

STURBRIDGE VILLAGER

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Thursday-Friday, August 6-7, 2026

Mid-year economic review presented in Sturbridge



STURBRIDGE — An economic review for Sturbridge was presented to the Sturbridge Planning Board at their July 27 meeting. This review cov-

ered various topics, including retail occupancies and vacancies, consumer spending on meals and lodging, new construction, corporate expansions and

promoting Sturbridge as a visitor attraction.

Meals and hotel spending

Meals spending in 2025 was \$86 million, with current spending for 2026 at \$42 million, which should be in line with 2025. Meals spending in 2024 was \$80 million, so the 2025 spending was an 8 percent increase. Starting in 2023 seasonal meals spending fluctuations shifted to be consistent through all seasons with no Spring Summer peaks with Winter Spring off peak spending. Since 2023 annual hotel revenues have been an average of \$21 million. Hotel revenues at Mid Year 2026 are \$7 million, which is an 8 percent decrease from Mid Year 2025. Hotel revenues in Sturbridge contain strong seasonal highs and lows from Winter/Spring to Summer/Fall.

Retail occupancies and vacancies

There are 131 small

retail and tourism related businesses in Sturbridge. Fifty-two of those, or 40 percent, are food and bev-

erage related. Specialty shops are 24 percent or 31 businesses. Health/wellness and personal

care comprise 24 percent, or 32 businesses. During

Turn To **ECONOMIC** page **A10**

Running for each other

Southbridge mother-son duo returns to Falmouth

SOUTHBRIDGE — The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA) is pleased to announce it will be returning to compete in the 54th Annual ASICS Falmouth Road Race with Team BIA-MA on Sunday, Aug. 16. Team BIA-MA will have a total of 29 runners for this iconic race, which is an important annual fundraising and awareness event for the organization.

Both from Southbridge, Austan Bellefeuille and his mom, Karen Dmohowski, will hit the Falmouth start line together this year as mother and son: Bellefeuille, a brain injury survivor who sustained his injury in 2013 and is returning to the team for the second time, will run alongside Dmohowski, who first discovered BIA-MA online in the aftermath of her son's injury and has since become a passionate advocate, returning for her fifth year and second time running side-by-side with Austan; together, they embody the heart of Team BIA-MA — survivor and caregiver, showing up for a community that has shown up for them, while Karen also looks forward to reuniting with teammates from years past.

"We are excited and thankful for this incredible team of inspiring runners who are



determined to accomplish their personal milestones while raising awareness for brain injury," said BIA-MA Chief Executive Officer Nicole Godaire. "Each runner brings a powerful personal connection to brain injury, which makes their dedication even more meaningful and helps shine a light on the impact brain injury has on individuals, families, and communities."

Though the Falmouth Road Race is not intended to solely be a charity race, the "Numbers for Nonprofits" Program allows nonprofit organizations like BIA-MA to both fundraise and partic-

ipate. To support any of the Team BIA-MA runners in the 2026 ASICS Falmouth Road Race, please visit the team fundraising page. More information can also be found at biama.org/falmouthroadrace.

The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA) is the only organization in the state dedicated to improving the lives of those affected by brain injury while reducing its incidence and impact through advocacy, education, prevention, research, and support. For more information, visit www.biama.org.

Ruth Wells Center spotlights life and work of Michel Merle

SOUTHBRIDGE — The Ruth Wells Center for the Arts, 111 Main St. in Southbridge, is excited to present a retrospective of the life and works of Michel Merle. The opening reception will be held Saturday, Aug. 8, 4-8 p.m. The galleries will then be open throughout the month Saturday and Sunday noon to 4 p.m. Please join us to celebrate his works, meet the artist and share refreshments in this historic setting. All are welcome.

The artwork of Michel Duncan Merle serves as a vibrant and provocative crossroads where legendary artistic heritage meets decades of technical mastery.

A native Parisian born in 1937, Merle spent more than three decades as a Professor of Art at Worcester State University in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he taught generations of students to view creation through an alternative or philosophical lens.

Artistic practice and innovation run deeply in his veins: Merle is the son of artist and gallery owner, Ligoa Duncan, the grandson of artist and philosopher Raymond Duncan, and the great-nephew of modern dance pioneer and virtu-

Turn To **MERLE** page **A1**

Charlton Lions wrap up 2025-2026 year

CHARLTON — The Charlton Lions Club recently finished a busy spring season of serving their community.

In April, the Club participated in Charlton's Earth Day Clean-Up by collecting debris along Bond Road and, with The Overlook's Tree Advisory Committee, distributing 100 free sweet gum trees to Charlton residents who helped with the town clean-up. (The trees were contributed by Bartlett Tree Experts.)

In May, they repaired their bulletin sign board located at Ted's Liquor Store at the junction of Routes 20 and 31. The sign is once again available for rent to post your message. Contact: Dr. Carole Duquette at kikibo0808@gmail.com.

Also in May, the Club conducted a toll-road fundraiser at the intersection of Route 31 and North Main Street when they raised \$889 for the Scholarship Fund.

And that month three \$1,000 scholarships were awarded to local secondary school seniors: Nicholas E. Jalbert, son of James and Renee Jalbert, graduated from Bay Path Regional



New officers of The Charlton Lions Club take the oath of office for their service during the 2026-27 Lions year at their June meeting at The Overlook.

Vocational Technical High School and plans to study political science and go on to law school. Nina V. Julian graduated from Shepherd Hill Regional High School and will major in accounting and finance. She is the daughter of Jason and Sheri

Julian. Sarah Miller will study nursing. A graduate of Shepherd Hill, she is the daughter of David and Lauren Miller. All scholarship recipients are Charlton residents and were very active in their school and community, embodying the

Lions commitment to service.

In June, the following officers were installed to serve in the 2026-27 Lions year: President - Ed Ciesluk 1st VP - Patrick Husereau 2nd VP - Kathy Gallant 3rd VP - Gerry Wolfe

Recording Secretary - Dana Gould

Reporting Secretary - Rhonda Tetrault

Treasurer - Dennis Taylor Lion Tamer - Diane LaLumiere

Tail Twister - Carole

Duquette Membership Chair - Kathy Gallant

Marketing Chair - Cynthia Young

Immediate Past Pres. - Dana Gould

2nd Immediate Past Pres. - Dennis Tucker

Director (2-year term 2026-28) - Michel Piergallini

Director (2-year term 2026-28) - Debra Ciesluk

Director (1-year term 2026-2027) - Karen Gauthier

Director (1-year term 2026-2027) - Helene Doucette

In July and August, The Charlton Lions Club is one of several sponsors of the summer concert series at The Overlook. Two concerts remain on the agenda: Tuesday, August 4 - The Reminisants (oldies); and Tuesday, August 11 - The Luster Kings (early rock, country, blues). Both concerts begin at 6 p.m. on the Tower Common at The Overlook and are free and open to the public.

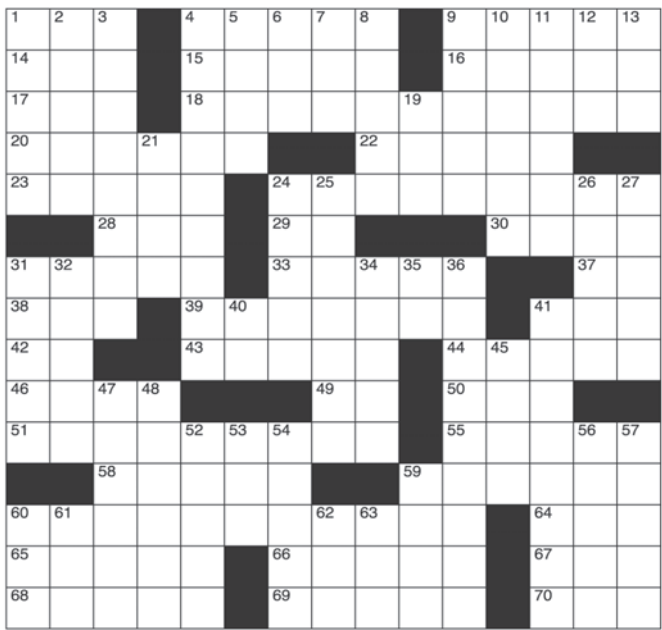
For more information about these programs and other projects of The Charlton Lions Club, please, visit thecharltonlions.com.

Badger & Nault coming to Jacob Edwards Library

SOUTHBRIDGE — The Jacob Edwards Library presents Badger & Nault live in concert on Thursday, Aug. 13, 6:30-7:30 p.m. This event is free and is open to the public. Badger & Nault are an old-time acoustic duo based in central Massachusetts featuring banjo, accordion and vocal harmonies. Freddy Badger is an old-time banjo player, guitarist, and singer; in the American/Western European roots music tradition. While he is a native of Ashland, based on his musical style you could easily believe he is from somewhere in the Appalachian Mountains circa 1920.

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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Midway between south and southeast
- 4. Fathers
- 9. Wine grape
- 14. Al Bundy's wife
- 15. Derived from ammonia
- 16. Venezuelan state
- 17. Interest rate
- 18. Experts
- 20. Vascular tissues
- 22. Smooth and glossy
- 23. Administrative region in S. Korea
- 24. One from Damascus
- 28. Special interest group
- 29. It cools your home
- 30. Oh, God!
- 31. Intestinal pouches
- 33. Men
- 37. Twelfth star in a constellation
- 38. Former CIA
- 39. Arrange in grades of size
- 41. A baglike structure in a plant or animal
- 42. "The Great Lakes State"
- 43. Having earlike appendages
- 44. Momentarily stop
- 46. Ancient kingdom
- 49. Of I
- 50. White clerical vestment
- 51. Songs to one's beloved
- 55. Charges
- 58. Computer application originator
- 59. A place to dock a boat
- 60. One guided by reason
- 64. Slang for cigarette
- 65. Sailboats
- 66. "Jerry Maguire" actor Zellweger
- 67. Screen type
- 68. Country legend Haggard
- 69. Puts together in time
- 70. When you anticipate arriving

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Involuntary muscular contraction
- 2. Eastern US transit agency
- 3. Leaves a place
- 4. Cease to participate
- 5. Current units
- 6. Cease to exist
- 7. General's assistant (abbr.)
- 8. Earth vibration
- 9. Very strong winds
- 10. For each one
- 11. A bog
- 12. The creation of beautiful or significant things
- 13. Affirmative
- 19. Pie __ mode
- 21. Nonclerical
- 24. Indonesian island
- 25. Educational environment
- 26. Namibian peoples
- 27. Bring out or develop
- 31. Moves into a place of thought
- 32. Out of the way
- 34. Loads a ship
- 35. Beloved Hollywood alien
- 36. Distinguishes
- 40. The ancient Egyptian sun god
- 41. Secondary or explanatory title
- 45. Relating to a wing
- 47. One who gives a speech
- 48. In the middle
- 52. Loop with a running knot
- 53. Airborne (abbr.)
- 54. Sweet persons
- 56. Put into play
- 57. Small cattle breed
- 59. Millisecond
- 60. Revolutions per minute
- 61. They __
- 62. Moon crater
- 63. A place to stay the night

PUZZLE SOLUTION

V L E S C N A S E T H E W
D O T E E N E H S V O H d
H V L L S I T V N O I L V H
V N I H V W E B O D V
S E L V H S E D V N E H E S
B T V E W W O D E
E S N V d D E H V E I W
O V S E L V D V H G S S O
N W S E T V W V O E V O
D V G E O V G I S
E N E O S V W V D N V S V W
K E E T S S E T E L S
S L S I T V I O E d S H d V
E H N d V E D I W I G E d
A V W V G S V D V D E S S

Bridget Nault is an accordion player, guitarist and singer out of Worcester. She is a Berklee educated musician who has appeared all over the state (and beyond) playing her original songs and performing solo and in different bands. Together this duo will play a selection of old-time and traditional songs spanning from the 16th century through the early 20th century, with a focus on the Scot, Irish and English music that was brought to Appalachia during that time period. Along with the music itself, Badger & Nault are passionate about the song histories, and will discuss the origins of the music they play throughout the performance. This program is supported by a grant from the Southbridge Cultural Council, a local agency funded by Massachusetts Cultural Council a state agency.

Overlook launches free summer concert series in Charlton

CHARLTON — Music lovers have six opportunities to enjoy live outdoor performances this summer as The Overlook hosts its annual Summer Concert Series on Tuesday evenings throughout July and into August. The free concerts will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. on the outdoor commons at The Overlook, 88 Masonic Home Rd., offering a variety of musical styles ranging from jazz and brass to classic rock and blues. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and enjoy an evening of live entertainment with family and friends. In the event of rain, performances will move indoors to the Performing Arts Center. The Salty Sister Project Acoustic Trio will perform July 28, offering an evening of acoustic favorites and harmonies. The series continues into August with The Reminisants on Aug. 4, bringing audiences back to the golden era of 1950s and 1960s rock and roll. The final concert will be held Aug. 11, when The Lustre Kings perform a mix of blues, rhythm and blues, and rockabilly music. The Summer Concert Series has become a popular seasonal tradition, offering residents and visitors an opportunity to gather outdoors and enjoy live music in a relaxed setting. Admission is free and open to the public. For more information, call 508-403-4987 or visit OverlookMass.org/events.

Emmanuel College announces Spring Dean's List

BOSTON — In recognition of their outstanding academic achievement, Emmanuel College has named more than 850 students to the Dean's List for the Spring 2026 semester, including Grace Garon of Charlton and Zoe Wojnowski of Uxbridge. To earn a spot on the Dean's List, Emmanuel students must achieve a grade point average of 3.5 or higher for a 16-credit semester. With more than 80 majors and areas of study, Emmanuel College combines outstanding classroom instruction and real-world experience to prepare students for lives of professional achievement, lifelong learning, and purpose. Voted the #1 college location in America in 2026 by Niche.com, Emmanuel offers ready access to world class medical, cultural, and business organizations in the Heart of Boston, all with a tight-knit 17-acre campus and 13:1 student-to-faculty ratio. Learn more at Emmanuel.edu.

REAL ESTATE

Charlton \$650,000, 9 Knollwood Dr, Evangelista, Ladijane, to Jennette, Dennis, and Jennette, Natalie. \$440,000, 97 Nugget Dr, Fabrizio, Deborah, to Franks, Norman, and Jutras, Julie. \$355,000, 2 Highland Ave, Nelson, David P, and Nelson, Julie Ann, to All Surface Technology In. \$355,000, 28 Curtis Hill Rd, Curtis Hill Estates Inc, to Shilinsky, Nicole A. SOUTHBRIDGE \$452,500, 227 Marcy St, Pollone, Richard G, and Pollone, Richard, to Hernandez, Eliezer. \$202,500, 44 Maria Ave #202, Worth, James, and Worth, Nicole, to Pierce, Christopher J. STURBRIDGE \$685,000, 45 River Rd, Desousa, Richard C, and Desousa, Elizabeth R, to Sheehan, Kendra M. \$412,000, 75 Fairview Park Rd, Hart, Sarah, to Coppola, Cheryl. \$260,000, 7 Crescent Way #302, Zwiebel Ft, and Zwiebel, Joseph R, to Ostrobinski, Carlene.

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Shepherd Hill students hosting Tackle the Stigma 5K to promote mental health awareness

CHARLTON — The Shepherd Hill Regional High School cheerleading program, in partnership with the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District community, is inviting residents to lace up their running shoes and help break down barriers surrounding mental health during the annual Tackle the Stigma 5K and 2.5K Walk/Run on Saturday, Sept. 27.

The event will begin at 10 a.m. at the Shepherd Hill football field and is designed to raise awareness about mental health and mental wellness while encouraging open conversations throughout the local community.

Organizers hope participants of all ages will come together to demonstrate support for those facing mental health challenges and reinforce the message that no one has to struggle alone.

"This event is very important to us as we work to raise awareness about mental health and mental wellness throughout our local community," organizers said in announcing the event.

The walk and run carries the theme, "Run toward awareness, stand up for support, and tackle the stigma one mile at a time," reflecting its focus on education, compassion and community involvement.

Mental health advocates continue to emphasize the importance of reducing the stigma surrounding anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions, which can often prevent individuals from seeking help. Community events such as Tackle the Stigma aim to create a welcoming environment where conversations about mental wellness are encouraged and support resources are highlighted.

In addition to providing an opportunity for exercise and community engagement, the event serves as a reminder that mental health is an important part of overall well-being. Organizers hope the day will inspire participants to check in with friends, family members and neighbors while promoting a culture of understanding and acceptance.

The Shepherd Hill cheerleaders have made mental health awareness a priority, using the event to unite students, families, educators and community members around a common cause. By bringing together participants from across Dudley, Charlton and surrounding communities, they hope to build momentum for ongoing conversations that extend well beyond race day.

Whether participants choose the full 5-kilometer course or the shorter 2.5-kilometer walk/run, organizers say every step represents a commitment to supporting mental wellness and reminding those who may be struggling that help is available.

Registration information and additional event details are expected to be available through Shepherd Hill Regional High School and the Dudley-Charlton Regional School District as the event approaches.

Troop 163 hosting ice cream social & open house

STURBRIDGE — Do you like camping, hiking, swimming, biking, fishing, kayaking, whitewater rafting, sailing, exploring with friends, and more? You might like being a scout! Come to an ice cream social and open house held by Troop 163, an all-girl troop of Scouting America. Learn about lassoing and how to use a sling shot, and other activities. Families are welcome. Please stop by, have fun, and learn about scouting and our troop.

The ice cream social and open house will be held on Sunday, Aug. 30 from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 345 Main St. in Sturbridge. The troop is open to girls aged 11-17, and while based in Sturbridge, is open to residents of any town. Please email troop163sturbridge@gmail.com with any questions.

Town of Charlton accepting applications for Opioid Settlement Funds Grant Program

CHARLTON — The Town of Charlton is accepting applications for funding through the Town's Opioid Settlement Funds Grant Program.

The purpose of this program is to support initiatives that prevent opioid misuse, expand access to treatment and recovery services, reduce the harms associated with substance use disorders, and improve the health and well-being of Charlton residents. Funding is made available through the Town's allocation of national opioid settlement funds and must be used for eligible purposes consistent with applicable settlement agreements and guidance. Funding may be requested to a maximum of \$2,500 per applicant. Final awards will be distributed based on available funding as well as demonstrated need and community impact.

Eligible applicants may include:

- o Nonprofit organizations
- o Educational institutions
- o Healthcare providers
- o Community-based organizations
- o Other organizations serving Charlton residents

Projects may include, but are not limited to:

- o Prevention and education programs
- o Treatment and recovery support services
- o Harm reduction initiatives
- o First responder or public safety initiatives related to opioid response
- o Behavioral health and mental health services
- o Community outreach and support programs
- o Data collection, evaluation, and other evidence-based strategies that address opioid use disorder

Applications will be evaluated based on demonstrated community need, alignment with eligible opioid settlement uses, measurable outcomes, organizational capacity, and the anticipated impact on Charlton residents.

Completed applications and all required supporting documentation for the first round of this grant program must be submitted by Aug. 31. Late or incomplete applications may not be considered.

Drought conditions prompt water restrictions

SOUTHBRIDGE/CHARLTON — The Massachusetts Drought Task for issues a Level -2 Significant Drought status for Worcester County. The Town of Southbridge now has to require that all Southbridge and Charlton water customers refrain from all outside water use except for handheld watering between the hours of 5 and 9 p.m. Please turn off all outside sprinkler systems.

This declaration from the State also applies to homes with private wells.

Certain water uses are not subject to restrictions such as production of food and fiber, health and safety reasons, maintenance of livestock, and core functions of a business (for example irrigation for a nursery).

For the general public's information, Currently the Southbridge Water Departments reservoir system is at 100.1 percent of total capacity. This is within our historical average for this time of year.

The declaration is a county wide declaration, and not due to any current water storage shortfalls within the Southbridge Water Department. This declaration is part of new laws and regulations put forth by the State legislature, and enforcement went into effect in April of 2025.

To be clear, the Southbridge Water department is not experiencing any water storage shortages currently.

The declaration of Level- 2 significant drought will remain in effect until the State Drought Task Force deems that the conditions within Worcester County have returned to acceptable levels.

More information can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/drought-management-task-force>

Please feel free to contact the Southbridge Water Department at 508-764-3207 if you have any questions or concerns.

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McLaughlin of Charlton named to Regis College Spring Dean's List

WESTON — Regis College today recognizes Emma McLaughlin, Class of 2029, of Charlton, whose academic excellence and commitment to learning have earned them a place on the spring 2026 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.

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.

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FRANK G. CHILINSKI
PRESIDENT/PUBLISHER
BRENDAN BERUBE
EDITOR

Building on strength
while looking ahead

Economic reports are often filled with percentages, charts and statistics that can be easy to overlook. Yet every number tells a story about the people who choose to invest, work, shop and build a future in a community. Sturbridge’s latest economic review offers encouraging signs that the town continues to be a place where businesses want to grow, while also reminding us that success requires continued attention and planning.

One of the clearest takeaways is stability. Restaurant spending climbed from \$80 million in 2024 to \$86 million in 2025, and this year’s numbers appear to be on pace to remain strong. That is welcome news for a town whose identity has long been tied to hospitality. From locally owned restaurants to hotels, specialty shops and attractions, tourism remains a cornerstone of the local economy.

Retail also tells an encouraging story. Business turnover is a natural part of any healthy commercial district, and Sturbridge has largely replaced every storefront that closed over the past two years with new enterprises. Since 2024, 23 businesses have opened while 19 have closed. That is not evidence of decline. It is evidence of an economy that continues to attract entrepreneurs willing to take a chance on the community.

The diversity of those businesses also matters. While food and beverage establishments remain the largest sector, Sturbridge continues to support specialty retailers, health and wellness businesses and personal services. A varied business community creates resilience. It gives residents more choices and encourages visitors to spend more time, and more dollars, in town.

Perhaps the biggest reason for optimism comes from the manufacturing sector. Photonis USA’s decision to expand its operations in Sturbridge with a \$15 million to \$20 million investment and the creation of 25 new jobs demonstrates confidence in the community’s workforce and business climate. Manufacturing jobs often provide stable careers while generating economic activity that extends well beyond a single company.

Likewise, R.W. Beckett’s investment in transforming the former Heal Dispensary building into a modern training center reflects another important trend. Companies increasingly seek communities where they can educate employees, host customers and establish long-term roots. The thoughtful dedication of the facility in memory of longtime employee Jeff Rozga also reminds us that successful businesses are about more than profits. They are built on people, loyalty and shared values.

Tourism promotion has evolved dramatically over the past decade, and Sturbridge has adapted. Through coordinated digital marketing efforts and the Experience Sturbridge campaign, the town is reaching hundreds of thousands of potential visitors each year. Today’s travelers often discover destinations online long before they arrive. Maintaining a strong digital presence is no longer optional. It is essential.

Still, no community can afford complacency. Hotel revenues are currently trailing last year’s pace, reminding us that economic trends can shift quickly. Competition from neighboring destinations remains strong, and consumer habits continue to change. Continued investment in infrastructure, attractive commercial areas, special events and quality-of-life amenities will help ensure that visitors continue choosing Sturbridge.

The numbers presented to the Planning Board are encouraging because they reflect years of deliberate effort by town officials, business owners, civic organizations and residents working toward common goals. Economic success rarely happens by accident. It grows through partnerships, thoughtful planning and a willingness to adapt.

Sturbridge has every reason to be proud of its progress. The challenge now is to build on that momentum, welcoming new investment while preserving the character that has made the town a destination for generations. That balance between growth and tradition has always been one of Sturbridge’s greatest strengths, and it remains the foundation for its future.

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

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

OPINION

Build confidence in your 401(k) decisions

In its simplest form, saving can mean putting money into a jar, adding to it and letting it grow slowly. A 401(k), or other workplace retirement plan, is a step beyond that. It's more like a garden than a jar. Once you understand the basics of your 401(k), it becomes easier to feel confident in your decisions.

In a jar, your money only grows when you add more. In a garden, what you plant can begin to grow on its own. Your investments can earn returns, and those returns may in turn earn additional returns. That's called compounding, and it can have a meaningful impact over time. Like a garden, however, growth is not guaranteed. Markets can rise and fall, and investments can lose value.

Most workplace retirement plan contributions are made with pre-tax dollars, which lowers today's taxable income; you'll pay taxes when you withdraw it in retirement. Some plans also offer a Roth option: you contribute after-tax dollars and withdrawals in retirement can be tax free. Your plan administrator can provide more information.

Many 401(k) plans include an employer match, either up to a set dollar amount, perhaps \$500, or a percentage of your salary, typically 3–5 percent. Contributions you make, as well as those from your employer, can grow over time. Try to contribute at least enough to capture the full match; anything less means you're leaving money on the table.

Now the question is how to invest your contributions inside your 401(k). The menu of investment options may seem complicated, but most fall into a few common categories.

- Stock or equity funds focus on stocks, which represent ownership in companies. Because they're tied to company performance, they have the potential for higher growth over



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time, but their value can go up and down in the short term. When you're decades from retirement, that short-term volatility matters less; you have time to ride out the swings.

- Bond funds invest in loans made to governments or corporations. These tend to be more stable than stock funds but typically grow more slowly. They can help balance

the ups and downs.

- Balanced or blended funds hold a mix of stocks and bonds in a single investment.
- Target-date funds combine different types of investments in one fund. As you move toward a specified retirement year, the fund gradually adjusts to focus more on stability and less on growth.

The earlier you start planting, the more time your money must grow. Even small contributions early in your career can end up as large amounts later, simply because they had more time to compound.

If you change jobs, keep in mind that your employer's contributions may not be fully yours immediately. It depends on your plan's vesting schedule, so it's worth checking before you go.

The most important steps in a retirement plan are getting started, contributing consistently and taking advantage of what your plan offers. With a little knowledge, you can feel more confident moving forward. The garden is yours. Start planting.

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. Edward Jones, Member SIPC.

The empty parking space

LANTERNS ALONG
MAIN STREET
By CHARLES

I pulled into a crowded parking lot last week and did what most of us do. I started looking for the closest available space. There wasn't one. So I circled once. Still nothing.

By the second lap, I noticed something interesting. Every driver seemed to be doing exactly what I was doing. We were all hunting for the perfect spot while dozens of perfectly good spaces sat empty just a little farther away. I finally gave up, parked near the edge of the lot, and walked. It took all of about 45 seconds.

By the time I reached the front door, several of the cars that had passed me were still circling. It made me wonder why we're so determined to save a few extra steps.

When we were kids, walking wasn't something we tried to avoid. We'd think nothing of hiking across a field to visit a friend or riding a bicycle halfway across town because someone said there might be a pickup baseball game.

Now many of us will spend five minutes searching for a parking place that saves us 30 seconds of walking. I'm as guilty as anyone.

There's something strangely satisfying about finding that front-row space. It feels like winning a prize, even though the prize is usually a walk that's shorter than the average television commercial. The funny part is what happens when you park farther away. You notice things.

You see flowers planted along the sidewalk that you would have driven right past. You hear conversations instead of engines. You notice the small independent businesses tucked between larger stores. Sometimes you even run into someone you haven't seen in years because you're both walking instead of rushing from one door

to another.

Those extra few steps become part of the outing instead of something to be avoided. I suppose that's true of a lot of life.

We're always looking for shortcuts. Faster internet. Faster checkout lines. Faster shipping. Faster routes around traffic. We measure success by how quickly we can get from one thing to the next.

But not everything improves by speeding it up. Some conversations are worth lingering over. Some roads are worth taking because they're scenic instead of efficient. Some Saturday mornings deserve to unfold without constantly checking the clock.

Living in New England reminds us of that every season. Nobody hurries through the first blaze of autumn color. People stop to watch a fresh snowfall. We pull over for covered bridges and scenic overlooks even when we're already running a little late.

Those moments aren't productive by any measurable standard. They're simply enjoyable. Maybe that's why I didn't mind the longer walk after all.

The parking lot gave me a few extra minutes outside on a pleasant afternoon. I watched a family loading pumpkins into the back of a pickup. An older couple strolled toward the garden center without seeming to be in any hurry. A little boy proudly carried a loaf of bread that was almost as long as his arm.

None of those moments would have registered if I'd found that perfect parking space. I still like parking close to the door. Old habits don't disappear overnight. But every now and then, the best spot in the lot isn't the closest one. It's the one that reminds us slowing down is sometimes the shortest path to enjoying the day.

TO THE EDITOR

A garden that grows community

To the Editor:

I’ve spent the past several weeks helping to rebuild the Sturbridge Community Food Collaborative’s Web site. In the process, I found myself reading through the organization’s timeline—a year-by-year, month-by-month record of what has happened since the project began in 2017.

I expected a list of planting dates, harvest totals and volunteer schedules. Instead, I found the story of a community.

The Community Food Collaborative didn’t simply appear one spring. It began with an idea from local architect Joe Coan, who envisioned a community garden dedicated to growing fresh, organic vegetables for local food pantries. He brought that vision to the Rotary Club of Sturbridge, which embraced the concept and, together with the Rotary Club of Southbridge, established a Rotary Community Corps to turn the idea into reality.

Nearly a decade later, it’s clear that Joe’s vision took root in more ways than one. What started as one person’s idea has become a community effort involving hundreds of volunteers, countless acts of generosity and thousands of pounds of fresh produce for local families.

Of course, every successful garden also needs people who know how to make things grow. Head gardener Roberta Watson, along with the other experienced gardeners who have shared that responsibility over the years, has provided the knowledge, patience and leadership that have kept the garden productive season after season.

What becomes obvious after reading the timeline is that this garden belongs to everyone. Volunteers have come and gone over the years, but the commitment hasn’t changed. Community members have donated vegetable plants, gardening supplies and gently used tools. Local companies have provided financial support. Students from our regional high school have built raised beds, constructed a work shed and earned community service hours while learning that helping others is rewarding in its own right. Week after week, volunteers simply keep showing up.

The timeline is filled with the kinds of entries you would expect from any serious gardener.

A late-season nor’easter threatens newly planted vegetables, so

volunteers rush out to protect them. A heat wave arrives, and watering becomes the priority. Rain forces work sessions to be canceled. New raised beds replace aging ones. Tomatillos appear. Squash is harvested. Chives and scallions are delivered to the St. John Paul II Food Pantry.

Then there are the entries that make you smile. The rabbit is back. Bees have moved into the work shed. A hungry woodchuck has discovered the vegetables. Anyone who has ever tended a garden understands those entries immediately. What impressed me most wasn’t any single accomplishment. It was the persistence.

Gardens don’t care about calendars. Tomatoes don’t stop ripening because it’s Father’s Day. Squash doesn’t wait until the volunteers have a free afternoon. If the work needs to be done, someone simply shows up to do it.

And they have—for nearly a decade.

By my rough estimate, it takes nearly 800 volunteer hours each year to keep this garden operating. That’s almost twenty full-time workweeks donated by people who simply believe fresh vegetables belong on every family’s table.

Every year, those volunteers produce more than 3,000 pounds of fresh, organically grown vegetables for local food pantries. That’s an impressive harvest.

But after reading the timeline, I came away convinced there’s another harvest taking place here, one that’s a little harder to measure. Every season, the garden also grows volunteers, friendships and a stronger sense of community.

If you’d like to read the Community Food Collaborative’s complete timeline, from its founding in 2017 through today, you’ll find it at cfcgarden.org/timeline. It’s well worth the few minutes it takes to read. I suspect you’ll come away with the same appreciation I did for the volunteers whose quiet work has been nourishing our community since 2017. And you may just decide to join them.

*Joe Klimavich
Community Food Collaborative*

Joe Klimavich is an accredited public relations consultant and adjunct professor of communication at Worcester State University.

bankHometown strengthens Retail Banking team with key leadership appointments



Courtesy Photo

Jerusa DeBrito

OXFORD — bankHometown is pleased to announce the addition of four experienced banking professionals across its retail network. These appointments reflect the bank's continued investment in customer service, employee development, and community-focused banking throughout Central Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut.

Jerusa DeBrito appointed AVP, Branch Officer in Leominster

Jerusa DeBrito has joined bankHometown as assistant vice president, branch officer of the bank's 9 Sack Blvd., Leominster office.

With nearly 30 years of retail banking experience, DeBrito most recently served as AVP, bilingual branch manager at M&T Bank. She is known for her relationship-focused approach and commitment to serving customers and the community.

DeBrito serves as a board member of Fresh Start Furniture Bank and She's Local and is a member of the American Heart Association's Go Red Awareness Committee. She earned a Certificate in the Fundamentals of Banking from the New England College of Finance and has participated in the Certified Financial Educators' Financial Wellness Program.

Alison Tozzi named AVP, Branch Officer in Putnam

Alison Tozzi has joined bankHometown as assistant vice president, branch officer of its 182 Main St., Putnam, Connecticut office.

Tozzi brings nearly 30 years of banking experience to the organization. Most recently, she served as branch manager at KeyBank and previously worked as a senior personal banker at Bank of America. Her extensive background in branch leadership and customer service will support the continued success of the Putnam team.

Dhimitri Piluri joins Worcester Office as Branch Officer

Dhimitri Piluri recently joined bankHometown as branch officer of the bank's 1001 Millbury St., Worcester office, bringing more than 10 years of banking experience to the role.

Most recently, Piluri served as branch manager at Savers Bank and previously held positions as a relationship banker at Main Street Bank and Santander Bank. He has developed expertise in customer service, relationship management, and retail banking operations.

Piluri holds a Bachelor's degree in marketing from La Sapienza University in Italy and a master's degree in information technology from Southern New



Courtesy Photo

Alison Tozzi

Hampshire University. A strong advocate for financial education, Piluri has volunteered with Junior Achievement, assisting with lessons on budgeting, saving, credit, and loans. He has also participated in financial workshops for immigrants and low-income families and served through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

Maria Baker joins Sturbridge office as Assistant Branch Manager

Maria Baker recently joined bankHometown as assistant branch manager of its 331 Main St., Sturbridge office.

Baker has 25 years of banking experience and most recently served as market manager at Cornerstone Bank. Her extensive knowledge of retail banking and customer relationship management will be an asset to the Sturbridge team and its customers.

"At bankHometown, our success is



Courtesy Photo

Dhimitri Piluri

driven by the talented individuals who serve our customers and communities every day," said Robert Morton, president & CEO of bankHometown. "We are excited to welcome these accomplished banking professionals to our team. Their experience, leadership, and commitment to relationship banking will strengthen our ability to deliver exceptional service, build meaningful customer connections, and support the communities we proudly serve."

About bankHometown

Founded in 1889, bankHometown is headquartered in Oxford, Massachusetts. We have \$1.6 billion in assets and offer a complete line of consumer and business deposit and lending products and services through 15 locations throughout Central Massachusetts and northeast Connecticut. We're proud to fulfill our community banking mission—providing individualized financial support, comprehensive products

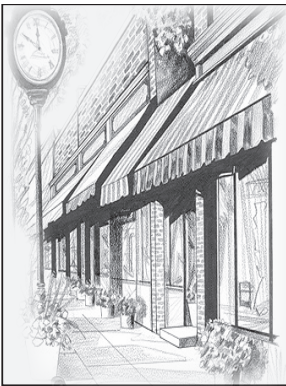


Courtesy Photo

Maria Baker

and services, and banking tools—to ensure our customers can unlock their potential and build a successful future.

Through our charitable giving program, The Giving Tree, we support non-profit organizations and causes throughout Worcester and Windham Counties. In 2025 alone, The Giving Tree donated more than \$550,000 and over the last decade donated more than \$3.3 million. bankHometown was named a Corporate Citizenship Award winner by Boston Business Journal for the past six years, reaffirming our status as one of Massachusetts' most charitable companies. Additionally, we were named a 2025 Top Place to Work award winner by The Boston Globe, and both bankHometown and our parent company, Hometown Financial Group, were recognized as five-time USA Today Top Workplaces award recipients. For more information, visit bankHometown.com.



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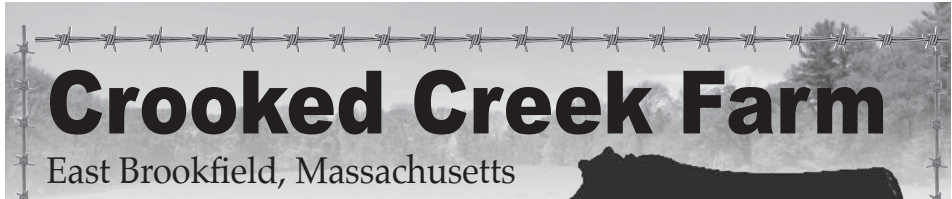
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Annual Zucchini Festival returns to Holland Aug. 16

HOLLAND — The Friends of the Holland Community Center will once again host their Annual Zucchini Festival at the Holland Community Center at 40 Brimfield Rd. in Holland. The event will take place on Sunday, Aug. 16 from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m. Admission is free, and there is something for everyone to enjoy.

We will have a bake sale, raffle table, a “spin the wheel” for prizes for the kiddos, a zucchini “cook off” contest, and a foam machine for kids and adults alike to run through to cool off.

The Holland Fire Department will once again be on hand (unless they are called away) with at least one of their fire trucks to check out, and our giant chess set and cornhole will be set up if you wish to use them.

Scout Troop #163 will be selling hot dogs and drinks, and Angry Panda and O’Neil’s Lemonade will also be on site.

Visitors can browse plenty of booths inside and outside, where both new and returning vendors will offer jewelry, local honey, and homemade items of every kind imaginable.

It will be a great



opportunity for you to bring your redeemable bottles and cans to drop off in our bin to the left of the building.

There is something for everyone, so we hope you will join us for this family friendly fun-filled afternoon. For more information, please call the Center at 413-245-3163 or email us at friends@holland@gmail.com.

Webster Five expands Board of Directors

AUBURN — Webster Five has appointed Tracy LeMaire to its Board of Directors. A seasoned CPA and entrepreneur, LeMaire brings extensive expertise in financial accounting, auditing and small business leadership to the role.

LeMaire joins Webster Five’s Board as an established accounting professional and the



Courtesy Photo

MERLE continued from page A1

oso Isadora Duncan. Merle’s extensive studies, from the Akademia Raymond Duncan in Paris to the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where he earned an MFA in Sculpture and Painting, reflects a global, lifelong commitment to the avant-garde.

Merle has participated in a myriad of artistic organizations and collaborations over the years, including: Grove Street Gallery (co-founder/co-curator); Noh Place Artists Cooperative (board of directors/performer); Forbidden Poets (piano/spoken word); WCUW 91.3 FM (radio show featuring The Stranger and Think Tank Tango); Worcester County Poetry Association (former president); and a variety of performances and contributions as a member of Worcester Artist Group, Invented Thing Quartet, Theater Now, and Kasner Gooch Multimedia.

Merle is also the author of a volume of cut-up poems, “Glass Bedding” (North American Editions) and continues to produce poems/art in this fashion. More recently, he produced collages in response to a series of René Magritte-inspired poems by Stephen Campiglio, as part of a multimedia manuscript, including the work of two other artists, Andres Juarez and Jennifer Forest, entitled “Other Turns.”

The Ruth Wells Art Center exhibition invites viewers to experience a brilliant collection that honors Michel’s family’s historic legacy, while celebrating his own distinct, thought-provoking aesthetic.



Tracy LeMire owner of Evolve CPA Consulting, LLC, which she founded in 2021 in response to the complex accounting and financial challenges faced by the cannabis industry. She currently serves as a consulting CFO for cannabis companies across Massachusetts and the Northeast.

"Tracy has built her career helping businesses navigate complex financial terrain, and that kind of experience is exactly what we want informing our vision," said Brian Westerlind, President and CEO, Webster Five. "Tracy's values and leadership experience are reflective of Webster Five's, and we look forward to the meaningful impact she will have on the Bank."

Before founding her firm, LeMaire spent 11 years at AAFCPAs, where she led financial statement audits for privately held companies across a diverse range of industries including manufacturing, technology, health-care, nonprofit and professional services.

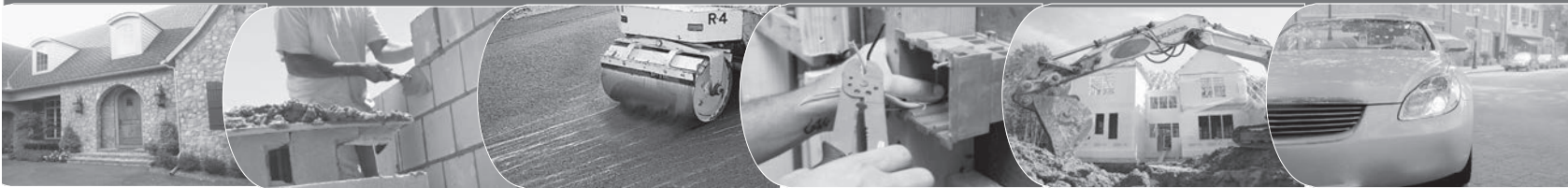
"Webster Five has deep roots in the communities it serves, and that's something I admire," said LeMaire. "I look forward to contributing my experience and perspective as the Bank continues to grow and innovate."

LeMaire holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Accounting from the University of New Hampshire and a Master of Business Administration from Bryant University. A member of the American Institute of CPAs and the Massachusetts Society of CPAs, she serves on the Cannabis Committee and Consulting CFO Roundtable. In 2018, she was honored with MassCPAs Women to Watch Emerging Leader Award.

"Tracy is a wonderful addition to our Board," said Steve Charniak, Chairman of the Board, Webster Five. "Her expertise will enhance the value we provide to Worcester County residents, businesses and nonprofits."

Outside of work, LeMaire volunteers as a coach for Girls on the Run Worcester County, while residing in Sutton with her husband and two daughters.

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About Webster Five

Webster Five is a full-service financial institution delivering personal, small business and commercial banking solutions backed by deep expertise in banking and local markets. With a relationship-driven approach and forward-looking products, the Bank helps clients navigate financial decisions with confidence and efficiency.

Hitchcock’s Summer Concert Series rocks Brimfield Town Common on Wednesday evenings



BRIMFIELD — The Hitchcock Summer Concert Series sponsored by Country Bank will take place on Wednesdays, 6 to 8 p.m., through Aug. 19 on the Brimfield Town Common. In the case of rain, concerts will move to Thursday. A food truck will be on site at each event. Picnics are also welcome; chairs and blankets are encouraged.

The series kicks off on July 1 with Woodshed, bringing Acoustic Folk, Country & Americana. Members Jason Wood of Brimfield, along with A.J. Kiernan, Karen Gallant, and Mike St. Germain are four musical friends who found each other through a love of music and mutual admiration, and are known for their signature three-part harmony. BT’s Smokehouse will be on site.

Aug. 5 brings the Brimfield debut of The Willies - a popular, community-focused classic rock and Americana band based out of Belchertown. The band performs across the Western Mass region, playing high-energy hits from the 1950s through the 1980s, modern country, and rock standards. Flippin’ the Bird BBQ returns for this concert.

Long-time series favorite CobbleStone Road of Connecticut returns on August 12th with high-energy country. Well-known throughout the region for playing modern and classic country hits from the 1990s to today, their energetic style mixes classic country with rock and blues.

Smashing Patties will have their concert series debut this evening.

The series closes out on Aug. 19 with Hard Knox, a Westfield, Massachusetts-based party rock and cover band known for their high-energy shows and “forgotten classics” setlist. Instead of regular cover tunes, they play unique, underappreciated gems from the ‘70s and ‘80s, making them a fixture in the Western Mass and Northern Connecticut music scenes. BT’s Smokehouse will return to bookend this year’s food truck lineup.

In addition to Presenting Sponsor Country Bank, this program is supported in part by a grant from the Brimfield Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council.

Hitchcock Summer Concert Series At-a-Glance:
Aug. 5 The Willies
‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s & more! | Flippin’ the Bird BBQ
Aug 12 CobbleStone Road
Country | Smashing Patties
Aug. 19 Hard Knox
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For more information, visit www.hitchcockacademy.org. Hitchcock Academy is a community center located at 2 Brookfield Rd. in Brimfield serving the community with educational, recreational, and cultural programming.



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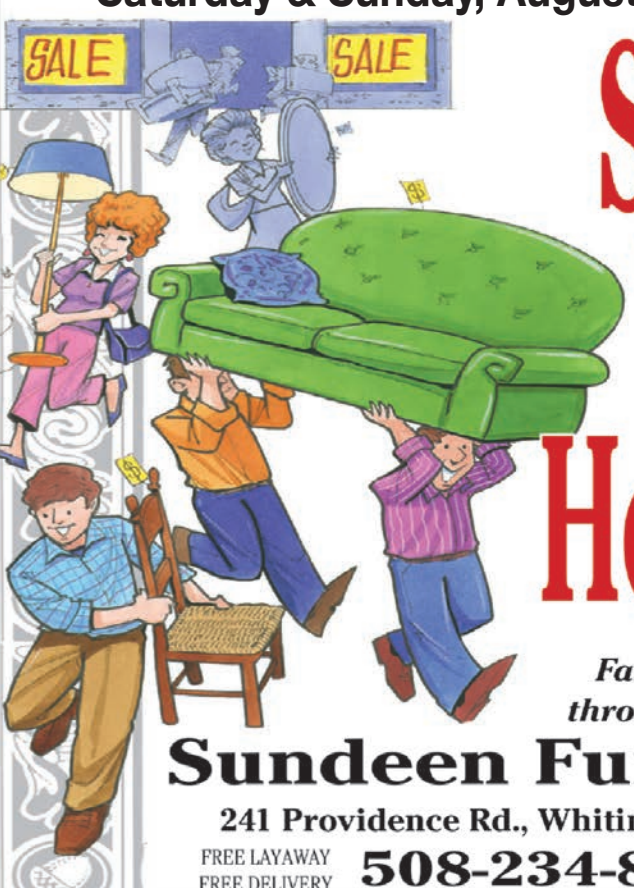
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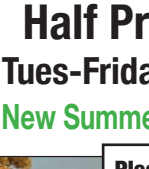
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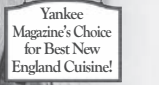
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LEGALS

SALE OF MOTOR VEHICLES
Under G.L. c.255 Sec.39A
Notice is hereby given by
Cruise Control Transportation Inc.
Pursuant to the provisions of G.L.
c. 255, Section 39A. that on or
after **July 31,2026** at Cruise Control
Transportation Inc. the following motor
vehicle/s will be sold at private sale
to satisfy our garage keeper's lien
thereon for storage, towing charges,
care and expenses of notices and sale
of said vehicle:

Vehicle:2014 Chevrolet Cruze
Vin :1G1PE5SBXE7324575
Last Registered owner :
Bruno Silva
2546 Providence Rd ,
Northbridge MA 01534

Vehicle:2008 Honda CR-V
Vin :JHLRE48558C002470
Last Registered owner :
QR Auto Clinic
101 Skyline Dr #1
Arlington WI 53911

Vehicle:2011 Honda Accord
Vin :1HGCP2F8XBA141609
Last Registered owner :
Brianna Chanel Rodriguez
28 Norcross Ter Apt 2
Lynn MA 01902-2546

Vehicle:2010 Lincoln Navigator
Vin :5LMJJ2J53AEJ08147
Last Registered owner :
Hannah Gallant
21 VILLAGE DR, APT 10
SOUTHBRIDGE MA 01550-3140

Vehicle:2007 Scion TC
Vin :JTKDE167070207732
Last Registered owner :
Cathleen Degraw
82 Blackstone St FL 1
Woonsocket RI 02895

Vehicle:2008 Hyundai SANTA FE
Vin :5NMSH13E78H140265
Last Registered owner :
Jacob Rodriguez
360 MAIN ST, APT 350
STURBRIDGE MA 01566-1390

Vehicle:2010 Subaru Forester
Vin :JF2SH6DC3AH756144
Last Registered owner :
Jenna M Raleigh
555 WORCESTER ST
Southbridge MA 01550-3300

Vehicle:2013 Nissan Versa
Vin :3N1CN7AP6DL869782
Last Registered owner :
LM Services Llc
104 Grove St Apt 2
Meriden CT 06451

Vehicle:2003 Chevrolet Astro
Vin :1GNEL19X83B140381
Last Registered owner :
Bobby Jo Samek
12 Pleasant St Apt 2
West Brookfield MA 01585

Vehicle:2014 Kia Forte
Vin :KNAFX4A60E5154408
Last Registered owner :
Lucas M. Oliveira
36 Cotting Ave.
Marlborough MA 01752-2977

Vehicle:2008 Chevrolet Malibu
Vin :1G1ZK577484283193
Last Registered owner :
Chandler Paul
33 Kingman Ave
Brockton ,MA 02302

Vehicle:2013 Hyundai VELOSTER
Vin :KMHTC6AD4DU110245
Last Registered owner :
Jeson Astrada Aponte
537 Broad St Apt 3
Meriden ,CT 06450

Vehicle:2013 Dodge Dart
Vin :1C3CDFBA0DD322666
Last Registered owner :
Erie Insurance Group
245 Grandview Ave Ste. 200
Camphill ,PA 17011

Vehicle:2005 Toyota Prius
Vin :JTDKB20U357016855
Last Registered owner :
Newton Bruno De Oliveira Pedro
71 Blue Hills Ave Apt C3
Hartford CT, 06112-1845
July 24, 2026
July 31, 2026
August 7, 2026

THE COMMONWEALTH
OF MASSACHUSETTS
MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT
OF TRANSPORTATION – HIGHWAY
DIVISION
NOTICE OF A VIRTUAL DESIGN
PUBLIC HEARING
Sturbridge-Charlton-East Brookfield
Intersection Improvements on Route
49 at Putnam Road, Walker Pond
Road & Route 20
Project File No. 611967

A Virtual Design Public Hearing will
be hosted on the MassDOT website
below to present the design for the
proposed project in Sturbridge and
Charlton, MA.
WHEN: 7:00 pm, Wednesday,
August 12, 2026
PURPOSE: The purpose of this
hearing is to provide the public with the
opportunity to become fully acquainted
with the proposed project. All views
and comments submitted in response
to the hearing will be reviewed and
considered to the maximum extent
possible.
PROPOSAL: The proposed project
was initiated as part of the Intersection
Improvement Program due to the pres-
ence of a Top 200 Statewide Crash
Location at Route 49 and Putnam
Road. Two other crash clusters were
identified (although not in the Top 200
Crash Locations) along the corridor
and have been included for safety
improvements. Location #1 - Putnam
Road at Route 49, Location 2- Walker
Pond Road, and Location 3 - Route
20. The targeted safety improvements
include construction of a roundabout at
Putnam Road, improved sight lines at
Walker Pond Road, and slip ramp mod-
ifications at Route 20. Bicycle improve-
ments will be included at Location 1 to
provide a Shared-Use Path circulat-
ing the proposed roundabout, meet-
ing MassDOT Healthy Transportation
Policy Directive and applicable design
guidelines.
A secure right-of-way is necessary for
this project. Acquisitions in fee and
permanent or temporary easements
may be required. The Commonwealth
of Massachusetts is responsible for
acquiring all needed rights in private or
public lands. MassDOT’s policy con-
cerning land acquisitions will be pre-
sented at the hearing.

Project inquiries, written state-
ments, and other exhibits regard-
ing the proposed undertaking may
be submitted to Carrie E. Lavallee,
P.E., Chief Engineer, via e-mail to
[MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.
state.ma.us](mailto:MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.state.ma.us) or via US Mail to Suite
7550, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA
02116, Attention: Project Management,
Project File No. 611967 Statements
and exhibits intended for inclusion in
the hearing transcript must be emailed
or postmarked no later than ten (10)
business days (14 calendar days) after
the hearing is hosted.

This hearing is accessible to peo-
ple with disabilities. MassDOT pro-
vides reasonable accommodations
and/or language assistance free of
charge upon request (e.g interpreters
in American Sign Language and langua-
ges other than English, live captioning,
videos, assistive listening devices and
alternate material formats), as avail-
able. For accommodation or language
assistance, please contact MassDOT’s
Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer
by phone (857-368-8580), TTD/TTY
at (857) 266-0603, fax (857) 368-0602,
or by email ([MassDOT.CivilRights@
dot.state.ma.us](mailto:MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us)). Requests should be
made as soon as possible, and prior
to the hearing, and for more difficult
to arrange services, including sign-lan-
guage, CART, or language transla-
tion or interpretation, requests should
be made at least ten business days
before the hearing.
This hearing will be hosted, or a can-
cellation announcement posted, on the
internet at [https://www.mass.gov/orgs/
highway-division/events](https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events).
JONATHAN GULLIVER
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR
CARRIE E. LAVALLEE, P.E.
= CHIEF ENGINEER
Town Clerk
July 31, 2026
August 07, 2026

**CHARLTON CONSERVATION
COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**
In accordance with the Wetland
Protection Act of the General Laws of
the Commonwealth of Massachusetts,
Chapter 131, Section 40, the Charlton
Conservation Commission will hold a
public hearing on August 19, at
7PM on the application of Jefferson
DeSouza.
The applicant has filed a Notice of
Intent for the construction of a sin-
gle-family home, driveway, well, and
septic system within the 100-ft buf-
fer zone to a Bordering Vegetated
Wetland. The project location is: Lot
5 Smith Road, Charlton, MA 01507.
Parcel ID: 6-A-4.19
Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts
of 2021, this meeting of the Charlton
Conservation Commission will be
conducted in person and via remote
means. Members of the public who
wish to participate can access the
meeting remotely by request.
Copies of the NOI may be examined
at the Conservation Office by appoint-
ment during business hours.
Thomas O’Malley
Chair, Charlton Conservation
Commission
August 6, 2026

**CHARLTON CONSERVATION
COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**
In accordance with the Town of
Charlton Stormwater Management
Rules & Regulations, the Charlton
Conservation Commission will be
accepting comments on the following
application:
The applicant, James & Tammie Gillies,
has submitted a Land Disturbance/
Stormwater Management Application
on July 29, 2026, for land disturbance
associated with the construction of a
single-family home and site work.
The project site is located at Lot 3/4
Smith Road, Charlton, MA 01507, and
is also known as: Parcel ID: 6-A-4.17
& 6-A-4.18
Copies of the Land Disturbance
Application are available at the
Charlton Conservation Commission
office during business hours.
Thomas O’Malley
Chair, Charlton Conservation
Commission
August 6, 2026

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Worcester Probate
and Family Court
225 Main Street
Worcester, MA 01608
(508) 831-2200
Docket No.WO26P2446EA
CITATION ON PETITION FOR
FORMAL ADJUDICATION**
Estate Of:
Thomas R. Trapp
Date of Death:05/15/2026

To all interested persons:
A Petition for **Formal Probate of Will
with Appointment of Personal Rep-
resentative** has been filed by **Robert
E. George of Sturbridge MA** request-
ing that the Court enter a formal De-
cree and Order and for such other re-
lief as requested in the Petition.
The Petitioner requests that :
Robert E. George of Sturbridge MA
be appointed as Personal Representa-
tive(s) of said estate to serve **Without
Surety** on the estate 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 appear-
ance and objection at this Court be-
fore: **10:00 a.m. on the return day of
08/25/2026.**
This is NOT a hearing date, but a dead-
line by which you must file a written ap-
pearance and objection if you object to
this proceeding. If you fail to file a time-
ly written appearance and objection
followed by an affidavit of objections
within thirty (30) days of the return day,
action may be taken without further no-
tice to you.
**UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION
UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS
COMMON 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 ad-
ministration directly from the Personal
Representative and may petition the
Court in any matter relating to the es-
tate, including the distribution of assets
and expenses of administration.
**WITNESS, Hon. Kathryn M. Bailey,
First Justice of this Court.**
Date: July 29, 2026
Stephanie Fattman,
Register of Probate
August 6, 2026

COMMONWEALTH OF
MASSACHUSETTS LAND COURT
DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL
COURT 26 SM 002374 ORDER OF
NOTICE TO: Chad T. Dolan and to
all persons entitled to the benefit
of the Servicemembers Civil Relief
Act, 50 U.S.C. c. 50 §3901 (et seq)
Massachusetts Housing Finance
Agency claiming to have an interest
in a mortgage covering real prop-
erty in Southbridge, numbered 172
Dresser Street, given by Chad T. Dolan
to Mortgage Electronic Registration
Systems Inc., as nominee for
Residential Mortgage Services, Inc.
, dated April 30, 2021, and record-
ed at Worcester County (Worcester
District) Registry of Deeds in Book
65057, Page 43, and now held by
Plaintiff by assignment, has filed with
this court a complaint for determination
of Defendant’s Servicemembers sta-
tus. If you now are, or recently have
been, in the active military service of
the United States of America, then
you may be entitled to the benefits
of the Servicemembers Civil Relief
Act. If you object to a foreclosure
of the above-mentioned property on
that basis, then you or your attor-
ney must file a written appearance
and answer in this court at Three
Pemberton Square, Boston, MA 02108
on or before September 7, 2026 or
you may lose the opportunity to chal-

lenge the foreclosure on the ground of
noncompliance with the Act.
Witness, GORDON H. PIPER, Chief
Justice of said Court on July 24, 2026
Attest: Deborah J. Patterson Recorder
August 6, 2026

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Worcester Probate and Family
Court
225 Main Street
Worcester, MA 01608
Docket No. O26P2310GD
CITATION GIVING NOTICE OF
PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF
GUARDIAN FOR INCAPACITATED
PERSON PURSUANT TO
G. L.c. 1908, § 5-304 & § 5-405
In the matter of:
Michael A Thibodeau
Of: Southbridge, MA
RESPONDENT**

Alleged Incapacitated Person
To the named Respondent and all oth-
er interested persons, a petition has
been filed by
**UMass Memorial Health-Alliance
Haof Southbridge, MA**
in the above captioned matter alleging
that **Michael A Thibodeau** is in need
of a Guardian and requesting that
Some Suitable Person of
(or some other suitable person) be ap-
pointed as Guardian to serve **Without
Surety** on the bond.

The petition asks the court to deter-
mine that the Respondent is incapaci-
tated, that the appointment of a Guard-
ian is necessary, and that the proposed
Guardian is appropriate. The petition is
on file with this court.
**You have the right to object to this
proceeding.** If you wish to do so, you
or your attorney must file a written
appearance at this court on or be-
fore 10:00 A.M. on the return date of
08/18/2026. This day is NOT a hearing
date, but a deadline date by which you
have to file the written appearance if
you object to the petition. If you fail to
file the written appearance by the re-
turn date, action may be taken in this
matter without further notice to you.
In addition to filing the written appear-
ance, you or your attorney must file
a written affidavit stating the specific
facts and grounds of your objection
within 30 days after the return date.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
**The outcome of this proceeding
may limit or completely take away
the above-named person’s right to
make decisions about personal af-
fairs or financial affairs or both. The
above-named person has the right
to ask for a lawyer. Anyone may
make this request on behalf of the
above-named person. If the above-
named person cannot afford a law-
yer, one may be appointed at State
expense.**
WITNESS, Hon. Kathryn M. Bailey,
First Justice of this Court.
Date: July 17, 2026
Stephanie K. Fattman
Register of Probate
August 6, 2026

**(SEAL)
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHU-
SETTS
LAND COURT
DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL
COURT**

26 SM 002350
ORDER OF NOTICE
TO:
Antonella Leal, Adrian Rafael Marin
Querales,
and to all persons entitled to the benefit
of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act,
50 U.S.C. c. 50 § 3901 *et seq.*
Lakeview Loan Servicing, LLC
claiming to have an interest in a Mort-
gage covering real property in South-
bridge, numbered **62 Kingsley Street**,
given by Adrian Rafael Marin Querales,
who acquired title as Adrian Marin and
Antonella Leal to Mortgage Electronic
Registration Systems, Inc. (“MERS”),
as mortgagee, as nominee for Lake-
view Loan Servicing, LLC, its succes-
sors and assigns, dated June 2, 2025,
and recorded or filed in the Worcester
County (Worcester District) Registry of
Deeds in Book 72091, Page 270, and
now held by Plaintiff by assignment,
has/have filed with this court a com-
plaint for determination of Defendant’s/
Defendants’ Servicemembers status.
If you now are, or recently have been,
in the active military service of the Unit-
ed States of America, then you may be
entitled to the benefits of the Service-
members Civil Relief Act. If you object
to a foreclosure of the above-men-
tioned property on that basis, then you
or your attorney must file a written ap-
pearance and answer in this court at
**Three Pemberton Square, Boston,
MA 02108** on or before 09/07/2026 or
you may lose the opportunity to chal-
lenge the foreclosure on the ground of
noncompliance with the Act.
Witness, GORDON H. PIPER, Chief
Justice of this Court on 07/23/2026.
Attest:
Deborah J. Patterson
Recorder
August 6, 2026

Major collaborative milestone marked at QCC Center Topping Off

WORCESTER — Quinsigamond Community College celebrated a major construction milestone with a Topping Off Ceremony for its new QCC Center, marking the completion of the building’s structural frame. State and local leaders, project partners, and members of the college community gathered to witness the raising of the final beam and celebrate the progress of this transformational project.

"Through careful planning, advocacy, fundraising, design and construction, the vision is now becoming a reality," said QCC President Dr. Luis Pedraja. "Most importantly, this will create opportunities for students to develop the skills they need to succeed in today’s workforce and strengthen the connection between education, industry and our community."

LEGALS

CHARLTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with the Wetland Protection Act of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 131, Section 40, the Charlton Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on August 19, at 7PM on the application of Ron Royer. The applicant has filed a Notice of Intent for clearing, filling, and grading work within the 100-ft buffer zone to a Bordering Vegetated Wetland. The project location is: 18 Oxbow Road, Charlton, MA 01507. Parcel ID: 38-A-3 Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting of the Charlton Conservation Commission will be conducted in person and via remote means. Members of the public who wish to participate can access the meeting remotely by request. Copies of the NOI may be examined at the Conservation Office by appointment during business hours. Thomas O'Malley Chair, Charlton Conservation Commission August 6, 2026

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Worcester Probate and Family Court
225 Main Street
Worcester, MA 01608
Docket No. WO24P1459PM
CITATION GIVING NOTICE OF
PETITION FOR REMOVAL OF A
CONSERVATOR
In the Interests of: Helen Xanthakos
Of: Southbridge, MA
RESPONDENT**

Incapacitated Person/Protected Person To the named Respondent and all other interested persons, a petition has been filed by Demetri A Kasperson of Southbridge, MA in the above captioned matter requesting that the court:
Remove the Conservator
The petition asks the court to make a determination that the Guardian and/or Conservator should be allowed to resign; or should be removed for good cause; or that the Guardianship and/or Conservatorship is no longer necessary and therefore should be terminated. The original petition is on file with the court.
You have the right to object to this proceeding. If you wish to do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance at this court on or before 10:00 A.M. on the return date of **08/18/2026**. This day is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline date by which you have to file the written appearance if you object to the petition. If you fail to file the written appearance by the return date, action may be taken in this matter without further notice to you. In addition to filing the written appearance, you or your attorney must file a written affidavit stating the specific facts and grounds of your objection within 30 days after the return date.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
The outcome of this proceeding may limit or completely take away the above-named person’s right to make decisions about personal affairs or financial affairs or both. The above-named person has the right to ask for a lawyer. Anyone may make this request on behalf of the above-named person. If the above-named person cannot afford a lawyer, one may be appointed at State expense.
WITNESS, Hon. Kathryn M. Bailey, First Justice of this Court.
Date: July 20, 2026
StephanieK. Fattman, Register of Probate
August 6, 2026



Courtesy Photo
Left to right: Deputy Commissioner Dr. Richard Riccardi of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education; QCC Trustee Dr. Barur Rajeshkumar; QCC Trustee Dr. Satya Mitra; Commissioner Adam Baacke of the Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM); QCC Board Chair Dr. Linda Maykel; QCC President Dr. Luis Pedraja; State Sen. Robyn Kennedy; State Rep. James O’Day; Assistant Secretary Robert LePage of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education; Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty; QCC Student Trustee Dawit Quilty and Craig Skurka, operations manager for Gilbane Building Company.

The event featured a ceremonial beam signing and remarks from Pedraja; State Sen. Robyn Kennedy; State Rep. James O’Day; Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty; Assistant Secretary Robert LePage of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Education; Deputy Commissioner Dr. Richard Riccardi of the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education; Commissioner Adam Baacke of the Massachusetts Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance (DCAMM); and Craig Skurka, operations manager for Gilbane Building Company.

"The raising of the beam is a moment for us to give gratitude and thank those who have stepped up to make this a reality," Kennedy said. "As you join into the growing skyline of Worcester, we continue to grow with you. By signing our names to these beams, we are signing our commitment to make sure the school continues to be successful."

The Topping Off Ceremony commemorated the progress of the \$37.4 million renovation and expansion project, which is transforming a 1960s-era athletic facility into a modern, accessible hub for learning, workforce development and student life.

Upon completion, the 57,000-square-foot facility will feature advanced manufacturing and robotics laboratories, hospitality training spaces, flexible classrooms and revitalized athletic facilities. The project also includes significant upgrades to aging infrastructure and accessibility improvements designed to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students.

"This project is so important to the mission and vision of Quinsigamond Community College, the region it serves and the Commonwealth," Riccardi said. "We know that holistic student success incorporates curricular and co-curricular initiatives, and this project provides the infrastructure to check both of those boxes."

Speakers highlighted the collaborative partnership among the college, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and project stakeholders that have made this investment possible.

"It is a necessity that we continue to improve our community college environments," O’Day said. "The legislature has made it very clear that not only is higher ed important, but certainly the community college segment is equally as important. It’s been an honor to be able to represent the college."

While the majority of the renovation is funded by DCAMM, the project reflects the type of transformational campus investment envisioned through the Commonwealth's BRIGHT Act (An Act to Build Resilient Infrastructure to Generate Higher Education Transformation). The statewide initiative is designed to support modernization of public higher education facilities.

"I want to thank our legislative partners for championing the BRIGHT Act to date and hopefully getting it across the finish line so we can keep doing impactful projects like this one," Baacke said. "As someone whose parents both worked at community colleges, I know there are few things we do that are more important in changing the lives of residents across the Commonwealth than what

community colleges do every day."

Designed to achieve LEED Gold certification, the facility will support improved energy performance, enhanced indoor air quality and long-term sustainability goals.

"Buildings like this bring jobs to your community – great-paying opportunities for advancement. We are looking forward to continuing to make these investments. They are about the future of the economy," LePage said.

Skurka recognized the efforts of the construction team and project partners in reaching the milestone safely and efficiently.

"Today's event celebrates a significant construction milestone and the many people and partnerships helping us bring this project to life," Skurka said. "At Gilbane, we are committed to creating healthy, safe and sustainable spaces that have a lasting effect on the community. We are honored to partner with QCC on this transformative project."

The QCC Center is expected to open in Fall 2027 and will serve as a centerpiece of the college's campus, creating new opportunities for hands-on learning, workforce training and community engagement.

"When we look at this structure, we aren’t just looking at steel beams and concrete; we’re looking at the literal framework of Worcester’s economic future," said Petty. "True progress means lifting everyone up. By expanding physical accessibility and producing state-of-the-art, energy-efficient systems, QCC is ensuring our green energy and equity goals move forward."

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House Ads - Southbridge
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Southbridge
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2 x 3

1143367
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FOR RENT
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FOUNDATION
CLASS
1 x 3

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Worcester Youth Leadership Institute kicks off 13th year

WORCESTER — While many students traditionally have headed off to summer vacations, for the past 13 years, some area high school and college students have participated in the Worcester Youth Leadership Institute. The program offers students a six-week learning experience which exposes them to a variety of Worcester businesses, industries, and mentors. The Institute is a part of a broader effort by the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce to develop and mentor Worcester's future leaders.

ECONOMIC

continued from page A1
later 2025 and 2026, Sturbridge lost 10 shops and gained 10 new shops. Since 2024, Sturbridge has experienced 19 business closings with 23 openings.

Corporate good news
Photonis USA recently announced that they would be expanding and extending their presence in Sturbridge in order to manufacture night vision devices. Town Administrator Robin Grimm along with Town Planner Jean Bubon worked closely with state economic officials and Photonis executives on a retention expansion assistance package. Photonis will be creating 25 new jobs and investing \$15 to \$20 million in this project. Photonis will be occupying space in 660 Main

Street which is currently under construction as a 40,000 square foot building.

Adding to all of these good news items is that the Ohio based corporation R.W. Beckett recently renovated the former Heal Dispensary building into a first class training center. R.W. Beckett is an 88 year old business that manufactures a variety of HVAC products. It is estimated that Beckett products are in 50 million American homes. The President and CEO of R.W. Beckett, Kevin Beckett, attended the Sturbridge ribbon cutting and thoughtfully dedicated this center for Jeff Rozga, a 45-year Beckett employee who passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. Members of the Rozga family were in attendance. Sturbridge is very appreciative of the investment made by R.W. Beckett and the human values they represent as a business. This center will attract many visitors to Sturbridge for their training sessions.

Marketing and promoting Sturbridge
Since 2022, the Sturbridge Tourist Association has retained the tourism marketing firm Tap Into Travel to promote Sturbridge through the Experience Sturbridge web site, Facebook, Instagram and seasonal digital marketing campaigns. Since 20024 there have been 39,000 to 57,000 visitors to the website annually. Online advertising campaigns reached 250,000 viewers in 2025. These figures reflect that reach and depth of digital messaging.

stand their community can offer them a unique college experience and fascinating job opportunities, and provide insight and perspective on the city's history, leadership, business community, and government make-up."

The Institute identifies 25 youth, ages 15 – 21, some who are participating in the city's YouthWorks employment program, and others who applied on their own to be a part of the program. The program runs from July 10 to August 14 introduces the participants to the business, government, education, and nonprofit sectors in a variety of ways including talks and question-and-answer sessions with the leadership structures of various sectors and organizations. Topics will include career exploration as well as leadership focus areas from the Worcester fabric, such as entrepreneurship, economic development, public health, and non-profit organizations.

The program launched in 2014 after conversations between Tim Murray, George Smith and Ron Scott from United Families for Change, Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty, City Manager Edward Augustus, and City Councilors Philip Palmieri and Sarai Rivera. All of the partner organizations came together and have graduated more than 200 students over the past 12 years. For the past 10 summers, the program was facilitated by Walter Jovel, whose passion for mentoring young people and commitment to helping students discover their potential made a lasting impact on hundreds of participants. Walter passed away unexpectedly in May, and the 2026 Worcester Youth Leadership Institute is dedicated to continuing his legacy of service and leadership.



Home Summer Auto

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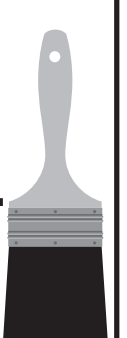


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Master Masons gather for pig roast

BY BRO. JIMMY FALZONE
MAJOR GENERAL SALEM TOWNE LODGE
SOUTHBRIDGE

OXFORD — On Saturday, Aug. 1, the Oxford Masonic Lodge parking lot welcomed Master Masons, their families, and friends from the 24th Masonic District for a family-friendly pig roast.

Brother Fred Aubin, Jr. of Oxford Masonic Lodge and Brother Clay Tull



Courtesy Photo

From left, Brother Clay Tull, Brother Fred Aubin III with the apple in his mouth, Dave Mackenzie, and Brother Fred Aubin, Jr. kneeling are Jamiesin Miller and Jeff Trainor. The group smiles after successfully removing the pig from the grill and placing it on the table before carving and serving it to guests.

of Major General Salem Towne Lodge in Southbridge hosted the event. With help from Brother Aubin's son and friends, Brother Aubin and Brother Tull began cooking the nearly 110-pound pig at 7 a.m. It took about eight hours to cook fully. The aroma filled the air as guests enjoyed pork butts, BBQ chicken, corn on the cob, pasta salad, potato salad, cornbread, coleslaw, baked beans, and more. Proceeds will support lodge needs and scholarship funds.

The day was filled with laughter, children playing, and the camaraderie and fellowship of Freemasonry, bringing together brethren from lodges across the 24th Masonic District with their families and friends. To learn more about Freemasonry, visit www.massfreemasonry.org to find a lodge near you.

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41st Valley Friendship Tour raises nearly \$110,000 for Open Sky Community Services

Courtesy Photo

Worcester-based nonprofit Open Sky Community Services brought together over 250 participants for its 41st annual Valley Friendship Tour fundraiser. The community event, for all ages and abilities, was held on June 6 in Whitinsville to support Open Sky's programs throughout Central Massachusetts.

WORCESTER — The 41st annual Valley Friendship Tour drew more than 250 participants who walked, ran, and rolled through the Blackstone Valley on June 6 and raised nearly \$110,000 to benefit Open Sky Community Services, a nonprofit behavioral health and human services organization.

The Valley Friendship Tour, which starts and ends at Alternatives' Whitin Mill, is Open Sky's signature fundraising event for the agency's nearly 150 programs serving children, adults, and families with mental health challenges, intellectual and developmental disabilities, substance use disorders, brain injury, homelessness and other complex challenges. Since it began just over four decades ago, the tour has raised millions in support of individuals and families in Central Massachusetts.

"The Valley Friendship Tour is a visual representation of Open Sky's mission – individuals of all abilities coming together in the community with purpose," said Ken Bates, President & CEO of Open Sky Community Services. "We are grateful to this community that has been created over the past four decades and for its unwavering support of our neighbors throughout Central

Courtesy

Lorie Martiska (right), Open Sky Executive Vice President and Chief Advancement Officer, poses with Teresa Pitaro, the 2026 Valley Friendship Tour top fundraiser. Pitaro, of Norwood, has been the top fundraiser for five years in a row and she raised nearly \$7,000 for this year's community event.

Massachusetts facing complex challenges. Thank you to our participants, attendees, sponsors, and staff for making this year's Tour another one to remember."

Teresa Pitaro, a resident of Norwood who has a family member served by Open Sky, was the top fundraiser for the fifth year in a row. She raised nearly \$7,000 for the 2026 Valley Friendship Tour.

The individual and team participants of all ages and abilities had the option of a 1-mile walk, 5K run or walk, or a 30-mile bike ride through the Blackstone Valley. The all-day event featured lunch, live music, raffles, and entertainment on the Dennis H. Rice Community Plaza at Alternatives' Whitin Mill.

About Open Sky Community Services

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

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