"Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere who bravely bears his country's cause.
Honor, also, to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves, as he best can, the same cause." – Abraham Lincoln

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

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BLANDFORD

Select Board hosts all department meeting

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

The Select Board conducted initial business before moving to departmental reporting at the Monday, Oct. 26 meeting.

The board did approve winter maintenance for Beagle Club Road, a private way, at the request of Stacy Iglesias on behalf of all residents of that road.

Town Administrator Cristina Ferrera, first up, announced that Tony VanWerkhooven had withdrawn his application for a Battery Energy Systems Storage area on his Josh Cross Road property off North Blandford Road as of Oct. 21.

The tax rate setting has been pushed back again, and is now set for November 16 at 6 p.m.

The check for the Fire Department's brush truck will be ready this week and it will be possible to take possession of it.

The town has received a complaint regarding a dog on Chester Road that gets out and attacks another dog on the road. Police Chief Jen Dubiel has been notified; this is not the first instance. Ferrera will follow up with the Police Chief.

Ferrera is working on the vocational education transportation contract, a work in progress.

She said that the Operational Services Division for direct purchases from vendors on state contract – requiring no bidding process – has been redesigned and is much easier to use.

There was an onsite visit at the Eversource substation to bring those involved up to date with existing conditions.

Department reports

Board member Ted Cousineau told those attending that the meeting was for departments to let everyone know what is going on in their areas and there would be no interruptions allowed and no questions.

Assessors Chair David Hopson relayed that his board is making slow progress on setting the tax rate. The Special Town Meeting on the Fire Truck prompted the delay, but they are back on track.

Board of Health member Jennifer Girard announced that they are having an open house in their new office space in Town Hall on Monday, Nov. 16 at 5 p.m. They are in need of a burial agent and proposed a meeting with the Select Board and the Cemetery

BOARD, page 7

CHESTER

TRUNK OR TREAT provides lots of fun

The Chester Parks and Recreation Committee sponsored the annual Trunk or Treat in Chester last Saturday and a robust crowd turned out for the festivities.

Held at the Emery Street ball field, the event featured more than a dozen decorated trunks, face painting by Adrienne Johnson, pumpkin painting by Mel's Kitchen, live music by the Tommy Filiault Band, food from the Chester Firefighters Association, hot chocolate and warm cider from the Chester Hill Association, and former Chester Selectman Craig Gauthier manning the fire

TREAT, page 8



A Firefighter hands out candy to children at the annual Trunk or Treat held at the town ball field.



The inflatable race participants run for the finish line.

Submitted photos

HUNTINGTON

'Library of Things' has items to borrow

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

The Huntington Public Library Director Amanda Loiselle announces their "Library of Things" will be on display during the month of November.

Numerous items owned by the library may be borrowed for two weeks, with one item per patron out at a time.

A special event will be held on Saturday, Nov. 14 at 11 a.m. when Loiselle will demonstrate how to make pumpkin pie steel cut oats using an instant pot. People who attend will get a demonstration on how an instant pot works, receive a copy of the recipe and can also view other available items and ask questions.

"I live off of my own instant pot," Loiselle said, adding that she probably uses her own device on average five times a week. She uses hers to cook an entire chicken, rice, soup, hard boiled eggs, potatoes, pasta and oatmeal.

Items cook in a fraction of the time that ovens, stove tops and crock pots take. Yogurt can also be made using an instant pot. Loiselle says her instant pot has replaced her crock pot, rice cooker and Dash rapid egg cooker.

Loiselle said that the library has a number of items available to loan to patrons. These include an air fryer, art coding kit, backyard bocce set, blood pressure monitor, blu-ray/DVD player, bongos, canopy (10' X 10'), Celestron 70MM travel telescope, Cometron 7X50 binoculars (2), cornhole, Cricut Explore 3, crock-pot slow-cooker, food dehydrator, gardening kit, instant pot, kalimba thumb piano and ukulele.

Board games for all ages are also available for loan, including Battleship, Betrayal at the House on the Hill, Bluey Scavenger Hunt, Chutes and Ladders, Connect 4, Gravity Maze Marble Game, Happy Salmon, Herd Mentality, Here to Stay, Jenga, Mysterium, Really Loud Librarians and The Chameleon.

Several kits are also on hand: Electronic Snap Circuits, Kill a Watt, and OSMO genius starter kits for iPads and Kindles.

A sewing machine is going out for repair. but will return soon. An impact driver was borrowed, but has not yet been returned. New items are being purchased regularly.

Patrons must review and sign the Library of Things policy and waiver before borrowing.

For more information, stop in on Nov. 14 or anytime in November to learn more. Items may be signed out with staff at the Circulation Desk.



Turley Publications photo by Wendy Long

Huntington Public Library Director Amanda Loiselle will showcase HPL's "Library of Things" in November. Loiselle, shown here with a crock pot, blood pressure cuff, instant pot, food dehydrator, sewing machine, Cricut cutter, and 118 pc. home tool kit.

CHESTER

Advocates seeking intermediate train stop

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

"If you build it, they will come."

So opens Bob Daley's statement advocating for a railway stop between Springfield and Pittsfield on the West-East Railway connecting Albany and Boston.

Daley explained that trains were once a part of daily life in rural Western Massachusetts. The original Western Railroad stops laid out in 1840 were designed to serve everyone.

The railroad was big business for small towns like Chester with a stop there to manage mail, passengers and send goods produced by mines and local industry. Years ago, public education for many hilltown students ended after eighth grade, which was deemed sufficient to earn a living wage and support a family by working for the railroad on farms, logging, mining and getting jobs in the mills.

Some local girls, including Florence Bates of Worthington, founder of the Hilltown Community Health Center, were brought to one of the rail towns on Sunday evenings to catch the train to Springfield, where they lived with a host family to continue their studies for careers as teachers or nurses. Their families collected them from the train again on Friday evenings.

Today rail stops are 25 miles apart, intended to capture what Daley calls ridership watersheds. They are highly popular wherever they stop.

"One need only look to the success of the North, South, and East legs of the Compass Rail Services, such as the Vermonter, the Downeaster, Northampton, Hartford, New Haven and New York, Worcester to Boston, which have all exceeded expectations," Daley said.

The Berkshire Flyer out of Pittsfield restored passenger rail access to New York City in 2022,

TRAIN, page 8



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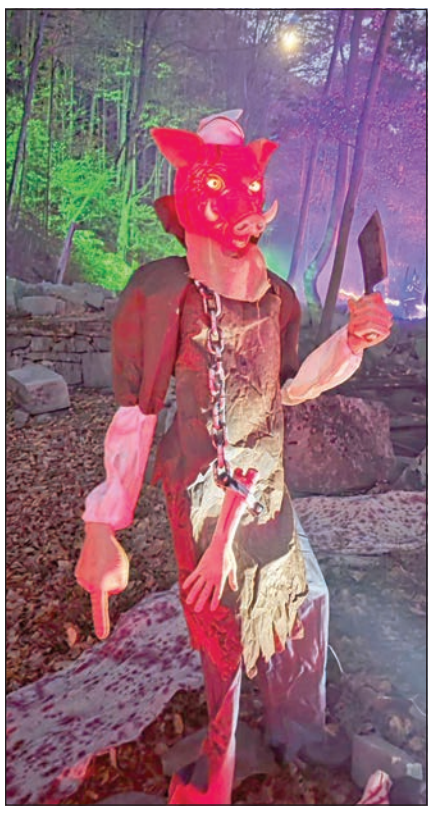
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HILLTOWN HIKING ADVENTURES



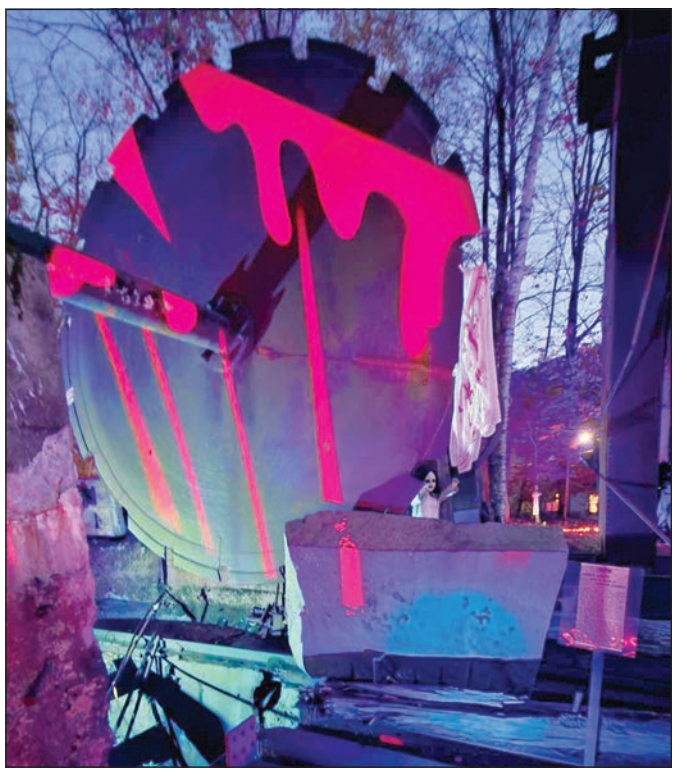
The grim reaper stands along the Sinister Haunted Trail.



This is just one of the scary figures people met on the haunted trail.



People walking the haunted trail had to pass this tall figure.



Submitted photos

The huge granite saw was one of key features of the haunted trail.

Sinister Haunted Trail participates in Chester Halloween

Sinister Haunted Trail 2026 in Chester is the biggest haunted trail in the Hilltowns.

For one day only, Saturday starting at 5 p.m. we opened the trail up, Screams and frights went on in the darkness for hours. Sinister Haunted Trail scared 100s of folks Saturday night (we lost count after 500 folks walked thru the entrance.

The trail is almost one mile long and encompasses the three acre Chester Granite Saw property located at 7 Prospect St. The Hilltown Hikers came up with the idea three years ago as a way to give back to the community and fundraise for the historic renovations of the Granite Saw.

String lights line the path and this year we decided to go a bit darker for the second half of the trail. Giant animatronics and scary sets are along the path including live props, who are volunteers that lurk in the woods here.

There was also a sound show provided by Frank Kennedy (Guthrie Center) with giant speakers hidden in the woods. The event was held at the same time as Chester's Town Halloween event bringing in more than a dozen trunks, face painting, live music, inflatable race, prizes, pumpkin painting sponsored by Mel's Kitchen, food by the Chester Volunteer Fire Department, free cider, cocoa and popcorn by the Chester Hill Association and ice cream by Our Mother's Kitchen.

Open to all, Sinister is ready for next year. Planning has already begun for new activities including "candy lane," "pumpkin patch" and a "tunnel of darkness." Volunteers are welcome to be a part of this unique event for next year, reach out to westernmasshilltownhikers.com.

All props, lights and equipment is donated, if you would like to donate a set or come set one up you are welcome to. Thank you all for coming, thank you to all of our volunteers and sponsors and see you all for even more screams and thrills next year.



Machines parts left at the old Granite Saw Company in Chester add to the fright of the Sinister Haunted Trail.

RUSSELL

Mark McLaughlin receives 60 year Veteran Scout Award



Mark McLaughlin

RUSSELL – At this year's General Knox Leadership Awards Picnic, Mark McLaughlin of Russell was recognized by the Western Massachusetts Council for Boy Scouts of America, for his remarkable 60 years of devoted service as a Scout and Scout leader.

In addition, he received the prestigious James E. West Fellowship Award from the National Boy Scout Office in acknowledgment of his continued contributions to the Boy Scouts of America.

McLaughlin began his scouting journey in 1966 when he joined Agawam Boy Scout Troop 82 alongside his cousin, Chris Pennock, and his close friend, Chris Muldrew. He successfully navigated through the ranks of scouting, achieving his God and Country award and earned the esteemed Eagle Scout rank in 1971.

Notably, he participated in a two-week hiking expedition at the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico at the age of 17, he earned the National Camping School Training award as a Waterfront Director and continues to be an active member as an Honor Camper with the Order of the Arrow.

Over the years in Troop 82, he has undertaken various leadership positions, including Junior Assistant Scoutmaster, Advancement Chairman, Assistant Scoutmaster and Scoutmaster, a role he held for five years. He earned the Wood Badge award, which represents the highest level of training available for Scout leaders.

McLaughlin proudly completed additional training from the University of Scouting in Commissioner Science and earned a Bachelor certificate. Currently, he provides mentorship to all Scouts as they progress, including guidance and coaching on their Eagle Projects. Throughout his tenure, he has successfully mentored over 40 Scouts as they achieved the distinguished Eagle Scout rank.

The Agawam Congregational Church sponsors Boy Scout Troop 82 since its inception in 1960. The Troop has served hundreds of Scouts through the years. Troop 82 has proudly produced 70 Eagle Scouts, with several current Scouts actively pursuing their Eagle Rank.

Troop 82 is supported by a team of dedicated and trained leaders who assist Scouts in gaining new skills, making advancements, and earning merit badges. The troop remains highly engaged in various outdoor activities, including campouts and high adventure trips, fostering an environment where Scouts can set and achieve goals, develop leadership skills, cultivate lifelong friendships, and enjoy the scouting experience.

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'Ghostly characters' roam Strathmore Park

By Mary Kronhom
Correspondent

RUSSELL – Strathmore Park, for the second year in a row, came alive last Friday and Saturday evenings with the arrival of an unidentified flying object, aka a "Weather Balloon."

The Weather Balloon was the official, on the record, report of what went down.

A video on the Russell Montgomery Police Face Book site explained it all. Featuring local residents as the actors in the video, the local police discovered the UFO and the evening progressed from that point.

In reality, the Russell Police Department Association worked with a corps base of ten volunteers to plan the event, which will now be annual. The smaller group worked on logistics, security, lining up vendors and the nitty-gritty details.

Chief Kevin Hennessey said that over 40 volunteers in all were involved in assembling the park for the event, Haunted Strathmore. Hennessy said, "It took more than a week to put up." The group began planning at the beginning of September and met twice a month.

Many ghastly ghostly characters roamed the park after dark. Activities included Trunk 'R Treat, a Jack O'Lantern contest, face painting, a DJ for entertainment and Tarot and palm reading for a chance to see the future.

The haunted hayrides were a constant feature after dark on both nights, according to Hennessy. There were prizes also for the best Trunk 'R and costume, and a Saturday night scavenger hunt.

Admission was free and a donation of two non-perishable food items provided a raffle ticket for a chance at many donated prizes.

Admission came with hot cider and popcorn. The only charge was for the hayrides at $10 per adult and $5 for a child.

The Russell Town budget provided $500 towards the event and the Russell Police Association provided $2-3,000. Hennessey said that Lakeside Property Services also "contributed greatly" to the festivities.

Planning for next year will begin "right away" said Hennessey, because of the popularity of the program and the desire to continue as a truly annual event. He added that they will be looking at incorporating more games and entertainment.



Photos courtesy
Russell Montgomery Police Department
The Grim Reaper comes to claim souls.



Steam emanates from a burial site.



Volunteers are shown for Haunted Strathmore Friday, Oct. 23 and Saturday Oct. 24



Scream arrived with a companion.



The Joker joined the fun.