

SENIORS
MRHS
represented
at conference
Page 2

SPORTS
Falcon
hockey
wins
Page 12

Dedicated to Improving the Quality of Life in the Communities We Serve



Turley photo by Kristin Rivers

From the left, Wilbraham Middle School students Demetrius Holmes, Maylin Severino and Neil Johnson with Julie Ann LeClair, reading interventionist and student services, with some of the donations for last December's Pajama Drive at Wilbraham Middle School.

Wilbraham Middle School Pajama Drive helps children in need

By Kristin Rivers
Staff Writer
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WILBRAHAM - Wilbraham Middle School supported children in need this holiday season during their 12th Annual Pajama Drive.

The school, with support

from the Scantic Valley YMCA and the Hampden County Sheriff's Department, collected 263 pairs of pajamas for distribution to children in the Springfield Housing Authority.

In partnership with Scholastic, each child also received a book.

Paraprofessional Lisa Mc-

Diarmid explained school staff also lent their support and over 4,000 pairs of pajamas have been collected since the drive's inception, crediting sixth grade English Language Arts teacher Stacy Dwyer for spearheading it.

McDiarmid said the school also utilizes its website, morn-

ing meetings during homeroom and a morning show broadcast online to encourage donations.

"We explain, you know, what we would like and the sizes, and it's all for children. Then Scholastic partners with them, and the children get the pajamas

Please see **PAJAMAS**, page 7

Food drive to benefit the Community Survival Center

By Dalton Zbierski
Editor
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WILBRAHAM - The season of giving never ends at Margolis Orthodontics; days after its holiday coat drive ended, a January food drive has begun.

All nonperishable food items collected at the practice at 3 Crane Park Drive will benefit the Community Survival Center in Indian Orchard, a nonprofit agency that has helped provide families with food, clothing and household items for 37 years.

Dr. Michael Margolis said his business is informally partnered with the survival center because it is a great organization that is easy to work with, is close by and meets a significant need in the community. He explained why proximity matters.

"When I was a kid, my parents used to say, 'Finish your food because there's children starving in India,' but what people don't realize is there's people hungry right in our backyard here so what we're trying to do is help out in some way," Margolis said.

Margolis noted that his practice sees anywhere from 40 to 60 patients each day. He said many people want to help but don't necessarily have a mechanism to do it, so the food and coat drives make a difference.

"So, this is giving all our patients a way to help out, and I've always wanted to give back to the community I'm in. This is really our community, the greater Springfield area, so we're just

Please see **FOOD DRIVE**, page 15

Pinochle provides space for socialization, friendships

Games occur Tuesdays at the senior center

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - Visitors to the senior center can partake in a game or two or more of Pinochle and make friends every Tuesday afternoon at 1:30 p.m.

Pinochle, a melding and trick-taking card game, is played with 48 cards ranked as Aces, 10s, Kings, Queens, Jacks and 9s, comprising two teams with two people. To win, players need to take bids during each hand of eight or nine points, reaching

121 points total.

JoAnn Mack, an avid player, serves as the instructor, explaining Pinochle came to Wilbraham when her father was in the area. He taught her and her siblings how to play when she was growing up, with cousins and her own children later taking part.

"He was at assisted living; they didn't play Pinochle there. So, I called the senior center and said, 'Can we start playing?' and that's how it started," Mack said. "Then my father moved down to Florida, and I kept playing. So, I've been here five years-ish here at least now."

Mack said, "It's a cool game," and she enjoys teaching and playing with people at the senior center. She called them "a



Turley photos by Kristin Rivers

Seniors playing a round of pinochle at Wilbraham Senior Center.

fun group."

"It's a low-key game. There is some thought to it, you know, to playing. But to me, anybody can learn how to play it. It's not as intense as Bridge, to me," Mack said.

Additionally, the game utilizes specific skills and fosters socialization.

"It's good because we talk about all different things," Mack said. "It is good with memory. It is good with counting."

Barbara Boucher, a new player, loves coming every week and had high praise for the senior center.

"We've made really nice friends here. Really nice."

Please see **PINOCHLE**, page 10

Students represent Minnechaug at state-wide World Language Teachers' Conference

SPRINGFIELD – Sometimes the best advocates for educational programs are the students themselves. This was the case late last October when 10 Minnechaug Regional High School students from Grades 10, 11, and 12 shared their insights about the relevance of learning a second language at the 54th Annual MAFLA Conference at the Sheraton Monarch Hotel in Springfield.

The conference session entitled, "When Students Become Our Teachers," allowed MRHS students to take center stage by participating in a panel discussion moderated by two MAFLA Board of Directors members. The purpose of the session sought student input on what motivates them to learn world languages, how they learn languages best, and what they hope to experience in and gain from their classroom world language learning experiences.

Students highlighted the importance of several routines and activities that they believe help them to develop and improve their second language proficiency. They highlighted classroom experiences such as daily partner conversations, access to a digital library, thematic units centered around cultural themes and the experiences of learning about the world, current global topics and world cultures through their second language. Project-based learning was mentioned as a way to dive deeply into topics such as ecotourism and art, which helped students learn the perspectives of individuals and communities from other cultures.

According to senior McKenzie Murray, these types of projects and research are "when you learn the most".

Several students mentioned that their world language classes help them build a sense of community by always having partners to talk to and practice the second language. They appreciate the proficiency-based model of teaching because it allows them to practice and receive feedback from other students and their teacher without the focus on getting every form correct but being successful while communicating ideas. This community theme was further developed when senior

Makayla Acevedo mentioned how her study of Spanish in school allows her to more fully interact with her native Spanish-speaking relatives crediting the daily unrehearsed peer to peer speaking practice in class.

Frequent writing and speaking practice were noted by sophomores Laila Hosnander and Connor Seymour as the key to their second language development.

According to Connor, his writing improved by the ability to add details and describe more fully by using a variety of sentence types.

Laila noted that when her teacher asked the class to compare their very first writing assignment with their last written assignment, it made a strong visual impact by showing the growth she demonstrated over the course of the 20-week semester.

Also mentioned by the students were the life benefits they believed are made available to them through world language classes. Senior Ainsley Sheehan said that general cognitive growth and brain development is a benefit of learning another language while sophomore Christian Lowe noted that his proficiency in English, his first language, has improved through the study of Spanish.

Senior Aby Haile noted that through the study of Spanish she has been able to understand the perspectives of others which is greatly needed in her future field of study of journalism to help "eliminate biases and misperceptions since language barriers can cause misinterpretations."

When asked for their recommendations for the language teaching profession and schools in general, several students noted that an earlier start to world language study beginning in elementary school is necessary. Junior Sadie Blair noted that, before she was a high school student at MRHS, she was enrolled in a school that taught Spanish since the early grades which "increased her interest and familiarity with Spanish".

Seniors Mia Fraga and Ainsley Sheehan both noted that their cousins in Portugal and Colombia, respectively, speak and write English so well and that American students should have the same opportu-



Photos submitted by Teresa A. Benedetti, PhD

From left, Laila Hosnander, Abyssinia Haile, Makayla Acevedo, McKenzie Murray, Dr. Teresa Benedetti, Aidan Dzierwinski, Connor Seymour, Christian Lowe, Sadie Blair, Mia Fraga and Ainsley Sheehan at the World Language Teachers' Conference.



From left, Sadie Blair, Abyssinia Haile, Makayla Acevedo, Ainsley Sheehan, Aidan Dzierwinski, McKenzie Murray, Christian Lowe, Connor Seymour, Laila Hosnander and Mia Fraga are local students who participated in the 54th Annual MAFLA Conference in Springfield last October.

nities for an earlier start for second language learning in order to reach higher levels of proficiency by the time they begin high school.

Aby, Ainsley, Aidan, Christian, Connor, Laila, Makayla, McKenzie, Mia and

Sadie, thank you for sharing your voices to make a positive impact on the world language teaching profession. The profession, Minnechaug, and your teachers thank you for being our advocates!

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Correction/ apology

We at the Wilbraham-Hampden Times recognize that a word appeared in a recent edition of the paper that is considered offensive to the Native American/First Nations communities. The word was quoted from 1863 and 1913 writings of local history. Our sincerest apologies to anyone offended. Thank you.

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Provost shares key findings on bullying and harassment data

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - Superintendent Dr. John Provost shared key findings on bullying and harassment in 2023 with the School Committee on Dec. 21 as part of implementing the Equity Plan.

First, the predominance of incidents involving male students as aggressors was 90% of substantiated incidents of harassment or bullying.

"I was surprised by that, but many members of our DEI team were not. Some of the female students who were on the team said that they felt that behaviors of girls that engaged in were more subtle, making it harder for administrators to substantiate a claim of bullying," Provost said. "And one of our staff members on the team sent me a report of national data showing that more than 75% of students disciplined for bullying nationwide are males, so our own data is not that far off from that."

The second finding, Provost said, showed students with disabilities "are dramatically overrepresented both as targets and aggressors."

"This finding was not surprising for me. In fact, in 2011, based on mounting evidence that students with disabilities were more likely to experience bullying

and to bully others, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued an advisory," Provost said.

The advisory involves considering how a student's disability affects their learning, skills and proficiencies to avoid and respond to bullying and harassment.

Looking into the literature on bullying and harassment of students with disabilities, Provost found a paper further confirming the scarce amount of research available. Also, the role of social dynamics during late childhood and early adolescence.

"12 years into this advisory we still don't have good methods or good techniques that can adequately protect students with disabilities, but we're going to keep trying and I really hope that a superintendent isn't sitting here 11 years from now saying, 'We're 22 years in still trying to figure out how to change this dynamic,' because as our data shows, the problem exists in late childhood and early adolescence, mainly male, mainly students with disabilities," Provost said.

School Committee Member Michael Tirabassi asked about middle schools.

"I know that that's a tough age, but do you think that the overcrowding at the middle school is contributing at all to the bullying?" Tirabassi said.

Provost said he can't say "with 100%



Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.

Superintendent Dr. John Provost discussed bullying and harassment data in the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School district during the Dec. 21 School Committee meeting.

certainty but I can't say that it doesn't help."

Sherrill Caruana noted a list of characteristics not grouped together, which "doesn't give us as much information as we might need to see a population and where our hot spots are and why."

Provost replied he could do a cross-walk between different groups for further

research.

School Committee Vice Chair Sean Kennedy considered the treatment of students, whether in the cafeteria or when told to be quiet.

"I'm just saying we need to look at maybe how we're treating the students as well instead of just saying, 'Well, look at all this bullying there.' Just look at ourselves as well and see if maybe there's anything that we're doing or saying that's setting an example in any way," Kennedy said.

On that, Provost said the most impactful thing, which educators learn in their training, would be "you can't have any favorites."

"Because part of that dynamic that's happening is kids are figuring out who are the favorites and who are the not-favorites and wanting to make sure they're with the right group," Provost said. "So, just treating all students fairly and impartially without favor or disfavor I think is probably one of the strongest things that staff could do."

Kennedy affirmed that's what he was talking about.

"Let's look at ourselves too and see what we're doing while we're trying to figure out with the students as well," Kennedy said.

MRHS Capital Planning Subcommittee works on committee makeup

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - The Minnechaug Regional High School Capital Planning Subcommittee met on Dec. 14 to discuss their committee makeup.

The members were joined by Superintendent Dr. John Provost, School Committee Chair Michal Boudreau, Hampden Board of Selectmen Chair Donald Davenport and Hampden Advisory Committee Chair Doug Boyd for additional insights.

The meeting comprised of various thoughts and ideas including defining the committee itself, what the plans and procedures should be, having a school committee member on the subcommittee and more.

On the School Committee member, Finance Committee member Marc Ducey suggested they would be a non-voting member and reside in Wilbraham.

"They would certainly be free to add whatever input they want, much like we do with the budget subcommittee or whatever you call it," Ducey said.

When Select Board Vice Chairman

Sue Bunnell asked if everyone was comfortable with the proposed idea, Capital Planning Committee Chair Nick Manolakis said yes. Delving to another topic, he wondered what the overall committee would look like after determining a process to connect with Hampden on passing the capital projects.

"What's the long-term outlook on this committee? Is it just a short-term thing to figure out the process and if we have the process done, we're done? Or is there a longer term?" Manolakis said.

Boyd's consensus was they come up with a proposal, a committee definition and procedures and go through the formal process with the appropriate groups.

"That was my view of this. Let's put some shape to this and then bring it back to the committees to formalize it," Boyd said.

For another topic, Davenport approved of the town getting a list of the projects from the schools beforehand and holding a joint meeting to discuss funding.

"Yes, if we could get 'this is what the projects are and how much we think they're going to be' and we can look at our budget and say, 'Well, we can do our share or we can't do our share,'" Davenport said.

Manolakis later pro-

posed this additional idea to Provost and Boudreau.

"What we usually ask is how to rank those projects, right? Because there's usually some level of needing this funded immediately versus this can wait a year or two. If you guys can work on getting a list together, I think that would be step one towards us working towards getting those funded," Manolakis said.

Additionally, they discussed having the list sooner, as the list for Minnechaug last year came in March.

"Now that we're getting organized ahead of the game, if we can see what's in that pipeline and then see that by priority, I think that would be helpful," Manolakis said.

Boyd also said it's important for the subcommittee to define what they would like to accomplish along with the procedures.

"I think what we're trying to accomplish is to have a workable procedure so the school district knows how to approach the issue, whatever it might be, bring it to the towns appropriately so we have enough time to deal with it, to take it up on the merits and bring it to town meeting. I think that's what we're trying to accomplish," Boyd said. "So, we're just trying to take all of these different issues and all potential issues that we ha-

ven't even thought about yet but that are going to pop up and how we plug them into this process, so that we don't have to start from the beginning every time this happens."

Manolakis agreed.

"I think what it boils down to is there has to be cohesion on both sides to address these projects. The question of whether or not we can afford a million dollars a year is probably beyond this committee. It's more like a town or town-wide issue, right? Our charge, at least on my committee, on capital, is just to determine what we can afford to finance that year, right?" Manolakis said. "And then we would have to work with Hampden to figure out what we can afford and then anything on top of what we can afford, I think, has to revert back to another party to figure out how we address these issues."

It was clarified that the towns already do this, particularly with CPA projects.

The consensus was clear among the members that they want to work with the School Committee and district to have capital needs addressed, albeit in a timely manner.

"The schools want to work with the towns, and I think we should make it easier, not more difficult," Boyd said.

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Brenda Cuoco & Associates Real Estate Brokerage gives back



During a holiday meet and greet, Brenda Cuoco & Associates Real Estate Brokerage collected enough items for Toys for Tots to fill six buckets.



Courtesy photos
Children were able to meet Mickey and Minnie Mouse at the Longmeadow Office of Brenda Cuoco & Associates Real Estate Brokerage on Dec. 3.

Holds free mastermind session and holiday meet and greet

By Dalton Zbierski
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WILBRAHAM/LONGMEADOW – Over the past several months, Brenda Cuoco & Associates Real Estate Brokerage has contributed to the community in numerous ways.

With offices in Wilbraham and Longmeadow, the brokerage includes realtors licensed in Massachusetts and Connecticut. During a time to give back, the brokerage had plenty to offer.

On Nov. 15, 2023, the brokerage hosted a Real Estate Mastermind Session, a free initiative open to all industry professionals at the Elks Lodge in Springfield. Madison Degnan, a marketing administrator and office administrative assistant, shared what was the day's focus.

"It was pretty much an open invite to all real estate and sales professionals, so not just realtors but any of the attorneys, the lenders, anyone in the industry as well," Degnan said.

She noted that the brokerage partnered with a lender who helped lead the event.

"We went over different techniques and ways to drive in the industry. Especially going into the new year with quarter

one and the market being as crazy as it is, we wanted to give back to newer agents or professionals and collaborate," Degnan said.

Through various role-playing activities, the session looked to instill confidence into its participants, specifically surrounding the process of converting clients and leads. Degnan said that members of the brokerage presented skills and techniques used to convert and land appointments.

"We wanted people to have more skills and knowledge in leads conversion," Degnan said. "It was a great opportunity. Not many brokerages do things like this, especially for free and open to all ages. I mean, the feedback we got, everyone was extremely appreciative. They said they walked away learning something new."

Realtor Alyssa Stout said it was critical to make the session free, as many local realtors belong to the Realtor Association of Pioneer Valley, which she said charges several hundred dollars to participate.

"So, anything free that shows agents either value, help in turning over clients or even just how to handle certain situations and objections and better themselves to better the industry is really the biggest thing," Stout said.

Stout noted that those in the room on Nov. 15 ranged from real estate agents with 30 years of experience to individuals who were only recently licensed. She said it was very rewarding to help people she may only see several times a year, as she

was able to build relationships with them.

Moving forward, the brokerage will look to hold a mastermind session quarterly. The next one is scheduled for February and will be aimed more at sellers, as the first session targeted buyers.

"Building those connections is a huge thing in the real estate world. Putting together this session, we definitely put a lot of work into it, but seeing what we got out of it, it made it all worth it," Degnan said.

On Dec. 3, 2023, the brokerage held a holiday meet and greet at its Longmeadow office that saw 700 people go through the building's doors. The event was also free, and Degnan said it was a huge hit.

"One of our biggest values is giving back to the community and taking part in supporting our community," she said. "It's extra special around the holiday time. Everything just came together so well, and we're just so grateful to be able to do this for our community."

The Christmas-themed initiative included a Toys for Tots donation drive, and six boxes were filled with toys to be distributed to youths by the U.S. Marine Corps.

The event drew participants of all ages and allowed youngsters to take a photo

with Disney's Mickey and Minnie Mouse, the highlight of the day for many.

"We had a couple people say that this was their kid's biggest dream come true; to meet Mickey and Minnie or even be this close to a Disney character," Stout said. "I think we had the biggest line you've ever seen. There were families, parents, grandparents, extended families; they all came out just to see their little ones with Mickey and Minnie, and that in and of itself was just amazing."

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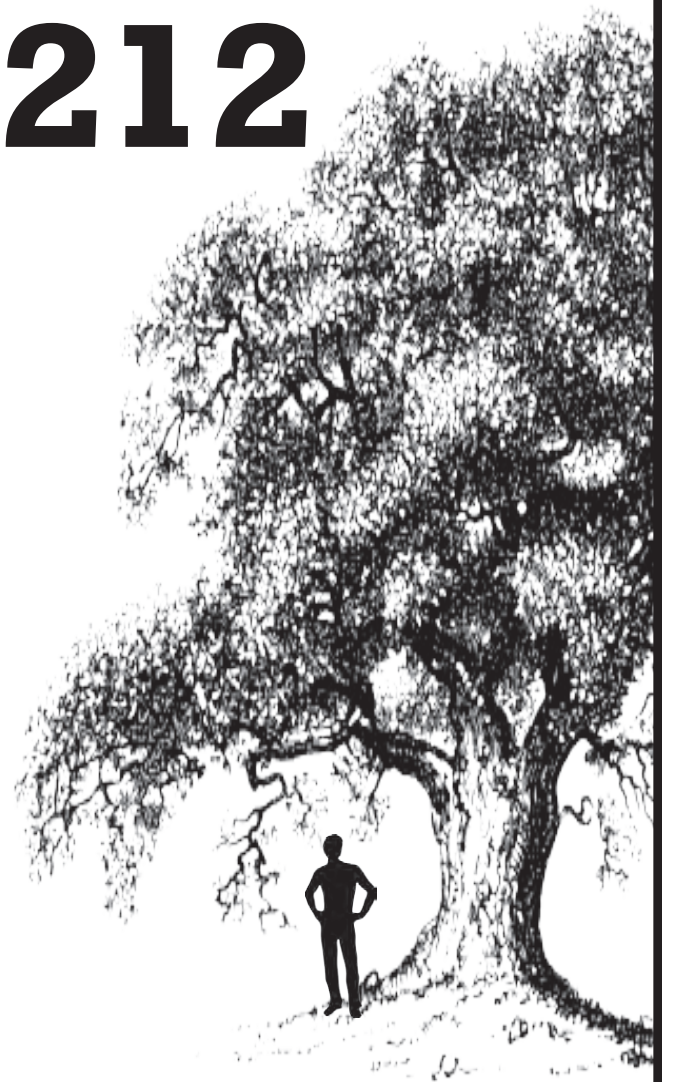
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VIEWPOINTS

HAMILTON ON FOREIGN POLICY

Kissinger left complex foreign policy legacy

By Lee H. Hamilton

Possibly no one had more influence on American foreign policy in the late 20th century than Henry Kissinger, who died last month at age 100. In his long and active career, he advised presidents, carried out policies and initiatives, and was a highly visible figure around the world.

While it's early to pronounce judgment on his legacy, it's clear that his impact is deeply mixed. His accomplishments were both positive and negative. He was respected and he was reviled.

Kissinger is the only person to have served as national security adviser and secretary of state at the same time, positions he held in the Nixon and Ford administrations. He was brilliant and secretive, and he wasn't much focused on the human cost of his policies.

He was interested in strategy, not values.

He showed little interest in democratic governance or transparency. A creature of the executive branch, he seemed to almost scorn the idea of three separate and coequal branches of government.

You sometimes got the impression he had contempt for Congress.

I was not close to Kissinger, but our paths did cross on foreign policy matters. I served in Congress, and we approached policy from different perspectives. Coincidentally, we were both connected to the commission that investigated the 9/11 attacks.

Kissinger was the original pick to chair the group, and former Sen. George Mitchell was to be vice chair. Both stepped down because of perceived conflicts of interest.

Former New Jersey Gov. Tom Kean chaired the 9/11 Commission, and I was vice chair.

Kissinger's view of the world, which he



Courtesy of the Wells Library

Rep. Lee H. Hamilton is shown shaking hands with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in this circa 1969 photo; with Rep. William Broomfield in the background.

characterized as sober realism, may have been influenced by his background as a Jew who spent his childhood in Nazi Germany, before his family fled and settled in New York. He was a very talented man and, wherever he went, in academic, policy circles and government, he rose to power very quickly.

In the 1970s, Kissinger was widely praised for his diplomatic work. When he was named secretary of state in 1973, a Gallup Poll found him to be the most respected man in the world.

He engineered President Richard Nixon's historic visit to China in 1972, opening the door to improved U.S.-Chinese relations and ultimately reshaping the geopolitical map. He promoted détente with the Soviet Union, helping to reduce Cold War tensions.

In the Middle East, his tireless shuttle diplomacy improved relations between Israel and its neighbors. These were real accomplishments.

Kissinger shared the 1973 Nobel Peace

Prize for negotiating the agreement that ended the Vietnam War. His critics found that highly ironic.

During the war, Kissinger orchestrated the U.S. bombing and invasion of Cambodia, which expanded the conflict and fueled a civil war that eventually brought the Khmer Rouge to power, resulting in up to three million deaths. The Cambodia disaster was Exhibit No. 1 for critics who accused Kissinger of war crimes, but he was also tied to a brutal military coup in Chile, Indonesia's bloody invasion of East Timor, a violent civil war in East Pakistan and other foreign policy disasters.

Kissinger later had a lucrative career in consulting. He clearly enjoyed being a celebrity, rubbing elbows with rich and powerful people and being photographed with glamorous women.

He became a great figure on the social circuit in Washington. Getting Kissinger to attend your dinner was a big achievement.

Henry Kissinger left quite a stamp on American foreign policy. He was a master of developing strategy and exercising power.

But American greatness isn't just about using force and gaining advantage. It also relies on our faith in democratic governance and our belief in human rights and the dignity of all people.

There's a place for sober realism, but American foreign policy should be grounded in our values.

Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar at the IU Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice at the IU O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.



with his wife listed birds seen on Dec. 8. They included 210 Canada geese, 93 mallards, 70 hooded mergansers, three black ducks, two pied-billed grebes, one great blue heron, one bald eagle, two crows, one white-breasted nuthatch, two black-capped chickadees, three bluebirds, four house finches, one goldfinch, six white-throated sparrows, six dark-eyed juncos and three cardinals.

He also emailed in late November, "I checked the ponds in Warren and there were 14 hooded mergansers very actively feeding and a very cold looking great blue heron that looked like it was not enjoying the 36 degree temperature."

Christmas bird count

For over 120 years the Audubon Society has been doing a Christmas bird count and this year is no different. People can participate in an organized count or just do one on their own in their backyard.

Decline in bird numbers

I received an email on Wednesday, Nov. 29 from a long time birder. He said, "[I] regularly feed them but have noticed a steep drop off of the number and type of birds since around September. Right now we have a loyal troop of blue jays and that's about it. Usually we have copious amounts of starlings, chickadees, grackles, crows, titmice, cardinals, juncos, etc."

He said he asked many people about this phenomena and "they have noticed the same thing but can't explain it either. We are all aware of some birds heading South but the sheer volume has dropped dramatically."

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



Rick Hendra of Oakham took this photo of sandhill cranes foraging in a field on Stone's Road in Oakham.

In his email, he wrote, "I took this picture this morning (Sunday, Dec. 17) about halfway up Stone Road. Their call was so loud it startled me from 50 yards away. And they were large, but oddly colored."

The sandhill crane is a tall bird about 45 inches, gray colored with a dark red patch on the forehead and a black bill. They have staining of feathers on their back and tail caused by the iron rich soil on its beak when it preens feathers. The immature crane lacks the red patch and has an orange bill. It also may have more rust colored feathers on the back and tail.

The sandhill crane summers on prairies and tundra and during winter feed on agricultural fields and roost in shallow water. For several years now, Hardwick had a pair of nesting sandhill cranes, who successfully raised chicks.

The female lays one to three olive eggs with dark marks in a mound like nest of marsh plants, grasses and weeds either placed on the ground or shallow water. Courtship displays are seen during migration and involve graceful jumps off the ground in a dancing manner.

Many years ago, Richard Jankauskas, saw some in a field on South Street in Barre. He commented about a pair jumping up and down and dancing.

Their voice is a low pitched "karoo, karoo, karoo." Rick Hendra mentioned their call in his email printed above.

Bird count

A Brimfield resident, who visits ponds in Warren, Brimfield, Holland and Sturbridge

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The TIMES will gladly correct factual errors that appear in this paper and can be substantiated. Corrections or clarifications will always appear on the editorial pages. To request a correction, send information in an e-mail or mailed communication to the editor at the above address listed above.

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PAJAMAS from page 1

and a book," McDiarmid said. "Some children have never had a pair of pajamas or a book, so this is really a big thing for them."

McDiarmid emphasized how the drive teaches students to think about others.

"I think our community is very giving, and I think it means a lot to them to know another child is benefiting from their kindness as well," McDiarmid said. "We usually have a lot of participation and it just warms our hearts too to see that."

She added how "there's so many people in need," especially during the holiday season, and the school has also given back through a food drive around Thanksgiving to support the Community Survival Center.

"We always try and get the kids to think beyond themselves," McDiarmid said. "I think it's important that they think beyond their community to other communities that need it."

Lynne Cimino of the Springfield Housing Authority stopped by the school to thank the students and pick up the donations, sharing "it's pretty humbling" to see so many give back.

"I think it's great," Cimino said. "It's a good way that we can start to teach kids how to give back and this is just

one of the community projects I think that they do, which is really, really good and I think all communities should be doing that."

Cimino echoed McDiarmid's thoughts on the pajama drive's importance during the holiday season.

"I think it's super busy...you know, for families," Cimino said. "When they stop to think about, as they're buying gifts, just to pick up one more thing and donate those, I think it's important for a family as well as a whole to express that."

Cimino also appreciates how the drive provides an opportunity to promote literacy for children.

"They need to learn how to read, so it's great. It's great that it gets paired with a book," Cimino said.

McDiarmid wants the community to know how important it is to teach young people about giving and helping others in need.

"You're going to make a difference to a child somewhere and I think that's the spirit of Christmas," McDiarmid said.

Cimino said community members understand how fortunate they are, want to give back, and she stressed that the importance of helping others "means something" to kids.

"I think it takes a community to be involved in something like that to get that impact. So, I think they've done a great job here about teaching kids how to give back," Cimino said.

She had this message for the school.

"We'd really like to thank them because we've been involved in the past and how important it is to us and for them. I think it's a win-win situation, so we really appreciate it and all the work they do," Cimino said.

Town of Hampden

Prospect Hill & Old Cemetery will be closed for burials until April 1, 2024

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PET OF THE MONTH Meet Brady!



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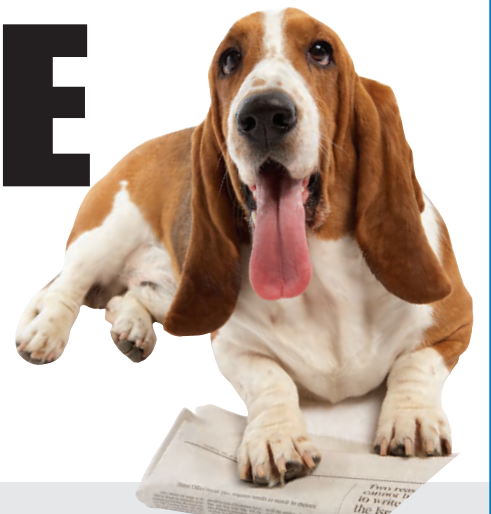
PET PAGE

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Send in your pet picture for our "Pet of the Month" and receive a free weekend get-away or spa package for your pet courtesy of Porter Road Pet Care.

Email your photos to: jwalker@turley.com.

Please include your name and your pet's name.



How to Welcome a New Adult Dog into Your Family

When welcoming a new adult dog into your household, remember the rule of threes.

For the first three days, dogs are often in a bit of shock, and don't show their personalities until they've been there a few days. After three weeks, many dogs have settled and behave as though they feel like they are home now, but they really don't fit into your routine until about three months have gone by."

Establish and stick to a daily routine. Dogs are creatures of habit, and they're most relaxed when they know what to expect of you and what you expect of them.

- Keep the dog on the same diet for at least two weeks. If you want to switch foods, do it gradually, mixing the old food with the new one.

- Reinforce positive behaviors. When your new dog does something you approve of, reward it with praise and treats.

- Be patient with housetraining, and treat the dog the way you would a puppy – keeping an eye on him whenever he's not confined and giving him frequent walks outside.

- Visit your veterinarian. The first visit should be a greet and treat to make him comfortable.

Stay calm and patient, warm and welcoming. A dog who's anxious and insecure in a new environment can take months to show trust and affection.

- Introduce your new dog to your other pets gradually. Take them on a walk together. Keep their food dishes, toys, and treats separate.

- Don't take your dog to other outside places until he's had a chance to adjust to his new surroundings. If you have to go out, leave and return calmly to prevent separation anxiety.

- If the dog displays behavior issues you're not sure how to deal with, check with your vet.



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A COMMUNITY GALLERY



'A dictionary of your very own' . . .

Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club Sergeant at Arms Dr. Kevin Trombly (left) and club Secretary Brad Sperry handed students in Mrs. Russell's third grade class at Stony Hill School new Webster's dictionaries on Dec. 14 to keep for themselves. Sperry told them, "A dictionary of your very own. . .". The Rotary Club gives out dictionaries to all third graders every year to aid in their reading skills. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.



With members of the Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club behind them, local students reveal their new dictionaries on Dec. 14. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.



'A big thanks to the Rotary Club' . . . Emily Shimansky's third grade class at Green Meadows School yells out a big "thank you" for the gift of Webster's dictionary from the Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club Dec. 14. Each third grader in both towns received dictionaries from the club to aid in reading. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.

Life in &

Readers are encouraged to send in medium to high resolution photos for this page by e-mail to dzbierski@turley.com or mail to TIMES, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069. Please note that if you send us a photo of the Times in different parts of the world, please include a recognizable landmark in the background. Examples: Eiffel Tower; castle in Spain.

WILBRAHAM



As they do every year members of the Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club handed-out Webster's Dictionaries to each third grader in Hampden and Wilbraham. After the event was organized with the principals of both schools, coordinated by club Vice President Chris O'Connor of Edward Jones Co., members of the club gave out print versions of the books at Stony Hill School and Green Meadows School on Thursday, Dec. 14. Helping O'Connor were club members Peter Salerno, Brad Sperry, Dr. Kevin Trombly. The event was photographed by Past President Charlie Bennett.



Mr. LaBelle leads a cheer . . . Mr. LaBelle (left) and his third-grade class at Stony Hill School yells out a big Hampden Rotary Club Dec. 14. Each third grader in both towns received dictionaries. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.

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WILBRAHAM HAMPDEN

Community Bulletin Board

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Love, Rayna, Mom, Dad, Zachary & Natasha

Send us in your announcements!
 Happy Birthdays, Anniversaries, etc.
 We will pick one each week to run here free of charge, please keep it to less than 50 words. Please send to dzbierski@turley.com



'This is for you' . . .

With third grade teacher Leslie O'Connor looking on at Stony Hill School, Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club member Peter Salerno, a former chairman of the Regional School Committee, hands out a Webster's dictionary to students Dec. 14. Each third grader in Hampden and Wilbraham received their own dictionary from the club. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.



Santa's not the only one to deliver toys. . .

Al Grimaldi of the Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club delivers toys, donated and collected at the club's Dec. 13 Christmas Party at LaCucina, to Jacqueline Lantigua of the YWCA Domestic Violence Shelter in Springfield Dec. 18. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.

"thank you" for the gift of Webster's dictionaries from the Wilbraham-Hampden Rotary Club to aid in reading. Photo courtesy of Charles F. Bennett.

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LLC

MRHS Booster Club shares transition updates with School Committee

Also, decisions reached on MRHS capital need quotes

By Kristin Rivers
Staff Writer
krivers@turley.com



WILBRAHAM - The School Committee heard from new board members of the Minnechaug Regional High School Booster Club on Dec. 21 regarding the club's transition.

Booster Club President Bill Metzger, joined by First Vice President Carrie Lee, Treasurer Karen Hoar and Recording Secretary Lori Poindexter, explained the board has met a few times in the past month and their plans include creating new bylaws and improving communication.

"So, people can expect a lot more communication from us moving forward. We're also open and receptive to ideas of doing things differently, perhaps, that have been done before," Metzger said. "Not entirely differently, but we're willing to take on new suggestions or pursuing different activities."

Poindexter elaborated on communication, explaining concessions at all home events were reinstated immediately for winter sports, with National High Society students running the concessions and a board member around to oversee. Additionally, there is a dedicated space in the school store.

"It's been great. People are excited to come out. There's candy and drinks and water and Gatorade, you know, makes every sporting event just a little bit better. We also have pizza. We've partnered with Pafumi's for the winter sports. Hopefully, we'll reach out to a different pizza place for spring sports," Poindexter said.

On the bylaws, Lee said, "We've

been working on them quite a bit." "Hopefully, pretty shortly into the new year we'll have a set to work on and then our priority is to, then, apply for charitable status so that we'll be able to move forward from that," Lee said.

School Committee Member William Bontempi thanked the board members for volunteering.

"It's an undertaking that it's going to take time, but it's a great opportunity for you, but it shows a tremendous amount of character because this is a very important organization," Bontempi said.

Bontempi asked if the signature card for Interim President Peter Dufresne was transferred over to the new board. Additionally, he inquired if all spirit groups with accounts still had the same amount of money as before the transition.

Hoar confirmed yes to both questions.

"I'm the treasurer, and Bill's the president, and so both of us are now the signers on the accounts per account," Hoar said.

School Committee Vice Chair Sean Kennedy praised the board members for highlighting communication "because that's what's going to highlight the integrity and fairness of what you're doing throughout this transition."

"Anything that we can do here to support you, please reach out," Kennedy said.

Next, decisions were reached on the high school's capital needs

quotes for the physical plant and IT after the vote was tabled on Dec. 7.

The two physical plant bids are from EBI Consulting and RTA Architects, with EBI Consulting as the low bid at \$50,430, and two IT quotes from Ayacht Consulting for \$21,900 and System Software Support for \$25,000.

Kennedy disclosed he worked for Ayacht Consulting nearly five years ago and had no communication with the company on this item beyond encouraging them to place a bid.

After Superintendent Dr. John Provost provided an overview of a Finance and Operations Subcommittee meeting where the stance had shifted to waiting until consulting costs go down for the physical plant, Bontempi said he would be in favor of IT consultancy because he "would be interested to hear what a consultant would have to say about technology, especially with our camera systems."

"The concept of having 140 continually recording loop cameras versus having a fleet of continually recording cameras in key spaces and then augmenting that with motion-activated cameras. Is there a role for wireless cameras?" Bontempi said. "I think all of those questions are keenly interesting and especially when we look at a potential technology impact to the budget immediately of a million dollars, then I'm in favor of spending \$20,000 to say 'Hey, what can you do with this and do we think that there's a possibility that we can take that technology cost, not only the immediate cost, but also the ongoing cost and lower those?'"

School Committee Member Michael Tirabassi favored going forward with both, saying he felt the driving force was the towns wanted it and the committee needed their full backing and support. With that position changed, his stance has shifted.

"My perspective is I don't see much point of doing one without the other and so I'm still looking at it at the \$74,000 price tag," Tirabassi said. "I mean, the whole point was to get a whole picture of what the expenses were so the towns could plan out for five years, 10 years and make sure the funds are available. Now that they've changed their stance, I guess I'm not in favor of either way."

School Committee Chair Michal Boudreau explained her take on the towns' stance was they are still asking the committee to do the quotes.

"I think that some of them were as not as, you know dare I say, gung-ho about it after the price. However, I think they said that we don't have to do this, get the consult, do the consulting immediately," Boudreau said. "So, if we wanted to wait a year or we could do partial, we could do the technology or the physical. We don't have to do both of them immediately."

After deciding not to move forward with a physical plant consultancy for Minnechaug at this time, the School Committee voted 5-1, with one abstention, to approve an IT consultancy for Minnechaug for up to \$22,000.

DESE conducts Tiered Focused Monitoring Review of school district

During the week of Dec. 11, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Office of Language Acquisition conducted a Tiered Focused Monitoring Review of Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District.

The Office of Language Acquisition reviews each district's and charter school's ELE program every six years to monitor compliance with federal and state English learner education laws and regulations. Areas of review will include English learners' student assessments, identification of English learners; what programs English learners are placed in, parent and community involvement, curriculum and instruction, student support services, licensure requirements for faculty, staff and administration, program plans and evaluation and recordkeeping.

In addition to the onsite visit, parent outreach is an important part of the review process. The district sent a survey to the parents of students whose records the review team examined.

The survey focuses on key areas of their child's English learner education program. Survey results will be reviewed by OLA, and they will contribute to the monitoring report.

Parents and other individuals may call David Parker, Office of Language Acquisition Review Chairperson, at (781) 338-3466 to request a telephone interview. If an individual requires an accommodation, such as translation, to participate in an interview, DESE will make the necessary arrangements.

Within approximately 60 business days of the onsite visit, the review chairperson will provide the school district with a report with information about areas in which the district meets or exceeds regulatory requirements and areas in which the district requires assistance to correct or improve practices. The report will be available to the public at <https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/cpr/>.



From the left, Elize Bailey and Barbara Boucher are immersed in their game as they play Pinochle at Wilbraham Senior Center.

PINOCHLE from page 1

Boucher said. "And Paula (Dubord) and Barbara (Harrington) and Jen (Curtis) are just great."

Elize Bailey agreed on how the Pinochle group fosters friendships, with Mack, or others, checking in on each other and getting together for other events.

"Like Barb said, you do this and then she's telling us about 'Oh you got to do bingo' or 'Let's go to lunch,'" Bailey said. "When you were working, you had one set of friends and now you've got these (people) as your friends."

Peggie Ross said the game helps fine motor skills and is inclusive. She shared how a late friend and player, Gail, got a placeholder for her cards so she could participate.

"It shows that someone that has special needs like she did can still play. So, it gives them a little boost," Ross said.

Ross also enjoys the fun of spending time with friends and playing the game.

"It's a lot of fun to be around them; keeps you kind of together. Laugh a lot which is good for the soul. It gives you something to do, something to look forward to," Ross said.

Mack, along with her friends and fellow players, encourages everyone to stop by. Signing up for the group is not required.

"That's what's nice about (it). You can come whenever," Mack said. "We need at least three players for three-handed, but you can come whenever."

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Falcons edge Auburn for road win



Ben Daniels fights for the puck near the boards.

Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

AUBURN— Auburn High School is one of the six non-league opponents from Central Massachusetts listed on the Minnechaug Regional hockey schedule.

The Rockets, who co-op with

both Shepherd Hill, and Tantasqua Regional, entered last Wednesday afternoon's contest with a perfect 4-0 overall record. The Falcons players enjoyed the bus ride back to Wilbraham following a thrilling 3-2 non-league victory at the Horgan Skating Arena in Auburn.

"They're a quality hockey team and this is probably one

of the best wins of my coaching career," said Minnechaug head coach Kyle Bousquet. "We put a lot of pressure on them, and we capitalized on their mistakes. It was a great all-around team effort."

The Falcons (4-1), who also defeated the Rockets, 2-1, a year

Please see **HOCKEY**, page 9

Solid effort busts losing streak



Miles Fergus drives to the hoop.



Max Baroni drives around an opponent to the hoop.

WILBRAHAM – Last Friday afternoon, Minnechaug boys basketball picked up a much-needed win over West Springfield 65-47. The win broke a two-game losing streak and gave the Falcons momentum heading into 2024. The Falcons were led by Gus Pryzbal with 16 points. Nick Disa had 13 points and Nathan Pace had 10 points in the victory. The Falcons are now 2-2 this season.



Nick Disa goes around an opponent and heads for the basket.



Dajuzan gets ready to shoot a free throw.



Nathan Pace goes for a layup.



Turley photos by Sofia DiGrande
Gus Pryzbal gets the layup.



Falcons defense shines in win

Ava Manning reaches out to grab the loose ball.



Aloni Bitas shoots near the free throw line.



Kelly Cronin goes for the layup.



Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Lyric Nelson makes her way up the court after making a rebound.



Jayla Comes pushes a pass as pressure comes on.

T-Birds fall hard against Bruins

SPRINGFIELD – The Springfield Thunderbirds (16-10-3-1) had few answers for a confident opposing attack, falling 8-2 to the Providence Bruins (17-12-2-2) on Saturday night in front of a sold-out MassMutual Center crowd of 6,793.

The Bruins were opportunistic off a self-inflicted T-Birds mistake to jump to a 1-0 lead at 3:44 of the opening period. Will Bitten directed a pass back toward the Springfield bench, where a pair of defenders were in the process of a line change. Out of the confusion, Anthony Richard jumped on the loose puck and quickly snapped a wrist through Vadim Zherenko to give Providence the game's opening goal.

Rookie Bruins blueliner Ethan Ritchie would add his first career AHL goal just 60 seconds later, jumping up into a 3-on-2 rush and ripping a shot through Zherenko at 4:44 off a drop pass from Jesper Boqvist. Providence also made life difficult on the T-Birds' offense, as the Springfield attack mustered only five shots in the opening 20 minutes.

After going unsuccessful on a power play early in the second, the T-Birds saw a familiar bout of adversity when Justin Brazeau whipped a turnaround wrist through Zherenko at 6:21 to make it 3-0 for Providence.

The T-Birds gave the sellout crowd a glimpse of another comeback bid when Jakub

Vrana extended his point streak to four games with a beautiful wrist shot under the crossbar behind Brandon Bussi, cutting the lead to 3-1 just 18 seconds after the Brazeau goal.

The two-goal deficit proved only temporary, though, as Jesper Boqvist scored on the front end of a four-minute power play, one of his three points on the night, at 8:40 to make it 4-1.

Zach Bolduc had the opportunity to give the T-Birds another jolt when he was awarded a penalty shot with Springfield down a man at the 10:46 mark. However, Bussi had the answer with the leg pad, shutting the rookie's bid down and keeping Providence ahead by three.

The Bruins rewarded their goalie in kind with back-to-back power-play goals from John Farinacci at 11:31 and Trevor Kuntar at 15:11, upping the margin to 6-1 before Bitten finally got Springfield on the board again with a power-play tip-in at 19:27 of period two.

Patrick Brown would add to the Providence lead with a rush up the left side at 7:17 of the third, and Jayson Megna capped off the scoring by netting the first shorthanded goal against Springfield all season at 18:00.

The T-Birds finish up the homestand as they begin a 3-in-3 weekend against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins on Friday at 7:05 p.m. at the MassMutual Center.

Candlepin League News

By Ryan Drago
rdrago@turley.com

Thursday Night Mixed League

PALMER – The Thursday Night Mixed League met for their final league night of 2023.

The standings as of Dec. 14 have Team Six as the #1 seed at 34-22. In second place, Team One has a record of 31.5 wins and 24.5 losses. Team Three is in third place with a record of 30.5 wins and 25.5 losses. Team Two is in fourth at 27-29, Team Five in fifth (23-33) and Team Four at 22-34.

Every bowler was ready to finish off strong heading into the new year.

One match featured Team Five bowling against Team One. In game one, Team Five was victorious over Team One by a score of 433-398. Joe Danek of Team Five began the night with an opening game of 104.

In game two, Team One was the winner of the game by a score of 404-378. In game three, Team Five won the last game 409-383. Team Five won total pinfall with a final score of 1220-1185.

Another match took place between Team Three and Team Six. In game one, Team Three was the winner by a score of 401-398. In game two, Team Three won 419-389. In game three, Team Three won the third and final game 422-401.

Team Three won total pinfall by a final score of 1242-1188.

Team Two bowled against Team Four. In game one, Team Four won the first game by a score of 430-401. The final two bowlers on Team Four, John and Nick started off their night strong with 108 and 100.

In game two, Team Four won again by a score of 389-374. In game three, Team Four went for the clean sweep and won the last game 417-387.

Team Four won total pinfall by a final score of 1236-1162.

The Thursday night Mixed League will continue their season into the new year and will return to Diamond Junction Bowling Lanes on the first Thursday of 2024.

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Liam Faneuff sends a shot on goal.



Gabe Tassinari gets the faceoff.



Ethan Kelliher reaches out to block an Auburn pass.



Owen Tzoumas locks up with an opponent with a loose puck up for grabs.



Brayden O'Sullivan looks to shoot.

HISTORICAL from page 1

ago, won their fourth consecutive game since a season opening loss to Longmeadow.

One of the key players in the Falcons victory against the Rockets was senior goalie Gage Vedovelli, who made a total of 52 saves. He also made 39 saves in the Falcons 2-1 win against West Springfield at the beginning of the regular season.

"Gage played a phenomenal game today, along with our defensemen," Bousquet said. "He made a couple of huge saves during the third period."

The Falcons senior-laden defensive unit is led by Derek Semanie, Tim Harrigan, Mike Roy, and Jake Klakotskiy, who returned to action after missing a few games with an injury.

Freshmen defensemen Cam Faneuff and Jameson Murray

also played in their first varsity games against Auburn.

Eleven of the players listed on the Auburn varsity hockey roster attend Tantasqua. They are senior Gabe Rice, sophomore Nathan Dono, senior Sam Panek, senior Peter Casine, junior Austin Dono, who's an alternate captain, senior Owen Stattenfield, sophomore Jake Tully, sophomore Max Sealey, senior Emmet O'Brien, senior captain Braeden Rich, and sophomore starting goalie Ethan LaPlante, who's also an alternate captain.

"This is probably the most players that we've had from Tantasqua during the six years that we've been co-oping with them," said Glen Bombard, who has been the Auburn hockey coach for the past 34 years. "It gives those kids an opportunity to play hockey and it also helps our program."

LaPlante (6 saves), who's one of the best goalies in the Quinn Conference, didn't see as much action as Vedovelli did.

The Rockets outshot the Falcons, 18-3, during the first period, but they were trailing 1-0 entering the second.

"We just ran into a hot goaltender," Bombard said. "He just stood on his head in today's game, which was the difference. This is our first loss of the season, but we'll be fine. We weren't going to go 20-0."

Minnechaug senior Gabe Tassinari scored a short-handed goal, giving the visiting team an early 1-0 lead with 11:18 remaining in the opening period.

It looked like the Rockets had tied the score on a goal by freshman Logan Rada just as the power play had expired. The goal was disallowed by the referees because the net had come loose

from its pegs prior to the shot attempt.

The Falcons also killed another power play in the first period, which was the only other penalty committed by either team for the remainder of the contest.

"We played a game earlier this season where we only had one penalty and the other team had two," Bousquet said. "I would rather play a game without very many penalties than have a game where they call every little thing. It also allows you to play all your lines."

A little more than five minutes into the second period, Auburn scored the equalizer on a goal by junior Sullivan O'Brien. The game tying goal was assisted by senior Erik Dupuis, and Emmet O'Brien.

The Falcons retook the lead again two minutes later when Tassinari fired a shot from the

right circle for another unassisted goal.

Then a tip-in goal from senior Tristen Hottin at the 10:32 mark, gave Minnechaug a 3-1 advantage.

Junior Brayden O'Sullivan and Klakotskiy were credited with the assists on the Falcons third goal.

Rich scored the only goal of the final period, which cut the Rockets deficit to 3-2 with a little less than ten minutes remaining in regulation. Austin Dono was credited with the assist.

With 2:45 left on the scoreboard clock, Auburn had a golden opportunity to score the tying goal, but a shot attempt sailed wide of the net.

It was the only meeting of the regular season between the two squads, but they could possibly meet again in the Division 2 state tournament.

Foundation surpasses Goal on Giving Tuesday

SPRINGFIELD -- The Foundation for TJO Animals participated in Giving Tuesday in 2023 with a hefty goal to raise \$25,000 for the purchase of a special therapeutic laser for the Thomas J. O'Connor Animal Control & Adoption Center vet clinic.

This vital piece of equipment promotes healing, helps with cell regeneration, reduces inflammation and much more. More importantly, it decreases recovery time and discomfort for the animals in the care of the adoption center. The laser is not limited to surgical patients; animals with chronic conditions including skin and ear infections, allergies, arthritis and wounds will benefit as well.

The Foundation for TJO Animals, the nonprofit organization that provides fundraising and granting support for animals in the care of the Thomas J. O'Connor Animal Control and Adoption Center, proudly surpassed its goal. With the support of generous donations from the community, more than \$25,000 was raised to make that effort a reality. Hundreds of animals will benefit each year from laser therapy via the therapeutic laser.

Lori Swanson, executive director of the animal control and adoption center said, "This year, the Foundation for TJO Animals' goals was quite lofty. With a goal of \$25,000, the community once again rose to the occasion to improve the lives of animals. We are grateful for each, and every donation made to the Foundation on Giving Tuesday."

Water supply district could include 35 Hampden houses

By Dalton Zbierski
Editor
dzbierski@turley.com

A total of 35 Hampden houses could connect to the public water supply through the Scantic Valley Water District in a process that is ongoing, Tighe & Bond Project Manager Jennifer Gilbert said.

The Scantic Valley Water District has 16 active water services and provides drinking water to 13 homes, including the Laughing Brook property at 783 Main Street, the Town Highway Garage, the Hampden Town House and Hampden Fire Station, according to the town website. More buildings are set to join.

The Scantic Valley Water District is a registered community based Public Water System in the commonwealth and is regulated by the Environmental Protection Division of Water Supply.

During the Dec. 18, 2023, meeting of the Board of Selectmen, it was made apparent that more than a dozen homes scattered between Scantic Road, Cross Road, Glendale Road and South Monson Road are in line to join the district and receive public water.

Water District Commission Chair John Plaster joined the Selectmen in person on Dec. 18 alongside Gilbert, who appeared virtually, to discuss the rollout.

Plaster said there has been an issue with Polyfluorinated Substances, or PFAS, near the old landfill. PFAS are a group of chemicals used to make fluoropolymer coatings and products that resist heat, oil, stains, grease and water and are determinantal to drinking water.

On a quarterly basis, 10 homes near the old landfill are tested by William J. Frank Engineering, P.C., an environmental consultant in Wilbraham.

Plaster proposed renovating or rebuilding the town's pump house to increase more water capacity to service the addi-

tional homes and filter/distribute more water at a quicker rate.

"The pressure will be created outside the tank, not into the tank. Right now, the wells providing the pressure along with condensed air, but now we're going to have two pumps on the outside of the tank. It should give us sufficient pressure," Plaster said.

Hampden already contracted with Tighe & Bond for \$174,000, using ARPA funds to test a list of 10 homes near the district.

Tighe & Bond's first scope was for 10 homes, and one already was hooked up to the water district. On Dec. 18, Gilbert requested an additional \$40,000 to cover the engineering fees required to do more state-mandated testing.

"Currently, the scope is for nine homes that are adjacent to Cross Road, Glendale Road and the southern end of South Monson Road," Gilbert said. "We were pretty much at the 50% design meeting, talked about the project and were notified that Mass DEP provided an additional 10 homes that they wanted monitoring to begin on for the town."

Gilbert said the town reached out to Tighe & Bond to ask what the construction cost would be, as well as what amendment would be required to the design contract, to add the 10 new homes to the construction scope.

The original scope was for 3,600 feet of pipeline. With the additional 10 homes, the modified scope will include an additional 1,500 feet of pipeline.

Martin said the construction costs will be a bit more expensive for the added homes because several of the houses are significantly far back from the road.

"Upwards of 100 feet, so the actual per linear footage for the additional work would be a little bit more, but our scope of service and our design budget wouldn't reflect that. We have the base map done so

we'll be doing a little bit more surveys," Gilbert said.

She added that the extra 1,500 feet of pipeline will allow for the system to be looped for Cross Road and Glendale Road, which could also make the water supply accessible for more houses in the future.

"On Glendale (Road), there's only two houses being serviced with the additional feet of pipe and on Cross Road, you have three served off the existing and only one (new one) so by looping the system, there's more linear feet per house," Gilbert said. "However, by doing that, if those other houses on Glendale across would need to be connected, the pipe will be there. It's advantageous to have a looped system just for water quality and turnover."

Selectman John Flynn spent several minutes questioning the total of homes that are looking to be added to the water district and was surprised to hear about the second letter from the DEP adding more to the list. He said he was also surprised how the pipeline will be dispersed.

"I really would have thought the first group of houses would have had more of the linear pipe required because they were so much closer to the district. Then, this list of additional houses that we see would have required more of an extension at the line," Flynn said.

Flynn asked Plaster if he thinks he'll get feedback from other nearby homes asking why they aren't being added to the water district, and Plaster said he has already begun hearing back.

Flynn reminded the audience that the entire process is a multi-million dollar one that will take time, as he made a motion to approve the amendment for the Scantic Valley District Pump Station and attribute \$40,700 to Tighe & Bond, suggesting it be distributed through ARPA money like the last appropriation.

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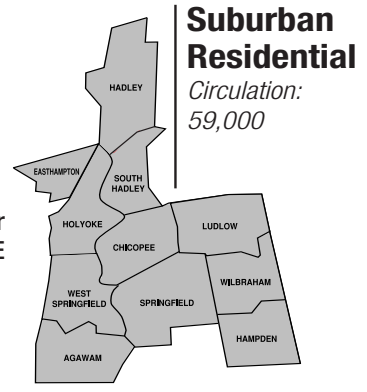
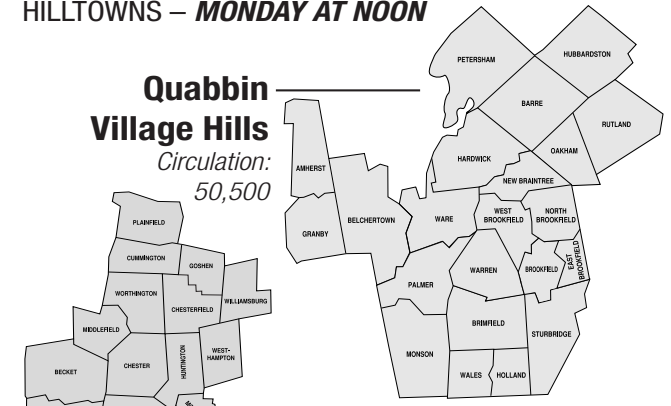
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The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts officially opened on Dec. 14. Turley photo by Tedy Makuch, CHS senior.



A variety of activities and programs will be held out of the Food Bank's teaching kitchen. Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski



(L to R) State Sen. Adam Gomez (D-Springfield), Food Bank Executive Director Andrew Morehouse and State Rep. Shirley Arriaga (D-Chicopee), pictured on Dec. 14. Photo courtesy of the Food Bank.



The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts' new 62,000 square foot facility includes this state-of-the-art warehouse. Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.



Local and state officials, and members of the community, visited the Food Bank on Dec. 14. Photo courtesy of the Mayor's Office.



Local and state officials gathered at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts on Dec. 14. Photo courtesy of the Mayor's Office.

Food Bank of Western Mass debuts new Chicopee facility

By Dalton Zbierski
Editor
dzbierski@turley.com

CHICOPEE – Dec. 14, 2023 was a banner day for the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, as its newly constructed, state-of-the-art food distribution facility on Carew Street officially opened.

Food Bank employees showcased the 62,000 square-foot building during an evening ceremony attended by elected officials, donors, partners and invested residents from Chicopee and neighboring communities.

Since 1982, the Food Bank has been feeding neighbors in need in Berkshire, Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties, and the strategically located warehouse and office space will allow the operation to further pursue its mission of ending hunger.

"It's at the crossroads of the major interstates of Western Massachusetts, so we selected this location because it will really enable us to provide healthy food to anyone and everyone who needs it, when they need it, across all four counties in Western Massachusetts," Food Bank Executive Director Andrew Morehouse said.

The new structure is far larger than the food bank's previous home in Hatfield, enabling it to serve more people than ever. Last year, the Food Bank distributed the equivalent of 11 million meals to about 107,000

people monthly, and Morehouse expects the number to rise, as residents battle inflation and the end of federal pandemic benefits.

"So, they turn to the Food Bank and our 175 partners, the local, frontline food pantries, meal sites and shelters, to seek food assistance so they can carry on with their lives and get ahead in life," Morehouse said.

The Food Bank employs 64 people, but that number could rise as management capitalizes on the facility's "incredible" capacity. Morehouse said the staff is currently in a "learning mode," getting accustomed to the space and repeatedly rearranging inventory to maximize efficiencies and food flow.

Statistics are already proving the larger warehouse to be more effective than the previous site.

"In the last three months, we've provided 25% more healthy food than the same period last year, and we're confident we'll be able to sustain that growth moving forward," Morehouse said.

Being able to serve the community better than before is fantastic, said Director of Programs Christine Maxwell. She described the building's teaching kitchen.

"We'll be using that for community programming, for food demonstrations and for cooking classes and nutrition workshops. We weren't able to do that in our old building, so we're excited about that," Maxwell said.

Director of Development Jillian Morgan said moving into a facility that allows the Food Bank to serve its communities at a higher clip is significant. She said the staff is dedicated to making sure food is delivered to as many people as possible who are facing food insecurity, and the larger warehouse pays dividends.

"This was a really important move for the food bank to be able to increase our capacity and efficiency," she said. "We already have distributed more food in this building, so we know that it's going to serve us for decades to come until we end hunger."

Farm Manager Lee Gadway estimated that the new warehouse can store twice as much food as the old one. He said even the parking lot is twice the size.

"This is amazing," Gadway said. "Just being able to warehouse this much food and being able to think of it as a hub and spoke system on a bicycle. Everything's brought in on the spokes to the hub, and then we deliver it back out."

Gadway said the larger space makes the operation more efficient, as the Food Bank delivers food to places that smaller farms are unable to reach.

Morehouse said people are blown away when they enter the building and see its size and magnitude. He said the Food Bank looks to leverage the power of community to create a hunger free Western Massachu-

setts. "The way we're going to do that is by talking to one another and cooking up new ideas, so this new facility and food distribution center has a lot of space for us to invite community groups in, whether they want to volunteer or just collaborate and plan how we can work better together to get more done," Morehouse said.

Morehouse pointed out that the dream could not have become a reality without the assistance of state and federal legislators. The Food Bank raised \$30 million to build its new home, and about half of the money came from state and federal government.

He also expressed gratitude for private donors, as 246 businesses and individuals invested in the food distribution center.

"We couldn't have done it without them, large and small," he said.

Morgan said she is humbled by the amount that was raised, noting that it displays the community's investment in addressing the underlying causes of hunger and making sure that the operation can help alleviate hunger in the community or get rid of it entirely.

"(The \$30 million raised) is a real testament to how much people in this area care about addressing the needs of people who are facing hunger," she said.

FOOD DRIVE from page 1

facilitating our patients helping out and at the same time helping people who really need it," Margolis said.

Although he is willing to collect whatever helps the food drive, Margolis emphasized that he is looking for canned goods or boxed food specifically; items that won't go bad over the course of the month.

The practice sends out various reminders for people via text or email ahead of their appointments, encouraging them to give back if they can.

Margolis stressed the survival center's close location and said his business tries to support local whenever it can, especially if it means fighting hunger or providing coats during the winter. He said his business serves relatively well-off suburbs of Springfield and its surrounding areas but he knows there are people who need help only a matter of miles away.

This year, anyone who participates is eligible to win a gift card to Rice Fruit Farm or a nearby business.

"We'll draw a name among the people who donated. Hopefully, it will stir up even more interest than we have in the past," Margolis said. "I think when we do deliver the food, we put a picture with our social media what we're up to, so people see it there too. There's a lot of different ways to raise awareness."

In the past, due to media coverage, people have come in to donate that aren't patients or associated with the practice because they know it is a trustworthy location to leave donations.

As the business begins its new food drive, Margolis made it clear that a need exists and there is an easy way to meet it.

"Even if you're not coming to the practice for orthodontic treatment, we certainly welcome anybody to come in and bring things so we can facilitate that," Margolis said. "I think a lot of people, they feel funny going to the (survival center). They might be apprehensive in some way, but we can take that off their hands by us going to the place and delivering everything for them."



Dr. Michael Margolis

Baystate Health's Mobile Blood Donation Team is coming to Palmer in 2024

PALMER – The Baystate Health Blood Donation team will host a blood drives at Baystate Wing Hospital in 2024, beginning on Feb. 7, from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Additionally, Blood Drives will be held every other month on Wednesday throughout the year at Baystate Wing on April 10, June 5, Aug. 7, Oct. 9 and Dec. 11.

"There continues to be an urgent need for blood, when you donate blood to Baystate Health, your precious gift remains in our local communities," said Nicole VanZandt, MLT III, supervisor, BRL Blood Donor Services. "Please help us to ensure a safe and adequate blood supply is available by donating blood with the Baystate Health Blood Donor Program.

"There is no substitute for human blood," VanZandt said. "Blood dona-

tions take approximately one hour to complete, including the interview, donation, and refreshments. To donate blood, you must be at least 17 years old; weigh at least 110 pounds have a photo ID; be in good health (no colds, or sore throat); and have not donated blood within the past eight weeks."

Blood drives will be held at Baystate Wing Hospital, 40 Wright St., Palmer, in Snow Conference Room C. In appreciation, all eligible donors will receive a \$10 Gift card.

For more information or to book an appointment to donate blood, please call the Blood Donor Center at 413-794-4600. Please be sure to note the Baystate Health hospital location you would like to make your donation at when you make your appointment.

Habitat breaks the mold

Offers affordable homeownership despite rising costs

By Brandice J. O'Brien
Guest Column

SPRINGFIELD – Yes, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity builds houses. But, there's so much more to the nonprofit organization. Simply put, Greater Springfield Habitat offers the limited-income population of Hampden County an opportunity to create better lives and generational wealth for their families. GSHFH operates using a three-pronged approach as a construction company, social service agency, and mortgage provider. In fact, Greater Springfield Habitat's construction projects are built despite the rise of inflation, financial challenges, and changes in the local housing market.

GSHFH primarily constructs three- and four-bedroom single-family homes that measure approximately 1,500 square feet. GSHFH helps families purchase homes that they construct in partnership with the organization, by requiring sweat equity contribution in lieu of down payment from partner families and providing low-to-zero-interest mortgages and subsidies to purchase homes at below market rate. Greater Springfield Habitat mortgages are based on the family's income and set to not exceed 43% of their total household debt when combined with all financial obligations.

"GSHFH works with families that earn 45% to 60% of the area median income level. For a family of four, that's a household income of \$35,000 to \$59,000 per year," said Aimee Giroux, GSHFH executive director. "Traditional first-time home buyer programs require a minimum income of 80% or \$80,000 AMI and the family must have 3% to 10% down payment to qualify."

By comparison, Aimee said, imagine a

family of four earning \$50,000 (50% AMI) is trying to secure a \$150,000 mortgage. They have a current debt of \$700 per month for a student loan, credit card and car loan. By partnering with GSHFH, they can afford up to a 2.5% interest loan. Their maximum payment with escrow would be \$993 per month with an overall debt to income of 40%. At the current 6.5% interest rate, their payment would be \$1,348 per month, and their debt to income would be 53%, which would make them ineligible for traditional funding.

Juan Gonzalez said just before he and his wife showed up to the January 2023 closing of his new home in Holyoke, he ran the numbers one last time to make sure the home was within their financial means. Looking over the math, he was worried. Unnecessarily so. Juan forgot the loan was interest-free. When he heard that he exhaled a big breath and said, "Disregard my math. Thank you, Lord. This home is more affordable."

"Habitat made the process easy and with a no-interest loan in this economy, we couldn't have asked for anything better," said Karina Dise, Habitat homeowner in Monson, who with her husband, purchased their home in November 2007. "We are blessed to own a house and have land that goes with it. We can enjoy the outside when the weather is nice and we don't have to hear our noisy neighbors who used to live right next door to us. My husband likes to grill outside too, so that's definitely a plus."

Greater Springfield Habitat realizes everyone deserves simple, decent, affordable housing. Period. Habitat aims to close the racial wealth disparities by providing subsidies and affordable mortgages to help families break the cycle.

"We had debt, we cleaned it up and went to the bank to see if we qualified for a mortgage. We were told we didn't have enough money," said Lori Holt, who with her husband purchased a Springfield Habitat home in May 2014. "Our daughter told us about



Submitted photos

New homeowner Ireydiza accepts the keys to her new home

Habitat and encouraged us to apply. I didn't think we had a chance."

Eventually, Lori and her husband applied and were accepted. "It was such a blessing for us," Lori said. The couple has five children, four of whom are now adults. "We pay for mortgage what a lot of people pay for rent. Habitat helped our family a lot."

Kim Rivera, who experienced homelessness, on and off since her 18th birthday before owning a Habitat home, said she appreciates what Habitat has done for her. Kim purchased her home in December 2009.

"Habitat gave people like me the ability to get the American dream. I have stability. My children and grandchildren have a safe haven," Kim said. "I'm never selling this house. I'm going to keep it in the family. I want other generations to know they won't be homeless. I have three kids, and they've all seen the benefits of having a home."

Studies have shown children of limited-income homeowners are 11% more likely to graduate from high school and are 4.5% more likely to complete post-secondary education than children of low-income renters, Aimee said.

Since its inception in 1987, GSHFH has

constructed 74 homes throughout Hampden County.

Habitat chooses partner families based on need, their willingness to partner with us, and their ability to repay a mortgage for the purchase of their home. In many instances, a family's current living situation is less than ideal with issues of rodents, limited electricity, no heat, and/or the apartment is in a dangerous location. For many families, gunfire, drugs and vandalism are frequent. Families who face these realities often have challenges breaking the cycle for their children.

To ensure selected families understand the "hand up" versus a "hand out" ideology, prospective and have tools to manage the responsibility of homeownership, Habitat partner families must also attend first-time homebuyer education, financial literacy classes, good neighbor and home maintenance classes.

To keep the mission moving forward, GSHFH relies on donations. Most funding comes from individual donations, local businesses, and grants.

To learn more about Greater Springfield Habitat and its mission, visit habitatspringfield.org.

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