A first glance at fall
BSD releases draft reopening plan

MELINA BOURDEAU
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – With a homework assignment of their own, the Belchertown School District Reopening Task Force put together a 70-page working document on the three potential plans for the fall. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education required each district in Massachusetts was assigned to plan for three opening possibilities — in-person learning with new safety requirements; a hybrid of in-person and remote learning; and remote learning.

The document compiled by the Belchertown Reopening Task Force includes safety measures in each model, travel restrictions and seating models, meals, dismissal procedures and many other aspects of day-to-day schooling.

In-person learning with new safety requirements
In the in-person model, schools have been advised to “consider using their libraries, cafeterias, auditoriums and other appropriate available spaces to set up additional classrooms to accommodate more students, reduce class size and/or enable additional distancing,” according to the reopening draft.

The Belchertown classrooms were designed with the three-

BELCHERTOWN GRADUATES

Told to ‘take the nest with them’

In-person graduation brings class of 2020 together

MELINA BOURDEAU
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – For the first time since March, graduates from the class of 2020 sat next to their peers for one last time — graduation.

In a hour-long ceremony outside on the football field at Belchertown High School, the group of about 170 graduates were able to close out an unprecedented final year of school.

“Wherever you go and whatever you do, you are Orioles and you always will be.”
Christine Vigneux

Students gave speeches about overcoming obstacles and moving forward.

Belchertown High School graduates process onto the football field for their graduation ceremony last Friday.

Christina Vigneux, Belchertown High School principal, told graduates to remember all of those who have down them love — from their families to teachers, administrators and staff of the schools.

GRANBY

Mower subject of debate at Annual Town Meeting

DALTON ZBIERSKI
Staff Writer

GRANBY – An old tradition took on new form on July 25, as Granby’s 2020 Annual Town Meeting occurred outside in front of Granby Junior/Senior High School. The 82-minute affair was largely uneventful with the exception of a conversation regarding a lawnmower.

Article 13 called for the town to allot $115,000 towards the purchase of an air conditioned lawnmower for the Public Buildings Department. The Finance Committee recommended that the item be postponed indefinitely.

“We’d like to put this off until there is time for a more thorough discussion and study of the issue. The current mower that we have was authorized eight years ago for $54,000. The new mower that is requested is $115,000,” said John Libera, a member of the Finance Committee.

Libera noted that inflation only accounts for approximately 12 percent; the equivalent cost of the 2012 purchase is $60,664.

He questioned why a significantly more expensive mower was necessary.

“There were any days where we were mentally and emotionally tested, whether it be by a pop quiz, or yet another English essay,” he said. “In addition, the bond the group formed together brought them together to celebrate.

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“First of all, it’s a 16-foot mower instead of 14-foot mower, which is bigger than most golf
A site-readiness grant was recently awarded for improvements to Carriage Drive's infrastructure.

STAFF REPORT

BELCHERTOWN – Senator Eric Lesser, Representative Thomas Petrolati, and Representative Susannah Whipps welcomed news from the Baker-Polito Administration that the Carriage Grove District in Belchertown was one of 12 projects chosen to receive a Site Readiness Program award.

Senator Lesser has been a long-time champion in promoting Site Readiness Funds in his role as Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Development. The Belchertown Economic Development and Industrial Corporation will use the $265,000 in Site Readiness funds to partially match the U.S. Economic Development Agency’s $550,000 grant for infrastructure improvements in Carriage Grove’s industrial district, supporting the construction of new roadway, sidewalks, utilities, and stormwater improvements.

“This project represents another giant step forward for Belchertown as the State continues working with local officials to redevelop the old Belchertown State School site,” said Senator Lesser. “The advancement of this project will create jobs, generate revenue for the town, help with Coronavirus recovery, and ultimately find a purpose for 25 acres of land that can be put to good use.”

“The scale and potential for the Belchertown State School property makes this Carriage Grove project an exciting development in Western Massachusetts,” said Representative Petrolati. “It is an important milestone for Belchertown as we invest in our communities and begin economic recovery from this pandemic.”

The development of Belchertown State School property has been a priority for our delegation for several years,” said Representative Whipps. “I’m proud to have worked with Senator Lesser and Representative Petrolati to bring attention and much needed infrastructure to this particular site.”

A Site Readiness Program award in September 2020.

MassDevelopment, the Site Readiness Program aims to boost Massachusetts’ supply of large, well-located, project-ready sites; accelerate private-sector investment in industrial and commercial projects; and support the conversion of abandoned sites and obsolete facilities into clean, actively used, tax-generating properties.

MassDevelopment anticipates announcing funding for the fifth round of the Site Readiness Program in September 2020.

$265,000 in site-readiness funding awarded for Old Belchertown State School property
Relay for Life of Quaboag Valley to host mostly virtual event Aug. 8

STAFF REPORT

BELCHERTOWN – Relay for Life of Quaboag Valley will be holding an Evening of Hope and Luminarias on Saturday, August 8. Relay for Life is a signature event of the American Cancer Society. Each year relay events are held across the country to raise funds for cancer research and to provide support to cancer patients and their families.

In addition to raising money, the events are a way for communities to come together to celebrate with survivors, to remember those who have lost their lives to the disease and to commit themselves to fighting back.

Just like COVID-19 has created financial strain for many families and businesses, it has also caused the cancellation or modification of many relay events. Many of the smaller fundraisers that teams hold throughout the spring have had to be cancelled as well. The ACS estimates that if the current trend continues, fundraising for 2020 will be down fifty percent from previous years. This threatens lifesaving research and disrupts the patient support provided to society.

The leadership team for the Quaboag Valley event has been working hard to plan a modified Relay event that will keep everyone safe.

On August 8 the group will be holding a mostly virtual event that relay teams and the public will be able to view and participate in on the group’s Facebook page. Members of the Event Leadership Team will be at the Belchertown High School track that evening from 6 to 8 p.m. where they will be live streaming some of the traditional relay events such as the opening ceremony and survivor lap. Throughout the evening there will be live online programming with videos and photos from relay teams and survivors. That evening will also kick off an online auction that is still in the planning stages.

At 8:30 that evening, relay teams and the group are invited to come to the high school parking lot for a drive-through luminaria ceremony. Luminarias are decorated, illuminated bags that are made in honor of a cancer survivor or in memory of someone who has passed away after a battle with cancer. Attendees will park in the lot and remain in their vehicles for the ceremony and then be able to “drive-through” to view the luminaria.

The evening will end with a closing ceremony streamed on Facebook. Be sure to follow “Quaboag Valley Relay for Life” on Facebook to catch it all!

Individuals may make a donation or dedicate a luminaria through the website, www.RelayForLife.org/QuaboagValleyMA. Luminaria may also be purchased through any Relay for Life team member. Please help give hope the advantage over cancer by donating now.

Belchertown COVID-19 count update numbers increasing

STAFF REPORT

BELCHERTOWN – With state numbers, increased testing and other contributing factors, determining how many COVID-19 cases there can be is confusing.

As of July 24, Quabbin Health District Director Judy Metcalf reported a total of 124 total positive cases of COVID-19. She explained there are slight variations in the data at the town level and the state level.

“(It’s) due to address changes or even slight changes in testing,” Metcalf wrote in an email on Monday. “The state reporting system MAVEN was overwhelmed in April, so even simple things like updating an address or tracking down a lab report that was filed under the wrong zip code was impossible. Most of the glitches on the state level have been corrected as well as expanding computer capacity.”

The total cases to date on July 10 was 115, with two new cases and 111 tests performed in that given week.

Then, a week later, on July 17, there were 121 total cases to date, six of which were new, and 260 tests performed in that weekly period.

Then as of July 24, there were three new cases, and 251 tests performed in that particular week.

The total number of deaths due to COVID-19 has maintained at eight.

That huge jump in testing data on July 13 was because of a state data dump of negative tests that week. Some dated back 4-5 times per week.

The Quabbin Health District numbers can be found here: http://www.belchertown.org/ Right on the front page under “Welcome to Belchertown.”

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Please call 413-332-0706 for more information
Behavioral Health Network to open Family Resource Center in Ware

Providing support to families and connecting them to resources

**STAFF REPORT**

WARE— Behavioral Health Network (BHN) has announced the opening on August 1 of a new Family Resource Center (FRC) at its Ware location. The BHN Family Resource Center provides free support and access to community resources for families and their children ages 0-18. Located in each of the 14 Massachusetts counties, the statewide network of FRC’s are funded by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Children and Families. The BHN Family Resource Center provides families and children in Hampden and Hampshire Counties with a variety of supports and services. “We offer everything from playgroups and family events to connecting families with services and opportunities - no one is turned away and everything is free of charge. Our goal is to emotionally support families, strengthen their bonds and help them engage with the community,” explained Program Director Linda Blauin-Roy.

The FRC offers an array of services through its experienced staff. School Liaisons help families work with school systems to ensure their children are receiving the support and resources they need. Family Support Workers help connect families with community resources; and clinicians and Family Partners work with families to develop a support plan that best meets their needs. Children and families that need additional supports or are at risk of court involvement can be assessed by FRC clinicians to develop a Family Support Plan.

“This program is an exciting addition to our service offering,” said BHN President and CEO Steve Winn. “The Family Resource Center is a great example of how BHN is collaborating with community partners to provide a support network for families. In these pandemic times when families are experiencing more isolation and stress, resources like this become even more essential.”

The BHN Family Resource Center is located at 78-80 Main Street in Ware. It is currently open by appointment only due to COVID-19. Telephone support and virtual offerings such as story time and caregiver support groups are available. For more information, contact the BHN Family Resource Center at 413-277-6601 or bhn@bhninc.org.

BHN has been providing behavioral health services to children and families in Western Massachusetts since 1938. The agency provides community-based services that include innovative, integrated whole-health models as well as traditional clinical and outpatient and therapeutic services, day treatment, addiction services, crisis intervention and residential supports.

Interlibrary loans start up at Clapp Memorial Library

**STAFF REPORT**

BELCHERTOWN – Curbside service is in full swing at the Clapp Memorial Library.

Interlibrary Loans have officially begun and patrons can explore the CWMArts catalog searches. Patrons can call the library, reserve items online through the library catalog, or send an email to clapprequest@clapplibrary.org. When items are ready, patrons will receive a phone call to set up an appointment time.

Statewide delivery of materials is beginning on a staggered schedule. Library staff are happy to choose a selection of items based on general interests, or specific themes or genres. Requested items will be checked out, bundled or bagged and set on the front porch for a contact-less pickup.

Patrons are limited to 10 items per individual or 20 per family. Five requests at a time can be accepted over the phone. The book drop is now open 24/7 to accept returned items.

All returns are quarantined before being checked in and returned to the shelves. Patrons should note that returned items will still show up as checked out to a library account until the current quarantine period of 72 hours has expired.

No fines will accrue during this time.

The library accepts phone calls and books picking appointments until 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

For more information, please call the library at 413-323-0417, visit the website at www.clapplibrary.org or email clapprequests@cwma.org.

MBA elects officers, directors

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Bankers Association recently elected new officers and members to its Board of Directors, including Patrick J. Murray, president and CEO of Bristol County Savings Bank in Taunton, as board chair effective July 1. Among those elected to the board is Steven E. Lowell, president and CEO of Monson Savings Bank, who will serve on the Board of Directors.

The Massachusetts Bankers Association represents 130 commercial, savings, cooperative, and federal savings banks and savings and loan associations with approximately $380 billion in local assets, 72,000 employees across Massachusetts and New England, and more than 2,000 banking locations. For more information, visit www.massbankers.org.
In the second group, students’ transitions between classes will be regulated. Students and staff will follow ‘one way’ placards in hallways/dairways during passing times while maintaining physical distancing while in hallways.

As far as restrooms use, the ‘occupancy will be limited... available based on student population and student needs.’

The estimated costs for the in-person learning plan are $48,000 for student furniture, $151,000 for technology, $33,800 for professional development, and $22,501 has been spent to date for PPE and it would cost $100,000 for 12 weeks.

These funds are proposed to come from a Coronavirus Relief fund, CARES ACTS and a technology grant, with the exception of staff and the funds spent to date.

Hybrid learning

Based on a survey by the Belchertown school community, parents/teachers/staff prefer each student attending school two days a week every day except Tuesday or Thursday/Friday, and learns from home on the other three days every week, either Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday/Friday, and learns from home on the other three days every week.

In this model, there would be two cohorts A and B – separated by last names. Cohort A would be at school with a last name A through L and B would be names M through Z.

The hybrid model, Cohort A will attend in-person on Monday and Tuesday, and participate in Independent Learning Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and learns from home on the other three days.

Cohort B would attend in-person on Tuesday and Thursday and participate in Independent Learning Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

Wednesday is used for teacher office hours and planning as well as a deep clean of facilities. Classrooms would be designed with a six-foot distance in mind, according to the report. The reopening plan also has examples of a week in the hybrid model for each cohort including self-directed learning days, extra help sessions and check-ins with the cohort work from home.

The estimated costs of the hybrid model are $192,500 for technology, $110,000 for staff, $33,800 for professional development and $100,000 for PPE for six months.

The funding sources are identical to those listed in the in-person plan.

Remote learning plan

The reopening plan states, “even if in-person learning takes place, parents/caregivers have the option to choose a district’s remote learning program for their child’s instruction if they prefer – with the understanding that the remote learning program may not provide as robust offerings as, or replace the full benefits of, learning in person.”

This plan would provide students transitioning between school buildings with “additional communication from educators/administrators about these supports closer to the beginning of the school year. The activities may include virtual tours, small group meets with teachers, online social gatherings, and remote learning days.”

The Google Suite would be used for online learning and would try to maintain regular school hours of 7:30 to 2:30 for grades seven to 12 and 8:30 to 1:30 for grades pre-school to six.

Parents and students have listed guidelines and expectations for the remote model.

Students in grades two and above as well as teachers and staff will be required to wear a mask or face covering in both the in-person and the hybrid models.

There will be “masks breaks” when “students cannot be six feet apart and ideally outside or at least with the windows open.”

All meals will be eaten in classrooms as well as the cafeteria, in both the hybrid model and the in-person model.

On Tuesday, July 28 the Belchertown School Committee held a meeting to discuss the plan. The story on that discussion will be in next week’s Sentinel. The document can be found online at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dkDzsen6Td-7PqKHuby2Kao/edit.

The BCTV Studio is located at 68 State St., Belchertown. BCTV channels are 191, 192 and 193. The BCTV schedule is available at www.Belchertown.org. On the main title page select ‘residents’ click on Belchertown Community Television. Selected BCTV shows are also available on Vimeo. Go to www.Belchertown.org to go to quick links and click on ‘watch meetings and events online.’ The schedule is subject to change.

The BCTV weather information is broadcast on TV channel 191 and displays the current weather conditions at the BCTV station as well as the current regional radar. This service operates 24 hours a day with audio provided by the National Weather Service from New York, with forecasts, storm and emergency warnings for the Pioneer Valley.
In My Backyard

ELEONOR DOWNEY

Note: There is no bird drawing this week.

A n Oldham resident said she saw a black and white warbler for the first time. She also saw a yellow warbler. She has cedar warblers that come for the berries on mulberry trees planted by a previous owner.

The black and white warbler is about 5 ¼ inches long. It creeps down tree trunks like a satchel in search of insects under the bark. The first time I saw a black and white warbler it was climbing down an oak tree in my yard. The warbler’s long bill enables it to grab insects under the bark. The male has black and white striped crown as well as upper and lower parts. The female is similar, but she has a gray ear patch, white throat and gray streaking on the underparts.

It is one of the earliest migrants in spring, showing up often before the trees have leafed out. It inhabits deciduous and mixed woodlands especially damp woodlands, and in the north, the cleome’s habit of self-sowing doesn’t fit. In other words, it pops up everywhere the following season (and maybe seasons later?). This can be a very good thing if you enjoy having the cleome abound as much as I do.

Spider flowers grow by the scientific name Cleome hassleriana. Older cultivars such as ‘Helen Campbell’ and the ‘Queen’ series top off at an airy four or five feet tall. ‘Sparkler’ cultivars are a bit shorter and bushier. Besides white, spider flower comes in pink, china blue, and crimson. I chose such a unique name because of the flower’s long, slender stamens that remind one of spider legs protruding from the plant. The stamens hold the central seed pods a distance away giving them even more “popping power.” Because cleome are flower producing power-houses, they sometimes become a mess. I planted them under fallen branches, over baby ferns, crabgrass, purslane and the like. To my surprise, how- ever, there was a friend among the foes! A cleome, sometimes known as spider flower, had seed- ed itself. Had the seed lay dormant for years only to be exposed to the light now that the ferns were gone? One is never certain how volunteers make their way to the landscape.

Cleome was one of the flowers that my mother and I planted in the annual border along the foundation of our house; for that reason it holds a special place in my heart. As a child, I was drawn to the exotic look of this peculiar plant; if you waited until they were “just right” and gave them a squeeze, the seeds would fly everywhere. What fun! This attribute gives the plant tremen- dous “staying power” in the garden. In other words, it pops up everywhere the following season (and maybe seasons later?), which can be a very good thing if you enjoy having the cleome around as much as I do.

In the north, the cleome’s habit of self-sowing doesn’t become annoying, but in warmer areas it can become weedy. Clipping the seed-pods as mentioned above would “nip this problem in the bud.” Seedlings that develop from volunteers will likely be a blend col- or-wise of the plants you grew last year because they are cross-pollinated by insects. Only time will tell what color my cleome flower will be. I can’t wait to see and have it drop all of its wonderful seeds just in time for next year’s garden.

Roberta McQuaid, graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For the last 28 years, she has held the position of horticulturalist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to ekemedy@turley.com with “Gardening Question” in the subject line.

Questions about working while collecting benefits

RUSSELL GLOOR

Guest columnist

Dear Rusty: In 2019 I was out of work for an extended period. I was eligible to begin receiving retirement benefits (age 63) and started to do so in August. My part-time job was limited so it did not con- flict with my Social Security amount, but in October through the end of 2019 I went back to my old industry at four times the pay rate. My understanding is that I will need to pay Social Security back about $1.40 for every benefit dollar they have paid me while I worked at the higher wage. When and how is that paid? Signed: Part Time Again

Dear Part Time Again: If you started your Social Security benefits in August of last year at age 63, for the remainder of 2019 you were subject to the “first year rule” which means you had a monthly earnings cap of $4070 but after your benefit started. If you exceeded that monthly limit starting in October of 2019 and for the rest of the year, you won’t be entitled to bene- fits for the months of October, November and December. Social Security will consid- er that an overpayment, and they will want you to repay all those benefits to them. However, if it would be to your advan- tage to do so, you can request that Social Security use the annual earnings limit for the year you started your benefits and do not have to repay the overpayment. If you think this is the case, please give me a call at (413) 967-3505, leaving a message at extension 501 or emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com.
course mowers. It has an enclosed cab and is air conditioned. If you design a mower from a blank sheet, you’re probably going to get a Mercedes, and this is what we are getting here for $115,000,” said Liber.

The Finance Committee made it clear that it was not attempting to “kill” the purchase of a new mower, which is needed at Dufresne Park, Brown Ellison Park and the high school athletic fields. Liber summarized the committee’s sentiment, stating that “this is clearly not the mower that is needed.”

Liber urged the Public Buildings Department to go back and study “what an appropriate mower would be for the uses that we have.”

Jeremy Carriere, Facilities Supervisor, took to the microphone to justify the request. This is the best time for us to purchase this mower. “There’s no better time than the present for used vehicles with MTE and turf products the way we are doing this.”

The cost of the mower is $144,439, but state discounts enable the department to purchase it for $115,000. Carriere explained that the town’s large properties require equipment to be easily mobile.

With all those large properties, we want to make sure that we can maintain them. The current mower is 14 feet. We’re going to have two feet wider because the grand is what we are looking for. Don’t come in 14 feet; he said.

The department’s current mower is an eight-year-old Jacobsen, whose air conditioning and cab are non-functional. The lack of air conditioning could become dangerous during the dog days of summer.

“We are looking for something that somebody can now for a continuous eight-hour shift and not be fatigued,” said Carriere. “Fatigue will cause a person to have lack of judgment and vision issues so we’re looking for something that can safely mow and not do those things, which would cause more damage and more costs to the town.

The department researched the market for used vehicles with MTE and turf products. Carriere noted that prices on mowers have not increased in the last two years. Making the monthly ideal to strike. Highway Superintendent Dave Desrosiers supported the request. He stated that the Finance Committee’s “lack of understanding of the current regulations” clouded their perception of the item.

“The new regulations put in place a year ago put us on notice that we have to protect our employees from hazards such as silica dust, which is sand,” said Desrosiers. “There’s almost no vehicle that comes through now-a-days without air conditioning. It’s not a luxury; it’s a necessity to protect against lawsuits.”

Libera reaffirmed the Finance Committee’s stance. He repeated the reasoning behind his decision to urge voters to postpone the item.

2019, instead of the monthly limit. For example, if using the 2019 annual earnings limit ($17,640) would result in a smaller impact on your benefits. Social Security may accommodate your request to use the annual limit. Depending upon your total earnings in 2019, you may want to consider asking that the annual earnings limit be used instead of the monthly limit, when determining your 2019 impact for exceeding the annual earnings limit.

Starting in 2020 you’ll be subject to an annual limit of $18,240 (limit changes yearly). If you exceed the annual limit, $5 will take back benefits equal to $1 for every $2 you are over the limit. If you’re again stopped working at the higher amount, and now only working part-time and won’t earn more than $18,240 for this year, you’ll not be subject to the annual limit. But exceeding the 2019 monthly limit last year will still affect you.

You will receive a form from Social Security asking you to specify your 2019 income month by month for the months you were receiving benefits. Since you exceeded the monthly limit from October through December, they’re asking you to repay all of the benefits you received from October through December. They will give you the option of either repaying them in full in a lump sum, or they will recover what you owe by withholding your monthly benefits until the overpayment is satisfied. That will mean you’ll go some months without benefits, the number of months dependent upon your monthly benefit amount and how much you owe them. Remember, you have the option to request the annual limit if it will benefit you.

Though you’ll lose benefits for some number of months now when you reach your full retirement age the earnings limit goes away entirely.

We are here to help you get back to the new normal.

Visitors were able to vote from their vehicles during the July 25 Annual Town Meeting, which was broadcast on the radio.

“This is a lot of money for this time. Any of you who own businesses know that it’s pretty easy to put together a group of people to construct exactly what it is you want and justify it,” said Libera, emphasizing the need for a team of investigators independent of the town. “We believe that is certainly what happened; we believe that they did a lot of work looking at this, but the bottom line is that $115,000 just eight years after we spent $54,000 does not seem appropriate for now.”

Ultimately, voters failed to heed the Finance Committee’s recommendation. The vast majority of those in attendance were in favor of purchasing the new mower, which will soon call Granby home. We Are Essential & So Is Your Child Plan that deserving graduation party today. We are here to help you get back to the new normal.
BCC sees new leadership team

MELINA BOURDEAU
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN — The Belchertown Cultural Council has two new leaders at the helm after April Jasak-Bangs stepped down earlier this month. Melissa Mann and Audrey Anderson were unanimously elected by the council. In her resignation letter Jasak-Bangs said she was stepping down for 15 months.

“Thanks to an amazing team of women, I have learned so much about leadership, patience and persistence that I will carry with me into the rest of my professional and volunteer career,” she wrote. “Thank you to the Selectboard and all the town departments for collaborating with us to great some fantastic cultural programming for our community.”

Since the group's weekly meeting, both Jasak-Bangs and Sarah Maroney have resigned from the Belchertown Cultural Council, but plan to help the group as volunteers in the future.

The sense of teamwork and comradery were two reasons Mann and Anderson said they stepped up to serve as co-chairs. Mann said she got involved in the group after attending a food truck event and became a volunteer. She said the community and the council “makes it easy to put the work in.”

“The community itself is very receptive and we get positive feedback,” she said. “My hopes and dreams for my term are finding ways to bring the community together along the famed Boston Marathon route, whether that be from a treadmill in their own home on Sunday, their neighborhood, favorite trail, or from their most comfortable — whether that be from their couch, kitchen counter or a treadmill in their own home on Sunday.”

Similarly, Anderson joined after winter light night because she wanted to help.

“‘That’s the thing that people often talk for granted,’” Mann said. “The effort it takes to have these events happen is more than we think even from one. It’s a lot of work and it takes a strong team.”

BCC is always looking for more people to help bring their knowledge and skills to the table, Anderson said.

“We want to do something different while keeping people safe,” Anderson said.

Recently, the BCC worked with the Recreation Department to help put on a drive-in movie night, which was successful and sold out within a day.

“We want to do programs in a safe way and maybe that means engaging with art in a different way,” Anderson said.

Looking ahead, Mann said she is most looking forward to the modified food drive-in movie night, which was successful.

“We’re going to have,” Anderson said. “We would love more feedback about the things people find valuable.”

Register for the 32nd annual Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk

BOSTON — Registration is now open for the 2020 Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk. Your Walk Your Way presentation by Hyundia This year, the Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk will have a different look as it for the 2020 Boston Marathon Jimmy Fund Walk to ensure the safety of everyone in the community. Participants will be encouraged to “Walk Your Way” from wherever they are going to have,” Mann said. “We would love more feedback about the things people find valuable.”

All forms of adult and pediatric patient care and cancer research at the nation’s premier cancer center, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. This year’s event will have a lower funding raising requirement ($300 for adults and $25 for those 12-years-old and younger) and everyone will pay just a $5 registration fee. Each walker who registers will receive a bib, and medal and the first 5,000 walkers to register will receive a commemorative Jimmy Fund Walk T-shirt.

Cancer care and research does not rest to help keep the wheels turning for the Meals on Wheels program during this pandemic crisis. This program may be closed, but they will still gladly accept donations.

The BLC thanked incoming President Victor Robodoux and outgoing President Tom McKee for spear-heading this local charitable contribution.

Regional Planning Commission receives $195,000 grant from Tufts Health Plan Foundation for Age-Friendly Pioneer Valley Initiative

STAFF REPORT

REGION – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission was awarded a three-year grant for $195,000 from Tufts Health Plan Foundation. The funds will be used to convene a Pioneer Age Friendly Collaborative that will engage members communities in planning for an aging population, including in the town of Belchertown. This is one of 13 new community investments totaling $1.7 million that reflect the Foundation’s support of collaborative community efforts and systems change to advance healthy aging.

“We have an opportunity to think differently about how our systems are addressing community needs,” said Nora Moreno Cargie, president of Tufts Health Plan Foundation and vice president for corporate citizenship at Tufts Health Plan.

“We are living in unprecedented times. We need to learn from this experience and think about how we can change the conditions that hold problems in place.”

This project, led by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), formalizes an existing effort around age-friendly planning in the region. PVPC will partner with municipal planning departments, councils on aging, health care and service providers, community organizations, universities and residents to create municipal Age Friendly action plans that reflect priorities of the region’s current and future older adults.

“We are excited to expand planning for healthy aging to municipalities throughoutout the PVPC region,” commented Becky Basch, Senior Planner with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. “And by bringing together all of the cities and towns that are planning for an aging population, we will create a valuable space for sharing ideas and best practices at the local and regional levels.”

Established in 2008, Tufts Health Plan Foundation supports the health and wellness of the diverse communities we serve. The Foundation has given more than $46 million to Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island nonprofits that promote healthy living with an emphasis on older adults. The foundation began funding in New Hampshire in 2016 and in Connecticut in 2019. The Tufts Health Plan Foundation funds programs that move communities toward implementing age-friendly policies and practices that are relevant, focus on older adults and include them in community solutions. Visit www.tuftshealthplanfoundation.org or follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

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Seniors

Keeping the meals coming

B elchertown Lions Club treasurer, Frank Crowdy, makes a $1,000 donation to help keep the wheels turning for the Meals on Wheels program during this pandemic crisis. This program may be closed, but they will still gladly accept donations.
Doug "Danger" Senecal stops at Steaming Tender

BY DALTON ZBIERSKI Staff Writer

PALMER – Doug "Danger" Senecal, the pride of Palmer and one of the great stuntmen of his generation, made his homecoming on July 24 during a book signing at the Steaming Tender Restaurant.

Steve Senecal stops at Doug "Danger" during an appearance at the Steaming Tender Restaurant in Palmer on July 24.

The 58-year-old daredevil has performed all over the world but relished the opportunity to return to his humble beginnings.

"We're kicking off the book signing tour, and where else can you do it but your hometown," said Senecal, promoting his book "Doug Danger: Dare to Dream. From Tragedy to Triumph."

Senecal is a world record holding motorcycle jumper who first entered the Guinness Book of World Records in 1991. Over the course of his career, he's jumped over school buses, tractor-trailer trucks and jumbo jet from wingtip to wingtip.

His trials and tribulations have been well-publicized. As a stuntman, Senecal has broken approximately 50 bones; one incident landed him in a coma for more than a month.

Last Friday, he reminisced on his incredible journey, crediting the people of Palmer for their longstanding belief in him.

"The greatest people come from somewhere. All I can say is that the people in the town of Palmer inspired me to chase my dreams," said Senecal. "I had a great past, and this town was the absolute greatest to grow up in. We had great people, great teachers, great police officers; this is just such a beautiful place.

Senecal fondly recalled riding through sand pits and wooded trails. Palmer was home to his first stunts – including one he performed inside of Palmer High School during his sophomore year. It is still remembered more than 40 years later.

On the last day of school, Senecal said he rode his motorbike through the halls of the high school. "School was the act that led to his dismissal and eventual enrollment at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School almost never occurred."

"We had talked about doing it for a while, and it started circulating around the school. I started thinking 'This is way too big; I'm going to get in trouble,'" said Senecal. "I was going to back off, and then two guys from the football team who played the offensive line came up to me and said, 'What time are you going to go?' I told them I thought about it and wasn't going to do it. They said, 'Oh, we got money on you; you're going. What time do you open it?' They held the doors open for me, and the rest is history."

Senecal launched his stunt career in 1979, jumping over 10 cars in Palmer. From there, he never looked back.

Senecal earned his first world record in 1985 after completing a jump over 14 school buses. In 1991, he entered the Guinness Book of World Records by jumping 251 feet over 42 cars.

Spread between his many successes, however, are numerous failures; several of which nearly cost Senecal his life.

While Senecal had experienced numerous bone-breaking crashes, during one of which he caught on fire, Senecal is sure that he cheated death on a summer afternoon in 1992.

During a July practice jump at Hudson Speedway in New Hampshire, Senecal slammed head-first into a three-foot concrete retaining wall, suffering brain damage, prolonged amnesia and 17 broken bones. When it was widely assumed that Senecal's career was over, the stuntman instead made his greatest leap.

"When I missed that jump at Hudson Speedway and hit that cement wall, I was very slow after because I had brain damage; people treated me very differently," he said. "I didn't like being treated that way. My brother sent me video of the crash and other jumps I had, and I was like, 'That's who I was? I want to be that guy again. If I did before, I had to be able to do it again.'"

Senecal returned to the ramp to become more committed than ever to land an extreme jump. He built back his confidence and skill before successfully leaping over 18 tractor-trailer trucks in Las Vegas in 1999.

Several years later, Senecal returned to the scene of his 1992 New Hampshire accident to conquer the same jump that had nearly doomed him. He described what prompted him to one of his greatest accomplishments.

"After that crash, when I came to, I had no memory of anything in my past, but I wanted to come back and redo the jump," said Senecal. "The night that I booked it, I was laying there in bed. I saw the whole jump; it came to me. I saw that the ramps weren't quite set right. When I landed, I went straight up into the wall. Just before I hit the wall, I woke right up; sweat pouring off me and everything. But I learned what I did wrong.

From there, Senecal developed a philosophy that has enabled him to overcome adversity time and time again.

"You have to look at every failure as a learning experience. Learn from it and don't ever do it again. As long as you do that and keep your chin up and keep going forward, you’re going to get where you want to be," he said.

Today, Danger lives in Florida and continues to perform, jumping vehicles that range from motorcycles to monster trucks.

"Doug Danger, Dare to Dream. From Tragedy to Triumph," is a newly-released biographical work written by Senecal's cousin, Steven Hall.

The publication is available on numerous platforms, including Amazon.

Dalton Zbierski is a Staff Writer and can be reached at dzbierski@turley.com.

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PHOTOS BY DALTON ZBIERSKI
MEMA offers hurricane season preparedness tips

REGION — MEMA is working closely with the Department of Public Health and the newly established Pandemic Disaster Mass Care Working Group to develop guidance for evacuations and mass care during COVID-19. This guidance will be provided to municipalities to inform their planning and preparedness for hurricane season and will be used to adjust the Commonwealth’s mass care evacuation plans to help keep individuals both safe and healthy during a disaster.

Working in partnership with the Emergency Support Function Team and with local partners some of the MEMA is taking to prepare for the 2020 hurricane season during COVID-19 include re-evaluating capacities of state-initiated regional shelter sites; preparing for the need for additional evacuation transportation vehicles, including screening, sanitization, disinfection, and public health protocol to existing mass care plans, and planning for and preparing to provide sheltering in non-congregate settings such as hotels.

Massachusetts has defined hurricane evacuation zones, designated as Zone A, Zone B and Zone C, for areas of the state at risk for storm surge flooding associated with tropical storms or hurricanes. If evacuations are necessary because of a tropical storm or hurricane, local or state officials will notify residents of emergency evacuations in zone areas to leave the area for their safety. Even areas not directly along a coastline may be at risk for storm surges caused by tropical storms or hurricanes. Find out if you live, work, or vacation in a hurricane evacuation zone by visiting the "Know Your Zone" interactive map located on MEMA’s website at www.mass.gov/memac. Residents should develop a plan with the members of their household to prepare for what to do, how to find each other, and how to communicate in a tropical storm or hurricane. An emergency plan should include meeting locations, emergency contact information, evacuation plans, shelter-in-place plans and considerations for families members with access and functional needs, and pets.

For more information people should see: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/make-a-family-emergency-plan.

Build an emergency kit containing items that will sustain you and your family in the event you are isolated for three to five days. In addition, you should go to a store. Emergency kits are particularly important during hurricane season, due to potential extended power outages, flooding, and impassable debris-covered roads. While it is important to customize your kit to meet the unique needs of you and your family, every emergency kit should include bottled water, food, a flashlight, and a radio extra batteries, a first aid kit, sanitation items, and clothing. Depending on your family’s needs, emergency kits should also include medications, extra eyeglasses, medical equipment and supplies such as diapers, formula, and food supplies for pets and service animals, and other items you or your family members might need during a disaster. For a complete emergency kit check-list, visit: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/build-an-emergency-kit.

Building emergency kits and timely emergency alerts and information from public officials is critical to staying safe during a tropical storm or hurricane. Every family should have multiple methods for receiving emergency alerts. Learn more about different types of alerting and communication tools including the Emergency Alert System, Wireless Emergency Alerts, NOAA Weather Radio, Social Media, and Traditional Media. 2-1-1 Hotline, Local Notification Systems: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/how-to-informed-and-receive-emergency-alerts.

POLICE LOGS

Belchertown Police

Editor's note: The following are brief descriptions of summons and arrests from Belchertown Police log and arrests for the weeks of July 13 through July 19. The information was provided by a member of the police department based on the review of the logs. This information is designed to provide context and explanation to some of the calls police respond to every day. Of the 278 calls police received over that time, there were 15 incidents, 1 accident, 2 arrests/summonses and 13 citations.

ARRESTS/SUMMONSES

Sunday, July 19

2:27 a.m. – A 16-year-old Belchertown juvenile was charged with possessing liquor under 21. And possession of an open container in the area in Police Department and the schools when they could hear voices coming from the playground area. The officer estimated there were six to eight people in the group. The officer pulled into the lot checked to check the high school and saw two people running along the tennis courts, toward Stadler Street. Another officer responded to the area and observed two juveniles walking from that direction, one of which was holding bottle of alcohol. The juvenile’s parents were notified and advised about the changes. The party was able to open a session of liquor.

4:30 a.m. – An 81-year-old Belchertown man was issued summons to court for assault and battery on a family member.

ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS

Thursday, July 16

12:43 p.m. – An ambulance was on patrol when they were flagged down by a person concerned for a box truck that had bottomed out while exiting a driveway. The truck was stuck on the bumper bar caused rear tires to lose traction. The truck couldn’t get back in the driveway due to loss of traction. There was minor damage to the pavement surface caused by the rear bumper. The truck was removed.

Sunday, July 19

2.44 p.m. – Officers reported to an accident on Cold Spring Road. It was reported a vehicle was traveling east when the right wheel departed from the roadway while the driver was turning. The vehicle then pulled to the right, swiped a tree and collided with a second tree head on. The airbags deployed. The car was parked, sideways on the tree while the driver crossed the vehicle which came to a rest facing westbound. No injuries were reported. It is unknown who was involved. 9:45 a.m. – Officers took a report dam-

Granny Police

Editor’s Note: The Granny Police Department responded to 125 calls for the week of July 13 through July 19. Those arrested are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. Information is provided by the Granby Police Department.

ARRESTS/SUMMONSES

There were no arrests or summons this week.

ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS

Friday, July 17

3:03 p.m. – Officers investigated a report of a car theft. The incident is still under investigation.

Saturday, July 18

11:11 a.m. – Officers investigated a two-car accident on Route 190. 6:47 p.m. – Officers investigated a two-car accident at Parish Hill Road and Center Street. Minor injuries were reported.

State warns of unemployment scam

BOSTON – Criminal enterprises in possession of stolen personal information from earlier communitywide data breaches have been attempting to file large amounts of illegitimate unemployment claims through the Massachusetts unemployment system. The Department of Unemployment Assistance announced this is part of a national unemployment fraud scheme.

In order to ensure the integrity of the unemployment system, the Department will implement additional identity verification measures that may temporarily delay the payment timeframe for some unemployment claims in Massachusetts, the office said. In a press release, the ADA said the investigation is being coordinated with the Massachusetts State Police, the Department of Revenue and the National Guard on this identity verification effort.

"Protecting the integrity of the unemployment system is only going to valid claimants that are top priority of the Department of Unemployment Assistance," said Labor and Workforce Development Secretary Rosalin Acosta. "It is unfortunate that some criminal activity, people who really need our support may face delays in receiving the benefits they need. We will continue to work with state and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as our related constituent service personnel, to ensure that those with valid unemployment claims receive financial benefits as quickly as possible.

The Department of Unemployment Assistance is working with the Yang to conduct a forensic accounting investigation into the fraud scheme, and additional forensic accounting work will be posted as soon as they are available.

Individuals who believe a false unemployment claim has been filed in their name are urged to utilize the Department of Unemployment Assistance fraud contact form at mail/unemployment-fraud-to call the DUA customer service department at 877-626-6800.
REGION – In what is a very ominous sign for the future of high school sports in the 2020-2021 school year, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association has postponed the beginning of fall sports to the middle of September.

Last Tuesday, a virtual meeting of the MIAA Board of Directors took place, with a unanimous vote in favor of moving the state date of fall sports to Sept. 14. This means actual contests may not be played until the end of September. This could result in almost only a half season of action in fall sports, and some sports could still be cancelled altogether.

The state and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is planning to issue additional guidance in the coming month which could change how the MIAA approaches fall sports.

Currently, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is in Phase 3 of its re-opening plan, but Phase 3 is to remain stalled until either an impactful treatment or a vaccine for COVID-19 is developed and available for the public at large, allow-
Matt Hirschman takes win at Star Speedway

EPING, N.H. — Matt Hirschman wasn’t about to be denied. The Pennsylvania native, who is no stranger to Victory Lane on the Tri Track Open Modified Series circuit, returned to glory on Saturday night at Star Speedway in the ninth annual SBFM race.

But the ride to victory wasn’t one that came without difficulty, especially at the end. Hirschman dominated the beginning, taking the lead on lap 25 and leading through lap 83, before a controlled caution slowed the race. While some elected to stay out, Hirschman worked to pit road for a fresh Hoosier tire, the charge started back to the front from ninth position.

He would eventually pass Matt Swanson for the top spot on a restart at lap 112 and never look back.

It was the fifth win in the prestigious event for Hirschman, who is one of just two drivers to compete in all previous SBFM races. The race was 121 laps, in honor of track owner and operator Bobby Webber’s son Tim Webber, who turned 21-years-old this week.

The purse for the event was over $40,000, a figure that didn’t change post-COVID pandemic. Due to COVID-19, and guidance from the state of New Hampshire, Star Speedway ran at 50% capacity for the event and the gates, and sold out. Tri Track and Star officials made sure that all social distancing and safe health practices were in place.

“I’ve always enjoyed coming here, winning the first time I have ever came here, and having all of this success, I’ve had in this SBFM race after that,” Hirschman said. “Going back to the original races, it was, and has been, a big deal for us.”

Swanson, who started 27th after earning a provisional into the race, played a different strategy than Hirschman did, and it almost paid off. Swanson elected not to pit as part of the controlled caution period on lap 83, and took over the lead when most others went down pit road. Swanson led the race.

In the night’s Iron Mike Memorial, NEMA Midget main event, open-wheel legend Randy Cabral did what he’s done at least once over the last 20 years. Cabral blasted to victory in the caution-free 30-lap-prix, taking the checkers ahead of Todd Bertrand and early-race leader Paul Scally.

Avery Stohr topped the Lites 30-lapper.

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Pinhurst Resort to host 2020 High School Golf National Invitational

BOSTON – Pinhurst Resort in North Carolina will host both the Boys and Girls 2020 High School Golf National Invitational, August 5-7. Participating teams come from more than 40 states—more than 110 girls and 250 boys—to compete in a three-round, 54-hole, stroke-play format.

The High School Golf National Invitational showcases golfers at the highest level, bringing together the strongest and most diverse field in high school golf from large, small, private and public high schools across the United States. Encompassing 300 boys and girls representing 43 states, the Boys National Invitational will take place at Pinehurst Resort, where the players can showcase the most talented high school golfers from across America.

The Boys’ National Invitational will be played on Pinhurst’s No. 6, No. 8 and No. 9 courses, and top 25 teams will be invited to showcase the most talented high school golfers from across the country. The Girls National Invitational will be played on Pinhurst’s No. 6, No. 8 and No. 9 courses, and top teams will be invited to showcase the most talented high school golfers from across America.

Pinhurst Resort is steeped in tradition and has hosted some of golf’s greatest events, including the PGA Championship, Ryder Cup, U.S. Women’s Open, U.S. Open and U.S. Amateur. It’s really incredible to bring the 2020 High School National Invitational to Pinhurst Resort, where the players can experience one of the best golf facilities in the world,” said Jimmy Walker, President of the MIAA. “This event is the pinnacle of high school golf and provides our student-athletes and their coaches the opportunity to experience and achieve things they never dreamed of. It is a testament to the skill and determination of all of our student-athletes and the coaches who work so hard to inspire them to reach their goals.”

Last year, the Girls Invitational went down to the wire, with a two-hole playoff for the top national high school championship. The four-on-four aggregate team playoff was won with a birdie on the final hole by tournament medalist Camilla Dimagio (Buena Park, Calif.), who shot par-71, to finish with a 2-under par, 142 total.

Virginia won the 2019 Boys Division title with a two-day score of 584 (291-293). Second place went to Arkansas (592), followed by Pennsylvania (598) in third. Aiden Bernaoli from Bernalillo, N.M., fired a career-best round of 65 on day one of the tournament, and followed with a 70 on day two, to win the individual medalist title with a 9-under par, 135 total. The Boys National Invitational is conducted by the National High School Golf Association (NHSGA), a division of Nextgengolf, which was acquired by the PGA of America in 2019. The Invitational is supported by some of the largest names in the industry, including NGF, the PGA of America, AJGA, Strix, Gatorade and Junior Golf Hub.

Racing to resume in Thompson

THOMPSON, Conn. - Econn Motorsports and Thompson Speedway Motorsports Park announced this week an agreement that the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour will resume racing on the 3/4 mile oval on Wednesday, August 5.

Plans currently call for Econn Motorsports to also host an open practice on the oval this week. Racers are expected to race during the Bud 150 on Wednesday, August 5, which has been rescheduled from October 9-11. The NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour is expected to headline both races.

“Thompson is the racetrack in the area that has been most affected by COVID-19,” said Econn Motorsports and Thompson Speedway Motorsports Park President Jerry Parncutt. “We feel this course is a perfect place for the Modifieds to return to racing during this time, as the track is spread out and allows for social distancing.”

RSA Motorsports has prepared a modified touring series to resume racing at Thompson beginning this week.

Curfew provided by outdoor displays

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Died: July 22, 2020
Service to be held at Family’s Discretion

The Sentinel
OBITUARY POLICY
Turley Publications reserves the right to edit the text of obituaries.

One is a free, brief Death Notice listing the name of deceased, date and place of death and place of residence.

The other is a Paid Obituary, costing $150 for each 100 words, plus design, which can be submitted through a local florist or www.turley.com.

Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-approved.

The board also unanimously passed a recommendation to suspend the end-of-game handshakes until further notice to reduce contact between teams. Currently, only high school-age baseball and some other sports that are outdoors are being played in Massachusetts with some social distancing being adhered to.

Among sports that could be played in fall currently are volleyball, cross country, field hockey, and golf. It is not yet known if high school students will be allowed to play football or soccer this fall.
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Public Hearing
Legal Notice
Belchertown
Zoning Board of Appeals

In accordance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40A, Section 13, the Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a Public Hearing on Wednesday, August 19, 2020, at 6:30 PM.

Per Governor Baker Executive Order March 12, 2020, this hearing will be held remotely on the application from Robert L. Stephens seeking Special Permit $145-
69, 145-17 Non-Conforming Use C Extension or addition and $145-16 Variance. 145
Attachment 2 side yard
set back 8’ feet from the required
20’ feet on an 866 Federal Street
map 103 Parcel 16 Zoning
District LR.

A copy of the application may be inspected on the Zoning Board of Appeals Website at Belchertown.org

Any Person interested and wishing to be heard can access the hearing on August 19, 2020 @ 6:30 PM or in writing, mailed to ZBA P.O. Box 670 Belchertown MA 01007-0670

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or phone:

https://www.gotomeeting.com/join/413185621

You can tune in to the meeting anytime during the August 19, 2020 hearing.

This hearing will be available by

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For those without Internet access, a free number for the hearing impaired is 617-565-5308. The toll free number for the hearing impaired is 800-535-3090.

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COVID-19 hasn’t done us any favors, robbing us of prom, spring sports, senior trip and a traditional graduation. All of it, gone, and there’s nothing we can do about it. We can’t let these past few months destroy a past few years’ worth of work.”

He added it was best for the group to “pick themselves up and continue (their) journey to achieve (their) goals.” Similarly, Class President Derek Guntor said the classes’ senior year was “pretty unconventional.” While Guntor said he felt the sting after receiving the email telling students they wouldn’t return to Belchertown High School for the rest of the year, he said the group was reliable and “thrived at everything (they’ve) ever done in this school and it’s all because of (them).”

He said despite the fact the graduation ceremony was a closure of one part of their lives, they would not be separat- ing anytime soon.

“The bonds we’ve all created through the last decade will be there forever,” Guntor said. “Some of us will be at each other’s weddings. Some of us will be godparents, aunts or uncles to each other’s children. But most of us will always look back and smile when you think of this class.”

In his address, Valedictorian Ryland Charron talked about the influence of books on his life and encouraged his classmates to be lifelong learners.

“Wherever you go and whatever you do, you are Orioles and you always will be,” Vigneux said. “As you fly away, you bring the nest with you. You don’t have to say goodbye because in all the most important ways, we will be with you forever,” Guntor said. “Some of us will be at each other’s weddings. Some of us will be godparents, aunts or uncles to each other’s children. But most of us will always look back and smile when you think of this class.”

In his speech, Class Valedictorian Ryland Charron, spoke about the effects books have had on his life and urged his classmates to continue reading. “I read a lot throughout elementary and middle school. I used to read a new novel every week,” he said. “In my English class junior year, we did a unit on The Stranger by Albert Camus. The story itself isn’t super exciting, but the philosophies embedded in the book are very thought pro-
voking.” He explained the book’s philosophy on absurdism – the idea that the universe has no meaning and the best way to live is to fully enjoy every individual moment – which he found helped to make sense of the chaotic world.

He advised his classmates to read books throughout their lives because unlike many aspects of life, people get to pick what books they want to read. “This ability to choose is powerful, because by selecting what we read, we can choose who we are, and who we will become,” he said.

Following the speeches, the class was presented to Superintendent Brian Cameron and each student’s name was read.

Rather than receiving their diploma at graduation, stu-
dents and families received the diploma last week during a two-day event. At the ceremony, each student stood and moved their tassel from the right to the left side of their caps.

In her address to the graduates and their families, Principal Christine Vigneux told students to reflect on their experiences not only in the last year, but throughout their time in the Belchertown Public Schools.

She told them to think of “all the special and unique time you have shared and the thing you have truly loved about this BHS community.” She listed classes, sports, assemblies and social meets.

Remarkable on the last few months of their high school careers with a story from Atlas Obscura about a school-
teacher, Hildreth Heiney, and her fiancé St. Kleber Hadley. The two wrote each other letters about wearing masks during a pandemic.

“Yes, I wore one, and so did everybody else,” Vigneux said, reading a letter from Heiney. “(She) wrote this letter on Nov. 21, 1918. Graduation exercises often bring me back to my roots in education, my start as a history teacher. Here we are, you here, you are more than a century after this letter was written by a woman separated from someone she loved, grappling with a pandemic and trying to make the best of a ‘new normal’ which included mask-wearing.”

She said there were three lessons one could take from the letters – the fact that people will see the other side of the pandemic, the bonds people share with loved ones are stronger than ever and lastly that the ‘nest’ is a feeling, not a place. “Wherever you go and whatever you do, you are Orioles and you always will be,” Vigneux said. “As you fly away, you bring the nest with you. You don’t have to say goodbye because in all the most important ways, we will be with you and you will be with each other. Everywhere. Always.”