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Friday, January 30, 2026

Victoria Mulrain, Cole Milgate named SEBRSD 2026 Project 351 Ambassadors



SPENCER — On Saturday, Jan. 17, Victoria Mulrain and Cole Milgate, eighth graders from Knox Trail Middle School, were honored by Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll as Spencer and East Brookfield's 2026 Project 351 Ambassadors at Project 351's Annual Launch and Service Day in Boston. Victoria Mulrain, Cole Milgate, and the Class of 2026 were honored for inspiring an ethic of service and values of kindness, compassion, humility, and gratitude. Project 351 is

a non-profit organization that empowers a youth-led movement for change, powered by an eighth-grade student representing every city and town in Massachusetts.

"As Superintendent of Schools for the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District, I am proud of Victoria Mulrain and Cole Milgate for their exceptional leadership and heartfelt service as Ambassadors in Project 351. Their compassion, dedication, and commitment to building

bridges and serving others embody the values we cherish in our schools and community. Victoria and Cole have inspired us all with their drive to make a positive impact, and their example fills me with hope for the future. On behalf of our district," said Superintendent Paul Haughey. "I thank them for representing us with dedication and for reminding us that together anything is possible."

Saturday's Launch Day honored Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and celebrated a "Revolution of Love". Victoria and Cole

met with more than 450 Ambassadors and Alumni mentors representing the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns to kick off a year of leadership development, unifying service, and enrichment. Since 2011, 5,930 Ambassadors have united across all facets of difference to impact 1.5 million neighbors through service.

"Through Project 351, young leaders from every corner of Massachusetts learn to refine their leadership skills, take on challenges, and work together across different lived experiences to help cre-

ate a better world around them," said Lieutenant Governor Driscoll. "It is always profoundly meaningful to see the impact these eighth graders make in the lives of those most in need across our state. Each of them, in their own unique way, represents what it means to be part of Team Massachusetts, and we're proud to celebrate with them today."

Over a year's term, Ambassadors develop the skills and confidence to create transformative social impact. Guided by

Turn To AMBASSADORS

page A10

*School
District
increasing
pre-school
tuition*

BY JASON BLEAU
CORRESPONDENT

SPENCER — The Spencer - East Brookfield School Committee voted on Jan. 13 to increase pre-school tuition costs to bring their rates in line with other local districts while staying competitive.

After recently conducting an analysis of different pre-school rates in Southern Worcester County, Superintendent Paul Haughey recommended a series of increases that were later amended by the School Committee and increase further for both half-day and full-day slots for local and out-of-district students.

The final vote confirmed an increase for local student half-day slots from \$15 to \$20, as opposed to the superintendent's original proposed increase to \$18, and for out-of-district students from \$15 to \$22.50, as opposed to the superintendent's recommendation to \$20. Full-day slots will increase from \$32 to \$40 for local students and from \$32 to \$45 for out-of-district students, both in-line with the superintendent's requests.

Haughey's recommendations were the result of careful examination of other local rates. Data

Turn To TUITION page A10

Ag Commission to host educational program to address invasive plant species

BROOKFIELD — On Feb. 10, the Brookfield Agricultural Commission will host a program at 6:30 p.m. at the hall at the Brookfield Congregational Church 8 Common Street to educate both farmers and interested landowners on how to address invasive plant species. All are welcome.

Plants like Japanese Knotweed are highly aggressive plant that can damage infrastructure. Multiflora Rose are thorny shrub that out-competes native plants. Common Buckthorn is a shrub that forms dense thickets, displacing native species. These are just a few plants common to Massachusetts. This program looks to identify these and others with ideas to combat them.

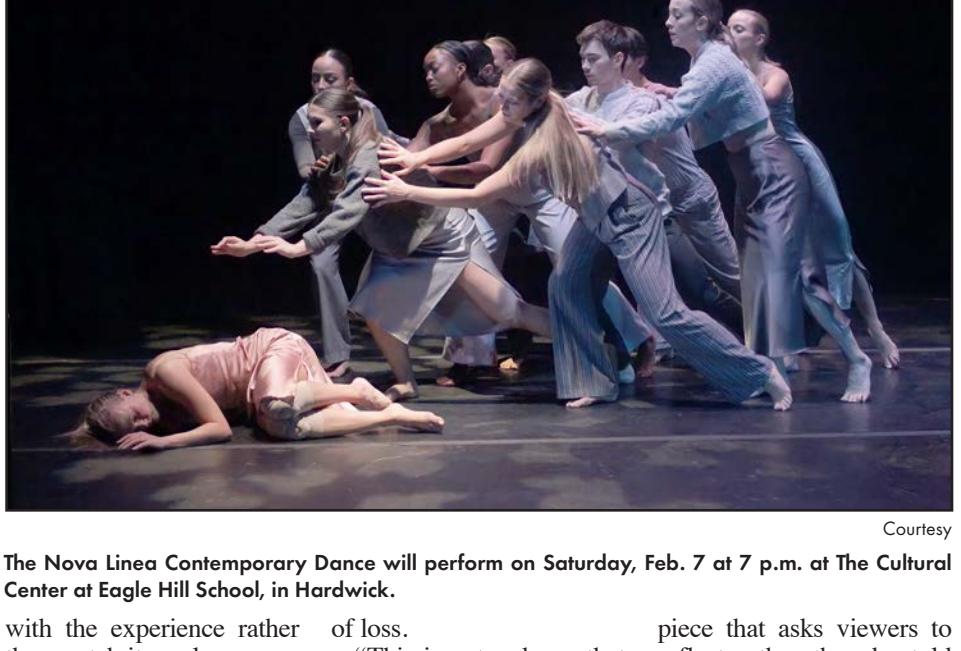
This program is an example of the objectives of local AG Commissions. Under the Right to Farm statute AG Commissions look to increase public awareness of agriculture, and the positive impact it has on the town. Communicate the guiding principles of Right-to-Farm Bylaw. Act as a mediator in disputes. Work in close cooperation with other Town boards and committees to promote agricultural activities. Bring awareness to farms and farmers of federal, state and other programs. Encourage the pursuit of agriculture, promoting agriculture based economic opportunities, and protecting farmlands within the community by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and town agencies.

West Brookfield native returns home for powerful, unconventional dance performance

WEST BROOKFIELD — Betty Gundersen Studio of Dance is proud to announce that alumna Avree Gundersen, a native of West Brookfield, will return to Massachusetts as a featured performer with Nova Linea Contemporary Dance, Wisconsin's premier contemporary dance company, in a compelling full-length performance titled "some wounds never heal."

The performance will take place on Saturday, Feb. 7, at 7 p.m. at The Cultural Center at Eagle Hill School in Hardwick. Tickets are on sale now, priced at \$30-\$35, and are available through The Cultural Center at Eagle Hill School Web site at <https://www.thecenter-ataglehill.org/shows-tickets-buy-tickets>.

Choreographed by Nova Linea Artistic Director Jared Baker, "some wounds never heal" stands apart from traditional narrative dance works. Rather than telling a linear story, the 90-minute performance explores an overwhelming emotional state—grief—inviting audiences to sit



Courtesy

The Nova Linea Contemporary Dance will perform on Saturday, Feb. 7 at 7 p.m. at The Cultural Center at Eagle Hill School, in Hardwick.

with the experience rather than watch it resolve.

The work unfolds in two chapters, separated by an intermission. Senior Company Artist Gracie Plath appears throughout as the grief-stricken human at the center of the piece, anchoring the audience's emotional journey as the ensemble moves around and through her experience

of loss.

"This is not a dance that explains grief—it allows the audience to feel it," said Betty Gundersen, founder and director of Betty Gundersen Studio of Dance. "The honesty of the movement, the pacing, and the emotional restraint make this work incredibly powerful. It's rare to see a full-length contemporary

piece that asks viewers to reflect rather than be told what to feel."

Through physically expressive movement and emotionally evocative imagery, the piece examines how loss can leave us feeling frozen in place and how connection, empathy, and community become

Turn To PERFORMANCE, page A10

Fourth Annual National Baseball Poetry Festival looking to increase student participation

LOCAL POET SERVES AS FESTIVAL AMBASSADOR

WORCESTER — The National Baseball Poetry Contest and Festival is readying for its fourth season, where adults and students write about and celebrate the sport of baseball. The Festival includes two poetry contests, the first for grades 4-12, and the second for adults 18 and older. The adult contest deadline is March 27, and the youth contest deadline is April 17. Entries may be sent in any time before those deadlines. The Festival culminates

May 7-10 in Worcester with a welcome reception, a youth poetry event, an open mic night, two Triple-A baseball games, a fireworks display, and other activities. Prizes will be awarded to 80 poets, 20 in each of the following categories: elementary school, middle school, high school, and adult.

Pamela Gemme is a baseball poet and Festival ambassador who joined the festival poet's committee at its inception. Gemme is

again helping promote the festival, which is the only one of its kind in the nation.

"The aim of this contest is to get students and adults writing poetry on a fun subject that so many love. We are already receiving contest entries from around the country and even from India, Turkey and Nigeria. We also would like to see an increase in entries from Spanish speakers this year. I would encourage student and adult poets to submit a

poem and hopefully join us at Polar Park in Worcester next spring," she said.

According to Festival founder Steven Biondolillo, the National Baseball Poetry Festival is the first-ever festival to unite sports and the fine arts.

"For the youth who make submissions and/or attend the event, the Festival fosters the appreciation of poetry and the fine arts through the lens of base-

ball," Biondolillo said.

gmail.com."

Teachers and parents interested in involving their students can visit www.BaseballPoetryFest.org, where two complete lesson plans and a contest form can be found.

"Please reach out to me directly for more information," encourages Gemme. "I'm happy to again be helping with the contest and Festival and can be reached at pamelagemmepoetry@gmail.com"

The National Baseball Poetry Festival is a project of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and Biondolillo Associates, LLC. Worcester—the birthplace of Ernest Thayer, author of "Casey at the Bat"—is the Festival's permanent home and early-May—which follows National Poetry Month—its strategic place in the calendar.

North Brookfield explores partnership with Heart & Soul

BY JASON BLEAU
CORRESPONDENT

NORTH BROOKFIELD — The town of North Brookfield is pursuing a partnership with Community Heart & Soul and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation that would help the town chart a path for its own future growth.

Community Heart & Soul is a national non-profit that works to help small communities become even stronger and, working with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation, they've pinpointed several towns to be an early focus including North Brookfield. Representatives of both

organizations had already been in early talks with North Brookfield stakeholders and felt the community would be a good fit for their program which would provide coaches to help identify ways to enhance or compliment the character of the town and the people's emotional connection to where they live utilizing input from local officials, residents, and other stakeholders.

Catherine Ingraham White, a coach with Heart & Soul, called it a two-year process that works in phases: identifying what matters most to the community, bringing in different stakeholders to be involved with the discussion, plan-

ning for the "long game" to chart priorities and potential plans for future growth, and helping the town prepare to act on these goals. Heart & Soul would not be controlling this process but rather serving to help North Brookfield work through it themselves with representatives from the community leading the charge.

"Through the partnership with the Greater Worcester Community Foundation they're going to try this as a pilot program and North Brookfield was identified as a place that might be right for it," said White. "You have wonderful people here. There's already a lot of really great work that's going on and through

some of those initial conversations we've got a few folks that are willing to sort of start doing a little bit of that 'getting started' work."

The proposal did spark some debate, with at least one citizen concerned about Heart & Soul's intentions feeling it wasn't a good fit for North Brookfield and asking town officials to seek more information before proceeding. Part of that concern was the potential for affordable housing, which selectmen said was unrelated.

Selectman Jamie Gilman sought to clear up any misconceptions about the partnership.

"The goal here is to help us help ourselves. There's

no agenda other than helping us help ourselves. Nobody is coming into this town and doing any work to help us. Nobody is coming in to do the work for us. Nobody is coming here to give us ideas. This is all home grown. The purpose of this program is to understand what's important to us. They listen, they coach us on ways to get there, they can help with funding to get there, but it's all on us," Gilman said.

He added that the big question has actually been if there are enough people interested in putting work into this to help the town, which has been the subject of the preliminary meetings over the last year.

The program costs nothing for North Brookfield, as the Greater Worcester Community Foundation pays for the coaching, and they would receive a \$10,000 grant that could be used for any sort of community engagement activity in town.

Community Heart & Soul requested that the selectmen have the town administrator write a letter of support that they are aware of the partnership, and they support continuing that work. Selectmen also showed interest in working with Heart & Soul to possibly hold a public forum to further educate the public on the goals of the partnership.

Nominations wanted for Educator & Hero of the Year

PALMER — The Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce, the area non-profit that promotes business, development and tourism within surrounding communities of Hampden, Hampshire, and Worcester counties, is seeking nominations for its 2026 Choice Awards. Nominations are needed in the categories of Community Hero and Educator of the Year.

Nominations can be submitted on the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce official website, QHMA.com through Feb. 13. Online voting for this year's finalists will be open to the public and conducted from Feb. 15 through March 15, also at QHMA.com.

Finalist voting will also include a number of Chamber-member specific categories honoring local non-profits, manufac-

ting and service businesses. All finalists will be honored and the announced at the Choice Awards Dinner on Wednesday, May 6 taking place at the Steaming Tender Restaurant, located at the former historic Palmer Railroad Station site.

"The annual Choice Awards is one of the most distinguished programs the Chamber conducts. It is an honor each year to celebrate a new class of extraordinary individuals who make our region so special. Last year, we received more than 22,000 finalist votes, which is a testament to how deeply our communities appreciate those who make a difference in our lives every day," said James Przybeck, Chief Executive Officer of the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce.

The criteria to nominate are:

Community Hero of the Year

An individual (citizen, resident, veteran, first responder) who has gone above and beyond via a single outstanding act within the last 12 months, or a series of contributions over an extended period for the betterment of their community. The individual must reside or have performed their act or work within the Quaboag Hills 15 member communities.

Educator of the Year

An individual who has positively impacted the school (public, regional, private or independent) and the students for which they work. The individual must reside, or the school for which they work must be located within the Quaboag Hills 15 mem-

ber communities.

About the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce

Established in 1978 and headquartered in Palmer, the Quaboag Hills Chamber of Commerce's purpose is to advance economic growth, interests and tourism for our members through policies, programs and development in the Quaboag Hills region, including the fifteen towns of Belchertown, Brimfield, Brookfield, East Brookfield, Hardwick, Holland, Monson, New Braintree, North Brookfield, Palmer, Spencer, Wales, Ware, Warren, and West Brookfield.

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TO THE EDITOR:

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OR send to Spencer New Leader

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Leicester KOC hosting family dinner

LEICESTER — Leicester Knights of Columbus, located at 90 Mannville St., will have a Family Dinner on Wednesday, Feb. 11 at 6 p.m.

The menu features choice of Pulled-pork Mac 'n cheese or Baked Fish. Cost is \$15, and includes salad, dessert and coffee.

Call Don at 508-615-8434 or email at ohno7g7@yahoo.com by Monday, Feb. 9 for reservations. All are welcome.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

JANUARY 30 TO FEBRUARY 6

Sunday, Feb. 1
Spencer — Finance Committee Meeting — 7 p.m., Spencer Town Hall, 157 Main St.

Monday, Feb. 2
Brookfield — Cultural Council Meeting — 6:30 p.m., Brookfield Town Hall, 6 Central St., Banquet Hall.

East Brookfield — Board of Health Meeting — 6 p.m., Memorial Town Complex, 122 Connie Mack Drive (Board of Health Office).

East Brookfield — Public Library Trustees Meeting — 6 p.m., Memorial Town Complex, 122 Connie Mack Drive (Library).

Tuesday, Feb. 3
Brookfield — Council on Aging Meeting — noon, Brookfield Town Hall, 6 Central St., Banquet Hall.

Leicester — Planning Board Meeting — 6 p.m., Leicester Town Hall, Meeting Room 3, 3 Washburn Square.

Spencer — Board of Health Meeting — 6:30-9 p.m., Spencer (event listing through town calendar).

Wednesday, Feb. 4
Brookfield — Library Trustees Meeting — 6 p.m., Merrick Public Library, 2 Lincoln St.

Brookfield — Planning Board Meeting — 6:30 p.m., Brookfield Town Hall, 6 Central St., Banquet Hall.

SPENCER ALMANAC

REAL ESTATE

BROOKFIELD

None.

EAST BROOKFIELD

None

LEICESTER

\$586,000, 20 Leela Ln, Wheeler, Lawrence A, to Bacon, Caroline, and LaB 2nd, Daniel.

\$497,000, 3 Flagg Dr, Chmura, Meredith E, to Higgins, Nicholas, and Higgins, Sadesha.

\$430,000, 21 Warren Ave, Laincz Ft, and Podmostka, Linda G, to Dierenzo, Anthony J.

\$235,000, 2 Shady Ln, Ta, Xuan T, to Fam, Ehab.

\$91,000, 2 Shady Ln, Pham, Melinda, to Ta, Xuan.

\$40,000, 20 Broad St, Brooks Paul N Est, and Colby, Melissa A, to Robinson, Clifford.

NORTH BROOKFIELD

None

SPENCER

\$525,000, 86 Jolicoeur Ave, Schneider, Mark S, and Coca, Eliana, to Peters, Spencer.

\$75,000, 35 Marble Rd, Lussier Enterprises LLC, to Morgan, Gail M, and Lempicki, Bernard A.

WARREN

\$540,000, 142 Walkeen Kozol Rd, Fountain Ft 2023, and Fountain, John F, to Martin, Michael G, and Barry-Martin, Crystal S.

\$473,000, 2195 Main St, Martin, Michael G, and Barry-Martin, Crystal S, to Bissonnette, Jeffrey T.

WEST BROOKFIELD

None

Hearts for Heat to host 18th Annual Spaghetti Dinner

NORTH BROOKFIELD — North Brookfield Hearts for Heat is hosting its 18th Annual Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser on Saturday, Jan. 31 from 5-7 p.m. in the North Brookfield Elementary School Cafeteria. The dinner is \$12 per person with a cap of \$36 for a family of four or more. Takeout available. Tickets are only available at the door.

Sponsored with the Hayden Masonic Lodge and supported by Hannaford Supermarket, this is truly “community helping community.” Big ticket raffles include: Celtics team signed basketballs, WooSox

Family Pack-tickets for four and other paraphernalia, Marks of Asgard Tattoo \$100 gift certificate Local gift certificates donated so far include: Angel Nails, Bike House Brewery, Bogey Lanes, Boston Bruins signed puck, City of Smoke, Connect Restaurant, Inishowen Farms, JARS Café & Bakery “Tea for Two,” Jim’s Pizza, Joy of Beans, NB Liquors, Salem Cross Inn, Second Chance Animal Shelter, Shaman’s Closet, Springfield Thunderbird Hockey tickets, Strandz Hair Salon, Subway, and Whitco. The Door Prize is a Mr. Coffee 10-Cup Optimal Brew Coffeepot.

The Otters will provide musical ambiance all evening. Students from the NBHS National Honor Society and Valley View School will assist. The dinner’s snow date is the following Saturday, February 7th. Tickets are only available at the door.

NB Hearts for Heat is a 501(c)3 charitable organization to help North Brookfield residents in need of emergency home heating assistance for Oil, Propane, Natural Gas, Electric, Pellets, or Cord Wood. 100% of donations are used for fuel purchases. We have assist-

ed 345 families since 2009.

Donations can be mailed to NB Hearts for Heat, P.O. Box 44, North Brookfield, MA 01535. North Brookfield Savings Bank will match the first \$3000. Thank you also to Monson Savings bank for their \$2000 support.

To access the printable 2025-26 application, visit <https://www.heartsforheat.org/NorthBrookfield/index.html>.

P.E.T. of the Week

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Troop 163's Alison Regan earns Eagle Scout rank



Alison Regan

BROOKFIELD — Alison Regan of Brookfield, a member of Scouting America Troop 163 of Sturbridge, has earned the rank of Eagle. She passed her Eagle Board of Review on Dec. 11.

For her Eagle project, Regan led the design, construction, and installation of four nature signs on the Trek Sturbridge trails behind Tantasqua Regional Junior High School. The signs highlight local plants, trees, birds, and mammals, and show how to identify them.

Regan, currently a senior at Tantasqua Regional High School, joined Scouts when she was in eighth grade. She has served her troop in a variety of roles, including librarian, patrol leader, assistant senior patrol leader, and senior patrol leader. She was inducted into the Order of the Arrow, Scouting America's honor society, where she earned brotherhood, and has earned National Outdoor Achievement awards in camping and aquatics. Last summer she was named Rookie of the Year staff member at Treasure Valley Scout Reservation, where she worked on the waterfront as a lifeguard. Outside of Scouting America, Alison also earned a Girl Scout Silver Award, holds leadership positions in her school's drama club, show choir, and student council, and is on the school swim team. She loves the outdoors, especially climbing trees, and wants to one day hike all forty-eight of New Hampshire's 4,000-foot mountains. She plans to attend college next year for engineering.

Troop 163 is a Scouting America troop for girls ages 11-17. The troop is based in Sturbridge but has members across southern Worcester County. The aims of the troop are character development, citizenship, fitness, and leadership. To learn more about scouting or Troop 163, email troop163sturbridge@gmail.com.

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DPHS band invites community to annual spaghetti dinner

SPENCER — Looking for a date night and music? The David Prouty High School Band is putting on the Fourth Annual Spaghetti Dinner. The dinner and music event will be held at Mary Queen of the Rosary Parish in Spencer on Feb. 7 at 5:30 p.m.

DPHS Jazz band and concert band will be performing music from The Lion King, Earth, Wind & Fire, Moana, and more!

Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m., and the show begins at 6:45 p.m.

Ticket Information: Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. Tickets can be purchased ahead of time from a David Prouty Jazz Band or Concert Band musician. Tickets can also be purchased at the door.

Looking forward to sharing the amazing talent with our friends and families.

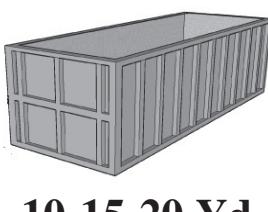
For further updates, please visit the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District.

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Age 10
Registration #8685

Gabriel, who prefers to be called Gabe, is a kind, fun-loving young boy with a delightful sense of humor and a vivid imagination. He has a natural curiosity and an engaging personality that draws people in right away.

Gabe enjoys building and creating with Legos, blocks, and Magna-Tiles, but what he truly loves most is playing with his Matchbox cars and trucks. He also enjoys spending time on his tablet, playing video games, watching TV, and exploring the outdoors. His interests reflect both his creativity and his energetic spirit.

Gabe often shines as a leader among his peers. He is confident, friendly, and eager to connect with others, happily striking up conversations and asking thoughtful, endless questions. His enthusiasm, openness, and playful nature make him a joy to be around and easy to engage with.

<https://www.mareinc.org/child/21183284104>

If you're at least 18 years old, have a stable source of income, and room in your heart, you may be a perfect match to adopt a waiting child. Adoptive parents can be single, married, or partnered; experienced or not; renters or homeowners; LGBTQ+ singles and couples. As an adoptive parent, you won't have to pay any fees, adoption from foster care is completely free in Massachusetts.

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. 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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FRANK G. CHILINSKI
PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER

BRENDAN BERUBE
EDITOR

• Friday, January 30, 2026

VIEWPOINT

OPINION AND COMMENTARY FROM SPENCER, LEICESTER AND THE BROOKFIELDS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Trump MAGA massive, deadly assault on our United States democracy

To the Editor:

This assault didn't begin yesterday. Many think it began with Congressman Newt Gingrich's in the 1990s and his threat to shut down the government if he and his supporters didn't get what they wanted. Then it continued with various the billionaire backed very conservative movements like the Tea party.

From there, with similar funders, it went with Mitch McConnell and the Federalist Society's efforts to remake our court system along very conservative partisan Republican lines.

Then, in 2015, came Donald Trump. He was then and continues an entirely self-centered, crooked, ruthless, wealth seeking, fully biased, ignorant, without morals, mentally damaged person. He also has become a gifted entertainer and has developed the ability to fire up anger and fear among his followers and funding from benefitting billionaires.

Because Republicans didn't deny him the nomination and because of our electoral system gave him the majority of the election votes even though 4 million more people voted against him, he became

President.

Given who he is, he performed badly and was twice impeached. However because of some great and patriotic conservatives in his administration, the damage was to a degree, controlled.

Losing the 2024 re-election by seven million votes, for the first time since our Civil War, Trump led an insurrection in which, he and his followers tried to take over government. This time our United States democracy, while under serious threat, survived thanks to, among others, Mike Pence.

Having learned from their mistakes, Trump and his followers planned well both for winning the election and cementing their plans on how they would not govern our United States, but dictate it.

This is why our friends across the world have become furious, and why our government feels free to kill its citizens.

What we should do about it?

KEVIN KANE
SPENCER

Lanterns Along Main Street

LANTERNS
ALONG
MAIN
STREET

By CHARLES

There is a certain sound that tells you winter is finally losing its grip: the slow, steady drip from the edge of a roof. It is not dramatic. It does not announce itself loudly. But once you hear it, you know something important is happening.

Around here, late winter has its own personality. The snowbanks shrink one cautious inch at a time. Mud season starts knocking on the door. The sun hangs around a little longer in the evenings, giving us just enough light to feel hopeful without quite letting us relax yet. It is an in-between season, and I have come to appreciate it more as the years go by.

When I was younger, I wanted winter gone the moment it arrived. I counted down the days until spring with the impatience of someone waiting for a bus that never seems to come. Now, I find myself paying closer attention to the small signs of change. A patch of grass reappearing along the edge of the driveway. A bird returning to the feeder that I have not seen in months. The first time I leave the house without my heaviest coat and realize, halfway down the steps, that I do not actually need it.

These small moments do not make the weather report, but they shape our moods more than we realize. They remind us that no season lasts forever. Not the cold ones, and not the easy ones either.

Living in small Massachusetts towns, we are used to adapting. We shovel, salt, scrape, and repeat. Then, without much ceremony, we switch gears. Out come the rakes and the garden gloves. The snow brush gets tossed in the back of the clos-

et, and the lawn chairs quietly reappear on porches. We do this every year, almost automatically, yet it always feels a little new.

There is something comforting about that rhythm. It gives structure to time. It teaches patience. It also teaches humility, because no matter how many winters we survive, the next one

still has the final say.

My wife likes to open the windows on the first mild day, even when the air is still a little sharp. She says the house needs to "remember what fresh air feels like." I usually grumble about the cold breeze, but I secretly enjoy it. It smells like change. It sounds like the start of something better.

We talk a lot about big goals and fresh starts this time of year. But I think the real reset happens quietly. It happens when we take that first walk without worrying about ice. When we linger outside a little longer after work. When we notice ourselves breathing easier, not just because the air is warmer, but because the season is shifting in our favor.

Late winter teaches a useful lesson. You do not need everything to be perfect to move forward. You just need enough light to see the next step.

So if you find yourself listening to that drip from the roof or watching the snow retreat from the corners of your yard, take a moment to appreciate it. It is not just water falling to the ground. It is time moving on, slowly and steadily, the way it always has.

And that steady movement, even when it is subtle, is often exactly what we need most.

SEND US YOUR NEWS!!!



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.

Local business owners: Don't overlook retirement plans



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If you're a local business owner, you're juggling many priorities: growing revenue, managing expenses, supporting your team and planning for your own future. What if one tool could help with all these goals?

A workplace retirement plan might be that solution and can, directly or indirectly, offer benefits that extend beyond simple savings.

Double the tax advantages. Starting a retirement plan can deliver immediate tax advantages. For the business, employer contributions are tax-deductible. And as a participant in your company plan, your pretax salary deferrals are excluded from income taxes; your investments within the plan are tax-deferred until distributed. Many plans now offer Roth options that allow tax-free withdrawals in retirement.

Local businesses may also qualify for federal tax credits that help offset startup costs, employee education expenses and plan administration fees. Additional credits may be available for auto-enrollment features and employer contributions made during the plan's first five years.

A competitive edge in hiring. In today's labor market, offering a retirement plan can differentiate your business from competitors and help improve employee retention.

Many plans also provide access to financial education tools and resources, helping your employees make informed decisions about saving, investing, and planning for retirement. This support can lead to greater employee satisfaction and productivity, contributing to a positive work environment for your business.

More flexible than state-sponsored options. If you live in a state requiring an employee retirement program, you might be considering a state-sponsored plan. While these programs can provide a starting point, they typically offer fewer investment options, lower contribution limits and limited design flexibility.

Establishing your own workplace retirement plan lets you customize features for your business needs to control administrative costs, set contribution limits and offer employees a wide range of investment options. This added control in plan design can lead to better outcomes for your business and your employees.

Reducing a hidden risk in your own retirement planning. Business owners often have as much as 80 percent of their net worth tied up in their businesses, according to the Exit Planning Institute. While that demonstrates commitment to success, it also creates significant financial risk to the owner.

Relying solely on a future business sale to fund your retirement can be precarious. Market shifts, timing challenges or limited buyer interest could derail those plans. By building personal assets through your employer-sponsored retirement plan, you can gain financial flexibility and reduce the risk of having your retirement lifestyle depend entirely on one event.

Getting started. With various retirement plan options available, determining which one fits your business best can feel overwhelming.

A qualified financial advisor can help you navigate these decisions, explaining the trade-offs between different plan types and identifying which option best suits your unique situation. They can also help you understand eligibility requirements and ensure the plan you choose aligns with your business goals and personal financial objectives.

Starting a workplace retirement plan represents an investment in your future, your employees, and the long-term success of your business.

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@edwardjones.com.

EDITORIAL

The quiet power of the local library

In towns like Spencer, Leicester, and the Brookfields, the library is easy to overlook because it rarely demands attention. There is no flashing sign, no urgent siren, no ribbon-cutting every week. Most days, the building simply sits there, dependable as a mailbox, waiting for whoever needs it.

That steadiness is exactly the point.

A good public library is one of the few places left where you can walk in without needing to buy something, sign up for a membership, or prove you belong. You can come in with a question, or a problem, or a restless kid on a long afternoon, and you can leave with something useful. Sometimes it is a book. Sometimes it is a quiet hour to fill out a form, print a document, or get work done when home is too loud. Sometimes it is simply the feeling that there is still a corner of town life set aside for learning and calm.

There is a lot of talk these days about "community," usually in the abstract. But libraries are community in its most practical form. They are where toddlers learn to sit still for a story, where students find a place to study that is not a kitchen table, where job seekers print resumes, and where older residents read the paper and keep a familiar routine. They offer a bridge between generations without making a big production out of it.

And libraries do all of this while adapting to a world that keeps changing. They have become technology lifelines for people who do not have reliable internet, updated devices, or the confidence to troubleshoot a stubborn screen. They have become navigation centers for modern paperwork, from online applications to basic services that used to be handled face-to-face. Even for those who are comfortable online, it is reassuring to know there is a staffed, local place to turn when something becomes confusing, or when the stakes feel too high to risk a mistake.

In small towns, that kind of help matters. It keeps people from falling through cracks that are not always visible until you are the one standing over them.

Libraries also do something else, quietly and consistently: they protect attention. In a time when so much of life is built to distract, the library remains one of the last public spaces designed for focus. You can read without interruption, work without being watched, and think without being pushed to scroll. For kids and teenagers, that is more valuable than we sometimes admit. For adults, it can feel like a rare kind of relief.

Of course, none of this happens by accident. Libraries need budgets, planning, and staff support. They need trustees and town officials willing to treat them as essential infrastructure, not as an optional amenity. They need residents who show up, not only as patrons but as people who pay attention when decisions are being made about hours, staffing, and long-term upkeep.

The good news is that library support is one of the simplest ways a community can invest in itself without turning it into an argument. A strong library benefits families, seniors, students, and everyone in between. It makes a town easier to live in. It makes it easier to grow up here, raise a family here, and age here.

In the end, the library is not about nostalgia, and it is not about resisting modern life. It is about giving modern life a steady local anchor. The doors open. The lights are on. The help is there. And in a world that can feel louder by the day, that kind of dependable, public welcome is worth protecting.

Leicester Democratic Town Committee to hold 2026 Democratic Caucus

LEICESTER — The Leicester Democratic Town Committee (LDT) will hold its 2026 Democratic Caucus on Monday, March 9, at the Leicester Public Library, located at 1136 Main St., Leicester.

The caucus will begin promptly at 6 p.m., with doors opening at 5 p.m. Registration will open at 5:30 p.m. and close at 6:15 p.m. All eligible Democrats are encouraged to arrive early to ensure timely registration and participation.

Democratic caucuses are an important part of the party's grassroots process, allowing registered Democrats to participate in the selection of delegates and alternates to Democratic conventions and to engage directly in party governance at the local level.

Participants must be registered Democrats in the Town of Leicester and meet all eligibility requirements as outlined by the Massachusetts Democratic Party. Same-day party registration may be available in accordance with party rules.

The caucus location is ADA accessible. Individuals requiring other aids are encouraged to contact the Leicester Democratic Town Committee in advance at ldtcmass@gmail.com so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

The Leicester Democratic Town Committee welcomes community members who are interested in civic engagement, democratic participation, and helping shape the future of the Democratic Party in Leicester and across the Commonwealth.

For additional information or questions regarding the caucus, please contact the Leicester Democratic Town Committee at ldtcmass@gmail.com or other auxiliary aids, are encouraged to contact the Leicester Democratic Town Committee in advance at ldtcmass@gmail.com so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

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For additional information or questions regarding the caucus, please contact the Leicester Democratic Town Committee at ldtcmass@gmail.com.

Berthiaume announces local office hours

REGION — State Rep. Donnie Berthiaume and Chief of Staff, Donna, and Senator Peter Durant's office invites Constituents and town officials to meet them to express any concerns, ideas, or issues that they may need assistance with. Please feel free to contact Donna if you would like a private meeting. 774-402-4742

Wednesday, Feb. 11 — In the Town of West Brookfield, at the Senior Center 11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 11 — In the Town of Brookfield at the Town Hall, 12:30 — 1:30 p.m.

Thursday, Feb. 12 — Town of North Brookfield — Senior Center 11 a.m.- noon

Wednesday, Feb. 18 — In the Town of Leicester at the Senior Center, 9 — 9:45 a.m.

Wednesday, Feb. 18 — In the Town of Spencer, at Howe Village, 10 — 11 a.m. - With Tammy Ruda from Rep Marsi's Office.

Wednesday, Feb. 18 — In the Town of East Brookfield at the Senior Center 11:15 a.m. — noon

WEEKLY POLICE BLOTTER

Spencer

The Spencer Police Department reported the following arrests from Jan. 1-20.

Shawn J. Jackson, age 40, of Spencer was arrested on Jan. 5 in connection with a warrant.

Douglas Arthur Dunbar, age 62, of Worcester was arrested on Jan. 8 for Operating a Motor Vehicle after suspension of license and in connection with multiple warrants.

Alec B. Reynolds, age 30, of Shrewsbury was arrested on Jan. 10 for Disorderly Conduct, Vandalization of Property, and Assault & Battery on a Police Officer.

Gerald David Courtney, age 51, of Spencer was arrested on Jan. 19 for Possession of a Class A Drug, operating a motor vehicle after suspension of registration, and operating an Uninsured Motor Vehicle.

Leicester

The Leicester Police Department reported the following arrests during the week of Jan. 15-21.

An individual whose identity has been withheld from publication received a summons in lieu of arrest on Jan. 15 for Assault & Battery.

An individual whose identity has been withheld from publication received a summons in lieu of arrest on Jan. 18 for Operating a Motor Vehicle after suspension of license and a Marked Lanes Violation.

An individual whose identity has been withheld from publication received a summons in lieu of arrest on Jan. 20 for Unlicensed Operation of a Motor Vehicle and for transporting an Unsecured or Uncovered Load.

An individual whose identity has been withheld from publication received a summons in lieu of arrest on Jan. 20 for a Number Plate Violation to Conceal ID, operating an Unregistered Motor Vehicle, a Passing Violation, and a Marked Lanes Violation.

BROOKFIELD — A new community storytelling group, The Story Exchange, is forming in Brookfield and will hold its organizational meeting at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 10 at the Merrick Public Library Annex, 18 Common St., Brookfield.

The Story Exchange is designed for individuals interested in telling and developing true, personal stories, shared aloud in a supportive, structured environment. The group emphasizes storytelling craft, focused listening, and constructive feedback, and welcomes participants of all experience levels. Stories shared during meetings are expected to be true, personal narratives, typically five to seven minutes in length, focused on a single moment or experience rather than a full life history.

The group will be facilitated by Joe Klimavich, an accredited public relations consultant and adjunct professor of communication at Worcester State University, who has taught effective speaking and communication courses for many years. While facilitated, The Story Exchange is intended to be largely member-driven, with participants shaping discussions, stories, and feedback through shared experience.

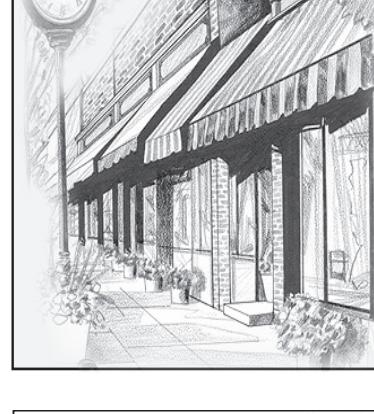
If you've lived a little, noticed a lot, and you're curious about shaping real moments into meaningful, well-told stories, you'll feel at home with this group.

"As a public relations professional and educator, telling stories - my own and those of my clients - has always been central to my work," said Klimavich. "Inspired by programs like The Moth and Stories from the Stage, The Story Exchange grew out of a belief in the power of true stories, told well, and the value of listening as much as sharing."

Participation will be limited to six to eight storytellers per session. There is no cost to participate, but advance registration is required. Interested individuals should send a brief introductory email to joe.klimavich@gmail.com and indicate whether you are interested in sharing a story during the first meeting.

Following the organizational meeting, The Story Exchange will meet on the first Tuesday of each month at the Merrick Public Library Annex.

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Springfield College recognizes Dean's List students

SPRINGFIELD — Springfield College Recognizes Dean's List Students for the 2025 Fall Semester.

Springfield College has named Avianna Gregoire from Spencer to the dean's list for academic excellence for the 2025 fall semester.

Gregoire has a primary major of Health Science / Pre-PA.

Springfield College has named Peyton Knott from Leicles- ter to the dean's list for academic excellence for the 2025 fall semester.

Knott has a primary major of Health Science / Pre-OT.

Springfield College has named Isabelle Russell from W Brookfield to the dean's list for academic excellence for the 2025 fall semester.

Russell has a primary major of Health Science / Pre-PT.

Springfield College has named Margaret Stevens from W Brookfield to the dean's list for academic excellence for the 2025 fall semester.

Stevens has a primary major of Pre-Prof Athletic Training.

Springfield College has named Julianna Torres from Rochdale to the dean's list for academic excellence for the 2025 fall semester.

Torres has a primary major of Health Science / Pre-PA.

The criteria for selection to the Dean's List are as follows: The student must have completed a minimum of 12 credit hours of graded coursework for the term, exclusive of "P" grades. The student must not have any incompletes or missing grades in the designated term. The student must have a minimum semester grade average of 3.500 for the term. Student must not have been barred from Dean's List due to disciplinary action.

Area residents named to Dean's List at University of New England

BIDDEFORD/PORTLAND, Maine — Makenzie Lipski and Gabrielle Soter of Spencer have been named to the University of New England's Dean's List for the fall semester 2025. Dean's List students have attained a grade point average of 3.3 or better out of a possible 4.0 at the end of the semester.

The University of New England is Maine's largest independent university, with two beautiful coastal campuses in Maine, a one-of-a-kind study-abroad campus in Tangier, Morocco, and an array of flexible online offerings. In an uncommonly welcoming and supportive community, we offer hands-on learning, empowering students to make a positive impact in a world full of challenges. We are the state's top provider of health professionals and home to Maine's only medical and dental colleges, a variety of other interprofessionally aligned health care programs, and nationally recognized programs in the marine sciences, the natural and social sciences, business, the humanities, and the arts. Visit www.une.edu.

Cullen West named to Dean's List at University of Maryland Global Campus

ADELPHI, Md. — Cullen West of Charlton was named to the Dean's List for the fall 2025 term at University of Maryland Global Campus. To be eligible for the honor, a student must complete at least six credits during the term, earned a grade point average of at least 3.5 for the term, and maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.5 at UMGCC.

University of Maryland Global Campus was founded more than 75 years ago specifically to serve the higher education needs of working adults and military service-members. Today, UMGC is the largest provider of post-secondary education in Maryland and continues its global tradition with online and hybrid courses, more than 175 classroom and service locations worldwide, and more than 135 degrees and certificates backed by the reputation of a state university and the University System of Maryland. For more information, visit umgc.edu.

Area residents named to dean's list at Quinnipiac University

HAMDEN, Conn. — Molly Ledbetter of Leicester and Carly Donohue of Spencer were named to the dean's list for the Fall 2025 semester at Quinnipiac University:

To qualify for the dean's list, students must earn a grade point average of at least 3.5 with no grade lower than C. Full-time students must complete at least 14 credits in a semester, with at least 12 credits that have been graded on a letter grade basis to be eligible. Part-time students must complete at least six credits during a semester. Names followed by an asterisk denotes with honors.

About Quinnipiac University

Quinnipiac is a private, coeducational institution located 90 minutes north of New York City and two hours from Boston. The university enrolls 9,700 students in more than 100 degree programs through its Schools of Business, Communications, Education, Computing and Engineering, Health Sciences, Law, Medicine, Nursing and the College of Arts & Sciences. Quinnipiac is ranked 51st in The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse "2026 Best Colleges in the U.S." and is also recognized by U.S. News & World Report and The Princeton Review's "The Best 391 Colleges." The university is expanding innovative programs for both traditional and adult learners and developing dynamic corporate partnerships. Quinnipiac recently completed a significant capital expansion on its main campus, including a state-of-the-art new School of Business and an interdisciplinary science and innovation hub. For more information, please visit qu.edu. Connect with Quinnipiac on Facebook and Instagram and follow Quinnipiac on X @QuinnipiacU.

QCC receives \$148,000 for program to support adults with disabilities

WORCESTER — Quinsigamond Community College has received a \$148,993 grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to support its Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education (MAIPSE) program. MAIPSE programs provide adults with significant disabilities, ages 18 to 22, with integrated access to higher education.

QCC's MAIPSE program provides resources to students, including textbooks, laptops and peer support. Peer mentors assist with classroom navigation, social engagement and completing coursework assignments. The funding also supports presentations and speakers on topics such as neurodiversity.

"This investment benefits students in the program, but also the campus community because we are all receiving education about disabilities," said Director of Student Accessibility Services & Assistive Technology Kristen Proctor. "Community colleges are perfect for MAIPSE because having all students belonging and learning together parallels the mission of QCC and embeds inclusion into the fabric of the college."

After partnering with seven local schools for referrals, the MAIPSE program has grown to more than 20 students, with signs of continued growth and demand, according to Proctor.

"Sometimes, you don't know when you have assumptions and biases about students who have more significant disabilities. This program helps people understand that the limitations we put on people might not be needed," said Student Accessibility Services Coordinator Cassandra Estey.

Many students in the MAIPSE program have been in self-contained classrooms throughout the majority of their lives. Being in a QCC classroom offers an integrated setting and room for growth. Staff who work with MAIPSE students have noticed an increase in their communication skills, especially when interacting with non-disabled adults in the community. Estey noted that these interactions can improve the communication skills of non-disabled adults as well, especially those coming directly from high school.

Estey has witnessed several students find success after the MAIPSE program, by enrolling at QCC as fully matriculated students or going on to obtain employment in areas they might not have considered before completing the program. One such student gained employment at Assabet Valley Collaborative after gaining interest and skills from a psychology course.

For more information on QCC's MAIPSE program, visit www.QCC.edu/support/specialized-support/student-accessibility-services.

Samaritan's Purse celebrates 12.2 million Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts

REGION — Samaritan's Purse is celebrating a successful season after collecting 12.2 million Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts in 2025, sharing the love of Jesus with children in need around the world.

The milestone reflects the generosity of millions of shoebox packers helping to fill shoebox gifts with toys, school supplies and personal care items. Across the U.S., the project collected 10.9 million shoebox gifts in 2025. Combined with those collected from partnering countries, the ministry is now sending over 12.2 million shoebox gifts to children worldwide, including those whose lives were turned upside down by Hurricane Melissa, a category 5 Jamaica.

opportunity to remind boys and girls around them," said Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse. "We are so thankful for the generosity of every person who has given to this project. These gifts are bringing joy and the hope of the gospel to children around the world."

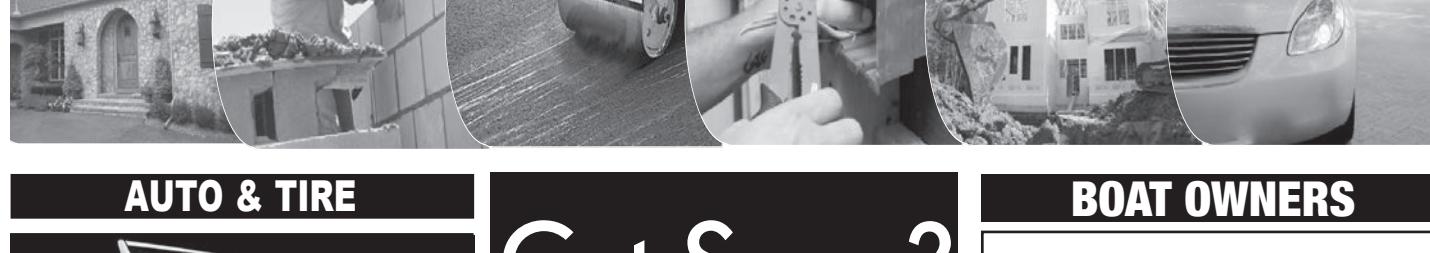
box gift is the first gift they have ever received. It is a tangible expression of God's love, offering hope to children in war, poverty, disease and disaster. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 170 million shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries.

tions are closed until National Collection Month in November, but individuals can participate year-round by packing a shoebox at itanspurse.org/buildonline. These shoeboxes are sent to the world's hardest-to-reach areas in the world—slums, or steep mountainsides. Individuals who are interested in getting involved year-round can also be found at itanspurse.org.

Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, seeks to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world and, together with the local church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 244 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries and territories.

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Brookfields Lions Club accepting scholarship applications

NORTH BROOKFIELD — The Brookfields Lions Club is now accepting applications for its annual scholarship program, according to club president Bill Cass.

Each year, the club awards a scholarship of up to \$1,000 to a graduating senior in each of the club's member communities, Cass said. Recipients of the 2026 Brookfields Lions Club scholarship awards will be announced in June.

To qualify for consideration, applicants must live in one of the member communities -- Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, West Brookfield, and New Braintree -- and submit an application before their school's spring break. The application must include the student's class rank and be signed by the school's guidance director.

The application form is now available for download on the club's website at brookfieldslionsclub.org/scholarships. The completed form should be mailed to the scholarship selection committee care of Brookfields Lions Club, Scholarship Committee, P.O. Box 128, North Brookfield, MA 01535.

For additional information, please contact the Brookfields Lions Club at brookfieldslionsclub@gmail.com, or visit the Club's Facebook page at [facebook.com/BrookfieldsLionsClub](https://www.facebook.com/BrookfieldsLionsClub).

As the world's largest, youngest and most active service organization, the mission of Lions Clubs International is to empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace, and promote international understanding. Members of the Brookfields Lions Club are dedicated to service and support in the communities of Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, West Brookfield, and New Braintree.

Upcoming events at Richard Sugden Library

SPENCER — The Richard Sugden Library invites the community to a pair of upcoming programs.

“New England Ghosts” with Jonah Knight will be held Monday, Feb. 2 (snow date: Feb. 9) from 6 – 7 p.m. This PG-13 storytelling magic show features one story per state along with magical effects. The stories range from 1778-2002 and include locations to help attendees plan a road trip. It will be held at the Richard Sugden Library, Spencer. This program is funded in part by a grant from the Spencer Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

Doodle with the Tunes will be held at the Richard Sugden Library, Spencer, Thursday, Feb. 12 from 6 – 7 p.m. Come doodle as we get inspired by an improv jazz performance by Wilhelm on electric bass guitar. All ages are invited.

Brookfield Council on Aging hosting seminar on thinking ahead

BROOKFIELD — The Brookfield Council On Aging invites the community to a seminar, “Something to Think About: Planning Ahead, Being Prepared,” on Tuesday, Feb. 10 at 10:30 a.m. Lunch will be served.

Pre-sign up is required by e-mailing seniors@brookfield-ma.us, or you may drop by in person Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, 10 a.m.-noon at the Brookfield Congregational Church, 8 Common St.

Ayala of North Brookfield named to Regis College Dean's List

WESTON — Regis College today recognizes Serenity Ayala, of North Brookfield, whose academic excellence and commitment to learning have earned them a place on the fall 2025 Dean's List.

To qualify for the Dean's List, students must earn a GPA of 3.5 or higher. First-year students qualify with a GPA of 3.25 or higher.

“Earning recognition on the Dean's List reflects the discipline, curiosity, and perseverance students bring to their academic work,” said Mary Erina Driscoll, PhD, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. “At Regis, learning is not just about mastering coursework but about developing the intellectual rigor and sense of purpose that will guide students long after graduation.”

Founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph nearly a century ago, Regis College educates students to lead with integrity, purpose, and compassion. Through an inclusive and innovative learning community, Regis prepares graduates to build meaningful careers and make a positive impact in the world.

Workshop13 highlights local musicians with Singer Songwriter Series

WARE — Workshop13 is excited to highlight seven local and regional musicians in the second session of their Singer Songwriter Series. Musicians will include Dan Frost, Tasteless Jack, Dave Herrera, Carly Lara, and featured artist Seth Newton. This event takes place in Workshop13's Grand Hall at 13 Church St., Ware, on Saturday, Jan. 31. Doors open at 6 p.m., and the performance begins at 7 p.m. Tickets are priced on a sliding scale and are available at www.workshop13.org.

Enjoy photo ops, meet and greets, food for purchase (free popcorn), and a cash bar. The performance will feature sound design by Brian Jyringi and be hosted by Amanda Meli and MC'd by Kevin Wherry. Singer-songwriters will share their original songs and the stories behind them, “in the round” style. This performance format brings a group of singer-songwriters together sharing the stage, with each artist delivering songs one after another. After intermission, enjoy a special featured performance by Seth Newton followed by a powerful second round, a group curtain call, and a community meet-and-greet with all performers.

Seth Newton is an American singer songwriter who's been active for decades, performing internationally in well-known music circuits throughout the globe. Known for his strong, uniquely dynamic four octave vocal range and ethereal atmospheric rock songwriting style, this modern-day vagabond delivers a live experience that resonates long after the final note is sung!

About Workshop13

Workshop13 is a dynamic center where arts, culture, and community converge—expanding access to the arts and nurturing creativity and self-expression in our rural region. For more information, visit workshop13.org, or call 413-277-6072.

University of Hartford students named to Dean's and President's Lists

WEST HARTFORD, Conn. — The University of Hartford is pleased to announce that 2,327 students have been named to the Dean's List and President's List for the fall 2025 semester.

The Dean's List recognizes students achieving superior academic standing. The requirement, with some exceptions, is a grade point average of at least 3.0 and no grade below C.

The President's List recognizes a select group of students reaching the highest level of academic standing. To be placed on the President's List, students must maintain a GPA of at least a 3.75 and receive grades of C or better.

Among those recognized are:

Hannah Collette of Leicester - Dean's List and President's List

Collin Harrington of Leicester - Dean's List and President's List

Patrick Harrington of Leicester - Dean's List and President's List

Casey Macaruso of Leicester - Dean's List

Janelle Sefah of Spencer - Dean's List

Alex Carter of W Brookfield - Dean's List and President's List

Congratulations to all our students on their hard work and academic success!

The University of Hartford blends raw passion with emerging talent, offering intentional preparation across six career-focused schools and colleges so every student can thrive. Located on a 350-acre campus neighboring Connecticut's capital city and positioned midway between New York City and Boston—the University is home to approximately 4,300 undergraduate and 1,700 graduate students from 42 states and 53 countries. Here, students are guided to discover their place, their people, and their purpose.

Local student earns President's List recognition at Norwich University

NORTHFIELD, Vt. — Norwich University is pleased to announce that Ashley Parker, of Spencer, has earned President's List honors for the Fall 2025 semester. Founded in 1819, Norwich University is recognized for its emphasis on experiential education and leadership development.

President's List recognition is awarded to full-time undergraduate students who achieve a semester grade point average of 4.0, acknowledging sustained academic achievement and dedication to scholarly success.

About Norwich University

Norwich University is a diversified academic institution that educates traditional-age students and adults in a Corps of Cadets and as civilians. Norwich offers a broad selection of traditional and distance-learning programs culminating in baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Norwich University was founded in 1819 by Captain Alden Partridge of the U.S. Army and is the oldest private military college in the United States of America. Norwich is one of our nation's six senior military colleges and the birthplace of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). www.norwich.edu

Music & Movement at the Merrick Public Library in Brookfield

BROOKFIELD — Every Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., join Julie at the Merrick Public Library in Brookfield for songs kids know and love! Stretch, move, sing, and dance, all while developing early literacy skills through music and rhythm! Recommended for ages five and under, but all ages are welcome. Drop in—no registration necessary. This program is sponsored by the Jeppson Memorial Grant and the Friends of the Merrick Public Library.

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Courtesy

Heart of New England, Scouting America Class of 2025 Eagle Scouts.

Annual Eagle Scout Recognition Dinner celebrates achievements of young leaders

WORCESTER — Heart of New England Council, Scouting America proudly hosted the Annual Eagle Scout Recognition Dinner at the Hogan Campus Center at Holy Cross College. This prestigious event honored the remarkable achievements of the newest class of Eagle Scouts, the highest rank attainable.

The evening was filled with inspiring stories of dedication, leadership, and community service. Distinguished guests, including local dignitaries, community leaders, and proud family members, gathered to celebrate the hard work and commitment of

these exceptional young individuals.

What it means to be an Eagle Scout

Becoming an Eagle Scout is a significant milestone that represents years of dedication, perseverance, and personal growth. To earn this rank, a Scout must demonstrate proficiency in various skills, complete a series of merit badges, and lead a community service project that benefits their local area. The journey to Eagle Scout fosters leadership, responsibility, and a strong sense of community.

Eagle Scouts are recognized for their ability to set and achieve goals, their commitment to ethical and moral values, and their readiness to take on challenges. This rank is not only a testament to their past achievements but also a foundation for future success in their personal and professional lives.

Among the local Scouts who attended this year's ceremony were:

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For more information and to apply, contact Wally Connor, Facility/HR Manager at (508) 885-8700 Ext. 550 or by email: wally@spencerabbey.org

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Troop 101, Auburn
Ames Alvarado

Troop 1, Groton
James Esten, Timothy Yafrate

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Arthur Johnson, George woODS

Troop 106, Grafton
Caden Cacciapouti, Austin McCormick

Troop 107, Grafton
Bennett Bredford, Raghav Dave, Jackson Margwarth, Jeremy Soma Reddy

Troop 7219, Grafton
Morgan Gervais, Kathryn Shultz

Troop 118, West Brookfield
Ayden Mulcahy, Stephen Lanne, Logan Rodrigues

Troop 131, Sutton
Benjamin Furno

Troop 243, Sutton
Nathanael Furno, Austin Gaska

Troop 161, Sturbridge

Christopher Hendrick, Robert Powell, Jonah Scherer

Troop 7163, Sturbridge
Shannon Finan, Isabella McGrady, Addison Oxman, Alison Regan

Troop 238, East Brookfield
Noah Clark

Troop 273, Dudley
Riley Lepage, Charles Rollins III

Troop 316, Douglas
Justin Dooner

Troop 338, Charlton
Daniel Harris, Zackery Kelleher, Adam Rydlak

About Heart of New England Council, Scouting America Heart of New England Council is a 501(c) (3) organization that serves about 4,000 boys and girls in more than 60 communities in central Massachusetts. We provide the nation's foremost program that teaches young people character, leadership, and citizenship through fun and exciting adventures for the entire family. We foster a culture of diversity and inclusion that makes it enriching to participate, volunteer and work in the Scouting program. Visit www.hnscouting.org for more information.

Cornerstone Bank supports South Worcester families with donation to Jeremiah's Inn

WORCESTER — Cornerstone Bank has donated \$5,000 to Jeremiah's Inn to support the ongoing operations of its Nutrition Center, one of the largest food pantries in Central Massachusetts. This contribution builds on the bank's history of giving to the organization, including previous donations of \$5,000 in 2023 and 2024 for the Nutrition Center and additional support for the organization's recovery program and food drives.

This year's donation will help Jeremiah's Inn meet the growing demand for nutritious food among low-income residents in South Worcester, where food insecurity has reached unprecedented levels.

In 2024, Jeremiah's Inn served more than 32,000 individuals, a 30 percent increase from the previous

year and a 167 percent increase over the past two years. At the same time, the Worcester County Food Bank reduced food distributions to the pantry by 30 percent, creating a critical gap between supply and demand. Cornerstone Bank's continued support ensures that children, seniors and families who rely on the Nutrition Center have access to essential meals and resources.

"Supporting our neighbors in times of need is a core part of our mission," said Cornerstone Bank CEO Todd Tallman. "We are proud to continue our partnership with Jeremiah's Inn and help ensure local families have access to the food they need to grow and thrive."

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 or call 800-939-9103.

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EcoTarium hosts Second Annual Free Community Day, bringing USA Luge Team to Worcester



WORCESTER — The EcoTarium welcomed more than 1,100 excited visitors on Saturday, January 24, 2026, for a Free Admission Community Day, made possible through the generous support of Norton | Saint-Gobain. Families and guests of all ages took advantage of a full day of hands-on science, nature exploration, and a special luge experience with the USA Luge Team, making it a highlight of the weekend.

"The luge is a high-speed physics lesson on gravity,

acceleration, and aerodynamics", said EcoTarium President and CEO Noreen Smith. "With the help of the USA Olympic Luge Team and Norton | Saint-Gobain, visitors were able to experience the excitement of the sport and meet some of the athletes who inspire us all."

"Partnerships like ours with Norton | Saint-Gobain help us expand how young people see science, technology, engineering, and math," said Katie Chappell, Deputy Director of Museum Operations at

the EcoTarium. "Working together with the USA Luge team allows us to highlight the many ways STEM connects to real-world experiences like winter sports and the Olympics, while also introducing youth and families to career paths they may not have previously considered."

"We're incredibly excited to sponsor the Norton Luge Challenge with our partners at the EcoTarium and the USA Luge team. This event captures the creativity, teamwork, and

engineering spirit behind winter sports, and it's a fun way to share our enthusiasm as we look ahead to the upcoming Winter Games," said Melanie Bonsu, Community Relations Manager, Saint-Gobain Abrasives.

The Norton Luge Challenge gave visitors the opportunity to try out the sport of luge under the expert guidance of the USA Luge Team international medalists and coaches. Participants used easy-to-maneuver plas-

tic sleds in a safe, slope-side setting. Helmets were provided to ensure a fun and safe experience for all. Adding to the high-energy atmosphere, the USA Luge DJ kept the excitement going with upbeat music throughout the event.

During the Free Admission Day sponsored by Norton | Saint-Gobain, visitors also enjoyed full access to the museum's interactive science exhibits, educational programming, and planetarium shows, making for an unforgettable day of learning about science, nature, and outer space.

About The EcoTarium

The EcoTarium is New England's leading museum of science and nature, an indoor-outdoor experience dedicated to inspiring a passion for science and nature in visitors of all ages. Founded in 1825 as one of the oldest natural history museums in the country, the EcoTarium has been a leader in informal science and nature education for 200 years. Highlights of the 45-acre Worcester campus include the science center with three floors of interactive exhibits; Alden Planetarium; Science Discovery programs; extensive outdoor nature trails, wildlife zoo, and habitats; a seasonal railroad with the Worcester Railers Explorer Express Train; and an extensive outdoor play exhibit, Nature Explore®. The

EcoTarium is located at 222 Harrington Way, Worcester, MA 01604. Parking is free, and Museum admission tickets may be purchased online. The EcoTarium is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

About Saint-Gobain Abrasives

Saint-Gobain Abrasives offers powerful, precise, user-friendly solutions, which enable customers to cut, shape and finish all materials in the most complex and challenging applications. By working closely with end-users and grinding expert partners, Saint-Gobain Abrasives designs and provides customized solutions to secure the best option for performance, cost and safety.

Leveraging its global manufacturing presence, Saint-Gobain Abrasives serves its customers locally through its structured sales operations in over 27 countries, employing over 10,000 people.

About USA Luge

Founded in 1979, USA Luge is the national governing body for the Olympic sport of luge in the United States. USA Luge recruits, develops, and supports athletes in their pursuit of competitive excellence while promoting the sport nationwide. To learn more, visit usaluge.org

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AMBASSADORS

continued from page A1

high school Alumni mentors, Ambassadors mobilize schools and communities in statewide service campaigns that address the causes and consequences of poverty and expand equity and equality of opportunity. Project 351's calendar of social impact includes Spring Service in support of Cradles and Crayons, 9.11 Tribute Service in support of Home Base, and Fall Service, which seeks to eradicate hunger through support of hundreds of

hometown Food Pantries.

The 16th Annual Launch Day included a morning celebration at Faneuil Hall with Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, the afternoon of transformational service, and the Service Celebration at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Day one of the Ambassador year was one of inspiration and impact – more than 27,000 neighbors served in partnership with 14 nonprofit organizations, including La Colaborativa, Cradles to Crayons, Hope & Comfort, Home Base, Give n' Glow, and the

Wonderfund, Ambassadors addressed critical issues including hunger, educational opportunity, childhood poverty, mental health and wellness, and care for military and veterans.

"With joy, we welcome our 16th Class of bridge-builders and change makers!" said Carolyn Casey, Project 351's Founder and Executive Director. "At a time of increased division and polarization, these eighth-grade leaders demonstrate the unlimited potential of a Commonwealth united in common cause. We are

proud of our Ambassadors' compassionate leadership and excited for a year of unity, hope, and transformative social change."

Project 351 is a social change movement powered by young leaders of vision and values. We build a more just, inclusive, and equitable world by developing change-makers with compassion, courage, and skill. Founded in 2011 in partnership with Governor Deval Patrick, Project 351 engages eighth graders representing Massachusetts' 351 cities and towns in a five-year Leadership Continuum

for skill development, civic engagement, career-readiness, and transformative social impact. Since 2011, 5,930 eighth-grade Ambassadors have united across all facets of diversity to positively impact more than 1.5 million neighbors. As they serve, Project 351 leaders cultivate the values of kindness, empathy, and inclusion; address the causes and consequences of poverty; progress social and racial justice; and strengthen a statewide ethic of youth service and advocacy.

Project 351 is a nonprof-

it organization powered by the generosity and engaged leadership of partners including Boston Celtics Shamrock Foundation, Anonymous, John Hancock, Blue Cross Blue Shield, The Quin Impact Fund, Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, and individuals, families, educators, and Alumni from across the state. We are powered by fierce conviction in Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community and the wisdom, compassion, and leadership of the 35ONE generation.

PERFORMANCE

continued from page A1

essential to healing. The

work encourages audiences to confront their own experiences with grief and resilience, finding meaning in shared understanding.

Professional dance workshop for local students

In addition to the public performance, Nova Linea Contemporary Dance

tell whether a waiting list would be a normal occurrence or how many seats would be available in any give class.

"It depends, year to year. It's not a set number of half-day slots and full-day slots. It really depends on the enrollment and what families ask for when they're enrolling their child," she said, noting that full-day slots were more coveted than half-day.

The approved increases will go into effect for the next school year and represent the first such increase in the Spencer-East Brookfield District in more than 15 years.

will offer a one-day student workshop at Betty Gunderson Studio of Dance on Sunday, Feb. 8 from 9 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. Open to dancers ages seven and up, the workshop will include individual technique classes taught by company members.

The cost for the full-day workshop is \$140 per student. Advance registration is required. A separate registration form must be completed for each dancer at <https://bit.ly/4bF5xaI>

"This is such a wonderful and rare opportunity for young dancers to work closely with professional artists from across the country," Gunderson said. "Experiences like this help students understand not just how dance looks, but how it communicates."

About Nova Linea

Contemporary Dance

Nova Linea

Contemporary Dance is Wisconsin's premier contemporary dance company, known nationally for its emotionally provocative performances and its mission to present accessible,

relatable stories through dance. The company's work emphasizes human connection—both onstage and within the communities where it performs.

The dance company is dedicated to creating a positive environment where artists feel valued, collaborating with and supporting youth dance studios, and aiding in the resurgence of live theater. Through these efforts, the company seeks to cultivate future audiences for dance while shar-

ing the profound emotional and cultural impact of live performance. To learn more about Nova Linea Contemporary Dance, visit <https://novalineadance.com/>.

About the Betty Gunderson Studio of Dance

The Betty Gunderson Studio of Dance, located at 79 Wickabog Valley Rd., West Brookfield, offers a full range of classes designed to nurture local students at every age and stage. Additional information can be found at <https://bettygundersendance.com/>, by calling (508) 867-8925, or by emailing bgstudiodance@gmail.com.

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Docket No. WO26P0036EA

CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION

Estate Of:

Theresa L Kowal

Date of Death: 09/01/2025

To all interested persons:

A Petition for S/A - Formal Probate of Will with Appointment of Personal Representative has been filed by **Marcia Toomey of Reading MA** requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

The Petitioner requests that:

Marcia Toomey of Reading MA be appointed as Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve on the bond in unsupervised administration.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: **10:00 a.m. on the return day of 02/17/2026**.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS**UNIFORM PROBATE CODE (MUPC)**

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration.

WITNESS, Hon. Kathryn M. Bailey, First Justice of this Court.

Date: January 16, 2026

Stephanie Fattman,

Register of Probate

January 30, 2026

starting at 6:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as can be heard:

Minor Site Plan and Special Permit**Applicant: East Brookfield & Spencer Railroad, LLC/ George Bell; Owner:****Holston Land Co. Inc, Location:****22 Podunk Pike, Spencer, MA****Assessor's Map R21-39. The applicant is looking for a Minor Site Plan****under section 7.4.6 (Minor Site Plan)****and a Special Permit under section****4.8.9 (Solar Photovoltaic Generating****Installations) of the Spencer Zoning****Bylaw to install a thirty-five foot wide****by eighteen foot wide opened wall****canopy with a****free-standing solar array. The prop-****erty is located within the Industrial (I)****zoning district.**

January 29, 2026

February 6, 2026

February 13, 2026

At the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting to be held on Tuesday February 10, 2026, in the McCourt Social Hall of Memorial Town Hall, 157 Main Street, Spencer, MA, a public hearing will be held on the following items starting at 7:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as can be heard:

Notice of Public Hearing – Spencer**Zoning Board of Appeals****Variance Permit Finding– Applicant:****Brendan O'Rourke, Owner: Eliza-****beth Rafferty O'Rourke Rev Trust:****Location: 39 Wilson Ave, Spencer****Assessor's Map U29-43. The applic-****ant is seeking a Variance under****section 5.2.6 (Detached Accessory****Structure) of the Spencer Zoning****Bylaw to build a retaining wall in the****front setback for additional parking.****The property is in the Lake Residen-****tial (LR) district.**

January 23, 2026

January 30, 2026

Town of Spencer Conservation Commission PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the requirements of the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act, MGL c. 131, s. 40 and the Spencer Wetlands By-Law:

Chris Hansen has filed an ANRAD with the Spencer Conservation Commission for Wetland Delineation located at **Lot 3 & Lot 4 I Caper Road, Spencer, MA**.

Richard Gaffney has filed an NOI with the Spencer Conservation Commission for Wetland Delineation located at **21 Sherman Grove, Spencer, MA**.

Thalita Nataly Dernulc has filed an RDA with the Spencer Conservation Commission to replace porch posts and remove a retaining wall located at **11 Dale Street, Spencer, MA**.

Applications can be reviewed at the Office of Development and Inspectional Services, Town Hall. A public hearing regarding these filings will be held by the Spencer Conservation Commission in McCourt Social Hall at Town Hall, 157 Main Street, on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at which time

all persons having an interest may be present or call in remotely to participate. Conservation Commission meetings open at 6:15 p.m.

Mary McLaughlin

Mary McLaughlin, Chairwoman

January 30, 2026

NOTICE OF MORTGAGEE'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE

By virtue and in execution of the Power of Sale contained in a certain mortgage given by Akyeampong Associates, LLC to New Silver Lending LLC dated January 18, 2024 and recorded with the Worcester County (Southern District) Registry of Deeds in Book 70108 at Page 82, as affected by an assignment from New Silver Lending LLC to NS Pool LLC dated January 23, 2024 and recorded with the Worcester County (Southern District) Registry of Deeds in Book 70229 at Page 345, of which mortgage the undersigned is the present holder by assignment, for breach of the

conditions of said mortgage and for the purpose of foreclosing the same will be sold at Public Auction at 12 o'clock P.M. on the 20th day of February 2026 at

27 Maple Street in Spencer, Worcester County, Massachusetts, all and singular

the premises described in said mortg-

age,

To wit:

Property Address is: 27 Maple Street, Spencer, MA 01562

A certain parcel of land with the buildings

thereon and all the privileges and appurte-

nances thereto belonging situated in

Spencer on the east side of Maple Street

and being shown on Plan of House Lot

in Spencer dated April 23, 1946 by E. A.

Chamberlin, said plan recorded in Plan

Book 139, Plan 4 and being more partic-

ularly bounded and described as follows:

BEGINNING at the most westerly corner

of the parcel herein described on the

easterly line of said Maple Street;

THENCE N. 40° East by said easterly

line of Maple Street eighty-one (81) feet

to a point at a stone wall;

THENCE S. 82° East by a stone wall and

land of William Forrest one hundred

five (105) feet to a point at another stone

wall;

THENCE Southwesterly by said wall one

hundred (100) feet to a point;

THENCE N. 83° West continuing by said

wall and part of the way eighty (80) feet

to the place of beginning.

BEING the same premises conveyed to

the Mortgagor by deed recorded here-

with.

Premises to be sold and conveyed sub-

ject to and with the benefit of all rights,

rights of way, restrictions, easements,

covenants, liens or claims in the nature

of liens, improvements, public assess-

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titles, tax liens, water and sewer liens

and any other municipal assessments



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* June Cazeault * Laurie Sullivan* Lori Johnson-Chausse * William Gilmore II * Maureen Cimoch * Bryan Pelletier



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On the shores of Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg



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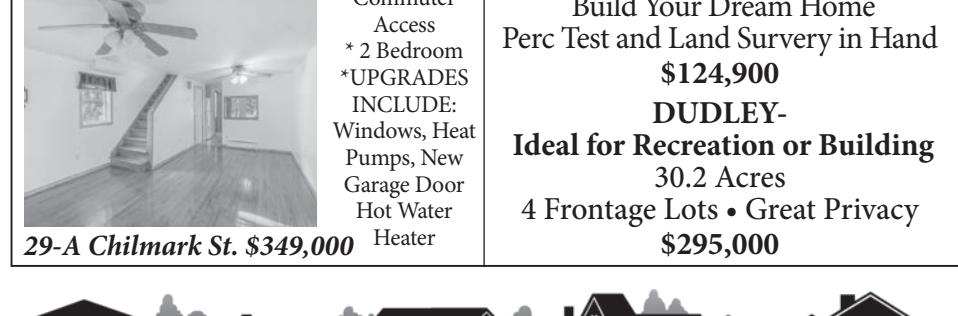


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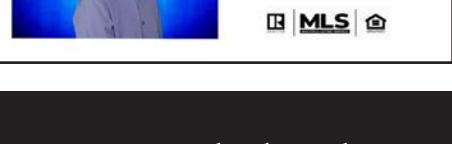
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DPHS students hit high note at Central MA District Concert

SPENCER — David Prouty High School is proud to announce that students Bradyn LaFountain and Jackson Rutkiewicz represented the district this past weekend at the prestigious Central Massachusetts District Concert.

After a rigorous audition process, LaFountain and Rutkiewicz joined 181 of the most talented young vocalists from across the region to perform in the District Chorus. The event followed an intensive week of rehearsals, during which the students dedicated numerous hours to perfecting a challenging repertoire under the guidance of guest conductors.

"Bradyn and Jackson performed beautifully and represented DPHS proudly," said Kelsey Forfa, Music Director at David Prouty High School. "They are great examples of what DPHS stands for, and I am beyond proud of their love and dedication to music."

"The performance showcased the high caliber of the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School District's arts programming and highlighted the commitment of its student-athletes and performers," said Superintendent of Schools Paul Haughey. "On behalf of our entire regional school district, many congratulations to Bradyn and Jackson on their outstanding performances at the Central Massachusetts District concert... We could not be any prouder of what you are doing out in the community, representing our high school and district so well."

About David Prouty High School Located in Spencer, David Prouty High School is committed to academic excellence and the personal growth of its students through diverse extracurricular and fine arts opportunities.

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Saint Joseph School seventh graders win MLK poetry honors at Worcester State University



Courtesy

Saint Joseph School seventh grade students Abby Rubin and James Miranda proudly display their winner certificates after being honored in Worcester State University's 32nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Poetry Contest on Jan. 17.

WEBSTER — Two Saint Joseph School seventh graders were recognized as winners in Worcester State University's 32nd Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Poetry Contest, centered on this year's theme: "Voices of the Future: Bold Roots, Brave Leaders."

Abby Rubin (daughter of Mark and Agnes Rubin of Webster) and James Miranda (son of Thiago and Alyssa Miranda of Douglas) were selected as two of only 25 winners from hundreds of entries submitted by students in Grades 7-12 from Worcester Public Schools and schools in the Diocese of Worcester.

The poetry contest invited students to reflect on Dr. King's enduring legacy of equality, justice, and nonviolence, asking how young people will use their voices to continue his dream. Entries were

reviewed by the MLK Jr. Poetry Committee, a panel of educators, university students, and community members. Judging criteria included creativity, originality, style, and connection to the theme.

Saint Joseph School's Grades 6-8 Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Karen Lefebvre, encouraged students to participate. In mid-December, the school was notified that Abby's winning poem, "Dr. King's Words," and James' winning poem, "Equality for All," were selected.

James writes, "We show his dream matters by speaking up, even when our voices shake a little."

Abby emphasizes peaceful courage, writing, "He taught us how to use love not violence, to show how you will fight with words not fists."

Rubin and Miranda and their parents attended the award ceremony with Saint Joseph School Principal Mrs. Beth Boudreau and Mrs. Lefebvre on Saturday, Jan. 17 at Worcester State University, where each student received a certificate from Congressman James McGovern and a \$50 Amazon gift card.

"Abby and James captured Dr. King's message in a way that feels both hopeful and urgent," said Boudreau. "Their words reflect what we encourage every day at Saint Joseph School: to live with faith, treat others with respect, and take responsibility for making the world more just."

Saint Joseph School congratulates both students on the honor and applauds the many student participants who used poetry to share their voices and leadership.

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