

"Believe in yourself. Have faith in your abilities," – Norman Vincent Peale

Country Journal

Devoted to the Needs of the Hilltowns

Becket, Blandford, Chester, Chesterfield, Cummington, Goshen, Huntington, Middlefield, Montgomery, Otis, Plainfield, Russell, Sandisfield, Westhampton, Williamsburg, Worthington

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HILLTOWNS

Santa Claus visits the Hilltowns

By Kathryn Koegel
Correspondent

On Saturday, Dec. 14 a familiar red-suited man seemed to be here, there and everywhere.

We caught up with him in Huntington as well as Russell. And while in much of the world he rides a sleigh pulled by reindeer in places like Australia, kangaroos take the rein and in the Hilltowns he is driven by a fire truck. The trucks, lit festively for the season, drive him to his appointed rounds with children. In Huntington he even drives by children's houses and they all come out to cheer

It was still light out when the sirens blared from the Huntington Fire House on Route 20 and whisked Santa to the town green where he took up a brief residency in the gazebo. Alighting from the truck helped by elf John McVeigh, Assistant Chief, he high fived the line of children before listening to their heart's desires. Santa here is reputed to be related to Assistant Fire Chief Graydon, who retired this year.

Just over Route 20 in Russell, Santa, with his most amiable wife, her first appearance at a Hilltown event, kicked off the annual Russell Parade of Lights. While his suit lined with fur prepared him for the 20 degree weather, he and Mrs.

Claus greeted young and old alike from warmth of the town hall.

After this location, he planned on hopping another fire truck down to a nursing home in Chicopee. "You can't forget the older people in nursing homes and those with dementia," he said. Mrs. Claus looked relieved to have a seat as she had spent the day before making 350 sugar cookies and 300 ginger snaps that she handed out to the crowd.

With Santa's work done, the annual Russell Light Parade kicked off to a record crowd as well as new high



This couple decorated in lights got into the holiday spirit.

SANTA, page 2



This Westhampton Fire Truck is ablaze with Christmas lights as is the vehicle behind it.

Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel

HILLTOWNS

New ADU regulations helpful for Hilltowners

By Kathryn Koegel
Correspondent

With 2024 being declared the worst year in recent memory for housing, new Massachusetts regulations on so-called "granny flats," technically known as Accessory Dwelling Units or ADUs, may bring about a glimmer of hope for Hilltowners.

Last week, The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities issued draft regulations for these units and announced a public comment period that will open Dec. 20. Town officials in the Hilltowns are studying up on the new rulings and prepping for the potential increase in housing they may bring.

Up in Worthington, "We just passed a new ADU by-law a year or so ago," says Select Board Chair Charley Rose. "Previous to that, Worthington didn't allow any kind of ADU or second dwelling on a single property. Our by-law is pretty close to the new state law, but they are having to update ours to comply."

Meg Stewart and her wife have owned property in Worthington since 2005 and her ADU has been a way to keep family close. Their 27 year-old son, who works in a farm animal sanctuary in the Berkshires now lives in the ADU they had built. Their main house was purchased as a cabin on 18 acres and is used part-time by them. Meg is a retired public school teacher and her wife is still working as a professor at Vassar. The ADU is 500 sq. ft. and was constructed just this past March.

"We're always going to have a place to live in," says Stewart. "We like having a compound," she jokes. "The air is good, the water great. We're aging. Our son is around and can help us do things."

"It's becoming more common," she says. "We were not the only ones looking at ADUs. It's so hard for young people to buy a house."

The process of getting that ADU had its challenges, especially in regard to permitting. "It took a lot of back and forth with the building inspector,"

ADU, page 2

OTIS

Hilltown Blues Jam gather once a month to perform



Hilltown Blues Jam perform on stage including Chuck on electronic sax, Randy on his Gibson Les Paul Junior, John on drums and Ron on lead guitar.

Turley photos by Mary Kronholm

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

Every third Sunday of the month there is a Hilltown Blues Jam at the Knox Trail Inn in Otis. It is an Open Mic event and it's a very casual affair.

Just show up with your instrument, sign the sheet, first names only, and the host will let you know when it's time to be on stage. A lot of table-hopping and visiting happens while performers

are waiting to play.

There is more or less, a house, or backup band already in place. Percussion and a couple of guitars; this Sunday it was bass player, Mike Buscemi, percussion John Piper, visiting keyboardist Bob Toriani and Marcia Gamash served as guest host as well as singing and playing guitar.

These musicians can accompany a performer,

BLUES, page 10



PAGE 3

Becket.....	13
Blandford.....	6
Chester.....	11
Chesterfield.....	8
Classifieds.....	14

Easthampton.....	6
Florence.....	8
Hilltowns.....	2
Huntington.....	16
Montgomery.....	11

Northampton.....	12
Obituary.....	12
Opinion.....	4, 5, 6
Otis.....	10
Pittsfield.....	8

Puzzle Page.....	13
Russell.....	7
Schools & Youth.....	3
Stockbridge.....	12
Westhampton.....	10



HUNTINGTON

RECREATION COMMITTEE HOLDS GINGERBREAD HOUSE EVENT



Bonnie Kubacki with grandson Roman, exclaimed that spending time with him was the best present ever. The organizers swept up the excess sugar and hurried off to prepare for an appearance of the red-suited man in the town gazebo.



The Huntington Recreation Committee, chaired by Vicki Mayhew, held their annual gingerbread house making event at Stanton Hall in Huntington on Saturday, Dec. 14. Sugar plums tripped off the fingers of children, their parents and grandparents. *Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel*



This was a family affair involving children, parents and grandparents.

Hope Your Holiday Season Is **Extra-Extra Happy!**



Thanks to all of our readers and advertisers for supporting our publication and the future of local community journalism. We value our role in this community, and we're committed to keeping you current in 2025 and beyond with a focus on the local news and events that matter most to you.

We wish you an informed and fabulous new year!

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Henry Thomas Noel

September 9, 2024

Parents: Dalton & Lauren Noel, Cummington

Grandparents: Lori Wawro, Belchertown

Mike Skowronek, Palmer

Karen Landry, Worthington

Frank Noel, Cummington