her comments in their entirety are on the op ed page as a guest column.



DPU brought in all the sound and recording equipment for the hearing. Turley Publications photos by Mary Kronholm

Corinne Shartrand, also a member of EPSEC was next. She said that the town's zoning bylaws were "developed to protect our residents from any undo harm, to protect our land from hazards and to keep our native wildlife safe."

She noted that the town has not been presented with any "detailed plans... shown any studies such as environmental or ecological impacts," nor "noise studies." She also asked about any "increase in magnetic field levels."

Other concerns, also voiced by others, included "hours of operation during construction, road blockage, restricting passage of emergency vehicles." She also said the cost of the project will be passed on to the customer.

Shartrand also asked, "Why Blandford," a question also asked by others. She added that "The expansion will be an open invitation to turn Blandford into nothing less than a solar city...being overrun with solar farms threatens our livelihood... house values will plummet."

Concluding her remarks, Shartrand said Eversource bypassed the town "completely" and now "want(s) to dismiss and disregard our zoning bylaws. This feels like a giant punch to the throat."

Lombardi responded that Eversource will present to the Conservation Commission for approval as noted in the presentation. A noise study has been done,

according to Lombardi. Results were not mentioned.

Christopher Soderman, Eversource's Director of Transmission line engineering said that the magnetic fields in some portions will go down, some will go up, but changes at the "boundaries of property will not measure any difference in magnetic fields or electric fields as a result of this project."

Tarr recalled Shartrand to the podium and she reiterated, "Why Blandford?" Eversource Lead Project Manager for Distributed Generation Hakob Mkrtchyan, said that there were requests for interconnection in Blandford and "as part of the study that we conducted, it was determined that certain upgrades to the infrastructure need to be done for this renewable project to interconnect with the grid." He added that Blandford is not the only substation "that we have received interconnection applications" for.

Colleen Doyle, speaking as a resident and not on behalf of the Conservation Commission, of which she is a member, reiterated a previous question regarding megawatt output. The substation, she said, "serves 8,000 users with 11 megawatts use at peak output" and she questioned the need for the expansion – citing divergent numbers, a 2024 cost of \$31.7 million. Tarr cut off further discussion.

When asked for accurate numbers of users and communities served, Eversource

External Communications Manager did not immediately respond. Doyle concluded with the question, "See where the discrepancies come from."

Richard Gates, Chair of the Conservation Commission and EPSEC member and a concerned citizen asked about what is going to be submitted to Conservation not only for a notice of intent, but also an Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation. He wanted it confirmed that that is correct and wants to understand the justification for this project "in our small town" and "Does Eversource coordinate with developers? Are there conversations about generation facilities that are going to be built? What they are? What size, location...is there information out there that we can see that helps us understand what's driving the need for this project?"

He also asked about any "history of reliability issues with the current installation." Adding that he didn't recall any.

Eversource Environmental Specialist David Askew responded that the ANRAD would be forthcoming soon and the Notice of Intent would be presented in July. Lombardi responded that Eversource does not wait for equipment to fail, but upgrades.

David Converse, also a member of EPSEC, asked about the 140% increase in the capacity of the facility, from 35 to 130 megawatts. "If we're maxed at 24 and going to 130, that's a 400 percent increase...the basis for this? ... how much of the increase is attributable to increased solar development in the area?"

Tyler Nelson-Yarrows, Eversource Lead Engineer explained that "the new standard is 62.5, so with two transformers it would be 130. "We account for only if one transformer is operational."

Coury again took the podium and noted that for Blandford there is a challenge. "You're notified of the need for more interconnections...we haven't approved anything. So, we get confused. Who is asking for this buildout?"

And what does that plan look like? So Blandford understands, you're privy to something that we're not. We understand we can't track what's happening but we don't know who's contacting you to make this huge investment and we haven't approved anything. We're asking for transparency."

Hakob responded that

Eversource is "not allowed to share any customer information...we do our part... all customers are treated the same." He added, "We provide access to the grid and that it will accommodate the project they propose to build." Lombardi added, "We're not proposing the solar projects, we are required to study and evaluate the interconnection..."

Cousineau again spoke, reiterating Coury's message: "We want transparency. If it's solar, we want to know. This is our community and all of a sudden, we're in this limelight. What's going on? It seems like it's an attack on small towns"

Again, he asked, "What's the driving force behind this? And I don't want to hear this green community crap because you can't create a monopoly for the electric companies...that's not the American way."

He continued with reliance on different fuels and if power is out, it's because lines are down; the cost of electricity is high; "I'm paying ten percent to be a customer."

Doyle asked if Eversource could "tell us what percentage of this project they're paying for, or any of the substation expansion." Lombardi replied, "34% of the cost is by the connectors, the rest from local rate base." Public comment ended.

Resident Lisa Bruno said, "I thought everyone who stood up and spoke asked some great questions. I love our town so much. I think the presentation itself was ill prepared to really answer questions in my opinion. I thought the siting board members were easy to talk to and I hope they consider some of the points that were made tonight. Also, there is still time to let people know they have until Thursday, Feb 18 to write in."

Resident Susan Racine added, "I really have nothing more to what Jackie, Dick, Corinne, Colleen and T.J. said. They hit all the pertinent points about our town. I feel that Eversource still did not have a good answer about "Why Blandford" or that we the consumers are paying for this in our electric bills. And I believe T.J. is right, our property values will go down if this huge solar project ties in to the substation. We will become a ghost town and we will become commercialized." The entire public hearing can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCk1Pj6xxSKww-Kr26IEZVTA>.

PLAINFIELD

PVFD, mutual aid save home

PLAINFIELD – This past mid-week, the Plainfield Volunteer Fire/EMS Department was requested to respond to a “working structure fire” on West Main Street in town in the middle of the week, middle of the day.

This response could not have come at a worse time of day as a majority of the volunteer members including all fire officers, were either at work out of town or just not able to respond. Three fire department members, Claude DuPont, Olan Thompson and Nate Wooldridge were able to respond in Engine 1 along with extensive mutual aid fire departments to the scene.

At the scene, the firefighters found a working fire in the first floor basement of the home. With the help of responding mutual aid firefighters, they initiated an attack on the fire in the basement. They were able to knock down the fire and stop extension of fire damage to the rest of the house. Though the structure had fire damage in the basement and smoke damage throughout the remaining structure, it was saved. Mutual Aid response was provided by Cummington, Goshen, Windsor and Chesterfield



The Plainfield Volunteer Fire Department and mutual aid from surrounding towns saved a home on West Main Street, Plainfield. Photo Courtesy of Plainfield Volunteer Fire Department

Fire Departments.

The response by the initial Plainfield firefighters, mutual aid and additional Plainfield firefighters allowed for a fortunate “save” of the home. The Plainfield Volunteer Fire Department needs more first responders on their rosters. Most have full-time jobs, families and pay taxes on their properties. They are also first responders and

EMTs. The job can be dangerous at times; the training is ongoing and extensive, but the rewards can be special. Anyone interested in being a volunteer firefighter is invited to stop at the Public Safety Complex any Thursday evening from 7 p.m. on to learn more about becoming part of a small, but critical, membership serving the public safety of their town.

WORTHINGTON

COA offers grab ‘n go meal

WORTHINGTON – The Council on Aging serves a senior grab ‘n go meal on Thursday, Feb. 19 from noon-1 p.m. at the Town Hall.

The menu will be a choice of chicken parmesan or goulash with pasta, California vegetables,

spinach and applesauce. To reserve a meal, seniors should call or text 413-238-1999 by Sunday, Feb. 15 and tell their name, number of meals and the name of the person also receiving the meal and their meal choice.

New enrollee forms are

available at the Town Hall bulletin Board and the COA bulletin board at Corners Grocery.

They can also fill one out when they come to pick up their meal.

They should bring a bag with them to carry their meals to the car.

NORTHAMPTON

Library holds puppet pageant

NORTHAMPTON – Forbes Library, 20 West St., will hold a winter exquisite puppet pageant on Saturday, Feb. 28 at 12:30 p.m.

The creative works, “What We Do In the Shadows,” of the Fobes

Library staff is on display at the Hosmer Gallery, located in the library, now through Friday, Feb. 27. An opening reception will be on Thursday, Feb. 19 from 6-8 p.m. Participating artists exhibiting include: E.J. Hinton, Jill

Emmons, Joshua Vrysen, Julia Cornick, Harrison Greene, Heather Diaz, Lisa Downing, Nola QC, Pamela Acosta, Priya Charry, Rebecca Morgan, Robin Williams, Steven Stover, Timi Antonio and Zoe Kruger.

DALTON

Loss of Life Partner Peer Group scheduled to meet on Feb. 21

DALTON – The Loss of a Life Partner Peer Group meets on Saturday, Feb. 21 from 2-3 p.m. At the Dalton Free Public Library, 362

Main St.

The peer group is for people, who have lost a spouse or life partner and are seeking conversation and

encouragement as they move forward. People may email dalton@cwmar.org or call 413-684-6112 and ask for Janet.

PITTSFIELD

Pittsfield house fire on Virginia Avenue claims woman’s life

PITTSFIELD – A Virginia Avenue resident died after being rescued from a late-night fire in her home, said Pittsfield Fire Chief Thomas Sammons, Acting Pittsfield Police Chief Captain Mark Strout, State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine and Berkshire

County District Attorney Timothy J. Shugrue.

“On behalf of the Pittsfield Fire Department, I want to express our heartfelt condolences to the woman’s family and loved ones,” said Chief Sammons. “This is a terrible loss for them and the community.”

The Pittsfield Fire Department responded to 7 Virginia Avenue on Saturday, Jan. 31 just after 11:20 p.m. following a report of a fire. On arrival, firefighters observed fire at the front of the building and immediately made entry to attack the fire and search

for occupants. They located the sole resident, a woman in her 70s and rescued her from the home.

The woman was transported to an area hospital, where she later passed away. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner will determine the cause and

manner of her death.

Working in subzero temperatures with more than a foot of snow on the ground, firefighters were able to bring the fire under control in about half an hour and remained on scene into the morning for overhaul and investigative support. The Hinsdale Fire Department provided rehab services to support firefighter health and safety at the scene.

The origin and cause of the fire are being investigated by the Pittsfield Fire Department, Pittsfield Police Department, State Police fire investigators assigned to the State Fire Marshal’s office and State Police assigned to the Berkshire DA’s office. They are supported by the Department of Fire Services’ Code Compliance and Enforcement Unit.

Preliminarily, investigators found no evidence that the fire was intentionally set. Based on an examination of the scene, they believe it began in the living room at the front of the home. They found no working smoke alarms.

“This is the fourth fatal fire this year where our investigators found no working smoke alarms,” said State Fire Marshal Davine. “Take a few minutes to be sure you have working alarms on every level of your home. Test them every month to be sure they’re working properly. And please check in with older family members, friends, and neighbors to be sure they’re protected. If you need help installing, maintaining or replacing your alarms, contact your local fire department.”

DON'T MISS OUT!

THE COUNTRY JOURNAL

is offering our local businesses an opportunity to advertise at a **REDUCED RATE!**

- Business profile - 250 words
- Photo - yourself, employees or building

ONLY \$99!

This special section will run in the March 12, 2026 issue of the *Country Journal*.

AD DEADLINE: March 4, 2026

AD SIZE: 5.25"x6" for ONLY \$99

Contact your sales representative **Wendy Delcamp** at **413.2374245** or email **wdelcamp@turley.com**

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SCHOOLS & YOUTH

Hampshire Regional Middle School announces honor roll

WESTHAMPTON – Hampshire Regional Middle School announces the honor roll.

Seventh grade academic excellence

Seventh grade students making academic excellence are: Brennan Bigda, Brooke Bisbee, Vincent Black, Zoe Buell, Julian Carrasquillo, Savannah Chicoine, Trevor Christenson, Patrick Corduff, Brooklyn Desrochers, Emma Dybacki, Jaice Ellinger, Adriana Fini, Leanna Francis, Mason Galenski, Connor Graham, Gunnar Gribi, Chloe Guillemette, Alice Hearn

Harley Hilt, Ryleigh Hurley, Eli Hutchison, Kendall Jarosz, Ishmael Jeffords, Carey Jillson, Adalyn Johnson, Michael Kraus, Brooke Labrie, Diane Leahy, Aubrey Leary, Isabella LeCours, Violet Letendre, Jesse Locke, Lucas Maak, Maisie Mahoney, Lilly Malo, Tula Marino, Eleanor Maynard, Claire Musa, Tessa Neill, Avery Proulx, Saige Reynolds, Kaleigh Rida, Liam Schnell, Elliot Scully-Henry, Rory Snape, Taylor St. Pierre, John Tisdell, Stella Tremblay, Nora White, Audrina Whittaker and Sage Zimora.

Eighth grade academic excellence

Eighth grade students making academic excellence are: Mala Adams-Rivera, Stephen Estelle, Caleb Falkowski, Riley Fisher, Joseph Gagne, Patricia Gagne, Lorelei Gilman, Anna Huard, Aubrielle Jarrett, Sienna Kalmakis, Aurora Loud, Tyler Menard, Camilo Ocampo, Scarlett Parent, Gianluca Pica-Smith, Claire Pickard, Madison Rida, Ashtyn St. Martin, Georgia Sugrue, Phoebe Todd, Cyrus Tomsovic and Addyson White.

Seventh grade academic achievement

Seventh grade students making academic achievement are: Emma Assan, Robert Avery-Cote, Nathaniel Bouffard-Broadhurst, Hannah Chilson, Faith Chretien, Autumn Coon-Drawe, Gretta Darling, Quinn Dunphy, Keegan Farrell, Hayden Gamache, Drew Geffin, Braydon Gougeon, Benjamin Haughey, Charlie Johndrow, Olivia Kakley, Miya Lambert, Levi Liimatainen, Josephine Lynn, Anthony Mone,

Zachary Moylan, Kennedy Mulvaney, Penelope Murray, Jacob Nadolski, Bentley Neal, Hunter Noel, David Nuttelman, Desmond O'Sullivan, Olivia Patruno, Andrew Raymond, Wade Rida, Logan Schmitter, Ryan Short, Louisiana Sinopoli, Augustus Taylor, Brycen Tylek, Ashlynn Ulrich, Allison Woz and Ryan Zononi.

Eighth grade academic achievement

Eighth grade students making academic achievement are: Ava Boissonneault, Valentina Bresnahan, Ivy

Cardoza, Ryder Cefalo, James Clemeno, Sunali Driver, Lana Gomes-Parsons, Dylan-Joy Hocking, Camryn Jasinski, Megan Johnson, Sofia Klopfer, Summer Kohl, Morgan Lawler, Dorothy Li, Corbin Limatainen, Lukas Manley, Isabella Masi, Brigid McArdle, Samuel Monette, Aurelia Montague, Samantha Moreau, Mariah Pacinella, Emilee Peart, Emily Sampson, Jackson Smalley, Madeline Soares, Thomas Sullivan, Lucy Trombley, Eli Willard, Cooper Williams, Meghan Wood and Bradley Woods.

Local schools receive Credit for Life Fairs funds

BOSTON – The State Treasurer's Office of Economic Empowerment, in partnership with the Division of Banks and the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation, announce the 2025-2026 recipients of the Financial Education Innovation Fund Grant.

Following a competitive application process that concluded in November, the state agencies awarded grants to 92 schools, totaling \$383,420. This funding will allow Massachusetts high schools and special education programs to host financial education fairs, known as Credit for Life Fairs, for their students.

Of the 92 recipient

schools, 24 received funding as Seed Applicants and will host fairs for the first time.

Local award recipients are: Hoosac Valley Regional School District (Chester) \$3,700, Lenox Public Schools \$6,100 and Westfield Public Schools \$3,200. For the third year, participating schools that have a large population of low-to-moderate income students will receive an additional \$500. Twenty-five schools received this additional funding to bring much-needed financial education to students in the state's most vulnerable communities.

"Credit for Life Fairs empower high school students with the tools they

need to succeed," said State Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg. "This year, we are supporting a record number of schools, helping young adults prepare to make informed financial decisions as they approach graduation and adulthood."

"The Division of Banks is proud to support this initiative with another round of funding," said Mary Gallagher, Commissioner of Banks. "With hands-on, high-quality lessons offered at these fairs, students can learn foundational financial management skills they can use into adulthood."

"It is important for high school students to understand how to manage their personal finances so they can be suc-

cessful in life," said Layla R. D'Emilia, Undersecretary of the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation. "Funding Credit for Life Fairs through these grants provides a fun, engaging, and productive environment for students to learn fiscal responsibility."

Since 2015, over 65,000 Massachusetts students have attended Credit for Life Fairs. The Financial Education Innovation Fund Grant was established as an ongoing effort to strengthen access to financial literacy throughout Massachusetts. This financial education program is funded by the Division of Banks through a settlement over alleged unlawful lending practices.

COLLEGE NOTES

Colleges and universities announce President's, Dean's list

PRESIDENT'S LIST

Western New England University
Springfield

Seth McClafflin of Easthampton
Alison Goodreau of Westfield
Zakery Thibodeau of Easthampton
Jessica Cloutier of Easthampton
Abigail Dean of Easthampton
Christina Harris of Montgomery
Brittney Cardoza-Rebollo of Westfield
Jeffrie Surgen of Easthampton
Jaiden O'Kane of Westfield
Gianna Strange of Westfield
Kelsey Bouchard of Westfield
Leah Wilson of Huntington
Alivia Brisson of Williamsburg
Richard Moritko of Westfield
Addison Sigda of Easthampton
Aliana Morales of Easthampton
Delaney Boomsma of Becket
Nathan Biddulph of Easthampton

DEAN'S LIST

American International College
Springfield

Ian Soto of Westfield
Rebecca Connell of Williamsburg
Makenna Slate of Easthampton
Julia Bloniarz of Westfield
Christina Legkodukh of Westfield
Zulma Lopez of Westfield
Chelsey Priest of Westfield

Clark University

Worcester

Tanya J. Sheinkman of Becket, first honors
Hannah L. Quesenberry of Easthampton, second honors.
Rena Skloot of Cummington, second honors.
Ashton R. Murphy LaPenn of Easthampton, second honors.

Hartwick College

Oneonta, New York

May Lieberman-Bachman of Huntington

Salve Regina University

Newport, Rhode Island

Daniella Ferreira of Westfield
Chelsey Ghareeb of Easthampton
Gianni Soucy of Easthampton
Kasimir Supinski of Cummington

University of Alabama

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Nora Flaherty of Westfield
Sofia Lichwan of Westfield

University of Albany

Albany, New York

Nicholas Krawlec of Westfield

Western New England University

Springfield

Kailey Downs of Westfield
Ryan LaPoint of Westfield
Rachel Brenzel of Westfield
Ariana Contreras-Munoz of Westfield
Ryan Charland of Westfield
James Cloutier of Westfield
Vasco Sardinha of Westfield
Matvey Hancharonak of Westfield
Aiden Levesque of Westfield
Zachary Cloutier of Easthampton
Elizabeth Baker of Westfield
Maura Campbell of Westhampton
Brooke Darling of Westfield
Matthew Armstrong of Easthampton
Connor Donovan of Westfield
Mason Labranche of Russell
Isaac Ribeiro of Westfield
Declan Connolly of Westfield
Philip Morin of Cummington

Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Worcester

Gabriel Rapoza of Easthampton, class of 2027 majoring in aerospace engineering
Daniel Raymond of Goshen, class of 2026 majoring in electrical and computer engineering
Marissa Whalley of Westfield, class of 2026, majoring in architectural engineering

Smith Scholarship applications being accepted

WESTFIELD – The Horace Smith Fund will be awarding \$317,000 in scholarships and fellowships to residents of Hampden County, who have also graduated from an eligible high school or private school. This year 21 scholarships, four fellowships and one William R. Rooney Award for students with special needs will be presented to recipients at the June 18 Awards Night ceremony at Storowton Carriage House in

West Springfield.

Scholarships are offered not only to graduating high school seniors but also to students already in college or those wishing to return to college. Scholarships of \$12,000 are distributed as \$3,000 annually and renewable each year until graduation. Fellowship awards of \$15,000 are distributed as \$7,500 annually and renewable for one additional year to students pursuing a full-time

graduate degree. Students must maintain at least a B average to renew.

Recipients are selected on a variety of criteria, including academic records, merit, and financial need. Of great importance is a personal written account of why the student feels deserving of financial assistance. Applicants must submit their transcripts and, if applicable, college entrance exam scores or graduate degree specific tests, and

three letters of recommendation.

Completed applications must be received either electronically or be mailed to The Horace Smith Fund at 16 Union Avenue, Suite 2K, Westfield, MA 01085 no later than March 15, 2026. Applications are available at local high school guidance offices, college financial aid offices, and on-line at www.HoraceSmithFund.org or by phoning (413) 739-4222.

HCC scholarship season open for 2026-2027

HOLYOKE — The Holyoke Community College Foundation is now accepting scholarship applications for the 2026-2027 academic year.

The application deadline is Friday, March 13, 2026.

Last year, the HCC Foundation awarded 410 scholarships worth about \$364,000 to 379 incoming, current, and transferring HCC students. Some students received multiple scholarship awards. The average scholarship award is typically around \$900.

Students must be cur-

rently enrolled at HCC or have been accepted for the upcoming academic year to be eligible for scholarships.

Applicants only need to fill out a single online form to be automatically matched with the scholarships they are most qualified to receive. There are scholarships for new students, current students and students transferring to other institutions, scholarships based on financial need, scholarships for students in specific majors, scholarships for residents of certain communities, and

scholarships that recognize academic achievement.

To view scholarship opportunities and begin the application process, please go to: www.hcc.edu/scholarships.

The HCC Scholarship Resource Center, on the first floor of the Donahue Building (Room 158), is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to help current and incoming students navigate the process of applying for scholarships.

The HCC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) that works

to advance the college's mission, vision, and values. Founded in 1968 as the Friends of Holyoke Community College, in response to a devastating fire that forced the college to rebuild on a new campus, the Foundation now manages assets of more than \$20 million, the largest community college foundation endowment in Massachusetts.

Questions should be directed to the HCC Foundation office at 413-552-2182, or by email to scholarships@hcc.edu.

PUBLIC NOTICES

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION HIGHWAY DIVISION NOTICE OF A DESIGN PUBLIC HEARING

Project Description: Westfield Intersection Improvements at Southampton Road (Route 10/202), Servistar Industrial Way, and Barnes Airport Drive. Project File No. 612600

A Design Public Hearing will be held to present the design for the proposed project in Westfield, MA.

WHERE: Westfield City Hall City Council Chambers Second Floor 59 Court Street Westfield, MA 01085

WHEN: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 @ 7:00pm

PURPOSE: The purpose of this hearing is to provide the

public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project. All views and comments submitted in response to the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

PROPOSAL: The proposed project consists of intersection improvements at Southampton Road (Route 10/202), Servistar Industrial Way, and Barnes Airport Drive. The intersection is proposed to be reconstructed as a roundabout. Bicyclists and pedestrians will be accommodated with an 8-foot wide shared-use path around the outside of the roundabout in accordance with applicable design guides.

A secure right-of-way is necessary for this project. Acquisitions in fee and permanent or temporary easements may be required. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is responsible for acquiring all needed rights in private or public lands. MassDOT's policy concerning land acquisitions will be presented in

the hearing.

Project inquiries, written statements and other exhibits regarding the proposed undertaking may be submitted to Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E., Chief Engineer, via e-mail to MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.state.ma.us or via US Mail to Suite 7550, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116, Attention: Project Management, Project File No. 612600. Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days (14 calendar days) after the hearing is hosted on the MassDOT website listed below.

This hearing is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (e.g. interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, live captioning, videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats), as

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In case of inclement weather, a cancellation announcement will be posted on the internet at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events>.

JONATHAN GULLIVER
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR

CARRIE E. LAVALLEE, P.E.
CHIEF ENGINEER
02/12, 02/19/2026

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Snow Day event has sledding, food and more

CHESTER – For over 25 years, the Chester Hill Association sponsored Snow Day in Chester an annual event where friends and family come out to play in the snow on a Sunday afternoon. The Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers were honored to co-host this event

again with sledding on Holzman’s Hill. Hosts Shelley and Rich Holzman opened up their property to all, which includes a large sledding hill, cross country ski and snowshoe wooded trails and a large garage for a warming place. Grooming of the hill and

trails was done by Chester’s Fire Chief Nate Bolduc in his snow monster Jeep on tracks for supreme sledding, cross country skiing and snowshoe conditions. The Jeep and a snowmobile gave everyone a ride up the hill since the snow was so deep this year. The warming spot was

heated this year courtesy of Chester Plumbing Inspector Nick Chiusano where inside there was corn chowder by Hilltown Hikers vice president Karen McTaggart and Chester Hill Association provided hot cocoa, drinks and cookies. Both Chester Hill

Association and the Hilltown Hikers are non-profits located in Chester and events like these bring the community together. The Littleville Fair Association was also there and brought fresh warm rolls to go with lunch, Dogs, families and friends are always welcome

to this great event on Chester Hill with glorious views of Gobble Mountain and Round Hill. People may follow the Chester Hill Association and the Hilltown Hikers on Facebook to see announcements of year round events open to the public by both non-profits.



Liz and Stephanie hop on the sled to get a ride up the hill towed by Chester Fire Chief Nate Bolduc.



Sue Volrath got into Westfield River fever and brought her kayak.



Both adults and children took to the hill in sleds.



These participants of the annual Snow Day in Chester enjoy the view at the top of Holzman’s Hill.

Submitted photos



Jeep with tracks easily makes it way up Holzman’s Hill.



The Jeep makes its way back down the hill to take more people up to the top of the hill.

WILLIAMSTOWN

Clark Art Institute offers free admission on first Sundays

WILLIAMSTOWN – The Clark Art Institute, 225 South St, will offer free admission for all visitors from January through March 2026.

In its fourth year, the “Free for Three” program is part of the institute’s ongoing effort to expand awareness of its programming and to welcome new visitors. During the free admission season, visitors will have the opportunity to tour the Clark’s noted permanent collection

and to see two ongoing special exhibitions, Raffaella della Olga: Typescripts (open through May 31, 2026) and Shadow Visionaries: French Artists Against the Current, 1840-70 (open through March 8, 2026).

In addition, the Clark presents three special installations during this period. Mariel Capanna: Giornata (open through Jan. 25, 2026) and Sónia Almeida: Stages (opens Feb. 14, 2026) are featured as part of the Clark’s

ongoing series of contemporary art in its public spaces. The Clark library’s series of year-round public installations, Paginations, presents Gridlocked: The Geometry of Weaving (open through May 17, 2026) in conjunction with Raffaella della Olga: Typescripts.

The Clark’s grounds, which are always open free of charge, provide miles of walking trails. In the winter months, the Clark’s popular Project Snowshoe program

offers visitors the opportunity to borrow free snowshoes to explore the beauty of the campus in winter. Snowshoes are available in adult and child sizes on a first-come, first-served basis. Visitors are invited to discover six monumental sculptures positioned across the campus.

The Clark also offers a wide array of free public programs, concerts, and other activities. Details are available by visiting events.clark-art.edu.

Clark offers Valentine’s Day program

WILLIAMSTOWN – On Saturday, Feb. 14, the Clark Art Institute, 225 South St., offers special activities in celebration of Valentine’s Day.

Visitors are welcome to visit the galleries to find all the forms of love in the permanent collection—from tender brushstrokes to flirtatious figures. Head to the Museum Pavilion to write a note about the artwork that pulls at the heartstrings and share it on the “art lov-

ers” response wall,” where notes from others will also be on view. Then, at 1 p.m., they enjoy a love-inspired gallery tour of the Clark’s collection led by a Clark educator. The tour meets in the Museum Pavilion.

These activities are free. Tour capacity is limited. People should pick up a ticket at the Clark Center admissions desk, available on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information, people may visit events.clarkart.edu.