

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

Ashfield, Becket, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Dalton, Easthampton, Florence, Goshen, Granville, Hawley, Haydenville, Hinsdale, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Peru, Plainfield, Russell, Southampton, Washington, Westfield, Westhampton, Windsor, Williamsburg, Worthington

A TURLEY PUBLICATION | www.turley.com

July 9, 2026 | Vol. 48, No. 11 | 75¢

www.countryjournal.turley.com

MERIDEN, CT

Hayden Labonte earns Eagle Scout rank

MERIDEN, CT – On June 13, 2026, at a special Court of Honor held at the Saint John Lutheran Church, Hayden Crawford Labonte was recognized for receiving his Eagle Scout rank the highest honor in Scouting America.

Hayden Lebonete is the son of Heather and

Dennis Labonte, former Scoutmaster. Maternal grandparents are Helen and Rev. Alden Barnes of Cromwell and paternal grandparents are Paul and Carol Labonte of Worthington, Massachusetts.

The ceremony started with Troop 43 of Meriden leading Hayden into the fellowship hall, followed by the

Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath and Scout Law.

Life Scout and good friend of Hayden’s, Lorcan Hayes was the master of ceremonies for the event. Meriden City Mayor, Kevin Scarpati, gave a speech on the importance and honor of attaining the Eagle Scout rank, and that only 4% of

all Scouts attain the highest rank.

Mayor Scarpati reinforced the importance of the Scouting America program, highlighting the leadership and community service roles that it instills in the young men and women of the program.

At his conclusion, Mayor Scarpati presented Hayden with a certificate of achievement from the City of Meriden.

Among the attendees were Hayden’s parents, Heather and former Scoutmaster Dennis Labonte; Hayden’s maternal grandparents, Helen and Rev. Alden Barnes of Cromwell and paternal grandparents, Carol and Paul Labonte of Worthington, Massachusetts.

Many current and past Troop 43 Scouts and families were also in attendance, along with numerous family and friends.

Hayden started his Scouting journey in first grade as a Cub Scout in Meriden, Connecticut. In 2019, he crossed over to Troop 43 Boy Scouts, now



Submitted photos

Eagle Scout Hayden Crawford Labonte is flanked by his father, Dennis Labonte and mother, Heather Labonte.

BLANDFORD

Bells Ring through the land



By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – As the nation celebrated the semiquincentennial of its origin, bells pealed for a full ten minutes in Blandford.

Bells rang out at the White Church, the

Historical Society and the First Congregational Church of Blandford Chapel on Saturday afternoon, July 4.

Historical Society President Chips Norcross, board members Melissa Hamm Stearns, Terri

BELLS, page 6



Photo courtesy of Mary Hull Blandford Historical Society

Historical Society President Chips Norcross pulls the rope to the clapper at the White Church.

BLANDFORD

Select Board hears department issues and questions

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – The Monday, June 29 Select Board meeting included multiple departments reporting in with any issues or concerns or questions.

Water Department

The Water Department, represented by Chair Brand Curry, Administrative Assistant Jasmine Ortega and Superintendent Steven Grondon voiced concern regarding compensation for damage done to the Kana

driveway on Chester Road.

Kana will have to provide an invoice, as according to Town Accountant Kelli Pontbriand, the town must pay the vendor for the service rendered.

The Water Department plans to provide a regular newsletter with information for the town and water users. There are currently 40 households late with payment, some houses may be vacant.

There are 25 to 30 water users whose accounts are a year in arrears.

Highway Superintendent

Highway Superintendent Ray Hultay spoke about the bridge work on Beech Hill Road. Select Board Chairman Jackie Coury said that the 100% reimbursement had not been discussed nor budgeted.

Council on Aging

Council on Aging Director Margit Mikuski informed everyone that the senior tax work off program is underway and lunches are well attended.

She will be attending a Farmers’ Market Coupon luncheon.

Highway Superintendent

Hultay will replace the existing chains on the swing set behind Town Hall with longer chains so youngsters can have easier access.

They are not able to get on the seats as the chains are too short making the swing seats too high for convenient access.

He said his seasonal employee, Robert Holmes, wants something in writing from the town regarding his time and wages.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Adam Dolby, attending virtually, referred

enced the acquisition of the department’s brush truck. Responding to a question regarding the \$20,000 for training, the board wants to see a written program proposal.

Dolby said, “We need the program.” A written description will be provided for the board. He said he does not require any administrative assistance, as he now has “a better system” in place for bills.

He told the board that the Fire Department was at the fairgrounds for the fireworks

from the time the fireworks arrived until well after the event ended and returned the next morning to make sure there were no smoldering embers.

Public comment

Public comment brought a question from George Reichert about maintenance around the Jethro Jones Historical Marker on Blair Road.

Executive session

There was a roll call vote by the board to go into executive session.

BOARD, page 6

HUNTINGTON

Huntington residents graduate Fire Academy

Jose Acevedo Rivera receives McNamara Award

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – Three Huntington residents are graduates of the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy’s call/volunteer recruit firefighting training program July 1.

Huntington graduates are Lia Oliveira, Brandon Noonan and Jose Acevedo-Rivera. Acevedo-Rivera of Huntington won the Martin H. McNamara Outstanding Student Award.

The award is named for Martin McNamara V, a firefighter with the Lancaster Fire Department. In 2003, McNamara died while fighting a fire in a multifamily house.

The award is given to

one recruit in each graduating class for their performance in academic and practical skills, testing and evaluations.

A statement from Fire Chief Joshua Ellinger on the Department’s Facebook page commended Acevedo-Rivera on this achievement. “Jose is the first member of the Huntington Fire Department to receive this distinguished honor, making it a historic achievement for both him and our department.”

“It was definitely a surprise. I am a firefighter of a certain age. I turned 53 during the academy and hadn’t been in a classroom setting for over 30 years,” Acevedo-Rivera said. “I was surprised and honored.”

Fire Chief Ellinger said

of the three Huntington graduates, “Their commitment to training and serving our community has brought them to this important milestone, and we couldn’t be prouder.”

The Huntington Fire Department is a paid, on-call department serving Huntington residents. It also provides mutual aid to Montgomery, Russell, Chester, Worthington, Blandford, Westhampton and beyond.

The Call/Volunteer training program took place at the Department of Fire Services’ Springfield campus. It provides 240 hours of training on evenings and weekends to address the needs of both suburban and rural firefighters.

Students begin with

classroom instruction in basic firefighting skills and then progress to using those skills in controlled fire situations. Proficiency must be demonstrated in search and rescue, ladder deployment, water supply, life safety, fire attack and pump operations, all under a variety of conditions.

According to the Academy, today’s firefighters are the first line of deployment in a variety of situations, ranging from stalled elevators and lost children to someone falling through the ice. They must also be prepared to deal with hazardous situations such as chemical spills, gas leaks or carbon monoxide events, as well as fighting fires in a variety of settings.



Submitted photo

Huntington’s newest fire academy graduates, from left, are Lia Oliveira, Brandon Noonan and Jose Acevedo-Rivera. Acevedo-Rivera was the first Huntington firefighter to win the prestigious Martin H. McNamara Outstanding Student Award for his performance in academic and practical skills, testing and evaluations at the Massachusetts Firefighting Academy.



Becket.....6	Hilltowns.....2, 3, 5	Schools & Youth.....9
Blandford.....6	Huntington.....12	Westhampton.....7
Chester.....7	Monterey.....8	West Stockbridge.....3
Classifieds.....11	Opinion.....4, 5	Williamsburg.....10
Great Barrington.....6	Otis.....9	Worthington.....6, 7, 9



8 0 4 8 7 9 1 3 1 7 8 6

HUNTINGTON

Summer reading kicks off

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – The staff at the Huntington Public Library, “Calls all brave explorers, book wizards, dragon tamers and quest seekers” as their Summer Reading opens.

This year builds upon the popularity of last year’s adventure-themed program. Summer 2026 features a “Dungeons and Dragons” themed journey.

This year’s handbook contains a broader map and instead of moving between mythical villages, readers move through the “guild halls” (libraries) of surrounding towns.

Sign-ups opened on Saturday, June 27 and the first one through the door was James Perras, aged 11 of Montgomery. His mother Brittany said he took part last year and loved it.

“I just personally liked the theme,” he said, of last year’s adventure focus. His only disappointment, he said, was missing the sessions on how to play Dungeons and Dragons.

This year, James hopes to attend the D&D workshops. Space is limited and

people must sign up by visiting the library website at huntingtonpubliclibrary.org.

Storyteller Kevin Weldell will lead four sessions on tabletop role playing games like D&D. Each takes place from 4:30-9 p.m. at the library and includes a pizza dinner; dates are July 1, July 15, July 29 and Aug. 12.

If people are away on one of those dates, they can still attend the others; while designed to be a continuous campaign, each event has the same starting point.

Twenty adventurers signed up on opening day, and the kickoff invited visitors to build an allergy-free snack and try to bait and trap one of the elusive stuffies that will be among the prizes for this year’s raffle on closing day.

Raffle tickets are awarded each time participants complete a quest at the Huntington Guild or a side quest at the Blandford, Chester, Montgomery, Russell, Easthampton, Westhampton and Worthington “Guilds.”

Those opportunities will be posted in the library each week. Participants log their events and books read in the quest log; they can also

earn a point if they complete a “scouting mission” while they’re away on vacation.

July’s Crafternoon on Thursday, July 9 will use dungeons & dragons dice to make key chains, necklaces or earrings. Other side quests at HPL include making fizzy glitter potions on July 16, fairy light jars on July 21, DIY slime on Aug. 3 and a fantasy map making session on Aug. 13.

Special in-town quests will be offered by other groups in Huntington, so keep apprised at the library and on its website.

Every reader who completes and turns in their logs by the closing party on Saturday, Aug. 22 will receive a complete set of Dungeons and Dragons Dice. Raffle tickets will be drawn that day for additional prizes, including two \$25 gift certificates to Barnes & Noble (those come with the hard cover or graphic novel book, Dungeon Crawler Carl) and a \$50 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble.

Four D&D stuffies will also be raffled: a giant space hamster, owl bear, griffon and displacer beast. Readers tried to catch a glimpse of those same shy critters by creating a snack mix to bait a trap on opening day.

Summer reading programs were designed to prevent the “summer slide.” Children who don’t read during the summer can lose up to two months of learning by the time they return to school in the fall.

Children who participate in summer reading programs and read a minimum of six books over the summer score higher in reading and math when they return to school. But the ultimate goal of this program is to have fun.

“There’s so much to see, so much to do at your library. There’s no better place to take your kids. The library is the place to learn, read, and have fun . . . a place the whole family can enjoy,” Loiselle wrote in the program guidebook, given to each adventurer who signs up for summer reading.



Turley Publications Photo by Wendy Long

Eleven year-old James Perras of Montgomery was the first to sign up for the Huntington Public Library’s summer reading adventure, which opened on June 27.

NIGHT SKY REVEALS ASTRONOMER’S DELIGHT



Turley Publications photo by Deborah Daniels

The night sky on Tuesday, June 16 was a stunning scene with one of the planets as close as it gets to Earth. The view was taken on Searle Road in Huntington.

Meredith Robinson performs July 16

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – Rock and Roll artist Meredith Robinson will take the stage on Thursday, July 16 from 6:30-8 p.m. on the town green as part of the town’s summer music series.

Robinson is described as a versatile vocalist and guitarist and hails from Chicopee. As a solo artist, she is a regular performer at Riverside Pub and at Se7ens Sports Bar and Grill.

She is also a lead singer in Crazy on You, a Heart tribute band that plays throughout New England, including at the Mohegan Sun’s Wolf Den and the North Country Center for the Arts Jean’s Playhouse in Lincoln, New Hampshire.

Concerts are held every Thursday on the town green, located at the corners of Routes 20 and 112.

The series is free of charge and runs through Thursday, Aug. 20. Different town groups will offer refreshments for sale at each event.

Music lovers are invited to bring their lawn chairs, but not their pets to enjoy these free performances.

Also in this summer’s lineup are Jon Berman (beach favorites and originals), Rock 201 (classic rock), Cover Daddys (mix of pop and classics), Moon Hollow (folk/bluegrass/Americana/early jazz) and The 413s.

This series is organized by the town’s Community Events Committee; follow them for updates on Facebook (the Huntington MA Summer Music Series/C.E. Committee page). The Huntington Local Cultural Council, a local agency, helps fund this popular event. The HLCC is funded by the Massachusetts

Cultural Council, a state agency.

In the event of inclement weather, the show moves indoors to Stanton Hall, which is wheelchair accessible.



Submitted photo

Meredith Robinson will perform on Thursday, July 16 at 6:30 p.m. in Huntington’s Summer Music Series on the town green.

Send Us Your Autumn Event Information

Turley Publications will print your Autumn event **FREE OF CHARGE** in our **Autumn Fest Supplement** which will be published **September 9, 2026.**

Total circulation of 85,000 reaching over 200,000 readers in the Pioneer Valley.

Deadline for Calendar submissions is August 19.

Community Autumn Events

Event Should Be Non-Profit & Open to the Public

FREE Calendar Listings Reaching over 200,000 Readers in the Pioneer Valley

Event Name _____

Date/Time _____

Location _____

Description _____

Cost _____

Contact name & phone number for more information _____

MAIL YOUR LISTING INFORMATION TO:
Turley Publications, Attn: Jamie Joslyn, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069
or email* them to: jamie@turley.com
***Be sure to indicate “Autumn Event” in the subject line of your email.**