

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

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CHESTERFIELD

Ashmere Project holds first season in new digs

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

CHESTERFIELD – The Ashmere Project completed its first season in its new grounds: the former Chesterfield Scout Camp it purchased on Oct. 3 for \$1.4 million.

Numerous projects were undertaken, with substantial help from volunteers and donations, throughout the spring of 2026 to bring the old buildings back to life and create wheelchair accessible facilities and trails on the grounds.

Camp opened on June 28 to about 30 friends with disabilities and 50-60 volunteers, who supported individuals, provided activities and served in key roles such as cooks and nurses.

The camp, which started 20 years ago on Martha's Vineyard, moved to Western Massachusetts several years ago. During the summers of

2022-2025, they rented out Berkshire Lakes Camp on Ashmere Lake in Hinsdale, while searching for a permanent home.

They are a mission-driven project that relies 100% on donations and fundraisers. No one is charged to take part in the camp program and the only paid staff member is Camp Ranger Jakob Paltches, who has overseen the extensive renovations completed to date.

Also unique to the Project is their mission of creating a "community of friends who celebrate diversity and foster inclusion, independence and equity." Language is key to living this mission; what most camps would label "staff" and "people with disabilities" is replaced by terms like "friends with disabilities," "volunteers" or simply, "a community of friends."

"We try to eliminate the hierarchy of language,"

Maggie Moyers, R. N. said. She also pointed out that some participants cross these labels, as there were a few caregivers, who have disabilities themselves.

Moyers, co-chair of the Project's Board of Directors, said that this year's program reached several milestones, most notably taking place in their new, permanent site.

Other highlights included winning first place for their float in the Chesterfield Parade, a town that she said has fully welcomed them. The heat wave that took place during camp was made much better by their beautiful pond.

With its original roots in eastern Massachusetts, the camp was pleased to open up a slot for a person, who lives in Western Massachusetts, although it sadly meant that one of their regular friends was ill.

Moyers also noted that



Kellen McDonald, Ben Wadleigh, Te Cole, Keenan Bartlett, Stella Guggenheim (the director), and Isabelle Barnett being interviewed by Susan Harrington on the red carpet before the Ashmere Project's documentary screening at the Academy of Music on July 10.

Submitted photo

ASHMERE, page 5

BLANDFORD

Homeowners discuss plumbing problems with house construction

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – Almost new resident but homeowner Megan Kaiser, in person, and her husband Ryan Chaffee, via zoom, brought a formal complaint to the Select Board at the Monday, July 20 meeting.

Plumbing work done at their home on Brookman Drive, which is under construction, was both done incorrectly and not completed.

After multiple attempts

to have Bill Clark Plumbing of Chester to finish the work, the family has engaged the services of Osdens Plumbing and Heating of Blandford at additional cost of \$6,755 on top of the \$9,500 already paid, to complete the plumbing work and "bring it up to code."

The town's Plumbing Inspector Aaron Poteat, according to Kaiser's prepared statement to the board, "approved rough plumbing work that, as we have now learned, remained incomplete and contained deficiencies."

As a result, the couple has asked for a "complete reinspection of the rough plumbing" to comply with the state plumbing code. They want the town to assign a different plumbing inspector to review the work and want to be on site at the time.

When asked for his perspective, Chaffee referenced PEX plumbing, polyethylene cross linked tubing, which is a new easier-to-use than copper piping plumbing system and it requires special and specific installation, which, according to Chaffee, was not

done appropriately nor completed.

"The pictures will speak for themselves," he said and added that Poteat told him he could do the vent through the roof himself. "I'm not going to do that...but I'm going to follow the rules and do this right."

Kaiser provided pictures as documented evidence of the non-completed work, including no roof venting, incorrect connections and more. "It's a mess," she said.

They would like to be in residence by November

in time to enjoy the holidays with their children.

Chair Jackie Coury said, "We will make this a priority," and she said that appreciated that she came to the board with the issues.

The board then approved the establishment of a Blandford Community Development Coordination Group to improve "communication, routing and coordination among the Town boards, departments, committees and officials involved in the review of special permit applications and related

development matters."

This group is "limited to administrative coordination" that includes confirming receipt of applications, identifying boards that should be involved, noting deadlines, next steps and coordinating the flow of information "so that each party can carry out its duties independently."

The group shall include representatives from those involved in the town's permitting and development review process. This group

HOMEOWNERS, page 2

CHESTER

Littleville Fair marks 104th anniversary

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

CHESTER – The 2026 Littleville Fair, 15 Kinnebrook Road, opens on Friday, Aug. 7 from 4-10 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 8 from 7 a.m.-10 p.m. and runs through Sunday, Aug. 9 from 7 a.m.-4 p.m.

All of the fair goes favorite events are returning including oxen draws, the demolition derby and live music throughout.

Admission is \$10 for adults with children 12 and under free. This long standing agricultural fair will have livestock, flowers, vegetable and art exhibits, competitions and prizes.

The fair book can be downloaded by visiting littlevillefair.com. The Littleville Fair is a cash only event and coolers, alcohol and dogs are not permitted except for medical service dogs.

Several new events are offered this year including the Arcadia Wildlife tent on Saturday and Janoah the Jester and a K9 demo on Sunday.

Friday will feature two classes of Oxen draws, a truck pull and Bingo in the Dining Hall. The top prize for the Bingo coverall will be a 43-inch smart TV.

Saturday is a long, full day with gates opening at 7 a.m. and breakfast available in the food booth. There will be four classes of oxen draws, a diesel truck pull, a dairy and beef cattle show, ox teamsters challenge and the popular Demolition Derby at 5 p.m. followed by the women's fry pan toss.

Sunday's schedule features another early start at 7 a.m. and breakfast. Events include antique tractor pulls, a sheep show, horse pulls, a beard competition, zucchini contest weigh in, wool spinning demo and Jack 'n Jill



Chicken barbecue will be served in the dining hall on Saturday, Aug. 8.

Submitted photo

cross cut saw competition. Events end at 4 p.m. with entrants picking up their items from the exhibit hall.

There are tons of activities for children. Bicycles will be raffled off on Friday

at 7 p.m., 1 and 5 p.m. on Saturday and noon and 2:30 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are free and children must be present to win.

LITTLEVILLE, page 7

BLANDFORD

Public comment garners heated discussion

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

BLANDFORD –The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in a March 2023 unanimous decision that government officials cannot silence members of the public based on the substance of their input during "public comment" periods of government meetings.

Specifically, the state's highest court ruled that "civility" codes that limit criticism of public officials are contrary to multiple provisions of the state constitution, which provide "robust protection of public criticism of government officials."

Pam Dirschka started off the Public Comment segment of the July 20 Select Board meeting with what she said was "a positive."

She complimented the board on the recent information session on all things energy related. However, she continued with the issue of not finding out in a timely manner that the town's November 2025 vote for a solar/energy moratorium was disapproved by the Attorney General's office.

Planning Board Chair Greg Garfield addressed the appointments made by the Select Board to the planning Board.

At the June 4, 2025 Planning Board meeting, "a mob came into the room and the chair of the Planning Board quit and another member quit. Who stood up? Edna (Willander) stayed because I stayed and Sara (Simpson) stayed because we stayed. We did not even have a quorum at that time.

PUBLIC, page 2



PAGE 8

Blandford.....	2, 3	Goshen	8	Monterey	6	Public Notices.....	9
Business Directory.....	3	Great Barrington	10	Montgomery	7	Puzzle Page.....	10
Chester.....	7	Hilltowns	6	Opinion	4, 5	Sandisfield.....	10
Chesterfield	5	Huntington.....	8	Pittsfield	5	Schools & Youth.....	9
Classifieds	11	Middlefield.....	6	Plainfield	10	Worthington.....	5





Department of Conservation and Recreations recently put on a new roof at the old bathhouse and latrine and cleared problem trees.

CCC built Boulder Park

In 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Emergency Conservation Work Act, popularly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps.

This federal New Deal program provided employment for young men and veterans during the Great Depression. The program's aim was to improve the nation's forests and recreational resources. From 1933-1942 the CCC in Massachusetts employed a total of 100,000 men in 68 camps.

The CCC program in Massachusetts had seven primary activities: camp construction, road building, silviculture, fire hazard reduction, pest control,

wildlife management and recreational development.

The program not only touched the lives of the enrollees, but also left a lasting legacy of forest improvements and recreational resources. More than 75 years later, many of the facilities built by the CCC throughout the state are still in use.

The origins of the Commonwealth's park system date to 1893 with the purchase of three public-funded properties in the metropolitan Boston area, and to 1898 when Mount Greylock became the state's first wilderness park.

As the forest and park system expanded, much of this land was undeveloped, inaccessible to a public

interested in outdoor recreation. Until 1933, only a few state properties offered picnic areas or campgrounds.

With the creation of the CCC, there would be coordinated development, through the Park Service and US Forest Service, of a nationwide state parks program, setting standards for park development, planning and advancing forestry work for future generations.

Special guest DCR Interpretive coordinator Alec Gillman gave us a history lesson on one of the hidden Hilltown history gems. One of the most lasting contributions of the CCC was the construction of park recreational facilities.

In June 1933, the 113th Company of the

CCC, began work in the Southern Hilltowns region of Massachusetts, resulting in a number of facilities in and around Chester, including Boulder Park.

The work of the CCC has left a lasting legacy of parks and other recreational resources for all to appreciate. The men who undertook these projects can be remembered with great pride.

Thank you to DCR for the new roof, clearing trees and cleaning up the pond area, wow. Support our state parks and learn more at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departement-of-conservation-recreation> let them know our Hilltown Parks are important and the history here is like no other.



Many information panels line the trail like this one in front of the pavilion.



DCR interpretive coordinator Alec Gillman shows the group the stone work the CCC built at Boulder Park.



Hikers make their way on the American Disabilities Act trail.
Submitted Photos



The Hilltown Hikers learned all the tasks the Civilian Conservation Corps workers had and the tools they used to build our state forests.



The Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers pose for a group shot at the entrance to Boulder State Park in Chester.