

"Christmas isn't a season. It's a feeling." – Edna Ferber

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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OTIS GINGERBREAD HOUSE making fun



Arya Patel puts frosting on his cardboard house to attach a graham cracker roof. Submitted photos



Jace Bacon decorates his gingerbread house.

A long-time Christmas holiday tradition has been making gingerbread houses. That tradition was carried out in Otis on Sunday, Dec. 15 at 11 a.m. at the Town Hall.

The Recreation Commission organized the event and provided all the necessary and required materials to craft the perfect gingerbread house from frosting to gumdrops, pretzels, colored Cheerios, red and white peppermint candies and more.

Recreation Commission members are Dana Pustinger, Kelly Kennedy, Robin Martin and Wendy Peterson, alternate.

RUSSELL

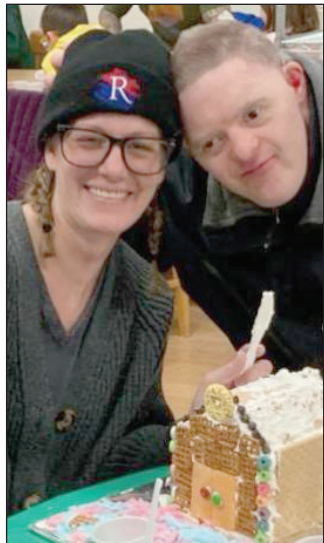
Police Chief clarifies use of Rec Field

By Kathryn Koegel
Correspondent

At the regular Select Board meeting on Dec. 17, the Russell Police Department's Chief Kevin Hennessy clarified use of the fields near the police station.

"There is a lot of misinformation floating around social media," said

FIELD, page 11



Sara and Nathan Crandall are shown with their creation.



Lily Goodwin, left works opposite Harper Goodwin; seated behind Lily is Jennifer Catalone and standing, Mark Catalone.

HUNTINGTON

ARPA funds wind down

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

Chairman Roger Booth, Select Board Members William Hathaway and John McVeigh and Town Administrator Jennifer Peloquin were present for the final Select Board meeting of 2024, held Dec. 18.

The three biggest agenda items were spending out American Rescue Plan Act funds, which must be incurred by Dec. 31,

2024; reviewing applications for used car business licenses and the need for over a dozen town employees to complete their cyber security training.

Appreciation dinner

Scheduled to begin at 7:15 p.m., the meeting didn't actually start until nearly 8 p.m., as the quartet was hosting an appreciation dinner for town employees

ARPA, page 3

BLANDFORD

Blandford 2024

By Mary Kronholm
Correspondent

JANUARY

New Town Administrator Michael Szlosek's first day was Jan. 29.

FEBRUARY

A significant leak in the Town Hall roof brought claims adjusters out for inspection.

MARCH

Fire Department Emergency Medical Technician Pat Lombardo conducted a Stop the Bleed class, which was well attended. The class learned how to stop an accident victim from bleeding while waiting for professional assistance. Participants were: Council



Jeff Bacon and son Jace view the solar eclipse which took place April 8, 2024.

File photo

on Aging was represented by Judith MacKinnon, Lloyd Martin, Linda Barnard, Mary and Don Brainerd, all displayed their certificates for completing the course. A very nasty ice storm dropped many trees.

YEAR IN REVIEW, page 8



Thank you for filling our year with so many special memories!

Hope Your Season Is Trimmed With Every Happiness

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Community Newspapers

HILLTOWNS

Wonderful things happened in Hilltowns 2024

By Kathryn Koegel
Guest Columnist

Note: With contributions from correspondents Mary Kronholm and Wendy Long as well. Note: People who have more ideas about things like this that they think should be covered in the Country Journal or just want to relate something wonderful email countryjournal@turley.com.

As the year draws to a close, we wanted to celebrate the richness of life in the Hilltowns including the events that make a difference and the volunteers who step up to make it a better place.

We asked our readers and town officials what was wonderful this year. We thank everyone who contributed.

“We expected to serve 500 kids through our toy initiatives this holiday and the total ended up being 941. We held special giveaway days just for our immediate Hilltown families and also delivered toys to families in safe houses, shelters and transitional housing throughout the region.”

Lisa Goding, Executive Director
It Takes a Village
Hilltowns

“Thirty one volunteers contributed 220 hours of work to maintain and create hiking trails throughout the Hilltowns, including Hilltown Land Trust’s newest public trails at the Hilltown Boulders in Ashfield and Goshen.”

Sarah Welch,
Community Engagement Manager
Hilltown Land Trust
Ashfield

“In the fall, members of the Blandford community came together to

inaugurate the new stone patio that now graces the north side of our 1892 building.”

Byam Stevens, Library Trustee
Blandford

“I’m tickled pink when someone says they enjoyed my Journal article.”

Debbie Daniels,
Country Journal Correspondent
Norwich

“Porter Memorial Library received a planning and design grant for our expansion and our new patio was constructed and enjoyed by so many residents.”

Nicole Daviau, Library Director,
Porter Memorial Library
Blandford

“The Gateway Regional School District received a \$50,000 Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) planning grant, from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). The grant’s goals are to provide equitable access to high quality preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds living in high need communities. It supports local coordination between public and private preschool options to develop a shared curriculum and goals, regardless of where a child attends. The intent is to level the playing field so that all children enter kindergarten with similar skill sets and experiences.”

Kurt Garivaltis,
Director of Pupil Services,
Gateway Regional School District
Huntington

“Volunteer day in the Bicentennial Park spearheaded by George Reichert.”

Deb Brodie
Blandford

“We were designated 2024 School



Children at Littleville Elementary made puppets of the animals that live along the river courtesy of the Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee.

Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel

of Recognition by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for demonstrating high achievement and high growth and meeting or exceeding targets set by the state. We received the 2024 Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Silver Level Partner Award; named a Certified Wildlife Habitat from the National Wildlife Federation and received the 2024 Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Silver Level Partner Award. We enjoyed numerous partnerships with local businesses and groups, including Marsy Belle Farms in Blandford, Girls on the Run, the Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee, Tommy’s Composting, the Chester Railway Station and numerous local artists who brought new programming to our students.”

Vanna Maffuccio, Principal,
Chester Elementary School
Chester

“The Chester Water Department and their 250 water system customers had a rocky summer in 2024 with the DEP boil water order in place but since then the Water Department, following three years of taking ownership of the problems and finding solutions, believes we have reached a ‘Renewal Plateau’ and can now spend more time focusing on sustaining Chester’s water future instead of jumping from problem to problem.”

Don Humason,
Chester Town Administrator,
for the Chester Water Commission
Chester

“The new All-Person’s trail that offi-



A happy kayak winner at the 69th annual Westfield River Wildwater Races, the country’s oldest canoe and kayak races.

cially opened up at Noble View Outdoor Center in Russell this September ensures wilderness access for differently abled people.”

Heather Wyman
Westfield

“The historic Westfield River Wildwater Races were almost canceled this year due to a lack of funds. They were revived with an upswell of emotion, memories and stories that inspired people to generously donate and to volunteer. We are looking forward to celebrating the 70th running of the Hilltown spring canoe and kayak races on Saturday, April 19th! Thank you to all who helped then and who plan to participate and volunteer this year.”

Harry Rock
Chair of the Westfield River Race
Committee and Race Director
Wyben

“One huge highlight of 2024 was that we were able to bring renowned cellist Inbal Segev – between international festivals and concerto engagements – to Worthington to play three of the six Bach Cello Suites (1,3, and 5) It was so wonderful. Our audience was transported!”

Rorianne Schrade, Executive Director
Sevenars Concerts, Inc.
South Worthington

“In Cummington at Project Art, we installed Sergei Isupov’s Everything Is Upside Down. The 12 foot tall figural sculpture was carved from a tree that fell victim to the spring ice storm. With community support, volunteers and an honorarium from the Cummington Cultural District, Isupov worked for three weeks to carve and paint the 150 year old maple. With support, we continue to see the

WONDERFUL, page 5



It Takes a Village in Huntington had lines out the door for its holiday toy distribution to Hilltowns families

OTIS

COA Cookie Swap began a new tradition

OTIS – According to Council on Aging Director Karen Yvon, the COA is starting a new holiday event that will continue next year.

Monday, Dec. 16 at 2 p.m., there was a last-minute organization of a COA Cookie Swap in the Town Hall. “We’re going to make it a tradition,” said Yvon. “She said that eight people participated and everyone loved it.”

Next year the plan is to open the event up to more people. Everyone brought at least three dozen cookies, “plus extras” and went home with three dozen or more cookies.



Selecting cookies, from left, are Lori Loring, Wlaih Swvoti, Diane Dwyerm and Dede Loring,
Courtesy photos by Karen Yvon



Kendra Rybacki, Diane Dubiel, Tom Dubiel, Lori Loring and Elsie Deboto pick out their favorite cookies.



Supervising selections was Fred Oscheski.

CMP Mobile Health arrives at town hall

OTIS – On Thursday, Jan. 23, 2025 from 9 a.m.-noon, Community Health Programs Mobile Health unit will be at Otis Town Hall, 1 North Main Road.

CHP Mobile health offers urgent care on wheels. They provide same day care, flu vaccines, back to school physicals, non-emergency sick visits, STI, UTI and other screenings, reproductive care and counseling, SNAP and food security assistance and referrals.

For more information, people may visit chpberkshires.org/mobile.

COA to hold pizza party on Jan. 15

OTIS – The Council on Aging will hold a pizza party on Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025 at noon at the Otis Senior Center. Donation is \$5.

GOSHEN

Council on Aging announces upcoming news, events

GOSHEN – The first Council on Aging luncheon of 2025 will be a trip back to the Williamsburg Snack Bar on Tuesday, Jan. 14.

They have such a diverse menu and the food is delicious. And the staff is so attentive too. People should meet at the restaurant at 11:30 a.m.. The COA will cover up to \$20 per person. Seniors should call Kerry at 413-268-9354 by Tuesday, Jan. 7 so the COA can let the restaurant know how many to expect. Donations he COA are appreciated, but not mandatory.

The Crafts Group will not meet this month due to the Jan. 1 holiday.

On Friday, Jan. 3 Community Connections Group will be held in the Goshen Town Hall upstairs dining room from 10-11 a.m. This month will feature

Sound Healer Jennifer O’Connell. Jennifer is a skilled practitioner and this class will give people a feeling of calm and relaxation. It is a healthy way to start off the New Year. All are welcome.

On Tuesday, Jan. 7 at 4 p.m. the first meeting for the group “Lets’ Talk About Death Over Dinner” will take place in the Goshen Town Hall upstairs dining room. They had a great response to this group and have started a wait list. People call Kerry at 413-268-9354 if they are interested in being placed on the waitlist.

On Wednesday, Jan. 15-Games Group will meet in the library from 2-4 p.m. This is a fun way to spend an afternoon. The COA has games available, but if people have a favorite they would like to play, bring it along. The COA is always open to

learning new games, as well as playing old favorites.

On Thursday, Jan. 16 from noon-2 p.m. Goshen resident Stephen Morley volunteers through the Tech Connect Program and offers technology help at the library. People should bring any and all questions regarding their computer, their phone or their tablet to Stephen and he will help problem solve with them.

On Tuesdays, Jan 21 and 28 from 12:30-1 p.m. Highland Valley Elder Service grab and go lunches will be served at the Goshen Town Hall. HVES delivers meals to Goshen COA on the third and fourth Tuesdays of the month. Participants pick up their hot lunch at the Goshen Town Hall from 12:30-1 p.m. The lunch for Jan. 21 is a choice of chicken corn chowder

or asparagus and cheese quiche and the choice for the Jan. 28 is ham and pickle salad or egg salad. The meals also include milk, vegetables, and dessert. There is a suggested \$4 donation given to Highland Valley to offset the cost of the meal. People may call Kerry at 413-268-9354 if they would like to sign up to get these nutritious and delicious meals.

Goshen Age Friendly Group has Henrietta Munroe as coordinator for this program. People can reach her at 413-268-7465. She is the people may call to borrow medical equipment free of charge. They have items such as tub seats, commodes, walkers and even a knee scooter. People should call Munroe if there is a piece of equipment they need: they have so many items they cannot store anymore.

HUNTINGTON

ARPA

from page 1

and board members. It was well attended and friendly and lingered a bit past the expected departure time. About 50 employees and board members attended.

ARPA funds

Once the meeting was underway, Peloquin distributed the updated ARPA funding spreadsheet and requested approval for inter-agency agreements on items that have not yet gone out to bid. These included an assessment of highway department buildings up to \$1,000; Owens Corning lumber boards to replace wooden boards on the community events committee benches, not to exceed \$2,000; a video camera for the Town Clerk’s outside mailbox \$500; replacing six garage doors and entry doors at the highway garage, not to exceed \$70,000; a fire alarm system for the highway garage \$23,500, with some funds coming from the town and fire alarms at both fire stations, totaling \$33,000.

The town received about \$650,000 in ARPA funding, which was distributed throughout the country to bring the economy through the financial impact of Covid. The three-year grant paid for upgrades to the town’s water and sewer operations, a new town website, new computers for some town departments, new windows at the library, items needed by the fire department including radios, a SCBA compressor fill station, and AEDs at town offices; boiler repairs at the town hall and a new card access system for town employees to town buildings.

Used car licenses

Two applications for used car licenses for Hilltown Motors and Jackalynn’s Auto Sales were reviewed. Hilltown

Motors was unanimously approved, but there was a paperwork discrepancy for Jackalynn’s Auto Sales. Their permit application to the Town Clerk’s office was incorrect and must be re-submitted; the business license cannot be approved until this was done. The second application was tabled to the next meeting.

Cyber Security Training

Peloquin reported that 14 people with access to town Internet and email have still not completed the required Cyber Security Training. Booth expressed frustration with the matter, noting that several of the individuals have access to critical town files. The 14 will lose their cyber access as of Jan. 2, until they complete the training. Several will be invited to the next Select Board meeting to discuss this further.

Grants

General business items included signing the close out agreement for the FY’19 Community Development Block Grant, which paid for the new ramp at town hall. The board voted to accept a grant to the Board of Health of \$4,550 from recycling dividends; these funds were earned by meeting the required percentages of recycled materials at the transfer station. The Board of Health has discretionary use of these funds.

Other business

Two new employees were signed on for the Water and Sewer Department and Fire Department. Peloquin, who already serves as Procurement Officer for the town, was reappointed to the position of “Chief Procurement Officer for the remainder of her three-year term in this role, which ends June 30, 2026. Any

town issuing Requests for Proposals is now required to have a Chief Procurement Officer.

A posted Assistant Treasurer position had no applicants so that position cannot be filled with remaining American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Treasurer Aimee Burnham will hire someone this spring and put it into the budget for next year.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m. The next meeting of the Huntington Select Board will be Wednesday, Jan. 2, 2025 at 5 p.m.

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OPINION

GUEST COLUMN



Have I saved Social Security money by claiming at 62?

Dear Rusty:

I had to start collecting Social Security at 62 and I am 75 now.

I believe that in the last 13 years I have saved Social Security money, so I do not know why I cannot draw my full benefits now.

If I had started drawing at 65 at \$1,200 per month, then I would have drawn \$16,400 per year. Instead, I got \$680 per month from 62 to 75 or \$8,160 per year or about \$106,000 over 13 years. Compare that to the age 65 amount of \$14,400 per year for 10 years, which is \$144,000. So, by claiming at 62, at age 75 I have saved the government over \$38,000. It would make seniors lives so much easier if they could draw full Social Security at 75 years old, after getting only part of their SS.

Signed: Second-guessing

Dear Second-guessing:

The difference between benefits claimed at various ages causes many to reflect, as you have done, about what might have been had you waited longer to claim. But there is an error in your calculations. If your age 62 monthly benefit is \$680, your age 65 monthly benefit would have been about \$845, not \$1,200. Thus, at 75 you would have collected about \$101,400 by claiming at 65, vs. the \$106,000 you have received by claiming at age 62. In other words, you still would not have broken even had you claimed at age 65.

Social Security says that it doesn't matter when you claim they say that if you claim early your payments will be less, but you'll get more of them. Where SSA's argument falls apart is when life expectancy is longer. Our experience is that if you wait until your Full Retirement Age to claim, which is age 66 in your case vs. claiming at age 62, you will collect the same amount of total money at about age 78.

In other words, the "breakeven age" for waiting until FRA to claim is about 78. So, you will reach your personal "breakeven age" in about 2 1/2 years, at age 78). And this is precisely why we encourage everyone to understand their life expectancy when deciding when to claim Social Security those who expect to live longer will, indeed, get more SS money if they delay claiming.

Your benefit is determined by your age when you claim and if you claim before your FRA your monthly amount is permanently reduced. If you claimed at age 62 and your monthly amount was \$680, then in the four years until you reached age 66, your FRA, you would have received about \$32,640. If you had, instead, waited until your FRA to claim, your benefit at age 66 would have been about \$906/month. Collecting \$906/month (at 66) vs. \$680/month (at 62) would make your breakeven age about 78. If you claimed at age 65 instead of 62, your breakeven age would have been about a year earlier (77).

So, have you saved Social Security money? Up to this point, you have not. Since you claimed at age 62, you have collected about \$680/month for 13 years until you were 75 (or about \$106,000). If you had waited until

SECURITY, page 5

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Corrections will be printed in the same section where the error originally occurred.

ABOUT THE DRONE ACTIVITY IN THE EVENING SKIES...



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Planning Board chair discusses ADUs

For Worthington the change at the state level has some repercussions, but since we already allowed them "By Right" with Site Plan Approval, we are much less affected than other towns.

The main changes that affect us are: one, we can no longer require owner-occupancy of either unit of housing and two for some reason the state has capped the size of an Accessory Dwelling Units at the smaller of 900 sq ft or 50% of the main house. That means someone with a small house (e.g. 1,500 sq. ft.) is limited to a very small and practically challenging, ADU of 750 sq. ft., while someone with a large

house (e.g 2,400 sq. ft.) is capped at a 900 sq. ft. ADU.

This has been common in ADU bylaws in the state, but Worthington decided we would rather let people build more functional housing, so we capped the size at 900 sq. ft. regardless of the size of the main house. Nine hundred square feet is sufficient to build an ADA compliant apartment. Much less than that and it becomes quite challenging.

Good luck and thank you for writing on the topic.

Bart Niswonger

Chair Worthington Planning Board

GUEST COLUMN

A Christmas card gardening question



My long-time friend Jane sent a column request via her Christmas card! "I still read your columns, Roberta. I like the folksy way you write! Can you please provide some tips on keeping my Poinsettia healthy?"

So, out of the archives comes this column, devoted to Jane and you guessed it, the poinsettia.

Every Christmas the poinsettia takes the stage, front and center, in grocery and box store displays. The deep red bracts lure buyers to make them part of their holiday decorating.

Pretty? For sure, but without proper care, the plant won't have a chance past New Year's Day.

Let's learn what we can do to keep this favorite looking its best throughout the holiday season and then some.

It's important that you start off with a healthy plant. Choose a poinsettia with dark green foliage all the way to the soil line. Color should completely cover the bracts on the upper portion of the plant.

Avoid plants whose flowers (located in the center of the bracts) show pollen. If pollen is evident, the plant is old.

Be wary of those that are displayed in plastic or paper sleeves or even those that are elbow to elbow. Poinsettias need room to spread out, and the longer they are cramped, the more likely it is that their quality will be impacted.

Wilted plants are also best avoided, as this may indicate more than dry soil alone.

Poinsettias are cold sensitive. I was aghast when an out of town florist delivered these to me without a proper covering!

Temperatures under 50 degrees for even a few minutes can damage the plant.

Therefore, insert into a bag or protective sleeve for the ride home from the store and do not leave in an unheated car while you run other errands!

Once home, position the poinsettia in a location where it will receive indirect light for at least six hours a day. Avoid drafts, warm or cold, and place far enough away from windows to prevent the foliage from touching cold glass.

Chances are if you are comfortable inside, your poinsettia will be as well. Temperatures from 65-70 degrees during the day to around 55 at night will extend its life.

Check the plant often to see if it needs water. If the soil is dry, water until droplets leak through the drainage holes in the pot. Saucers shouldn't accumulate water. Dump the excess out after each watering so the plant won't reabsorb it and become waterlogged.

Soil that remains soaking wet is likely to cause root rot. A visual indication of this irreversible disease is curled, wilting foliage and bracts. Hold off on fertilizing the plant while it is in bloom.

It's unfortunate that few people keep their poinsettias past the holiday season. My mom tries for repeat bloom each year with varying degrees of success. This year, some bracts are just starting to turn red!

Here's what to do if you'd like to try it: In early April cut back the plant to eight inches. Fertilize with an all purpose house-plant fertilizer once a month.

New growth should appear by the end of May. After the danger of frost has passed, move the plant outdoors. Continue to water but increase fertilization to every two weeks.

Pinch plants in late June or early July to promote bushy growth. At this time you may also wish to repot the poinsettia. Select a pot one size larger, filling around the root ball with a good potting soil.

Bring the plant indoors as temperatures fall.

The poinsettia is photoperiodic, and

GARDEN, page 5

EDITORIAL POLICY

Letters to the editor should be 500 words or less in length. We require letter writers to include his or her name, town of residence and home telephone number. We must authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions deemed to be libelous or contain unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, defamation of character and offensive language. All unknown or alleged facts and quotations offered by the author need to cite credible, unbiased sources.

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HILLTOWNS

WONDERFUL

from page 2

impact of the CCD on bringing people together to enjoy history and culture from throughout the Hilltowns and beyond.”

Leslie Ferrin, Project Art
Cummington

“Community Day where the Post Office was refreshed, along with the Park, stands out as an event that brought our community and local businesses together.”

Jackie Coury
Blandford

“Chester Railway Station fulfilled its mission as a community center in 2024, in addition to private functions, the non-profit hosted everything from Chester Library’s Summer Reading Program, COA yoga classes, bible study, local author book discussions, HCHC Child Care (continuing into 2025) and the toy train we left at Chester Elementary for the Holiday season has been extended to February by popular demand.”

Dave Pierce, Chester Railway Station
Chester

“We had great success supporting our young families with events like the annual Trunk or Treat, blueberry and apple picking, building gingerbread houses with a special visit from Santa and doing family movie nights in Stanton Hall.”

Vicki Mayhew,
Events Committee Chair
Huntington

“A group of people—organized by Ann Gzcela-- formed a Garden Team and have

beautified the Town with new plantings, sculptures, and activities that have brought great spirit to town (we had a Scarecrow Contest with whimsical, creative entries requiring people to drive around town to see them!).”

Holly Higinbotham,
Co-Chair, Select Board
Windsor

“The repair of General Knox Road. It was literally falling into the ravine on the South West side of the road...The town got a grant to widen the road in that area. The process required the rock face opposite that spot to be dynamited, moving it back several feet. Then, re-grading the road bed and installing new hard-top. The project started in late July early August and finished in mid-November.”

Tom Kulig, Chair, Select Board
Russell

“Many in the town [took] on the challenge of hiring a new Town Administrator and fast! The Finance Committee worked many, many volunteer hours to get our budget presented on time. This did my heart good This tells me we have a team that works together.”

Joann Martin
Blandford

“It’s been nearly 50 years since Arlo Guthrie introduced Bob Dylan and Joan Baez to the Dream Away Lodge during the Rolling Thunder Revue. Two of Arlo’s grandchildren performed there



Artist Sergei Isupov turned a downed 19th century tree into public sculpture. It is part of the Cummington Cultural District, the only rural cultural district in the state.

Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel

during the summer season.”

The Dream Away Lodge
Becket

“Around the first of the year the town was granted \$2 million through a Congressional Earmark from Congressman Neal, to build a Senior Center. We are working on finding the additional funding to build it on the lot next door to Town Hall.”

Charley Rose, Select Board Chair
Worthington

“We have several members that set goals this year that specifically was to improve their health by being more active outdoors. We have someone who actually overcame diabetes and lost over 70 lbs this year by hiking with us and now is hiking 20 miles a week. We motivate and bring people outdoors to beautiful and amazing places – it’s what we do.”

Liz Massa, President
Western Mass Hilltown Hikers
Chester

“The Hilltown Community Development Corporation is pleased to announce that it’s added a new vehicle to the fleet for the Hilltown Easy Ride transportation program. We are looking forward to accommodating more folks.”

Joan Griswold,
Director of Community Programs
Hilltown Community
Development Corporation
Chesterfield

“The Hilltown Community Development Corporation got a \$1 million USDA grant to build a commercial kitchen and expand our farm store into the vacant Cummington elementary school in 2025. The town received a \$400k Rural Development grant to get a bid ready design completed to renovate the entire school.”

Dave Christopolos, Executive Director
Hilltown Community Development
Corporation
Chesterfield

“This year, Hilltown Market expanded its reach by providing over \$175,000 worth of free locally grown food to

food-insecure families and seniors, thanks to partnerships with local pantries and farmers. Together, we reduced food miles and strengthened our rural economy.”

Hunt Chase, Director of Community Food Resilience

Hilltown Community Development Corporation

Chesterfield

“Local businesses like Gateway Farm & Pet, which is supplying all my Christmas presents for the family (yes, Carhartt) and also the stocking stuffers for my dogs and the birds. Thank you Tara Grenier and team. Then there is Moltenbrey’s Market where the prime rib for Christmas dinner is coming from – thank you Darryl Fisk and team. Having local retailers is essential to the life of the Hilltowns.”

Kathryn Koegel, resident
Huntington

“On Thursday Sept. 26, 28 Hampshire Regional students traveled to Woods Hole, Massachusetts for a field trip. Many of these students were 8th graders who spent every Wednesday after school last year assembling the Millennium Raider, our research mini-boat. We also took along a small contingent of high school students interested in STEM careers.”

Dr. Vito Perrone, Superintendent,
Hampshire Regional
Chesterfield

“The Worthington Parks and Rec Committee has done a great job of beautifying the park.”

Pat Kennedy
Worthington

“Greeting visitors to the early October Open Studio Tour, I enjoyed the beauty of the center of Worthington. It was a sunny fall day, with visitors from our community and the larger region. One couple who lived locally described delight at how this now-annual event brought a festival atmosphere to these little towns.”

Kathryn Jensen, Event Chair,
Hilltown Arts Alliance Open Studio
Tour

Plainfield

“The canoe races, the Halloween event [Haunted Strathmore] hosted by the Russell Police Department, the Parade of Lights hosted by the Russell Recreation Committee.”

Deborah Danoff-Hoppe
Russell

“The Town of Russell Historic Commission got a \$9,700 Veterans Heritage Grant to have a memorial made for two WW2 Veterans. We also moved a huge bronze tablet created by Horace Moses, owner of Strathmore Paper Mills to Strathmore Park. This is dedicated to the WW1 veterans who were his employees in Woronoco and West Springfield.”

Sue Maxwell,
Russell Historical Commission
Russell

“The 14th Annual Historic North Hall Arts Festival brought some incredible music, dance, and stories to Huntington.”

Christine Mc Shain
Huntington

“The Russell Police Department Family Fun Day and new police department garage...the canoe races. Harry Rock was, and continues to be, a great resource for that event. The Highway Department got a new truck and a mini-excavator.”

Wayne Procopio
Russell

“Western Mass Hilltown Hikers and the exciting opening of the Chester Granite and Polishing Works. We also had an amazing Halloween event.”

Heather Wyman
Westfield

“The Becket Arts Center Arts and Crafts Marketplace this past November and June. So wonderful to have Hilltown crafters and artists able to feature and sell their beautiful creations. Really a wonderful community experience.”

Marilyn Taylor
Becket

“Musical events at the Becket Arts Center, free for the community.”

Francine Gadowski-Gentry
Becket

“The First (and now annual) Wyben Tractor Parade. An amazing example of a community getting together to create a new tradition that celebrated the agricultural heritage of the area and was just plain fun.”

Kathryn Koegel,
Country Journal Correspondent
Huntington

“An inquisitive fourth grade student came over to me, on the last day of our Wild & Scenic puppet making workshop, cradling his freshly painted mammal puppet and said ‘I thought I wanted to make computer games but I might want to make things I can touch, my hands like it...I love it.’ I could feel him expanding before my eyes, his ownership of his creation, his feeling of deep connection and understanding. It is moments like that that keep me working for this amazing river and the community that lives along its banks.”

OPINION

SECURITY

from page 4

age 65 to claim you would have, instead, collected about \$101,400 – in other words you have received more, so far, by claiming at age 62. But that will change when you reach 77, your breakeven age, had you claimed at 65). Starting at age 77, you will have received less in cumulative lifetime benefits because you claimed at age 62.

Which, again, is why – at the AMAC Foundation’s Social Security Advisory Service – we encourage everyone to consider life expectancy when deciding when to take Social Security. Of course there are other factors too, not the least of which is financial need, but life expectancy is key. And since the benefit you get when you claim is permanent except for annual Cost of Living

Adjustments, deciding when to claim Social Security is a decision which affects a lifetime.

The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation’s staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisior@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.

GARDEN

from page 4

long nights of uninterrupted darkness encourage it to bloom. In greenhouses, growers go to great lengths to withhold light, as even small amounts can delay or stop the plant from setting bud.

At home, putting the plant in the closet for 14 hours each night is your best bet. Most people get on a 5 p.m.-8 a.m. schedule beginning on Oct. 1 and continue it for eight-10 weeks until color shows on the bracts.

Night temperatures should be no higher than 70 degrees or flowering may be delayed.

Regardless of whether you enjoy the poinsettia for the season or longer, may its colorful bracts brighten your holiday!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 33 years she has held the position of staff horticulturist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with “Gardening Question” in the subject line.

SCHOOLS & YOUTH

Sophomores take first place at annual 'Reindeer Games'

By Wendy Long
Correspondent

HUNTINGTON – The upper grades at Gateway Regional School were in hot pursuit of spirit points at the school's annual "Reindeer Games," which is held during the last few hours of school before the holiday break each December.

Freshman, sophomore, junior and senior classes gave it their all through a variety of competitions over nearly two and a half hours on Friday, Dec. 20. In keeping with tradition, each class took a bleacher section of the gym, that they had decorated. Once the others were in place, the seniors ran into joyous music, pulling Santa on his sleigh.

Events included gingerbread decorating, volleyball, a three-legged race, tug of war, musical chairs and the always popular finale, a dodgeball tournament. Some of the games were particularly inventive, including "snowball toss" where a blindfolded student tries to toss a ping pong ball into a small bucket on their teammate's head and "balloon pop" where small teams had to pop balloons that were tied to their opponents ankles, with everybody staying within the center circle of the gym.

A breather from all of the action was built in, with a friendly "snowman building" competition between the school office and the district's Central Office. Sullivan was joined by Assistant Principal Val Zeh and SPED Educational Team Leader Chris Tamburrino and competed against Superintendent Kristen Smidy, Pupil Services Director Kurt Garivaltis and Technology Director Christopher Parker. Tamburrino and Parker each served as their team's "snowman." Smidy and Zeh were pushed on rolling chairs by Garivaltis and Sullivan to collect a hat, carrot nose, scarf and rolls of toilet paper to "wrap" the snowmen. It was close, but students judged the Superintendent's team to be this year's winner.

Senior Gia Marchese served as Master of Ceremonies. Joey Pisani, of the Class of 2024, returned to help out at the games and took the microphone whenever Marchese had to compete. Pisani's remarks were hilarious, as he noted things like, "Our talent is not unlimited" during a particularly haphazard event. When the seniors won an event, Pisani noted, "Congratulations. You will be graduating in June."

And as the seniors and sophomores lined up to determine the tug of war winner, Pisani wryly quipped, "So much rests on this. You're going to remember this moment for the rest of your lives."

Principal William Sullivan reported that the morning had included four rotations of fun events throughout classrooms and building spaces. Offerings included Jenga and Monster Magnetic



Junior spectators cheer on their classmates during Gateway's annual "Reindeer Games."

Turley photos by Wendy Long

Conkers, Felting and Paper Flower Making, Rockband, Puzzles and a showing of "Call of the Wild" among many others. The Wellness Center hosted "Holiday Bootcamp" sessions, while the wood shop held an Uno Tournament.

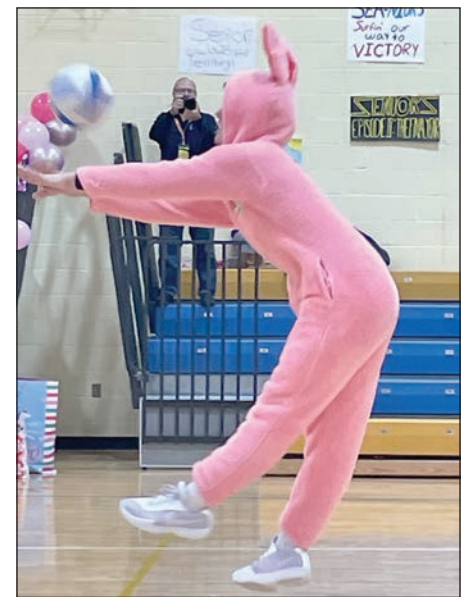
Not to be outdone, Sullivan offered a workshop called "Breakfast for Beginners" where students cooked and ate while Smidy taught participants how to make spring rolls in the Central Office.

Despite a hard fought battle between the classes and several lead changes the sophomore class took top prize with 800 points. Seniors were second with 725 points, closely followed by the junior class with 700. Freshmen posted 525 points on the day.

These points go into the yearlong class competition for the highly coveted "Spirit Trophy" prize. In addition to reindeer games, points are collected through things like fundraisers, food drives and spirit days. The winning class for the year is announced at Gateway's annual awards assembly in June.



Choral director Daniel Rose deejayed the festive, holiday music and shared a joke with alumni Joey Pisani, as senior organizer Thea Papillion looks on.



An unnamed junior bunny goes up for an epic volleyball spike.



Sophomore Anna Niles out-witted and outlasted the others to win the balloon pop.



Evan Fogue played the role of Santa when the senior class entered the gymnasium for Gateway's 2024 "Reindeer Games."



Seniors Sklar Radwich, Jaidon Plant, Rosandela Resto and Kyleigh Benson with their decorated gingerbread house. Each team had about 5 minutes to decorate a pre-formed house, using icing and candies. Faculty judged the winner.

FSU sponsors high school writing contest

FITCHBURG – The English Studies Department at Fitchburg State University invites writers from area high schools to submit original work for its annual writing contest, where prizes will include publication in the university's literary magazine as well as gift certificates to the campus bookstore.

All participants will also have their application fees and enrollment deposits to Fitchburg State waived. The contest is open to any high school student in Massachusetts, grades 9 through 12.

Writers are asked to create their submissions based on the following prompt: Have you ever experienced things seemingly unrelated, but discovered an unexpected connection? Sometimes, thinking about two such events brings a new way of thinking about each of them. Consider, in their life, two separate experiences that are connected in some way and write

about them. They may focus on a central image, word or idea that connects the two experiences or they may create a connection that makes sense to them. Share how looking at these two events together help them see things in a new light.

Students may submit a narrative essay up to three pages long, a poem or group of up to three poems (no more than three pages total) or a multimedia project up to five minutes in length. Written submissions may be offered in a language other than English.

Submissions are due Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2025 and may be turned in online at <https://tinyurl.com/4wy77sc6>.

For additional information, people may email English Studies faculty members Wendy Keyser at wkeyser@fitchburgstate.edu or DeMisty Bellinger-Delfeld at dbelling@fitchburgstate.edu.

HILLTOWN HIKING ADVENTURES



This mine was the destination of one of their hikes.



The Western Massachusetts Hilltown Hikers sit on a log with cascading falls behind them.



A member of Hilltown Hikers looks at a large pool of water.



The Hikers explore this old wood structure.



The Hilltown Hikers take time to relax by this bridge on one of their many 2024 hikes.

Submitted photos



The group stops to look at some old machinery on this hike.



This hiker holds a metal pole he found along the trail.

Looking back at 2024

The year 2024 was an impressive year for the Hilltown Hikers. They provide outdoor adventure, nature and history guided hikes and tours for Western

Massachusetts. They are based in Chester and their favorite areas are within the Gateway

District. The group shares some photos of hikes they took in 2024.

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USDA INSP. FROZEN PORK SHOULDER PICNIC. \$1³⁹ lb	USDA INSP. FRESH BONE-IN STRIPLOIN STEAKS \$7⁷⁷ lb	NEW YEAR'S ITEMS
USDA INSP. FRESH BONE-IN PORK LOIN ROAST LOIN END or RIB END..... \$2³² lb	USDA INSP. FRESH BONELESS BEEF SIRLOIN SPOON ROAST \$5⁹⁹ lb	USDA INSP. IQF FROZEN CHICKEN PARTY WINGS PORTIONS 3 LB BAG..... \$5⁹⁹ ea
USDA INSP. FROZEN PORK BREAKFAST SAUSAGE LINKS FULLY COOKED \$2⁴⁹ lb	USDA INSP. GROUND FRESH DAILY 80% LEAN GROUND BEEF 7 LB BOX \$3⁹⁹ lb	USDA INSP. FROZEN ARMOUR COOKED MEATBALLS 4 LB BAG \$9⁹⁹ lb
USDA INSP. KAYEM BUDDABALL BONELESS SMOKED PIT HAM..... \$3⁶⁶ lb		USDA INSP. HILLSHIRE FARMS POLSKA KIELBASA 14 OZ OR 15 OZ... \$3⁴⁹ ea
USDA INSP. FROZEN BUTCHER WAGON BONELESS DINNER HAM AVERAGE 5 LB \$1⁹⁹ lb		USDA INSP. IQF FROZEN RAW SHRIMP PEELED & DEVEINED 51/60 CT 2 LB BAG..... \$7⁹⁹ ea
USDA INSP. FROZEN TURTLE CREAM PIE 25.1 OZ. \$5⁹⁹ ea		USDA INSP. FROZEN 5 LB BLOCK JUMBO RAW SHRIMP 6-10 FOR STUFFING \$39⁹⁹ ea

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BLANDFORD

Select Board hold brief meeting then STM

By **Mary Kronholm**
Correspondent

BLANDFORD – The Select Board met prior to the Special Town Meeting Friday evening, Dec. 20 at 6 p.m.

The board, along with Town Counsel Mark Reich of KP-Law, Moderator David Hopson, Finance Committee members Jackie Coury and Kevin Green, Town Administrator Cristina Ferrara and Assistant Town Clerk Mary Kronholm in Town Clerk Doris Jemiolo’s absence, reviewed the warrant articles and found them to be in order.

The board, acting as the Zoning Board of Appeals approved the relocation of the First Congregational Church sign in front of the Chapel on Main Street to a more visible location.

The board meeting concluded at 7:44 p.m. in time to move into the gym

for the Special Town Meeting.

Special Town Meeting

All nine articles on the warrant having been motioned and appropriately seconded passed unanimously as declared by Moderator Hopson. There were 27 registered voters who participated in the less-than-half-hour meeting in spite of the snow.

Articles

Article 1, to transfer \$50,000 from Free Cash to fund the town’s Other Post-employment Benefits will help the town’s bond rating for borrowing power.

There were several questions about the \$40,000 for a new Council on Aging vehicle, Article 2. Ferrara explained that a new vehicle would not cost that much, but she wanted to have sufficient funds available so

there would not be a need to return to the town for additional money. The \$40,000 was moved from Capitol Projects Stabilization Fund. Lloyd Martin asked about acquiring an electronic vehicle and that will be looked into. An electronic vehicle will require at least one charging station.

Moving money from Free Cash to the Reserve Fund produced the question of the actual dollar amount in Free Cash, which is \$631,000. This was moved to replenish the Reserve Fund. Articles 6, 7, 8 and 9 all were for moving funds from Free Cash to cover previous year’s invoices, add money to the Town Hall Maintenance account and provide sufficient funds for a new town accounting service to begin in January.

Additional monies from Capital Projects Stabilization were moved to cover un-budgeted Information Technology upgrades.

Select Board adopts single tax rate

BLANDFORD – The Select Board met with the Assessors on Wednesday, Dec. 18 at 4 p.m. for the annual tax classification and potential tax rate for the new fiscal year.

Harald Scheid President of Regional Resource Group and Regional Tax Assessor and Associate Assessor Christopher Cozzaglio, also from Regional Resource Group and Assistant Assessor Cathy Smelcer were also at the meeting. The recommendation from the Board of Assessors was for “the Select Board to adopt a single tax rate to be applied to all classes of property in Blandford.”

The Select Board voted, in accordance with Mass. General Law Ch. 40, sec. 56 to maintain the single tax rate. The town has historically only ever had a single tax rate for all properties.

The proposed tax rate for the next fiscal year, FY 2025 is \$11.71 per thousand dollars of value.

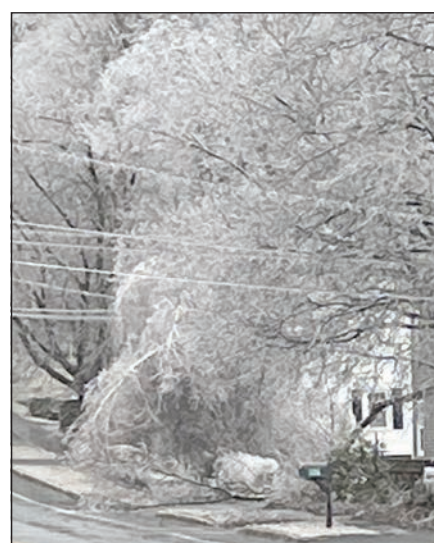
The average single family home property tax should see about a \$132 increase in property tax, or 3.32%. According to RRG, the average value of a single-family home in town is \$340,600.

The Department of Revenue will review the calculations and recommendation before confirming the estimated single tax rate for fiscal year 2025 is \$11.71 per thousand dollars of valuation.

This rate is an estimate and may change upon Department of Revenue review. Assessors are Chair Dr. David Hopson, Stephen Jemiolo and Paul Martin.



The First Congregational Church of Blandford held a church picnic in July.



In March, there was an ice storm. This is a view of Main Street. *File photos*

YEAR IN REVIEW

from page 1

APRIL

The April 8 eclipse of the sun brought out many people to the center of town to view the spectacle. Jeff Bacon and son Jace found a good spot on the side of the library to watch the eclipse.

MAY

There was a massive hail storm on May 9 and a major water break on the Mass Turnpike. The bears came out of hibernation and were sited far and wide throughout town. Bird feeders were most vulnerable.

JUNE

Annual Town Meeting and Election were held. T.J. Cousineau was re-elected to the Select Board. The position for Tree Warden was the only contest on the ballot, incumbent Mark Boomsma’s seat was challenged by Gordon Avery IV, but Boomsma reclaimed his seat.

JULY

This month saw a picnic at the parsonage of the First Congregational Church of Blandford with Pastor Ciprian Droma as chef. The Porter Memorial Library Summer Reading Program was underway.

AUGUST

August saw fixit events at the fairgrounds. Volunteers painted, put in new windows and stabilized buildings. The Jose Gonzales trio performed at The White Church and the 29th Bel Canto performance was the last weekend. This year was indeed very special as soprano Latonia Moore sang again giving credit and appreciation to Maestro Eve Queler for her successful operatic career.

SEPTEMBER

Labor Day Weekend’s Blandford Fair was very successful accord-

ing to Fair President Matt Ripley. The library patio was the place for a meet and greet reception for the new Town Administrator Cristina Ferrara. The patio was constructed with a grant from the Mass Board of Library Commissioners.

OCTOBER

State Auditor Diana DiZoglio walked through town promoting her ballot question for auditing the legislature. She was joined by Holyoke Mayor Joshua A. Garcia who accompanied her from town for a short distance.

George Reichert spearheaded the Community Day effort to refurbish the Post Office, Fire Department training area and Bicentennial Park. There was a great turnout for this feel-good program. Library Director Nicole Daviau was elected to a state wide position on the Massachusetts Library System’s Executive Board for a three-year term.

NOVEMBER

The Council on Aging Veteran’s Annual Dinner, the Volunteer Firefighters save at 83 Main St. and the formation of Democratic Town Committee were highlights for this month.

DECEMBER

The Fire Department’s Association held their annual Pancake Breakfast and there was a craft fair at the Historical Society, pet photos with Santa at the Blandford Animal Hospital and a Special Town Meeting to finish out the year.



Stop the bleed participants show their certificates earned in March. They are from left, Judith MacKinnon, Lloyd Martin, Linda Barnard, Mary and Don Brainerd.



In September Town Administrator Cristina Ferrara with Finance Committee Chair Jackie Coury is shown at the first event on the new patio at the library.



In May, this mother bear and her three cubs were seen at a bird feeder.



WILLIAMSBURG

bankESB hires Kelly Martins as social media manager

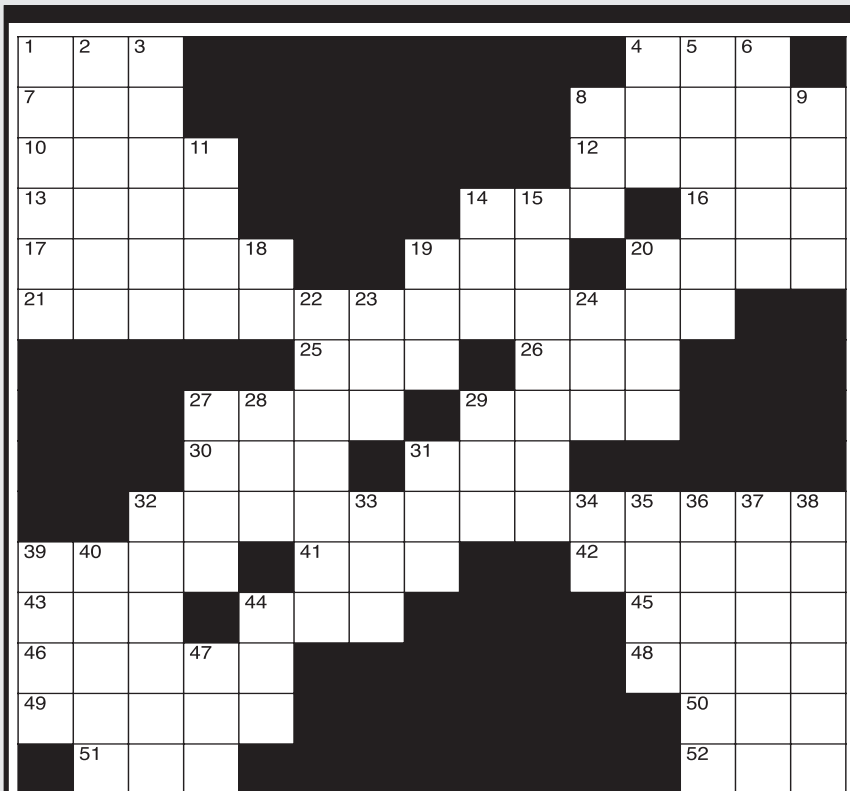
EASTHAMPTON – bankESB recently hired Kelly Martins (Partridge) as social media manager, based at its 36 Main St., Easthampton office.

Martins of Ludlow earned a master's degree in nonprofit management

and philanthropy with a focus on strategic planning and implementation from Bay Path University. She joins the bank from GRATI Consulting where she was the director of marketing and business development.

Founded in 1869 as Easthampton Savings Bank, bankESB is headquartered in Easthampton. Through their sponsorship and charitable giving program, The Giving Tree, bankESB and the Easthampton Savings Bank Charitable

Foundation support non-profit organizations and causes throughout Hampden and Hampshire counties. In 2023 alone, The Giving Tree donated nearly \$635,000 and over the past decade has donated more than \$3.6 million.



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Central processing unit
- 4. Taxi
- 7. Body part
- 8. Papal court
- 10. Young women making their public debuts
- 12. Metal shackles
- 13. Joseph's wife
- 14. Licensed professional
- 16. Partner to cheese
- 17. Mild fruits
- 19. File format
- 20. Province of Indonesia
- 21. Beloved grilled foods
- 25. Bar bill
- 26. Don't know when yet
- 27. Whale ship captain

- 29. Touches softly
- 30. Mock
- 31. Red-brown Pacific sea bream
- 32. Summer entertainment options
- 39. Protective crust
- 41. Cool!
- 42. Behave in a way that belittles
- 43. Denial
- 44. A place to sleep
- 45. Electronic counter-countermeasures
- 46. Intestinal pouches
- 48. SE Asia family of languages
- 49. Sound
- 50. Select
- 51. Give the impression of dishonesty

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Of cadmium
- 2. Deliver a sermon
- 3. Inner regions of a shadow
- 4. Aggressive dog
- 5. Smells
- 6. Twofold
- 8. Former OSS
- 9. Computer language
- 11. Indian groom
- 14. Automobile
- 15. Hairstyle
- 18. Atomic #76
- 19. Guy (slang)
- 20. Ladies' undergarments
- 22. Furniture with open shelves
- 23. Back-arc basin
- 24. Partner to flow
- 27. A type of horse

- 28. Possesses
- 29. Split pulses
- 31. Small amount
- 32. Flat-bottomed riverboat
- 33. Not good
- 34. Atomic #31
- 35. Assist in committing a crime
- 36. Chauvinists
- 37. Get away
- 38. One of a people who speaks a Semitic language
- 39. Civil rights college organization
- 40. Combustible dark rocks
- 44. Grocery container
- 47. Central nervous system

THIS WEEK'S HOROSCOPES

ARIES

Mar 21/Apr 20

It's easy for your mind to wander and get caught daydreaming, Aries. You could be feeling a little restless and in need of a change. A vacation or a night with friends may just do it.

TAURUS

Apr 21/May 21

Even if you are trying to save money, this week some situations will arise that will require you to open your wallet. This is why you have an emergency fund.

GEMINI

May 22/Jun 21

Gemini, sometimes people do not know which side of you they might encounter and might keep you at arms' length as a result. Try to be more open this week.

CANCER

Jun 22/Jul 22

Exciting things are on the horizon, Cancer. This might be something you have been anticipating for some time.

LEO

Jul 23/Aug 23

Leo, this week you might need to stick up for someone or fight for a cause you believe in, even if it adversely affects your popularity. Stand your ground in these situations.

VIRGO

Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, you might want to swallow your pride and ask for help rather than trying to do everything on your own. Going it alone hasn't helped you in the past, so why should it now?

LIBRA

Sept 23/Oct 23

Someone steps in and helps you along at work, Libra. Instead of feeling he or she took liberties, thank this person for giving you the extra boost you likely needed at the time.

SCORPIO

Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, try to look at a situation from a new angle and then you might get some of the answers you desire this week. Is someone acting out of character?

SAGITTARIUS

Nov 23/Dec 21

Learn how to deal with conflict in a productive way, Sagittarius. Then you won't get bogged down by others when they are going head-to-head. Aries might play a role this week.

CAPRICORN

Dec 22/Jan 20

This week you may find that all of your efforts to build up to a pinnacle moment perhaps didn't give you the feelings you desired. Try getting back to basics.

AQUARIUS

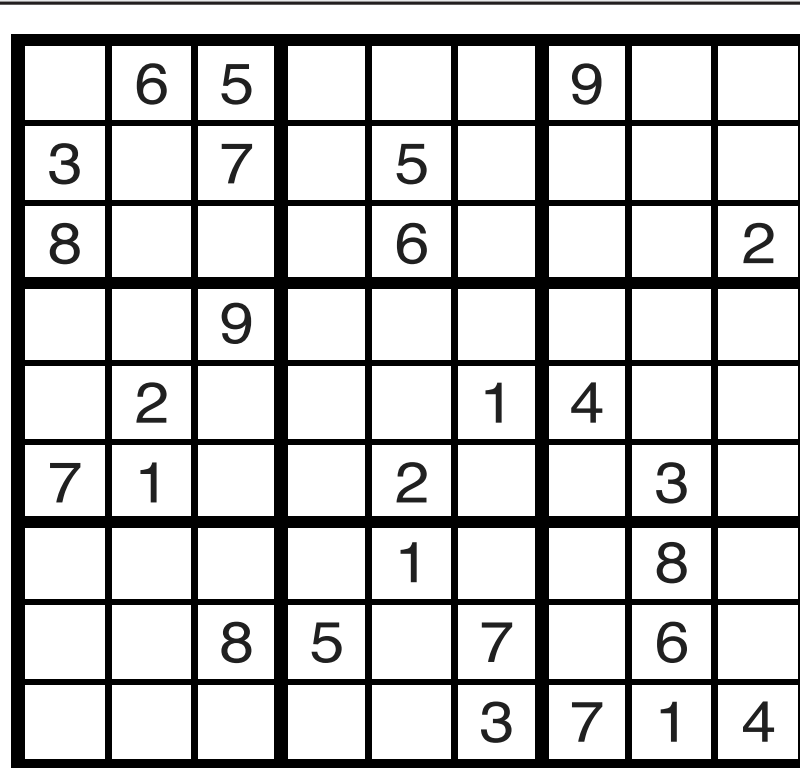
Jan 21/Feb 18

Aquarius, something that has been stretching on for quite some time finally gets finished, giving you the closure you need. Share the news slowly with others.

PISCES

Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, if what you are doing right now is giving you gratification, you might not need to make many big changes in the weeks to come.



SUDOKU

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

answers

4	1	7	3	9	8	2	9	9
6	9	2	7	4	5	8	3	1
3	8	5	9	1	2	4	7	6
5	3	8	4	2	9	6	9	7
7	6	9	1	4	8	6	3	2
6	9	1	2	5	7	3	6	8
2	5	3	6	9	7	4	1	8
8	6	4	8	2	5	7	1	3
8	7	6	8	3	4	5	9	2

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RUSSELL

Owner of Strathmore Mill gives Select Board update

By Kathryn Koegel
Correspondent

RUSSELL – At a regular select board meeting held Tuesday, Dec. 17, Donald Voudren, Sr., the owner of collapsed Strathmore Mill #1, was asked to give an update on the status of the building, which had been condemned by Russell Building Inspector Jason Fougue.

“The permits were approved and the demolition work on the collapsed section has been completed,” said Voudren. “Associated Building Wreckers is working with an architect and engineer to pull building records and has taken out the required permit to proceed with demolition of the rest of the building,” continued Voudren. He expected the second permit to take six to eight weeks. “Associated is qualified and knows what they are doing.” He noted that the demolition on the first building had been completed on the Dec. 17 at 1 p.m.

“All they have to do tomorrow is put in the erosion fencing.” That fencing was necessary due to debris including bricks from the building falling into the water, which Voudren said Associated would work on removing. Voudren said that Salvini & Associates would draw up the second demolition plan and work with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the town on approvals for the method of demolition.

Voudren said it was expected it to take six-eight weeks for the second permit and then six-eight weeks for the further demolition. Voudren had fenced off the south side of the building that had been open. The area has attracted thrill seekers, who create videos of themselves entering abandoned buildings. “The south side is secured,” said Voudren. “But you have to have a federal permit to get near a dam. Voudren said that Eagle Creek Renewal Energy had brought in a crane and was doing diving to check that the dam that sits just below Mill #1 was not compromised in the collapse.

Select board chair Tom Kulig asked for an update on the planned project for demolition. An architectural rendering, not architectural plans with the required engineering specifications had been given to the town years prior.

One of the owners of Strathmore Mill #2, Oksana Keeney said, “I saw Mr. Voudren at the mill one day 11 or 12 years ago with some workmen and I was curious and stopped him. He showed me a very nice picture of a building with terraces near the water.” That drawing was submitted to the Country Journal by a town official.

At the meeting, Voudren balked at the town’s request for complete architectural drawings with the engineering detail. “That is going to cost at least \$1.8 million. It’s too much.” “In checking with architectural firm Studio One Eleven, which specializes in work rehabbing historic structures and turning them into housing, partner Michael Bohn said that the rule of thumb for a complete architectural plan is that it should cost 8% of the total cost of the building. That would put the total project cost at \$22.5 million.

Voudren estimated his complete project to be 55,000 – 65,000 square feet. “There is enough room to build two buildings,” he said. “I want to propose housing of 800 sq foot apartments for veterans.”

When asked how he would fund such a project, Voudren said, “There is no state funding. This would be market funding with taxes paid to the town.” He was seeking federal funding to increase sewage treatment. “We will need new water mains,” he said. “The state has put on the agenda to rebuild the bridge. If we get that approved, the sewage has to cross that bridge.

The bridge Voudren referred to is just below Mill #1 and spans across a dramatic and scenic cataract called Salmon Falls. When asked for an update on the bridge reconstruction, Kulig said that Massachusetts Department of Transportation had been on site but that he expected any work on it to be 5-7 years away. “The state shows up when they show up,” he said.

For now, the residents on the north side of Woronoco have to cross a metal bridge that was supposed to be temporary when installed 30 years ago. They must drive two miles towards Westfield and drop down on Woronoco Road, which is closed off at the collapsed building area.



This photo shows vmill #1 from the river.

Turley photos by Kathryn Koegel



This shows the now demolished mill # 1 building.



A drawing of mill owner Voudren’s concept which has been circulating for over a decade. The town has asked for architectural drawing with engineering specs. Submitted drawing

Library hosts winter tracking workshops

RUSSELL – Families and adults are invited to join AMC family leader Dawne Piers-Gamble at Noble View Outdoor Center, 635 South Quarter Road, for wildlife tracking with certified tracker and Appalachian Mountain Club leader, Jim Pelletier on Saturday, Jan. 11, 2025 from 10 a.m.-noon.

Participants will learn the art of tracking and spy on wildlife foraging practices and travel corridors. Pelletier shares tips on identification techniques and where to look for wildlife activity in people’s backyard.

People may register by emailing dawne4amc@gmail.com, calling 413-862-6221 or coming to the Russell Public Library, 162 Main St., to sign up by Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025.

Sessions include families hike on Saturday, Jan 11, 2025 from 10 a.m.-noon followed by cocoa, stories and games with Librarian Dawn Piers-Gamble in the cottage at Noble View Outdoor Center and adults and teens hike on Saturday, Jan. 11, 2025 from 1-3 p.m. with AMC leader, Jim Pelletier.

Participants should dress in layers for winter conditions. Winter boots and warm socks are essential.

FIELD

Hennessy. “We have never kicked kids out of the play area [near the play station].” A petition had been circulated in previous weeks on social media by parent, Jessica Martell, to keep Little League in the field behind the police station. Usage of a playground that was once a part of the school was also discussed at the meeting.

“There’s a blind drive way. If there is a heart attack or a shooting, we might go down that road at 30 m.p.h.,” said Hennessy. “Three times we have been driving and a kid came out of nowhere. There are kids that drift down to the playground on bikes. You cannot see them.”

Hennessy clarified what the police station is used for. “You arrest people and take them there. You do not know, who is coming out of the building. One note: There are no holding cells at the police station. Just booking. But there are a lot of things going on.”

In a separate interview Hennessy said that the police department, located in the former Russell elementary school, is sometimes used by other police departments for training and drills, those activities are not appropriate for children to be around.

“I agree, I wouldn’t want my kid around a police station,” said Select Board Chair Kulig when reached for comment. At the meeting, Hennessy offered a compromise for use of the Little League field, which the local organization had already raised \$10,000 to

upgrade. “The board of selectmen want to know who is at the baseball field. One day there was a Jamboree and there was no place for police to park. All we ask is clear knowledge of who is on the field, especially for insurance purposes.” A representative from Gateway Little League concurred and said that a schedule of play would be submitted to the town in advance of the upcoming spring season.

Both the select board and the police acknowledged that there was no real appropriate play space for children in Russell. “Russell kids should have a hub they can go to: a full playscape, maybe even a splash pad,” said Hennessy.

Strathmore Park, a large facility just east of the town with ballfields, is only open for special events due to budget constraints. The town pool had been shut down for more than a decade. A playground behind the library in the center of town as reported in last week’s issue has rusted out equipment and access only on a rutted path to the right of the library. Nothing is ADA compliant.

Kulig noted that “We have a \$100,000 grant pending” to fix up the library play area. “We are waiting on the Governor to sign it. “Then we can really move on renovations.” On Nov. 22, the town had received an update from Senator Velis’ office saying that the funds were part of legislation, but that the governor had to choose their project from a five year Capital Campaign list.

At the meeting residents expressed

concern that there is extremely limited parking on site at the library and the area to one side is using for parking of highway department vehicles. The town has worked on a new parking area off of Frog Hollow that might be used when that playground is renovated. Woronoco resident Megan Ellinger said: “that is still a walk. Do we really want kids crossing Main Street? It’s also a challenge with a stroller.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, Select Board Chair Kulig noted that any new play space was likely three-to-five years on the horizon. The parents who attended the meeting were relieved that they had preserved access to the existing Little League Field, but frustrated that their children had no local, safe place to play.



Little League parent Jessica Martell advocated for use of the fields near the police station which they had paid to upgrade.

Turley photo by Kathryn Koegel

from page 1

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