

"The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May." – Edwin Way Teale

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

A TURLEY PUBLICATION | www.turley.com

March 21, 2024 | Vol. 45, No. 48 | 75¢

www.countryjournal.turley.com

HUNTINGTON

Huntington opts out of early voting

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

At 5:30 p.m., Town Clerk Linda Hamlin and Interim Town Clerk Michelle Fieldstadt-Booth joined the Select Board with a request to opt out of early voting for the upcoming town elections. "We would like to opt out of vote-by-mail for the municipal election," Hamlin, who is retiring this spring, said. "In order to do that the selectboard has to hold a public hearing." Fieldstadt-Booth added that they have to submit their paperwork no later than March 27. Town Administrator Jennifer Peloquin will check to make sure that a week's posting is long enough. If it is, she will post the hearing for March 20; if they require two weeks, they will hold it on March 27.

According to Hamlin, they did not opt out in 2022



Outgoing Town Clerk Linda Hamlin and Interim Town Clerk Michelle Fieldstadt-Booth met with the Selectboard to recommend opting out of mail-in voting for the upcoming municipal election.

Turley photo by Wendy Long

and had a total of 63 voters, including mail in. "In 2023, we did opt out and had a total of 73 voters come in to vote," Hamlin said. "Very few people bother sending their bal-

lots back. It's a lot of work for no return."

Roger Booth asked if the hearing to opt out is an annual requirement and Hamlin responded that it was. Booth

then asked Peloquin to get it on the select board agenda far enough in advance for the recurring need.

EARLY VOTING, page 3

HUNTINGTON

HCAA seeks 44% increase

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

At their bi-weekly meeting on March 13, the Huntington Select Board discussions were dominated by the Hilltown Community Ambulance budget request, the upcoming local elections and current data on the Franklin Regional Transit Authority van usage in the town.

Hilltown Community Ambulance Association town representative John Garriepy was first on the agenda. In reporting on the call breakdowns for Huntington Garriepy said, "They've really been good at answering calls; we haven't had to pay any intercept fees. They are definitely getting better." Intercept fees occur when the ambulance does not have its own paramed-

HCAA, page 3

BLANDFORD

Special Town Meeting approves most articles and tabled one

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

There were nine articles on the warrant at the Monday, March 18 Special Town Meeting.

One article was tabled, but all the rest passed unanimously with all 48 registered voters responding. The town approved using \$78,838 from free cash to purchase and

equip a new mini-excavator for the highway department; \$53,805 from free cash to be used for service debt for the broadband system, \$150,000 for the Porter Memorial Library to apply for, accept and expend a Massachusetts Library Construction Program grant, the funds come from the Library Building Stabilization fund and free cash; \$780 from free

cash for unpaid bills from prior years and \$26,637 for contracted Treasurer services.

The amendments to the town's Zoning By-laws increased capacity for small scale and medium scale ground mounted solar systems by ten direct current kilowatts; both from ten to 20.

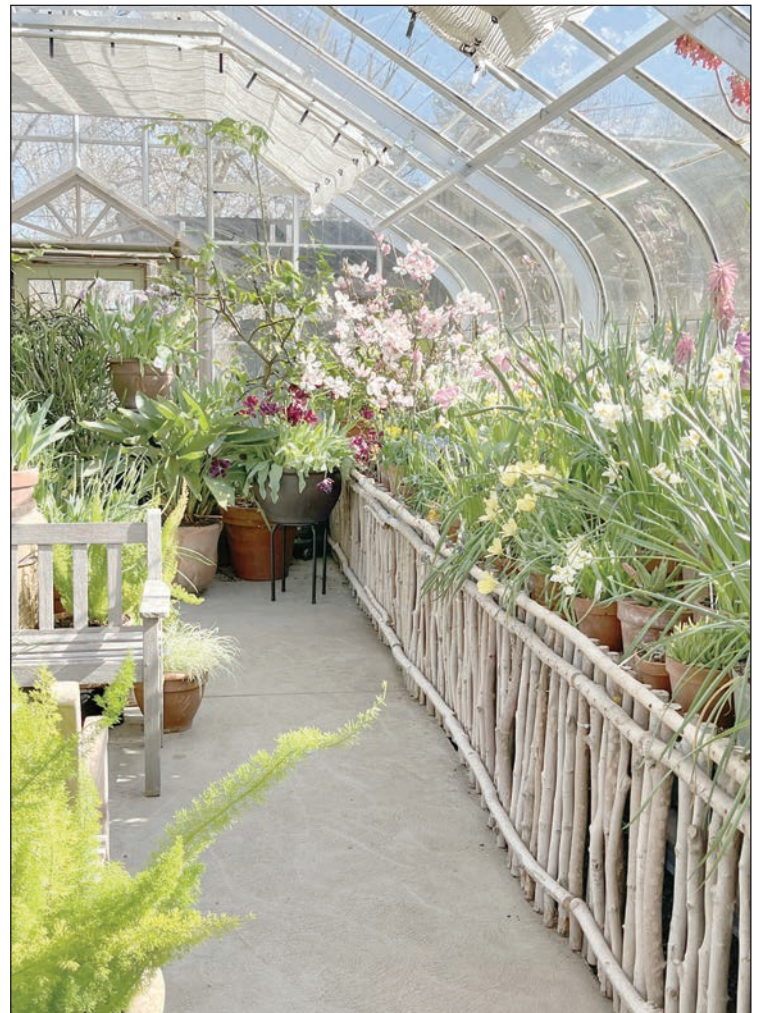
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Voters in Blandford attended a Special Town Meeting on Monday, March 18.

Turley photo by Mary Kronholm

SPRING ARRIVES AT BERKSHIRE BOTANICAL GARDENS



The Berkshire Botanical Gardens in Stockbridge display spring flowers a bit early.

Turley photo by Mary Kronholm



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HILLTOWNS

Tuesday, March 26 is National Diabetes Day

Diabetes Alert Day on March 26 is call-to-action for all Americans to find out their risk of developing diabetes, and if detected early, how to prevent or delay its complications.

Today, diabetes has become much more than a disease; it is an epidemic fueled by the combination of the rise in obesity and other biological, environmental and lifestyle factors.

The numbers tell the story: 38.4 million Americans or about 11.6% of the US population had diabetes in 2021 and 97.6 million American adults age 18 and older have prediabetes.

About 1.2 million Americans are diagnosed each year.

“Diabetes is a lifelong condition in which the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that is needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy needed for daily life and leads to high blood sugar levels,” said Dr. Michele Gortakowski of Baystate Endocrinology and Diabetes.

There are different types of diabetes. The main two types are type 1 and type 2 diabetes. In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas does not make insulin due to an autoimmune process that damages the cells of the pancreas that make insulin. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas

is resistant to insulin and may make less insulin than it used to. Type 2 diabetes is more common and the numbers continue to increase not only in adults, but also in children and adolescents.

Classic signs of diabetes include frequent urination, excessive thirst, extreme hunger, unusual weight loss, increased fatigue, irritability and blurry vision. However often there are no signs of diabetes. It is estimated that 8.7 million Americans are unaware that they have diabetes. Additionally, over 97 million people ages 18 or older have prediabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. People with prediabetes have a high risk of developing diabetes over time.

Factors that put people at higher risk for diabetes include age, having high blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol, being overweight, smoking, and having a family history. African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders are at an increased risk, as are women who have had gestational diabetes.

Getting more exercise and losing a small amount of weight can help prevent pre-diabetes turning into full dia-

betes if you are at risk. Eating healthier foods and becoming more physically active, taking a brisk walk for 30 minutes a day, five times a week, for example, can help you lose weight, feel better, and lower your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Even small steps losing just five % to seven % of your body weight (10 to 14 pounds for a 200-pound person) can make a big difference in preventing type 2 diabetes.

The American Diabetes Association encourages people who are at risk, display symptoms or who are overweight, physically inactive, and over the age of 45 years to take the American Diabetes Risk Test. The risk test asks quick simple questions about weight, age, lifestyle, and family history – all potential risk factors for type 2 diabetes. People are encouraged to see their primary care doctor if they score 10 points or more. The risk test, in English or Spanish, is available by visiting <https://diabetes.org/diabetes-risk-test>.

If diabetes is left untreated, it can lead to very destructive and even deadly complications.

“Early detection is critical to successful treatment and delaying or preventing some of the complications of

diabetes such as heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, stroke, amputation and death,” said Dr. Gortakowski.

“The chances of having diabetes complications can be reduced significantly by keeping blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels in the target range recommended by your doctor,” she added.

In the United States, nine out of every ten cases of diabetes can be avoided if healthy lifestyle changes are implemented. It is possible to prevent type 2 diabetes from developing by knowing the risk and taking action.

Treatment includes changes in lifestyle (diet and exercise), plus medicine (if needed). Type 2 diabetes can be treated with oral medicines (pills), insulin, and/or other injectable medicines. People with type 1 diabetes always need insulin.

“These treatments along with healthy lifestyle choices such as a healthy diet, moderate weight loss and regular exercise can maintain normal blood sugar levels and minimize diabetes-related complications,” said Dr. Gortakowski.

For more information on Baystate Health, people may visit baystatehealth.org.

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Mass DOT announces virtual meeting on passenger rail study

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation announces a virtual public information meeting for the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study will be held on Thursday, March 28 from 6-7:30 p.m.

The study is examining the potential benefits, costs, and investments necessary to implement passenger rail service from North Adams to Greenfield and Boston, with the speed, frequency, and reliability necessary to be a competitive option for travel along this corridor.

At this meeting, the study team will share an overview of the study's background, review the study alternatives, outline issues and opportunities to consider, present draft recommended next steps and draft implementation plan, and garner

feedback. The meeting materials will also be available after the meeting on the study website.

The meeting information, including the registration link, are currently available on the study website under Upcoming Events. Once registered, individuals will receive a confirmation email from Zoom with information about joining the webinar.

To sign up to receive updates on the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study, people may visit https://pima.massdotpi.com/public/subscribe/search?project_id=14308.

For more information, people may visit the study's website at <https://www.mass.gov/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study>.

OTIS

Otis caucus set for April 16

OTIS – The citizens of Otis will hold a caucus on Tuesday, April 16 from 7-8 p.m. in the Otis Town Hall for the purpose of nominating candidates for the Annual Town Election on Tuesday, May 28.

Nominations for the following offices will be accepted: one three-year term to Select Board, one one-year term to

Moderator, one one-year term to Tree Warden, one three-year term to Finance Board, one three-year term to Cemetery Commissioner, one three-year term to Library Trustee, one five-year term to Planning Board and two three-year terms to School Committee. The Australian system of voting shall be used.

Town clerk lists citizen's petitions deadline

OTIS – Tuesday, April 23 at noon is the last day and hour for voters to submit citizen's petitions to the Board of Registrars for articles to be placed on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant to be held on Tuesday, May 21. Citizen petitions should be returned to the Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, 1 North Main Road.

Otis Transfer Station to close March 31

OTIS – The Otis Transfer Station will be closed Easter Sunday, March 31.

The Transfer Station will have regular hours on Monday, April 1 from 7 a.m.- 3 p.m.

Correction

On page 2 of the March 14 edition, the headline was incorrect for an article about the Village closet being

part of the National Diaper Bank. It should be Village Closet is part of National Diaper Bank Network.

HUNTINGTON

EARLY VOTING

from page 1

FRTA Van Contract

Peloquin then presented data on the Franklin Regional Transit Authority van ridership for the current fiscal year. Huntington holds the contract for the van, which is also available to the towns of Blandford, Chester, Middlefield, Montgomery and Russell. Together, the towns had 474 one-way trips in FY'22 and 478 in FY'23; so far in FY'24, only 221 trips have been booked. These trips have all been booked by 19 individuals, only 4 of whom are from Huntington.

According to Peloquin, things like the regional Community Development Block Grants rotate between the towns acting as the fiscal agent. She thinks it would make sense for the FRTA contract to do the same.

"Seniors would experience no change from the service they currently receive since all van appointments are made on a first come, first served basis and not prioritized by town," Peloquin said following the meeting.

Given their data, the selectboard would prefer to not continue as the fiscal agent next year. They would have to end the contract by April 30, 60 days before renewal. They asked Peloquin to reach out to other towns to see if a rotation could be agreed to.

"The Select Board is only exploring the idea of having another town take over the service," Peloquin clarified. "They realize that transportation is important to Huntington seniors and will only give up the FRTA contract if another town is willing to take the program on." The issue will be taken up at the next meeting on Wednesday, March 27.

Other business

In addition to routine payroll, warrants and invoices, Representative Nicholas Boldyga asked for written testimony for the bill changing the Town Clerk's position from an elected to appointed position, due Friday, March 15. Peloquin had prepared the documents, which were approved and signed by the Select Board. Booth also asked Peloquin to contact the elections office to determine what happens if Boldyga's bill passes ahead of our municipal election, where the question is on the ballot and at least one candidate is running for the Town Clerk position.

Peloquin reported that the town had received a letter from the Department of Fish & Game, which is considering purchasing 108 acres in Huntington and Chester, with 68 acres in Huntington. If the purchase is completed by June 30, the Department will pay remaining property taxes for FY'24 and all of FY'25. If they acquire it between July 1 and Dec. 31, they will pay all of the FY'25 tax rate; after that, it will go to the Payment in Lieu of Taxes system for state-owned property.

Peloquin reported on progress concerning updating the town's Open Space Recreation Plan. Seven people have signed onto working on this. They have asked Peloquin to also attend to pull needed documents, keep notes and track the 5% in-kind donations of time required by grant funding for this project. The board moved to appoint the seven to the end of the project, or June 30, 2025, whichever comes first.

Finally, the Select Board voted to extend the landscaping contractor for town properties to Limited Budget. Peloquin shared recent FY'25 budget updates with the board, which included an expected increase in health insurance of 8%. Early numbers show the Gateway assessment going down \$63,270 for next year, but official assessment letters will go out after Gateway's budget adoption. Select Board members discussed setting up a stabilization account for education, which might be used to start saving for the new roof at Gateway or offset years when the town's census spikes.

COA lists upcoming events

HUNTINGTON – The Huntington Council on Aging will be hosting the following events at Stanton Hall, 26 Russell Road.

On Wednesday, March 27 at 2 p.m., Wild Thyme will entertain seniors. Hampshire Hope will provide a training on Narcan on Wednesday, April 3 from 1-2 p.m. A spring birthday celebration will be held on Tuesday, April 9 at 1 p.m. Everyone is welcome to enjoy cake, ice cream, and Bingo.

On Wednesday, April 10 from 1-2 p.m., Scott Gullett from Highland Valley Elder Services will present a program on Financial Exploitation of Elders. Lois Kiraly will present a program on Bird

Migration on Wednesday, April 17 from 1-2 p.m.

On Wednesday, April 24 at 2 p.m., Jack & His Guitar will perform. The Hilltown Memory Café is held weekly on Wednesdays from 2-3 p.m. and provides seniors with activities while their caregivers participate in a support group. The café is open to all with and without memory issues.

Chair yoga is held every Wednesday at 10 a.m. at the cost of \$5 per person per class. Line Dancing is held on Thursdays at 10 a.m. All events are free of charge unless noted. People may contact the COA at 413-512-5205 or coa@huntingtonma.us for more information.

COA seeks vendors for tag sale

HUNTINGTON – The Huntington Council on Aging will be sponsoring a tag sale on Saturday, June 1 from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on the Town Common and at Stanton Hall located at 26 Russell Road.

Spaces are available for a suggested donation of \$10 on the Town Common and \$15 inside Stanton Hall. Vendors must provide their own tables, chairs and

tents for rain/sun protection. No items shall be left behind. Set up will start at 8 a.m. on Saturday morning.

People should call 413-512-5205 to reserve a space by Monday, May 27. Location of spaces will be on a first come, first serve basis the day of the sale. In case of rain, the event will be held on Sunday, June 2.

Boy Scouts to host Easter breakfast

HUNTINGTON – Boy Scout Troop 120 will host a pancake breakfast on Saturday, March 30 from 9 a.m.-noon at Stanton Hall. The Easter Bunny will

also be there to have pictures taken with children. The cost is \$10 for unlimited pancakes. Funds raised will be used to support the Scouts throughout the year.

Trivia Night fundraiser reminder for Saturday, March 23

HUNTINGTON – A reminder to Gateway parents, community supporters and to anyone looking for a fun night out, the Gateway Education Foundation will host its Third Annual Trivia Night on Saturday, March 23 from 7-9 p.m. at Stanton Hall, 26 Russell Road.

Doors will open at 6 p.m. for players to set up food and peruse the silent auction items. D. J. Steve Nagle known from the Rock 102 Bax & O'Brien Show-returns as emcee.

Trivia Night is the annual FUNdraiser that supports the

Foundation's Funds for Learning Grant Program, which pays for "out-of-the-box" learning opportunities across Gateway schools and classrooms. Tickets are on sale now and are \$25 per person or people may register a table of eight for \$175. Tickets will also be sold at the door; if you do not have a team, you will be added to a table. There is a limit of 120 people at this event, so be sure to buy a ticket early. Tickets are online by visiting gatewayeducation-foundation.org.

There will also be a 50/50 raffle

priced at \$5/ticket. In addition, you can purchase a sheet of tickets and enter raffles for items at the end of the evening, which include artists donations from the Gray Catbird Gift Shop & Pottery Studio, Crystals from Junebug Rocks, a photo shoot with Sarah Foley, wine, coffee, and golf gift baskets, and gift certificates from Moltenbreds Market, Main Street Styles, Amazon, Dick's Sporting Goods and Starbucks.

This is a Bring Your Own Bottle and food event, and people may also order in from nearby Comfort Kitchen.

HCAA

ic on board and the medical emergency requires a higher level of care than a basic EMT. In such cases, the ambulance must meet up with another town or private ambulance service en route to the hospital and bring their paramedic on board.

Garriepy also reported on HCAA's use of the Comstar Billing Corporation, which completes the billing for the ambulance. In recent years, HCAA added a subscription opportunity for area residents, who must have health insurance to take part. Subscribing covers the gap between what the insurance company covers and the total cost of being transported by ambulance. To date, it has been found that the subscription fund is a good benefit to both HCAA and patients, Garriepy said.

HCAA was also able to negotiate a 1% lower rate with Comstar, Garriepy said and added that their collection rate is really good. This allowed HCAA to give a small raise to their EMTs, but they remain one of the lowest paying ambulances in Western Massachusetts. Garriepy also reported that the equipment is in good shape, but that medical supply costs have risen substantially.

Following the overview, Garriepy presented the HCAA proposed budget for FY'25. In this current fiscal year, HCAA charged \$35.20 per capita which resulted in \$73,708 to Huntington and a total budget to the seven member towns of \$293,422. In the coming fiscal year, HCAA proposes a per capita

rate of \$50.20, raising Huntington's cost to \$105,118.80 and the entire budget to \$416,288.40. In their proposal, HCAA reported that Highland Ambulance is currently at \$60 per capita for the towns of Goshen, Cummington, Ashfield, Chesterfield, Plainfield and Williamsburg. South County EMS is currently at \$65 per capita, for the towns of Deerfield and Whately.

The town is also liable for an Ambulance Assessment Rate of \$6,307.13 for FY'25, which is based upon 6% of the annual contribution. The Ambulance Association of Massachusetts set up this pay-in

system for private ambulance companies; funding is supposed to be matched by the Federal government and then returned to the towns. HCAA is a private ambulance service and Huntington's assessment for the current fiscal year was \$4,599.80. To date, no funds have been returned to the towns.

Select Board Chair Ed Renaud balked at the 44% increase for both rates, combined. "Two years ago, when HCAA broke the contract with the town, in my opinion, we had to get a 2-1/2 Override to be able to afford it. Last year, we were very fortunate because our school assessment was basically level funded, because of shifts in the distribution of students. But you guys are asking for a 44% increase. That's crazy, in my opinion."

Renaud added that this was the first time the town had seen budget numbers

for the coming fiscal year and the town has already begun its budget crunch for FY'25, adding that the town might have to go for another 2 1/2% override.

Garriepy pointed out that it is still the least expensive option for Huntington, coming in about \$10 per capita less than Highland Ambulance and \$15 per capita less than South County EMS.

Renaud responded that Huntington, Russell and Chester are larger than all of Highland's towns, except Williamsburg. "I'm not saying it isn't a fair rate, but I don't see how we're going to do this."

Selectman Roger Booth added that the Highland towns' per capita incomes

and tax rates are also substantially higher than Huntington's.

Renaud continued, "I think the process is what's broken here. This is a conversation that should have been going on regularly over the last two years. HCAA needs to realize that the tax base in the hilltowns is up against the levy limit all the time. There is no industry to draw on and there's only so many places to build more homes. This isn't sustainable."

Talk continued with a suggestion to get all town finance committees together with the HCAA and answer all of the questions at once. April dates are being looked at.

from page 1

Opening for Easter March 27th!

EASTER PLANTS

LILIES | TULIPS
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OPINION

GUEST COLUMN

in the Garden

by Roberta McQuaid

Thank goodness for the 'happy plant'

It was a bad night and the next day didn't start out much better. I had heard that the days prior to delivery can be a bit uneasy for a soon-to-be-mother (and therefore for her spouse!), now I know it to be true. Luckily, even before my husband came home from work, the smile he is accustomed to had returned to my face.

My grin grew even bigger, however, when I greeted him at the door and found he had a pot of gerber daisies in his hand. Years ago, I deemed this particular potted plant "the happy plant."

For me it is next to impossible to look at its brightly colored flowers and remain in a bad mood. If you feel the same way but have never had any luck growing the gerber daisy, read on to learn just what cultural requirements are necessary to keep it happy.

The gerber daisy was discovered by Robert Jameson in the early 1880s near the gold fields of Barberton, in the Transvaal region of South Africa. The most popular species, the one which we will concentrate on today, bears his name, *Gerbera jamesonii*.

The Barberton daisy, the Transvaal daisy, and the African daisy are all common names for the plant that relate back to its place of origin.

Not long after its discovery, breeding began on the gerber daisy in England, eventually resulting in improved quality and enhanced color variations. Today, the Netherlands and Columbia are the primary producers of gerbers in cut flower form.

In the floral trade, it ranks an impressive fifth in popularity, behind the rose, carnation, chrysanthemum and tulip.

According to floral lore, the meaning behind the gerber flower is one I would wholeheartedly agree with: cheerfulness, probably due to the wide palette of colors it is available in – nearly every one except blue. Look for vivid orange, cool coral, hot pink, crimson red and sunshine yellow, not to mention bubblegum pink and creamy white!

Unfortunately, the gerber daisy is not hardy in our area; it prefers a much warmer location in which to grow. On the eastern seaboard, the only place it will overwinter is the southernmost tip of Florida, in hardiness zones 9 and 10.

Here in New England, it is best enjoyed on the windowsill during the winter months. As long as the plant is provided with normal room temperatures, bright light and sufficient but not excess moisture it should bloom prolifically.

Remember to remove spent flowers to keep up the gerber's good looks as well as to encourage future blooms.

Once the danger of frost has passed, it is also safe to plant the gerber daisy outdoors, just as you would any other summer annual. More and more consumers are doing this each year and with success!

The best type of soil for it is one that is organically rich and well-drained. Full sun is a must for flower production.

If you wish to dig up the plant after the season wanes and attempt to overwinter it indoors,

GARDEN, page 5



GUEST COLUMN

in my BACKYARD

By Ellenor Downer

A Fiskdale couple reported seeing an American woodcock in their large field. They said, "On Saturday, March 9 we heard the first woodcocks of the season. So happy to have them back."

The woodcock has an extremely long bill, a short neck, a dark back and buff breast. Its feathers blend into the leaf litter. The long bill allows the bird to probe into the earth and it can open its beak below the surface to grab prey.

It can eat its weight in earthworms within 24 hours. It also eats insects and seeds. Woodcocks inhabit woods and thickets bordered by open areas.

Both sexes make a "peent" call. In spring, woodcocks display in open fields. The male rises in the air in wide circles. When he reaches about 50 feet about the ground his wings start to make a twittering sound. At about 200 to 300 feet the twittering stops. He gives a canary like flight song and begins a zig zag descent.



American woodcock

Photo by Keith Ramos/USFWS

Several males may display in the same field. Woodcocks are polygamous. Females are attracted to the area and mate with the males. Males continue to display after mating and may mate with other females.

After mating, the females raise their brood alone. The nest is a scraped depression in the ground lined with twigs or grass and placed within 100 to 200 yards of the male's display ground. The female lays four buff eggs with brown splotches.

Canada geese

On Friday, March 1 I saw a large flock of Canada geese in a field in Spencer. On

BACKYARD, page 5

How do survivor benefits work for a married couple?

SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

Dear Rusty

How does Social Security handle the death of one spouse? Say, for example, the husband receives \$2,000 per month in Social Security and his wife receives \$1,000 per month. How is the death of either spouse handled?

Signed: Concerned spouse

Dear Concerned

Benefits to a deceased beneficiary stop as soon as Social Security is notified of the death (notification usually done by the funeral director who handles arrangements). Benefits are not paid for the month of death, only for the preceding month when the beneficiary was alive for the entire month.

A surviving spouse is entitled to the higher of two benefits, their own personally earned

SS retirement benefit or an amount based on the deceased spouse's benefit at death. In the example you cite, and assuming the surviving spouse has reached Full Retirement Age: if the husband dies first the wife will receive the husband's \$2,000 monthly benefit instead of her previous \$1,000 amount.

But if the wife died first, the husband would continue receiving only his \$2,000 monthly amount because that is more than his deceased wife was receiving. Note in either case, the surviving spouse would be entitled to a one-time lump sum "death benefit" of \$255.

The surviving spouse would need to contact Social Security to claim the "death benefit" and unless the surviving spouse was previously receiving only a spousal benefit also to claim the higher monthly amount, if eligible. If the surviving spouse was previously receiving only a spousal benefit from the deceased and not entitled to SS retirement benefits on their own, then Social Security would automatically award their higher survivor amount

SECURITY, page 5

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ISSN NO. 0747-2471

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The Country Journal (USPS 483-550) is published every Thursday by Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069. Telephone (413) 283-8393, Fax (413) 289-1977. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069.



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Election letters to the editor welcome

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

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

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

Campaign news

As part of its election coverage, the 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.

SCHOOLS & YOUTH

COLLEGE NOTES

Colleges, universities announce fall President's and Dean's lists

President's list

*Fitchburg State University
Fitchburg*

Jordyn T. Gagliardi of Dalton and Meadow C. Mazza of North Adams

Dean's list

*Albany College of Pharmacy
and Health Sciences
Albany, New York*

Lindsey Gwilt of Pittsfield

Dean's List

*Bridgewater State University
Bridgewater*

Sarah Curti of Dalton, Brady McDonald of Florence, Cam Abdalla of Lee, Karla Calvo of Lenox, Kerrigan Maurer of Northampton, Juliana Hector of Pittsfield, Rachel Mulligan of Pittsfield, Ian Bacon of Westfield, David Forest of Westfield, Sophia Macqueen Pooler of Westfield and Abigail Camerlin of Worthington

Dean's list

*Fitchburg State University
Fitchburg*

Jordan C. Degrenierm of Cheshire, David D. Odell of North Adams, Elijah Stathis of Northampton, Owen T. Bonney of Pittsfield, Ashley L. Farina of Pittsfield, Miles A. Nordskog of Pittsfield

Dean's list

University of Minnesota

Nina Snowise of Pittsfield, junior at College of Continuing and Professional Studies

Chester Elementary students grow hydroponic crops

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

CHESTER – Students at Chester Elementary School continued growing vegetables and leafy greens in their hydroponic studio where Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics classes take place.

All students in grades Kindergarten – grade 5 have STEAM classes in 45 minute blocks, three times a week. Last spring, students launched their hydroponics station with help from the Community Food Engine Homestead in Easthampton. Jeremy Sundel, the head farmer at CFE, loaned some of the equipment and helped set up the area. Additional materials were purchased within the school budget and grant funding. Students met their goal of having each farmer bring a head of lettuce, bok choy or Swiss chard home by the end of the school year.

Cafeteria staff upped the ante last November by serving this year's first crop at lunch. Swiss chard and bok choy went into the "Very Veggie Soup," while red and green leaf lettuce topped the turkey and cheese sandwiches.

"Our students are modern day farmers practicing and promoting innovative and sustainable agriculture," said Principal Vanna Maffuccio.

"This was our first time harvesting our hydroponic crops for school lunch and our first harvest of the 23/24 school year," noted Maffuccio. "Instead of students taking all of their vegetables home, as they did last school year, I requested that half of our harvest be allocated for produce to use in an upcoming school lunch."

Maffuccio shared the idea with STEAM teacher Rebecca Nicholson, Food Services Director Tasha Hartley, and Chester's Cafeteria Manager Kendra Gregerson. All were more than willing

to collaborate to make this project come to life.

"Kendra and Tasha were eager to support this project and expressed excitement for the work we would be doing together," said Maffuccio. "Our cafeteria staff would need to put in extra time and care to wash and chop the plentiful harvest of vegetables we grew, but they were more than willing to roll up their sleeves and put in the additional time and work needed to ensure our hydroponics-to-lunch table project would be a huge and delicious success. It takes a village and I am so grateful for mine."

More recently, students harvested a gorgeous crop of cucumbers. "Our students were super excited to harvest and eat them," reported Maffuccio. "It was a bit challenging because the roots clogged up our systems a few times, causing the hydroponic system to flood-this happened three to four different times throughout the grow cycle." She said, "It was such a meaningful learning experience due to these issues though, as students had to remain steadfast in their commitment to persevere and problem solve in order to overcome the hurdles and setbacks caused by the flooding if they wanted to achieve the project's intended outcomes and the goals set for this grow."

During STEAM classes, students plant seeds and then transplant seedlings into the hydroponic growing unit. There are routine tasks that need to be done regularly, including checking for and pruning broken stems, monitoring the pH in the water, checking the electrical conductivity in the water that circulates through the growing tubes. These two data points will point to a need to add fertilizer to the water. Students also remove plants that aren't doing well and replace them with surplus seedlings in the germination station. Finally, they must examine the system regularly for



Cassidy Toporowsk, a third grader at Chester Elementary School, samples one of the hydroponic cucumbers grown in her STEAM class. Submitted photo

any leaks or burned out bulbs in the grow lights, while repairing either if discovered.

Among the fun facts that Maffuccio recently shared with parents is that hydroponic growing uses up to nine times less water than traditional food crop watering methods. The plants grow about 50% faster than plants grown in soil and there is no need for herbicides or pesticides. This method reduces the risk of diseases and pests and results in higher yields and better quality crops.

Students also learned about the careers in the hydroponics industry in Massachusetts. Last December, there were 44 jobs available with pay ranging from \$17.25 per hour to salaries as high as \$90,000 a year.

OPINION

GARDEN

from page 4

be extra careful not to disturb its deep root system or death may incur. Some gardeners who plan on overwintering their gerbers sink the pot and all at planting time to avoid any potential risk later on.

Right now, the "happy plant" sits on the bureau in the nursery, awaiting the arrival of our little girl, just as we are. There is indeed so much to be

happy about!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 31 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.

SECURITY

from page 1

when notified of the death.

If a surviving spouse has reached full retirement age somewhere between 66 and 67 depending on year of birth and is eligible for a survivor benefit, the amount of the survivor benefit will be 100% of the deceased spouse's benefit. But if the survivor claims the benefit before reaching FRA, the amount of the survivor benefit will be reduced by 4.75% for each full year earlier. The survivor's benefit reaches maximum at the survivor's full retirement age.

If a surviving spouse has not yet reached their FRA and if they are entitled to not necessarily collecting their own Social Security retirement benefit, the surviving spouse has the option to delay claiming the survivor benefit until it reaches maximum at their full retirement age. And if the survivor's personal SS retirement benefit will ever be more than their maximum survivor benefit, the surviving spouse also has the option to claim only the smaller survivor benefit first and allow their personal SS retirement benefit to grow to maximum at age 70 if desired.

With Social Security there is hardly ever a simple answer to a question but,

in the example you use, if both are over their SS full retirement age:

If the husband dies first, the wife will get 100% of the amount (\$2,000) the husband was receiving, instead of the small amount (\$1,000) she was previously receiving.

If the wife dies first, the husband's monthly benefit will remain at \$2,000 and he will get no increase in his monthly amount. In either case, the surviving spouse will be entitled to a one-time lump sum death benefit of \$255.

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

BACKYARD

from page 4

Monday, March 4 I heard the honking of geese. I looked up and saw two large flocks of Canada geese fly overhead. The first flock flew lower and lower and landed in my hayfield and the pond next to it. The second flock flew much higher and headed northward.

Belted kingfisher

On Feb. 29, a spotted a pair of belted kingfishers at a small pond in Ware on my way back from the Ware River News/Barre Gazette office. I was surprised to see them this early.

Black bears and more

I received an email from a Wilbraham resident. He said, "It was March 1, when I woke to see the damage a bear did to our poles and feeders. This was the second time our poles and feeders were damaged by a bear, in the last few years. Shame on me, for not bringing the feeders in at dusk."

He said, "We have been casual bird watchers and feeders for over thirty years. It is relaxing and fun to see the local and migratory birds visit our feeders. Unfortunately, we have to consider the risks associated with placing food sources in our back yards. It means we have to be aware and maybe take the feeders in at dusk, putting them back out in the morning." He also said, "However, that will not eliminate the chance for a bear/human encounter. Last year, a black bear was in our neighbors back yard, at 10:30 a.m. in the morning. The bear was attracted by the chickens in the coup. Fortunately, they have an electrified fence, surrounding the coup. After getting shocked, it ran across the street and into Cedar Swamp woods. It will be back, since a bear does remember

where the food sources are located." He said he recently saw a male, pileated woodpecker.

Loon fact

The Loon Preservation Committee in Moultonborough New Hampshire included these interesting loon facts in their newsletter. Loons are physiologically adapted for life in the water, so much so that they struggle to walk on land as a result. Their dense, thick walled bones help to weigh them down in the water. The extreme rear-placement of their legs and feet allows them to maximize the propulsive force that they can exert with each kick.

Many studies documented the duration of observed loon dives. Most of these studies have reported that average loon dives last somewhere between 33 and 52 seconds, regardless of season or location. Loons diving to deeper depths tend to spend more time underwater than those diving in more shallow areas.

In a study of loons using Lake Michigan as a stopover site during fall migration, Kenow et al. (2018) found that loons diving to depths of 40 m (131 feet) were spending, on average, 139 seconds (over 2 minutes) underwater per dive. In contrast, loons diving to depths of just 20 meters (65 feet) in that study were spending less time under water per dive (87 seconds, on average).

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

BLANDFORD

Library hosts construction program information meeting

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – The standing room only gathering at Porter Memorial library Wednesday March 13 at 5 p.m. gave residents an overview of the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program grant application process for small libraries.

Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners staff Library Building Specialist Heather Backman and Library Building Consultant Andrea Bono-Bunker virtually presented and answered questions about the process.

Residents learned that Blandford is one of three small communities applying for the grant and that two of the grant applications will be immediately funded, and the third waitlisted until funds are available.

Trustee Byam Stevens said “The grant opportunity provides for the construction of a building flexible enough to provide for future needs of the community.”



Library Director Nicole Daviau introduces Mass Board of Library Commissioners Building Specialist Heather Backman and Building Consultant Andrea Bono-Bunker who were virtually present on the computer screen in front of Daviau. To the right are Library Trustee Byam Stevens, Select Board member Theodore Cousineau, seated at desk are former library staffer Mary Martin and current library staff member Lucia Sullivan.

Library Director Nicole Daviau and library trustees have been working on the grant process since June 2023, applications are due this June.

This initial grant is for the design and planning phase which relies heavily on public input and community involvement at every step of the process. A library building committee has been formed and all interested Blandford residents are invited to take part.

The subsequent approval from the town at the March 18 Special Town Meeting of the article to allow the library to apply for, accept and approve the spending of the initial grant funding allows the library to move forward. The vote passed unanimously “in a great show of support for the library.”

Director Daviau said, adding, “This vote reflects the support and involvement our community has with our library. We are excited to be able to move forward in this process and build the library our residents deserve one that is safe, accessible and big enough to support the programs that bring our community together.”



Visible on screen is Mass Board of Library Commissioners Building Consultant Andrea Bono-Bunker during an information meeting held at Porter Memorial Library in Blandford on Wednesday, March 13. Listening to presentation, seated at desk left is Library Tech Kim Chaffee, standing Library Director Nicole Daviau, Library Trustee Byam Stevens, Select Board member Theodore Cousineau and seated at table is Mary Martin, resident and one-time library staff



It was standing room only gathering at the library to hear about the process for Mass Public Library Construction Program grant for the library. “This is clearly why we need to expand our space,” said Library Director Daviau, indicating the full house attendance.

Turley photos by Mary Kronholm

SENIORS DRESS IN GREEN FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY LUNCHEON



Theodore Cousineau was dressed in green for the Blandford Council on Aging St. Patrick's luncheon on Friday, March 15. Turley Photos by Mary Kronholm



Lucia Sullivan and Mary Martin with green drinks in hand are ready for lunch at the COA's annual St. Patrick's luncheon.

CHESTERFIELD

Real estate taxes due May 1

BLANDFORD – Treasurer/Collector Sara Hunter said Monday that fourth quarter real estate tax payments are due Wednesday, May 1 and can be made online via the town's website.

All taxpayers already have their statements because the bills are mailed twice a year and include two quarters' invoices. People should call Hunter at 413-848-4279 extension 102 with any questions.

Congregational churches list Holy Week and Easter services

CHESTERFIELD / WORTHINGTON – The First Congregational Churches of Worthington and Chesterfield will have several services during Holy Week.

Thursday March 28 at 7:30 p.m. there will be a Maundy Thursday Service of Tenabrae, held at the Worthington Church, 159 Huntington Road, Worthington. Friday March 29 the Chesterfield Church will be open for private prayer and silent contemplation from 2-4:30 p.m. At 5 p.m. there will be a Good Friday Service of Nails, Chesterfield Church, 404 Main Road, Chesterfield. Saturday March 30 the Chesterfield Church will be open to receive flowers from 3-4 p.m., for those wishing to place flowers on the altar for Easter Sunday. Due to allergies, people should not bring lilies or hyacinths.

Easter morning, March 31, there will be a sunrise service behind the Chesterfield Church, inside if inclement weather. Gather at 6:10 a.m.

Worthington Church will hold its Easter Service at their regular time of 9 a.m. and Chesterfield Church will have their Easter Service at 10:30 a.m.. All are welcome at any of the services.



MEETING

from page 1

The amendment for Battery Energy Storage Systems, according to Planning Board Chair Paul Martin, provides protection for the town and also protects the storage facility.

He said that the difference between the BESS and the solar farms is that the farms make payments in lieu of taxes for 20 years while the storage facilities are taxed “based on the value of the equipment” and increase the town's revenue base.

Article 7 amended the by-laws schedule of uses for BESS, breaking them down into three different tiers. The arti-

cle that was tabled proposed an amendment barring ground mounted solar systems from installation on Long Pond Watershed Protection zone. It was tabled because there has been no public hearing.

Finance Committee Chair Janet Lombardo with members Jackie Coury and Deb Brodie, Select Board Chair Cara Letendre with members Jeff Allen and Theodore Cousineau, Town Counsel Mark Reich of KP-Law, PC and Town Administrator Michael Szlosek were at the head of the room. Town Clerk Doris Jemiolo opened the meeting conducted by Moderator Dr. David Hopson.

CHESTER

Kindergarten Countdown Event takes place April 11

CHESTER – The Hilltown Family Center and Chester Elementary School will sponsor a free Kindergarten Countdown Event Thursday April 11 at 9:45 a.m. at Chester Elementary School, 325 Middlefield St.

This event is for children eligible for kindergarten in the fall of 2024, who are turning five on or before Sept. 1, 2024 and reside in Middlefield, Blandford, or Chester. Registration is required by contacting Jen Jakubasz, administrative assistant at Chester Elementary School at 413-685-1360. Students, who are not eligible for kindergarten in the next school year, will be registered if space is available.

This event will help children transition to kindergarten at the school and will feature the Ecotarium's "hands-on" Build Your World Program. Children will use the engineering design process to explore forces and motion in small groups by planning, testing, building and improving a way to cross a model river with only simple materials.

Families will have the opportunity to meet staff at Chester Elementary School. Children will take home backpacks from the Hilltown Family Center with a book, the Berkshire Museum's In Kindergarten activity book that helps children understand kindergarten routines, and other transition materials. This program

is made possible through the Hilltown Community Health Center's Hilltown Family Center through the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and the Massachusetts Cultural Council through the town of Middlefield.

Starting kindergarten can foster many feelings for children and their caregivers. For some children it may mean a new school, new teachers, new routines, and new friends. The goal of this program is to help make the transition to kindergarten a little easier for students and their families by helping families understand what to expect in kindergarten and to practice skills as they prepare for the transition.

This is the first event for Chester Elementary's Kindergarten Countdown transition events. Chester Elementary School is a small school, consisting of 122 students, with a big impact. There is a strong focus on personalized instruction and exploratory based learning experiences for all students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Students receive relevant and quality instruction in the areas of reading, math, social studies, character development, social skills, bullying prevention, science, technology, engineering, music, art, gym and health. The school has created strong community partnerships and

learning pathways to implement and elevate agricultural learning experiences for its students, such as hydroponic gardening, microgreen planting projects, composting, container gardening, tree tapping, maple syrup making, river studies, walking field trips and exploratory learning centered in local geology and provided by local experts within the community.

The Chester Elementary School community believes a meaningful education has the power to shape lives, inspire new ways of thinking, and build a better, brighter future. They are committed to building community partnerships that serve as catalysts to rich, relevant learning experiences and to empower students to push new boundaries of innovation and productivity within a culture of belonging, joy, and high expectations for what students learn and who they become.

The Hilltown Family Center, located at 9 Russell Road in Huntington, houses many of the Hilltown Community Health Center's community programs and services and offers an extensive list of resources for parents, caregivers and families. The Family Center programs are built around the belief in nurturing strong families, by helping them to strengthen their flexibility and resilience. Programs help families establish strong social connections and give concrete support in times

of need, recognizing family's strengths and understanding that being a parent is part natural and part learned. The Family Center also helps children connect and relate to their world.

The Hilltown Family Center's many free programs include weekly play to learn groups, the ASQ developmental screening program, Hilltown Holiday Help, Parent Powered learning messages, ParentChild+ home visit literacy program, Rise and Read Book bag program, StoryWalk program, parent education, as well as services and referrals through Hilltown Community Health Center. This program is made possible through the Hilltown Family Center and the Hilltown Community Health Center through a Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant through the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care and a Mass Cultural Council grant through the town of Worthington.

For more about this program or the Hilltown Family Center, people may visit their Facebook page at Hilltown Family Center or Parent and Family Supports Hilltown Community Health Center at hchcweb.org, email Susan LeBarron, Hilltown Family Center Coordinator at slebarron@hchcweb.org or call 413-667-2203.

Concert tickets on sale to benefit Chester Theatre Company

DALTON – Tickets are now on sale for a benefit concert hosted by James Barry and Tara Franklin, Chester Theatre Company's co-producing artistic directors.

The concert will be at the Stationery Factory, 63 Flansburg Avenue, on Thursday, April 18 from 7-9 p.m. with

all proceeds going towards producing the Chester Theatre Company's 35th anniversary season.

James will tip his cap to CTC's Irish founding artistic director Vincent Dowling by headlining the concert with a set of Irish folk tunes made popular by Luke Kelly and

The Dubliners. People may sing along to "Whiskey in the Jar," "The Wild Rover" and many other Irish traditional favorites.

There will be other special musical guests from James and Tara's family and their many musical friends. There will be a raffle with wonderful locally sourced prizes

and a silent auction with more valuable items.

As the Irish say, it will be "great craic." People can purchase tickets to this special event here by visiting <https://www.simplertix.com/e/james-barry-with-friends-family-a-benefit-tickets-163707>.

GOSHEN

Caucus on April 8

GOSHEN – The 2024 Town Caucus will be held on Monday, April 8 at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall, 42 Main St.

All registered voters are invited to participate. Any registered voter may be nominated for any of the positions below. All are encouraged to attend to ensure a quorum of 25 voters. Once a quorum is met, the meeting is generally over in less than 15 minutes.

Positions up for nomination and the individual, who currently occupy the seats include: Almoners three-years Kristine A. Bissell, Assessors three years Gina M. Papineau, Assessors one year Stephen A. Fancy, Board of Health three years Tiffany A. Marcinek (No), Chesterfield/Goshen Regional School Committee three years Barton W. Gage (?) and Finance Committee three years Angela S. Otis.

Other positions are Library Trustees two positions three years each Roxanne M. Cunningham (N) and Andrew B. Watt; Moderator one year Keith M. Wright; Planning Board five years Gary N. Griswold; Planning Board four years vacant; Select Board three years Angela S. Otis (No); Tilton Farm Supervisors three positions one year each Robert O. Goss, Richard K. Powrek and Roger A. Culver and Town Clerk three years Kristen M. Estelle.

The individuals with a no next to their name want to step down; the others have expressed an interest in continuing, except for the one, who the Town Clerk did hear back. Brief descriptions of the elected positions can be found at www.goshen-ma.us

The Annual Town Election for the attached offices will be held on Saturday, June 1. The Annual Town Meeting will be held on Saturday, May 18.

People may email Town Clerk Kristen Estelle with any questions at clerk@goshen-ma.us or call 413-268-8236, ext. 107.

COA hosts St. Patrick's Day celebration

GOSHEN – Irish eyes were smiling at the luncheon on Tuesday, March 12 in the Goshen Town Hall sponsored by the Goshen Council on Aging and hosted by Bill O'Riordan.

Over seventy people, including many of O'Riordan's friends from Northampton, came to enjoy a traditional St. Patrick's Day celebration. Jerry Bird and his staff at the Spruce Corner Restaurant prepared the delicious meal of corned beef, cabbage, potatoes,

carrots and Irish vegetarian stew. The Cummington Creamery provided Irish soda bread and Peggy Hewes baked colorful cupcakes for dessert.

O'Riordan was the master of ceremonies for the entertainment. His granddaughter, Dana Warner, a student at Hampshire Regional High School, began the program by singing the National Anthem of Ireland in Irish Gaelic and then gave a delightful talk on growing up Irish in Western

Massachusetts.

Steve Calderone on the keyboard led the attendees in a sing-along of Irish songs including "Danny Boy," "My Wild Irish Rose" and "When Irish Eyes are Smiling." The COA Board thanks Suzanne and Jim Krebs for decorating the hall and Ron and Joan Loven for setting up tables and chairs and general clean-up of the hall. The COA also thanks everyone who came, making this a wonderful St. Patrick's Day event.



A group of attendees at one of the tables get ready to join in the sing-along. The green pamphlets they are holding had the words to Irish songs.



Bill O'Riordan and his granddaughter, Dana Warren sang the National Anthem of Ireland in Irish Gaelic. Submitted photos

RUSSELL

Russell Recreation Committee to hold Easter Egg Hunt

RUSSELL – The Russell Recreation Committee will be holding their annual Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, March 30 at 10 a.m.

The hunt will be held at the Russell Elementary School, 155 Highland Avenue, rain or shine. People should arrive on time for the hunt. Free raffle prizes will be given away. This event is open to Russell residents and their families, children aged 12 and under. Participants should bring their own Easter basket to collect the eggs. The Easter Bunny will be making an appearance.



WORTHINGTON

Friends group to hold book sale

WORTHINGTON – The Friends of the Worthington Library will hold their Annual Spring Book Sale on Saturday, April 6 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Worthington Town Hall, 160 Huntington Road

Early bird entry \$10 begins at 9 a.m.

Book donations of gently used books and audiobooks (no magazines) may be dropped off at the Town Hall

Monday, April 1 from 2-4 p.m. and Tuesday, April 2 through Friday, April 5 during Town Hall hours. Books should be placed on the stage. They should not leave in front of building or other locations.

For more information, people may call Tiffany at 518-253-6233. Volunteers are needed for Friday setup and Saturday for the sale.

SOUTHAMPTON

JACK BINNALL TAKES THIRD PLACE GIANT SLALOM RACE



Jack Binnall of Southampton took third place in the Interclub Final Giant Slalom Ski Race, boys Under 11 division, held at Jimmey Peak Ski area on Sunday, March 3.

Submitted photo

BECKET

Preservation Committee to meet April 1

BECKET – There will be a meeting of the town of Becket's Community Preservation Committee on Monday, April 1 at 9 a.m. at the Becket Town

Hall, 557 Main St.

Proposed projects for CPA funding will be addressed at this meeting. The public is invited to this meeting.



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PITTSFIELD

Q-MoB hosts creative housing solutions forum

PITTSFIELD – Queer Men of the Berkshires is offering a series of Creative Housing Solutions Forums for the whole Berkshire LGBTQ+ Community, including a panel discussion on Sunday, March 24 from 3-5 p.m. at Hot Plate Brewing in Pittsfield.

Pittsfield Mayor Peter Marchetti and Stockbridge Select Board member and State Representative candidate Patrick White will join senior planners from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and other long-time housing advocates and LGBTQ+ community members to foster dialogue, collaboration and practical project development to meet the housing needs of LGBTQ+ community members.

In the first Housing Forum on Sunday, Feb. 25, a Senior Planner from Berkshire Regional Planning

Commission gave us an overview of some startling statistics about the housing crisis in the Berkshires:

Rents have been rising rapidly, especially during and after COVID, and are at historic highs in the Berkshires. Rental unit inventory has fallen dramatically since COVID and is at historic lows, meaning there is a lot of competition for very few rental units. Inventory for single family homes for sale has dropped dramatically since and beyond COVID and prices have skyrocketed.

Inventory for condos for sale has also dropped since COVID and remains at historic lows, and compared to other markets in Massachusetts the Berkshires have almost no condos to serve as starter homes or for seniors to move to when they can no longer afford to care for large houses. The prices of the few con-

dos there are at historic highs.

The demographics of the Berkshires is changing rapidly, in that the population of people over 60 is growing fast, while the numbers of younger generations are dropping rapidly. 18-29 year olds are leaving, 30-39 year olds are leaving, 40-49 year olds are leaving. Because of lack of high-paying jobs, skyrocketing housing prices and lack of housing inventory, the younger generations of queer people are being forced to flee the region, as are seniors on fixed incomes.

Each monthly forum will serve as a platform for LGBTQ+ individuals to share their housing challenges, needs, and visions. At the forums, participants will be invited to join a Working Group, which will collaborate between forums to develop practical projects aligned with their identified objectives, such as cre-

ating new housing resources, advocating for queer-friendly housing or policies, and even planning and building queer-friendly housing options, or facilitating older queer people who need help staying in their homes to connect with younger queer people who need affordable housing in exchange for helping with cooking, cleaning, running errands, landscaping, etc.

Q-MoB is a non-profit organization that empowers queer men in the greater Berkshire region to create, find, and participate in activity/support groups, classes and resources that foster community, wellness, and fun.

Note: The use of the term “queer” in this release is intended as an inclusive and affirming identifier for individuals who identify within the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

BEAT discuss spotted lantern fly

PITTSFIELD – Elizabeth Barnes, the Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, will present at the April Berkshire Green Drinks on Wednesday, April 10.

This free hybrid event will take place online via Zoom and in person at Hot Plate Brewing Co., 1 School St. in Pittsfield. The in-person social gathering will begin around 5:15 p.m.; the presentation and Zoom meeting will start at 6 p.m.

Invasive insects can have devastating impacts on the ecosystem, economy, and quality of life. Berkshire Environmental Action Team for their monthly speaker series features guest speaker Elizabeth Barnes will answer these questions by focusing on the spotted lantern fly, an invasive insect that eats grapes, roses, black walnut, and over 100 other plants and is now found in Massachusetts. They

learn about the problems it's causing, what conservation and natural resources agencies are doing to deal with it, what individuals can do, and, importantly, some rays of hope for mitigating its impact.

People should RSVP by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/April2024-Berks-Green-Drinks>.

Elizabeth Barnes is the Forest Pest Outreach Coordinator with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and previously worked as the Exotic Forest Pest Educator at Purdue University. She studied biology as an undergraduate at Mount Holyoke College and received her Doctorate in plant-insect interactions from the University of Denver, where she studied tent caterpillars and fall webworms. In her spare time, she is an avid caterpillar watcher and is always happy

to answer questions about all things insect-related.

Berkshire Green Drinks (formerly Pittsfield Green Drinks) is an informal gathering on the second Wednesday of the month that is free and open to everyone with any environmental interest. A guest speaker talks about an environmentally related topic for approximately 30 minutes beginning at 6 p.m.; the presentation is followed by a discussion and question and answer. The drinks aren't green but the conversations are. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to join and bring along questions

Berkshire Green Drinks is sponsored and organized by the Berkshire Environmental Action Team. For more information regarding Berkshire Green Drinks, people may call Chelsey Simmons at 413-464-9402 or email chelsey@thebeatnews.org.

Sen. Mark lists upcoming staff hours

PITTSFIELD – State Senator Paul W. Mark announces his staff will host office hours at locations in Berkshire County in March.

Residents of any of the 57 municipalities in the Senator's Berkshire, Hampden, Franklin and Hampshire District are encouraged to share ideas on current or potential state legislation or to ask for assistance with issues involving any state agency. Appointments are not required.

Staff office hours are Wednesday, March 27 and Thursday, March 28 from 9 a.m.-noon at the District Office, 773 Tyler St., Pittsfield.

NORTHAMPTON

Forbes Library lists programs

NORTHAMPTON – Forbes Library, 20 West St., will host local author Sarah Mahler Kraaz, who wrote “Music and War in the United States” on Saturday, March 23 from 1-2 p.m.

A question and answer will follow her presentation. Music has been used to recruit, train and direct soldiers in battle, to celebrate heroes and unify nations, and to support or protest wars.

The Silent Book Club will meet on Tuesday, March 26 from 6:30-8 p.m. in the Reading Room. People may bring a book or borrow one from the library's collection. The participants quietly read for an hour followed by sharing and socializing.

On Wednesday, March 27 from 6:30-8 p.m. the program is Reclaiming Folk: Celebrating the Voices of People of Color in Folk Music.

This program includes a performance by Massachusetts-based folk artists of color singing songs in a round. Each will play original songs and one traditional folk song by a musician of color. Following the performance will be a talk back and discussion where the musicians will talk about their songs and their experience as folk musicians, followed by question and answer.

Library Board of Trustees seeks candidates

NORTHAMPTON – Forbes Library, Northampton's public library, seeks applications for the position of Trustee of Forbes Library to fill two vacancies.

These vacancies were created when a change in the board's bylaws was made to increase the number of seats from five to seven. The board sought this change to allow for broader representation from the community as well as to share the increased demands on library trustees and distribute the workload of the board.

Candidates need to be a registered Northampton voter and should submit a statement explaining why they wish to serve as a trustee to the library director by Monday April 1. Statements should be up to 500 words and submitted by email to director@forbeslibrary.org.

Accessibility accommodations are available upon request. Eligible candidates will be invited to an open public meeting on Wednesday, April 10 at 5:30 p.m. where they will be asked a series of questions. The board will vote at the conclusion of that meeting. The two new trustees will then be appointed to serve

through the end of 2025.

The Board of Trustees is the governing body for Forbes Library. The Trustees are responsible for the hiring and evaluation of the director and the oversight of the library budget and policies. As an example, a few years ago Forbes Library eliminated fines after the Trustees voted on and approved this new policy.

Trustees also fundraise and advocate for the library. These important roles are filled by seven people, who are elected by the residents of Northampton in the general election unless there are vacancies more than 4 months before the next general election. The next election for trustees will take place in November 2025 for a four year term starting in January 2026. The term of office is four years and these volunteer positions are open to any registered voter in Northampton.

The trustees attend 11 monthly meetings a year and are asked to do committee work. “Every member of the board brings a unique perspective and

skill set. Ideally, the board is a reflection of the community. In this way diverse backgrounds and lived experiences are one of the most important things a candidate can bring to the table along with a strong interest in libraries,” said Lisa Downing, Library Director. The library has often benefited from trustees who bring their professional and personal expertise to the Board. Past examples of this include those with non-profit experience including fundraising, grant writing and marketing, as well as lawyers and those who have facilities and human resources backgrounds.

Anyone interested in learning more about serving as a member of the Forbes Library Board of Trustees is encouraged to email Library Director Lisa Downing at director@forbeslibrary.org, call 413-587-1016 or any of the current Board of Trustees of the library. Individuals from historically underrepresented communities are strongly encouraged to apply. More information is available on the library's website by visiting <http://www.forbeslibrary.org/trustees>.

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MIDDLEFIELD

COA announces lunch menu

MIDDLEFIELD – The Middlefield Council on Aging will serve lunch in the Senior Center, 169 Skyline Trail, on Wednesday, March 27 at noon.

The menu is eat in or take out. The choice is spinach and onion quiche or breaded fish on hamburger bun, tartar sauce, carrots, Brussel sprouts and pineapple. People should call 413-623-9990 to reserve a meal the previous Monday, March 25. Suggested donation is \$3. Lunch and learn program is by Highland Valley nutritionist.

Rabies Clinic to be held March 30

MIDDLEFIELD – All Hilltown dogs and cats are welcome to the Middlefield/Chester Rabies Clinic on Saturday, March 30 from 1-3 p.m. at the Middlefield Town Hall, 188 Skyline Trail.

Dr Sharon Lynch of Hilltowns Vet will be the veterinarian. People should bring their current rabies certificate if possible. Shots will be \$20 per pet. All pets must be leashed or in a carrier.

Middlefield dog licenses will also be available. Any questions, people may call Middlefield/Chester Animal Control at 413-354-0975.

WILLIAMSBURG

Library lists poetry month events

WILLIAMSBURG – The Meekins Library, 2 Williams St., celebrates National Poetry Month in April with two events.

On Saturday, April 13 at 2 p.m. “Sun on the Muddy,” a collaboration by Jim Armenti with poetry and songs and Dave Madeloni with photography will take place. Armenti is a renowned singer/songwriter, multi-instrumentalist and teacher. Madeloni is a photographer, educator and journalist.

On Wednesday, April 24 at 6:30 p.m. in the Hawk-Hayden Community Room at the Meekins Library the program features Maureen Hogan O’Brien, Williamsburg poet. She will be reading from her recently published book of poems, “Light on the Water.”

Corrections policy

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

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

STOCKBRIDGE

Berkshire Art Center’s host benefit and dance party

STOCKBRIDGE – Berkshire Art Center’s annual benefit and dance party is back and happening on Saturday, April 6 at 5:30 p.m. at The Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield.

This year’s theme is Rococo Raku Revelry. The grand setting of the Colonial Theatre will be host to an evening filled with one-of-a-kind sights and sounds, including special performances with local drag queen, Bella Santarella, and DJ BFG spinning vinyl on the big stage.

“Local artists have been busy at work crafting the elaborate decoration pieces for this immersive event,” said Executive Director, Lucie Castaldo. “And our silent auction of ceramic works from artists across the region is one not to miss.”

This spectacular event sponsored by Berkshire Bank will begin at 5:30 p.m. for guests attending “L’Apéro – Ooh La La,” a cocktail party with first access to the Silent Auction, featuring ceramics from artists across the county and more. These guests can enjoy drinks at an open bar and snack on delicious bites while bumping elbows with talented artists from the Berkshire region before making their way inside the theater to dance the night away.

Tickets can also be purchased by guests to reserve a “Bento Box” or a private opera box in the theater, complete with a bottle of bubbly from Spirited Wines and sweet treats from The Cake Lady. This ticket level includes “L’Apéro – Ooh La La” and the dance party.

The dance party kicks off in the theater at 7 p.m. for all guests, including General Admission ticket-holders, with music by DJ BFG and projections by local artist, Joe Wheaton, lighting up the stage. Partygoers are already devising their costumes as they creatively combine ornate French Baroque with Japanese minimalism. Just like in Berkshire Art Center’s art programs – there is no right or wrong way to express your creative self here! Come in your finest wigs and lapels, your Louis-heels and Pagoda sleeves, or wear it all.

Tickets are now available for purchase through the Berkshire Theatre Group. General admission is \$32 for dance party 7-11 p.m.

“L’Apéro - Ooh La La” is \$125 from 5:30-7 p.m. Guests will have first access to the Silent Auction, which features ceramics from artists across the county and more. Includes General Admission.

The Bento Box is \$500 and includes one’s own private opera box in the theater, complete with a bottle of bubbly and sweet treats. It includes “L’Apéro – Ooh La La” and Dance Party.

To book these special tickets, people should call Berkshire Theatre Group directly at 413-448-8084, extension 21.

For more information, costume inspiration, and to purchase tickets, people may visit www.berkshireartcenter.org/benefit and follow @berkshireartcenter on Instagram and Facebook for updates, sneak peeks and more.

Berkshire Art Center, a non-profit community art center, is the leading provider of high quality, hands-on instruction in the visual arts year-round at sites throughout Berkshire County. Founded in 1991, BAC has evolved to reach over 2,000 students each year through studio-based classes, artistic events, and out-of-school engagement programs for all ages, means, and skill levels.

For more information on Berkshire Art Center, people may visit berkshireartcenter.org, call 413-298-5252, extension 100 or email info@berkshireartcenter.org.

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HILLTOWNS



Jerry Mollison of Windy Hill Farm cooks up some pancakes on the grill.



Karen and Brian Rowe High Hope Farm.

Pancakes topped with syrup draw Hilltown crowds

By Kathryn Koegel
Correspondent

Drive along any winding road in the Hilltowns in March and you will likely notice plastic tubing connecting stands of maples and giant collection bins for sap at the lowest point in the vista.

In addition to the equipment of modern maple syrup production, motorists will also encounter cheerful signs announcing seasonal sugar shack breakfasts. In a region with so few cafes and diners to get food before noon, these wood-stove warmed rustic shacks are a welcome diversion from winters that cling just a bit too long.

I set out this past weekend to talk to three families with sugaring in the blood. Yes, pancakes with syrup hot-off-the-boil were enthusiastically consumed.

High Hopes Farm

This winter may have been virtually snowless, but that does not prevent the sap from rising. As South Worthington sugar maker Brian Rowe of High Hopes Farm says, it's not the snow but the differential between day and night temperatures: "It's been 20 at night and 50 in the day so the sap has been running like mad."

For 33 years, he and his wife Brenda have been welcoming visitors into their sugar shack to enjoy pancakes, eggs, sausages and bacon with a chaser of maple cream and cotton candy. He and the two other sugar shacks we visited, were experiencing strong crowds of breakfast seekers in the short spring season.

A changing climate has absolutely affected their business, says Rowe: "We began sugaring in January while we usually start at the end of February." It's the earliest he's seen in his 40 years of owning High Hopes Farm. He sugars 180 acres and it's a collaborative effort: "Some of our neighbors barter for the syrup," he says.

Rowe uses vintage equipment and wood to reduce the sap in the 40 to 1 process that results in maple syrup. As patrons enter into the sugar shack to get in line for breakfast, they are overwhelmed with steam rising off the syrup pans and the sweet, somewhat smoky smell of maple syrup.

This year the Rowes expect to produce 350 to 400 gallons of it. The breakfasts are an important part of the farm's revenue. He sees a future in agricultural tourism such as the sugar shack experience, which Mass Agriculture has been very supportive of.

They plan to host a fall maple breakfast buffet as well and are starting haunted Halloween events. Maple sugaring as he describes it is a labor-intensive task. The tubes that carry the sap were a major step forward in the 1980s over collecting those picturesque buckets, but it turns out that red squirrels are drawn to them and he spends time throughout winter and



Old-fashioned buckets hang on this maple tree at Maple Corner Farm.

Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel



Brian Rowe of High Hope Farm is seen at his vintage evaporator heated by wood.

sugaring season repairing lines.

Rowe says that like wine, maple syrup is distinct to the farm and the region. "It picks up the minerals in the ground and ours has a somewhat smoky taste from the wood we burn to boil the syrup."

Why should you buy directly from a local sugar maker when it is \$60 a gallon in the Hilltowns this year? The sap you see at large outlets like BJ's and Costco is likely produced in Canada, which has a huge stand of maples. Maple producers there must by law designate 40% of their product to a government run cooperative, which warehouses it enabling them to sell it cheaper than locally produced syrup.

Windy Hill Farm

Just up Rte 112 and down a side

road you come to Windy Hill Farm, which on a brisk Saturday was as chilly as the name suggests. Jerry Mollison, the fourth generation owner, manned a griddle with perhaps the largest of the pancakes seen on the tour. He offered chocolate chips or blueberries on request in the dinner-plate sized flapjacks. He showed concern for the future of maple in a warming climate: "It was too warm, too early." Judging from the backup of eager syrup tasters lined up in the cold, pancakes overcame any long range fears.

Maple Corner Farm

In the southern Hilltown of Granville, the talented Ripley family – headed by Joyce and Leon – are running a state-of-the-art maple operation that has been in the family since 1812. The

Country Journal profiled them in the March 7 issue. Until 1959 they were still making the syrup in the woods in small shacks with wood fired evaporators. In 2016, the family invested in a modern sugaring operation that uses reverse osmosis to lower the water content in the sap from two to 14%, which makes it quicker to turn into maple syrup. Their sugar shack has an interesting display of the history of sugar-making including antique kettles, taps and an assortment of the containers with the family name on them from long ago.

For them, it's a year-round family affair with son David running the kitchen for the breakfasts and selling at farmer's markets all summer and fall throughout the region. In the summers, they also make hay and sell blueberries.

All farmers visited expressed concern about maple syrup production in a changing climate. "A hundred years out, sugaring will absolutely move north," says Brian Rowe of High Hopes. For now, farmers are focused on making the most of the ephemeral spring sugaring season. When does the season end? "Look at the swamp maples that are now starting to turn red," says Rowe. "As soon as the first red buds appear, the sap turns bitter, leaves then appear and we're done for the season."

While there is no specific date for the end of Hilltowns' sugaring season 2024, breakfasts will be served at Maple Corner, Windy Hill and High Hopes Farms each weekend until Sunday, April 7. Check for Easter closings. They open at 8 a.m. and diners should show up early to avoid the lines.

CUMMINGTON

Friday Night Cafe musical showcase features Josh Wachtel

CUMMINGTON – The Cafe is back on Friday, March 22 from 7-9 p.m. with Josh Wachtel and some of his musical friends at the Village Church in downtown Cummington in the heart of the Cummington Cultural District.

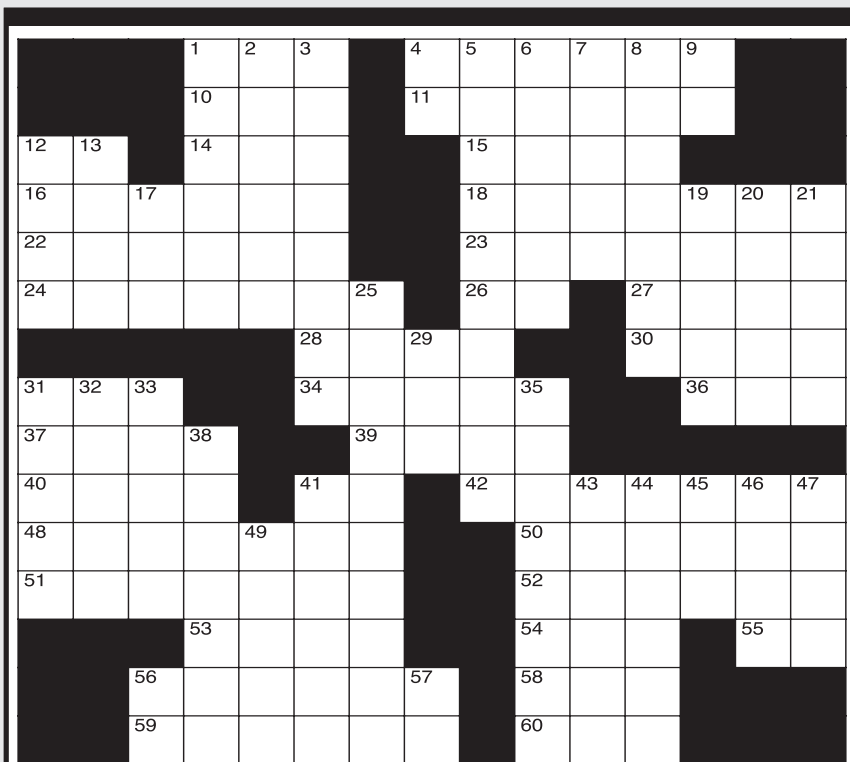
Josh Wachtel, a longtime friend of the cafe, brings his eclectic music,

full of humor, perspective and insight. Joined by Dave Christopolis and surprise guests, this show will focus on original songs that tell a tale of who we are and where we're going. The event is free; donations are appreciated. Snacks are provided, bring your own drinks.

The show will take place in the intimate Vestry space. Masks are welcome, and encouraged. Once again, the cafe is sponsored by the friendly folks at the Village Church, who believe music can be a powerful force for building community.

Friday Night Cafe receives promo-

tional support from the Cummington Cultural District and is supported in part by grants from the 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.



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Small Eurasian deer
- 4. Irish county
- 10. A major division of geological time
- 11. Broadway actor Lane
- 12. Canadian province (abbr.)
- 14. Human gene
- 15. Two
- 16. A famous one is blue
- 18. Utter repeatedly
- 22. Ring-shaped objects
- 23. Spoils
- 24. Occurs
- 26. Commercial
- 27. Near
- 28. Products you may need
- 30. Pledge thrown down as a challenge

- 31. TV network
- 34. Silk or cotton garments
- 36. Soviet Socialist Republics
- 37. Retired American football coach
- 39. Hot dish
- 40. A type of gin
- 41. Atomic #84
- 42. Sawhorse
- 48. About ground
- 50. Medicine man
- 51. Seedless raisin
- 52. Capital of Albania
- 53. Appendage
- 54. OJ trial judge
- 55. By the way (abbr.)
- 56. Bicycle parts
- 58. Barbie's friend
- 59. Moved one's neck to see
- 60. Commercials

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Make up for
- 2. Baltimore ballplayer
- 3. Salary
- 4. Influential world body
- 5. Engravers
- 6. Declared as fact
- 7. One who steals
- 8. Jewelry
- 9. Hospital employee (abbr.)
- 12. Nonsense (slang)
- 13. Town in Galilee
- 17. Value
- 19. A fake name
- 20. Sheep in their second year
- 21. Town in Surrey, England
- 25. Appropriate for a particular time of year

- 29. Creative works
- 31. Recesses
- 32. W. Pacific island group
- 33. Tolkien character
- 35. Ancient symbol co-opted by the Nazi party
- 38. Pioneer
- 41. Scribe
- 43. Painted a bright color
- 44. Lowest members of British nobility
- 45. Actress Thurman
- 46. Type of sugar
- 47. Crest of a hill
- 49. N. American people of British Columbia
- 56. Device
- 57. The Mount Rushmore State

THIS WEEK'S HOROSCOPES

ARIES

Mar 21/Apr 20
Aries, this week you need to get back to business, especially if hobbies or other interests have been taking up much of your time lately. Avoid distractions at all costs.

CANCER

Jun 22/Jul 22
Cancer, if you check the calendar lately you are bound to find a number of dates are filled. You may want to consider slowing down; otherwise, you may prematurely burnout.

LIBRA

Sept 23/Oct 23
Over the next few days you may receive some offers from employers or entrepreneurs that seem very appealing. Before you jump into something new, do your homework.

CAPRICORN

Dec 22/Jan 20
Take ownership of any actions that may have put you into a strained relationship with those close to you. Admitting mistakes is the first step in mending fences.

TAURUS

Apr 21/May 21
You may be excited about new prospects that are on the horizon, Taurus. With so much change coming, it can be exciting to see what lies in wait.

LEO

Jul 23/Aug 23
Leo, if expenses and finances have been troubling you of late, you can breathe a sigh of relief when things lighten up this week. Right now you are in a good spot financially.

SCORPIO

Oct 24/Nov 22
It will become obvious how others rely on you for advice and to get jobs done correctly. All of that responsibility can put extra pressure on you, so take it all in stride.

AQUARIUS

Jan 21/Feb 18
Aquarius, you may only now be getting to those resolutions you made a few months ago, but better late than never. Focus on projects around the home that will revitalize your spaces.

GEMINI

May 22/June 21
Gemini, you may discover that you are devoting a lot of attention to others of late, sometimes cutting into your own needs. Be attentive and caring, but pay attention to your own needs as well.

VIRGO

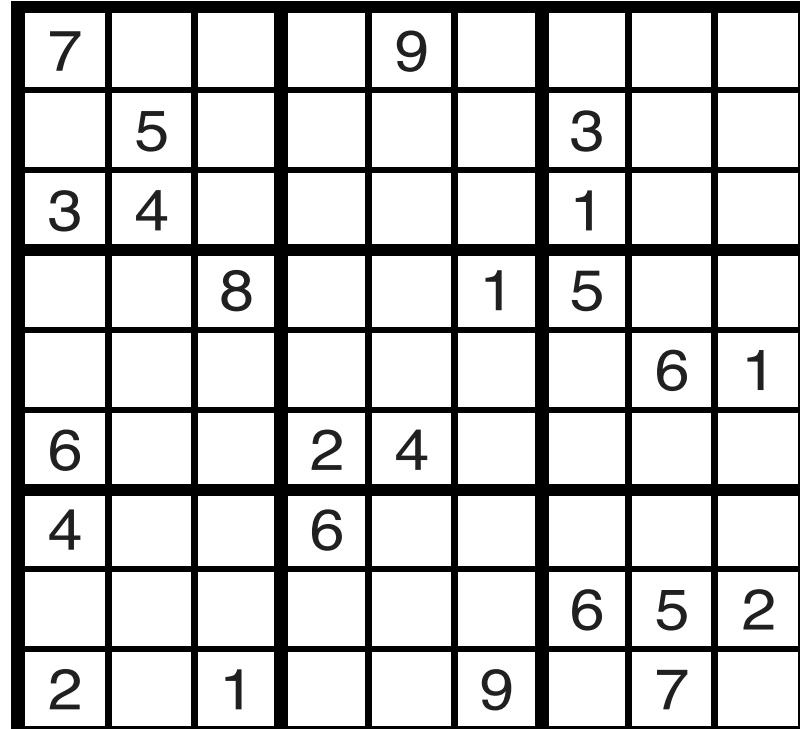
Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, you will need to uphold your end of the bargain for the time being as others are counting on you delivering. You cannot dodge any responsibilities right now.

SAGITTARIUS

Nov 23/Dec 21
This week you may discover that people are flocking to you left and right, Sagittarius. You will not have trouble making new friends if you so desire.

PISCES

Feb 19/Mar 20
Physical activity can do wonders for you, Pisces. If you are feeling stressed, overwhelmed or even tired, take a walk or hit the gym for some exercise that can alleviate many symptoms.



SUDOKU

Here's How It Works:

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

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

answers

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OBITUARY

Michael John Stewart, 72

HUNTINGTON – Michael John Stewart, 72, passed away peacefully on March 17, 2024 at home surrounded by family. He was born June 28, 1951 in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin to the late McLeod and Bess Stewart. He attended local schools and went on to higher education at the University of Wisconsin. He graduated in three years with a degree in education.

Mike's long teaching career started in Wisconsin. He then spent seven years in Florida, before settling at Gateway Regional School District in Huntington, where he retired after a 30 year career. Along with his passion for teaching, Mike enjoyed camping, fishing, golf, birdwatching and traveling, but his deepest passion was spending time with his grandchildren. One of Mike's fondest memories was a family camping trip to the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone National Park. For the past 30 years, Mike and Deb resided in Huntington raising their family. He will always be remembered for his good natured, kind-hearted soul who was loved by all who knew him.

He is survived by his wife Deborah Stewart of Huntington and his children Kelly and her husband Brian Binnall of Southampton, Erin and her husband Troy Beaulac of Westfield, Thomas McQuade and his wife of Andover, McLeod Stewart of Oregon and



Paul Stewart of Ohio. Additionally, Mike is survived by his sister, Jeanine and Brian Schlarb of Wisconsin, his sister, Kim and her husband John Kempt of Wisconsin, as well as numerous nieces and nephews. Mike is also survived by his five grandsons Jack, Brady, Patrick, Alan and Grayson. They were his pride and joy, and he loved being a Papa above all else.

The family would like to give special thanks to Dr. Philip Saylor and Erika Meneely NP, of Mass General Hospital for their compassion and outstanding care throughout Mike's long cancer journey. Mike was thankful for the love, support and camaraderie he received from the men's support group at Cancer Connections in Northampton. The family would also like to extend their gratitude to all the friends and neighbors, who have lended a helping hand this past year.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Academy Hill School, 1190 Liberty St. Springfield, MA 01104 or Cancer Connection, 41 Locust St., Northampton, MA 01060.

Calling hours will be held Saturday, March 23 from noon-3 p.m. with a Memorial Service at 2:30 p.m. at Firtion-Adams Funeral Home, 76 Broad St., Westfield, MA. www.firtionadams.com.

DEATH NOTICE

STEWART, MICHAEL JOHN

Died March 17, 2024
Calling hours March 23 noon-3 p.m.
Memorial Service 2:30 p.m.
Firtion-Adams Funeral Home, Westfield

Country Journal OBITUARY POLICY

Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries.

One is a free, brief **Death Notice** listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place.

The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$225, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com.

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

WESTHAMPTON

Westhampton Public Library announces April program

WESTHAMPTON – The Westhampton Public Library, 1 North Road, list events for the month of April.

The library will be closed Monday, April 15 Patriot's Day. Library hours are Monday and Thursday from 2-8 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday from 9 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. The library is open for in-person browsing and materials pick-up as well as curbside pickup. To place a request for curbside pickup, people should email westhampton@cwmar.org or call 413-527-5386.

Recurring programs are: COA Computer Class with Bob Miller, the second and fourth Mondays from 10 a.m.-noon, knitting group Mondays at 6 p.m. except April 15 holiday, Scrabble group Tuesdays at 2 p.m., CFCE Playgroup Tuesdays at 3:30 p.m., book group fourth Tuesday, Book Group fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m., Walk-in Wellness Clinics w/ Westhampton's Public Health Nurse first and third Wednesdays from 10-11:30 a.m. and Coffee and Chat Wednesdays from 10 a.m.-noon.

On Tuesday, April 2 at 3:30 p.m. the library will host Wildlife on Wheels for children and teens. It is presented by the Zoo in Forest Park and Education Center. Pre-registration is required to help by emailing Jessica at jloud@collaborative.org to register.

Wildlife on Wheels is an educational outreach program that brings animal ambassadors to young children and their families to support Science Technology



Engineering Arts and Math learning and promote environmental awareness. Children and youths will learn about the animals, including their special adaptations, habitats, diets and status in the wild.

There will be reptiles, including snakes. None of the animals are dangerous and all interactions will be supervised. This program is free and open to all young children and their families.

On Saturday, April 6 at 10:30 a.m. the HRSD Playgroup Family Yoga Class is held

This is family-friendly yoga with instructor Lorrie. To register, people should email Jessica at jloud@collaborative.org.

On Saturday, April 13 at 11 a.m. there will be music with Caylin. Caylin loves to perform children's music the

whole family will enjoy. With a mixture of well known children's songs and originals, she understands the importance of music and movement in early childhood. She is well versed in Guitar, Ukulele and Banjo-Guitar. Music and movement help promote language, gross and fine motor skills and fun Caylin brings scarves and shakers for lots of audience participation. Special thanks to Hampshire Regional District Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant for sponsoring this event.

Playgroup meets Tuesdays at 3:30 p.m. and story time on Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. After School Fun is held Thursdays at 3:30 p.m., LEGO Club is the first Thursday; Craft Club second Thursday; Nintendo Switch Happy Hour third Thursday and Comics Club Fourth Thursday.

Teen Craft Night will be held the third Thursdays, April 18 at 6 p.m. This month's craft is a dream catcher. Materials are limited to eight participants and registration is required. Teens must register by emailing Emily at ewayne@cwmar.org

Pierre Archambault "Moments in Time" will be on exhibit through the end of April. Archambault is a visual artist, a musician and a sound-designer for film. Mediums of choice for painting are oils and gouache paint. Musical instruments of choice are violin and guitar. Pierre also teaches courses in the field of sound arts and is an Associate Professor at Emerson College, Boston.

His undergraduate degree in fine arts is from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Tufts University. His Master in Fine Arts is from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Slow Yoga with Teri Anderson will take place on Mondays, April 1, 8 22 and 29 at 6 p.m. Registration for April classes opens on Saturday, March 30 at 10 a.m. Due to space limitations, registration is required. People may call the library at 413-527-5386 or email westhampton@cwmar.org. Special thanks to the Friends of Westhampton Library and the Lyn Keating Program Fund.

Classes will be led by Westhampton resident, Teri Anderson. Teri is a certified interdisciplinary yoga instructor and Body-Mind Centering® somatic movement educator. She has been teaching yoga and movement for 20+ years.

Digital Equity Plan Steering Committee members needed

WESTHAMPTON – The town is looking for a few dedicated volunteers to participate in a Steering Committee in order to develop and complete a Digital Equity Plan for the Town of Westhampton.

In simplest terms, "Digital Equity" is the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of Town, the region, and the state.

Another term is "digital inclusion," which means the activities that are necessary to ensure that all individuals in the United States have access to and the use of, affordable information and

communication technologies, such as reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service; internet enabled devices that meet the needs of the user and applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration and includes: obtaining access to digital literacy training, the provision of quality technical support and obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity.

A Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan will help the town design intentional strategies and investments to reduce and eliminate historical, institutional and structural barriers to access

and technology use.

The plan should address the four components to Digital Inclusion: Affordable Broadband, Affordable Equipment, Digital Literacy/Computer Skills Training and Public Computer Access.

To create the plan, the town has partnered with VHB, through a grant received from Mass Broadband Institute. VHB will assist the Town in conducting outreach activities, collecting data and synthesizing the Town's first Digital Equity Plan.

The Westhampton Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion Plan will include what options are available for affordable

broadband, affordable equipment and where public computer access may be available in a community or region. The plan may present options for programs that provide devices to those most in need. The plan may also suggest a digital skills training plan for Business Growth and Support; Tourism; Aging in Place and Residential Resources.

Anyone interested in serving as a steering committee member and are willing to help VHB develop Westhampton's first Digital Equity Plan, should call Doug Finn by voice call at 413-203-3086, or by email at [administration@westhamptonma.org?subject=Digital Equity Plan Steering Committee](mailto:administration@westhamptonma.org?subject=Digital%20Equity%20Plan%20Steering%20Committee).

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HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

The Town of Brookfield is seeking an experienced full-time Highway Superintendent. Full job description at brookfieldma.us. Please submit resume and cover letter to selectmen@brookfieldma.us. Application review will begin after March 28th. Resumes accepted until position is filled. Brookfield is an equal opportunity employer.

SQUIER & CO. is looking to hire an oil truck driver. \$40,000-\$60,000 full time. Squire will provide CDL school for the right candidate! Email: squiereoil@verizon.net. Call **413-267-3184** or visit us at 5 Squier Ave., Monson, MA. Monday-Friday.

The Town of Huntington is seeking a part-time **HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT** for 16 hours per week. Applicants must be proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, and Outlook. Hours are flexible, but must be worked during the regular highway department hours of Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. to assist the Highway Superintendent. Application and complete job description are available online at www.huntingtonma.us or by emailing admin@huntingtonma.us. Position is open until filled. Town of Huntington is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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TOWN ADMINISTRATOR

The Town of Brookfield is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Town Administrator. Responsibilities include professional, administrative, supervisory, and technical work. See job description at brookfieldma.us. Salary commensurate with experience. Current appropriation \$89,989.00. Please submit a resume and cover letter to Selectmen@brookfieldma.us. Open until filled. Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer

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The Town of Wilbraham is looking to fill several vacancies. For application and more information please visit www.wilbraham-ma.gov. Open until filled. EOE

TOWN OF WORTHINGTON POSITION OPENING

The Town of Worthington is seeking to fill the position of Assistant Treasurer/Tax Collector: 7-10 Hours a week, the position consists of assisting in the collection and posting of real estate, personal property and motor vehicle excise taxes. Assist in mailings and general office duties. Special requirement: Must meet the requirements to be bonded. Proficient in communicating with the public, computer skills, record keeping, and clerical skills. Please send a cover letter and resume to **Town of Worthington, Tax Collector's Office, P.O. Box 213, Worthington, MA 01098** by April 11, 2024.
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PUBLIC NOTICES

Chester Planning Board Notice of Public Hearing

The Chester Planning Board will hold a public hearing on **Thursday, April 4, 2024 at 5:45 pm** at the Chester, MA Town Hall regarding a Special Permit Application for a glamping permit on a parcel less than ten acres, which will allow the Chester Foundation (Chester Railway Station) to continue to operate a rental in the historic caboose on their property located at 10 Prospect St., Chester, MA 01011
03/21, 03/28/2024

CHESTER CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, and the Town of Chester Wetlands Bylaw, the Chester Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on **Monday, April 1, 2024, at 5:30 PM** at the Chester Town Hall, 15 Middlefield Road, Chester, MA 01011 on the application of Chipper Dazelle c/o Town of Chester Highway Department, 2 Town Road, Chester MA 01011.
The applicant is request-

ing an Order of Conditions for work on all Town owned roads in Chester, MA (Road ROW). Work will include, but not be limited to: Maintenance and repair of existing roadways, vegetation removal, sediment removal and replacing/repairing/improving drainage structures.
03/21/2024

MIDDLEFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, and the Town of Middlefield Wetlands Bylaw, the Middlefield Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on **Monday, April 1, 2024 at 7:30 PM** at the Town Hall, 188 Skyline Trail, Middlefield, MA 01243 on the application of Skip Savery c/o Town of Middlefield Highway Department, 4 Bell Road, Middlefield, MA 01243. The applicant is requesting an Order of Conditions for work on all Town owned roads in Middlefield, MA (Road ROW). Work will include, but not be limited to: Maintenance and repair of existing roadways, vegetation

removal, sediment removal and replacing/repairing/improving drainage structures. Project Location: All Town owned Roads Any interested persons wishing to be heard on the application should appear at the time and place designated. A copy of the application and plan may be inspected at the Middlefield Town Hall in the Conservation Commission Office, 188 Skyline Trail, Middlefield, MA 01243 or contact the office at middlefield.conservaion@gmail.com.

David Fuller Chair, Middlefield Conservation Commission
03/21/2024

LEGAL NOTICE TOWN OF CHESTER Conservation Commission Re: Stone Culvert Removal from Hiram Fox WMA (42.337604, -72.918312)

The Town of Chester Conservation Commission will hold a meeting on April 8, 2024 at 5pm at Chester Town Hall to act on a Notice of Intent for an Ecological Restoration Project for Trout Unlimited on the former Eastman Rd, Chester, for the purpose of a Restoration Order of Conditions. Copies of the Notice of Intent including design plans will be available at the Town Office

or via Erin Rodgers at Trout Unlimited (proponent) at erin.rodgers@tu.org.
03/21/2024

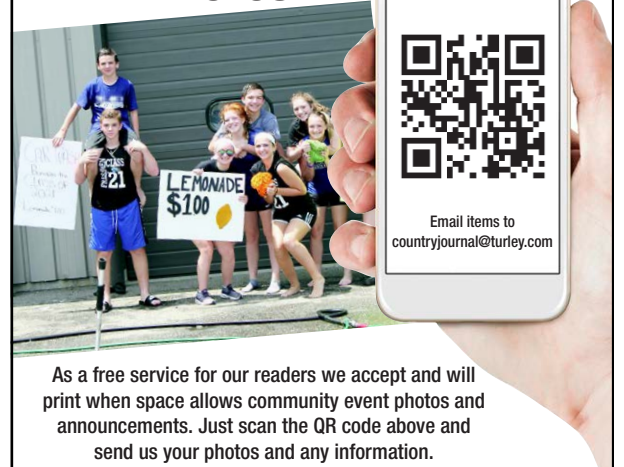
Notice of Hearing Town of Williamsburg

A public hearing will be held under Mass. Gen. Laws Chapter 138 on **Thursday, April 4, 2024, at 4:00 p.m.**, in Room 202 of the Town Offices, 141 Main Street, Haydenville, to act on the application of Tangle Chocolate, LLC, for an annual Wine & Malt Beverages Restaurant liquor license at 5 Main Street, Unit 1, Williamsburg.

By order of the Board of Selectmen.
William B. Sayre, Chair
03/21/2024

Please check the accuracy of your legal notice prior to submission (i.e., date, time, spelling). Also, be sure the requested publication date coincides with the purpose of the notice, or as the law demands. Thank you.

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- 3 Find a quick link to the state of Massachusetts' public notice web site to search all notices in Massachusetts newspapers.

Public notice deadlines are Mondays at noon, Fridays noon for Monday holidays.

visit www.publicnotices.turley.com

HILLTOWN HIKING ADVENTURES

Hilltown Hikers explore Canterbury Farm



Mark and Sarah head out on the Outer Limit Trail



On the Tyne Trail the Hilltown Hikers and their canine companions walk past old growth trees.

Becket Community Day was held at Canterbury Farm on Fred Snow Road on Saturday

so the Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers headed over to see Dave and Linda Bacon, who run this absolutely beautiful large property where they host cross country ski-

ing, snowshoe, ice skating and a bed and breakfast.

This is a place to put on the calendar for next winter. They rent the equipment also. There are miles and miles of well-marked trails through old growth hardwoods, hemlocks, cathedral pines, swamp land, water-

falls and more.

On a clear day, hikers and skiers can see Mount Greylock from the highest point. The Hilltown Hikers traveled the ski and the snowshoe trails for hours. For more information, people can visit <https://www.canterbury-farms.com/>.

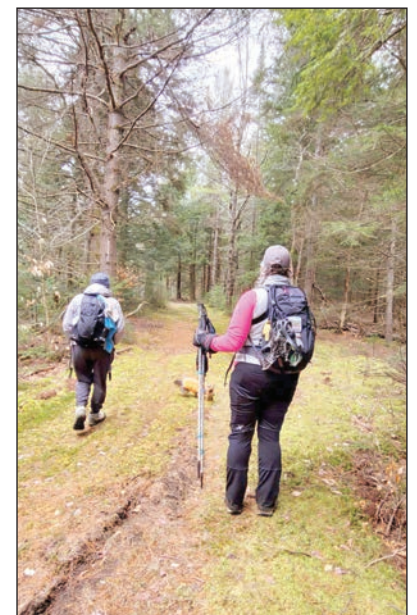


Hilltown Hikers walk past the lodge at Canterbury Farms in Becket.

Submitted photos



Melanie and Frankie the Frenchie enjoy the soothing sounds of the water on the Snowshoe Trail.



Stephanie and Melanie trek along a moss covered trail.

WESTFIELD

Westfield, Lee receive grant awards

BOSTON – The Healey-Driscoll Administration announced \$160,000 in grants have been awarded to four municipalities and four community groups as part of the Technical Assistance Grant Program.

The Technical Assistance Grant Program, administered by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, provides funding to enhance citizen participation in assessment and cleanup activities at waste disposal sites in local communities. Awards may be used to obtain expert assistance, increase public participation and provide public education regarding site cleanup.

“Waste site cleanup projects and environmental mitigation often come with complex plans that communities want to fully understand,” said MassDEP Commissioner Bonnie Heiple. “We’re pleased to make this resource available to inform and empower municipal officials and citizen groups to meaningfully participate in local assessment and cleanup efforts.”

Westfield Residents Advocating for Themselves, Inc. received \$20,000.

Westfield Residents Advocating for Themselves will use its award to engage technical expertise to review and interpret disposal site documents and information for the Barnes Air National Guard Base to increase public awareness by providing valuable insights into the extent and nature of residents’ health concerns and issues. Contaminants of concern include per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances affecting soil, surface water and groundwater and impacting municipal and private drinking water supplies.

Lee will use its \$20,000 award to engage technical expertise to review and interpret information about the Upland Disposal Facility, an area permitted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for storage of contaminated sediments from the Housatonic River Superfund Site, to provide technical assistance to local officials and outreach to citizens. Contaminants of concern include polychlorinated biphenyls, potentially affecting the aquifer.

For more information on the TAG Program, people may visit the MassDEP website.

Westfield Athenaeum hosts book sale starting April 8

WESTFIELD – The Friends of the Westfield Athenaeum seeks donations of gently used adult and children’s books and jigsaw puzzles for their upcoming book sale.

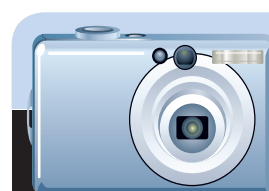
Donations will only be accepted by curbside drop-off at the First United Methodist Church, 16 Court St, during the week of April 8-13 as follows: Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday from 4-7 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m.-noon.

They will not accept musty or damaged books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, textbooks, Reader’s Digest books or outdated manuals, travel

books or self-help books.

The book sale will be held at the Church on Thursday, April 25 from 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday, April 26 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Saturday, April 27 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. On Thursday only, they are offering a \$5.00 discount coupon for educators with ID and new Friends members joining at the door.

People may visit website for full details at <https://www.friendsofwestfieldathenaeum.org/>. The Friends of the Westfield Athenaeum is an all-volunteer 501(C)3 not-for-profit organization that supports the programs and services of the Westfield Athenaeum.



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