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Selectmen heard update on Town House restoration

By Paula Ouimette
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NORTH BROOKFIELD – Jim Buzzell, president of the Friends of the North Brookfield Town House, told the Board of Selectmen that the organization has been working to start construction in order to restore a portion of the historic downtown struc-

ture. “We’ve met with a lot of consultants through the years, both those connected with the state and also fundraising professionals,” he said at the Feb. 10 meeting. “And we get the same recommendation from almost every one of these people we talk to and that’s ‘when you’re ready for construction, try to do it so that you can open a portion of the

building to the public.’” Buzzell said it could be a small or large portion of the building, but either way it’s a “great first step.”

“It demonstrates the viability of the project, it tends to gather a lot of support from the community, and most importantly it impresses both large and small scale funders,” he said.

Buzzell said the Friends have come up with a plan

to renovate part of the basement on the east side of the building, adjacent to Summer Street. He said this was formerly the space that housed the fruit store.

Construction would include repairs to the floors, walls, ceilings, and the stone wall, and the addition of a bathroom. He said the stone wall would either be sandblasted or pointed, depending on expert recommenda-

tions.

Buzzell said the space would be used for meetings, or small community events. He said this renovated section would be walled off from the rest of the Town House to prevent access to other parts of the building.

He said depending on whether or not the renovated space has heating, it may only be used seasonally.

Board of Selectmen

Chair Jason Petraitis said the cold and damp has impacted the flooring of this area, causing it to buckle. He said if the space wasn’t heated consistently, it could risk damaging any repairs made to the flooring.

Petraitis and Vice-Chair Jamie Gilman also asked if the building needed to have

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Planning Board heard tourism revenue update

By Paula Ouimette
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STURBRIDGE – Terry Masterson of the Sturbridge Tourist Association gave the Planning Board an update on tourism in town last year.

In 2025, meal spending increased by 8% over the prior year, totaling \$8.68 million. He said part of this reason is contributed to the rising cost of food.

“It is interesting to note, the whole four quarters were pretty consistent for meals, where it once was kind of seasonally fluctuating,” Masterson said at the Feb. 9 meeting.

Masterson said meal spending increased by 16% in the winter and 10% in the spring. He said summer and fall meal spending has been steady, without increases.

He compared meal spending in Sturbridge to that in Amherst, Holyoke, Worcester and Salem from the years 2022 to 2025.

“Since 2022, meal spending in Sturbridge has climbed 17%; Amherst was 23%; Holyoke was only 6%...Salem saw a 13% increase and Worcester a 15% increase,” he said. “So we’re inline with the other towns.”

Masterson said hotel revenues do show a seasonal fluctuation, with the summer and fall months bringing in the most revenue. Last year, the town brought in \$22.5 million in hotel revenue, or a 6% increase over the prior year.

He compared the hotel revenue from 2022-2025 to other communities, and Sturbridge saw an 18% increase; Holyoke, 17%; and Worcester, 13%. He said Amherst had a 66% increase in hotel revenue and Salem had 51% from 2022-2025.

Masterson said the town has 125 businesses including bakeries and dessert makers, coffee and tea shops, restaura-

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QHMA held annual breakfast meeting

By Paula Ouimette
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WARE – The Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce held its first event in the new year, its annual breakfast at Cedarbrook Village at Ware.

Chamber CEO James Przypek welcomed attendees to the Feb. 12 breakfast, which also featured a presentation by the Employers Association of the NorthEast, a century-old nonprofit organization in western Massachusetts.

Przypek thanked the sponsors of the breakfast, the Employers Association of the NorthEast - Presenting Sponsor; Cedarbrook Village at Ware - Breakfast Sponsor and Host; Hardwick Vineyard & Winery - Raffle Sponsor; and Monson Savings - Raffle Sponsor.

He also thanked the chamber’s underwriters for the year, Superior Plus Propane, Burkhart Pizzanelli, Country Bank, J. Stolar



TURLEY PHOTOS BY PAULA OUIMETTE
Gary Dawson, director of Learning & Development at the Employers Association of the NorthEast, was the featured speaker at the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce's annual breakfast.

Insurance Agency, Inc., Monson Savings, Servepro, Behavioral Health Network and Christopher Heights of Belchertown.

Director of Learning & Development at the Employers Association of the NorthEast, Gary Dawson, explained the history of the

nonprofit, and how its staff can help local businesses and employers.

“It started out as a manufacturing association,” Dawson said of the Agawam-based organization. “Over the years we’ve grown.”

Now, the Employers

Association of the North-East offers over 60 different training courses, offered both in-person and remotely, with flexible timing schedules to meet the employer’s needs.

“One of the things that makes us unique is all of the ways you can attend training,” he said. “We’re trying to give them a lot of flexibility.”

Dawson said the nonprofit also offers roundtable discussions and peer exchanges.

“That’s a chance for you to sit collectively and talk about a topic,” he said.

He said webinars are offered monthly, and the use of artificial intelligence has become a big topic of discussion for many employers.

“We constantly are looking for something you’ll find interesting and beneficial,” he said.

Dawson said grants for the trainings are available to employers, offering reim-

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Skylynn caught the first place bass in the kid's category during the Scouting America Troop 118's 49th annual Ice Fishing Derby held on Lake Wickaboag.



SUBMITTED PHOTOS
The first place bass in the kid's category measured 14.25 inches.

Skylynn had her bass measured during Scouting America Troop 118's annual ice fishing derby.

Troop 118 held annual ice fishing derby

WEST BROOKFIELD – Scouting America Troop 118 held its 49th annual Ice Fishing Derby on Lake Wickaboag this past Sunday.

This annual fundraiser took in \$350 in adult ticket sales, with all youth under 18 admitted free. A total of 22 people competed in the derby.

Assistant Scoutmaster Lucas Gorham said half of the money raised was awarded as prize money for the top fish in the adult

categories of bass, pickerel, perch and pout. Children’s winner received trophies.

Two of the adult winners generously returned their prize money back to the troop.

“Overall it was a great derby,” Gorham said.

Skylynn, who is a Scout in another troop and the daughter of wwof Troop 118 adult leader Greg Bryant, hooked the first place bass in the children’s category, measuring 14.25 inches.

A watershed is full of action

By Keith Davies
Coordinator, Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council
Guest Contributor

Editor's Note: This is the second part in a multi-part series about the Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council.

By 2014, the original Chicopee River Watershed Council (1970s) had ceased to exist, it had not been able to engage new people.

A small group of people saw a need to change that and began to renew an idea: the Chicopee Watershed and its tributaries are a special place and should be better known and appreciated by its local residents. Why and how to do that?

Rivers have long been the lifeblood of communities across the region. They helped build New England and they were worked hard and taken for granted.

By the 1970s, people began to realize we needed to clean up our rivers, they benefited us and wildlife in ways we had overlooked. Watershed Councils sprang up and helped start a process to turn things around and in the big picture, things improved, our rivers were cleaned up a great deal.



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Keith Davies led a discussion about the Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council.



Yet the job is not done, and some practices still impact healthy rivers in undesirable ways. Today we enjoy rivers recreationally and realize they serve wildlife and people in many important and healthy ways.

The new effort started with going community to community sharing the idea and inviting people to get in-

involved. We held many local meetings at town halls, libraries, and community centers and it stirred interest and awareness.

We hosted river paddles and clean ups. Some joined the effort!

To give this effort focus and connect people in meaningful ways to the rivers, C4R inaugurated two programs: Water quality monitoring and Paddling trail

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First graders are February's Artists in Residence

By Ryan Drago
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WEST BROOKFIELD – For the month of February, the Merriam-Gilbert Library welcomed the artwork done by first grade students.

These are the first-grade students at West Brookfield Elementary School, and they worked on winter birch tree collages in their art class. The class is taught by WBES Art Teacher, Kelly Mundell, who reached out to Children's Services Librarian Linda Higgins.

The two talked and worked out a plan to get the artwork of the kids highlighted and for the first time first graders become the Artists in Residence at the library. Over 25 students had their work exhibited in the meeting room of the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library.

The art medium for these projects consists of winter birch tree collages. Students would cut and paste their winter birch trees in front and then decorate their backgrounds with sunrises or sunsets.

To get an idea of what birch trees look like, the students looked at the birch tree sitting inside the WBES courtyard to get a glimpse of the lines, shapes and patterns of the birch tree. When



A winter birch tree collage with a beautiful sunrise background was made by West Brookfield Elementary School first grader Sloane. This collage is part of an art exhibit displayed at the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library in West Brookfield for the month of February.



These winter birch tree collages were made during art class taught by West Brookfield Elementary School art teacher Kelly Mundell.

adding snow to their background, kids used white paint and a touch of glitter glaze with a toothbrush to add on a winter effect.

In addition to the birch tree collages hanging in the meeting room there was a birch-themed poem split into parts surrounding the room. The poem is called "Birches" by Robert Frost. The poem can be read throughout the room as guests explore the artistic talent of 1st graders.

Higgins said there have been some visitors getting an early glimpse of the exhibit. Periodically, some of the WBES first graders came with their families to see the work displayed.

"The kids will be happy to have them up," Higgins said.

This is an exciting connection between the West Brookfield Elementary School and the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library. Higgins gets to visit the first graders in their classrooms at WBES, and the students get to visit her at the library.

The Merriam-Gilbert Library has sent out invitations to the first grade classes to visit the exhibit. Library Director Amy Agro finds this month's Artists in Residence a great opportunity to have parents and



Various birch tree patterns are pasted in front as drawings and paint are added to their background for these white birch tree collages.

friends come out and see the artwork of these students.

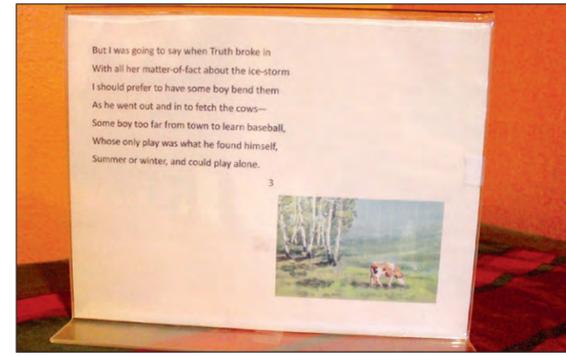
Besides hanging their artwork on the refrigerators at their homes, Agro calls the art exhibit room "the ultimate refrigerator" as the first graders of WBES have their birch tree collages displayed

for the month of February.

Check out these birch tree collages at the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library, 3 West Main St. Programs and events at the library can be found at www.westbrookfieldlibrary.org.



The colors in the background could indicate either a sunrise or a sunset, making the birch trees stand out



A piece to the poem "Birches" by Robert Frost were placed throughout the meeting room where the art is displayed.

Historical Society presents 'Exploring Massachusetts Property Records'

STURBRIDGE – On Thursday, Feb. 26, at 7 p.m. at the Publick House, the Sturbridge Historical Society in collaboration with the Joshua Hyde Public Library will present "Exploring Massachusetts Property Records" by genealogist Seema-Jayne Kenney.

Are you curious about who once owned your home? Wondering what land your ancestors may have bought or sold? This presentation introduces everyday researchers to the fascinating world of Massachusetts land records.

Learn how to use online tools like MassLandRecords.com, understand the meaning behind different

types of deeds, and uncover surprising details – from property disputes to family connections. Whether you're exploring genealogy or local history, land records can help piece together the past in a way few other sources can.

Kenney started in the business of genealogy after completing the Genealogical Research Certificate Program at Boston University's Center for Professional Education in 2010. Since then, she continued her education via ProGen & NIGR in 2012.

Along the way, she joined several Genealogy Societies, attended local conferences, and enjoyed

several webinars. Kenney has been a successful presenter in the past of programs at the Joshua Hyde Public Library.

Kenney is presenting two additional programs this spring in Sturbridge about genealogy. On March 26, the Joshua Hyde Public Library will host "Getting Started with Ancestry.com: A Practical Introduction to Family History Research". This beginner-friendly session introduces you to the core features of Ancestry.com, including how to navigate your family tree, evaluate hints, and organize genealogical information on one of the most widely used family history plat-

forms.

And in June Kenney will be at the Senior Center to present "Become the Ancestor Your Family Remembers". This session offers practical guidance on documenting your own life story using a variety of formats – from job applications and photo captions to vivid personal memories.

This program is supported in part by a grant from the Sturbridge Cultural Council, a local agency, which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

The program is free and open to the public; and is generously hosted by the Publick House.

Advisory Committee held budget reviews

By Ryan Drago
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WEST BROOKFIELD – The Advisory Committee met on Feb. 11 and went over a budget review.

The Advisory Board Secretary Melinda Barnes shared items for the members in person and on Zoom to see what items are currently budgeted and what may have to be reduced.

One item, expenses, is currently budgeted at \$400. It was suggested that a reduced budget amount would be \$100 less.

Another topic was to keep the salary line budget as is on the reduced budget. It seems the Advisory Committee was looking at two budgets; one they referred to as "level services" and the other being the "reduced budget."

A motion was made to keep the salary line as is on the reduced budget and the Advisory Committee voted in favor. The next motion was to have the expenses maintained at \$400 for the level service funded budget, and another motion was made to have the expenses be \$300 on the reduced budget. All these motions passed.

Barnes also asked if the Advisory Committee would vote to accept both budgets, reduced and level services. After the committee voted in favor, Barnes said she would send both versions to the committee. The Committee would

then discuss when they would begin reviewing budgets from other departments. It seems there are some departments looking at reductions, including the Council on Aging.

The Committee also heard that the Town Administrator, Theresa Cof-ske, has already reviewed some budgets. The Advisory Committee is looking to contact the Town Administrator and see what has been approved so far as they prepare to receive budgets soon.

Advisory Committee annual report

The Advisory Committee went over their annual report, which they want to complete at some point. Members took a few minutes to review and see how the report shapes up. There was a brief discussion about how to word the number of members that currently serve on the board. The five members are appointed by the Select Board.

According to Barnes and Committee Chair Lori Loughlin, at one point, the committee didn't have a full board for a year and a half.

The Secretary reviewed some sentences in the report to possibly amend and place the proper verbiage. The committee wanted a rewrite on the tax override item and the wording on how they plan to look ahead with fiscal year 2027.

After a few adjustments, the Advisory Committee agreed to accept the amendments made.

Federated Church announces 2026 Lenten services schedule

STURBRIDGE – The Federated Church of Sturbridge & Fiskdale has announced its 2026 schedule of Lenten services, starting with Ash Wednesday, and culminating in the Easter Sunday celebrations.

Services are held at the church located at 8 Maple St. and the community is welcome to attend.

The Rev. David W. Cote will officiate the services, which began on Feb. 18 with a 6:30 p.m. Ash Wednesday service and continue through Easter Sunday on April 5. Refreshments will be served in Fellowship Hall following each of the Sunday services.

On April 3, Good Friday, the congregation will gather in the Chapel at noon for meditation and prayer. An ecumenical Stations of the Cross service will also be held at St. Anne's Shrine, 16 Church St., Fiskdale.

"On Easter Sunday, the community is invited to join us at 6 a.m. as we celebrate with a special sunrise service at the original Baptist Meetinghouse, which is now located at Old Sturbridge Village," said Cote. "Following the sunrise service, we will return to the Federated Church Meeting House sanctuary at 8 Maple St. for our 9:30 a.m. Easter morning service."

The sunrise service at Old Sturbridge Village is an ecumenical service, with local faith communities participating, including Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Sturbridge), Brookfield Congregational Church (Brookfield), Elm Street Congregational Church (Southbridge), Holy Trinity Church

(Southbridge), and St. Anne/St. Patrick Catholic Church (Fiskdale).

Area residents who wish to attend are advised to enter the Meetinghouse by way of the security gate at the top of the parking lot, dress appropriately for the weather and wear sturdy walking shoes. Food and drink are not permitted, except for bottled water.

The Village will not be open for touring during this event and restrooms will not be available.

The Lenten season includes the following services: Feb. 18, Ash Wednesday, 6:30 p.m.; Feb. 22, First Sunday of Lent, 9:30 a.m.; March 1, Second Sunday of Lent, 9:30 a.m.; March 8, Third Sunday of Lent, 9:30 a.m.; March 15, Fourth Sunday of Lent, 9:30 a.m.; March 22, Fifth Sunday of Lent, 9:30 a.m.; March 29, Palm Sunday, 9:30 a.m.; April 1, Maundy Thursday, 6:30 p.m.; April 3, Good Friday Meditations and Prayer (Federated Church) and Ecumenical Stations of the Cross (St. Anne's Church), noon; April 5, Ecumenical Easter Sunrise Serve at Old Sturbridge Village, 6 a.m.; April 5, Easter Sunday Service (Federated Church), 9:30 a.m.

The Federated Church of Sturbridge & Fiskdale joyfully celebrates Christ's presence and God's grace in our lives. Community members are always welcome to join in worship on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. Services are also live-streamed on the church's Facebook page.

For more information, call 774-304-1021 or visit sturfed.org.

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- community -

Agricultural Commission hosted invasive species program

By Ryan Drago
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BROOKFIELD – The Brookfield Agricultural Commission held an education program at the Brookfield Congregational Church.

The program focused on invasive plants and was presented by Jacob Seidel, a Service Forester in District 5 of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. This was Seidel's first presentation and helps identify various invasive plants that are common in Massachusetts.

This program also explained what the state is doing to mitigate invasive plants, which Seidel mentioned has been an underfunded concept.

Plants like Japanese Knotweed are highly aggressive plants that can damage

infrastructure. Multiflora Rose are thorny shrubs that compete with native plants and usually win. Common Buckthorn is a shrub that forms dense thickets and displaces native species.

These are just a few invasive plants that are common to Massachusetts.

With this educational program, farmers and landowners can learn how to better protect their land and identify various invasive plants. Every year the Brookfield Agricultural Commission picks a new topic every year and this year's focus is on addressing invasive plants.

This program is an example of the objectives of local Agricultural Commissions. Under the Right to Farm statute agricultural commissions look to increase public awareness of agriculture, and the positive impact it has on the town.

This is just one of several objectives the Agricultural Commission follows. They also communicate the guiding principals of the Right-to-Farm Bylaw, work in close cooperation with other town boards and committees to promote agricultural activities, bring awareness to farms and farms of federal, state and other programs, and encouraging the pursuit of agriculture in various ways with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies.

Seidel mentioned one of the greatest threats that contributes to invasive plants is the threat growing after timber harvests and seeing what is growing back on the land. According to Seidel, you don't have to eradicate every invasive plant, but there are many that could cause harm.

There are various tools that can be used for invasive plant management. Ba-

sic gardening tools such as shears, clippers, chainsaws, woodchippers and brush mowers are all acceptable tools. Some may use black plastic, mulch, brush burning, and fire, which is not always the best solution.

"It's about knowing when to apply it," Seidel said.

Chemical herbicides are also reliable depending on the plants, and Seidel listed some additional tools and herbicides during his presentation. There is the Buckthorn Blaster and Honey-suckle Popper. There is also the Parsnip Predator tool that removes wild parsnip, a big invasive in Massachusetts.

Seidel suggests that any farmer or landowner should find out what kind of invasive plants are on their property first. In other words, monitor how severe the infestation is.

When removing invasive

plants, folks could do the manual labor themselves or hire professionals familiar with certain equipment. Property owners can use herbicide treatment or more manageable equipment such as brush mowers.

"What management option works for you," Seidel said.

There are, however, certain regulations to follow. There is the Wetlands Protections Act and the Mass Endangered Species Act that owners should be aware of when handling plant management. Seidel shared various resources to help with financial assistance when handling invasive plants.

Seidel mentioned environmental quality incentive programs and through DCR, the Climate Stewardship Incentive Program, which can be applied for through the Service Forestry. When it comes to managing invasive

plants, Seidel has worked on this subject a lot on DCR properties.

The Climate Stewardship Incentive Program helps provide cost-share funding to private forest landowners and municipalities. Through this program, there is proof that invasive species has become a growing problem.

More information and resources can be found on the Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group website, <https://massnc.org/mipag/>. Seidel stuck around and took questions from the public and brought several pamphlets of information regarding invasive plants and information from DCR Massachusetts.

Updates and further information from the Brookfield Agricultural Commission can be found on their Facebook page, Brookfield Agricultural Commission (Massachusetts).

Federated Church's Irish Feast March 16

STURBRIDGE – A Sturbridge tradition returns just in time for your St. Patrick's Day celebration.

The Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale will host its annual Irish Feast on Monday, March 16, at the historic Publick House Restaurant, inviting the community to gather for good food, good company, and a good cause.

This year's Irish Feast will benefit both the Federated Church and The Center of Hope Foundation, Inc., a Southbridge-based nonprofit that supports people with disabilities and their families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, helping them access resources, services, and opportunities to live meaningful, fulfilling

lives.

"We're fortunate to partner once again with the Publick House, which makes this evening possible year after year," said event chair Ken Benson. "This dinner has always been about community, and we're especially proud that it will also support the important work being done by The Center of Hope right here in our region."

Pastor Rev. David Cote added, "An Irish Feast is about more than corned beef and cabbage. It's about neighbors sitting down together, sharing a meal, and supporting organizations that reflect our shared values of care, inclusion, and compassion."

Guests will enjoy a buffet-style Irish dinner featuring corned beef and

cabbage, boiled potatoes, carrots and turnips, dinner rolls and Irish soda bread, a choice of beverage, and a cupcake for dessert. Dinner will be served in two seatings: The early seating will take place from 4:30-6 p.m., while a later seating happens from 6:30-8 p.m.

Adult tickets are \$18, and children ages 4-12 are \$7.

Tickets must be purchased by March 15 as no tickets will be sold at the door. Tickets will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-noon starting Feb. 13 in the Federated Church of Sturbridge parlor, 8 Maple St., where you may use cash, check, credit/debit card, or Venmo.

The church website at sturfed.org and Facebook page both offer payment

links and QR codes for those wishing to purchase tickets using PayPal. You may also purchase tickets electronically using Venmo at [@Federated-Church](https://www.venmo.com/@Federated-Church).

Please include your address, the number of meals you wish to purchase, and your preferred seating time. Time permitting, tickets purchased by Venmo will be mailed to the address provided. Late orders will be held at the door.

For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the Church Office at 774-304-1021 or Ken Benson at 774-230-3848.

The Federated Church of Sturbridge & Fiskdale joyfully celebrates Christ's presence and God's grace in our lives. Learn more at sturfed.org or email churchoffice@sturfed.org.

Cultural Council announced FY 26 grant awards

NORTH BROOKFIELD – The North Brookfield Cultural Council is pleased to announce the approved grants for fiscal year 2026.

Grants are as follows: Deborah Kirk Roberts - Introduction to Watercolor Workshop; Laura Nelson - Making Space: Conversations on Life, Death & What Matters Most, Death Literacy Programming; Timothy Van Egmond - Intergenerational Concert at the Senior Center; Quaboag Regional Middle/High School - QRMHS Performing Arts Programming; Legally Blonde, Jr.; Hoston Free Public Library - Mystic Aquarium - Traveling Touch Tank, MA Horticultural Society Plantmobile Sessions, Wingmasters

- New England Birds of Prey, Fused Glass Workshop, Sourdough Starter Workshop; Worcester Winds / Pakachoag Music School-Worcester Winds Concert; The Athol Historical Society, Inc. - Uniquely Quabbin magazine; Coalition for a Healthy North Brookfield - Christmas in North Brookfield; Apple Country Radio, Inc.-WACF-LP 98.1 FM; East Quabbin Land Trust, Inc.-EQLT Story Walk at Wendemuth Meadow; Friends of the Stone Church, Inc. - Spring 2026 Concerts; and Music Dance-Rondae Drafts - Hip Hop SQUARE Dance for Seniors!

For more information about the North Brookfield Cultural Council, follow them on Facebook.

Historical Commission announces 2026 scholarship

WEST BROOKFIELD – The West Brookfield Historical Commission is pleased to announce its 2026, 15th annual scholarship in the amount of \$2,000.

Qualified students must reside in West Brookfield and may attend Quaboag Regional High School, or be school-choice students, home schooled students, and independent school students.

This award is made possible through the J. Irving and Jane L. England Charitable Trust.

The students must be planning to attend either a four-year college/university program or a two-year college with the intent to transfer to a four-year college.

The Commission will show preference to study plans with concentration on History and History-related

areas. Major or minors may include Political Science, Social Studies, Anthropology, Archaeology, Historical Preservation, Museum Studies, and Education in any of these related fields.

Applicants must submit a brief essay based on one of the Notable Persons or Significant Places listed on the application. All necessary information will be found on the West Brookfield His-

torical Commission website. <http://westbrookfield.org>

Essays are due no later than April 6.

Email info@westbrookfield.org or mail to: West Brookfield Historical Commission, P.O. Box 372, West Brookfield, MA 01585.

The application and details can be found on the Historical Commission website- <http://westbrookfield.org>.

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- opinion -

Claiming Social Security early and investing it



Dear Rusty:
I am a 63-year-old single lady and I have questions regarding Social Security "early retirement," though I will still be working full time.

I know there is a maximum allowable income limit and, if I exceed that, I will need to return probably 2/3 of my received Social Security benefit. I'm thinking about taking those early SS benefits about \$1,400 per month and putting them in my high yield savings or CD where I can gain the interest on it and have it stay "liquid" so I can return what I need to.

My current interest rate is 3.65% on the savings and over 4.25% on CD, with options for 3,6,9 mos. or longer-but I want to be able to access the money to pay Social Security back at the end of the year. Can you advise me on this? Signed: Still Working but Wondering

Dear Still Working:

I commend you, for investigating your options before claiming early Social Security benefits while still working. FYI, the 2026 annual earnings limit for those collecting early SS benefits is \$24,480 (changes annually). If your 2026 work earnings exceed the annual limit, Social Security will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. The annual earnings limit lasts until you reach your Full Retirement Age and the limit is about 2.5 times higher during the year you attain FRA.

FYI, when you apply for benefits, Social Security will ask if you are working and, if so, how much you make. Using that information, they will evaluate whether you can take benefits now and, if so, how many months they can actually pay your benefits.

For example, if your projected 2026 earnings are, say, \$100,000, you would be about \$75,000 over the an-

nual limit which means that half of that \$37,500 would need to be paid back to SS. Since your monthly SS benefit at your current age would be about \$1,400 per month, Social Security will say that you are temporarily ineligible to collect early benefits because you cannot pay back within one year what you would owe for exceeding the limit. In other words, they won't pay your SS benefits just yet because your earnings are too high and they do not want to overpay benefits, which you will only need to return.

For additional perspective, if your expected 2026 earnings are less say about \$50,000 that means you would be about \$25,000 over the limit about half of that (about \$12,500) would need to be paid back to SS. In that event, SSA would tell you they will withhold nine months of your SS payments in advance and pay your benefits for only 3 months. This because the overpayment, with your current benefit of about \$1,400, could be recovered by withholding your SS payments for nine months. They do not want to intentionally overpay your SS benefits.

So, despite your best repayment intentions, Social Security will not favor intentionally overpaying your benefits. Historically, overpayment of benefits due to exceeding the annual earnings limit has been a notoriously difficult issue for the Social Security Administration. So, to get your early SS benefits while you are working full time, you would likely need to lie about your anticipated 2026 earnings on your application for SS benefits, which we strongly discour-

age.
Keep in mind that this all changes when you reach your FRA (67), because the earning limit goes away entirely when you reach FRA and the limit goes up by about 2.5 times in the year you attain full retirement age. So, depending on your earnings level, you may wish to either wait until your full retirement age, or until you stop working full time, to claim SS.

Now, as for the general idea of taking early benefits and investing them, many have said they wish to do that and we understand that logic. Our caution is that it requires religious discipline to put the SS money into a higher yield investment vehicle to accomplish the goal of beating the SS increase realized when you wait to claim. Many who try it succumb to the temptation to use the invested funds for emergency needs and sometimes non-emergency needs. I offer this only as something to be aware of, as some have shared that they failed in their investment objectives with their Social Security money.

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-advisor or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.



What are shallots, anyway?

Shortly after the two part column on growing onions, I received a question about shallots.

My friend was looking through a seed catalog and wanted to know the ins and outs of growing them. This topic was a fun one for me because it required some research.

Can you believe that the Garden Lady has never grown shallots before? There is an explanation why, with part of the reason being that I am not what you'd consider a fancy cook, and shallots have their place in fine dining.

The other reason is that admittedly I never understood the point of shallots - aren't they just small onions? Why would you buy something special for a recipe if you had a good old fashioned onion in the pantry?

As all the cooks in the audience gasp, let me qualify that statement with the fact that now I know better.

Shallots are slightly different plants from onions scientifically. Whereas the onion goes by the name Allium cepa, shallots are what you would call a cousin, with the Latin name Allium cepa gr. Aggregatum.

Although the flavor hints of garlic (who is another more distant cousin), shallots are sweeter and more mild than onions, and are a staple in French and Asian cuisine where they can be used raw or cooked. Think delicate sauces or vinaigrettes.

I laugh when I picture all of the onion family members sitting around at a party. You'd have the gregarious onion, the boisterous garlic and then the cultured shallot, wearing a beret and speaking with a French accent.

I'm not sure why my mind went there, but it was a fun digression.

In terms of culture, shallots are similar to onions in that they can be grown from both sets or seeds. Seeds would be started indoors anytime now through March. Transplants or sets are best planted in the garden as soon as the ground can be worked, usually early April.

Although shallots mature smaller than onions, spacing should still be four-six inches apart so that they can size up to their full potential. They are shallow rooted, so supplemental watering is

a must.

When foliage reaches 12 inches, apply a mulch around the base of each plant to help conserve moisture and cut down on weed competition. Until that point, cultivate carefully by hand or pull individual weeds as they pop up.

Like onions, scallions begin to "bulb up" around the time of the summer equinox. Top dressing with fertilizer at that time is a smart idea.

As summer draws to a close, shallots will exhibit similar die back as onions, whereby the tops begin to fall over, indicating they are ready for harvest. If the weather cooperates, sun cure on the ground or garden path for a few days, then move indoors to a spot with good air movement to finish the curing process.

Once necks have shrunken and dried, cut the tops off to about one inch above the bulb and store in mesh bags as close as you can to the freezing mark with ample humidity. One interesting fact I learned from Fedco Seeds (www.fedcoseeds.com) is that if you don't have a room that cold, humidity can be adjusted to make up the difference for proper storage.

For example, best case scenario dictates that shallots need 34 degrees at 66 percent humidity. Say the coldest you can get your storage spot is 55 degrees, well then they would like 45 percent humidity. The closest you can get it to add up to 100 the better.

I wonder if this theory holds true for other crops in storage. My squash and pumpkin aren't the happiest this year, so maybe I will look into how to manipulate the environment to avoid some of the shriveling I am seeing.

Anyhow, I hope you had a few chuckles reading this column and that you might feel inclined to give shallots, that cultured onion cousin, a try this gardening season.

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 34 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.

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Letters to the Editor, 80 Main Street, Ware, MA 01082 OR e-mail to pouimette@turley.com. Deadline for submission is Monday at noon for the following week's edition.

Protein: The big food craze of 2026

First it was low-calorie. Then it was fat-free. Then high fiber and low carb. Then gluten-free and zero sugar.

And now, it's protein. Walk down the aisle of your favorite store and you'll see shelves packed with protein powders, shakes, chips, bars, coffee, cereal, even protein soft drinks, alcoholic drinks and ice cream.

Food giants such as PepsiCo, Kellogg and Pop-Tarts maker Kellanova have rolled out protein-boosted versions of their products. Starbucks and Kroger are offering protein-fortified coffees and French toast sticks. The global market for protein-fortified foods is projected to hit \$100 billion by 2030, according to Grand

View Research.

What's going on? These companies hope to profit off a key concern of consumers: Getting more protein in their diets. According to a 2025 survey from the International Food Information Council, 70 percent of Americans said they're trying to eat more protein, up from 59% just three years ago.

We've always known that our bodies need protein to build and maintain lean muscle, hair, bones, connective tissues and general health. But what's driving the current fad, and how much protein do we need anyway?

The protein push seems to be partly the result of the boom in semaglutide

(GLP-1) medications, such as Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro and the like. They are helping people lose weight and maintain it, but users are also losing muscle because "every pound is water, fat and muscle," registered dietitian Kim Shapira said in an interview.

"This has just boomed an entire industry of protein," she said.

The problem is that a good deal of these protein-packed foods may not be good for us. A 2024 survey by Spanish researchers, posted on the National Institutes of Health website, that found 91% of foods with "protein" marketing claims (PCs) were

See YOUR HEALTH PAGE 8



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NEWS & FEATURES

As a paper of record, we attempt to cover all general news, personality profiles, and community features that we know about. This includes all selectmen and school committee meetings as well as spot planning board, board of health, finance, and other town meetings determined by the issue's relevance to our readers. There are the annual major community event features that we should always cover, but we are more than open to suggestions of other features to celebrate the fabric of our communities and their many interesting occupants. Our loyal advertisers provide funding for this paid staff coverage.

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- community -

'To Defend All That is Dear'

A historical book by
Wally Hersee

By Ryan Drago
Staff Writer
rdrago@turley.com

STURBRIDGE — History thrives in Sturbridge as a newly published book by Wally Hersee has been released earlier this year.

The story is called "To Defend All That Is Dear: The Soldiers Who Served Sturbridge, Massachusetts in the War for Independence 1775-1783". Hersee was at the Joshua Hyde Public Library this past Valentine's Day for a book signing and to share the history of the men who served Sturbridge during the American Revolution.

The book was released back in January and was published through Hersee's own imprint, Heritage Oak Press, in partnership with a regional printer. Hersee has a background in writing and considers himself a student of history. He had a book about photography published back in 2017, and also wrote for the Middlesex News, now the Metrowest News and published cartoons in local and national outlets.

Hersee has lived in Sturbridge for the last 25 years and currently serves on several committees and boards for the town. He serves on the Historical Commission, the Sturbridge Housing Trust, the Planning Board, the Monuments, Memorials and Markers Committee, and the Board of Directors

for the Sturbridge Historical Society. Hersee also founded the Sturbridge Gravestone Keepers.

After moving to Sturbridge, Hersee found himself looking more into the town's history and soon began digging deeper into research.

The story, "To Defend All That Is Dear", came from a project Hersee had, which involved a deep diving into extended research. It began with a question, "Who were the men from Sturbridge who served in the Revolutionary War?"

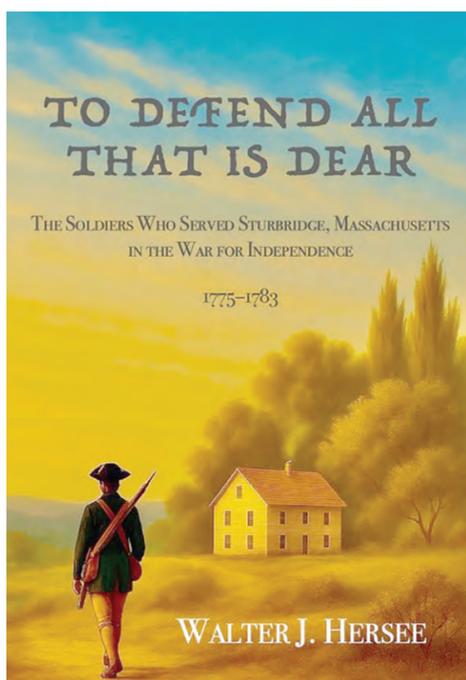
Hersee mentioned the Honor Roll for the men that served Sturbridge lists 124 names. Throughout his research, Hersee knew there were a lot of names that were missing and found an additional 186 names to add to the Honor Roll.

Technology has changed dramatically since the late 1800s and Hersee wanted to use that technology to his advantage during his research and time writing this book. He spent a lot of time in the town vault and came across records and papers that haven't been touched for so many years.

These were town records, information from town hall, and online records that were all brought together during Hersee's research project.

Hersee also looked at the Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, which is 17 volumes long and is to help identify who served in the War. These volumes were put together by the Secretary of State.

This was a massive project spurred by the discovery of 14 new



Submitted photo of the front cover of Walter "Wally" Hersee's new book, "To Defend All That Is Dear: The Soldiers Who Served Sturbridge, Massachusetts in the War for Independence 1775-1783".

volumes of records in 1894. Hersee said these are accessible online and is one of many various sources that helped him find these men who served and were connected to Sturbridge.

Hersee also connected with the Sons of the American Revolution, ancestry.com, fold3.com, and underwent a verification process through his online research. Hersee would be exposed to family histories from the 1800s, backgrounds of those served during the war, and pension records he had found.

His research focused on who were born in Sturbridge, who were

residents of Sturbridge, and who enlisted in Sturbridge. This whole process took about two solid years, according to Hersee, and since its publication, the book has been well received.

On May 28, Hersee will talk about the Revolutionary War soldiers of Sturbridge at the Publick House, located at 277 Main St. In addition to publishing his book, Hersee also designed the cover.

The book recognizes over 300 people who served Sturbridge during the War for Independence. The stories are broken up into interludes.

From Hersee's standpoint, the book serves as foundation and not an ending point.

"There is more to find," Hersee said. "I hope it gives the town a more complete record of its Revolutionary War service and encourages others to look deeper into our shared history."

Hersee is always interested in finding more research, and maybe someday would like to add more to these stories in the future. One of the unique finds of his research is that a total of 23 men fought and died during the war.

Another story that stood out for Hersee during his research is

the story of Warwick Dick, an enslaved man who served in the Revolutionary War. Warwick was connected to Ebenezer Crafts, the founder and keeper of the Sturbridge historic inn, the Publick House. Warwick Dick also enlisted in the Town of Weymouth as well.

Though he was an enslaved man, Warwick was so set on fighting in the War for Independence (1775-1783).

The book also shows Sturbridge as a small town that was a lot more active than people thought during the Revolutionary War. Hersee estimates there were about 1,700 people living in town at the time.

Out of that population, at least 300 men served from the same town. Sturbridge had formed a militia already by the year 1774, which is a moment in the town's history that helped inspire the title of Hersee's book. There was a town meeting dated on Dec. 10, 1774, as the town was preparing for any conflict. At one point, it was said in a meeting that it was up to the people to "Defend all that is Dear" to them.

Hersee has a great passion for history, which he initially got thanks to his former high school history teacher, Bernie Shea. Though he never got to give a copy of his book to his former educator, Hersee knows Shea would've loved this book.

Copies of "To Defend All That is Dear: The Soldiers Who Served Sturbridge, Massachusetts in the War for Independence 1775-1783" are available at the Publick House, during Sturbridge Historical Society Meetings, and online at <https://square.link/u/xto85PgS>.

N BROOKFIELD FROM PAGE 1

a sprinkler system installed for fire suppression.

The Friends members said they were told the sprinkler system wouldn't be necessary until the Great Hall was opened. They said they would like to seek the opinions of local contractors about this question.

Buzzell said the project would be paid for through grants and fundraising efforts.

Friends member Eva Brown said the organization's architect, Dan Benoit, said this would be the best place to start with restoring the building.

Buzzell said the long-term plan is to renovate the entire Town House, and turn the first renovated space into a restaurant with a commercial kitchen. He said the Great Hall would be used for performances, events and functions.

"Perhaps even town meetings," he said.

He said the main floor and basement could be used for professional offices and retail spaces.

"Whatever the interest is," Buzzell said.

Buzzell asked the board's permission to speak with the town's various inspectors and meet with the architectural access board to ensure that all is set with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The board members granted the request.

Resignation

The Board of Selectmen accepted the resignation of Town Administrator Ron Aponte, effective Feb. 1.

Council on Aging report

Council on Aging Director Courtenay Rivera gave the monthly report for December. She said at the Christmas luncheon, 43 seniors received meals.

Rivera said thanks to the generosity of the friends group, each attendee received a \$25 gift card to JARS Café & Bakery.

Rivera said another special luncheon was held in January and the next will be held before Valentine's Day.

She said attendance has

declined due to the weather, but the Senior Center is maintaining its regular programming. She said art and drawing classes will resume in February.

"That class is a really cool class," she said, with all supplies provided by instructor Carol Hawkins.

Rivera said on Feb. 24, there will be an end of life pre-planning discussion led by Varnum and Charbonneau funeral homes. She said participants will learn about making funeral arrangements and more.

Other events include chair massages on Feb. 26; hip hop square dancing in March; classes with Tina Bemis in March; laughter yoga in April; and more.

Highway Department report

The Highway Department responded to snow events Dec. 6, 20 and 27, Jan. 15 and Jan. 24. The Jan. 24 snowstorm lasted several days and resulted in accu-

mulations of 15-22 inches, which took almost a week to clear.

Superintendent Randy Morgan said widening roads, pushing snow off roadways, and continued scraping has been ongoing.

Morgan noted in his report that the department is short-staffed due to a vacancy, but he is utilizing a list of plow drivers available.

Fire Department report

Interim Fire Chief Keith Marshall said as of January, the department had 23 members. He said several members obtained their hazardous materials operational certification.

Marshall said interim Deputy Chief Thomas Bessette attended the regional EMA meeting to discuss an upcoming regional exercise.

The department responded to 34 incidents during the month of January, including one structure fire, one chim-

ney fire, one vehicle fire, one electrical hazard, one electrical transformer hazard, six motor vehicle collisions, one carbon monoxide incident, one fuel spill, two odor investigations, seven EMS assists, six false alarms, five public assists and one elevator rescue.

Marshall said the deep snow is causing a lot of blocked vents with heating systems and he urged all residents to have working smoke and CO alarms.

He said the snow has also caused lot of frozen or blocked fire hydrants. He asked residents to help to clear snow from around the hydrants in their neighborhoods.

Marshall said the department issued 35 burn permits during the month of January.

He said the department's fleet of vehicles are in need of repairs. He said some of the repairs have been made

already.

"These vehicles are essential," he said.

North Main Street parking

Gilman said he has been researching municipal policies regarding downtown parking and businesses. He said he wants to have a good understanding of policies and how other towns deal with parking.

"I've been paying a lot more attention to different times and different days as to when the parking is open and when the parking is full, and which sections," he said. "I'm just trying to get some understanding of our situation as well as how others are dealing with theirs before rushing into recommendations."

Gilman said there doesn't seem to be any state policy about where signs are posted.

Spending requests

The board members approved a spending request

in the amount of \$1,575.69 for heating oil at the Highway Department. An emergency order was made due to heating oil not being delivered at the end of January because of the snowstorm.

The board approved the use of Holden Hospital funds to purchase lifesaving medical equipment. This equipment includes tourniquets, first aid bags, AED pads and batteries, and more.

Peter Orsi said these are "very important items" for Police, Fire and EMS personnel.

Donation

The board accepted a \$1,000 donation from North Brookfield Savings Bank to benefit the Fire Department gift fund.

Water/sewer bills

The first combined water and sewer bills will be mailed in the coming week, and payment is due by April 1.

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- community -

DCR responded to requests by Watershed Advisory Committee

DCR responded to requests by Watershed Advisory Committee

By Zacharias Fragkiadakis
Correspondent

RUTLAND – The Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee heard responses from the Department of Conservation and Recreation regarding the committee's requests to increase access to the Rutland prison camp roads at their meeting last Thursday.

The committee said they submitted a request to DCR to partially re-open select prison camp roads for turkey hunting season, as well as a request to increase vehicle access to all prison camp roads a week prior to bear hunting season.

Dan Clark, who is a rep-

resentative from DCR presented the department's responses to the committee's requests. Clark explained that the DCR originally proposed to bar access to all roads of the prison camps except Coldbrook Road, before amending the proposal to be less restrictive.

He said the department carefully scrutinizes all requests to determine whether the reasons presented in the request are strong enough to justify approval.

The committee said their justifications for increasing access during turkey hunting season are to improve the relationship between turkey and deer, encourage youth hunting, and that turkeys contain pathogens that can be spread to other animals and humans, citing COVID as an example.

In his response to this

request, Clark said there is no literature that shows a significant correlation between turkey and deer populations. In terms of youth hunting, he said the DCR supports it, and offers it on much of their property.

He said the mission of the DCR is not to maximize hunting, and that increasing vehicle access would not increase the prevalence of youth hunting.

In response to the claim that turkeys carry harmful diseases, Clark said they carry no more or less than other wildlife. Clark said the justifications were not sufficient, and the proposed changes would not be made.

The second request was to open all prison camp roads a week prior to bear season. The committee's justification was increasing access would control the

bear population.

In his response to this request, Clark said the DCR has not received a request from Mass Wildlife to manage the bear populations, and that opening more roads would increase the prevalence of unauthorized vehicles entering. He said the justification was not adequate, and the request would not be fulfilled.

Committee member Dennis Guberski said he provided Clark and the DCR with 600 peer reviewed references supporting the claim that turkeys have communicable diseases. He also said the references for deer relationships he sent in were not peer reviewed, but from various sportsman magazines.

He questioned the DCR's review process, saying that whether or not the refer-

ences are peer reviewed, the DCR does not take them into account.

Committee member Steve LaRivee said he previously had conversations with Dave Wattles, who is a black bear expert from Mass Wildlife, who said the bear population is growing and needs to be addressed, prompting Mass Wildlife to extend the bear season. LaRivee recommended Clark to reach out to Wattles for more information. Clark said he may reconsider his position on opening roads for bear season after his conversation with Wattles.

Prison camp structures discussion

Clark reiterated the DCR's position on the prison camp structures, which is to demolish the cells and block access to the

root cellar, citing that these structures are structurally unsound, and attract hate speech. He said DCR staff need to paint over the hate speech, saying it is "unacceptable and intolerable."

He said he is awaiting solutions from the Rutland Historical Commission, whose position is to save the structures, to be submitted to him.

Historical Commission member Michele Van Reet said she believes the gates the DCR installed were an "attractive nuisance" rather than the alleged hate speech. She said she has not heard reports from people regarding seeing hate speech, and wants specific numbers and incidents of it from Clark.

The committee is scheduled to meet next on April 2.

QHMA FROM PAGE 1

bursement up to 75% of the cost.

Dawson said the Employers Association of the NorthEast offers human resources services too, including employee handbook services, and a hotline that can provide crucial support for "HR departments of one."

"Many companies have one person in HR," he said.

The nonprofit also hosts a human resources conference at MGM in Springfield. On April 9, a leadership summit will be held at the same location.

"It's our biggest event of the year," he said.

Dawson said the Employers Association of the NorthEast provides services throughout Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Dawson said one of the

things his organization helps employers with is bridging the "critical skills gap," and helping to develop "power skills" in employees.

"We're seeing more and more gaps," Dawson said.

The Employers Association of the NorthEast also provides leadership training and technical training. The goal of these trainings is to create "confident, capable leaders."

Dawson said the nonprofit also provides training and solutions to improving interpersonal relationships in the workforce.

"Conflict resolution skills are always at the top of the list of needs for our members, and also emotional intelligence," he said. "The ability to have a professional presence."

Dawson said a complete calendar of available trainings is posted on the nonprofit's website, EANE.org.



TURLEY PHOTOS BY PAULA QUIMETTE
Mackenzie Diaz, Workforce Solutions Specialist at the Employers Association of the NorthEast, spoke about membership options.

"We're happy to customize the content to make sure we're speaking the way you want to speak," he said.

Mackenzie Diaz, Workforce Solutions Specialist at the Employers Association



Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce's CEO James Przypek welcomed attendees to the chamber's breakfast, held at Cedarbrook Village at Ware.

of the NorthEast, said the nonprofit works to empower employers to be better "people" people.

She said employers don't need to be members of the nonprofit to benefit from its trainings and services, but that membership helps

provide more incentives to employers. Membership fees are based on the number of employees an employer has.

"We try to be as affordable as possible," she said.

For more information, visit EANE.org.

Upcoming QHMA events

The Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce will host its inaugural women in business event, EmpowHer, on Thursday, March 12 in the chamber's office at Pathfinder Tech, Four Corners, 191 Sykes St., Palmer starting with breakfast from 8:30-9 a.m. followed by a panel discussion from 9-10 a.m. Space is limited and registration is required.

A Bingo Night fundraiser will be held on Friday, March 20 at AMVETS Post 74, 2150 Main St., Three Rivers at 6:30 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m.

Online registration ends at noon the day of the event and walk-up registrations (cash only) will be accepted

from 6-6:25 p.m. You must be 18 years old to register/play.

Prizes include designer handbags, premium power tools and a large screen television.

An Intro to AI session will be offered free to chamber members on Monday, March 30 at the chamber office. Advance registration is required and participants must bring their own laptops.

An Open House and Members Showcase will be held on Wednesday, April 29 at the chamber's office from 5-7 p.m. and the Choice Awards Dinner will be held on Wednesday, May 6 at Steaming Tender Restaurant, 28 Depot St., Palmer from 6:30-8 p.m. Registration deadline is April 24.

For more information about the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, or to register for an upcoming event, visit QHMA.com.

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CLUES ACROSS

- Cut quickly
- A way to state clearly
- River in NE Scotland
- Expansive
- Lacking social polish
- Amount of time
- Frame
- Automobile
- Toadstools
- High school dances
- Utilize
- Experimented with
- One-sided
- Acquisitive
- Potted plants
- Everyone has one
- Kalahari Desert lake
- Unidentified flying object

CLUES DOWN

- Brushed
- Small water spirit (Germ.)
- Heroes
- Monetary units
- Some don't want to share theirs
- Free-swimming invertebrate
- Litigates
- Outer
- Parallelograms
- Uneasy feelings
- Cross
- A way to remove
- Pages can be dog-__
- Ukrainian city
- A citizen of Denmark
- Month
- Hindu queens
- Group of chemicals
- Rider of Rohan

CLUES DOWN

- Wet dirt
- Southwestern Russia city
- Observed
- Angry
- Drivers' licenses
- Musical composition
- Auction
- They __
- Women
- Be filled with love for performer
- Protein
- "Gunga Din" script writer
- Art __, around 1920
- __ Blyton, children's author
- Abnormal breathing
- A place to rest

STURBRIDGE FROM PAGE 1

rants, orchards, wineries, brew pubs, wedding venues, hotels and motels, RV parks, wellness spas, fitness and specialty shops.

"Food and beverage is 42%, retail is 25%, health and wellness is a big niche, which is almost 20%," he said.

Masterson said there were 12 new businesses that opened in 2025, as well as 12 businesses that closed. He said there are five new businesses proposed to open soon.

Masterson also gave an update on occupancy in the Mill Yard. He said there are 17 current tenants in the building, with four vacancies.

He said two of the businesses have expanded, some have shifted floors, eight have closed and eight have opened.

"Now the building is more retail and more type of tourism related businesses," he said.

Masterson said the Sturbridge Tourist Association conducts an annual business survey each year, and re-

ceived 22 responses in 2025.

"I think a lot of the results were very positive," he said.

He said they have also interviewed businesses that have left the town, with two business owners responding. He said one business owner was "very positive" about the town in their response.

Masterson also spoke about the One Stop Business Assistance program offered by the town, which provides incentives to business owners.

Since 2022, the Sturbridge Tourist Association has retained Break the Ice Media for an advertising campaign to promote tourism in the town.

The state's Tourism Secretary Kaye Fox and her staff visited Sturbridge last year and toured key areas in town. He said the town was also featured on Channel 25's Zip Trip this past August.

"It gave all of Kaye Fox's staff a chance to see Sturbridge and its highlights," he said.

Masterson said 1,200 voters decided the winners of the 2025 Business of the Year awards, which will be

announced in March.

New solar regulations

Ron Barron, manager of Land Use and Zoning for the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, came before the Planning Board to discuss the kickoff of a project funded by the state's Local Technical Assistance program.

"What we are looking to do is to work with planning boards...to discuss the recent changes to and provide technical assistance on the recent changes to the solar regulations and the permitting process that the state is in the process of releasing."

Barron said the new permitting process is set to be released on Feb. 13.

He said CMRPC is working with several towns (at no cost to the town) to help boards understand how the new permitting process will impact local regulations and assist with changes to existing zoning regulations.

Town Planner update

Town Planner Jean Bubon said Frisbie's ice cream opened at the Noble Energy property.

She said they are close to finalizing a grant for Noble Energy that they have been working with the Department of Transportation on for the past few years.

Bubon said the former Hog Heaven property was purchased, and will now contain a golf simulator.

The next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 9.

Find it in the
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SPORTS

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Cougars tipped by Panthers in non-league game

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

PALMER—The most recent encounter between the Quaboag and Palmer girls' varsity basketball teams before last Monday night took place at the 2010 Spalding Hoopball Classic. The Lady Cougars edged the Lady Panthers 41-40 in that contest, which was held at Blake Arena situated on the Springfield College campus.

Led by eighth grader Harper Brouillette, who netted 13 of her game-high 19 points during the second half, the Lady Panthers managed to pull out a 41-36 non-league home victory over the Lady Cougars in their only meeting of this season.

"Every win for us this season is big because we're such a young team," said Palmer girls' varsity coach Amanda Theriault. "We've been playing very well during the past couple of weeks."

The Lady Panthers finished the regular season with a 9-9 overall record.

Brouillette was Palmer's only double digit scorer



Maddie Potvin heads down the court against Quaboag (3-14).



Reagan Grant looks to pass.



Caitlyn Toomey sends a pass inside.



Madeline Dufresne is pressured as she enters the paint.

"Harper has been playing really well in our past couple of games," Theriault said. "She's been one of our leaders this season."

Three other Palmer eighth graders combined to score 16 points. They are

Aria Nompleggi (8 points), Isabelle Braden (6 points), and Lainey Haley (2 points).

Freshman Anabelle Ladue (4 points), and junior Addyson Petraszewicz (2 points) rounded out the scoring column for the home team.

Senior Madeline Potvin (15 points) and eighth grader Caitlyn Toomey (14 points) combined to score 29 of their Lady Cougars 36 points.

"We really didn't shoot very well in tonight's game," said Quaboag head coach

Bill Beauregard. "It's another disappointing loss for us."

The only other senior listed on the Quaboag varsity basketball roster is Madeline Dufresne, who saw limited playing time in the road game.

Quaboag held a 6-5 lead in the middle of the first quarter following a jumper in the lane by sophomore Riley Corder (3 points).

The Lady Panthers' other

See **COUGARS** PAGE 8



Jack Nichols heads down the court after a steal.



Darriel Correa is pressured after making a rebound.



Ian Squi Nieves heads down the court.



Dustyn Cook takes a free throw.



Cassian Kowalik gets the tip-off.

Knights grab third straight win

ISKDALE — After some struggles throughout the season, Holyoke High School boys basketball grabbed some momentum last week, winning three straight games, including against Tantasqua Regional 60-48 last Thursday night. The Knights would get to enter the Western Mass. Tournament, facing Pope Francis in the quarterfinals.



Drew Wright sends a pass across the court.

Pioneers fall against Franklin Tech

PALMER — Last Thursday night, Pathfinder Tech boys basketball was defeated by Franklin Tech 53-49 in a game that Pathfinder nearly came all the way back to tie. In the loss, Cassian Kowalik had a massive game with 28 points.

He made seven free throws for the Pioneers. The Pioneers are still looking to qualify for the state tournament and need more wins this week to squeeze in.



Maddox Baer avoids the defense and goes for the hoop.



Thomas Eldred holds possession just outside the arc.



Sean Allen takes advantage of a pick-play to get around an opponent.



Brody Wetnicka holds the ball outside the arc.



Maddox Baer avoids the defense and goes for the hoop.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM

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- community -

Colleges list Dean's and President's lists

Abby Radebaugh named to President's List at Plymouth State

PLYMOUTH, NH – Abby Radebaugh of Brookfield, has been named to the Plymouth State University President's List for the fall 2025 semester. Radebaugh is majoring in Nursing at Plymouth State.

To be named to the President's List, a student must achieve a grade point average of 3.70 or better for the fall 2025 semester and must have completed at least 12 credit hours during the semester, at least nine of which must confer grade points, at the time the lists are finalized.

Alfred Laskowski makes Salve Regina University's Dean's List

NEWPORT, RI – Alfred Laskowski of Fiskdale was named to the Dean's List during the fall 2025 academic semester at Salve Regina University.

To qualify for the Dean's List, students must earn a semester grade point aver-

age of 3.6 for full-time students completing at least 12 graded credits, or a semester grade point average of 3.8 for part-time students completing at least six credits.

Brandon Allen named to Dean's List at WNEU

SPRINGFIELD – Western New England University is proud to announce that Brandon Allen of West Brookfield, has been named to the Dean's List for the fall 2025 semester.

Allen is one of nearly 800 students to achieve this mark of academic excellence. Students are named to the Dean's List for achieving a semester grade point average of 3.30 or higher.

Local residents make Clark University's Dean's List

WORCESTER – The following local residents were named to Clark University's fall 2025 Dean's List: Alexis M. Taudel, of Fiskdale, was named to first honors and Ava Elizabeth Paradis, of West Brookfield was named

to second honors.

Students must have a GPA of 3.8 or above for first honors or a GPA between 3.50 and 3.79 for second honors.

Lauren Gunagan makes Dean's List at Adelphi University

GARDEN CITY, NY – Lauren Gunagan has been named to Adelphi University's fall 2025 semester Dean's List.

Gunagan, from Sturbridge, was among a select group of outstanding students recognized by Adelphi's deans of Arts and Sciences, Education and Health Science, Business, Nursing and Public Health, Social Work and Psychology for superior academic performance.

The list comprises full-time students, registered for 12 or more credits, who have completed at least nine graded credits who achieved a GPA of 3.5 or above for the semester. This recognition becomes part of the student's academic record and is entered into the individual's transcript.



Paddlers explored the Quaboag River Blue Trail

WATERSHED FROM PAGE 1

development.

We would monitor the basic bacterial health of the river for recreational use and enjoyment. This would invite people to see these special places and learn if they were a healthy place to enjoy.

We started with six sites on two rivers in 2015 and are now at 20 sites on all four rivers. We have created four Blue Trails, routes on and maps of the rivers that highlight both historical and natural places that people can explore to see how special our four local rivers are.

Knowing their special character and health benefits reveals their value.

Good progress, yet just a



Volunteers participated in one of many river cleanups in the Chicopee River Watershed

start. The initial excitement of renewing the idea has worn off a bit.

But once something of value is recognized, it needs to be maintained, cared

for, what a handful of people had started needs more hands to keep things going. Could you help?

Next week we share our vision going forward...

New Braintree Police Log

During the week of Feb. 2-9, the Hardwick/New Braintree Police Department responded to 15 building/property checks, 27 directed/area patrols, three radar assignments, two traffic controls, nine emergency 911 calls, one scam, two citizen assists, two assist other agencies, two motor vehicle accidents, one chimney fire, one animal call and one motor vehicle stop in the town of New Braintree.

Monday, Feb. 2

9:12 a.m. Assist Citizen, North Brookfield Road, Referred to Other Agency
1:24 p.m. Assist Other Agency, Ravine Road, No Action Required
10:25 p.m. Motor Vehi-

cle Crash, North Brookfield Road, Removed Hazard
Tuesday, Feb. 3

1:08 p.m. 911 Hang-up/Abandoned, Moore Road, Officer Handled

Wednesday, Feb. 4

1:27 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Ravine Road, Written Warning

Thursday, Feb. 5

11:12 a.m. Assist Other Agency, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

11:26 a.m. Assist Citizen, Memorial Drive, Officer Handled

3:31 p.m. Scam, Worcester Road, Officer Handled
Friday, Feb. 6

5:17 a.m. Medical Emergency, West Brookfield Road, Patient Refusal

9:47 a.m. 911 Fire/Chimney, West Road, Extinguished

9:58 p.m. 911 Suspicious Activity, Unitas Road, Officer Handled

Saturday, Feb. 7

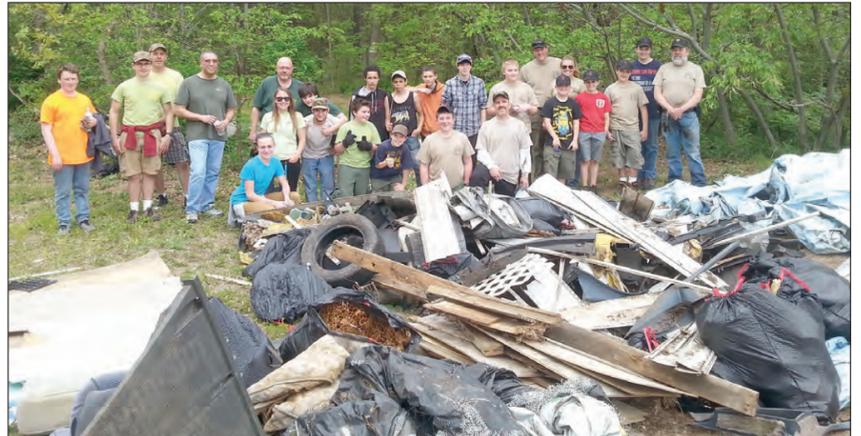
2:45 a.m. Medical Emergency, Barre Road, Patient Refusal

8:51 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, West Brookfield Road, Transported to Hospital

9:55 a.m. Motor Vehicle Crash, West Brookfield Road, Officer Handled

Sunday, Feb. 8

12:55 p.m. 911 Notification, Old Common Road, No Action Required



Volunteers stood near a pile of trash and debris collected during a cleanup.

COUGARS FROM PAGE 7

scorer was sophomore Caitlyn Stevens, who finished the road game with four points.

Palmer, who scored the final four points of the first quarter, took an 11-6 advantage on an inside hoop from Braden less than a minute into the second quarter.

A Toomey lay-up with 3:55 remaining in the first half closed the gap to 11-10.

Another lay-up from Stevens tied the score at 14-14 before the visitors from Warren retook the lead with 46.3 seconds left in the second quarter when Potvin made one of two shots from the

free throw line.

Potvin also buried a 3-pointer from the right corner giving the Lady Cougars a 20-18 lead with 6:50 remaining in the third quarter.

The Lady Panthers then responded with a 7-0 run.

Brouillette scored five of those points and Nompoggi also chipped in with a put-back hoop.

The Lady Panthers, who outscored the Lady Cougars, 18-11, in the third quarter, entered the final eight minutes of regulation holding a 32-26 lead.

After a Braden inside hoop increased Palmer's lead to 34-28, Potvin knocked down a 3-pointer from the

right side.

With 20 seconds left in the fourth quarter, Toomey hit a runner in the lane slicing the Lady Cougars deficit to 38-36.

The Lady Panthers would seal their victory with two free throws from Brouillette and another one by Ladue

Two nights later, the Lady Panthers lost at top-seeded Drury, 66-19, in a Western Mass. Class C quarterfinal game. They'll also be competing in the Division 5 state tournament, which begins next week.

Quaboag didn't qualify for the Division 4 state tournament.

YOUR HEALTH FROM PAGE 4

less healthy overall because they are ultraprocessed and often have added sugar, fat and sodium.

"The perception that foods with PCs are healthy is incorrect, and consuming them may pose an additional health risk," the researchers wrote.

The protein we need everyday varies with age, weight, level of activity and other factors. To estimate your minimum recommended daily allowance (RDA), multiply your weight in pounds by 0.36 grams. For a 140-pound sedentary woman, that comes to about 50 grams a day.

Pregnant women and active adults benefit from more protein, but researchers really don't know how much is too much. (The USDA has a nutrition calculator on its website at myplate.gov.)

They do recommend spacing out protein consumption throughout the

day rather than consuming most of it at dinner, as most Americans do.

Jumping on the protein bandwagon takes careful consideration. It's not just a question of jacking up protein consumption, but doing it in the context of healthy eating. In other words, eating six protein bars a day is not likely to help your overall health.

If you're ready to boost your protein intake, here are some tips:

Turn to protein-rich unprocessed or lightly processed foods, which you may have in your pantry and fridge. According to the USDA, some of the best are:

Tuna: 21 grams of protein in 3 ounces

Cooked chicken or turkey: 19 grams in 3 ounces

Plain Greek yogurt: 17 grams in 3 ounces

Cottage cheese: 14 grams in 1/4 cup

Other good sources are beans, nuts, low-fat dairy and eggs.

Don't translate "eat more

protein" as "eat more beef and cheese." The saturated fats in these foods are not good for cardiovascular health.

To avoid weight gain, cut back on other foods. If you're consuming more calories as protein, reduce the calories you get from breads, sweets and alcohol. Rather, up your intake of fruits, vegetables and legumes.

Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, R.N., a registered nurse and board-certified patient advocate, is the founder of www.NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com, which trains medical professionals to become successful private patient advocates. A Monson, MA resident, she is the author of "How to Be a Healthcare Advocate for Yourself & Your Loved Ones" and her new book, "Advocating Well: Strategies for Finding Strength and Understanding in Health Care," available at Amazon.com. Contact her at Teri@NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com to set up a free phone consultation.

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The Town of North Brookfield is looking for a **PART-TIME PROGRAM ASSISTANT** for the Senior Center. Please submit a resume with a letter of interest to the **Selectmen's Office, 215 North Main St., North Brookfield, MA 01535;** or by email to: selectmen@northbrookfield.net.

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This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate that is in violation of the law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertising in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis. To complain about discrimination call The Department of Housing and Urban Development "HUD" toll-free at 1-800-669-9777. For the N.E. area, call HUD at 617-565-5308. The toll free number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-927-9275.

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Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 31 Edward Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and better community. This home includes a wonderful floor plan with very spacious rooms. Master bedroom includes a walk-in closet. Two full bathrooms. A four-season sunroom is off the kitchen. Includes two large woodsheds and a metal garage you can park under to fend off winter weather. **Asking \$279,000.** See listing on MLS # 73433198

NO ENTRANCE FEE

Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 21 Varney Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and Better community. This home includes a wonderful floor plan with spacious rooms. Master bedroom includes a large attached bathroom. Two full bathrooms, large back deck, and two large wood sheds. **Asking 245,000.** See MLS#73457117.

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