

Country Journal

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SCHOOLS & YOUTH

Roland Joyal fills in as Gateway's Interim Principal

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

On Oct. 15, Roland Joyal finished his third week as Interim Principal at Gateway Regional School, following the departure of Dr. William Sullivan in late September.

Joyal's educational career spans decades, starting as a science teacher at Putnam Vocational School and moving through various administrative roles including Vice Principal at Putnam, Principal at Chicopee High School for 18 years, Assistant Superintendent in Chicopee and Superintendent of the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative.

This marks his fifth administrative interim post since his retirement in 2023, having just come from serving as Acting Superintendent in Greenfield.

"Interim work is nice," Joyal said. "I find it interesting. Because I've had some nice experiences from different places, I think I've even been able to help in some situations."

Joyal grew up in Western Massachusetts and worked up and down the Pioneer Valley. Gateway is his first true regional district with an unusual span of grades – sixth through 12th.

He recently attended



Roland Joyal, Jr.

his first soccer game followed by the Open House on the next night. At both events, he said he was amazed to see the connections between people and to see a bunch of alumni stop to say hello to their former teachers.

In his opening meetings with the faculty and each class, he told everyone he was astounded by the theater. Students quickly set him straight, telling him that it is called the Gateway Performing Arts Center or GPAC.

A correction, he says, he won't forget.

Joyal is quick to point out that Gateway's enrollment decline is not unique; all regular district enrollments have declined.

The staff, he said, is working hard to continue to improve instruction and grow opportunities for students. By example, he described Athletic Director Matt Bonenfant's work underway to offer an intramural volleyball program next spring with an eye to possibly establishing an athletic team in the future.

Another seven students asked that Model United Nations be restored and a faculty member agreed to take up the advisor role, a request that Joyal will take up with Superintendent Melissa

PRINCIPAL, page 6

BLANDFORD

Library expansion holds groundbreaking ceremony



By Wendy Long
Correspondent

Porter Memorial Library held a groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion and renovation project to the building at 87 Main St. held on Saturday, Oct. 17 at 10 a.m.

The original building was constructed in 1892 and was first served by librarian Josephine Porter.

Led by a building committee chaired by Dr. David B. Hopson and architects Ron Paolillo and Ryan Koplin of DRA, the project will expand Porter Memorial Library from a one-room, 1,250 square foot building to a total of 5,926 square feet.

The cost is estimated to come in between \$7 and \$8 million. A Small Population Grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners



Mary Kronholm uses the golden shovel to lift the first bit of dirt at the ceremonial groundbreaking for the updated library.

Turley Publications photo by
Wendy Long

Library Trustees, from left, Byam Stevens and Amy Hagstrom, Massachusetts Senator Paul Mark, Trustees Chair Mary Kronholm, Library Director Nicole Daviau, and Massachusetts Representative Nicholas Boldyga attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the renovations and additions to Blandford's library.

Public Library Construction Program of \$5.4 million will cover about 75% of the cost.

A trust bequest, specifically earmarked for library expansion, from lifelong Blandford residents Sally and Sumner Robbins will add another \$1 million in support. The balance will be paid by the town, which received an

LIBRARY, page 7

BLANDFORD

Smelcer fills vacancy on school committee

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

The board signed the warrant for the 2026 State Election for Tuesday, Nov. 3. Polling hours are 7 a.m.-8 p.m. at the Town Hall.

The sale of surplus office filing cabinets, tables, etc. on Saturday, Oct. 10, netted \$29. Board member Corinne Shartrand found someone to remove the remaining items at no charge.

There are still cabinets on the stage belonging to Planning Board, Cemetery and Cultural Council.

Shartrand also said that there were extra office supplies, folders and the like.

The board then interviewed Cathleen Smelcer with current school committee member Katherine McDonough to fill the town's

second seat on the Gateway Regional School District School Committee.

Responding to Chair Jackie Coury's question about why she was interested, Smelcer said she had grandchildren go through the school but "currently none of them are in there for various reasons, but that's not to say they won't be back."

She has always had a "strong interest in education" and was very involved when her children were younger. The family lived in Westfield and she was a constant volunteer in the Westfield School System.

She added, "And selfishly, just to see where our tax dollars are going, and to learn



Cathleen Smelcer

a little bit more about that process...and ensure that the kids have everything they need..."

Coury said that the superintendent would be at the next meeting and invited Smelcer to attend.

Smelcer also noted that there would be a school committee training session in West Springfield on Saturday, Oct. 17 and she intended to register for that.

Coury also asked if they would come to a board meeting periodically to bring the board up to date.

McDonough told the board, referencing their budget concerns that all the schools need new boilers and roofs. "That's a huge amount

of money," she said.

Last year funds intended for roofing were used to offset other expenses and eliminate the need for staff layoffs. Rural aid, according to McDonough, has increased this year so there is potential to use those funds.

The vote to appoint Smelcer to the GRSC School Committee for Oct. 13, 2026 to June 30, 2028 was unanimous with McDonough and the three board members voting approval.

Finance Committee members Deb Brodie and Saara Malanson with Town Clerk Doris Jemiolo, Hopson and the board reviewed the warrant for the Special Town Meeting to be immediately following the board meeting.

The single article asked

VACANCY, page 7

BLANDFORD

Voters approve increase borrowing

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

Voters unanimously approved increasing the borrowing amount for a newer fire truck for the Volunteer Fire Department.

Fire Chief Adam Dolby responded to several questions about having a third party approve the status of the equipment and grants.

Dolby told voters that the truck is "exactly the size we need" and that a new truck, besides being more expensive, would take three to four years to acquire. Plus, it would have to be built to special spec-



Blandford Fire Chief Adam Dolby

ifications for the fire house and that might not be an issue down the road.

Grants are always a consideration for equipment and he told voters that Springfield Water and Sewer Commission had provided funding for the brush hog. There have also been contributions.

The proposed vehicle has a 2,000 gallon capacity.

The finance committee recommended extending the borrowing amount.



PAGE 2

Becket.....	2	Easthampton.....	5	Obituary.....	11	Schools & Youth.....	6
Blandford.....	7	Goshen.....	5	Opinion.....	4	Westfield.....	9
Chester.....	9	Haydenville.....	3	Pittsfield.....	8	Williamsburg.....	2
Classifieds.....	10	Huntington.....	3	Public Notice.....	6	Williamstown.....	8
Cummington.....	2	Northampton.....	2	Russell.....	5	Worthington.....	9



CUMMINGTON

Friday Nite Café benefits community food insecurity

CUMMINGTON – On Friday, Oct. 23, at 7 p.m., James Kitchen and the Appliances will perform a free concert at the Friday Nite Café at the Cummington Church, 32 Main St., featuring a special musical collaboration spanning an astonishing 96 years.

The evening’s special guests will be Nan Clark, 97, and brothers, Oakley and Quinn Mason, ages three and one.

Clark and Oakley previously performed together at the Meekins Library in Williamsburg, with an age difference of approximately 94 years, in what was believed to be a world-record-setting performance.

Now, Oakley’s younger brother Quinn is ready to join the act, extending the age difference to 96 years.

What happens when a 97-year-old musician

shares the stage with a one-year-old percussionist? Possibly a world record, certainly a lot of fun, and an opportunity to shine a spotlight on an important cause.

Whether the performance qualifies for an official world record remains to be determined, but the musicians are certain it will be memorable.

Clark is no stranger to the stage. She has performed with Kitchen on numerous occasions, including previous benefits for the local Food Pantry. At one memorable event, she even led the audience in a demonstration of the Chesterfield Crawl, proving that enthusiasm and a sense of humor have no expiration date. She is also an accomplished and exuberant tambourine player.

The evening will feature the musical talents of James Kitchen and the

Appliances, including: Stephan Katz, cello; Dave Christopolis, bass; Josh Wachtel, guitar and vocals; Rory Mason, vocals; Mirela Wachtel, vocals and James Kitchen, vocals and assorted instruments.

The musicians bring an eclectic collection of instruments, musical styles, and personalities to the stage, promising an evening filled with great music and good humor.

But behind the laughter is a serious purpose. The concert will help raise awareness of the continuing problem of food insecurity in Western Massachusetts and the vital role local food pantries play in helping families and neighbors in need.

“Our goal is to have fun and bring attention to a great cause at the same time,” said Kitchen.

The concert is free and open to the public.

BECKET

Men’s group holds first meeting

BECKET – The Gathering, a men’s group meets Thursday, Nov. 19 from 7-9 p.m. at the Becket Town Hall Community Room, 557 Main St.

All men, regardless of which town they reside, are invited to the first meeting on Thursday, Nov. 19. They should enter through the back door of the lower parking area. They are welcome to bring a friend.

For more information or to RSVP, they may call Dave Johnson at 978-424-5752 or email aiaincdaj@gmail.com. Their covenant is “We come together as men in a larger community where everyone is welcome.

We are committed to creating a safe space where everyone can share freely without judgment, be heard, and seek this community’s counsel and support as desired. We are committed to compassionate and generous listening for the sharing of the wisdom and experiences each of us shares. We promise to speak in a manner that acknowledges and honors the humanity of everyone. We promise to maintain confidentiality. We

promise to hold each other true to this covenant.”

They gather with their own stories and/or concerns that are very private. What is said in the meeting stays there. We respect the privacy and anonymity of everyone. Sharing is centered around what is going on in your life. There is no judgment. They avoid political and religious conversations and talking about other people.

The group will also meet on Thursday, Dec. 17 from 7-9 p.m. in the Becket Town Hall Community Room.

WILLIAMSBURG

Town has vacant seat on the HRSD

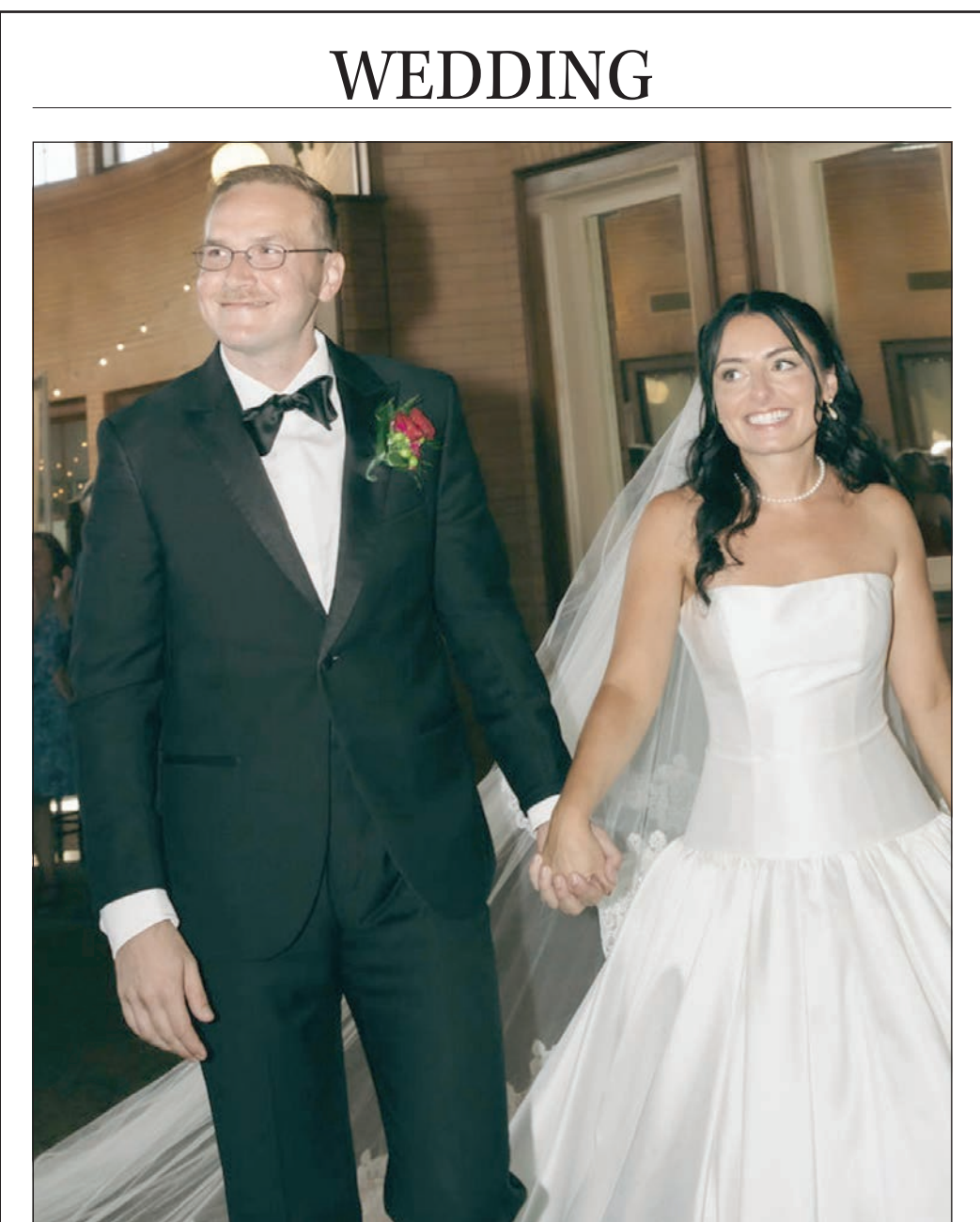
WILLIAMSBURG – One of the three elected seats representing the town of Williamsburg on the Hampshire Regional School District School Committee is currently vacant.

The Select Board and the Williamsburg members of the HRSD School Committee share joint responsibility to appoint a member to serve on the HRSD School Committee until the May 2027 Town Election.

Williamsburg residents interested in serving may submit a brief letter to the Select Board outlining their interest, experience and qualifications. They should submit letters by email to selectmen@burgy.org or by mail to the Williamsburg Select Board, 141 Main St. P.O., Box 447, Haydenville, MA 01039-0447.

The deadline to submit letters is Wednesday, Nov. 4. The Select Board and Williamsburg Members of the HRSD School Committee will meet Tuesday, Nov. 9, to consider applicants and appoint a member to serve on the committee.

If people have questions about this vacancy or about the appointment process, they may email Town Administrator Tom Bernard at townadmin@burgy.org who will provide staff support to Select Board and Williamsburg members of the HRSD School Committee.



WEDDING

Magdalene Joy Taylor and Zane Allsman Plattor wed

Joy Smith Taylor is delighted to announce the wedding of Magdalene Joy Taylor to Zane Allsman Plattor.

The proud father of the bride is Frank Taylor of Cambridge. The parents of the groom, Cathy Allsman and Joel Plattor of Miami, Florida are honored and overjoyed.

The couple were united on July 25, 2026 at Union Station, a renovated train depot in Northampton, where many guests arrived in fashion by rail travel.

The ceremony was officiated by the brother of the groom, Adam Sageser. This beautiful couple met attending New College in Sarasota, Florida, from where they both graduated.

Today, by profession, Magdalene is an independent writer and also senior editor for Playboy magazine and Zane works in data analytics.

Together, Maggie and Zane live and enjoy life to the fullest in Queens, New York where they hope to start a family after a vacation in Vietnam.

NORTHAMPTON

Local chorus invites the public to sing along

NORTHAMPTON – Heart of the Valley Chorus invites members of the community to sing along with them at three, free, open rehearsals this holiday season.

Anyone aged 9 to 99 who enjoys singing in the “treble” range, soprano, alto, mezzo and high men’s parts, are encouraged to come learn a few seasonal and holiday songs and experience singing in the 4-part barbershop style.

Visitors will perform alongside the chorus at the Bombyx Center for Arts and Equity in Northampton on Saturday, Dec. 12. Singers under 16 are welcome with an adult.

“It can be intimidating to try out or visit a chorus, especially if you haven’t sung since high school,” says Mollie Hartford, a member of the chorus for the past 4 years. “This program is meant to be welcoming, fun, and accessible for people who love singing.”

Last holiday season, the chorus welcomed over 20 visitors from up and down the Connecticut River Valley. There are no auditions, and singers do not need to be able to read music.

And while “Sweet Adeline” barbershop singing has traditionally been for women, Heart of the Valley Chorus is open to anyone who can sing comfortably in the treble or ‘traditionally female’ vocal range. “If you can carry a tune, and like to harmonize, we want to hear it,” says Stephanie Flinker, the chorus director. “We will help you figure out which voice part is right for you.”

Heart of the Valley Chorus has been bringing its unique blend of barbershop harmonies to the Connecticut Valley for over 40 years. Members come from Northampton, Greenfield, Belchertown, Hadley, South Hadley, Easthampton, Westhampton, Goshen, Williamsburg, Holyoke and Chicopee, and range in age from their 20s to their 80s. Singing a variety of music – jazz, Broadway, contemporary, and inspirational - all in four-part barbershop style, the group is dedicated to sharing their music with underserved populations and creating a safe and welcoming space for all singers.

The group’s open holiday rehearsals are scheduled for Wednesdays, Nov. 25, Dec. 2 and Dec. 9 at 6:30 p.m. at the Christ United Methodist Church on Rocky Hill Road in Northampton. Heart of the Valley Chorus is not a religious group. The final performance will be held at the Bombyx Center for Arts and Equity on Saturday, Dec. 12 at 1 p.m. (chorus call time 11 a.m.). Anyone interested in joining this special holiday program should email Stephanie at heartofthevalleychorus@gmail.com or visit www.heartofthevalleychorus.org to sign up.

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