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# STURBRIDGE VILLAGER

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Thursday-Friday, March 12-13, 2026

## Five Sturbridge businesses win Business of the Year Awards

STURBRIDGE — Five Sturbridge businesses have been voted Business of the Year (BOYA) thanks to a recent survey sponsored by the Sturbridge Tourist Association (STA). These businesses were recognized at the March 2 Sturbridge Board of Selectman's Meeting. More than 1,200 votes were offered by enthusiastic patrons who expressed their preferences on the "Experience Sturbridge.com" Web site.

Voters selected their favorite businesses under the categories of:

- Shopping: Businesses that sell goods to customers in town.
- Eating and Drinking: Businesses that prepare meals and/or drinks for patrons in town.
- Staying: Businesses offering overnight stays.
- Playing: Businesses offering patrons something fun to enjoy.

The winning businesses are:  
Category Eat:  
Sturbridge Coffee House



sturbridgecoffeehouse.com  
BT's Smokehouse  
www.btssmokehouse.com  
Category Shop:  
Twiddle T's Pottery  
www.twiddletpottery.com  
Category Stay:  
Publick House  
publickhouse.com  
Category Play:

Old Sturbridge Village  
www.osv.org  
• A plaque noting their BOYA Award.  
• Award presentation at a Board of Selectman's meeting.  
• A public announcement from the STA to all media platforms promoting these businesses.  
Comments from the award

winners:  
Brian Treitman, Owner of BT's Smokehouse:  
"We are deeply honored to be voted Best Place to Eat in Sturbridge! A heartfelt thank you to our amazing community, loyal guests and dedicated staff team members who make B.T.'s Smokehouse what it is every day. Your support keeps our

pits burning, our tongs turning and our passions sizzling. We could not deliver our food without you all behind us!"

Rona T. Roy, Sole Artist and Owner of Twiddle T's Pottery:

"I am honored to receive the Sturbridge Business of the Year Award. It is an incredible feeling to know that our community values my craft and all of the time and love that goes into every piece that is created. I opened Twiddle T's one year ago and it has been a whirlwind ever since. Sturbridge is such a special town, so warm, so supportive, and full of people who truly care about small businesses and handmade work. I am endlessly grateful to everyone who has walked through my door, shared kind words and supported my little pottery shop in any way. This town has become a part of my story, and I'm so proud to be a part of this community. Thank you Sturbridge!"

James Donahue, President and CEO, Old Sturbridge Village  
"Old Sturbridge Village is

honored to once again receive this recognition based on the votes of so many local, regional and distant visitors. We look forward to continuing to provide educational and entertaining programming as we enter our nation's semiquincentennial."

Michael Harrington, Principal, Publick House

"We are so proud to have been chosen as the best hotel. It has taken some time for us to get to the level of comfort and service that lives up to the Publick House reputation. We look forward to providing unparalleled experiences for all our customers."

Pia Rogers, Owner, Sturbridge Coffee House:

"We are beyond grateful to be chosen for a Sturbridge Business of the Year Award. This means everything to us. Community is at the heart of what we do and this recognition reflects the hard work, love and support that surrounds us every single day. We're honored to continue learning, growing, and evolving alongside our community for years to come. Thank you for believing in us."

### Charlton Fire Chief receives accreditation through MA Fire Services Commission

CHARLTON — The Massachusetts Fire Service Commission granted accreditation to Chief Rob Barton of the Charlton Fire department on March 5, who has demonstrated the required fire service experience, education and certifications for accreditation.

This accreditation is granted through the Massachusetts Fire Service Commission, a gubernatorially appointed board that has established a process for uniform credentialing for the level of fire chief.

Belchertown Fire Chief John S. Ingram, who serves as chair of the Commission, says, "The program establishes requirements based on education, training and experience in areas relevant to serving as fire chief. It establishes benchmarks for training in fire and emergency service management so that chiefs may be better prepared to serve their department and their community."

The applicant's documentation is reviewed by a subcommittee of the Massachusetts Fire Service Commission to determine if the individual has attained a minimum level of credits for education, training and experience.

State Fire Marshal Jon M. Davine said, "This program allows chief officers to document their

Turn To **BARTON** page A8

## Charlton Lions Club member honored

CHARLTON — At the Lions Clubs International District 33A Mid-winter Conference held last month at the Wellsworth Hotel in Southbridge, several Lions were recognized for their contributions and accomplishments. Receiving one of the most prestigious honors was Kathy Gallant, a member of The Charlton Lions Club.

Kathy earned designation as a Melvin Jones Fellow. Melvin Jones, a successful insurance salesman in Chicago, founded the Lions Clubs in 1917 to encourage businessmen and local leaders to be of greater service to their communities. Today, Lions Clubs International is the largest service organization in the world with 1.4 million members. Once for men only, Lions are now "co-ed" and stronger for it.

The Fellowship is awarded to members who raise



Courtesy Photo

Kathy Gallant

and donate \$1,000 to the Lions Clubs International Foundation or for whom

\$1,000 is given in the designee's honor to the Foundation by others. This award was

provided by The Charlton Lions Club in recognition of the service Kathy has provided to the Club.

Kathy Gallant hasn't been a Lion for long, but has achieved much in four years. In May of 2022, she saw a newspaper article about the Charlton Club's membership drive and attended a meeting. She filled out an application that night and a month later was inducted into the Club. It didn't take her long to get involved. She volunteered to serve on various committees and worked on fundraisers and service projects. In 2023, she raised over \$5000 for the Club's charity contributions by running the Club's Quarter Mile Challenge. In 2025, she almost single-handedly organized and promoted the Club's "Charlton's Got Talent" show, raising another \$1,000 for scholarships and other donations. In recognition, the Club nominated her for the Melvin Jones Fellowship.

Kathy, who retired after 44 years as an insurance agent and 18 months working for the Charlton Senior Center, is currently the Charlton Lion's second vice president, the "Tail Twister" and advisor to the Bay Path Leo Club for high-school-age Lions. (A tail twister helps keep order and harmony during meetings and brings a little levity while doing so.)

The Charlton Club meets the second and fourth Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m. in the Great Room of Independent Living at The Overlook in Charlton. The Club is part of District 33A, a network of 45 local Lions Clubs dedicated to serving the communities of Central Massachusetts. Lions focus on addressing critical community needs, including hunger, vision care, youth services, and disaster response. To learn more, visit www.lionsdistrict33a.com.

## Master Masons receive 50-year Masonic Veterans Service Medals

BY BRO. JIMMY FALZONE  
MAJOR GENERAL SALEM TOWNE LODGE  
SOUTHBRIDGE

SOUTHBRIDGE — On Monday evening, March 2, the Major General Salem Towne Lodge (MGSTL) filled both its upper and lower parking areas as attendees gathered to recognize and congratulate two distinguished Master Masons. This evening, MGSTL will also be hosting a fraternal visit from Brother Gordon Forsberg, the District Deputy Grand Master (DDGM) of our 24th Masonic District, along with his suite.

Brother Forsberg presented two 50-year Masonic Veterans Service Award Medals. The recipients of these two coveted 50-year Masonic Veterans Service Award Medals are Brother Thomas Houston of



Courtesy

From left to right, Brother Peter Baldracchi, recipient of the 50-Year Masonic Veterans Service Medal, his wife Lora, and our 24th District Deputy Grand Master, Brother Gordon Forsberg and recipient Brother Thomas Houston and his wife Laurie. These men are proud to call themselves Master Masons.

Webster, who attained the Sublime Degree of Master Mason on May 3, 1976, and

Brother Peter Baldracchi of Fiskdale, who achieved the Sublime Degree of Master

Mason on June 19, 1976.

These two men are both Past Master of this great

Masonic Lodge. They joined this fraternity in 1976 because of our identity. It's simpler with men who share our values. We're there for our brothers no matter what life may bring, and our brothers are there for us. We help others, not just because it's the right thing to do, but also because it helps us grow. We value honor and integrity. We believe there's always more to learn. After 167 years, this Lodge is still thriving and we as Freemasons thrive to make good men even better. We are dedicated individuals who prioritize family and community, consistently seeking opportunities for both personal and professional growth. For further information regarding Freemasonry or to locate a lodge in your area, please visit our Web site at www.massfreemasonry.org to find a lodge nearest you.



# Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale Irish Feast coming March 16

STURBRIDGE — A Sturbridge tradition returns just in time for your St. Patrick's Day celebration. The Federated Church of Sturbridge and Fiskdale will host its annual Irish Feast on Monday, March 16, at the historic Publick House Restaurant, inviting the community to gather for good food, good company, and a good cause.

This year's Irish Feast will benefit both the Federated Church and The Center of Hope Foundation, Inc., a Southbridge-based nonprofit that supports peo-

ple with disabilities and their families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, helping them access resources, services, and opportunities to live meaningful, fulfilling lives.

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

Center of Hope right here in our region."

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

Guests will enjoy a buffet-style Irish dinner featuring corned beef and cabbage, boiled potatoes, carrots and turnips, dinner rolls and Irish soda bread, a choice of bev-

erage, and a cupcake for dessert. Dinner will be served in two seatings: The early seating will take place from 4:30 – 6 p.m., while a later seating happens from 6:30 – 8 p.m. Adult tickets are \$18, and children ages four to 12 are \$7.

Tickets must be purchased by March 15 as no tickets will be sold at the door. Tickets will be available Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon starting February 13 in the Federated Church of Sturbridge parlor, 8 Maple Street, where you

may use cash, check, credit/debit card, or Venmo.

The church website at sturfed.org and Facebook page both offer payment links and QR codes for those wishing to purchase tickets using PayPal. You may also purchase tickets electronically using Venmo at @FederatedChurch. Please include your address, the number of meals you wish to purchase, and your preferred seating time. Time permitting, tickets purchased by Venmo will be mailed to the address provid-

ed. Late orders will be held at the door.

For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the Church

Office at 774-304-1021 or Ken Benson at 774-230-3848. The Federated Church of Sturbridge & Fiskdale joyfully

celebrates Christ's presence and God's grace in our lives. Learn more at sturfed.org or email churchoffice@sturfed.org.

## Sturbridge Affordable Housing Trust seeks input through survey

STURBRIDGE — The Sturbridge Affordable Housing Trust (SAHT) is leading the development of a new Housing Production Plan (HPP) to update its 2021–2026 Housing Production Plan and guide the Town's future housing strategy. The updated HPP will include current data and analysis on demographic trends and housing conditions, identify priority housing needs, and recommend strategies to address them.

The SAHT will offer multiple opportunities for residents to share input on local housing challenges, goals, and priorities. As part of this effort, the SAHT is conducting a Community Housing Survey to gather additional feedback. The survey is designed to be brief and easy to complete, taking only a few minutes of your time.

To participate in the survey, visit the town Web site, sturbridge.gov, and click the link under the News tab on the main page.

Community engagement is a central part of this process.

## UMass Amherst announces

### Fall Dean's List

AMHERST — The following students were named to the Fall 2025 Dean's List at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Students are appointed to the Dean's List at the end of a semester in which they have completed a minimum of 12 graded credits and have earned a grade point average of 3.500 or better.

Brimfield  
Broderick Dalton  
Custance  
Ella Victoria  
Petersen  
Elizabeth Rose  
Shaw  
Abigail Kathryn  
Stattenfield  
Malahny Yanay  
Wedderburn

Charlton  
Kasey Jade  
Blanchette  
Callie Elizabeth  
Cahn  
Samantha Cox  
Hanna Joanne  
Gamelli  
Caylee Lynn  
Goulet  
Abbigael Mae  
Rose Hill  
Andrew John  
Kania  
Harry John  
Kennan  
Leah Rose Leclair

Shawn Christopher  
Maple  
Luke Harry  
Miller  
Joseph Shea  
Montville  
Colleen Jacklynn  
Murphy  
Eliana Anima  
Owusu-Ansah  
Madelyn Taylor  
Parker  
Colin Michael  
Resener  
Anna Catherine  
Thomas  
Mark Mina  
Wassef

Fiskdale

Katherine Christine  
Eliason  
Camden John  
Foley  
Brodie W  
Hemingway  
Ava Christine  
Howard  
Drew Ronald  
Howard  
Adam Albert  
Howe  
Laurel Elinor Ives  
Vanessa T Joyner  
Holland  
Abigail S Grillo  
Southbridge  
Isabella Lucia

Southbridge  
Isabella Lucia

Colangione  
Matthew Zenon  
Gil  
Kierce Jason  
Jarvis  
Lauren Ann  
Lemire  
Adriana Del  
Carmen Quintanilla  
Manaali Durgesh  
Vaidya  
Sturbridge  
Zachary R  
Christenson  
Zachariah  
Ertsgard  
Julia Rose  
Faugno  
Luke Brandon

Goodwin  
Brady John  
Miller  
Owen William  
O'Connor  
Guy Raymond  
Zwiebel

Wales  
May Marie Adams  
Claire Theresa  
Godek



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## Retirement on the Horizon

After 39 years in business (and being 39 years older than when we started) one notices that there is now a shorter distance left to travel on life's journey than the distance that has already been traversed. That thinking led us to the decision to begin to wind down our business during the first quarter of this year and retire by the end of March 2026. This wind down period has allowed us plenty of time to honor and fulfill all our current customer special orders in progress. Due to some products' extended lead times, we will only be processing new orders that will be able to be shipped completely within the above-mentioned time. In the meantime, we have lots of super budget-friendly deals to be found as we draw down our inventory of windows, doors, patio doors, locksets...., and bargain-bay items. Also, our fully functioning, beautiful kitchen cabinets, windows & doors displays are being made available for sale as well.

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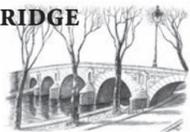
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FRANK G. CHILINSKI  
PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER  
BRENDAN BERUBE  
EDITOR

## The importance of local businesses to community life

In towns like Charlton, Sturbridge, and Southbridge, local businesses do more than provide goods and services. They help shape the character of the community.

From family-owned restaurants to small retail shops, repair services, and professional offices, these businesses form the everyday backbone of local economic life. They provide jobs, support local events, and often serve as gathering places where neighbors cross paths and conversations begin.

While larger national chains may be part of the regional landscape, small and locally owned businesses remain an important part of what makes these communities distinct.

A locally owned shop or restaurant often reflects the personality of the people who run it. Owners know their customers, recognize familiar faces, and develop relationships that grow over time. In many cases, these businesses become part of the rhythm of daily life.

Residents stop by for morning coffee, pick up a quick lunch, or run into neighbors while shopping for everyday items. These simple interactions may seem routine, but they help create the sense of connection that many people value in small-town living.

Local businesses also play an important role in supporting community activities.

Throughout the year, small businesses sponsor youth sports teams, donate gift cards or products to charity raffles, and contribute to school fundraisers. Many also participate in community events such as holiday celebrations, seasonal markets, and local festivals.

Their involvement helps strengthen the social fabric of the towns they serve.

Operating a small business, however, is rarely easy. Owners must balance rising costs, changing consumer habits, and increasing competition. Many work long hours while managing staffing, inventory, and the day-to-day responsibilities that come with running a business.

Despite these challenges, small businesses continue to invest in the communities where they operate.

In Southbridge, efforts to revitalize downtown areas have drawn attention to the role local businesses can play in bringing energy back to commercial districts. In Sturbridge, a combination of tourism and local entrepreneurship helps sustain a wide range of shops and restaurants. Charlton's growing commercial corridors also reflect the ways businesses adapt as communities evolve.

Each town has its own economic character, but the presence of locally owned businesses remains an important common thread.

Residents can play a part in supporting these enterprises through everyday choices. Shopping locally when possible helps keep money circulating within the community. It also encourages entrepreneurs to continue investing in their towns.

Even small decisions can make a difference. Choosing a neighborhood restaurant for dinner, purchasing gifts from a local shop, or hiring a nearby contractor are ways residents help sustain the businesses that serve them.

Over time, these choices contribute to a healthier and more resilient local economy.

Local businesses also help define the identity of a town. Visitors often remember a community by the places they explore, the shops they discover, or the restaurants where they share a meal.

Those experiences shape how a town is perceived both by residents and by people who may be visiting for the first time.

As our communities continue to grow and change, maintaining a strong network of local businesses will remain an important part of preserving the character of these communities.

Supporting those businesses is not only an economic decision. It is also an investment in the relationships and traditions that make small towns feel like home.

### Letter submission policy

Letters to the Editor must include the author's name, address, and a daytime phone number for purposes of verification in order to be considered for publication. Only the author's name and the town in which they reside will be published. Letters submitted without all of the required information will not be accepted.

It is the sole prerogative of the Editor to determine whether a submission satisfies our requirements and decency standards, and any submission may be rejected at any time for any reason he or she might deem appropriate.

# OPINION

## Take charge of your debt, one step at a time

If you're dealing with debt, you're far from alone. More than 80 percent of U.S. households carry some form of debt (2025 Federal Reserve report), and since 2019, total household debt for Americans has increased more than 31 percent, to \$18.59 trillion.

While debt can help you achieve important goals, such as buying a home or getting an education, it can also create strain on your life and finances. If you only make minimum payments, for example, you'll hold debt longer and pay more in interest.

Having a clear debt reduction plan can help you take control, reduce anxiety, and even save money.

Know your debt. The first step is understanding what you owe. Make a comprehensive list of all your debts, including credit cards, mortgages, auto loans, student loans, and medical bills. For each one, note the total amount owed, the interest rate and your minimum payment requirements.

Next, add it all up to see your total debt load. Then calculate your debt-to-income ratio by dividing your total monthly debt payments by your gross monthly income. A good rule of thumb is to keep this ratio below 35 percent if you have a mortgage or 20 percent if you don't.

Manage what you owe. Now that you have the big picture, look for oppor-



### FINANCIAL FOCUS

TREVOR  
NIELSEN

tunities to reorganize your debt more effectively. Perhaps you can refinance existing loans at lower interest rates, consolidate multiple debts into a single payment, or transfer high-interest credit card balances to cards that offer lower or 0 percent introductory rates for up to 12 months.

These strategies won't reduce the total amount you owe, but they can make your debt more manageable and potentially save you money on interest. Just watch out for fees and make sure you understand new terms before making changes.

Set your payment target. Start by identifying your required minimum payments across all debts. Missing these can trigger fees and penalties and damage your credit score, so treat them as non-negotiable expenses in your budget.

Next, look at your budget to identify any funds available after covering all essential expenses. Consider how much

of this surplus to put toward paying down debt versus saving for other goals. Remember that building an emergency fund and saving for retirement are also important priorities that shouldn't be sidelined.

If you have no surplus, you may need to cut back on things like eating out, clothes shopping, on-line subscriptions, entertainment, or expensive vacations while you bring your debt in line. Consider an additional part-time job for extra income to pay off your debt sooner.

Prioritize your debt. Finally, decide which debts to tackle first with any extra payments. One approach is to focus on paying off the debt with the highest interest rate first, which minimizes the total interest you'll pay over time. Alternately, you can target the smallest balance first to help you build momentum and motivation.

Taking control of your debt doesn't happen overnight, but with a clear strategy, you can make steady progress toward your financial goals.

*This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Please contact Trevor Nielsen, your local Edward Jones Advisor in Sturbridge at 508-347-1420 or trevor.nielsen@edward-jones.com. Edward Jones, Member SIPC*

## Spring sneaks in, one morning at a time

Every year about this time, I start noticing small things.

Not the big, dramatic signs of spring. Those come later, when the trees turn green all at once and people start dragging lawn chairs out of the garage. I mean the quiet little hints that winter is loosening its grip on Massachusetts.

It might be a patch of grass showing up along the edge of the driveway. Or that first morning when the sun comes through the kitchen window a little earlier than it did the week before.

You notice those things when you've lived somewhere long enough.

The other morning, I stepped outside to grab the newspaper, and the air felt different. Still cold, mind you. This is Massachusetts, after all. March has a habit of pretending to be spring one day and January the next. But the cold felt lighter somehow.

That's the best way I can explain it.

When I was younger, I used to think spring arrived all at once. One day, it was winter, and the next day, it was warm enough to play catch in the yard. But the older I get, the more I realize spring actually sneaks in quietly, one small sign at a time.

The birds know it before we do.

You start hearing them earlier in the morning, carrying on like they've got important business to attend to. I'm not sure what they're saying to each other, but they sound awfully cheerful about it.

Then there's the sunlight.

## LANTERNS ALONG MAIN STREET By CHARLES

In February, the sun always seems tired, like it's putting in only a half day. By March, it sticks around longer, stretching across the sidewalks and warming the side of the house in the afternoon. My wife noticed it first the other day when she said the living room suddenly felt brighter.

I told her that happens every year.

Still, it's nice when it does.

Around town, you start seeing the early signs too. Someone has already swept the winter sand off their walkway. A neighbor is standing in the driveway looking thoughtfully at the snowblower, as if trying to decide whether to keep it out a little longer or finally push it to the back of the garage.

That's always a gamble in Massachusetts.

I've made the mistake before of putting away winter too early. The moment you do that, it seems like the weather hears about it and decides to

send one last snowstorm just to keep you humble.

So I leave the shovel handy for now.

But even with that possibility hanging in the air, there's a different feeling around town this time of year. People walk a little slower when the sun comes out. You see neighbors lingering a moment longer at the mailbox. Someone opens a car window for the first time in months just to let the air in.

None of this happens all at once. It unfolds gradually, the way most good things do.

When my kids were younger, the arrival of spring meant baseball gloves coming out of the closet and muddy sneakers by the back door. These days the house is quieter, though every once in a while I still catch myself noticing things the same way I did back then.

The smell of thawing earth. The sound of melting snow dripping off the edge of the roof.

The first afternoon when you realize you don't need your heavy coat anymore.

I suppose that's the real magic of a New England spring. It reminds you that even after the longest winters, the world eventually wakes up again.

Not with a grand announcement.

Just a little sunlight on Main Street, a few birds singing before breakfast, and the quiet feeling that warmer days are on their way.

And after a long Massachusetts winter, that's usually enough.

# Got Space?

we do.

Contact Mikaela Today

774-200-7308 mikaela@stonebridgepress.news

# Walk in Faith Lenton mission open to all

BRIMFIELD — St. Christophers Church, 16 Sturbridge Rd. (Route 20), Brimfield, and St. Patrick's church at 22 Green St. in Monson are co-hosting a Lenten Mission March 16 – 19.

The mission title, "Our Walk in Faith," will be led by Fr. David Gunter MIC of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception from the National Shrine of Divine Mercy in Stockbridge. The talk will be at 7 pm each evening. St. Christopher's will host Monday and Tuesday, while St. Patrick will host on Wednesday and Thursday. Each night Fr. Gunter will lead you on a spiritual journey to awaken and deepen your faith during this holy season of Lent. The event is free and open to all. For more information contact St. Patrick's at 413-267-3622. Father Gunter will also offer the masses the weekend before and will hear confessions on the weekend and each evening prior to the talk at 6pm.

The parishes are led by Father Jack Brennan, who shares, "The season of Lent is a time to reflect, listen with our hearts and pray. It echoes Christ's 40 days in the desert as a period of

transformation and a return to the Lord through prayer. To make room for grace by practicing Almsgiving through generosity of heart and choosing compassion over convenience."

Both parishes welcome visitors and all who wish to attend are invited to join us throughout the year.

About Fr. David W. Gunter, MIC

Fr. David was ordained in 2009 for the Archdiocese of Boston. Prior to entering priesthood, he had studied at Northeastern University receiving a B.A. in Economics and Geology in 1981 and an MBA from Babson College in 1984. Fr. Gunter has had a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary that eventually lead him to the Congregation of the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception. He entered the community in July of 2014 and professed perpetual vows on October 19, 2019. Fr. Gunter has researched Marian apparitions, Marian teachings by saints and popes, and has produced an exciting video series called "The Days of Elijah and the Coming Triumph" available at the Marian website [divinemercyplus.org](http://divinemercyplus.org). Presently, Fr. Gunter is assigned to the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, MA

About the Marians

The Congregation of Marian Fathers of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary is a fraternal community of consecrated life in the Roman Catholic Church. They are also known for their devotion to Mary Immaculate, dedication to pray-

ing for the poor souls in Purgatory, and active service to the Church. Founded in Poland in 1670 by Saint Stanislaus Papczyński, today the Marian Congregation has about 500 priests and brothers who labor in 19 countries. They administer the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Mass., a place of beauty – a holy ground – where thousands of pilgrims visit each year seeking healing and spiritual renewal.

## Brimfield to mark 250th anniversary of Independence

BRIMFIELD — Save the date! On Saturday, June 13, a community-wide celebration marking the 250th anniversary of our nation's freedom will take place in Brimfield.

In recognition of this year's historic milestone, a full day of remembrance and celebration is planned. All are welcome to attend the day's events, which include the following: Revolutionary War themed cemetery tours, a ceremony at the town common gazebo, a parade, and fun-filled festivities at the Brimfield Winery. The evening will close out with a spectacular fireworks display.

Additional details and updates will be available through the Friends of Historic Brimfield event Web site, [www.fohbrimfield.org](http://www.fohbrimfield.org). Tax-deductible donations can also be made in support of this celebration through this website, and in gratitude, donors will

be recognized in the event program. Donations can also be mailed to: Friends of Historic Brimfield, P.O. Box 52, Brimfield, MA 01010 with "Spirit of Brimfield" in the memo.

This event is currently being sponsored by the Massachusetts Army National Guard and Classic Hits 97.7 FM. If you or your company are interested in any level of corporate or business sponsorship, please visit the event website at [www.fohbrimfield.org](http://www.fohbrimfield.org). Additional volunteers are needed for both planning and to help with activities during the event, or if you are interested in putting a float in the parade, contact Friends of Historic Brimfield at (413) 239-0288 for more information.

Be sure to save the date for this celebration of the founding of our country! More information will follow.

## Applications welcome for Ronald J. Denault Memorial Law Enforcement Scholarship

CHARLTON CITY — A \$1,500 scholarship, honoring the memory of Ronald J. Denault, a highly respected police officer at both the state and local levels, will be awarded again this June to a student in the Class of 2026.

To be eligible for consideration for this award, preferably, a student must be a Charlton resident who is planning to further his/her education in pursuit of a career in law enforcement or criminal justice. Applicants may be graduating from a public or private high school or from a home schooling program that has been approved formally by the School Committee. Ideally, applicants will show evidence of scholarship, leadership, and community service.

Any interested person should complete and submit an application packet no later than April 30, 2026. The application packet will include the follow-

ing: an application form; a one-page essay summarizing why the applicant is interested in a career in law enforcement; two letters of reference; and documentation of academic scholarship. Details regarding all requirements will be included with the application form. Application forms can be obtained at the Charlton Public Library, at the Charlton Police Station, or through the guidance offices at either Bay Path Regional or Shepherd Hill Regional High School. Further questions may be directed to Dr. Linda E. Denault, who can be reached via email at [ledenault@aol.com](mailto:ledenault@aol.com) or by calling 508-248-7711.

Completed application packets should be mailed to the Ronald J. Denault Law Enforcement Scholarship Committee c/o P.O. Box 352, Charlton City, MA 01508.

## St. Anne – St. Patrick's Calendar Raffle celebrates Lucky Month

STURBRIDGE — St. Anne – St. Patrick Parish is celebrating the month of March with a St. Patrick's Day Calendar raffle. One lucky winner will be drawn each day. The winning ticket will be reentered for more chances to win. Raffle tickets are \$10 each.

The calendar features four \$100 prizes drawn every Saturday in March as well as several random cash prizes throughout the month. On St. Patrick's Day, the lucky winner will receive \$500.

Other prizes include gift cards to St. Anne's Gift Shop, Tutti Quanti, Napoli's Pizzeria, Elm Street Café, Big Bunny Supermarket, Nova's Restaurant Holland, Publick House, and tickets to Entertainment Luxury Theater.

Raffle tickets may be purchased in the St. Anne Gift Shop and in the St.

Anne – St. Patrick office. Proceeds benefit St. Anne – St. Patrick Parish.

St. Anne - St. Patrick Parish is an active parish community. It offers daily Mass for worship, religious education, and community ministries. It welcomes visitors to St. Anne Shrine, the new Memorial for the Unborn, the Hall of Saints, the Russian Icon Exhibit, the Votive Chapel, the Generations Statue, and the Angel of Hope Monument. Our pilgrims feel at peace walking the ground, including the Stations of the Cross and the Holy Stairs. And weather permitting, pilgrims also have access to a picnic grove. The Daily Rosary is recited at 3 p.m. in the St. Patrick Chapel, and weekend Masses are celebrated in its outdoor pavilion in the summer. Its religious gift shop is open every day from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

## Build a house, build a garage, build an addition with help from Tantasqua students

FISKDALE — The Tantasqua Regional School Committee will be accepting applications for projects to be built during the 2026-2027 school year. The purpose of these projects is to provide practical work experiences for the carpentry students of Tantasqua's Technical Division. Since there is no charge for student labor, qualified applicants realize substantial savings. Additional savings can result if Tantasqua's electrical students install any necessary wiring.

Applications and design plans will

be accepted for the construction of a single story house, garage, addition, or similar project. One or more projects may be selected. Applicant must reside in the Tantasqua School District.

All applications should be submitted directly to the Superintendent's Office by May 15.

For further information please call the Technical Division at 508-347-3045, ext. 0915 or access our Web site at <http://www.tantasqua.org/technical/forms.htm>.

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# A night of harmony and hope

## JAK-L Foundation to host Dueling Pianos in Auburn

AUBURN — Get ready to sing, dance, and make a difference. On Saturday, May 2, the local community will gather at J. Anthony's Italian Grill for a high-energy "Dueling Pianos" event presented by the JAK-L Foundation.

The evening promises a vibrant blend of music and laughter, but the mission behind the melodies is deeply personal. Proceeds from the event will directly support youth mental health and suicide prevention programs within the local community.

Turning pain into purpose

The JAK-L Foundation was established in 2023 by President Joy Kochinskas. For Kochinskas, a local salon owner and stylist for more than 25 years, the cause is an intimate one. After losing her sister to suicide in 2017, she became a dedicated advocate, par-



Courtesy

The members of the JAK-L Foundation. Front row, from left: David Boucher, Christine Afful, Joy Kochinskas, Devon Renfro, Steve Kochinskas. Second Row, from left: Karen Sisko, Kathy Konkol-Saad, Kim Sterczala, Shirley Shepardson, Kerry Bielicki, Ruth Cahill, Laurie Boucher

ticipating in the "Out of the Darkness" walks for years before founding the JAK-L Foundation to create a more direct impact on mental health awareness.

"I'm hoping to make more of an impact on the mental health society," Kochinskas said regarding the foundation's mission. Alongside an

active event committee, the foundation is working to transform how the community discusses and supports mental wellness.

**Event details**  
The event kicks off at 8:00 PM, though supporters are encouraged to arrive early.

• When: Saturday, May 2

• Time: 8 - 10 p.m. (doors open at 7:30 p.m.)

• Where: J. Anthony's Italian Grill, 917 Southbridge St., Auburn

• Admission: \$35 per person (plus fees)  
**Pro-Tip:** Guests who enjoy dinner at J. Anthony's prior to the show will receive priority seating for the performance.

Community support

The success of the JAK-L Foundation is driven by a dedicated team of volunteers. The event committee includes David Boucher, Christine Afful, Joy Kochinskas, Devon Renfro, and Steve Kochinskas. Supporting the front lines are team members Karen Sisko,

Kathy Konkol-Saad, Kim Sterczala, Shirley Shepardson, Kerry Bielicki, Ruth Cahill, and Laurie Boucher.

By attending, guests aren't just buying a ticket to a show—they are helping to "spark meaningful change" for local youth who may be struggling in silence.



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# QCC's director of community engagement receives Black Excellence award

WORCESTER — Quinsigamond Community College's Director of Community Engagement, Sean Harris, was recently named a 2026 Black Excellence of the Hill award recipient by the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus (MBLLC).

This annual honor celebrates Black and Latino Community leaders who are making a meaningful difference in their communities. Harris was nominated for the award by Massachusetts State

Representative David LeBoeuf.

"Sean embodies the best of QCC and the Worcester community. We are incredibly proud to see his impact recognized at the state level with this distinguished honor," said QCC President Dr. Luis Pedraja.

A longtime pillar of the Worcester community, Harris has supported local organizations and initiatives for decades. He is the founder of the Professional Men of Color Dinner

Club and serves on the boards of the Business Improvement District for Downtown Worcester and Dress for Success. In 2023, he was recognized with the BIPOC Community Leader Award from the Diverse Professional Roundtable. Additionally, Harris was a founding member of the Worcester Youth Center and later served as its youngest executive director.

Harris has worked at QCC since 2021, becoming the Director of Community Engagement



Courtesy Photo

## Cornerstone Bank commits \$7,500 to support Abby's House 50th Anniversary Gala

WORCESTER — Cornerstone Bank has donated \$7,500 to support the Abby's House 50th Anniversary Gala, scheduled for May 29 at the Hogan Center at the College of the Holy Cross. The milestone gift builds on the bank's ongoing commitment to the organization, following donations in 2023, 2024 and 2025.

"Abby's House has been opening doors for women and children in Worcester for half a century, and we are proud to stand with them at this historic moment," said Todd Tallman, CEO of Cornerstone Bank. "Their impact is profound, and this contribution reflects our belief in their mission and our commitment to strengthening the communities we serve."

Abby's House provides shelter, affordable housing, advocacy and support services to women and children. Over the past five decades, the organization has helped more than 16,000 women and their children rebuild their lives and achieve stability and independence. It operates one of the first overnight shelters for women in the country and is now the largest provider of affordable, supportive housing in Worcester

designed specifically for women and children.

The 50th Anniversary Gala will celebrate Abby's House's legacy, recognize key community partners and support the organization's continued work to meet the evolving needs of families across the region.

About Cornerstone Bank

Cornerstone Bank was formed in 2017, born of a long history of supporting the community, and providing a strong foundation to help people and businesses thrive. Serving Worcester County, Massachusetts, Cornerstone Bank's local presence and community-based banking model enables a unique ability to deliver outstanding service, with a personal touch. Cornerstone, which is a subsidiary of

PeoplesBankCorp, MHC, operating independently under its own name and brand, provides the highest level of service and expertise for individuals, businesses, and community organizations with branch locations throughout Central Massachusetts. Cornerstone works to connect customers with opportunities through a broad range of deposit and loan products and services. Built on Trust is not just a tagline, but also one of our guiding corporate values. Whether a business or personal partnership, Cornerstone stands on the foundation that relationships are built on trust. To learn about Cornerstone Bank's personal and business banking offerings, please visit [cornerstonebank.com](http://cornerstonebank.com) or call 800-939-9103.



Sean Harris

in 2023. In addition to fostering relationships and partnerships between QCC and the surrounding community, he co-chairs the Access to Opportunity Committee and serves as a member of the Advisory Council for Access & Opportunity.

"I'm deeply honored

to be recognized among such dedicated leaders from across the state. Working within the Worcester community has always been rooted in unity and what we can accomplish together," said Harris.

The award winners were celebrated

last week at a ceremony featuring remarks from Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll and keynote speaker Mechelle Brown, President of the 7uice Foundation and mother of Celtic's star Jaylen Brown.

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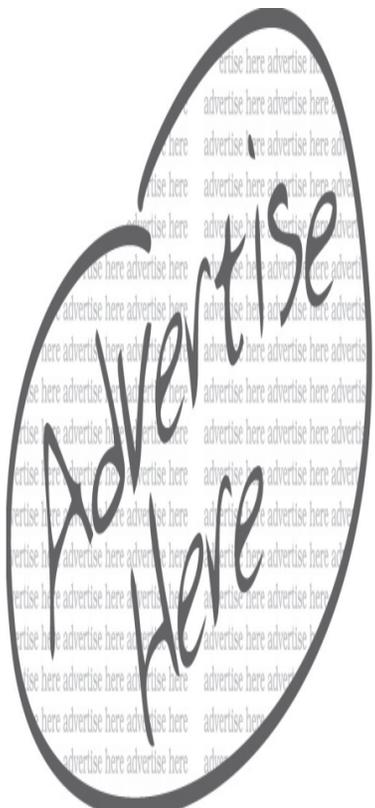
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# OBITUARIES

## Zida Z. Lach, 76

Southbridge, MA- Zida Z. (Sims) Lach, known as ZoeAnn Lach, 76, of Elm St., passed away on March 3rd in the Southbridge Rehab. & Skilled Care Center, after a brief illness.

She leaves her loving husband of 58 years, Edwin Lach of Southbridge; her sons, Christopher Lach and his wife Betty Proulx of Southbridge and James M. Lach and his wife Jennifer of Charlton; her brothers, Danny Sims and his wife Lynda of Kansas, and Terry Sims of Missouri; Grandchildren, Cody Lach, Bethany Lach, and Matthew Lach, and half-sister, Glenna Keeper of Jasper Missouri.

She was predeceased by her sister, Yarala Arnold and her half-brothers, John Logan Rardin, Troy Joe Rardin, Howard Sims, Jr., and Harold Sims.

ZoeAnn was born in Pitcher, OK, the daughter of Howard E. and Velma Flo (Woods) Sims.



ZoeAnn was well known in her community and touched many lives in her over 25 years spent working at Harrington Memorial Hospital. In her free time ZoeAnn enjoyed tending to her flowerbeds, researching and documenting her family's genealogy, and going out for ice cream with her husband. During the cold months, she enjoyed baking Christmas cookies and decorating for the holidays. Above all, ZoeAnn's favorite thing to do was enjoy time with her children and grandchildren. Her kindness, positivity, and selflessness will be carried on by those she loved.

Services for ZoeAnn will be private. There are no calling hours. The Daniel T. Morrill Funeral Home, 130 Hamilton St., Southbridge, is directing the arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association MA Chapter, 309 Waverley Oaks Rd., Waltham, MA 02452.

## Nancy M. Norowski, 89

Southbridge- Nancy M. (Osimo) Norowski, 89, of Therese Ave., passed away on Monday, March 2nd, in the St. Vincent Hospital, Worcester, after a long illness.

She leaves her husband of 66 years, Roger L. Norowski; her two daughters, Claire Tuson of Southbridge and Catherine O'Brien and her husband Justin Spinney of Southbridge; her twin sister, Claire Russell of Webster; her three grandchildren, Kyle O'Brien and his wife Alexandria of Sturbridge, Chelsey Tuson and her fiancé Dylan Orzulak of Buckeye, AZ and Kerry Harrington and her husband Christopher of Wales; her three great grandchildren, Axel O'Brien, Luke Harrington and Shane Harrington; her two step great grandchildren, Enzo Jones and Luka Jones; and many nieces and nephews. She was predeceased by her four brothers, Vincent 'Jimmy'



Osimo, Anthony 'Tony' Osimo, Tulio 'Tito' Osimo and Alphonse 'Ponzi' Osimo, Jr. and her five sisters, Isabella Authier, Mary Rondeau, Rita Lorange, Lillian Galonek and Laura Berthiaume. Nancy was born in Worcester the daughter of Alphonse and Angelina (Salce) Osimo, Sr.

Nancy worked at Hyde Manufacturing in Southbridge for over 25 years, retiring many years ago. She was a longtime devoted member of the former St. Hedwig's Parish in Southbridge, serving as a Eucharistic Minister and a member of the Holy Rosary Sodality. She was a member of St. John Paul II Parish and a member of the St. Rita's Society.

Nancy loved her husband, daughters and grandchildren deeply. She held a strong faith in God which poured into everything she set out to do. Her soothing voice and soulful eyes will be remembered by anyone lucky enough to have known her.

Her funeral was held on Saturday, March 7th, from the Daniel T. Morrill Funeral Home, 130 Hamilton St., Southbridge, with a Mass at 11:00am in St. Mary's Church of the St. John Paul II Parish, 263 Hamilton St., Southbridge. Burial followed in St. Mary's Cemetery, Southbridge. A calling hour in the funeral home will be held on Saturday, March 7th, from 9:30 to 10:30am, prior to the Mass. www.morrillfuneralhome.com

## BARTON

continued from page A1

efforts to develop and maintain the skills to be an effective leader and manager in today's fire service. The process provides an equal opportunity for the volunteer, call, or full-time fire service leader to meet the minimum criteria for achieving fire chief accreditation."

Barton said, "I am dedicated to pro-

viding the highest level of service to this community and have worked hard to continue my education and experience to bring a high level of professionalism to this position. I appreciate that this accomplishment recognizes my dedication to be the best fire service leader I can be for this community."

Credentialed participants will be required to renew their credentials

every three years. The program is open to all members of the fire service in the Commonwealth serving as chief of department. Additionally, any person holding the rank of lieutenant or above in that department is also eligible to apply for credentialing. Participation in this program is voluntary and all eligible personnel are encouraged to participate.

# LEGALS

The Brimfield ZBA will hold a public hearing at 5:00 pm on April 06, 2026, at the Town Annex (Clerk's Office) 23 Main St. Brimfield, MA on behalf of Andrew and Joseph Comerford for their land on Shaw Rd. in Brimfield, MA. Assessor's Parcels 5-A-1.3 and 5-A-1.5. Book 25931-582. The applicants seek to construct a common driveway (less than 500 feet) to serve two single family lots. A 33-foot easement will be provided. No more than two lots will be served and a 24-foot driving surface will be provided. Although not required to attend, abutters and members of the public are welcome to attend and provide feedback. March 13, 2026 March 20, 2026

## CHARLTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, the Charlton Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on March 25, at 7PM on the application of Christopher Hansen. The applicant has filed a Notice of Intent for the construction of a single-family residence, and associated grading within the 100-ft buffer zone to a Bordering Vegetated Wetland. The project location is: (Lot 2-1A) 0 North Main Street, Charlton, MA 01507. Parcel ID: 35-D-2.2 Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting of the Charlton Conservation Commission will be conducted in person and via remote means. Members of the public who wish to participate can access the meeting remotely by request. Copies of the NOI may be examined at the Conservation Office by appointment during business hours. Thomas O'Malley Chair, Charlton Conservation Commission March 13, 2026

## Public Hearing Notice

The Charlton Select Board will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, **March 24, 2026 at 6:45pm** in the Charlton Town Hall, Meeting Room 1, 37 Main St., Charlton MA to act on a request for a Club/All Alcoholic Beverages License to be held by Overlook Communities, Inc., 88 Masonic Home Road, Charlton, MA 01507. Anyone wishing to be heard on this matter should appear on the date and time specified or submit concerns in writing to the Charlton Select Board, 37 Main St., Charlton, MA 01507 March 12, 2026

## NOTICE OF SALE

Pursuant to Mass General Laws Chapter 105A, the contents of the following spaces: H22 (Stephen Johnson), H67 (Joseph Anselmo) and H136 (Joyce Lacerte) located at 25 Brimfield Road, Holland, MA will be sold to satisfy the owners

lien of Storage Plus. Sale date is March 18, 2026 @ 2:00PM. Inspection between 1:30PM and 2:00PM on March 18, 2026. Sealed bids must be hand delivered by 2:00 PM on March 18, 2026. All goods must be purchased with cash as is, and must be removed within 48 hours of sale. Owner has the right to bid to protect his lien and to withdraw any unit upon settlement by the obligated party up for sale. For further information call (413)245-4388. Please run the following advertisement for two weeks in the Webster Times: Pursuant to Mass General Laws Chapter 105A, the contents of the following spaces: D21 (Dawn Marie Chesnis), D23 (Bozena Barszczewski) and D64 (Michael Pagan) located at 144 Schofield Avenue, Dudley, MA will be sold to satisfy the owners lien of Storage Plus. Sale date is March 18, 2026 @ 3:30PM. Inspection between 3:00PM and 3:30PM on March 18, 2026. Sealed bids must be hand delivered by 3:30 PM on March 18, 2026. All goods must be purchased with cash as is, and must be removed within 48 hours of sale. Owner has the right to bid to protect his lien and to withdraw any unit upon settlement by the obligated party up for sale. For further information call (508)949-8818. March 5, 2026 March 12, 2026

## CHARLTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, the Charlton Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on March 25, at 7PM on the application of Property Solutions Real Estate and Contracting LLC. The applicant has filed a Notice of Intent for the construction of a single-family residence, driveway, and associated site work within the 100-ft buffer zone to a Bordering Vegetated Wetland. The project location is: Lot 5 Brookfield Road, Charlton, MA 01507. Parcel ID: 15-B-4.3 Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting of the Charlton Conservation Commission will be conducted in person and via remote means. Members of the public who wish to participate can access the meeting remotely by request. Copies of the NOI may be examined at the Conservation Office by appointment during business hours. Thomas O'Malley Chair, Charlton Conservation Commission March 13, 2026

## (SEAL) COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS LAND COURT DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL COURT 26 SM 000710 ORDER OF NOTICE

TO: Travis J. McDonald and to all persons entitled to the benefit of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act: 50 U.S.C. c. 50 § 3901 (et seq): Freedom Mortgage Corporation claiming to have an interest in a Mortgage covering real property in Southbridge, numbered 13 Ridge Road, given by Travis J. McDonald to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as mortgagee, as nominee for JG Wentworth Home Lending, LLC., dated October 21, 2019, and recorded at Worcester County (Worcester District) Registry of Deeds in Book 61269, Page 168, as affected by a Loan Modification Agreement dated February 4, 2022 and recorded at said Registry in Book 67293, Page 383 as affected by a Loan Modification Agreement dated February 4, 2022 and recorded at said Registry in Book 67516, Page 266 and now held by the plaintiff by assignment, has/have filed with this court a complaint for determination of Defendant's/Defendants' Servicemembers status. If you now are, or recently have been, in the active military service of the United States of America, then you may be entitled to the benefits of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. If you object to a foreclosure of the above-mentioned property on that basis, then you or your attorney must file a written appearance and answer in this court at **Three Pemberton Square, Boston, MA 02108** on or before April 13, 2026 or you may lose the opportunity to challenge the foreclosure on the grounds of noncompliance with the Act. Witness, GORDON H. PIPER, Chief Justice of said Court on February 27, 2026. Attest: Deborah J. Patterson Recorder March 12, 2026

## CHARLTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Town of Charlton Stormwater Management Rules & Regulations, the Charlton Conservation Commission will be accepting comments on the following application: The applicant, Steven Bressette, has submitted a Land Disturbance/Stormwater Management Application on March 5, 2026, for land disturbance associated with the construction of a single-family home. The project site is located at 30 Hill Road, Charlton, MA 01507, and is also known as: Parcel ID: 31-D-6 Copies of the Land Disturbance

Application are available at the Charlton Conservation Commission office during business hours. Thomas O'Malley Chair, Charlton Conservation Commission March 13, 2026

## Town of Brimfield Conservation Commission Public Hearing Notice

In accordance with the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, Chapter 131, Section 40, the Brimfield Conservation Commission will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 5:30 PM to review a Notice of Intent (NOI) submitted by DC Engineering & Survey, Inc, c/o Andrew & Joseph Comerford. The NOI proposes to construct a single-family home and a driveway. **Project Location:** Lot A – Shaw Road (Seventh Street) (Assessor's Map 5-A-1.3) **Meeting Location:** Public Participation will be In-Person at Hitchcock Academy at 2 Brookfield Road, Brimfield, MA 01010 on March 25, 2026, at 5:30 PM. Any person(s) interested or wishing to be heard on this request should appear at the time and place designated. A copy of the permit application and plan may be inspected at the Brimfield Town Annex in the Conservation Commission Office, Salisbury Annex Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 23 Main Street, Brimfield, MA 01010 or contact the office at 413-245-4100 ext. 1101. Roger deBruyn & Joseph Venezia Co-Chairs March 02, 2026 March 12, 2026

## CHARLTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, the Charlton Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on March 25, at 7PM on the application of Christopher Hansen. The applicant has filed a Notice of Intent for the construction of a single-family residence, and associated grading within the 100-ft buffer zone to a Bordering Vegetated Wetland. The project location is: (Lot 2-1B) 0 North Main Street, Charlton, MA 01507. Parcel ID: 35-D-2.3 Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting of the Charlton Conservation Commission will be conducted in person and via remote means. Members of the public who wish to participate can access the meeting remotely by request. Copies of the NOI may be examined at the Conservation Office by appointment during business hours. Thomas O'Malley Chair, Charlton Conservation Commission March 13, 2026

# Saving lives through conversation

## JAK-L Foundation launches QPR suicide prevention training series

AUBURN — In its ongoing mission to strengthen community mental health resources, the JAK-L Foundation has announced a series of upcoming QPR (Question, Persuade, and Refer) training sessions beginning this March. The initiative aims to equip local residents with the essential tools needed to recognize and respond to the warning signs of a suicide crisis.

Much like CPR is used to sustain life until medical professionals arrive, QPR is an emergency mental health intervention. The training teaches three simple steps that anyone can learn to help prevent a tragedy.

**Empowering the community**  
The first session is scheduled for Tuesday, March 10 at 6 p.m. at J. Anthony's Italian Grill, located on the Auburn/Oxford line.

Founded by Joy Kochinkas in 2023 following the loss of her sister to suicide, the JAK-L Foundation focuses on youth mental health and suicide prevention. By bringing QPR training to a familiar local venue like J. Anthony's, the foundation hopes to make these life-saving conversations accessible and less intimidating for the general public.

**2026 training schedule**  
To ensure widespread impact, the foundation has outlined a schedule of training dates through the summer. Organizers noted that classes require a minimum of five participants to proceed, emphasizing the importance of early community sign-ups.

- Upcoming Sessions:**
- Tuesday, March 10: 6 – 8 p.m. (J. Anthony's)
  - Wednesday, April 8: 6 – 8 p.m. (J. Anthony's)
  - Saturday, May 16: 10 a.m. – noon (Location TBD)
  - Tuesday, June 9: 6 – 8 p.m. (J. Anthony's)
  - Wednesday, July 29: 6 – 8 p.m. (J. Anthony's)

**How to participate**  
Registration is now open, but spots are limited for each session. Residents, educators, parents, and community leaders are encouraged to visit the foundation's website to secure a seat.

"Come learn the skills that save lives and help spark meaningful change," the foundation shared, highlighting the importance of moving from awareness to active prevention. To register or learn more about the JAK-L Foundation's mission, visit <https://jak-l.com/>.

**Quick Facts: Why QPR training matters**  
QPR stands for Question, Persuade, and Refer—three simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people trained in CPR help save thousands of lives each year, QPR trainees learn to recognize the warning signs of a crisis and provide a "bridge" to professional care.

• It's not counseling: You don't need to be a medical professional. QPR is designed for "gatekeepers"—everyday people like parents, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

• Recognize the signs: Learn to identify the subtle verbal, behavioral, and situational clues that someone may be struggling.

• Break the silence: Gain the confidence to ask the "S" question directly and listen without judgment.

• Provide a bridge: Learn how to effectively persuade someone to seek help and exactly where to refer them in our local community.

"The more people in Auburn and Oxford who are trained in QPR, the safer our entire community becomes."

## BHS Class of 1986 seeks community's help locating classmates for 40th reunion

REGION — As the Bartlett High School Class of 1986 prepares to celebrate its 40th reunion on Sept. 26, organizers are asking the community for assistance in locating classmates who have not yet been reached through social media or via text.

To make the process simple, the reunion committee has created a short contact-information form and is encouraging residents, friends, and former classmates to help spread the word. If you know someone on the "missing classmates" list, organizers ask that you text them the link to the form so they can update their

information.  
**Contact Info Form:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/BHS1986-40Years>

If it's easier, you may also complete the form on a classmate's behalf—so long as you have their current contact details. Organizers emphasize that any help tracking them down is truly appreciated, as personal connections often succeed where digital outreach falls short.

A list of classmates the committee is hoping to locate appears below. With the community's support, they hope every member of the Class of '86 will have the opportunity to join this milestone cele-

bration.

- Peter Allain
- Beth Antonopoulos
- Marie Aperges
- Andrew Baca
- Austin Bailey
- David Beardsley
- Frank Belanger
- Carolyn Bembenek
- Richard Bernier
- Sheila Bialoncik
- Beth Bialy
- Jason Borski
- Doreen Bourget
- Eric Brisbois
- Kathleen Brown
- Paul Browning
- Paul Bugan
- Cindy Bullens
- Sandra Butt
- Mont Canterbury
- Stephen Carlson
- Daniel Chapdelaine
- Kelly Cobb
- Ken Cournoyer

- Timothy Decker
- Tammy Deschenes
- Aaron Dorcas
- Daniel Doyle
- Dorothy DusoSelina
- Fife
- James Gardner
- Jeffrey Gatto
- Tina Giakoumis
- Alicia Goudreau
- Richard Guerin
- Robert Hamm
- Scott Horanzy
- Jane Houle
- Todd Hufault
- Joseph Hughes
- Melissa Jankowski
- Thor Johnson
- Nena Johnston
- Lisa Kozlowski
- Robert Krasnecky
- Jill Krause
- Michael Kryger
- Rick Lawson
- Deborah Leite
- Linda Lifer

- Patricia Majewski
- Renee Marchand
- Jennifer Marsh
- Jennifer Mason
- John Meagher
- Fumiyo Mochizuki
- Deborah Munsch
- Brett Napierata
- Wayne Parmentier
- Brian Poplawski
- Gary Poplawski
- Edward Powers
- William Radcliffe
- James Remy
- Debra Ross
- Collin Salmon
- Dale Schleis
- Theresa Sergel
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# New England Water Ski Collective to host State Slalom Championships at Buffumville Lake

CHARLTON — The New England Water Ski Collective (formerly known as the Webster Water Ski Collective) is proud to announce that it will host the Massachusetts State Slalom Championships on July 15 at Buffumville Lake, located on the Oxford/Charlton town line. A competitors practice session will take place on July 14 for this event.

This event marks the first time in many years that a Massachusetts State Slalom Championship tournament will be held in the Commonwealth. The New England Water Ski Collective is honored to bring

this prestigious competition back to Central Massachusetts, where it will showcase the best water skiers from across the state and surrounding regional area.

How Slalom works  
Slalom skiing is one of the most popular and recognizable disciplines in water skiing. Performed on a single ski, it is the skill that many beginners aspire to master — and what elite skiers make look effortless.

In competition, a slalom course is comprised of six fixed buoys positioned 11.5 meters (37.73 feet) to the left and right of the boat's centerline. The centerline itself

is marked by boat guide buoys spaced 2.1 meters (6.89 feet) apart to ensure precise boat path alignment.

- A successful pass requires the skier to:
- Enter through the starting gates
  - Pass around the outside of all six buoys
  - Exit cleanly through the end gates
- Only after clearing the exit gates is the pass considered complete.

Depending on a skier's category and ability level, rope length begins as long as 18.25 meters (60 feet) and can shorten to an incredibly challenging 9.75 meters (32 feet). After each successful pass, the rope is shortened — increasing the difficulty — while boat speeds can increase up to a maximum of 36 mph depending on division.

As rope lengths shorten and speeds increase, the physical demands grow dramatically. Professional skiers are known to generate cross-course speeds between 60–75 mph across the wake as they accelerate from one buoy to the next.

Final scores are recorded based on boat speed, rope length, and the number of completed buoys. The skier who can complete the most buoys at the shortest rope length and highest speed earns the victory.

Competition will be conducted under the standards of the American Water Ski Association (AWSA), whose official rules govern sanctioned tournament slalom events.

Supporting conservation and accessibility  
Tournament profits will be donated to support conservation efforts and improvements to the grounds at Buffumville Dam, maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

In addition, the New England Water Ski Collective plans to install accessible beach mats at Buffumville Beach this summer to improve shoreline access for individuals with mobility challenges — ensuring more members of the community can safely enjoy the lake.

Built on partnership and community  
The Collective's Slalom/Competition Team has worked diligently to build partnerships with regional ski teams, individual competitors, and the Army Corps of Engineers to bring this championship event to life. The coordination of athletes, officials, volunteers, and site logistics represents months of collaboration.

Led by director Joe Zmetra, the New England Water Ski Collective's competition team is especially excited to see many of its own members compete on home water as they pursue qualification for AWSA Eastern Regionals and Nationals.

Zmetra reflected on the athleticism required in the sport: "Slalom is as much about strength as it is about precision. The skier has to generate incredible power

across the wake, maintain perfect form in and out of their cuts, and carry maximum velocity into each turn. At the buoy, you need the ability to stop on a dime, change direction instantly, and set up your next cut with total control. It's a balance of explosiveness and technique — and when it all comes together, it's an amazing thing to watch."

All abilities — one passion  
The championship represents more than just competition — it reflects the Collective's mission of "All Abilities — One Passion."

"Our team is incredibly excited to bring the Massachusetts State Slalom Championships back to Central Massachusetts," said Leonardo Topa, President of the New England Water Ski Collective. "All three divisions of our organization have worked together to make this event possible, while also supporting our other major initiatives this season — including our Learn to Ski programs and our traveling adaptive ski clinics. This tournament shows how our organization continues to grow while making sure everyone has the opportunity to get out on the water and enjoy the sport we love."

The New England Water Ski Collective is eagerly awaiting the warmer weather as it prepares to begin a busy season that will see its members actively skiing and competing across the New England region.

About the New England Water Ski Collective

The New England Water Ski Collective is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization devoted to making water skiing and water sports accessible to all. Through its Adaptive, Competitive, and Recreational ski teams, the organization works to remove barriers to participation and grow the sport throughout the New England region.

As a nonprofit, the Collective relies on the generosity of donors, community partners, and sponsors to help expand programming, host events, and provide opportunities for athletes of all abilities.

If you are interested in donating to support our Adaptive, Competitive, or Recreational ski teams, please contact our Sponsorship Coordinator, Juliet, at Juliet@NewEnglandWaterSki.org

By supporting the New England Water Ski Collective, you are helping ensure that more individuals — regardless of age or ability — have the chance to experience the thrill and community of water skiing.

For more information about the Massachusetts State Slalom Championships or the New England Water Ski Collective, please contact New England Water Ski Collective at (774) 495-0165 or comp@newenglandwaterski.org.

## Open Sky Community Services earns two Clubhouse International accreditations

WORCESTER — Open Sky Community Services, a nonprofit behavioral health and human services organization, today announced that its Tradewinds Clubhouse and Crystal House Clubhouse have been awarded three-year Clubhouse International Accreditations for adhering to globally recognized benchmarks and providing the best quality clubhouse services possible.

Tradewinds Clubhouse and Crystal House Clubhouse are free employment and vocational rehabilitation programs utilizing evidence-based mental health recovery models for adults. Tradewinds Clubhouse is located at 309 Main St. in Southbridge and serves 15 surrounding communities. Crystal House Clubhouse is located at 55 Lake St. in Gardner and serves 13 surrounding communities. Both Clubhouses are two of 36 members of the Massachusetts Clubhouse Coalition.

"These Clubhouse programs are an exceptional piece of Open Sky's programming and have demonstrated the power of employment to open the doors to recovery and further opportunity for over 30 years," said Open Sky President and CEO Ken Bates. "The Clubhouse International Accreditations signify the dedication of our staff to the recovery of the individuals we serve, as well as the courage and resilience that Clubhouse members demonstrate in their journeys. The accreditations are a remarkable honor and reminder of what is possible when people are given the tools to overcome challenges."

The Clubhouse International site survey is an in-depth, three-day process during which surveyors from strong Clubhouses around the world visit a center and observe

operations. The surveyors also conduct confidential interviews with employees, board members, and persons served. Findings are translated into a formal report, outlining areas of strength and recommendations for improvement in adherence to each of the eight categories of International Standards for Clubhouse Programs.

In the Accreditation Report, Tradewinds Clubhouse was commended for its approach to transitional employment development, educational resources, diverse Advisory Board, support of members and culture of respect and collaboration. Crystal House Clubhouse was recognized for broadening community member outreach, adding new community voices, and providing ample social opportunities to support mental health recovery.

About Open Sky Community Services  
Open Sky Community Services is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency based in Worcester that has been helping individuals in our community achieve more than they imagined possible for over 50 years. The agency provides a wide range of services throughout Central Massachusetts for children, adults and families with mental health challenges, intellectual and developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, brain injury, homelessness and other complex challenges. Open Sky Community Services has more than 1,300 dedicated employees and nearly 150 programs throughout the region, supporting over 8,000 individuals annually. Open Sky is committed to equity and belonging and promotes a trauma-informed, whole-person care culture. For more information, please visit www.opensky.org.





William is a funny, energetic, caring, and incredibly charismatic boy. He has an outgoing personality and warms up to new people quickly — in fact, he's rarely shy and is happy to strike up a conversation with just about anyone. His confidence and natural charm make him a joy to be around. William loves staying active and engaged. He enjoys playing with remote control cars, shooting hoops, building with Legos, and playing board games. He also has a hoverboard that he loves riding, always eager to show off his skills. When he's ready to relax, he enjoys watching TV and cheering on his favorite team,

**William**  
Age 15  
Registration #7297

the New England Patriots — they're at the top of his favorites list! Using his creative mind and working with electronics are also among William's "top things" to do. He enjoys figuring out how things work, building, experimenting, and bringing his ideas to life. With his big personality, caring heart, and curiosity about the world around him, William has so many strengths that make him truly special.

<https://www.mareinc.org/child/22545111574>

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The process to adopt a child from foster care includes training, interviews, and home visits to determine if adoption is right for you. These steps will help match you with a child or sibling group that your family will fit well with. To learn more about adoption from foster care visit [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org). Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) can give you guidance and information on the adoption process. Reach out today to find out all the ways you can help children and teens in foster care.



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# Sheriff's Office successfully brings Random Acts of Kindness initiative to Worcester County

REGION — Sheriff Lew Evangelidis and the Worcester County Sheriff's Office successfully carried out their Random Acts of Kindness Initiative (RAOK), spreading goodwill and encouraging thoughtful gestures during the nationally observed week of kindness, Feb. 16-20.

Throughout the week, Sheriff's Office community teams traveled across the region, distributing more than 2,500 donated goody bags filled with snacks



Courtesy

This year's effort was made possible through the support of CareOne at Millbury, Pepsi of Worcester, M c C a r t y Companies, and Rockland Trust Bank, along with assistance from the Worcester County Reserve Deputy Sheriff's Association. Their generosity provided all 2,500 bags for staff to distribute.

The Sheriff's Office thanks residents, businesses, and community partners for helping make the initiative another success and for continuing to foster a spirit of kindness across Worcester County. The Office hosts community engagement events year-round; to learn more, visit [www.WorcesterCountySheriff.com](http://www.WorcesterCountySheriff.com) or follow the Sheriff's Office on social media for updates.

The WCSO Webster Support Center Staff deliver RAOK bags to Tradewinds Clubhouse in Southbridge.

and bottled water at public locations, offering a visible reminder of the care, connection, and community focus of local law enforcement.

On Thursday, Feb. 19, Evangelidis joined staff in distributing bags throughout the City of Worcester, including a stop at Worcester Regional Airport, where teams shared bags with airport staff and travelers.

The initiative was inspired by the work of the Random Acts

of Kindness toward promoting everyday kindness, which promotes kindness as a means of strengthening communities nationwide. Founded in the mid-1990s amid concerns about rising violence, the organization helped spark a cultural shift

and strengthening community relationships," Evangelidis said. "We were proud to spread positivity throughout Worcester County and remind residents that even the smallest act of kindness can make a lasting difference."

## CCUMC readies for corned beef & cabbage family supper



CHARLTON — Charlton City United Methodist Church is hosting their scrumptious Corned Beef and Cabbage Supper on Saturday, March 21 from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Come and enjoy food and fellowship with friends and neighbors.

Corned beef, cabbage, potatoes, carrots, and turnips, fresh homemade baked soda bread - St Patty's Day cake will be served. Free crafts will be provided for the kids. As always there will

be continuous serving and take-out. \$15 for adults, \$8 for Children six to 12, and children five and under eat free. Maximum \$50 per family. We appreciate reservations. Call the church office at (508) 248-7379 for seating or take-outs. Church is located at 74 Stafford St. in Charlton. Ample parking is available, and the building is handicapped accessible.

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