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# Joel H. Prouty Masonic Lodge continues long tradition of supporting Auburn youth

AUBURN — Over the last 25 years, there has been a partnership that has evolved between the Auburn Youth & Family Services and the local fraternal lodge of masons, known as Joel H. Prouty Lodge situated at 780 Southbridge Street, Auburn for annual food drives held on Saturdays, Nov. 12, 19, and 26.

Normally, twice a year, the brothers at the lodge gather up their banner, tables, cold weather gear, and a crew to man their

collection station outside of the Park 'n Shop grocery store at 711 Southbridge Street, Auburn. But this year of COVID-19, has demonstrated that more people are in need of the services of Auburn Youth & Family Services than normal. So, the idea was brought up by Mark Maass, a Past Master of the lodge, to see if we could run more Saturdays between Thanksgiving and Christmas to continue the food drive collections.

The members signed up immediately for 4 hour shifts for mornings and afternoons for the next four weeks to man the collection table. For the last three weekends, Nov. 12, 19, & 26 the members of Joel H. Prouty Lodge have collected over \$3,000.00 in contributions that allowed them to shop in Park 'n Shop to fill more than 100 boxes of canned goods, non-perishables, and even a few turkeys, which have been delivered to AY&FS each Monday following the drives. They will continue to collect food for the next three Saturdays, December 5, 12, & 19 so help them out and stop by with any donation you can.

Park 'n Shop has a new owner, Kevin Meehan, and is fully supportive in out taking up the mantle of having a Food Drive for members of our community. Kevin O'Donnell, the current Master of the lodge, Dan Barston & Mark Maass are co-chairing the Food Drive efforts, and putting a plan in place to continue this effort the first Saturday of each month



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Courtesy

Joel H. Prouty Lodge members braving the cold while filling the baskets, and delivering the donations to the Auburn Youth and Family Services Center.

## Charlton police continue annual Toy Drive

BY JASON BLEAU  
VILLAGER CORRESPONDENT

CHARLTON – Ringing in the 2020 holiday season, the Charlton Police Department continued its annual tradition collecting toys to benefit Toys for Tots.

On Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 5 and 6, the Charlton Police Department welcomed donation to help families in need provide a fun Christmas for their children in a year that has been particularly challenging. Each year the Charlton Police team with the Worcester County Toys for Tots effort to collect toys throughout November culminating in a two-day final collection. According to Officer Derek Gaylord, who manned the drive on Dec. 6, this was a particularly successful year even in spite of the economic hardships being faced by

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Jason Bleau

Donations filled a cruiser on Dec. 6 during day two of the final weekend of the 2020 Charlton Police Toys for Tots Toy Drive.

## Winter storm leaves thousands in the dark



Courtesy

Accidents were reported throughout the area during last weekend's snowstorm, including this wreck in Charlton.

REGION – A powerful winter storm overspread the region last weekend, causing several accidents and widespread power outages.

At the height of the Dec. 5 storm, nearly 50,000 customers statewide were

without power, with multiple communities picking up over a foot of snow. The speed limit was reduced on the Mass. Pike, which saw several accidents.

Surface streets were equally treacherous,

with accidents reported in Charlton, Leicester, and Spencer. Police in those communities also received multiple reports of downed power lines.

In Sturbridge, Route

Turn To **STORM** page **A12**

## Bay Path UNICEF Club holds fundraiser for children's nutrition

CHARLTON — This holiday season, the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy UNICEF Club pounced on the opportunity to help support UNICEF USA to raise awareness and funds to children's nutrition worldwide by holding a bake sale.

The UNICEF club raised and donated \$113.23. UNICEF Club PR Officer, Isabella Boateng of Manchester, Conn. stated, "Malnutrition

has resulted in almost 50 percent of all childhood deaths. UNICEF keeps increasing its efforts to reach the most remote villages and communities all over the world, to ensure that all children have the adequate nutrition necessary for growth, learning and development. UNICEF has been treating malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life, UNICEF has assisted in cutting down the number of children badly affected by stunting by nearly 100 million since 1990."

The Officers of the

UNICEF Club, member, and Club Advisor, Professor Cheryl Cahill, MSN, RN were filled with enthusiasm and drive to make a difference in the lives of children.

"In spite of the pandemic and hardship in these present times, we organized a Bake sale to raise for funds" said Boateng.

She added, "Volunteers baked delicious homemade pastries which were served with coffee, tea, or hot chocolate for a donation. The event was successful with safety protocols observed."

Courtesy

This holiday season, the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy UNICEF Club pounced on the opportunity to help support UNICEF USA to raise awareness and funds to children's nutrition worldwide by holding a bake sale.



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## Must-haves to achieve a holiday wonderland

The end of the year marks a period of heightened festivity. Come the holiday season, homes and businesses are decorated and everyone seems to have an extra spring in their step.

The sight of snowflakes, candy canes, evergreen wreaths, and Christmas trees can elicit nostalgia for happy holidays of the past, as well as excitement for what is yet to come. When it comes to decorating for the holidays, there are certain items that set the scene.

- **Christmas trees:** Germany is credited with starting the modern Christmas tree tradition. It dates back to the 16th century when devout Christians brought trees into their homes and decorated them. German settlers brought Christmas tree traditions to America upon their arrival in Pennsylvania in the 19th century.

- **Mistletoe:** Mistletoe is known as the "kissing plant" and it is customary for couples to kiss while standing beneath the plant, typically hung in

doorways and arches. Mistletoe was once hung to drive off evil spirits and ensure fertility. Kissing under the mistletoe was first found associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites.

- **Lights:** Lights are commonly seen during the holiday season. The custom of having holiday lights dates back to when Christmas trees were decorated with candles, which symbolized Christ being the light of the world. These traditions evolved from pagan rituals that would celebrate the return of light of the sun as the days grow longer after the winter solstice.

- **Yule log:** Many families burn a yule log in the fireplace and watch it burn while listening to Christmas carols. The familiar custom of burning the log dates back to solstice celebrations and the tradition of bonfires. The Christmas tradition called for burning a portion of the log each evening until Twelfth Night, also known as the Epiphany, which takes place on Janu-



ary 6.

- **Poinsettias:** Poinsettias are a tropical plant that originated in Mexico. Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first Ambassador from the United States to Mexico. He became enamored with the plants, and brought them back to his native South Carolina. An old Mexican legend suggests a poor girl had nothing to offer baby Jesus at Christmas Eve services, so she picked a handful

of weeds and put them at the bottom of the nativity scene. These weeds burst into bright red flowers and became known as "Flores de Noche Buena," or "Flowers of the Holy Night."

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Ma in her kerchief  
And I in my cap,  
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As he drove out of sight,  
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# 2019 Bay Path male grads achieve 100 percent pass rate for NCLEX-PN



Courtesy

The male graduates of the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy Class of 2019 recently earned a 100 percent pass rate for the National Council Licensure Examination, a comprehensive adaptive exam that allows students to become licensed and practice as licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

CHARLTON — The male graduates of the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy Class of 2019 recently earned a 100 percent pass rate for the National Council Licensure Examination, a comprehensive adaptive exam that allows students to become licensed and practice as licensed practical nurses (LPNs).

This comes after Timothy Nikopoulos, LPN of Charlton notified Gretheline Bolandrina, MSN Ed, RN, CRRN Academy Director of passing the NCLEX-PN on his first attempt.

“It as a bit of a wait, about four months since I signed up, and a bit of a drive to South Burlington, Vermont to take one of the only four available test dates in New England” wrote Nikopoulos. He added, “I have begun working as an LPN, with my second shift of training.”

Nikopoulos completed his last two weeks in the

Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst with his final practicum night shift in the medical ICU. He plans to secure a position in a nurse residency program in critical care/ICU in a hospital setting. The Accelerated BS in Nursing is a full-time undergraduate program that allows students to earn a BS in Nursing in 17 months. This option is open to students who have completed bachelor’s degrees in other disciplines.

Nikopoulos enjoyed the ABSN program at UMass, despite the transition to online learning in April 2020. He was named on the Dean’s List for the Fall 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters. Nikopoulos stated “the rigorous nature of the practical nursing program at Bay Path provided a great framework of knowledge for me to excel in the ABSN program.” His

anticipated graduation date is February 2021.

“This accomplishment of the graduates from the PN Class of 2019 warms an educator’s heart,” said Academy Director Bolandrina. “The Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy prides itself on producing real world ready nurses, outstanding outcomes, and passing on the first try. Male or female graduates, the Academy celebrates NLCEX success.”

The other male members of the PN Class of 2019 are as follows:

- James Karuri, LPN of Worcester
- Onesmus Katua, LPN of Worcester
- David Macharia, LPN of Worcester
- Gideon Mendza, LPN of Cherry Valley
- Timothy Nikopoulos, LPN of Charlton
- Isaac Njoroge, LPN of Worcester
- Erik Olson, LPN of

Sturbridge  
James Wachira, LPN of Worcester

At Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy, the program is a 40-week, (10-month), full-time, Monday through Friday, evening program. The program begins mid-August and is completed in late June. Graduates receive a Practical Nursing Certificate and are eligible to take the NCLEX-PN licensure exam. The Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy is fully approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services Department of Public Health Board of Registration in Nursing ([www.mass.gov/dph/boards/rn](http://www.mass.gov/dph/boards/rn)) and is accredited by the Commission on Occupational Education ([www.council.org](http://www.council.org)). For more information, visit [www.baypath.net](http://www.baypath.net)

## Edward Street Child Services announces name change

WORCESTER — Edward Street Child Services, a Central Massachusetts leader in early childhood investment and advocacy since 1883, has announced that it will begin operating under a new name.

The organization will be known as Edward Street, effective immediately, and has also unveiled a new logo and redesigned homepage.

The name “Edward Street” reflects the organization’s evolution from The Day Nursery, a childcare center, to Edward Street Child Services, a supporter of childcare providers, to its current mission of broad investment in early childhood. Today, Edward Street promotes early childhood success through

strategic partnerships, funding, advocacy, education and training, and its leadership in response to COVID-19.

“Now more than ever, early childhood leaders, providers and communities need to collaborate on behalf of children and families,” said Executive Director Eve Gilmore. “Edward Street is committed to investing in early childhood by building relationships and advocating for policies that advance the learning, development, health, safety and care of our youngest children, today and for generations to come.”

Edward Street initiatives include the Alignment Partnership Council, a coalition of providers and programs that seeks to align

and strengthen services from birth to third grade; the Master Teacher Project; the Book Buddies Early Literacy Program; earlychildhood-central.org, a resource center for constituents; and the annual Day of Play Family Festival.

In response to COVID-19, Edward Street has curated trusted health and safety information; collaborated to provide emergency funding via the Commonwealth Children’s Fund Massachusetts Family

Child Care Emergency Fund; helped establish virtual learning programming through training and support; and advocated for policies that promote early childhood education and care on the local and state levels.

For more information about Edward Street or its name change, visit [edwardstreet.org/contact](http://edwardstreet.org/contact) Managing Director Kim Davenport at (508) 792-0220 or [kdavenport@edwardstreet.org](mailto:kdavenport@edwardstreet.org).

**Auburn News**

**ACCURACY WATCH**

The Auburn News is committed to accuracy in all its news reports. Although numerous safeguards are in place to ensure accurate reporting, mistakes can occur.

Confirmed fact errors will be corrected at the top right hand corner of page 3 in a timely manner.

If you find a mistake, call (508) 909-4106 or email [news@stonebridgepress.news](mailto:news@stonebridgepress.news) during normal business hours. During non-business hours, leave a message in the editor’s voice mailbox. The editor will return your phone call.

## Charlton to maintain single tax rate

BY JASON BLEAU  
VILLAGER CORRESPONDENT

CHARLTON – The Charlton Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to remain with a single tax rate, maintaining one unified rate that applies to business and residential properties. This approach will continue the town’s tradition or spreading the tax burden evenly among residents and businesses.

Selectmen held their annual tax classification hearing in late November where they received a brief presentation about the tax rate and what their votes would mean for the community. In the end Charlton’s top board agreed to stay with the status quo and avoid putting added pressure on businesses to manage the tax burden. Selectman Bill Borowski helped lead the charge to support the single tax rate and clarified the vote of selectmen after the unanimous decision.

“What these motions were in a nutshell says that both residential and businesses are going to be taxed the same. The rationale behind that is you want to encourage business to come to town and towns that have a split tax rate generally don’t have quite a favorability,” Borowski said. “In fact, you’ll see many larger municipalities that even have a split tax rate have been trying, sometimes with great difficulty, to move that burden away from businesses.”

Selectmen also argued that staying with a single tax rate with encourage businesses to move into town with the understanding that the tax burden will be distributed fairly.

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# LEGALS

(SEAL)  
**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS LAND COURT DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL COURT**  
20 SM 001652  
**ORDER OF NOTICE**  
TO: Laurie M. Levitre a/k/a Laurie Levitre and to all persons entitled to the benefit of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. c. 50 §3901 (et seq) Wilmington Savings Fund Society, FSB, as owner Trustee on behalf of CSMC 2018-RPL1 Trust claiming to have an interest in a mortgage covering real property in Auburn, numbered 62 Federal Hill Road Unit # 62 Building #6 Village Green Condominium, given by Laurie M. Levitre a/k/a Laurie Levitre to Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc., as nominee for Weichert Financial Services, dated August 24, 2007, and recorded at Worcester County (Worcester District) Registry of Deeds in Book 41705, Page 1, as

affected by a Loan Modification Agreement dated July 31, 2015, recorded in Book 54484, Page 218, and now held by Plaintiff by assignment, has filed with this court a complaint for determination of Defendant’s Servicemembers status. If you now are, or recently have been, in the active military service of the United States of America, then you may be entitled to the benefits of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. If you object to a foreclosure of the above-mentioned property on that basis, then you or your attorney must file a written appearance and answer in this court at Three Pemberton Square, Boston, MA 02108 on or before January 4, 2021 or you may lose the opportunity to challenge the foreclosure on ground of noncompliance with the Act. Witness, GORDON H. PIPER, Chief Justice of said Court on November 30, 2020  
Attest: Deborah J. Patterson Recorder  
December 11, 2020

(SEAL)  
**COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS LAND COURT DEPARTMENT OF THE TRIAL COURT**  
DOCKET NUMBER: 20 SM 001610  
**ORDER OF NOTICE**  
TO: **Bradley Sjosten a/k/a Bradley P. Sjosten** and to all persons entitled to the benefit of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, 50 U.S.C. c. 50 §3901 (et seq)  
**20 Cap Fund I LLC** claiming to have an interest in a Mortgage covering real property in Auburn, numbered 69 Bryn Mawr Avenue, given by Bradley Sjosten a/k/a Bradley P. Sjosten to National City Bank, dated October 30, 2003, and recorded in Worcester County (Worcester District) Registry of Deeds in Book 32119, Page 150, and now held by Plaintiff by assignment, has filed with this court a complaint for determination of Defendant’s Servicemembers status.

If you now are, or recently have been, in the active military service of the United States of America, then you may be entitled to the benefits of the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act. If you object to a foreclosure of the above-mentioned property on that basis, then you or your attorney must file a written appearance and answer in this court at **Three Pemberton Square, Boston, MA 02108** on or before January 4, 2021 or you may lose the opportunity to challenge the foreclosure on ground of noncompliance with the Act. Witness, GORDON H. PIPER, Chief Justice of said Court on November 24, 2020  
Attest: Deborah J. Patterson Recorder  
December 11, 2020

# Country Bank announces sponsorship agreement with Worcester Red Sox



Courtesy

**Pictured:** Dr. Charles Steinberg, President of Worcester Red Sox, Paul Scully, President and CEO of Country Bank, Mary McGovern, EVP and CFO of Country Bank, Tom Wolcott, SVP, Commercial Lending of Country Bank, Shelley Regis, SVP of Marketing of Country Bank and Jack Verducci, VP, Corporate Partnerships of the WooSox.

**WORCESTER** — Country Bank, a full-service financial institution serving the region with assets of \$1.8B, today announced that it entered into an elite-level corporate sponsorship arrangement as a Founding Partner of the Worcester Red Sox. Country Bank's multi-tiered sponsorship includes an iconic sign in right field atop the stands known as the "Worcester Wall" along with the Country Bank Guests Services located on the first base concourse.

The partnership between the WooSox and Country Bank also underscores their mutual commitment to the community through the WooSox Foundation and Country Bank's Charitable Giving Program by supporting local non-profits in the region through a combined charitable giving campaign throughout the baseball season.

In addition, both organizations will be working together to launch a Teacher of the Month Program that recognizes the outstanding work teachers do every day to educate and support students.

"We have been impressed and inspired by Country Bank's sense of community involvement," said WooSox President Dr. Charles A. Steinberg. "We see how helpful they are to various institutions and thousands of people in our region, and we welcome them to Polar Park with open arms as we work together to enhance the quality of life in our community even more."

"In an era where spectator sports continue to be redefined by new norms of social distancing, sports sponsorships are taking on new forms. With that in mind, we couldn't be more excited to be a part of the WooSox, and the Worcester community. The addition of year-round entertainment, including ball games, concerts, and various family activities at Polar Park, is exciting for the people and businesses in the region. We all look forward to the day when we can come together again at the ballpark enjoying activities with our families and friends. We also look forward to seeing our businesses thrive once again after being heavily impacted

by the pandemic," said Paul Scully, President and CEO of Country Bank.

To kick off their partnership, last week a team from Country Bank and the WooSox Mascot, Smiley Ball, delivered 500 Thanksgiving meals prepared by Old Sturbridge Village along with iconic apple pies from Worcester based Table Talk Pies to the St. John's Food Pantry for the Poor.

"The alignment of our organizational values with the WooSox solidifies our commitment to service and teamwork as we continually strive for excellence in all we do," shared Scully.

About Country Bank  
Country Bank is a full-service mutual community bank serving central and western Massachusetts with 14 offices in Ware, Palmer, West Brookfield, Brimfield, Belchertown, Wilbraham, Ludlow, Leicester, Paxton, Charlton, and Worcester. Country Bank is a member of FDIC, DIF, and the SUM network. Country Bank can be reached at 800-322-8233 or online at [countrybank.com](http://countrybank.com).

## Charlton resident receives dual Master's degree from Grand Canyon University

**CHARLTON** — Sarah Grant of Charlton, adjunct faculty at Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy, recently received dual degrees: Master of Business Administration and Master of Science in Nursing: Nursing Leadership in Healthcare Setting recently from the Grand Canyon University.

Grant is a recent addition to the Bay Path Practical Nursing Academy Clinical Faculty.

"My nursing academic journey began with a Practical Nursing Certificate in 2007 from Massachusetts Bay Community College," said Grant.

Becoming an LPN expanded her world view and provided her not only with the knowledge, inspiration, and discipline to seek academic progression but also to have a challenging and meaningful professional life. She looks back at her academic progression with gratitude. She completed her Associate degree in nursing at Quinsigamond

Community College in 2015 and obtained her license as a Registered Nurse. She then completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Grand Canyon University in 2017. As an undergraduate, her clinical affiliations included Saint Vincent Hospital in Worcester, Milford Hospital in Milford, Harrington Hospital in Southbridge, and in the Worcester Public School System. Her previous employment includes Hospice of Western & Central Massachusetts as an RN Case Manager, Wingate at Worcester as Nurse Supervisor, and Parson Hills Nursing as Staff Nurse.

Grant is serving her first term as a Clinical Facilitator at Bay Path Practical Nursing. Already, practical nursing students are glowing with comments such as "Professor Grant is an excellent instructor. She makes sure you understand very well. I remember everything she taught us." And "My clinical facilitator, Professor Grant, is such an amazing instructor. Am so thankful to have her."

*A STONEBRIDGE PRESS PUBLICATION*

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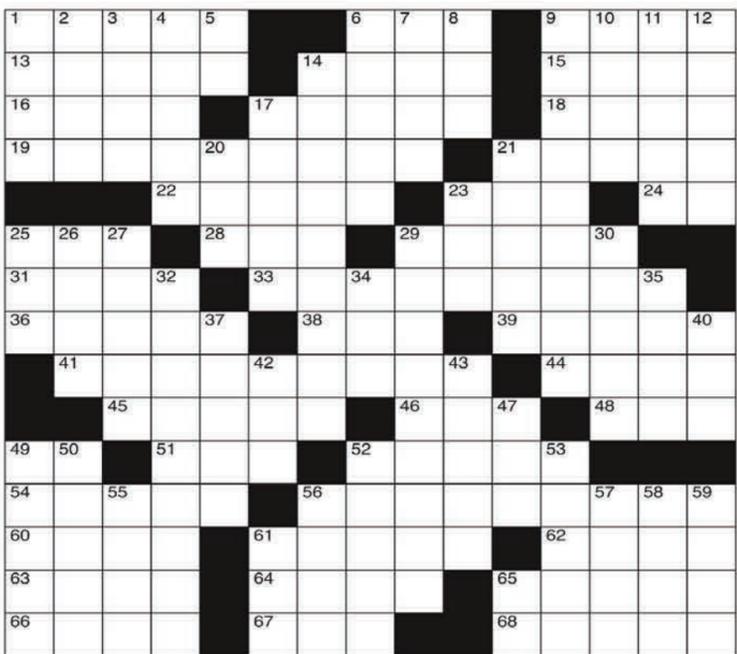
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## ALMANAC

### REAL ESTATE

**AUBURN**  
Propco LLC.  
\$440,000, 254 South St, 2020 Kusy FT, and Kusy, Randy F, to Obrien, James M, and Obrien, Julia N.  
\$360,000, 60 Elmwood St, Obrien, James M, and Obrien, Julia, to Wolf, Devon G.  
\$300,000, 40 Pinehurst Ave, Krupa, Robert B, and Pasihecka-Krupa, Ewa, to Vidal-Perez, Rodrigo E.  
\$155,000, 3 Carroll St, Savers Coop Bank, to Sclo, Lorraine A.  
\$138,000, 136 Old Meetinghouse Rd #136, Olson, Laura A, and Begley, Laura A, to Dzerhachova, Iryna.  
\$120,000, 26 Laurel St, Shaw, Andrew R, and Ferrera, Lauren, to Shaw, Andrew R.



### CLUES ACROSS

1. Skateboarders love them
6. Popular sports podcast (abbr.)
9. Former Ohio State great Michael
13. Not dirty
14. Earth goddess (Greek myth.)
15. A Spanish river
16. Pig meat (French)
17. Famed astronomer
18. Floating ice
19. Broadcast
21. Aquatic mammals
22. Some are bath
23. Hip hop trio
24. NY Giants' #56
25. Small European viper
28. Neither
29. Multiple Tony-winner Rivera
31. Loud noise
33. Second year high schooler
36. "\_\_\_ in comparison"
38. Golf score
39. Raise
41. Pastas
44. Easily manageable
45. Fathered
46. Pouch
48. Institute legal proceedings against
49. News organization
51. Unruly group of people
52. Fasten or secure
54. Sheets of glass
56. Doubled
61. Rooney and Kate are two
62. Small, rich sponge cake
63. Advice or counsel
64. Large wading bird
65. Famed British physicist
66. Narrow ridges (Swedish)
67. Field force unit
68. Lying face downward

### CLUES DOWN

1. Proof of purchase (abbr.)
2. Soap ingredient
3. Blackbird
4. Single steps
5. Tin
6. Books have lots of them
7. Made of fermented honey and water
8. You can get it in a bed
9. Room for communal meals
10. Early Syrian kingdom
11. Provokes dry amusement
12. Use with "thou"
14. Mollusk
17. Grain storage units
20. Not a car, not a truck
21. Ooze
23. N. Vietnamese ethnic group
25. Tennis pros group
26. Something that's not what it's purported to be
27. E. Indian trees
29. Beloved December holiday
30. Regions
32. Metric unit of length
34. Peter's last name
35. Beige
37. 18-year period in astronomy
40. Where golfers begin
42. Basketball stat (abbr.)
43. Frocks
47. Soda comes in it
49. On approval
50. Trims by cutting
52. Small finch
53. Language Bura-\_\_\_
55. Nothing
56. Imbecile (British)
57. Tropical Asian plant
58. Abba \_\_\_, Israeli politician
59. Small freshwater fish
61. Indicates position
65. Data processing

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# Baker administration pushes awareness of COVID precautions

BY KEVIN FLANDERS

STAFF WRITER

REGION – With mask fatigue and other frustrations continuing to build statewide, the Baker-Polito Administration is scrambling to find creative outreach options.

Last week, Gov. Charlie Baker announced a new public awareness effort encouraging residents to continue heeding health guidance. Dubbed “Get Back Mass,” the campaign highlights the importance of wearing a mask, practicing good hygiene, keeping a safe distance, and avoiding large gatherings.

“The campaign features residents from across the Commonwealth who, in their own words, draw the connection between taking precautions and getting back to the activities, people, and experiences they enjoy,” read a statement released by Baker. “The campaign underscores the importance of taking precautions so the Commonwealth can slow the spread of the virus and keep our communities safe.”

The multilingual campaign will run on several platforms this winter, including television and digital ads. The Get Back

Mass program will also utilize social media messages, and informational posters will be displayed in several public locations.

The program will run through at least February, officials said. Depending on COVID-19 conditions toward the end of the winter, the campaign could be expanded to March and beyond.

The Get Back Mass campaign is the latest in a series of public awareness efforts the Governor has launched to help slow the spread of COVID-19. The state has seen sharp increases in new cases

and hospitalizations over the last month. State leaders blame the surge mostly on large private gatherings and complacency with health measures, as well as travelers returning to the state without adhering to quarantine regulations.

Looking ahead, officials are particularly concerned about a steeper spike emerging from Thanksgiving travel and gatherings.

In addition to the Get Back Mass campaign, the Baker-Polito Administration made several other COVID-19 announcements last week. These include an

award of \$650,000 in grant funding to community-based and faith-based organizations to help reduce the spread of the virus.

“The COVID-19 Community Grant Program supports nonprofit, community-based, and faith-based organizations in raising awareness of COVID best practices,” the Governor’s statement read.

Twenty organizations statewide will receive grant awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000. Awardees will engage in peer leadership activities, advanced COVID-19 health communications,

educational programs, and community outreach efforts, among others.

Also, the Governor announced last week the expansion of the Abbott BinaxNOW testing program to include Massachusetts long-term care facilities. This will increase COVID-19 testing availability throughout the winter for some of the state’s most vulnerable residents.

For more information on statewide efforts to combat COVID-19, visit [www.mass.gov](http://www.mass.gov).

## Nearly \$2 million awarded in annual community grants

WORCESTER — When the pandemic hit, and adult learners were forced to leave the classroom and seek nurturing study space elsewhere, Lisa Brennan knew there was a challenge in store for some of her members.

As executive director of the Genesis Club in Worcester, Brennan oversees the nonprofit’s Supported Education Program which assists members with severe mental illness in navigating the hurdles of attending classes – be they in a college curriculum, certificate program, or vocational training – while balancing doctor and therapy appointments, medi-

cations, and recovery.

“Social connections are key to recovery” said Brennan. “COVID-19 struck right at the heart of what we are – a community of people trying to achieve a common goal of recovery.”

She estimates, each year, 80 members are reliant on the organization’s educational services and focus on greater workforce development.

The Greater Worcester Community Foundation is proud to offer Genesis Club an award to sustain its Supported Education Program and return members to their studies.

“It’s increasingly important for young peo-

ple to have a solid educational foundation in order to succeed in their careers, personal lives, and feel accomplished,” said Barbara G. Fields, president and CEO of the Foundation.

Genesis Club’s grant is one of 123 awarded to 114 organizations – totaling \$1.935 million – by the Foundation in its 2020 Community Grant Program cycle. The Community Grant Program is the largest GWCF competitive grant-making program and is made possible by the generosity of donors.

“We knew the needs of local nonprofits would be different in light of

the pandemic,” added Fields. “It is essential for these organizations to receive the funding and support they need to sustain themselves. In this time of uncertainty, the Foundation stepped up to strengthen this sector and meet the needs of our most vulnerable populations.”

In this year’s Community Grant Program, a wide range of projects – everything from food insecurity and cultural engagement to entrepreneurship training, health care delivery, basic needs, and youth opportunities – were awarded funding.

“We are excited and inspired by this year’s

grant recipients,” said Jonathan Cohen, GWCF vice president for programs and strategy. “Each of the funded projects speaks to the uniqueness, creativity, and community spirit that is alive and well in Central Massachusetts.”

A list of the 2020 GWCF Community Grant Program recipients – including a short description of the funded projects and the amounts awarded – is available on the Foundation’s Web site.

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## Central Massachusetts see surge in COVID cases

BY KEVIN FLANDERS

STAFF WRITER

REGION – With COVID-19 conditions rapidly worsening statewide, central Mass. officials continue their scramble to convince residents to follow health protocols.

Last week, multiple communities throughout the region were listed in the state’s “red zone” for COVID-19 transmission. Positive cases have soared over the last two weeks, both locally and across the state.

North Brookfield (27 positive cases over the

last 14 days); Spencer (63); Leicester (63); Charlton (102); Sturbridge (40); and Southbridge (157) have all seen alarming spikes in new cases.

With winter approaching and the holiday season in full swing, officials fear those numbers will continue to rise.

“As COVID infections are on the rise throughout the region, I want to remind the public just how important following the CDC guidelines are to staying safe and reducing transmission,” said Spencer Town Administrator Thomas

Gregory. “All persons over the age of five must wear a face covering whenever in public – indoors and outdoors. The Governor’s stay-at-home advisory advises all residents to stay home from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m. While this is not a requirement, residents are strongly encouraged to comply.”

Additionally, indoor gatherings at private residences are limited to ten people, including family household members. Outdoor gatherings are limited to 25 people.

Officials urge residents

to adhere to protocols at private residences. State leaders have blamed several outbreaks on large private gatherings without masks or social distancing.

“Face coverings are also strongly encouraged in a private residence when non-household members are present,” Gregory added. “Spencer has now been categorized by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health as a high-risk community. Now that winter is here – and with the holidays approaching – please follow the guide-

lines that are in place.”

Leicester officials are offering similar insurances. The town has spent much of the last two months in the state’s red zone, leading to the cancellation of trick-or-treating and several other events.

“The Leicester Board of Health and the Town Administration are working closely with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and regional health officials in response to COVID-19,”

read a statement released by town officials. “The Leicester Board of Health guides the town response to COVID-19, implementing the recommendations of both the MDPH and the CDC as appropriate, as well as working with the public schools.”

The most current guidance and recommendations being implemented in Leicester will be listed on the town Web site: [www.leicesterma.org](http://www.leicesterma.org).



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# OPINION/COMMENTARY



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 EDITOR

## The struggle against Old Man Winter

The first big nor'easter of the season has come and gone, leaving us with anywhere from three to nine inches of snow (or more in some cases), depending on where you live. As with most things, we like to think about how our ancestors handled certain situations. It was during a snowy drive last winter that we became more grateful for studded snow tires and heat, after thinking about how those before us dealt with travel during snowstorms.

During the winter of 1717, a storm dumped four feet of snow, creating snowdrifts of up to 25 feet. Passing through the snow covered roads was too much for a postman who traded his horse for a pair of snowshoes. Objects similar to skis were attached to carriages as a means of winter transportation.

Streets had to be passable for wood and food deliveries. When the roads were not passable townspeople would gather together in large groups and dig out a path. The snow was placed into the back of a horse-drawn cart by gangs of men and driven to the closest river to be dumped. Salt was also used on streets, but many people complained because it ruined their shoes and clothes.

Fast forward to 1840, when the first snow plow patent came to be. It wasn't until 1862 that the first snowplow was put into use. The plow was attached to a cart and pulled by a team of horses. Soon after, many cities began to use the horse-drawn snowplow.

Typically the use of the horse-drawn plow was only used to clear main streets, leaving side streets and sidewalks snowed in by large piles often blocking entrances to businesses. Many business owners actually brought lawsuits against the plowing companies as a result because their customers could not gain access to the storefronts.

The solution to that conundrum, was the hiring of snow shovelers to accompany the plow. The blizzard of 1888, however, was too much for the "modernized" plow, leaving many people trapped inside their homes. This emergency was the catalyst cities needed to begin coming up with a better plan for snow removal. One idea was to stay on top of the storm as it started, instead of waiting for it to end. Different men driving the plows were assigned to certain neighborhoods as well.

The invention of the automobile brought with it a crutch and a new possibility as far as snow removal went. The crutch being that an entirely new method needed to be engineered and put into use. In New York in 1913, a dump truck could be seen on city streets. Seven years later the first snow loader, came on to the scene. It had a big scoop with a conveyor belt. The snow would go into the scoop via the belt, then dumped into the back of the truck. From there, off to the river it went.

It wasn't until 1959 when the weather was able to be predicted more accurately, allowing towns and cities to better prepare for any incoming storms.

Reading old diaries of our New England ancestors gives the perfect window as to what it was like to experience a bitter cold winter, prior to modern practices.

As literary critic Van Wyck Brooks wrote in "The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865," "All praise to winter, then, was Henry's feeling. Let others have their sultry luxuries. How full of creative genius was the air in which these snow-crystals were generated. He could hardly have marveled more if real stars had fallen and lodged on his coat. What a world to live in, where myriads of these little discs, so beautiful to the most prying eye, were whirled down on every traveler's coat, on the restless squirrel's fur and on the far-stretching fields and forests, the wooded dells and mountain-tops, -these glorious span-gles, the sweepings of heaven's floor."

## Life in balance

I'm not a very athletic guy. I've mentioned this before, but we used to be a skiing family. We'd head north to the slopes several times a year and occasionally out west to the Rockies. I never really enjoyed skiing, but Arlene and the kids did, so off we'd go.



POSITIVELY SPEAKING  
 GARY W. MOORE

I think much about life can be learned staring down a hill from eight-thousand feet while standing on two skis. The first thing that comes to mind is that it was unnatural. I don't think we were meant to slide down a hill with two planks strapped to our feet.

The next and most prominent thought was that it was dangerous. On Vail Mountain one afternoon, I counted eleven skiers being towed down on sleds by the ski patrol. Later in the same day, I watched a teenager fall off a ski lift.

Why would I submit my family to such risk? I guess the answer is that they loved it ... and you can't live life in a protective bubble. Other than damage to my self-esteem and confidence, we never suffered a major ski injury.

I did learn a valuable life lesson while on skis. As I said, I never felt comfortable. I could be skiing perfectly down the slopes, then get a sudden sense of fear, believing I was going to fall and inflict serious injury. When that happened, and it always did, I'd purposely fall. I realized I was doing it. My oldest son asked, why are you falling so much? I shrugged it off, but his question stuck in my head and I pondered it the rest of the day. Then in the dark of night, I realized what I was doing.

As I said, I could be coming perfectly down the hill, get a sudden stroke of fear and purposely fall. I believe my lack of comfortability and confidence told me I was going to fall and harm myself, so instead, I decided to plan my fall because it was something I could control. I was sabotaging my own success on skis. Rather than planning to succeed, I did the opposite.

I'm preparing to speak to my local chamber of commerce this month. In my thoughts about why businesses and individuals succeed and fail, I think about my purposeful failure on the slopes. I didn't envision making it to the bottom of the hill without falling. Unconsciously, I planned, executed, and succeeded at my own failure.

I wonder how many people, organizations and businesses do the same thing. How many marriages begin and end the same way? Or how many students flunk out of college because they can't picture themselves graduating? I think the true numbers would shock us all. I believe most failure is subconsciously planned and executed.

The question then is, why don't we picture ourselves making it to the bottom of the slope unharmed and still upright on our skis?

I think the answer is obvious, and it's because we haven't planned to do so. We push off the top of the mountain with a hope and prayer of making it. We don't have a plan to make it to the bottom while still upright because our fear causes us to protect ourselves against the inevitable failure. No success plan, no positive image of succeeding ... is maybe why so many skiers end up on sleds and why so many businesses, marriages and life plans fail.

If I had spent more time planning to stay upright rather than planning to hit the ground, I bet I may have found the success and enjoyment that others do on the slopes. I may have learned to enjoy skiing!

Is this a story about a winter sport? Certainly, skiing is the example, but it's more about our balance in life. Does your lack of an optimistic belief in your success sabotage your plans in any or every activity?

Before we begin any endeavor, do you plan your success, envision your accomplishment, and believe you'll make it to your goal on your feet?

In short, get your ducks in a row, have a positive plan, have fun, live more, and worry less.

Believe in and imagine your success before it happens. Create a plan with a successful ending. Execute your plan and make it to the bottom of the slope on your feet.

Believe you can and will.

*Gary W. Moore is a freelance columnist, speaker, and author of three books including the award-winning, critically acclaimed, "Playing with the Enemy." Follow Gary on Twitter @GaryWMoore721 and at www.garywmoore.com.*

## Grow your own herbal centerpiece for the holidays

Dress up the table and your holiday meals with a centerpiece of fresh herbs. You and your family will enjoy snipping a few fresh sprigs to season your meal to your own taste.



GARDEN MOMENTS  
 MELINDA MYERS

Purchase plants so they will be ready to harvest for the holidays. Many garden centers now carry herb plants year-round and some grocery stores sell herb plants in their produce department.

Include herbs your family likes and those that complement your menu. Grow plants in individual containers or plant several in one larger decorative pot. Select a container with drainage holes and one that complements your table setting.

Double pot plants when using a decorative container that lacks drainage holes. Plant herbs in a smaller pot with drainage holes. You can set several individual pots in a larger container. Place pebbles in the bottom of the decorative pot. These elevate the inner pots above any excess water that collects in the bottom of the decorative pot. Better for the plants and less work for you.

Use a quality, well-drained potting mix when moving herbs into another container. Be sure to place a saucer or tray under the pot to protect your furniture. Set on a decorative placemat for added protection and add a few seasonal items to complete your display.

Include some basil to dress up a pizza, salad, or soup with just a few leaves.

Add some oregano for seasoning any tomato-based dishes such as pizza and pasta. Use fresh thyme to add flavor to cheeses, eggs, tomatoes, and lentil. Lemon thyme makes a nice tea.

Chives' mild onion flavor is great on potatoes, but consider adding it to soups, dips, seafood dishes, and omelets. Just snip a few leaves and cut them into smaller pieces before adding them to your dish.

Parsley is high in vitamin C and often added to soups, pasta, salads, and dressings. Harvest a sprig at the end of the meal to freshen your breath.

Always water plants thoroughly when the top inch of soil is starting to dry. Basil likes slightly moist soil but not soggy wet. Pour off excess water that collects in the saucer or elevate the pot on pebbles above any water that lingers in the saucer or

tray.

And don't forget the snips. Let everyone add their own favorite herb seasonings to their meal. Encourage everyone to make the cut above a set of leaves. This keeps the plant looking good and the wound will close quickly. And don't be timid; regular harvesting encourages new growth for future harvests.

When the herbal centerpiece is not dressing up the table, move the plants to a sunny window or under artificial lights. Avoid drafts of hot and cold air. Continue watering it thoroughly as needed.

Everyone will appreciate the fresh flavor and fun of flavoring their own meals right at the table during your holiday meal.

*Melinda Myers is the author of more than 20 gardening books, including Small Space Gardening. She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and the nationally-syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine and her Web site is www.MelindaMyers.com.*



## Are you still planning to retire early?



FINANCIAL FOCUS  
 DENNIS ANTONOPOULOS

Have your retirement plans changed because of COVID-19? If so, you have plenty of company. Nearly 40 percent of those planning to retire say the pandemic has disrupted their intentions, according to the Edward Jones/Age Wave Four Pillars of the New Retirement study. You might have been thinking about retiring early – can you still do so?

Even without a crisis, it's not a bad idea to review your important life goals from time to time. So, in thinking about the possibility of early retirement, consider these factors:

Your retirement lifestyle – Your ability to retire early depends somewhat on what sort of lifestyle you're anticipating during your retirement years. If you think you'll be traveling extensively or pursuing expensive activities, you might not be able to afford to retire as early as someone with more modest ambitions. Of course, there's no "right" or "wrong" way of living in retirement – we all have our own dreams and preferences. But be aware that different lifestyles do carry different price tags – and have different effects on when you can retire securely.

Sources of retirement income – Obviously, a key factor in knowing whether you can retire early is the amount of retirement income you can rely on. So, you'll have to assess all your sources: Social Security, any other pensions you might receive, and your investment portfolio, including your 401(k) and IRA. The amounts you receive from these sources will depend on a variety of factors.

For Social Security, the longer you wait until collecting, the larger your monthly payments (although they will "top out" when you reach 70, excluding cost-of-living adjustments). In regard to your investments and retirement accounts, you'll need to establish a withdrawal rate that's appropriate for the length of time you expect to be retired. So, by adjusting these variables – taking Social Security earlier or later, taking more or less money from your retirement accounts – you can help determine if the retirement date you had in mind is viable.

Your feelings about work – Your goals are not static – they can change in response to any number of reasons, both external and personal. When you first decided you wanted to retire early, you might have been motivated by, among other things, a weariness of your current job. But has that changed over time? Have you found new challenges that interest you at work? Or, if you were forced by the pandemic to work remotely, did you actually enjoy the arrangement and want to continue it?

After all, many employers have found that their workers can be just as productive working at home, so, even when we've gotten past COVID-19, we might see a sizable shift in the geography of the workplace. In any case, if your feelings about work have changed in some way, leading you to think you could work longer than originally planned, you'd likely gain some financial advantages. You'd make more money, for starters, but you'd also keep building your 401(k) and IRA, and you could even possibly delay taking Social Security.

The pandemic may lead to a reevaluation of many financial goals – and taking early retirement might be one of them. By thinking carefully about your situation and your options, you can come up with a course of action that's right for you.

*This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor. Please contact Dennis Antonopoulos, your local Edward Jones Advisor at 5 Albert St., Auburn, MA 01501 Tel: 508-832-5385 or dennis.antonopoulos@edwardjones.com.*

# On the hunt

Deer hunting in Massachusetts has been great for some, and others not so good. It depends on who you ask. With all check stations closed and deer being registered online this year because of Covid, it will be a while before we can get some of the harvest figures. It seems the younger generation is doing extremely well harvesting some real impressive bucks locally.



THE GREAT OUTDOORS  
•••••  
RALPH TRUE

A Milford group of hunters harvested a good number of big bucks last week, while others struggled to bring home a couple of small does. Some hunters were blaming the high harvest of deer to archers prior to the shotgun season. Archers did harvest the highest number of deer in the last few years, as stated in a previous column.

The shotgun deer season will end this Saturday, followed by Black powder season, which opens this coming Monday, Dec. 14 and runs through the end of the month. The ice crusted woods made it a bit noisy for hunters trying to sneak up on deer during the start of the second week of deer hunting, but warmer temperatures for the last three days should help shotgunners finish up their season on a high note. Hunters that worked the woods with a couple of buddies, did the best, as deer were pushed to waiting gunners on well-traveled runs.

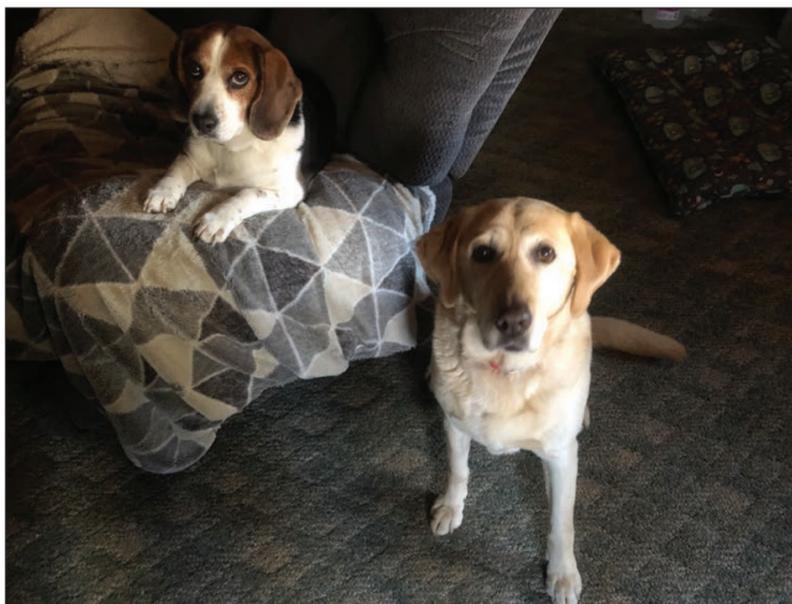
Primitive arms season is a favorite method to hunt deer for many hunters.

the bullet down the barrel. Some hunters can reload as fast as 15 seconds.

A lot better than the old ball and patch, which for years allowed for a smoothbore gun only in Massachusetts! Changing hunting laws in Mass. is like pulling teeth with legislators! The Sunday hunting bill and the Crossbow bill needs to be passed. Now that elections are just about over, sportsmen will again try to convince Massachusetts Fish & Wildlife that these bills need to be addressed and passed this year.

Trout fishing anglers are still fishing numerous bodies of water from their boats, but they are hopeful that some cold weather is on the horizon. It has been a few years now that many lakes and ponds in the area, have provided very little ice fishing, because of unsafe ice. With the darn pandemic giving anglers a touch of cabin fever, a little bit of ice fishing could be just what the doctor ordered. Watching TV every day makes it hard to concentrate on everyday life that we are accustomed to. When the vaccine is available, I will be in line.

This coming spring may not see



Courtesy

This week's picture shows this writer's two dogs, Molly & Twig.

sportsmen's shows open if we do not get the pandemic under control. That would be a shame! Thousands of sportsmen attend the shows annually, pumping thousands of dollars into the economy, not to mention seeing old friends and telling lies about their fishing and hunting experiences in 2020.

Shopping for Christmas gifts this year is being done mostly online, which is a good idea. Purchasing a hunting or

fishing license is now available online, and is one of the best things you can give any sportsmen. Gift certificates are also a great gift, when purchased at a sportsmen or sportswoman's favorite store.

Be sure to social distance and wear a mask.

Take A Kid Fishing & Keep Them Rods Bending!

## Readers Share Timely Tips!

As we countdown to the festive holidays, readers took time from the hustle and bustle of the season to share their favorite tips and tricks. From creative COVID related strategies to sparking sentimental memories, the following hints from area readers are sure to please!

Bringing extended family to the holiday table without literally having them at the table this year can be a reality, thanks to this reader's present project:

It looks like the Covid virus is going to be here for the holidays. Many families will have to skip the traditional get together where everyone looks forward to homemade food. I am trying something different this year. Because we won't be able to share a favorite recipe at the table, I am creating a family cook book. I have emailed family and extended family members requesting that they send me one or more of their favorite recipes. I will then put together a family favorite cook book. They will then receive a copy at Christmas. Stay safe, and Happy Holidays. Chris Griffin  
Whitinsville, MA

Feeding baby his first finger foods can be a challenge - here's an easy way to up the odds your little one can easily "pick up" the healthy foods:

My 10 month old grandson is loving finger foods, and banana is a favorite. Picking up chunks of banana can be slippery business, though. My daughter found that sprinkling the banana pieces with powdered peanut butter makes the task simple, and my grandson LOVES the

combination!!! Also gets more protein into the little guy at the same time.

Janine Cortesa  
Uxbridge MA

This clever reader discovered a way to stretch the budget by increasing the lifespan of disposable face masks:

Disposable facial masks are expensive. Cloth are great but here are some tips for safely extending the life of the disposable types. I experimented, and mine did hold up to at least one wash in the washer and being dried in the dryer. I figured it was worth a try, and the worst thing would be that there would be lint all over that load of clothes and I would need to re-do the laundry. However, mostly I soak both the disposables and cloth masks in a stainless steel bowl with boiling or very hot water to which some drops of essential oils such as tea tree or lavender as well as a capful of rubbing alcohol has been added. Those particular oils hold some anti-bacterial properties. After an hours soak thoroughly rinse, wring out and hang indoors or outside preferably in a sunny spot to air dry. Hope this helps stretch the budget!  
Annie Wuelfing  
East Brookfield MA

This reader has long promoted the virtues of gifting nostalgic presents! Here are two ideas she shares:

I started coin collections for my niece and nephew, which I continue to add to at holiday time. I began by giving them Lincoln Pennies at age 1 with books, and each year at Christmas I give them another few coins of years of birth-



TAKE THE HINT  
KAREN TRAINOR

dates of both sets of grandparents, aunts, uncles and more as keepsakes. Hopeful they will collect coins like their grandpa or at least they have a second book with the genealogy recorded and real coins from their biological grandfather, aunt and uncle.

I am trying to get cousins together again after Covid, and last year I paid to get old 8mm family movies on disc and had four reunions across the U.S. with cousins, copies for all.

My point is, to share stories now, take phone photos of old 35mm, 110, 126 and historic photos and share with family on Facebook etc. so they can keep them for their genealogy folders and suggest to them to do so. "Seize the moment," in the words of Robin Williams!

Who knew? This reader's slow cooker method eliminates the hassle of peeling and cutting hard-as-a-rock butternut squash!

Here is my tip. Put the whole butternut squash right in the crockpot, add just a little water and cook it until soft. It comes out so good, I can even eat the skin. I wish my father knew this on all those holidays! Just scoop out the seeds in the middle, no peeling needed.

Cathy Patchen  
North Brookfield, MA  
Prize Winner

Congratulations to Chris Griffin of Whitinsville, MA, whose name was drawn for Dinner for Two at the Public House in Sturbridge.

Chris submitted the family recipe book idea above.

Win Dinner for Two at the Public House  
Your tips can win you a great dinner for two at the historic Public House Historic Inn in Sturbridge! Simply send in a hint to be entered

into a random drawing. One winner per month will win a fabulous three course dinner for two at the renowned restaurant, located on Route 131 across the town common in historic Sturbridge. Because I'm in the business of dispensing tips, not inventing them (although I can take credit for some), I'm counting on you readers out there to share your best helpful hints!

Do you have a helpful hint or handy tip that has worked for you? Do you

have a question regarding household or garden matters? If so, why not share them with readers of Stonebridge Press newspapers? Send questions and/or hints to: Take the Hint!, C/o the Southbridge Evening News, PO Box 90; Southbridge, MA 01550. Or email KDRR@aol.com. Hints are entered into a drawing for dinner for two at the historic Public House Inn.

Do you have a helpful hint or handy tip that has worked for you? Do you

PLACE MOTORS IS PROUD TO SPONSOR

## Friday's Child

**Hi! My name is Kelsi and I am a talented singer!**

Kelsi is an outgoing girl of Caucasian descent with a strong personality. She loves being the center of attention and she has a great sense of humor. Some of Kelsi's favorite activities include playing outside, swimming, doing arts and crafts, and playing video games. Kelsi is also a talented singer! When she grows up, Kelsi wants to attend cosmetology school. In school, she is known to be bright and resourceful.

Kelsi is legally freed for adoption and would benefit from a permanent family who could build a relationship with her slowly over time. Kelsi is very active and it would be best if her future resource can spend time with her engaging in activities she enjoys. The family should also be able to offer Kelsi patience, flexibility, and consistency.

**Who Can Adopt?**

Can you provide the guidance, love and stability that a child needs? 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.

The process to adopt a child from foster care requires training, interviews, and home visits to determine if adoption is right for you, and if so, to help connect you with a child or sibling group that your family will be a good match for.

To learn more about adoption from foster care, call the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE) at 617-6273 or visit [www.mareinc.org](http://www.mareinc.org). The sooner you call, the sooner a waiting child will have a permanent place to call home.

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Head of School List  
 Olivia-Mae Acquah-Harrison, Charlton; Abigail Alicandro, North Oxford; James Alves, Uxbridge; Kaitlin Baca, Webster; Greyson Baldaro, Oxford; John Barnwell, Danielson, Conn.; Morgan Beaudreault, Dayville, Conn.; Lillian Belsito, Millbury; Maya Benway, Acton; Abigail Boria, Charlton; Benjamin Bouchard, Douglas; Celia Bouchard, Douglas; Samuel Bouchard, Douglas; Vincent Bourgeois, Thompson, Conn.; Campbell Braun, South Grafton; Jessie Calkins, Charlton; Stephen Canavan, Ashford, Conn.; Hansen Cao, Shenzhen, China; Dominika Chmielewski, Webster; Lauren Conde, Danielson, Conn.; Sidney Corriveau, Brimfield; Spencer Courville, Charlton; Anna Czechowski, Webster; Giana DeCesare, Chepachet, R.I.; Alexandra Delano, Charlton; Joseph DiPietro, Worcester; Danielle Doiron, Charlton; Fiona Doiron, Charlton; Ava Fabiano, Killingly, Conn.; Chiara Faiola, Auburn; Courtney Fleming, Douglas; Felicia Fongemie, Ashford, Conn.; Barbara Forgues, Shrewsbury; Fabian Gabriel, Zlin, Czech Republic; Alexandra Giorgio, Millbury; Ashley Giorgio, Millbury; Xiayuan Gong, Wuxi, China; Madelyn Grundstrom, Moosup, Conn.; Emily Hammond, Sutton; Angelina Hargrave, Charlton; Sofia Hargrave, Charlton; Donovan Hendrick, Willimantic, Conn.; Sophie Hendrick, Willimantic, Conn.; Philip Heney, Douglas; Thu Hoang, Hai Phong, Vietnam; James Hoban, Millbury; Maura Hoban, Millbury; Patrick Hoban, Millbury; Kaylynn Horan, Putnam, Conn.; Nghi Huynh,

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Mackenzie Jutras, Greenville, R.I.; Ethan Kalmin, Dudley; Claire Kelleher, Auburn; Zachary King, Plainfield, Conn.; Avery Kurzontkowski, Shrewsbury; Kate Landis, Brooklyn, Conn.; Molly Landis, Brooklyn, Conn.; Abigail Leahy, Leicester; Juhyoung Lee, Seoul, South Korea; Lauren Lemire, Southbridge; Qianhui Lin, Beijing, China; Zachary Litke, Brooklyn, Conn.; Sydney Lundt, Woodstock, Conn.; Bridget MacDonough, Grafton; Ian MacKenzie, Woodstock, Conn.; Kiera MacKenzie, Woodstock, Conn.; Szymon Mamro, Webster; Claire Marchand, Holden; Delia Marchand, Holden; Wednesday Maskova, Sestajovice, Czech Republic; Tessa McCabe, Douglas; Benjamin McGarry, Thompson, Conn.; Conner McLeod, Foster, R.I.; Keegan McLeod, Foster, R.I.; Emma McQuiston, Webster; Katherine Melnick, North Grosvenordale, Conn.; Sara Michailides, Chepachet, R.I.; Ayame Mizuno, Nagoya, Japan; Zaire Moore, Thompson, Conn.; Luciana Najjar, Northborough; Abbie O'Brien, Plainfield, Conn.; Declan O'Connor, West Boylston; Riley O'Connor, Dudley; Jenna Olivieri, Douglas; John Perveiler, Oxford; Long Pham, Hanoi, Vietnam; Katrina Piekieniak, Dudley; Morgan Polinski, Webster; Wiktor Potem, Webster; Jill Reardon, Fiskdale; Brianne Rett, Uxbridge; Lucas Rhoads, Stafford Springs, Conn.; Olivia Richardson, Lincoln, R.I.; Emma Russell, Brooklyn, Conn.; Anthony Russo, Brooklyn, Conn.; Thomas Santos Soares, Porto Alegre, Brazil; William Savoie, Northbridge; Cassidy Semo, Dudley; Trinity Semo, Dudley; Emily Shamback, Sterling, Conn.; Andrew Shultz, Oxford; Zachary Stoddard, Pomfret Center, Conn.; Maya

Summiel, Dayville, Conn.; Matthew Tomasino, Leicester; Violeta Torres, Plainfield, Conn.; Thang Tran, Da Nang, Vietnam; Daniel Twohig-Mann, Douglas; Rachel Ullstrom, Auburn; John Vigliotti, Worcester; Caroline Vigneault, Southbridge; Caroline Villa, Auburn; Tram Vo, Phan Thiet, Vietnam; Aurora Voas, Oxford; Emily Walsh, Thompson, Conn.; Yunpeng Wang, Shenzhen, China; Kyle Woodruff, Southbridge; Wenyang Yuan, Beijing, China; Anthony Zurowski, Plainfield, Conn.

Dean's List  
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City, Vietnam; Hayley O'Connell, Webster; Collin O'Connor, Sutton; Linh Pham, Hanoi, Vietnam; Sophia Rabor, Dayville, Conn.; Emma Raps, Webster; Grace Rhoads, Stafford Springs, Conn.; Morgan Royston, Oxford; Hannah Schoemer, Oxford; Olivia Sczurowski, Pomfret Center, Conn.; Alex Spetseris, Webster; Lily Tessmer, Lancaster; Chinh Tong, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Owen Trainor, Brooklyn, Conn.; Ashley Vandembrouck, Oxford; Isabella Vigliotti, Worcester; Elizabeth Walker, Thompson, Conn.; Anna Wildes, North Uxbridge; Kang Xu, Xi'an, China; Zhihe Ye, Beijing, China; Abdullah Zameer, Woodstock, Conn.; Xingyu Zhu, Wenzhou, China; Yutian Zhu, Hangzhou, China

Honor Roll  
 Aaron Barnwell, Danielson, Conn.; Nicholas Boligan, Thompson, Conn.; Grace Booth, Webster; Domenic Capalbo, Worcester; Kara Corriveau, Brimfield; Claire Crossman, Oxford; Bridget Duffy, Shrewsbury; Ruiyi Gao, Hohhot, China; Audrey Hammond, Sutton; Lily Hayes, Danielson, Conn.; Camille Larson, Charlton; Michael Levesque, Narragansett, R.I.; Kaya Lukasek, Webster; Riley Martin, Moosup, Conn.; Sydney Masciarelli, Northbridge; Jacob McCabe, Douglas; Olivia Montione, Dudley; Andrew Peck, Paxton; Dominic Penny, Charlton; Luis Arturo Perez Povedano, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; Elena Polsky, Thompson, Conn.; Kaeleigh Sullivan, Douglas; Maggie Vo, Worcester; Wondimu Weinberg-O'Brien, Worcester; Tyler Whiteley, Foster, R.I.

## Legislators offer help in securing unemployment benefits

BY KEVIN FLANDERS  
 STAFF WRITER

REGION — As residents continue to grapple with an overwhelmed unemployment assistance system, local legislators are working hard to help with navigation.

Area state representatives and senators have seen a recent increase in calls and emails from residents who haven't received an unemployment check in months. Others have gotten notices from the Mass. Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) demanding repayment of monies previously approved during the pandemic.

Even in normal times, local officials receive a steady flow of calls related to unemployment issues. But since September, an influx of desperate residents have called with complaints that their benefits were either suspended or retracted as part of a DUA crackdown on fraudulent claims.

"They have had a big issue with fraud," said State Rep. Peter Durant, of Spencer. "Several people have had their identities stolen, and the DUA had to take precautions to investigate. Of course, that hurts a lot of the people

with legitimate claims." Comprehensive DUA investigations of fraud have led to a significant backlog of unemployment claims that need to be processed. Additionally, many residents' claims have had missing information or errors, which caused DUA adjudicators to flag them as potentially fraudulent. These residents will need to resubmit their claims with the proper documentation in order to receive benefits.

Moreover, confusion has surrounded the difference between "pandemic unemployment assistance" and general unemployment benefits. Thousands of residents have erroneously filed under the wrong category, officials said. To be eligible for pandemic unemployment assistance, residents must demonstrate that they lost their jobs as a direct result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Meanwhile, scammers continue to flood the system in search of ways to take advantage of the confusion.

"There have been a considerable number of fraudulent applications to unemployment, which has resulted in a delay due to increased scrutiny of

all applicants," said Sen. Anne Gobi, of Spencer. "I receive a number of requests daily from people who are having trouble opening a claim or getting their funds from an already open and approved case."

Many of the fraudulent claims are the result of autonomous software programs. During the weekend of Nov. 14-15, approximately 31,000 unemployment claims were filed statewide, officials said. DUA staffers will need to pore over every claim to ensure its legitimacy, as well as the thousands of claims that were submitted in the ensuing weeks.

Over the last several months, local officials have helped serve as intermediaries between desperate residents and overwhelmed DUA officials. With Christmas and the winter season fast approaching, many residents can't wait much longer for their claims to be processed. Some families are already struggling to figure out how they'll provide food and heat their homes this winter.

Area leaders continue to work long hours to help secure relief as quickly as possible.

"We have some good contacts at the

DUA, and we have helped advocate and get things moved along for people," Durant said. "The entire process can be very confusing for people. It's especially difficult when a person's business closed and there is no one to verify that an employee worked there."

Officials and residents alike are eager for the distribution of vaccines over the next several months. This will allow residents to feel safe about restarting their businesses, interviewing for new jobs, or moving on to the next chapters in their careers.

"Once these vaccines get rolled out, we will start getting more people back to work," Durant said.

For now, residents are urged to have all of their documents organized when filing claims or appealing DUA repayment orders. It is important to save all communications from employers related to COVID-19 layoffs or closures.

Local legislators are also assisting residents who have been scammed or had their identities stolen.

"Anyone who is the victim of a fraudulent claim — please let me know so we can notify unemployment," Gobi said.



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**TOY DRIVE**

continued from page A1

many in the middle class. "We've all been very impressed with the number of toys and the quality of the donations. We didn't expect that this year, but it's a good sign and something we're very happy to see," Gaylord said. "This shows us that the community really does care. There are a lot of people hurting and I think people are stepping up and doing the right thing. It's much appreciated."

The toy collection is always a great undertaking for the department and with 2020 having increased limitations due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a heightened need for the holidays the department and Toys for Tots had to evolve with the times. However, both parties remained committed to providing an opportunity for families to ensure their kids had a Christmas to remember.

"We do this every year and it's ongoing for about six weeks or so then we really try to do a big push

for this final weekend. The Marines run the Toys for Tots in Worcester County. This year it's a little different. We're taking them to Worcester a few times and have already donated a carload. After today we'll probably have at least one more. They're the ones who distribute the toys through Worcester County," Gaylord said.

In 2019 Toys for Tots of Worcester County donated nearly 42,300 toys to 14,385 children. To donate or apply for toys, visit [www.toysfortots.org](http://www.toysfortots.org).

**STORM**

continued from page A1

148 was closed in the area of Warren Road due to fallen trees and power lines. Meanwhile, the Warren Fire Department helped provide assistance during multiple accident responses on the Mass Pike.

The storm also caused

several local events to be postponed. The fifth annual Stuff the Bus campaign, which had been slated for Dec. 5 in three towns, had to be postponed to Saturday, Dec. 12.

Run each year by AA Transportation, the Stuff the Bus program enables the community to donate toys for local youngsters. On Dec. 12,

AA Transportation will bring buses to Spencer, North Brookfield, and Leicester. From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., AA employees at each site will collect new, unwrapped toys.

AA Transportation officials thank all donors for their continued support and patience through the postponement.

**LODGE**

continued from page A1

in the future. The target is to be operational by March 2021, but could be sooner.

The masons are putting into action their values of brotherly love, relief, and truth to help, aid, and assist those that are less fortunate and in need of their assistance. They spend two consecutive weekends before Thanksgiving and before the Easter seasons to encourage their fellow man in assisting them in filling the pantries of the Auburn Youth & Family Services shelves so they may assist local families.

There has been a bond molded between the Auburn Youth & Family Services Executive Director, Sally D'arcangelo, the store manager Ed Paquette and Jim Alicea, Asst. Store Mgr. along with the Charity and Relief Committee of the

masonic lodge, chaired by R.W. Daniel Barston.

You can learn more about the Auburn Youth & Family Services, Inc. mission to support families through Empowerment and Community Collaboration on the Web at: [www.ayfs.org](http://www.ayfs.org).

You can also learn more about the world's oldest & largest international fraternity through the Grand Lodge of Masons of Massachusetts on the Web at: [www.massfreemasonry.org](http://www.massfreemasonry.org).

You can learn about the local lodge by emailing to [joelhproutylodge@gmail.com](mailto:joelhproutylodge@gmail.com).

Or drop by and visit any Tuesday evening after 7:00 p.m. to meet the members, and join in the conversation, have some refreshments, and learn some of the history of the fraternity both in Auburn and it's rich history in Massachusetts since 1733.



# Festival of Crafts perseveres in 2020

BY JASON BLEAU  
VILLAGER CORRESPONDENT

DUDLEY - The Shepherd Hill Music Parents Association didn't let the COVID-19 pandemic stop them from continuing their annual fundraiser the Festival of Crafts in 2020, shifting the event to an online experience.

The annual showcase of crafters has been a longstanding tradition at Shepherd Hill Regional High School as a staple of the holiday season drawing hundreds to purchase hand made holiday gifts with the proceeds to the entry fees helping support band, chorus and show choir programs at Shepherd Hill. In order to continue their largest fundraiser Shepherd Hill Music Parents Association took advice from one of the high school's teachers Kristin Griffiths to move the event to a digital setting through Dec. 11 to allow consumers to connect with sellers online.

Jeff Cloutier, President of the SHMPA, said the process was smooth in working with crafters to embrace a format that is much different from past years. They also leaned heavily on webmaster Scott Sretter to help set up the online marketplace where participants could shop. The shift to virtual also required a more openminded approach to who could participate as a seller.

"In a normal year, we evaluate the crafters to make sure everything is hand made. We do not allow vendors, but for the virtual fair, we allowed anyone. It's been a tough year for everyone and most of our crafters are from New

England, so we wanted to give everyone an opportunity. It is restricted to crafters who have some form of online presence, unfortunately we were not able to serve everyone this year," Cloutier said.

Unfortunately, the fundraiser efforts of the SHMPA have taken quite a hit in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The association's second largest fundraising effort involved working volunteer programs at Gillette Stadium which has been unable to host fans or groups since April due to the outbreak. Cloutier acknowledged that the virtual fair has not produced the same income as the live event but at least it brought something to help the association continue to support the high school's music programs.

"The virtual fair only generated about 3 percent of what we make from the in-person fair. In a normal year, we make money on the crafter registration, customer admission and food sales. This year, we only have a small registration fee. We wanted to keep the fee low because this was more about doing something for both our crafters and our community. We also didn't know what to expect in terms of traffic," said Cloutier. "We want to thank all of our crafters and customers both past and present. Our fair works so well because we have loyal following with both our crafters and our customer. I also want to thank our volunteers who got the fair up and running. Our organization is 100 percent made up of volunteers who selflessly dedicate their time."

## Pets perish in Charlton fire

Courtesy — Bud Harris  
Photography

Firefighters inspect the damage from a fire in a two-family home on South Sturbridge Road in Charlton.



BY JASON BLEAU  
VILLAGER  
CORRESPONDENT

CHARLTON - A two-alarm fire in Charlton resulted in the loss of several pets after a two-family home was caught fire in the late morning hours of Dec. 3.

Emergency responders dispatched the Charlton Fire Department to 19 South Sturbridge Rd. at around 11:09 a.m., where first responders discovered smoke coming from a doorway on the first floor. According to a press release, a passerby had been attempting to rescue family pets that were known to be inside the home. A second alarm was requested by Fire Chief Ed Knopf bringing mutual aid to the scene. Fire department members made entry in an attempt to determine if any residents were inside. In the process the firefighters extinguished more of the blaze on the first floor. It took around 30 minutes for the fire to be deemed under control.

The scene was cleared by 5:05 p.m. that evening.

No residents were home during the fire, however emergency responders did locate four deceased pets inside the home allegedly perishing due to smoke inhalation. A fifth animal, a dog, was located alive and rescued from the home. Firefighters provided oxygen for the dog who as of this report is recovering at the Tufts Animal Hospital in Grafton. Five residents were displaced due to damage resulting from the fire.

The Charlton Police Department received mutual aid from Southbridge, Sturbridge, Auburn, Dudley and Leicester. The department is working with the District 7 Fire Investigation Unit and Fire Marshalls Office to investigate the cause of the fire.

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# DA's office assists in combating opioid crisis

BY KEVIN FLANDERS  
STAFF WRITER

REGION — The Worcester County District Attorney's Office will use federal grant funding to assist police departments in combating the opioid crisis.

The federal Department of Justice recently awarded the Worcester County District Attorney's Office a \$1.2 million grant to help facilitate outreach and recovery efforts. District Attorney Joseph Early, Jr., will team up with local police departments to support several grant-funded programs.

Among other projects, the federal grant monies will fund recovery coaches who will respond with police personnel and offer services after an overdose. These critical measures can help start victims down the path to treatment and recovery, police said, rather than allow them to be cycled back through the same destructive process.

Police in all 60 of Worcester County's cities and towns began using the Critical Incident Management System (CIMS) earlier this year to track overdose incidents. The goal of the system isn't to track data for the purpose of arresting people, but rather to maximize assistance opportunities, police said.

Law enforcement officials discovered at the start of the opioid crisis that it is impossible to

solve the problem simply through the criminal justice system. A broader support system of counselors, clinicians, recovery groups, and family advocates is necessary, officials said.

Federal and state grant funding will continue to pave the way to recovery for many desperate residents and families.

"We're glad to have been awarded this grant so we can help support our police partners in their response to the opioid epidemic," District Attorney Early said. "When we implemented CIMS, our goal was to respond to every overdose incident and help people get access to services. This grant will ensure that overdose victims in every community receive help getting into treatment and on the path to recovery."

While many area police departments already have overdose follow-up protocols in place, the latest grant funding will allow recovery coaches to work on a regional basis and assist police departments that may not have the budget to employ coaches on a full-time basis.

"This is the piece of the puzzle that has been missing," said Spencer

Police Chief David Darrin. "I have trained nearly sixty percent of our officers and dispatchers in crisis intervention techniques. We also have CIMS thanks to DA Early to track overdose incidents. The final piece is the outreach, and thanks to this new grant the puzzle will be complete."

The three-year federal grant, which will begin administering funds in early 2021, was awarded through the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Site-Based Program (COSSAP). Local police officials are thrilled to have additional tools in their arsenal to help combat the opioid crisis.

"When the grant is in full swing, we will have access to recovery coaches who we can link up with individuals that need assistance," said Leicester Police Chief Ken Antanavica.

The LPD currently has a sergeant responsible for monitoring all overdose incidents and enter-

ing them into the CIMS database. The sergeant also monitors and orders Narcan as needed.

Chief Antanavica said his officers are looking forward to working with

the recovery coaches as another layer of community assistance.



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