"Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on you past misfortunes, of which all men have some."
– Charles Dickens

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

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HUNTINGTON

HPL hosts cookie swap

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

Kick off your festive holiday season at the Huntington Public Library, which is hosting its annual Cookie Swap on Saturday, Dec. 5 at noon.

Participation is limited so registration is required to take part. Each person bakes and brings a cookie of their choice and the recipe, to share with others. Participants go home with a variety of cookies and a copy of each recipe there.

In keeping with the holiday theme, the monthly crafternoon will feature DIY Holiday Cards to make at the library. People may stop in on Thursday, Dec. 10 at 4 p.m. to make their own holiday cards. All ages and skill levels are welcome.

The Hilltown Community Health Center will host a Friday playgroup on Dec. 18 at the library at 10 a.m. This fun filled morning is sponsored by the Family Center and funded by the Department of Early Education and Care.

There will be some

COOKIE SWAP, page 3

HUNTINGTON

Library Director gives *delicious demonstration*

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

This month features the "Things" available to loan at the Huntington Public Library, 7 East Main St.

Library staff remind patrons they have a number of items available for a two-week loan.

As a soft launch, Library Director Amanda Loiselle gave a demonstration on using an Instant Pot by making pumpkin steel-cut oats and fielded questions on how she has adapted numerous recipes to work in the quick cooking, easy to clean device.

The demonstration was held on Saturday, Nov. 14 at 11 a.m.

Omitting the chopped nuts in case of food allergies, Loiselle demonstrated the device by mixing water, steel-cut oats, canned pumpkin puree, maple syrup, chia seeds, pumpkin pie spice and sea salt in the instant pot, which is actually an electric pressure cooker.

She sealed the top, started the device to preheat it, and then cooked the oats et. al. for ten minutes. After decompressing for a few more minutes, she pushed a button on the lid to open the vent and allow the last of the steam to escape.

Those attending were then treated to the oatmeal, which was warm, fragrant and delicious. Preparation time was about 20 minutes.



Turley Publications photo by Wendy Long

Sadie G. enjoying the pumpkin-pie steel cut oats prepared in an Instant Pot at the Huntington Public Library, at their "library of things" demo on Saturday, Nov. 14.

The library also has access to instant pot cookbooks by Brittany Williams, an author that several patrons heralded as having wonderful recipes. Loiselle also showed a handy guide, which gives basic information on using the pot for a variety of dishes including meats, hard-boiled eggs, steamed vegetables and even yogurt.

One attendee said she makes bundt cakes and racks of ribs in hers. A "keep warm' function lets you keep foods in the pot for a time, although she said veggies can get mushy if left too long.

Loiselle says her favorite uses of her own Instant Pot is to cook hard boiled eggs, soup, rice, whole chickens and oatmeal.

Having the Instant Pot has allowed her to discard her slow cooker, rice cooker, and egg cooker. By studying cook books and consulting her guide, she has worked to adapt all of her favorite recipes to preparation in her Instant Pot. There are also apps available for cell phones for quick consultation and plenty of You Tube videos to give additional guidance.

Even foods that regularly require extended cooking time, such as brown rice or dried beans, are quicker to prepare in the pot; Loiselle recommends rinsing both until water runs clear before cooking.

Another tip Loiselle shared was to consider the size of the cooker to adopt a recipe written for one size but prepared in another. This may result in needing to change things like the amount of water in a recipe or the amount of cook time.

"It makes me a lot more adventurous in my cooking," Loiselle said.

Benefits to using the cooker include quick preparation time, not heating up the entire kitchen and a simple process of

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BLANDFORD

Board holds tax hearing

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

A full evening ensued at Monday, Nov. 16 Select Board meeting, continuing for nearly two hours.

Most of the meeting was dedicated to the Tax Classification hearing with detailed information presented by Alex Lackey of Regional Resource Group.

The Blandford Select Board voted in accordance with M.G.L., Ch. 40, Sec. 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy, which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2027 tax rates pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

This year the Select Board approved the recommendation of the Assessors that, to keep the average single-family tax bill at the Fiscal Year 2026 level, the Select Board adopt a residential factor of 0.8928, with a corresponding Commercial, Industrial and Personal property shift of 1.2844.

This results in an estimated residential tax rate of $12.49 and a CIP property tax rate of $17.97.

Home owners in the business zoned areas will not be impacted by the CIP.

According to Assessors' Chair Dr. David Hopson, utility companies will bear the higher cost.

Again, the rates depend

BOARD, page 6



Submitted photo

Chester Elementary School Principal Todd Gazda told his students that if they bring 500 non-perishable food items into school for the Western Mass Food Bank, he will camp on the roof of the school one night in December and livestream a bedtime story to them!

HILLTOWNS

Hilltowns take part in 'Giving Tuesday'

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

The holiday season is upon us and it's a fabulous time to be grateful for all of the good things in life, and to help hard-working groups that serve others.

With Giving Tuesday scheduled for Tuesday, Dec. 1, it's a great time to focus on some local groups ,who could benefit from the help and generosity of area folks.

Giving Tuesday formed in New York City in 2012 to add to the holiday-themed (but consumer targeted) "Black Friday," "Small Business Saturday" and "Cyber Monday" events. They added Giving Tuesday as a reminder that there were many unmet needs in the communities that were also deserving of attention and generosity during the holiday season.

According to Charity Engine, Giving Tuesday generated an estimated $4 billion from over 38 million participants last year. As people consider donating their time, materials or money this year, please consider the local non-profits that need support.

The Hilltown Community Health Center is taking part in Giving Tuesday this year, in an effort spearheaded by Nancy Gilbert from HCHC's Board, to raise funds to improve health access in the hilltowns.

But people may also have noticed student members of Gateway's National Honor Society running a local "Boot Drive" on Saturday, Nov. 21. They were part of a long standing collaboration between NHS, the Huntington Fire Department and the Hilltown Community Health Center to raise funds that support Hilltown Holiday Help, which supplies clothing, books and toys to children from families with low to moderate incomes in the hilltowns.

This effort is aided by many organizations, businesses and individuals throughout the region. Last year, the program served 51 families and 164 children, provided 19 holiday meals, distributed more than $1,500 in grocery and department-store gift cards, and also supported 33 teenagers who had aged out of the traditional children's program. Families from 12 rural Hilltown communities received assistance in December 2025.

And speaking of Gateway, the Gateway Education Foundation is taking part in Giving Tuesday again this year. Donations may be made on PayPal via their website (GatewayEducation Foundation.org) or by mailing a check to G.E.F., 12 Littleville Road, Huntington,

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HILLTOWNS

USDA offers housing repair program

BOSTON – State Representative Lindsay Sabadosa's Office received word from the State Director for Rural Development that unused funding is available through the USDA Section 504 Housing Repair Program in Massachusetts' preliminary allocation.

These funds must be allocated quickly. Any money that remains uncommitted may be returned to the federal government through its upcoming funding redistribution process.

If people know of an eligible homeowner in an eligible community including Worthington, who needs assistance with home repairs, they should let state Rep. Sabadosa's Office know immediately. By calling 413-270-1166. Homeowners may qualify for a grant of up to $10,000. For repair projects costing more than $10,000, the program can combine a grant covering the first $10,000 with a loan for the remaining amount at just 1% interest.

For example, if an eligible homeowner needs a $14,000 roof replacement, USDA Rural Development could provide a $10,000 grant and a $4,000 loan at 1% interest.

In her district, the following communities are eligible: Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Hatfield, Westhampton, Williamsburg and Worthington.

The available funding comes through a Continuing Resolution that runs through December, which is why we need to identify eligible homeowners as soon as possible. Additional Section 504 funding is expected to become available in 2027.

Veterans Cemetery seek wreath sponsors

The Friends of the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Agawam invites the community to honor and remember veterans by sponsoring remembrance wreaths for Wreaths Across America Day on Saturday, Dec. 19.

Each December, Wreaths Across America brings communities together around its mission to remember the fallen, honor those who serve and teach the next generation the value of freedom. Sponsored wreaths will be placed on veterans' graves at the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Agawam.

The Friends of the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Agawam is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that supports the cemetery and helps keep the memory of veterans alive.

Individuals, families, businesses and community groups are encouraged to sponsor wreaths. Each wreath is a meaningful expression of gratitude and remembrance, and community support helps extend this tribute to more veterans.

To sponsor a wreath through the Friends' Wreaths Across America fundraising page, people may visit www.wreathsacrossamerica.org/MA0110P. Donations to support the Friends of the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Agawam may also be made through Venmo at @WREATHSFRIENDS.

To learn more about the Friends organization, people may visit www.agawamfriends.org or write to Agawam Friends, P.O. Box 03, Feeding Hills, MA 01030.

GIVING

from page 1

MA 01050.

In the last five years, the foundation awarded more than $40,000 in their Funds for Learning Grants to Gateway teachers, staff, classrooms and schools.

So far this year, they have approved over $4,500 in projects, including a summer program trip to Lupa Zoo, a comic book library, creative play for Littleville's PE classes, finch robots, Braille Bloom, indoor gardening for the sunrise academy and a visit from "Galaxy on the Go" to the district's summer program.

Also, Save the Date for the Annual Trivia Night (GEF's biggest fundraiser), which will be held at the Blandford Town Offices on Saturday, March 17, 2027.

It Takes a Village might be considered for both volunteer, material, or financial support. Volunteers help the organization on many levels, including a home visiting program, helping with their Hilltown Holiday Hope project, or by sorting and organizing donations to the largest open closet in New England on East Main St. in Huntington.

For more information or to donate online, people may visit their website HilltownVillage.org. Checks may also be mailed to It Takes a Village, P.O. Box 304, Huntington, MA 01050.

Last but not least, the Huntington Food Pantry provides produce, meat, dairy, and pantry staples to residents from a dozen hilltowns surrounding Huntington. This is a choice pantry, meaning that people are able to select food to bring home to their families.

On average, they serve 65 families each week and last year gave out more than 120,000 pounds of food. They are located at the Pioneer Valley Assembly of God Church, 63 Old Chester Road, in Huntington. They gratefully accept food, volunteer and monetary donations and are open on Thursdays from 9-11:30 a.m. and 2-4:30 p.m. For more information, people may visit their website pioneervalleyag.org/foodpantry.

Speaking of food drives, Principal Todd Gazda upped the ante this year for Chester Elementary School's annual food drive to benefit the Food Bank of Western Mass. He challenged his students to earn an extra recess if they collectively donate 400 food items during the drive.

To add to this challenge, he has informed the school that if they collect 500 or more items, he will sleep on the roof of the school one night in December and livestream a bedtime story from there.

This is generating a lot of buzz on social media and has caused some former Gateway colleagues to vow to donate 100 or more items themselves.

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USDA INSP. FRESH BONELESS PORK BUTT STRIPS..... $2.99 lb

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USDA INSP. PASTRAMI..... $5.99 lb
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Attorney for Mortgagee
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Total circulation of 85,000 reaching over 200,000 readers in the Pioneer Valley.

Deadline for Calendar submissions December 31

Community Winter 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 _____
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_____
Cost _____
Contact name & phone number for more information _____
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MAIL YOUR LISTING INFORMATION TO:
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