

2024

Year in REVIEW

• JANUARY •

Rock Stars Don't Nap: Author reads new book at CML

By Ryan Drago
Staff writer

BELCHERTOWN – The Clapp Memorial Library featured an author's visit with a new kids book on the shelves. Jason Perkins of Chicopee visited the library to read his new book "Rock Stars Don't Nap".

This fun and hilarious bedtime story is about a boy named Jimmy who was born to rock. The story was inspired by Perkins' son Oliver who didn't want to go down for a nap. Perkins decided to listen to music and chose a lot of classic rock songs. One Metallica song came up and next thing



Jason Perkins alongside wife Kamah and son Oliver during his in person reading of "Rock Stars Don't Nap."

you know, his son Oliver was fast asleep.

During his reading at Clapp Memorial Library, Perkins witnessed children getting into the spirit of the story by laughing along during Jimmy's rock star adventures.

At the conclusion of the reading, kids got to stick around the library to get an autographed signed copy of "Rock Stars Don't Nap". In addition, the kids got to work on a rock star themed craft.

The craft was a paper craft featuring a child with a guitar in hand and the children can put their names on the guitar indicating they are rockstars like Jimmy in "Rock Stars Don't Nap".

This picture book was Perkins' first published book, and he has future plans in store for new stories for kids to enjoy.

Perkins is based out of Chicopee and is a special education teacher in Springfield; teaching for over 20 years. He

is a proud father of two children, his daughter Tallulah and son Oliver. One of his biggest supporters in attendance was his wife, Kamah Perkins.

"Rock Stars Don't Nap" is filled with rock'n'roll puns, hidden easter eggs, and a discography of classic hit songs going back to the 1980s. The illustrations of the book were done by Cale Atkinson.

"Rock Stars Don't Nap" is a fun story for anyone who likes to "move like Jagger".

Making a local connection

I began full-time writing for the Sentinel back in June, and when I came and worked here in Belchertown and Granby, I really got to know the people within these vibrant communities.

From befriending people at the libraries and police stations, to finding repeat faces to say hello to at events, being able to be here in Belchertown and Granby to report on all of these amazing events has truly been a wonderful experience.

From taking part in the adventures held at the Clapp Memorial Library, to attending a fun event at the Granby Historical Association, enjoying the fun and bright lights of the Belchertown Fair to the somber memorial erected for the heroes of 9/11 in Granby and being able to take part in your communities has been an honor.

As I look back on this year of adventures, I wonder what other adventures are in store for me.

After all, Belchertown and Granby are truly towns of community, and there is always something interesting hiding on those twisting back roads to explore and write about.

Thank you for a wonderful 2024, and I'll see you in 2025.

Emily-Rose Pappas
Staff Writer

Hearing continued for State School development

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – Plans for the Carriage Grove residential development on the former site of the Belchertown State School remained on hold after a tense public hearing on Tuesday, Jan. 23.

The hearing ended with Planning Board Chair Daniel Baudette offering developers Brisa Ventures, LLC an extension of three weeks for submitting a completed site plan. This extension came after Brisa had already been granted multiple continuations dating back to the fall of last year.

However, the presented plan was found to be incomplete by the board members, who received it minutes before the evening's hearing began.

Among the items missing from the site plan, were a maintenance and operation plan, evidence of substantive contact

with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority regarding transit access, and a written statement on how many units would be set aside for affordable housing purposes.

Despite identifying multiple shortcomings, Beaudette felt that the issues with the plan were each minor on their own. He expressed a willingness to approve the site plan with specific conditions that the identified shortcomings be rectified.

Multiple board members were also encouraged that local engineering firm Tighe & Bond, on whom the board had relied in the past, had signed off on Brisa's plan.

However, Vice Chair Michael Hoffer was unhappy that Brisa submitted an incomplete plan given how much time they had already been given to draft one.

The majority of voting members voiced a tentative willing-

Please see **HEARING**, page 2

EDIC discusses development of Carriage Grove

By Emily-Rose Pappas
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN — The Economic Development and Industrial Corporation meeting discussed the development of 15 acres of land and abandoned buildings, including the closed Belchertown State School.

Plans with the land include putting in an apartment complex with single and two-bedroom units as well as studios in order to create a place of affordable housing accessible to more people. There are more plans to introduce new businesses and more.

According to MassDevelopment, the EDIC is under contract with Brisa

Please see **EDIC**, page 2

• FEBRUARY •



This photo shows one of the abandoned buildings that are located on the former site of the Belchertown State School.

Planning board approves Carriage Grove site plan

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

Belchertown State School.

At the Feb. 13 meeting, the site plan was found to fulfill all of the requirements set by the board, ending a lengthy and at times tumultuous review process, with members of the board and the community

BELCHERTOWN – The Planning Board voted unanimously to approve the site plan presented by Brisa Ventures, LLC for the first phase of the Carriage Grove development on the former site of the

Please see **APPROVES**, page 10

FEBRUARY 2024 Year in REVIEW



Mother-daughter team Emily and Karen Chandran won first place in the puzzle competition.

Puzzlers compete for the fastest time

By Emily-Rose Pappas
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – To celebrate National Puzzle Day, the Clapp Memorial Library hosted a contest for who could put together a 500-piece puzzle the fastest.

The library, through the minds of Cyndi Harbeson and Annie Macon, wanted to do something fun for puzzle day, as they have in the past done something for Game Day in November. They were sure to be in for a surprise when they found how many people jumped at the competition to sign up.

The competition ended up having ten teams, and there were many more people who were in a waitlist for the next puzzle competition to be announced by the library.

“We all love puzzles,” Annie said about the library and expressed her excitement at the response of the community. The puzzle contest, since it was

held in a library, only made sense to be book-themed.

“I chose the puzzle because of its clear sections and colors,” Annie said. The contestants had a three-hour timer in order to complete the puzzle, and it being set up the way it was, was definitely some help.

Taking first place was the mother-daughter team, Emily and Karen Chandran, who are speed-puzzlers and have competed before in state championships. Their winning time at the competition was 27 minutes and 44 seconds!

All contestants who won finished the 500-piece puzzle in under an hour and began making plans for the fun they would have with the next puzzles they built- and what they could check out next.

Something as simple as puzzling has truly united the community in Belchertown, and the members of the library are looking forward to hosting more puzzle contests in the future.

Coordinator working to develop branding standards for town

By Melina Bourdeau
Correspondent

BELCHERTOWN – Much like advertisements from the Super Bowl made an impression, Belchertown’s Creative Economy Coordinator seeks to brand the town’s public facing materials.

The Select Board approved that E. Maude Haak-Frendscho, in conjunction with other committees, submitted a release designer request for a proposal for branding for the town.

This RFP would allow for the town to get a designer to be able to make a template for guides and brochures for various uses for the town boards and committees.

In the meeting, Haak-Frendscho said there are recommendations to create consistent public-facing branding materials for the town to be used for “small businesses, tourism, economic development goals and interested public information.”

The idea stemmed from a plan to develop an annual farm brochure with the Agricultural Commission and then expanded to include the creation of a

template.

Haak-Frendscho said the template would allow “both flexibility for a range of uses while also giving consistency to the look and feel of the material in a way that will make it attractive for that variety of uses.”

Select Board member Lesa Lessard-Pearson emphasized the importance that Haak-Frendscho work with the Communications Committee to create the template.

“I feel uncomfortable about doing that unless you’re working in partnership with the Communication Committee, they’ve done a ton of work. I don’t want there to be two different streams working on the same goals,” she said.

Louraine added that she thinks it would be important to speak with the Belchertown Fair Committee as well.

Select Board member Ron Aponte asked Haak-Frendscho to explain the scope of the project.

“This would not be the entirety of branding for all external communications,” she said. “This is for templates for guides and brochures.”

EDIC discusses next steps for Carriage Grove

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – During their regular monthly meeting on Feb. 21, the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation applauded the work of the Planning Board in their consideration and approval of the Carriage Grove site plan for the former site of the Belchertown State School.

Discussions were also held during the meeting on the next steps for the

location, including the potential subsequent phases for development beyond the planned residential development.

Additionally, the news was shared that a commercial real estate agent had been identified to aid the town in attracting businesses to the EDIC parcels.

Planning Board Chair Dan Beaudette and Planning Director Doug Albertson were both in attendance at the meeting,

Please see **CARRIAGE GROVE**, page 5

EDIC from page 1

Ventures, LLC to develop 12 acres into approximately 100 units of mixed income housing and to repurpose the former Administration Building into a community center, museum, cultural space, and either restaurant, brewery or distillery.

The EDIC purchased the site from the state following the closure of the Belchertown State School in 1992. The main campus of the property contained almost 400,000 square feet of abandoned buildings and utility tunnels

with significant environmental issues that required abatement and demolition.

The project has received several grants, and as of 2020 approximately 325,000 square feet of vacant buildings have been abated and demolished.

“The world will change again, and again, and again, and we the Belchertown people will deal with the changes together,” EDIC member Bill Terry said.

An update from Robert Jenkins, the MassDevelopment lead, talked about the state of several homes and buildings on Carriage Grove.

“We are advocating to the state to have these buildings come down. It’s all about right now, moving forward with the housing part of the development of Carriage Grove,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins is hoping to be able to get through the long process of gaining funds and materials for the project quickly so it can be worked on efficiently for the community.

HEARING from page 1

ness to conditionally approve the plan, with the exception of Hofler. Beaudette stressed the importance of having all board members agree before approving the plan.

D’Ambrosio accepted the offer to continue the public hearing at the Planning Board’s next meeting. That meeting is scheduled to take place at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

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Williams gains title of Town Manager

By Melina Bourdeau
Correspondent

BELCHERTOWN – Williams was hired as the town administrator in May 2023 with the promise of becoming the town's first town manager. The change is one of mostly title because last June the Selectboard delegated most of the authority of the position to Williams.

"I don't expect much to change," Williams said. "Department heads still need to come back to the board for ratification."

There are three areas of responsibility – one is personnel, the second is financial management and the third is basic administrative management. Williams cannot remove members of committee and employees such as the School Committee, school employees, the police chief, the fire chief and the library.

He is also in charge of personnel bylaws, which Williams said he is working with council to amend them. Financial management includes record keeping, signing warrants and controlling all budget expenditures. He is also in charge of the capital improvement and operational budget.

"Updates to the town's bylaws will probably be on the town meeting warrant," Williams said. "It still gives the Select Board the authority to formulate and implement policy directives and guidelines. It would be the town manager's role to implement them."

Select Board member Ed Boscher said he wanted to highlight the capital improvement budget.

"We've been talking about that for years," Boscher said. "As part of the free cash policy we adopted last summer as we have \$187,000, which is not even a dent of what's needed, but it's a start. It's encouraging."

Boscher said one distinct difference in the budget process is "all boards officers and committees of the town, including the school committee shall furnish all relevant information and possessions submit to the town manager...a detailed assessment of appropriations required and available funds."

Williams talked about his role is to keep the Select Board's communication "flying in both directions," authority over the jurisdiction on use of all town facilities and property and serve as chief procurement officer.

MARCH 2024 Year in REVIEW

EDIC welcomes commercial agent

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – The Economic Development and Industrial Corporation introduced Jeremy Casey, Managing Partner at SR Commercial Realty in Springfield, as their new real estate agent responsible for overseeing the marketing and sale of parcels on the former State School property for commercial development during a brief meeting on March 20.

He said that his team of eight brokers and agents were all completely focused on commercial opportunities, and shared that there were already two potential buyers in the manufacturing industry that

they were in contact with.

"I really wanted to see if this was something that we could not just support but also take action to get this development to the place that all of you want to get to," he told the members of the EDIC. "We're looking forward to working alongside you and MassDevelopment."

Robert Jenkins of MassDevelopment highlighted the benefit of having Casey and his team onboard. "It's always good to have somebody that's there," he said.

"He understands the zoning, he understands the players on the local level which we will be dealing with," he said. Jenkins added that SR Commercial will be responsible for actively marketing

these properties through the relevant channels in the commercial space.

"I think it's really what we need in order to get the commercial component of this master plan going, so we're looking forward to it," Jenkins said.

Casey shared that things had gotten moving quickly since he had assumed responsibility for the location.

He said that the potential buyers were "both for the industrial aspects of the land, which is really our initial focus to bring critical mass to this development." He said he expected that these buyers "will be a very positive outcome for this land, because I think that's a real opportunity that is needed in a heavier depth in Belchertown specifically."

BPD to regionalize dispatch with Wilbraham

Town hopes to save millions

By Melina Bourdeau
Correspondent

BELCHERTOWN – On July 1, the town [regionalized] its dispatch center to save money, have more coverage and reduce the hiring challenges the department currently faces.

Belchertown Police Chief Kevin Pacunas and Fire Chief John Ingram spoke to the Selectboard last week about the matter with unanimous support from the Selectboard. Pacunas told the board that the state is pushing towns to regionalize, and surrounding communities have already done so.

"In order to maintain effective dispatching services, we would need a minimum of eight to nine full-time dispatchers, an increase from our current staffing of five," Pacunas wrote. "It is a law and essential to have two dispatchers per shift."

There would also be a reduction in annual training for police officers. The town would also see savings in the salaries and benefits costs. However, Pacunas said there are drawbacks to the switch – a major

one being that the town could not have its own dispatch center again once regionalized.

The town would "lose its personal touch with citizens, (and) jobs are eliminated," he said.

Current dispatchers in the department would be eligible to apply for the three positions that would be created in Wilbraham.

Pacunas said Wilbraham would be a good fit for the town. Ingram added that after taking a serious look at other agencies and communities, Wilbraham is a good fit.

Town Administrator Steve Williams said he recently took a tour of Wilbraham's dispatch center and was impressed.

"It's a state-of-the-art center, I was impressed not only with the facility but with the people – how professional they were and how eager they were," he said. "The numbers really speak for themselves."

He added that the face-to-face interaction is an important element for the department to maintain, so there will be some people in the station with office hours so that "if somebody needs to be at the station for some reason, there will still be a face."

Schools face budget shortfall for FY 25

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – Members of the School Committee, Select Board and Finance Committee met on March 14 to discuss the proposed fiscal year 2025 budget for the school district, which included reductions necessitated by a combination of increased costs and decreased government funding.

Superintendent Brian Cameron explained that he anticipated a reduction in staff of 15 full-time equivalent positions would be necessary to operate within the town's \$33.2 million allocation for the school district, which falls short of the \$34.4 million Cameron had projected for a budget that would maintain equivalent service from the previous school year.

Increased costs for health insurance as well as increases in tuition for students enrolling in school choice and other out-of-district programs also increased the burden for the schools.

Cameron's proposed budget primarily accounted for these increases by calling for a reduction in district staff. Minimum student-teacher ratios could be expected to increase to around 17 students per teacher at Jabish Brook Middle School and the High School, up from around 14, he said.

Despite the elimination of these positions, Cameron highlighted that the district would be still responsible for the cost of unemployment benefits for eliminated staff that did not obtain new positions elsewhere.

The proposed budget allocates \$105,351 for unemployment, though given the uncertainties around the job market, Cameron expressed his concern that "we're still not sure if that's going to be enough."

Cameron did point out that a green light for the new Jabish Brook school building project could help to alleviate some of these budget concerns moving forward. "If we get it, it will take some of these issues off the table," he said.

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APRIL 2024



Second annual Search Social held in Belchertown

By Ryan Drago
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – Friends and family gathered at the disc golf course for the 2nd annual Search Social. This event is supported by the Chris Grazioso Foundation to honor the memory of Chris Grazioso of Belchertown.

Several years ago, Chris had the idea of installing disc golf in town for residents to enjoy and spark interest in players from amateurs to professionals.

To grow the sport and provide additional recreation opportunities for the residents of Belchertown, Chris spearheaded the movement to build a public Disc Golf facility in cooperation with the Belchertown Select Board and Recreation Department.

Friends and family created the Chris Grazioso Foundation to continue his mission to grow the sport of Disc Golf, support player development, and provide additional recreational opportunities in our local community.

Currently running the foundation is Nick O'Connor. Alongside fellow disc golf players, O'Connor was excited to get started for their two-hour



The 2nd Annual Search Social took place in Belchertown's newest disc golf course with friends and family of the Chris Grazioso Foundation.

event the Search Social.

O'Connor mentioned that the foundation also sponsors local players, donates disc golf equipment for the schools and helps promote recreational fun in town.

A full 18-hole course would soon be installed next to Ron Constantino Recreation Facility. The course is set for amateur and professional layouts.

At the time, Boscher knew how big of a project it would be to get a disc golf course and it would take multiple sources to make it happen.

"A big project to get done on a municipal level," Boscher said.

All in good time, the idea came to life and the field was built just outside of the Constantino Field and Facility. It took numerous volunteers to get the disc golf field made.

Thanks to this existing piece of land, disc golf can now be enjoyed in the town of Belchertown. Boscher admits he is new to the game of disc golf but plays for the fun of the game and collaboration of other players.

Run for Hope combines community and service

By Nick Boonstra
Staff Writer

GRANBY – The MacDuffie School held their 13th annual Run for Hope on April 13, raising funds for charity and bringing the community together for fitness and for fun.

The 5K race was run by over 40 participants, including both MacDuffie students and residents from the surrounding area, who turned out despite the overcast and at times wet spring weather.

Winners in their respective age and gender categories were awarded prizes including passes to Six Flags, and funds raised were donated to Food for the Hungry, an international Christian charity.

The MacDuffie School is a private, nonsectarian school for students in grades six to 12, with students from more than a dozen nations in attendance, according to Head of

School Steven Griffin. The school's diversity was on display during the race. "Just today I see students from the USA, Vietnam, Japan, China, Turkey, Spain," he said.

Griffin said that he had worked to start the charity race when he first came on as Head of School 13 years ago, but that he was happy to have seen it become a student-run effort in more recent years. He said he had wanted to create an event that got students focused on international service while also engaging with each other and the community.

Gabrielle Benoit of Belchertown oversaw the organization of the run this year, after having helped as a volunteer previously, and said she felt it was good to get involved more directly in the event.

Griffin said after the race that about \$1,500 had been raised to support Food for the Hungry.



Gabrielle Benoit of Belchertown and Riku Mizoguchi of Tokyo, Japan were excited ahead of the MacDuffie School's 13th Annual Run for Hope. Mizoguchi went on to win the Men's Under-20 division of the race.

Granby Clerk Reminders

GRANBY—Annual Census Information: The 2025 Annual Census will be mailed out at the beginning of January, to avoid any voting problems please mail back your census.

Compliance with this state requirement provides proof of residence, it protects voting rights, veteran's bonuses, housing for the elderly and related benefits.

The Annual Town Census does not register you as a voter or change your party enrollment. You must fill out a voter registration form or a change of enrollment card. This can be done by

going on-line at www.sec.state.ma.us and go under "Elections", or for more information on voter registration call the Town Clerk's office.

Also included with the Census is a flyer pertaining to voting, office hours, dog licensing, and a schedule for the landfill pickup.

Please continue to check our website at www.granby-ma.gov for any further information on any of our town affairs.

Dog Licenses: The Annual Census contains a Pre-Registration form, and this is the First Notice for the 2025 dog

licenses. Dog licenses are valid from April – April of each year however, if you wish to pre-register your dogs for 2025, follow the instructions on the form and return it with the census, or you may wait until March or April and stop by the office to license your dog. Please note that after May 1, 2025, a \$25.00 late charge may be applied along with the annual dog fee.

Thanking you all in advance for your cooperation with this mailing.

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MAY **2024** Year in REVIEW

JUNE



Director of Veterans' Services Charly Oliva reveals a model of the signs that are now installed at the Route 9 bridge, crossing the Swift River.

Route 9 bridge naming honors fallen soldier

By Paula Ouimette
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – Belchertown resident Kenneth J. Iwasinski had always dreamed of joining the military, enlisting in the U.S. Army in March of 2006.

Sadly, Iwasinski was killed in action in Iraq on Oct. 14, 2007, by an improvised explosive device. He left behind family members in Belchertown, Chicopee, Ware, Gilbertville, Palmer, Amherst and Holyoke.

Iwasinski's family, friends, fellow servicemembers and veterans, state and local officials, police, fire and community members, gathered on the green of the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Les and Terry Campbell Quabbin Visitor Center, overlooking the glistening blue of the Quabbin Reservoir, to remember and honor his incredible sacrifice.

Prior to the start of the ceremony, a long convoy of motorcycles entered the park, as the Massachusetts Patriot Guard Riders arrived to support the fallen soldier and his family. The riders stood at attention around the crowd, each holding an American flag.

Director of Veterans' Services Charly Oliva said she was "deeply honored and humbled" to be part of the bridge dedication ceremony in Iwasinski's name.

Naming the bridge after Iwasinski is a way to ensure that his sacrifice will be remembered for generations to come.

As the ceremony was starting,

the Massachusetts Department of Transportation unveiled the new signs at the bridge, which greet motorists traveling between the two towns.

"We see these names all over bridges," state Rep. Todd Smola said. "I hope this bridge will become a teaching tool for future generations."

Smola said the Legislature is moving forward to remember people like Iwasinski, and honoring their service and sacrifice.

State Sen. John Velis, a U.S. Army veteran, said that Memorial Day is the most sacred day of the year. He said a veteran is someone who writes a blank check to protect their nation's freedom, and that Memorial Day is when we honor those whose checks were cashed.

Velis spoke about his own military service, and the moment he was walking up the stairs to leave Afghanistan, and looked at the message on the mural displayed there.

"This mural is dedicated to the men and women who gave their lives during Operations Enduring Freedom," he said. A message on the mural stated, "Live a life worthy of their sacrifice."

Velis said he lost many of his fellow servicemembers on April 6, 2013, in Afghanistan, when a vehicle borne IED detonated, and he understands the loss felt by Iwasinski's family.

"We move on...life moves on – it's natural," Velis said. "But not the families of the dead."



Beth's Flamingos take a lap during the Quaboag Valley's Relay for Life on the Belchertown Common.

Relay for life: community joins together to find a cure

By Paula Ouimette
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – The Quaboag Valley Relay for Life welcomed cancer survivors, caregivers, family, friends and community members to the Common this past [summer], for the annual fundraising event to benefit the American Cancer Society.

This year's theme was "Flocking towards a Cure," and each team took this to heart, decorating themselves and their tents with flamingos. The bright pink birds circled the lap track, giving the Common a tropical feel on the warm, sunny day.

Throughout the 12-hour event, Relay for Life participants enjoyed special laps, including a survivor/caregiver lap,

team lap, Jimmy Buffet lap, selfie lap and more. Many participants saddled up for a Flamingo Dash for Cash.

K-9 handlers Sgt. Marcy Brougham and Adam Brougham held a K-9 demonstration with Ace, Apache, Theia, and K-9-in-training, 4-month-old Journey.

Children and adults also enjoyed a Touch-a-Truck event.

An impressive gift basket raffle gave attendees many chances to walk away a lucky winner. Area businesses and organizations supported the Quaboag Valley Relay for Life, and their names were displayed on signs throughout the Common.

The Belchertown Lions Club provided food for the day, donating the proceeds to help the cause.

Oak and Ash Farm comes to library to teach herb gardening

By Emily-Rose Pappas
Staff Writer

BELCHERTOWN – The Clapp Memorial Library hosted Lindsey Baird, owner of Oak and Ash Farm, to give a brief class on how to create, manage, and care for an herb garden.

"This is my favorite thing to do," Baird said. "I'm a self-taught, life-long gardener." Baird has been interested in learning about herb gardening and began her own garden at age twelve.



Lindsay Baird with her favorite herb gardening books, and plenty of her own to share with those who attended her class.

Please see **GARDENING**, page 7

CARRIAGE GROVE from page 2

with Albertson joining virtually.

EDIC Chair Jonathan Spiegel took a moment at the beginning of the meeting to "Thank them both for the heavy load they carried and the diligence with which they reviewed" the Carriage Grove site plan, which was submitted by developers Brisa Ventures.

The approved residential development at Carriage Grove is the first of five phases planned for the site, and Jenkins said during the meeting that phase two was set to be "60 units of elderly housing that will go through the same process" as Brisa Ventures did for their development.

The EDIC also made the significant announcement that Jeremy Casey, a real estate agent with SR Commercial of Springfield, had been secured to represent the town and help market the former State School property to businesses.

Unfortunately, Casey was ill on the night of the meeting and unable to attend. However, both Jenkins and the members of the EDIC expressed excitement around his selection, and said that they had already started providing him with initial information about the location.



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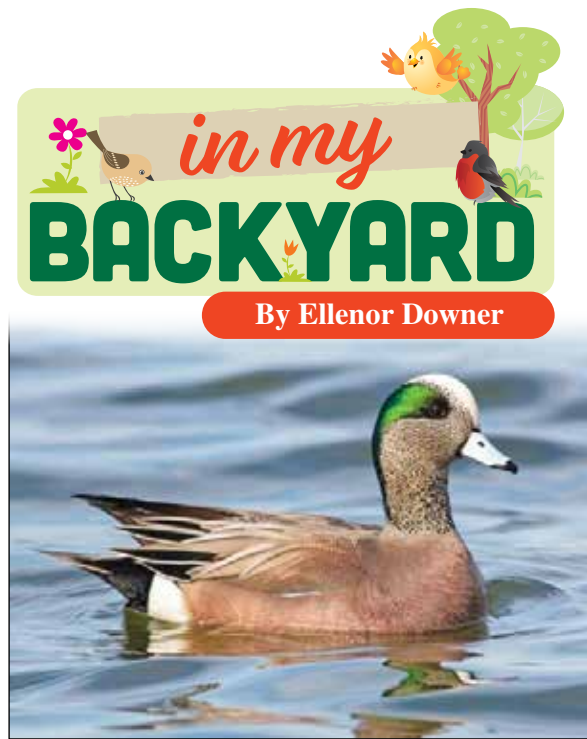
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OPINION



American wigeon

I received an email from a Brimfield resident on Dec. 15.

He said he checked out a pond in Ludlow in preparation for doing the Christmas Bird Count with the Allen Bird Club. He said, "My wife and I have been covering the town of Ludlow since 1989 and did my first count with the club in the late 1970s."

He saw four American Wigeons. He said, "Males with white crown/forehead and female with gray head brown body was swimming with the males. The male's white spot was very visible even to the unaided eye."

The American wigeon is 21 inches long. The male has a white forehead and crown, gray head and a green iridescent patch through the eye. The male has a white spot before the tail, which the Brimfield mentioned in his email.

The female has brownish sides, grayish head and sides, a dark eyespot and light gray bill with black tip. The female wigeon lays six to 12 white eggs in a grassy nest. The nest is concealed in rushes, sedge or under tree clumps.

American wigeons feed on pond weeds, milfoil, wigeon grass, wild celery and eelgrass. They may eat vexation stirred up by diving ducks such as canvasbacks. They summer on lakes and marshes and winter on wet meadows, lakes and protected coastal waters. They are usually found in small flocks. During courtship competing males give whistling calls and lift folded wings nearly vertical above their back. Males give soft descending three syllable whistles.

Other birds

Other birds seen by the Brimfield resident at the Ludlow Reservoir were 63 Canada geese, six mallards, 83 hooded mergansers, 161 common mergansers, one ring-billed gull, three common loons and one bald eagle flew directly overhead just above the tree tops. Other birds were two American crows, two tufted titmice and two dark-eyed juncos.

Hooded mergansers

I received an email from a woman on Dec. 14. She said, "The ponds on Brook Road in West Warren have more treasures. Two days ago I saw a pair of hooded mergansers. I sat and watched for several minutes and they spent most of the time under water."

Bird at feeder

I received an email from a woman on Dec. 20. She wrote, "I have spotted a bird I believe to be a yellow warbler coming to my feeder. My knowledge of the bird is that it migrates south or the winter." She sent a photo, but the bird was eating so the beak and head were not visible. It had two white wing bars, olive color and some yellow. It may be a male American goldfinch in winter plumage. They do spend the winter here and retain some of their yellow feathers.

Loon fact

Most of the fish loons catch are small enough to be swallowed whole when they're still underwater. However, when a loon captures a larger fish, it may need to return to the surface to subdue it before it is able to consume it. Loons may slap a fish against the surface of the water or repeatedly drop and recapture it until the fish stops struggling and is manageable enough to be swallowed.

Loons swallow fish whole, headfirst. When a loon starts to swallow a large fish, it will first ensure that it is oriented properly, sometimes dropping the fish and picking it up several times until it is properly

Please see **BACKYARD**, page 10

Air traffic controller shortage & holiday travel...



SOCIAL SECURITY Matters
By Russell Gloor

Can my wife claim her SS now and get half my SS benefit later?

Dear Rusty:

My wife will reach her full Social Security benefit at 66.5 years of age which is just under 2 years away for her now.

If she were to begin to get her monthly check now (i.e. early), would that prevent her from being eligible for the spousal benefit to receive half of what I am currently drawing?

Signed: Curious Husband

Dear Curious:

If your wife claims her own SS retirement benefit now (e.g., at 64.5 years) and you are already collecting your own SS benefit, then she will be automatically deemed to be filing for her spousal benefit immediately when she claims her own benefit. She does not have the option to defer claiming her spousal benefit until later.

This is a change made by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015, which requires all those first claiming SS to file for all benefits they are eligible for when they claim. What that would mean is that your wife's benefit now, including her spousal boost from you, would be actuarially reduced by the number of months early she claimed.

Her own SS retirement benefit would be permanently reduced by about 15% and her "spousal boost," the additional amount she would get as your spouse, would be reduced by about 19%, yielding a combined benefit which is roughly 42% of your Full Retirement Age SS benefit.

The only way your wife can get half 50% of your FRA benefit entitlement is by waiting until her own full retirement age (66 years and 10 months) to claim. Note

too that your wife's spousal benefit will be based on your FRA entitlement, so if you claimed earlier or later than your own full retirement age, her spousal benefit will still be based on your FRA entitlement.

Also, your wife should be aware that anyone, who claims early, is subject to Social Security's "earnings test," which limits how much can be earned while collecting early benefits. Thus, if your wife is working, she will be restricted on how much she can earn before Social Security takes away some of her benefits.

FYI, the earnings limit changes annually, but for 2025 it is \$23,420 and, if that is exceeded, SS will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 over the limit. And, FYI, the earnings limit goes up a lot during the year FRA is attained and the earnings test no longer applies once full retirement age is reached.

I hope this answers your question, but if you have need additional information, please feel free to contact us directly at SSAdvisor@amacfoundation.org, or call us at 1-888-750-2622.

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

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The Sentinel is published every Thursday by Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069. Telephone (413) 283-8393, Fax (413) 289-1977.



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JULY **2024** Year in REVIEW AUGUST

Local farmer's market kicks off the summer

BELCHERTOWN – The season for farmers markets has officially arrived, and locals can find one right in their own town on the common.

These markets will contain anything from homemade pet treats, to jewelry, to candles, to fresh fruits and veggies, and more.

Since the 70's, the market has been a staple to the community, and takes SNAP and HIC benefits, which is an important and valuable opportunity for the community.

"I have been with the market for three years," Brittnei Robidoux, the director of the market, said. Today, the market had twenty different vendors, all local.

"My favorite part about the market is the sense of community and the vendors are the best. We have a lot of regular customers and seeing them and catching up is always great," Robidoux said.

Sarah Crafts Things, featuring beautiful handmade jewelry, Barton Beeswax Natural



Planning to make a lasagna soon? Quabbin Hill Farms has got you covered with some homemade tomato sauce!

Beeswax Candles with wonderful scents, and Coldspring Soapery with its array of beautiful soaps and more were all available to purchase and use.

Sir Barks-A-Lor Homemade Dog Treats was also there and had fresh treats made from all-natural ingredients for dogs and cats to enjoy.

Austin Brothers Valley Farm had fresh meats and eggs to

purchase, and Quabbin Hill Farms had some delicious homemade tomato sauce and fresh veggies.

"I hope the community can come to the market and just enjoy each other's company, have conversations with the vendors, and shop locally, knowing where the food and items come from," Robidoux said.

Life Flight comes to PD summer camp

By Emily-Rose Pappas
Staff Writer
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BELCHERTOWN – The Police Department hosted a summer camp, called The Youth Academy, which started in 2017, and ended the week with a visit from UMASS Memorial's LifeFlight Helicopter.

The Life Flight team landed the helicopter in the field, and showed the students a part of the summer camp how it works and taught them about the importance of Life Flight and its use in saving patients in highly critical conditions.

The team brought along a stretcher, and took a photo with Comfort Dog Oliver while the students got a tour, and some members of the community came to watch the helicopter take off.

"We focused on teaching them the meaning of teamwork, integrity, and respect," Officer Rivera said. "My favorite part of the program is being

able to interact with our youth and show them a little bit of our day to day experience."

Officers Rivera, Krol, and Brougham worked hard to make sure the kids had fun learning together about everything to do with policing and more.

The camp also teaches the students about marching ceremonies, an overview of policing, constitutional law, accident reconstruction, juvenile law, defensive tactics, duties of the K-9's, community policing, crime scenes, and so much more.

"My favorite part is working with youth from Belchertown and surrounding communities and not only helping them learn about law enforcement, but also having them get to know me in an environment outside of school," Officer Krol said.

"I enjoy the entire week and the enthusiasm that is built during the academy," Officer Brougham said.

Local farm grows sunflower fields and more in Granby

SEPTEMBER

By Emily-Rose Pappas
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GRANBY – Red Fire Farm has been going since 2001, and Ryan and Sarah Voiland have worked together to keep and run the 120 acres at the Granby and Montague locations, growing dozens of varieties of crops, 70 seasonal staff members, and more.

"I enjoy the amazing food that we are able to coax from the land," Ryan Voiland said. The crops that are grown at Red Fire Farm include delicious vegetables, and some unique finds like husk cherries, which taste like a mix between a grape and a tomato.

The barn became the centralized hub for the farm store and CSA distribution, as well as housing the coolers, freezers, and produce displays, as well as storage space for farm equipment, tractors, and supplies.

The CSA, or Community Supported Agriculture Program offered by the farm, allows for the community to directly support the farm, and enjoy fresh produce from a local source.

The barn gets its name after a



Delicious squashes and pumpkins, and peppers galore to choose from at the honor-system farm store.

lightning strike burned down the original barn from the 1800's, and it serves as an ode to the property's history. You can find a GoFundMe page on their website, where you can donate to help the farm rebuild the barn to its former glory.

The farm has dozens of vegetables to pick yourself, or baskets to choose pre-picked fruits and vegetables. The store also has eggs, yogurt, maple syrup, honey, and more.

Visitors to the farm can also find the beautiful sunflower spiral, a garden of sunflowers with

paths to wander through and take pictures in. Also available are different kinds of flowers to pick, including dahlias and other set-apart sunflowers.

"We really appreciate the support from the community, and we really need it in order to keep the farm going," Voiland said.

Whether you want to pick flowers for your home or a loved one, cook a new meal with fresh herbs, or try a new vegetable, all while supporting locals, you can experience all that here at a local treasure.



Senator Oliveira, Police Chief O'Grady, Fire Chief O'Neill, State Fire Marshal Jon Davine, George Randall, and Selectboard Chair Crystal Dufresne with the memorial.

Granby public safety complex puts up 9/11 memorial

GRANBY – September 11, 2001 marked a significant moment in our nation's history, and on its twenty-third anniversary, Granby held a special ceremony to commemorate a memorial that was "years in the making".

A committee got together to work on a ceremony to share the acquisition of a piece of scrap metal from a damaged New York Fire Department engine.

The entirety of the project was funded and organized by the members of the commit-

tee, including Ed Chapdelaine, Matt Bail, George Randall, Steve Leucopoulos, and Todd Carpenter.

Matt Bail, another member of the committee, acquired the piece from a larger piece which is at the Barnes Air Force Base in Westfield, and the steel beam holding the piece of history was donated by Valley Welding of Belchertown.

"This artifact symbolizes not just a piece of machinery, but

Please see 9/11 MEMORIAL, page 8

GARDENING from page 5

Her farm is self-regenerative and has many different kinds of herbs that can be used for anything from teas to cooking seasonings, and more.

"There are many different benefits to growing an herb gar-

den", Baird said. These include the fact they contain easy to care for perennials, gardens for multiple uses, attract beneficial insects, and are very low-maintenance.

The science of herb gardening lies in the plants themselves, and knowing the plants

you want in your garden and their type (biannual, annual, or perennial), light, soil, and water requirements, uses, and growth habits.

Knowing these important aspects of your herbs can help you determine the kind of garden you wish to grow.

For example, a kitchen garden may be used to grow herbs for cooking, like seasonings, mixed in with fruits and vegetables. A tea garden would be filled with herbs used to brew teas.

Depending on your yard space, a shade herb garden would be a great fit, or perhaps

a container garden, which can be kept anywhere from apartments to large gardens.

Whatever shape, design, or type of herb garden you choose, being able to learn to take care of these plants and create something special can help bring peace and serenity to your life.

OCTOBER 2024 Year in REVIEW

Motorcycle ride for charity from local VFW

By Emily-Rose Pappas
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BELCHERTOWN – For the first year, the local Veterans of Foreign War, or VFW, hosted a bike ride in order to raise money for veterans through Home Base, and children at St. Jude's, with an overwhelming turnout.

Over 100 bikes came to ride for the VFW's fundraiser, the ride spanning 120 miles, starting at the VFW, then going to the village of Miller Falls, the American Legion in Athol, and then the VFW in North Brookfield, then back to Belchertown.

"It's a great turn-out for our first year," Rachel Chagnon, the manager of the Belchertown VFW said. "It's so exciting to see so many come to support the veterans."

"Bikers are probably the most generous group of people to give to charity by far," Commander George "Archie" Archible said. "The best part of the day was giving back to the community."

Commander Archie has served as com-



Friends getting ready to ride with Commander Archie (purple) giving them some encouragement.

mander of the VFW for twenty-three years, and is a Vietnam Purple Heart Veteran a part of the Marine Corps.

"If a veteran from Belchertown can't heat their home, we do," Commander Archie said. "We are here to give back to the veterans who gave it all."

In order to become a member of the VFW, you have to have gone to war. Less than one percent of the nation are veterans, and a smaller percentage actually got deployed out of the country.

"Who we are as veterans takes care

of 99% of the population," Commander Archie said. "That 1% took care of you, so why can't that 99% help the 1% when they come home?"

"[Being a veteran means] everything," Commander Archie said. "It's probably the most important thing in my life."

The VFW held a special BBQ at the end of the day, and the day was packed with people coming in to enjoy a meal, music from local band Wild Cat Halloran, and a basket and 50/50 raffle in support of the VFW.

NOVEMBER

BARC's holiday pop-up raises funds for animal control

By Emily-Rose Pappas
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BELCHERTOWN – BARC, or the Belchertown Animal Relief Committee, has for almost ten years worked to raise money in order to support the Belchertown Animal Control, and helped fund BAC's various needs.

BARC hosted a special Holiday Pop-Up, where local creators made adorable catnip toys, little rope toys, bandanas and neck ties for collars, blankets, food mat covers, and more, where sales went towards benefiting BARC and its mission.

BARC is "motivated by love and compassion for all animals" and works hard to ensure that the BAC has all the funding it needs in order to function and serve the community.

"I like to be the voice for the voiceless," said President of BARC, Cathy Maclutsky. "Somebody's gotta be a voice for these animals, and I want to be that voice."

"Giving back to the community is my favorite part. I grew up in Belchertown, and being able to give back to the community really means a lot to me," Maclutsky said.

BARC also hosts a Community Pet Food Pantry, which collects cat and dog food to help the animals in our town and



The amazing volunteers with BARC and Comfort Dog Oliver with the beautiful handmade items perfect for your pet's Christmas stocking (left to right: Pat Sanuit, Destiny Dixon, Jennifer Christian Wright, and Cathy Maclutsky).

holds several food drives throughout the year.

BARC has another special program, and it is the veterinary assistance program, where they send funds to veterinary offices, and the money is then given towards the medical costs for families who need the extra help in funding care for their pets.

The rabies and microchip drive that happened in early October, and will happen again in the spring, is also funded by BARC to ensure that pets can be safe from rabies and not get lost.

You can donate to BARC so that they can continue this special mission and help them help BAC help the animals in our community find loving homes.

CML's Book Sale

BELCHERTOWN – Since the 1970's, the Friends of the Clapp Memorial Library has hosted yearly book sales in order to support the library and the many activities and programs it offers to the community.

With 40,000 books on the shelves ready to be purchased, there really is no end to the possibilities of what can be found for avid readers, book collectors, teachers, and more come from all over New England to shop for books..

Jane Crutchfield, who has been running the book sale for the past thirty years, is a member of the Friends, and she along with 10 members and volunteers work to make the sale possible every year, setting up the bookshelves across the whole basement level.

"The book sale is everywhere in the library. You can find it the whole length of the building, Crutchfield said.

Members of the library line up hours before it opens to get a chance to be the first in line to explore the treasure trove of bookshelves filled with books across 25 categories.

"It's like setting up a store every six months," Crutchfield said. The members of the Friends of Clapp Library start putting the books together early, and it takes up to three days in order to move all shelves and books into place.

The books come to sale in the form of donations from community members donating their old books, tag sales, estate sales, and more, and some have come from the sale, been read and enjoyed, and donated back to be enjoyed again.

"It's a great fundraiser for the library," Crutchfield said. "We're a very dedicated group, and we're looking for the next generation to step in to volunteer."

The books at the sale are priced at \$1.00 for paperbacks, and \$2 for hardcovers, making the ability to fill a shopping bag for \$20 very possible.



Chris and Erika LaChance smiling with their book piles to bring home.

Practicing self care through an old Danish practice

BELCHERTOWN – In Meik Wiking's book, "The Little Book of Hygge: Danish Secrets to Happy Living", he brings about the different techniques of self-care that will allow anyone to find happiness, even in the dark and cold months of winter.

Ruthie Sterling, the teen services librarian, held a special Hygge (pronounced "hoo-ga") Night at the library with cookies, tea, and hot chocolate, and

a chance to learn about different self-care techniques in a fun, interactive presentation.

The eleven teens gathered shared their favorite hot chocolate recipes, and took home self-care kits, which contained fuzzy socks, tea, cocoa, a notebook, LED candle, chocolate, and a pre-addressed envelope with a card to send a

Please see **SELF CARE**, page 10

9/11 MEMORIAL from page 7

one of the most critical moments in our nation's history," Bail said.

There was music from the Holyoke Caledonian Pipe Band, a flag ceremony from the fire department, a special prayer from Father Michael Goodreau of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, and Alexis Anamisis sang the National Anthem.

"These heroes worked tirelessly during the chaos and destruction," said Jordan Lemieux, a retired Holyoke firefighter who responded to the call that fateful day. "The legacy for the first

responders from that day is one of selfless bravery."

Also there to say a few words were Selectboard Chair Crystal Dufresne, Fire Marshal Jon Davine, and Fire Chief at the time Mike O'Neil and Senator Jake Oliveira.

"This artifact is a story commemorating those sacrifices, and that we will never forget," Davine said.

The day was filled with remembrance, but also pride, not only in the stamina of our country to never forget, but also the pride in our first responders, and their unfailing willingness to walk into danger to protect others.

DECEMBER 2024 Year in REVIEW

Belchertown PD brings toys to kids

BELCHERTOWN – The police department, alongside the Girl Scouts of the town, including Brownie Troop 65329, helped collect toys from the community in order to donate back the toys to the kids within the communities.

“Our troop is really big on giving back to the community,” said Leader Jessica Stagnaro. “The girls love it and sorting the toys.”

“It makes me feel happy that the kids who get the toys are going to have a good Christmas, too,” said Charlotte, a Brownie Girl Scout helping sort and organize the toys.

An elf sent from Santa worked with the schools to find the kids who needed the toys, and allowed for them to come and pick out a toy especially for them, and with a packed room, was able to open up the rest to the community to meet Santa for a photo and pick out a toy.

Within just the first hour of the toy drive on Saturday, the community managed to fill the conference room at the police station with different toys from all over the town.

The toys and games were brought for ages six to fourteen, and several baby and toddler toys were brought in, including blocks, Legos, action figures, stuffed animals, baby dolls, outdoor and sports games, and so



Charlotte, Adelaide, and Bradlee holding toys they are ready to organize in the police station.

much more.

“It’s nice that the community comes together to bring in these toys to give to the kids who need it,” said Chief Kevin Pacunas. “It’s amazing how generous the community is. That room is sure to be filled top to bottom.”

The magic of Christmas deserves to be experienced by every child, no matter their age or circumstance, and it is through the generosity of our community that hundreds of children will have smiles on their faces this Christmas.



Linda Leduc, Gretchen O’Neil, Kirsten Krieger, and Jessica Langlois ready to cut the ribbon on the new benches.

Grant brings benches to walking paths

BELCHERTOWN – Being able to take walks on a nice day, or any day, is always a wonderful way to exercise, relieve some stress, or just take in the fresh air.

However, some people may hesitate to walk without the guarantee of places to rest, but thanks to the hard work and dedication of the members of the senior center and the Age and Dementia Friendly Committee, benches have arrived to provide rest spots.

“Being able to install benches, which provides a place to rest during a walk, a chance to take in scenery, chat with others or simply sitting with one’s own thoughts can be beneficial for both mental and physical health,” said Jessica Langlois. The Senior Center’s director.

AARP offers a special Community Challenge Grant, and Langlois learned about it through her work with the Age and Dementia Friendly Implementation Group, and out of 3,300 applicants, 343 were

chosen and the Senior Center was one of them.

This was a huge win, and the success of receiving this special grant was celebrated by the committee members and beyond, and they worked to set up a very special unveiling ceremony to be held last week to cut the ribbon on the new benches.

“We are most excited for these benches to be used! By increasing means to rest, older adults and those who rely on a care partner may be more likely to walk longer distances than they would be able to without a place to rest,” said Langlois.

The DPW staff worked to pour the concrete slabs and installed all six benches spaced out along Carriage Drive.

“[We] hope that the community at large and especially those who are older adults and/or those living with Alzheimer’s and Dementia and their care partners can enjoy these gifted benches for a long time to come,” said Langlois.

Belchertown veterans’ services receives generous donations

BELCHERTOWN – The holiday season is a giving season, and our community is known for its generosity, and in this case, it shone within the Veterans Services Department.

A local veteran here in town and his wife donated several bags full of hats, gloves, mittens, scarves, socks, slippers, blankets, shirts, and jackets.

Another family donated five \$100 gift cards to veterans for groceries, and before that a woman came to donate a \$100 grocery gift card for a veteran experiencing homelessness.

“In the last several months many people in town have collected items for this gentleman for when he is placed in a new apartment. The only thing he will need is the key,” said Charly Oliva, the Belchertown Veteran’s Services Coordinator.

Bacon Wilson Law Firm P.C. contacted Oliva and asked if she would be able to assist them in finding veterans who may be interested or in need of furniture, small kitchen appliances, utensils and more from a move.

The office takes donations year-round, and you can find a small donation-driven pantry

outside the office in the hallway. There is one large shelf that has food items, and the other has hygiene, cleaning, and household items.

“The community is probably going to get tired of me saying I love it here so very much,” said Oliva. “There’s so much support; if I just mention that I need something for a veteran, somebody comes out of the woodwork to help make sure that we’re fulfilling the need.”

Donating items doesn’t have to take a lot, and just by adding a few extra items to your grocery cart can make the biggest difference in someone else’s life, especially in the lives of veterans who fought for us.

“I would like the community to know that my office is here to help veter-

ans, their dependents and their surviving spouses that are in need,” said Oliva.

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BELCHERTOWN

Announcing artists for Container Murals

Share your creative talents with community engagement opportunities!

BELCHERTOWN — The Department of Public Works, Creative Economy Committee, and Clapp Memorial Library are collaborating to brighten the Belchertown Transfer Station & Recycling Center experience with murals focused on the theme of reduce, recycle, reuse, and regenerate coming spring 2025. The Belchertown Creative Economy will share updates and invitations on facebook for community engagement activities; the first opportunity to take part is a workshop specifically geared towards young folks at the library, coming up Jan. 4.

Mural stakeholders are pleased to announce the selected muralists for the set of three murals that will be painted on the Transfer Station containers: Caoin O’Durgy, a muralist, illustrator, and teacher; Melissa Pandina, a muralist, painter, and illustrator; and Joshua Smith, a muralist and designer. Each artist will bring unique perspectives and opportunities for community engagement as they create their murals.

The Transfer Station Container Murals aim to enhance the visual appeal of the site while also conveying the message that every resident’s effort contributes to a larger process—signaling that collectively with neighbors, contributions are part of a beginning process, not an end. To support this vision, each muralist will be offering

participatory community engagement opportunities tied to their respective murals.

Community Engagement Opportunities

Design Workshop at Clapp Memorial Library
Thursday, Jan. 4

Students K-6th are invited to help Caoin O’Durgy, a Massachusetts based illustrator and muralist, prepare his design for a mural at the Belchertown Transfer Station on Saturday,

Jan. 4 from 2:30 - 3:30 p.m. Participants will design their own character that will be referenced and incorporated into Caoin’s mural at the Transfer Station. Share your ideas and get inspired. This free workshop does not require registration. Children under 10 must be accompanied by a caregiver aged 14 or older.

The Mural Process Unfolds on Socials

Wondering how a mural gets made? Local artist Joshua Smith, who will be assisted by his Wall Smiths partner-in-painting, Brittany Smith, will share documentation about the process of designing, planning, and painting a mural. They’ll share insights into their creative journey, from conceptualization to the final installation, on social media.

Spring Community Paint Day

Once the weather warms, muralist Melissa Pandina will lead a community paint day where Belchertown residents of all ages and skill levels can bring some color to the contain-

er alongside friends, neighbors, and colleagues, learning more about the mural-making process, sustainability, and the Transfer Station.

Trash Gala Community Celebration

As the container murals come to life in the spring, the community Trash Gala will be announced, a celebration to dedicate the new murals, honor the artists, and acknowledge the contributions of all participants. The event will feature sustainability-themed activities to further engage residents in the mural themes. Residents will have opportunities to get involved, stay up-to-date, and share talents throughout the community engaged process of enlivening the Belchertown Transfer Station.

Project Background

The Belchertown Transfer Station Container Mural project began with training and support from New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) and the Municipal Area Planning Council’s Arts and Culture Department through their Making it Public for Municipalities program. Through Making it Public and funding artists through municipalities, NEFA aims to foster a community of practice that is inspiring more vibrant and just public spaces and culture through public artmaking across MA. Making it Public is a collaboration between the New England Foundation for the Arts’ public art program and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s (MAPC) arts and culture department, with funding from the Barr Foundation. For more information please visit: <https://www.nefa.org/MakingItPublic>

WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENT



Mary Lynn Scott weds Evan Bailey

Ray and Cindy Scott of Belchertown, proudly announce the marriage of their daughter Mary Lynn Scott (08’ BHS Alumn) and Evan Bailey on Sept. 13, 2024 in Portland, Oregon . The two were introduced by 08’ BHS alumni, Eddie Leary in 2018. They became engaged on their favorite hike in the Columbia River Gorge in 2021. Shortly after, they bought a home together in Portland where they plan to live happily ever after with their fur baby, Kala.

Reminders from the Town Clerk

BELCHERTOWN—Thank you in advance for your assistance in completing the Census and Dog licensing. As always, feel free to give the Town Clerk’s Office a call with any questions at 413-323-0281

Census Information

The Annual Census for 2025 will be mailed out the beginning of January. Please be sure to check for accuracy, adding any new members to your family and advising us if someone has moved.

Please also indicate the moved to address, for anyone who moved, so we can notify the resident of the removal from the Census. This is due back within 10 days of receipt.

The forms may be mailed back, brought in person to the Clerk’s Office or left in the drop box at Town Hall.

By completing the Annual Census, this helps to protect your voting rights as well as proof of residency.

This also provides data for veteran’s benefits, housing for the elderly and related support for the Town. Included on this year’s census form is the application for dog licensing.

All dogs over the age of 6 months are required by law, to be licensed with the Town.

Dog Licensing

The 2025 dog licenses are now available. Renewal notices were mailed out in the beginning of December. Note, that at the May 2024 Town Meeting, a price increase of \$2 was approved for spayed/neutered dogs. The new fee schedule is \$10 if the dog is spayed/neutered and \$15 if intact.

Licenses may be renewed online, however, note that the 3rd party vendor does charge a service fee. Licenses may also be renewed in person at the Town Clerk’s office, or by including payment and your form with the Census.

All dogs over the age of 6 months are required to be licensed by January 31st each year. After February 1st, late fees begin. Avoid the fines, license on time.

Town Election: If you have ever thought about participating in the workings of your Town, consider running for office. Nomination papers are available in the Town Clerk’s office beginning January 2, 2025. Town Election is May 19, 2025.

Open positions on the ballot are; Board of Assessor’s, Board of Health, Planning Board, School Committee, Select Board and Housing Authority.

More information is available on the Town Clerk’s webpage at www.belchertown.org.

its mouth and repeatedly extend its neck upward and then contract it back towards its body to help move particularly large fish through the esophagus to the gizzard.

American crow

I saw about five or six American crows foraging on a lawn on my way to church this cold Sunday morning. With the temperature registering 8 degrees F, the crows had their feathers all puffed up for warmth.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by calling me at 413-967-3505, leaving a message at extension 100, emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005.

SELF CARE from page 8

letter to a loved one, which is a hygge activity.

“I think self-care is really important for everyone right now, not just teens. However, the library is a place full of hygge, and I wanted to do this program to help young people like me who might get winter blues and struggle to be social in the winter,” said Sterling.

Hygge practices include anything to do with creating a warm atmosphere, enjoying time with good people and loved ones, and taking time away from

the rush of our lives to just relax, slow down, and enjoy the quiet things in life.

“It’s hard to be a helper and fill others’ cups when your own cup is empty. Taking care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially allows you to be the best version of yourself for others,” said Sterling.

“If anything, hygge stresses that it’s not selfish to take a break and be in the present moment either by yourself or with loved ones. Enjoy sweets. Enjoy each other’s company. Relax. I try to make time for those things. It can be easier said than done,” said Sterling.

APPROVES from page 1

expressing various concerns about the project at different points.

Among the final items on the board’s punch list were a proof of contact with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority regarding potential service to future residents, as well as a plan outlining the operation and maintenance of the property. Both of these were furnished by Brisa Ventures to the board in advance of Tuesday’s meeting.

Additionally, Brisa Ventures provided the board with a written commitment that at least 10% of the development’s dwelling units would be set aside for the town’s affordable housing inventory. This commitment was made to bring the development in compliance with the requirements of the town’s Business Neighborhood Center District zoning bylaw, which was passed at

town meeting in 2000 and has been amended multiple times since.

Members of the board spoke positively about the impact they hoped this development would have on the town.

“This could very well be the tipping point the town has needed,” Elizabeth Pols said ahead of the final vote on the site plan.

The residential development at Carriage Grove would be the first of a multi-phase plan that is slated to include the conversion of an old State School building into a local museum and the construction of a brewery or distillery.

The Carriage Grove development would come in addition to the Belchertown Day School early-learning center and the Christopher Heights assisted living facility that have been constructed on the State School site in recent years.

BACKYARD from page 6

positioned. Once the fish is aligned so that it is headfirst in the loon’s mouth, the loon begins the process of swallowing. Loons have sharp, rear-facing projections along the roof of their mouths and on their tongues. These projections, called denticles, interlock with the fish’s scales, ensuring that the fish is not able to escape back into the water. Loons then press their tongue into the fish and begin to inch it down the throat, into the esophagus. Depending on the size of the fish a loon is trying to eat, it may take a few seconds to several minutes for the loon to swallow. Once in the esophagus, the fish moves down into the gizzard. A loon may open



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Falcons get revenge on Lions in rematch

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

WEST SPRINGFIELD— After beginning the regular season with an overtime loss to Berry Division rival Ludlow on Dec. 14, the Minnechaug Regional hockey players had

a little bit of extra motivation when they faced the Lions again a week later.

The Falcons, who never trailed in the second match-up, escaped with a 3-2 victory at the Olympic Ice Center in West Springfield on Dec. 21.

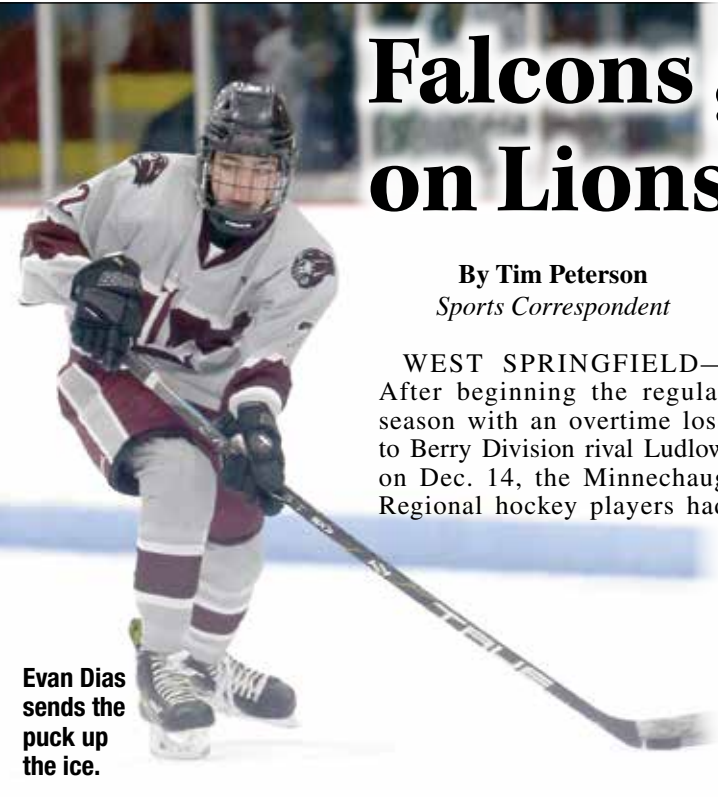
“This is a huge win for us because we just earned two points towards qualifying for the Western Mass. tournament,” said Minnechaug senior alternate captain Ben Daniels, who scored what turned out to be the game winning goal at the end of the second period. “We dominated last week’s game, and it killed us losing to them in overtime. We used it as a little bit of extra motivation coming into today’s game.”

The state power rankings have been used to determine which hockey teams qualified for the Western Mass. Class A tournament during the past couple of years.

The qualifications for the 2025 Western Mass. tournament have been changed.

The top four hockey teams in the Berry Division standings will qualify for the Western Mass. Class A tournament. A team earns two points for a win and one point for a tie.

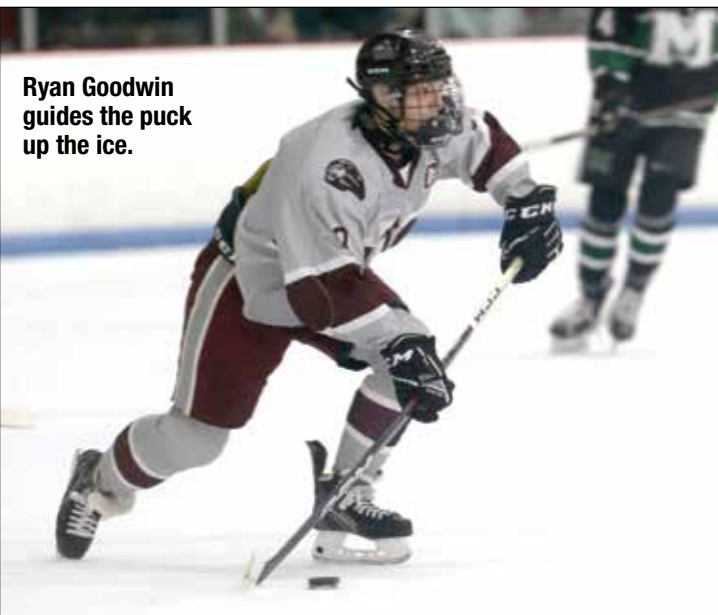
“Because of the way the Western Mass. Class A playoffs is now set up our Berry Division



Evan Dias sends the puck up the ice.



Jack Mandeville emerges from a scrum with the puck.



Ryan Goodwin guides the puck up the ice.



Charlie Fijal tries to grab the loose puck.

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com

Please see **HOCKEY**, page 12



Kaitlyn Curran looks to inbound the ball.



Eleanor Szlosek takes the open layup.



Brenna Moreno carefully enters the paint.

Rams rebound after tough start

GRANBY – After an 0-2 start, Granby High School girls basketball round out three straight wins to finish the 2024 portion of its schedule. Granby defeated Athol 54-15, Smith Academy 38-34, and last Friday night, defeated Ware 42-26 to go to 3-2 on the season. The Rams face Renaissance Jan. 3 at 7 p.m.



Molly Zumbuski takes a pass on the arc.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

Autumn Sicard looks to make a three-pointer.

SPORTS

Longtime referee Lavoie wins MIAA award

LUDLOW – Last month, long-time referee Joe Lavoie was recognized as the MIAA Football Official of the Year. According to information provided, Lavoie joined the Western Mass Football Officials Association (WMFOA) in 1974 (51 years) as a junior at AIC in Springfield, MA.

Lavoie was a 3-year starter for Milt Piepul's 8-1 ('75) AIC Yellowjackets. He was selected All-New England Honorable Mention by the AP and Boston Herald ('75), and selected to the ECAC team of the week versus Northeastern University.

After college, Lavoie taught and coached football in Ludlow for Steve Marino and subsequently in Agawam for Roger LeClerc, before joining private industry as a computer systems programmer/analyst. Retired from MassMutual with 30-plus years of service.

He was a 1971 graduate of Ludlow High School playing football for Chick Patullo and baseball for Bill Mullins.

In high school, he was selected All-Suburban League and All-Western-Mass as a tri-captain for Chick Patullo, Jim Cavallo, Dave Dzuira, and Joe

Andreis, who instilled the love of football, hard work, and fair play into their teams.

As an official, he was elected president of the WMFOA in 1993, and started and taught a first, second, third-year official's training class, and game sign-in requirement for new officials to attend pre-games and work the chains in varsity games. That process is still in effect today. In 1994, amended the training classes to have a separate class for first-year officials and started instructing the second and third-year officials' class, and still instruct that class today.

Among his many accomplishments, he officiated numerous MIAA playoff and championship games around the state and at Gillette Stadium. He joined the Western Mass Basketball Officials Association in 1980, was elected board President in 2013, subsequently elected sec-treasurer from 2015-2017. He still officiates basketball games.

Lavoie earned a CAGS from Springfield College, an MS in management from RPI Hartford, and an MBA from Western New England College. He has taught business and



Referee Joe Lavoie



TURLEY PHOTO BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

Referee Joe Lavoie (center) officiates with his crew on a rainy Thanksgiving morning at Agawam High School this year.

computer systems courses at HCC for over 25 years.

Lavoie has been married to high school sweetheart, Edna

(Robertson) Lavoie, for over 45 years, and has three wonderful sons. Two sons live and work in Boston, and one son lives in

Longmeadow and is an attorney in Springfield.

HOCKEY from page 11

games are now a little bit more important," said Minnechaug head coach Kyle Bousquet. "The seedings are now determined by points instead of the power rankings. We did get a point in last week's game because we lost to Ludlow in overtime. This week, we earned two points with the win, and they didn't get any points."

While the Falcons evened their overall and league record at 1-1, the Lions had a 2-2 overall record and a 1-2 league mark.

After defeating Agawam and Minnechaug in their first two regular season matches by a goal, the Lions, who co-op with Belchertown High School, suffered back-to-back one goal losses to East Longmeadow and Minnechaug.

"We didn't play very well in the first two periods of today's game," said Ludlow head coach Paul Rivest. "We just weren't ready to play hockey, and we allowed them to dictate the pace of the game. This is another frustrating loss."

Neither team had very many scoring chances during the first ten minutes of the opening period.

The Falcons took a 1-0 lead at the 11:12 mark following a goal from junior Dom Fiorentino, which was assisted by sophomore Nick O'Sullivan, who's earned his first varsity point.

With ten seconds remaining in the first period, Daniels had a breakaway opportunity, but he couldn't get a shot attempt off.

Ludlow also had two break-



William Mitus receives a pass.

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com



AJ Stupak takes a faceoff.

away chances during the first minute of the second period.

After stealing a pass less than ten seconds into the period, senior Charlie Fijal, who's one of the Belchertown players listed on the Lions hockey roster, fired a shot that deflected off Minnechaug freshman goalie Chase Folli (10 saves), who made his first varsity start.

Freshman Matt Lafley was the Falcons starting goalie in the season opener.

"This is the first time that I've had two freshmen starting goalies during my coaching career," Bousquet said. "Chase played very well in today's game and earned his first varsity win. Matt played well in last week's game. Both of them are solid goalies."

Another breakaway chance by junior Nick Deroin sailed wide of the net.

The third time was a charm for the Lions, as junior A.J. Stupak put the puck into the net which tied the score 55 seconds into the period. Junior captain Sean Kefalas was credited with the assist.

The score remained deadlocked at 1-1 for the next nine minutes.

The Falcons retook the lead when sophomore Liam Faneuff put a shot into the net past Ludlow sophomore goalie Peter LeBorgne (15 saves) for a power-play goal with 5:32 left in the second period.

Minnechaug's second goal was assisted by the duo of

senior captain Brayden O'Sullivan and Fiorentino.

A little more than two minutes later, O'Sullivan assisted on Daniels goal which gave the Falcons a 3-1 lead entering the final 15 minutes of regulation.

"That was my first goal of the season," said Daniels, who's a school choice student from Monson. "I saw the puck bounce off the goalie and I was able to finish it off."

Daniels, who also plays golf and baseball, has been a member of the Falcons varsity hockey team since he was a sophomore.

"I love going to school at Minnechaug," Daniels added. "It has also been a lot of fun

being a member of this hockey team the past couple of years."

The Ludlow faithful supporters thought their team had scored a goal less than three minutes into the final period, but the referee blew his whistle halting the play.

Kefalas blasted a shot into the net at the 10:10 mark, which closed the gap to 3-2. That goal was assisted by sophomore Evan Dias.

The Falcons had a power-play for the final two minutes of regulation, but they couldn't score another goal, but Folli didn't allow the tying goal down at the other end of the ice.

SPORTS

Pioneers wrestle past Smith Voke

PALMER – In their first dual meet of the season, Pathfinder defeated Smith Voke 48-18. The Pioneers participated in a tourna-

ment at Monument Mountain High School on Dec. 27. Coming up, the Pioneers will host Belchertown Jan. 8 at 7 p.m.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM



Ava Swist gets ready to grapple.



Gavin Sawabi, of Ware, starts his match at 144 pounds.



Max Alicngena tries to avoid being tripped up.



Jaiden Ambrose wrestles at the heavyweight position.



Logan Hayes attempts a takedown.



Zander Auffrey keeps the leverage at 138 pounds.

Railers fall to Thunder in first half home finale

WORCESTER – The Railers lost 7-3 loss to the Adirondack Thunder on Sunday afternoon to close out the first half of the 2024-25 home schedule.

Worcester went into the second period with the scored tied, 1-1. The Railers then allowed four goals in a little less than seven minutes starting at 3:53 and their afternoon was over.

Coach Nick Tuzzolino refused to place the blame for the defeat on Bullion's shoulders when asked if it was his fault.

"I would never say that in that light," Tuzzolino said. "We've got to be good in front of him and could have been better. Could have blocked a couple of those shots. I'm sure he has his own thoughts on those goals but we're a team."

Worcester got two goals from Jordan Kaplan and one from Griffin Loughlan. Anthony Repaci assisted on all three goals. Repaci's historic season continues unabated. He extended his points streak to seven straight games. He is 3-10-13 during the streak.

The game was his 193rd for Worcester, passing Barry Almeida as the all-time franchise leader in that category. The assists give him 90 in a Worcester uniform, tied with Almeida on that list. They are tied for fourth among all Worcester pro players with Tom Cavanagh of the Sharks next at 92.

The Railers were 2 for 5 on the power play and are among the league leaders in that category. They have

Please see **RAILERS**, page 15

Isles outlast Thunderbirds in 7-5 track meet

SPRINGFIELD — The Springfield Thunderbirds (13-13-2-1) could not escape a furious push by the Bridgeport Islanders (7-19-2-2) in a high-flying 7-5 contest on Saturday night inside the MassMutual Center.

The Islanders tried to spoil the T-Birds debut for rookie net-minder Will Cranley when Liam Foudy opened the scoring on a rebound to the goaltender's right at 7:36.

Springfield would be tested

after the Islanders went to a power play at the 13:04 mark, but captain Matthew Peca took matters into his own hands to change the tide. After skating out of his zone with possession, he challenged a forward wide on the left side before surprising Henrik Tikkanen with a short-side snapper to tie the score, 1-1, on Springfield's second shorthanded tally of the season. Peca's tally was his team-leading 12th of the campaign and second in as many nights.

Peca was in the middle of things again just 5:04 later, weaving into the offensive end to create a 2-on-1 outnumbered attack. This time, Peca played the role of playmaker, laying a perfect pass to the blade of Matt Luff in the right circle. With no wasted movement, Luff one-timed it past a sliding Tikkanen, giving Springfield the 2-1 lead with just 1:26 left in the frame. Peca's assist was his 100th as a member of the T-Birds, making him the first player in club his-

tory to hit the 100-assist plateau.

The Islanders gave a glimpse of what was to follow in the middle period when Tyce Thompson one-timed a slapper off the post and off Cranley to tie the game, 2-2, at 3:15 of the second period, as the T-Birds were scrambling to get back into position.

The T-Birds' special teams had the next notable moment just 2:09 later, as Marcus

Please see **T-BIRDS**, page 15



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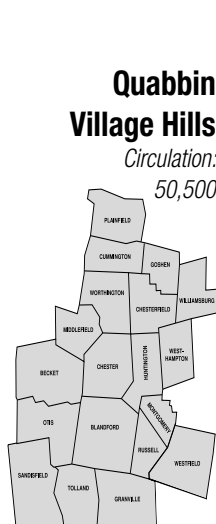


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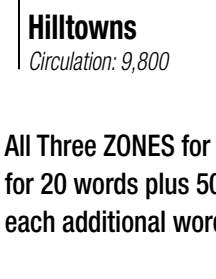
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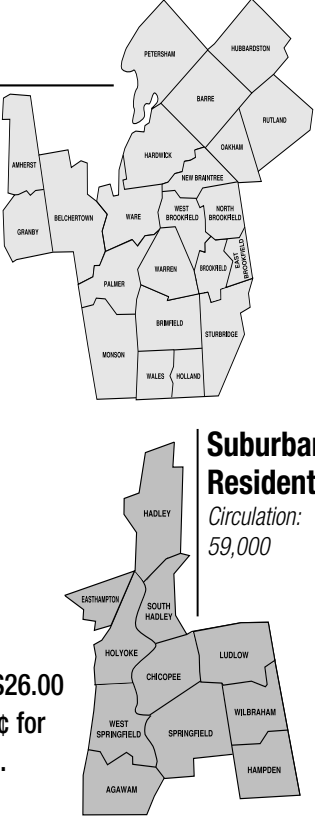
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T-BIRDS from page 11

Sylvegard beautifully spotted Luff on a pass from the left corner to the top of the crease, allowing the veteran winger a tap-in for his second of the night to restore the Springfield lead, 3-2, at 5:24.

After a rare stretch of scoreless hockey on this evening, the Islanders found their way to a tie score again when Matt Maggio surprised Cranley with a quick wrister from the left circle off a setup from Grant Hutton, evening the game, 3-3, at 14:20.

Before the T-Birds could escape the onslaught, the Islanders got their second lead of the night at 19:06, when a poor Springfield line change set up a 3-on-2 for Bridgeport. Gemel Smith neatly left a puck for Foudy near the crease, and the veteran winger had an open net for his second of the night and a 4-3 Islanders lead after 40 minutes.

Midway through what had been a quiet third period, the T-Birds power play connected for a second time as Sylvegard deflected an attempt from Aleksanteri Kaskimaki over Tikkanen's shoulder, and the game was tied again, 4-4, at 10:04 of the third.

Despite their scrappiness to get back even, the T-Birds could not salvage a point on this night, and Maggio capped his four-point night with a corner-picking wrister at 16:20, which gave Bridgeport a 5-4 lead. Cole Bardreau added an empty-net tally at 18:45 to push the lead to 6-4.

That Bardreau tally proved pivotal when Hunter Skinner found the net from the right side with 25 seconds to play, trimming the margin back to 6-5. Ultimately, however, the T-Birds ran out of time, and with the clock about to expire, Marc Gatcomb flung a clearing effort into the empty cage to round out the scoring. Cranley finished his T-Birds debut with 35 saves, while Tikkanen escaped with his first win in six tries with 31 stops.

OBITUARY

Elizabeth "Betty" Edna Plant



Elizabeth "Betty" Edna Plant, 82, passed away Dec. 28, 2024 surrounded by her family. She was born on Feb. 19, 1942 in Lowell, lived most of her life in Belchertown and Palmer, and graduated from Belchertown High School. Betty began her career as one of the first female police officers in Belchertown before taking time away to raise a family. After several years, Betty re-entered law enforcement by serving as a matron and dispatcher for both Belchertown and

Palmer for over three decades before retiring.

Betty was preceded in death by her parents, Alexis and Edith (Willy) Theriault. She will be dearly missed by her daughter, Amy Currier and her husband Gene; son, Alan Plant and his wife Jennifer; and her grandson, Chance Plant.

Visitation will be held on Thursday, Jan. 9 from 11 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Beers & Story Belchertown Funeral Home. Burial will be held privately.

RAILERS from page 11

at least one power play goal in seven straight games. That ties a team record set in February of 2022.

"That's probably the most frustrating thing," Tuzzolino said. "It's all those little pieces. We just have to find the right piece."

Loughran gave Worcester an early lead at just 2:36 of the first period. Repaci found his linemate all alone at the bottom of the left circle and Loughran made no mistake burying a 15-footer.

It was 1-1 after 20 minutes, then the Railers hit an iceberg.

"I think we got confidence early," Tuzzolino said, "then some of those goals they scored killed our confidence, and confidence is the easiest thing to lose and the hardest to get back."

Ryan Francis was 2-3-5 to pace the Adirondack offense. Josh Filmon, Ryan Wheeler, Alex Young, Grant Loven and Dylan Wendt had the other Thunder goals.



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DEATH NOTICE

Elizabeth "Betty" Edna Plant
Died Dec. 28, 2024
Services Jan. 9, 2025
Beers & Story Belchertown
Funeral Home

The Sentinel
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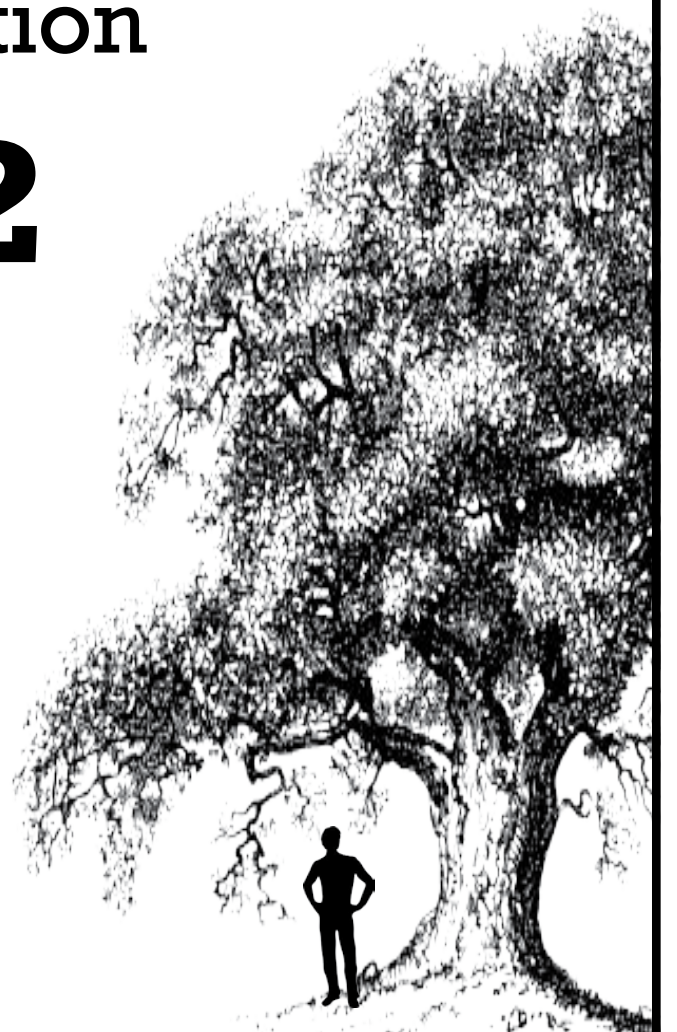
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