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JANUARY 22, 2026

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A look inside the **Black Fang Museum**

By Kristin Rivers
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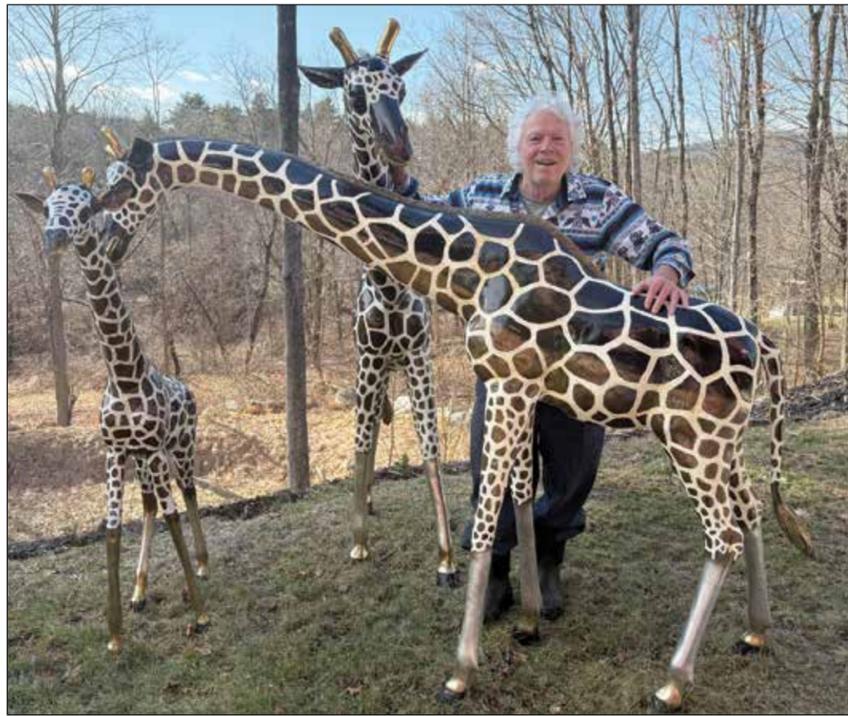
WILBRAHAM - If you've driven down Route 20 heading to Wilbraham or Monson and Palmer, you might have noticed a building with four Italian statues and other pieces of artwork.

That is the Black Fang Museum, overseen by Jeffrey Allard, which is open whenever he's around. Just look for the white SUV in the parking lot and the 'Open' sign.

Inside is a variety of artwork from Morocco, Egypt, Thailand and South Asia, famed artists such as Pablo Picasso, Keith Haring, Antonio Medici and Marc Chagall, Italian furniture pieces, Allard's own artwork, animal statues and many more.

Allard, who worked as a radiologist before retirement and now works as a consultant, explained he's been collecting art over the years and traveling, needing a place to put them. He thought some of the space would be used as offices, but after people visited and told him, "This is a museum, not an office," he went forward with the vision.

"I thought it'd be a good



Jeffrey Allard poses with his giraffe sculptures. His art museum is located on 3333 Boston Road in Wilbraham.

thing for the community and a good thing for me because I like to talk about it, talk about art, talk about anything with anyone who wants to take a look," Allard said.

As Allard got more into art, he met with an art dealer in San Francisco.

"He had this furniture. This was in a warehouse from his great-grandfather, appar-

ently, all from Italy and he was finally trying to sell it and so we worked a good deal for

Please see **ART**, page 11

Selectboard hosts budget roundtable

By Kristin Rivers
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HAMPDEN - The Selectboard, joined by the Advisory Committee, hosted their budget roundtable with town departments on Jan. 12.

The Times will break down the roundtable over the next few editions—beginning this week—to highlight what each department presented.

Advisory Committee Chair Doug Boyd explained how "people aren't happy about the increase on their taxes."

"Not a surprise to any of us who have been paying attention and, unfortunately, we anticipate that the coming year is going to be equally difficult and, as such, we are asking departments that level service budgets, which I believe everybody here knows a level service is exactly that, whatever the level of service is that's being provided now, budget for that, whatever the dollar is that flows from that, put that in the budget

request," Boyd said.

Boyd said a schedule of the meetings with Advisory will be distributed along with the budget sheets.

"We're asking that it'd be level service and, obviously, we anticipate that there'll be some variance. There always is. If there is, please just make a note down at the bottom section in the comments as to what why it's either up or down in terms of the level of the services being requested," Boyd said. "We just ask that people try to restrain your budget requests because we anticipate that it is going to be difficult. The preliminary numbers that we've seen from the school are already quite large and that is going to make putting together the budget quite challenging."

Police Department

Police Chief Daniel Bruno shared the budget is looking good and on track, partly due to being currently short one officer and the sal-

Please see **BUDGET**, page 4



Turley photo by Natalie Proulx

The January winter books display at the Wilbraham Public Library.

Winter Events at WPL

By Natalie Proulx
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM - This winter season, the Wilbraham Public Library is hosting lots of community events, clubs and resources for all ages!

For starters, this year's annual Winter Reading Challenge is going on now and everyone is encouraged to participate. From Jan. 1 to the final day of February, each age group is able to earn raffle tickets for a chance to win a prize in their age range.

From toddler to grade five, children can read for 300 minutes to earn three tickets for their raffle, teens can earn up to three tickets by writing a review for each book they read, and adults ages 18+ can earn up to five tickets for each

book review they write. All book reviews must be logged by Feb. 28 at midnight and all winners, regardless of age group will be notified March 4.

The Annual Stuffed Animal Sleepover is coming up for little ones this February. On Thursday, Feb. 19 from 3:15 to 4 p.m., kids ages three and up can drop off their favorite stuffed animal to spend the night having a sleep over at the library. With the teens from the Teen Advisory Board (TAB), your child will tuck their stuffed animal in for the night and get to listen to a bedtime story.

Signups begin Feb. 2 and you can sign up for one of the three time slots: 3:15 pm,

Please see **EVENTS**, page 2

MRHS NHS volunteers at cookie drop

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - The Minnechaug Regional High School National Honor Society volunteered their time during the Girl Scout Cookie Drop event at St. Catherine's Church in Springfield on Jan. 10.

The Springfield site was one of four across the region helping prep Girl Scouts to distribute their cookies for the season, with the others in West Springfield, Townsend and Worcester, covering the Western and Central Massachusetts chapter of the Girl Scouts.

Irene Chen, a senior at Minnechaug and the NHS President, explained how 23 students participated in the event and it ran from 6:45 to 11 a.m.

"The organizers assigned students into different groups that were in charge of different cookie favors. Troop leaders would pull up with a paper on their car window. On each paper, a different number of cookies would be listed. Samoas and Thin Mints were the most popular," Chen said. "I believe for one troop, the student had to bring around 120 large box-



Photo courtesy of Irene Chen

A group photo of the Minnechaug Regional High School National Honor Society members as they get ready to volunteer.

es of Thin Mints (That's not including the other cookies prior to this). Everyone was working very collaboratively, counting, stocking, and bringing cookies in people's cars. Many hopped onto the trunk of troop leader's trucks to organize and fit the cookies in."

Post-event, Chen reached out to her fellow NHS members, who shared their experiences and what they enjoyed about volunteering.

"I really enjoyed the ex-

citement that the troop leaders had taking part in Girl Scouts. NHS doing community service through Minnechaug is very important as it teaches us students how to better serve our community and see the joy that service can bring!" one student said.

"I enjoyed helping out other communities and meeting new people in my group. It's important that us as a community take community service to give back to our communities. As our pil-

lar "service" we give back and serve back to those that helped us," another said.

"Knowing that my service for the community helped to save so much time and effort makes me feel happy. I would like to take my weekend morning that I may not be doing much into a day where I'm helping others. In my school, it's always been an honor to be in the

Please see **COOKIE DROP**, page 8

HISTORICAL WILBRAHAM



The Spec Pond Recreation Area is the jewel in the crown of Post Office Park that means so much to the town's recreation, and sports teams. (Charles F. Bennett photo)

Spec Pond has a fascinating history

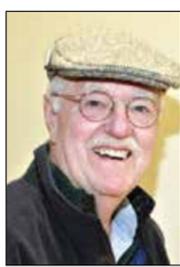
'Planting Day on the Plains' had its pitfalls

By Charles F. Bennett
Times Editor Emeritus

I came across a news clipping from 1961 written by my mother, Ethel M. Bennett, who was the Wilbraham correspondent for the Springfield Morning Union from the 1940's through the 1970's.

It was an interesting story about the history of Spec Pond on Boston Road, now a jewel in the crown of Post Office Park that means so much to the town's recreation, and sports teams and the envy of their opponents.

Back in 1961 the effort by the Wilbraham Lions Club, who made it their mission to



Charlie Bennett

develop the budding recreation area, involved promoting its purchase by the town. They were circulating petitions, holding information sessions, and trying to convince the Board of Selectmen to back the initiative that

the growing town needed the Please see **HISTORY**, page 13

65 Years Ago

Miss Szebak is Engaged

Here is a news clipping reported by my mom, Ethel M. Bennett, who was the Wilbraham correspondent for the Springfield daily newspaper The Morning Union from the 1940s through 1970s. From the March 1, 1961 edition. "The engagement of Miss Patricia Szebak, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Szebak of Boston Road, North Wilbraham to James

J. Diotalevi of Weston St., Indian Orchard, has been announced.

Miss Szebak is a graduate of Technical High School, Springfield and Green Mountain College. She is employed as an assistant to the buyer in the Infants Dept. at Forbes & Wallace. Miss Szebak made her debut in 1958 at the Kosciuszko Foundation Ball at the Waldorf Astoria, New York City."

COMMUNITY

Provost shares enrollment projections with School Committee

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - Superintendent Dr. John Provost shared enrollment projections with the School Committee on Jan. 8.

The biggest highlight Provost noted was the middle school numbers.

"Based on students already known to be born in our towns or enrolled in our elementary schools, we know that middle school enrollment is lower now than it'll be at any time in the foreseeable future," Provost said. "I'll say that again. This is the low point for middle school enrollment. It only goes up from here."

After Provost said the Jan. 1 enrollment showed 2,837 students, up four students from last month and preschool continuing to increase, he presented an updated report.

"Although they show that the district will add students in the coming decade, projections were revised down from the previous year due to three factors noted in the enrollment summary. Firstly, our actual kindergarten enrollment came in 30 students lower than projected. This smaller class will move through the system over the course of the next 12 years. So, that affects enrollment over all of the next 12 years," Provost said. "Also, the 9th-grade enrollment was 25 seats lower than they projected. As you recall, that was a policy decision that we made in order to move the ICP students to the high school. We reduced our choice students into the high school by about 25, so that accounts for that."

Provost noted eighth grade was down, but thought it was

an aberration "because in the way our data is reported, the eighth-grade students who are actually in the ICP are listed in the ungraded column."

"So, eighth grade didn't go down. The students went somewhere else. It would really be more representative and I think true to the actual situation if they were just listed in the 9 to 12 grade band rather than be putting it in their own grade band," Provost said. "So, I think that is a little bit of an aberration that also affects the projections, but it doesn't change the outcome."

Provost added although known births and projected birth rates "remain little change from the last estimate, kindergarten enrollments for the next 10 years were revised down from an average of 209 to an average of 196."

"I believe that adjustment to the projection is based on the lower number of kindergarten students that we received this year. It should be noted that, every year, in this projection as in the prior projection, as in our actual experience, the number of kindergarten students exceeds the live birth rate for their natal year, with the difference being attributable to families with young children moving into town," Provost said. "Last year's projections estimated that kindergarten enrollment would exceed the live birth rate by 43%. In reality, it exceeded the live birth rate by 22%. Whether this represents a short-term or long-term real estate trend remains to be seen. For the projection, NESDEC assumes that kindergarten enrollments will exceed live birth rates by about 35% over the next 10 years. So, in other words, two-thirds



of your kindergarten class is born in town, one-third moves to town before the students become age five."

Provost added the projection assumes class sizes will grow "from year to year in the elementary grades, decline slightly from year to year in the middle school grades, bump up quite a bit between eighth and 9th grade and then decline slightly in 10th, 11th and 12th grades."

"If you look first at Mile Tree's kindergarten in '21 to first grade in '22 to Stony Hill's second to third grade, that's essentially the same cohort of students. So, you can see the class started at 135 through to 141 then 148, then 155. Over in Hampden, the same thing was happening. Green Meadows, that year had 45 students in kindergarten. Next year, when that group was first graders, it had grown to 50 and by second

grade it had added four more students—54—and then grade three was 56 students," Provost said. "So, our district has a pattern where, as the classes age, they grow. Again, that's due mostly to in-migration as families join the district and the class sizes grow. So, that is an important part of the projection."

As a whole, the graduating class "contains about 36 more students than the kindergarten class had 13 years previously."

"So, from birth to kindergarten, we gain about 50 students, and then from kindergarten to graduation, we add 36 more. So, it's more or less constant growth of the cohort through that time, with the exception of middle school, where there is a few years where things go down, and then, with the exception of late high school, where students leave sometimes due to early graduation, sometimes due to other things," Provost

said.

Provost said, currently, "we have three relatively smaller classes," and one of them is grade seven.

"That's currently a grade that's helping to mitigate overcrowding at the middle school. But, next year they'll be eighth graders and the year after that, this class of 192 students will leave the middle school and be replaced by a sixth grade that has 31 more students than the exiting class," Provost said. "At that point, the middle school will have almost 9% greater enrollment than it currently does. So, that's 9% growth in two years, three years."

The kindergarten and first grade classes are, also, smaller classes.

"(The) first of those students will arrive at middle school in 2030, but so there will be a few years of relief, but once that group moves through, middle school num-

bers will start rising again, reaching more than 700 students by 2034," Provost said. "We know the middle school is overcrowded now and we're giving these projections based mainly on students who are already in our classes. These are students we already know. These are not projected, hypothetical or mathematical model students. These are kids who are in the pipeline. Based on the ones we already have, we know that we'll have 100 more middle schoolers who need a place to learn by 2034."

Provost summed up his report with this.

"If we want to give the children already enrolled in our schools what they need in order to thrive, if we want to be a community that continues to benefit from the in-migration of families with young children, we really need to get our choices right, as you all know," Provost said. "I'm very motivated to work with the committee and the boards to find a solution to this problem. I'm encouraged to see there's an increased awareness of this need in the community. I will rely upon your guidance to shepherd this process through to conclusion because you all understand the local context much better than I do. But, it's exciting because I believe we have before us a generational chance to set a course that will carry students well into the second half of the 21st century. So, it's a scary and exciting time to be your superintendent, but I thank you for the privilege and look forward to the conversations to come."

Provost then took questions and thoughts from the School Committee members to wrap up the discussion.

EVENTS from page 1

3:30 pm, or 3:45 p.m. to bring your stuffed animal to the library.

On Tuesday, Jan. 27 from 5 to 6:30 p.m., teens can join local artist Marie Tucker in recreating Van Gogh's Starry Night using only crayons. They will be led step by step, using all the materials provided. On that following Tuesday, Feb. 3 from 6 to 7 p.m., teens are invited to attend Teen Mystery Room: Alien Escape, where they will be working in teams to solve riddles, puzzles, and clues together.

On Friday, Jan. 23 from 2 to 3:30 p.m., anyone 18+ is encouraged to sign up to craft Paper Quilled Greeting Cards, which is a good chance for a hands-on project! The next

day, on Jan. 24 from Noon to 1:30 p.m., similar to the teen's activity of recreating Van Gogh's famous artwork, adults are also able to attend their own.

Any adult can recreate the artwork Sea at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer with crayons!

Looking for weekly events for your young ones? Every Tuesday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m., the library holds the Grow Play Learn weekly playgroup for little ones ages 0 to six. Another weekly event for little ones called Story Art, happens every Friday at 10:30 a.m. for children ages four to six with hands-on creative activities.

Are you looking to get into holding great discussions? The Great Discussions group encourages you to sign



Turley photo by Natalie Proulx
The Winter Reading Challenge Display at the Wilbraham Public Library.

up.

Meeting once a week from February to March, the group discusses critical issues facing the country.

Have any technology issues? Every Friday afternoon, the Wilbraham Monson Academy Community Service Team visits the library

to help the public with any technology issues they may be experiencing.

All of these events are open to all. Although some programs may require registration, all of these events are open to the public.

The public library, also, offers a variety of virtual

events for those who are unable to attend in-person. A common one, for example, is chatting and holding lectures with authors where viewers are able to submit questions.

The librarians of the Wilbraham Public Library do their best to consider the needs and wants of the community they serve.

"We think about what has been popular or in-demand in the past, and we also consider what new subjects/ideas we can introduce," Teen Librarian Rachel Hapgood and Adult Services Librarian, Emilie Lang said.

Winter can be a challenging season for library event programming with many people traveling or simply staying home because of the cold weather.

"We strive to plan a variety of programs—hands-on, discussion-based, etc.—that may bring people to the library," Hapgood and Lang stated how they try to combat the isolation of the winter season with warmth and commu-

nity.

They both mentioned that school vacations are also the perfect time to visit the library to pick up books, DVDs, video games or attend an event with a friend.

Library Director Melissa Harter explained how libraries are so much more than just books these days.

"Public libraries are the community center where everyone is welcome and comes together to discuss, learn and solve problems. Public libraries are truly a treasure!" Harter said.

This winter program was made possible by the Wilbraham Friends of the Library's donations and volunteers, Pathways for Parents, as well as the Teen Advisory Board's participation and collaboration.

If you'd like to find out more about these events, clubs, or resources, you can visit: <https://wilbraham.libnet.info/events> to see the Wilbraham Public Library's event calendar.

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The Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District

We are accepting applications for our Integrated Early Childhood programs for the 2026-2027 school year. These programs are designed for children who are 3- and 4- year olds and are open to residents of Hampden, Wilbraham, and surrounding communities.

If your child will turn three by September 1, 2026 you can obtain an application from our website at www.hwrdsd.org. Simply navigate to "Departments," then "Student Services," and select "Early Childhood Program." Alternatively, you can call Corinne Roberts, Administrative Assistant for Student Services at 413-279-3863 for assistance.

Please note that priority screening and placement will be given to children who live in either Hampden or Wilbraham.

Select Board recaps FinCom meeting

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
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WILBRAHAM - The Select Board recapped a Jan. 7 Finance Committee discussion during their Jan. 12 meeting.

Clerk Sue Bunnell thought it was "the best kind of laying the groundwork, going through the basics."

"Finance 101, Budget 101 sort of thing that I've seen and I would actually call it more like 101 and 201. Really masterful job of going through the budget document and through the sources of revenue and expenditures and all of that, how to work with the document itself," Bunnell said. "Masterful job done by everybody. Barbara was there, Derek did a great job doing a lot of the detailed presentation of moving things around and where to find things and then Assessor Chris O'Keefe and his staff were there as well to field some questions. It was a great meeting."

After Vice Chair Marc Ducey noted the information presented by O'Keefe was helpful, Chair Michael Squindo said he had reviewed the presentation as he was unable to attend the meeting that day.

"I actually found that very helpful, so I can only imagine that with discussion to fill in the gap, that that would be helpful," Squindo said.

"It was also was kind of a great refresher about the

breadth and depth of experience and knowledge and expertise based on the questions that were being asked by members of the committee," Bunnell said.

On potential FinCom requests to the board, Breault said there was a request by one of the members for the Jan. 14 meeting to discuss the Community Preservation Act.

"Consideration to be— from the Finance Committee—to see if there's desire to bring to the Select Board a warrant article that would call for its elimination of the Community Preservation Act," Breault said. "Elimination is one option, there could be discussion of reducing it and so forth. So, there will be discussion this Wednesday and, also, to let the board know that the chair of the CPC was notified that this would be coming up as a topic."

After Ducey noted he'd want to hear what FinCom has to say on this, Squindo asked Breault what would happen if the Community Preservation Act is eliminated, what's the process "regarding money that's been infused by the state, money that exists currently."

"As they're thinking about it, even if they don't have the answers or we don't have it for Wednesday, just as a question of process," Squindo said.

"I don't have insight," Breault said.

Bunnell then noted information from the Community Preservation Coalition website that asks questions.

"No town has ever successfully repealed it, but you could drop to a percentage to as low as 0.5% from where it is currently," Bunnell said. "I think it would also be useful to see information at the town level because there's certainly been millions of dollars of investment and use to which it was put."

For Ducey, he wished "the state would reconsider some of the legislation itself."

"Where we wanted to spend our money, then we should be able to spend our money. Whether or not we can accept the grant from the state effectively, and that's a whole different discussion," Ducey said. "If we could do that, I'd love to keep it in place. But we can't do that and so we're locking ourselves into something that's only matching at 18% now. It's problematic."

Item #2 Breault shared was the FinCom chair discussing the town taking over the oversight and management of facilities management of school buildings in Wilbraham.

"With the concept of whatever efficiencies are gained by doing that, which presumably would fall under the expansion of the department of Facilities Maintenance, under Sam Boyd, for any efficiencies that could be gained by doing do for

those funds to be earmarked towards the schools for educational purposes. That was the general idea that I got out of that proposal that I expect they're going to have that discussion this Wednesday and going forward," Breault said. "But things to be brought forward to the Select Board's attention if the committee wants to present that."

Ducey recalled this item as it was brought to him years ago and he thought about it for a while.

"There's a lot there to unravel if we do decide to go in that direction. So, I think, actually, it's an interesting discussion and I think it's actually worth looking at," Ducey said. "There's a lot there to unpack."

"And it has implications for the district agreement and for the leases," Bunnell said.

Other factors included staffing and impact to the town of Hampden.

"But, I do think there might be some efficiencies to be gained that way. I mean, as we look at Wilbraham Middle School, I think we start to question about the maintenance that's been done, I don't know, over the last number of years. Perhaps, we would be more in tune to that if that was us," Ducey said.

For item #3, Breault thought it was about Memorial School but was unsure, so Squindo said the board would circle back on that after they find out more information.

Snowman Contest 2026

WILBRAHAM/HAMPDEN - Calling all kids: the 2026 Snowman Building Contest is back.

Winter fun is officially on the horizon, and the Wilbraham Junior Women's Club is inviting kids across Wilbraham and Hampden to grab their mittens, roll up some snow, and let their imaginations run wild! The 2026 Snowman Building Contest is here, and it promises frosty fun, friendly competition, and fantastic prizes.

Young snow artists are encouraged to build their best, silliest, most creative snowman and snap a photo featuring the 2026 Snowman Building Contest flyer, which can be found on the club's website at www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org. Once the masterpiece is complete, parents or guard-

ians should post the photo to the Wilbraham-Hampden Snowman Contest Facebook page. Entries will be accepted throughout the winter season.

Winners will be chosen by the Junior Women's club and announced on the Facebook Page at the end of the season.

Prizes will be awarded to three top snow creations:

- First Prize: \$30, a trophy, and ultimate bragging rights
- Second Prize: \$25
- Third Prize: \$20

The Snowman Building Contest is proudly sponsored by the Wilbraham Junior Women's Club, an organization dedicated to supporting local programs, charities, and community events in Wilbraham and surrounding towns.

Have questions about the contest, the club, or interested in joining the Wilbraham



Junior Women's Club? Visit www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org to learn more. You can also contact Barbara Croteau at barbcroteau@gmail.com.

So when the snow starts falling, don't stay inside—get building, get creative, and get clicking. Your snowman could be a winner!

Women's Club January meeting

WILBRAHAM - St. Cecilia Women's Club next meeting is on Thursday, Jan. 29 from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It's our annual Card & Game Party Luncheon! Join us for an afternoon of lively fun, warm connections and friendship.

Enjoy card games and board games after a delicious lunch and dessert; then take part in our exciting raffle filled with fantastic prizes. It's a delightful way to spend your day while supporting our charitable contributions!

Everyone is welcome! Bring a friend and be part of the fun.

Evangel Assembly Hosts Open Door Open Mic Night in Wilbraham

WILBRAHAM - Evangel Assembly is excited to announce our Open Door Open Mic Night, a vibrant community event taking place on Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026, at 7 p.m. at Evangel Assembly, located at 348 Stony Hill Road, Wilbraham in the East Wing.

This event is open to all, inviting guests to enjoy a night of diverse performances or take the stage themselves for a five-minute performance of their choice. Whether you're a singer, poet, comedian, or story-

teller, this is your chance to shine!

Open Mic participants can sign up to perform by visiting <https://evangelassembly.churchcenter.com/people/forms/1120002>.

Spectators are welcome to come, relax, and enjoy an evening of local talent and entertainment in a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

"We're thrilled to open our doors to the community for a night of creativity and connection," said Steve Devereaux, the Open Mic Organizer at Evangel

Assembly. "This event is all about celebrating the diverse talents of our neighbors and fostering a sense of togetherness."

Join us for an unforgettable evening filled with laughter, music, and inspiration. Admission is free, there will be coffee and treats for donations, and all are welcome.

For more information or to register for a performance slot, visit <https://evangelassembly.churchcenter.com/people/forms/1120002>.

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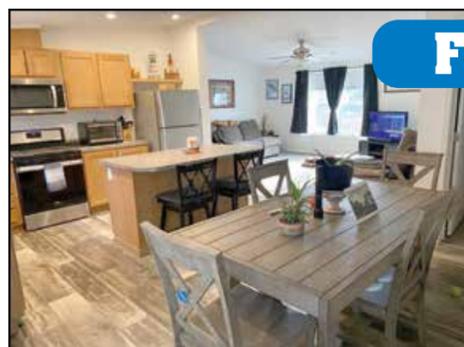
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COMMUNITY

Nomination papers available

WILBRAHAM - Wilbraham Town Clerk's Office is announcing that nomination papers are now available for placement of your name as a candidate on the Saturday, May 16, 2026 Annual Town Election ballot.

The last day to obtain nomination papers is Wednesday, March 25, 2026.

The positions being voted that day are:

- 1 Select Board member for 3 years
- 1 Assessor for 3 years
- 2 Regional School Committee members for 3 years
- 1 Cemetery Commissioner for 3 years
- 1 Cemetery Commissioner for 2 years
- 1 Water Commissioner for 3 years
- 2 Library Trustees for 3 years
- 1 Planning Board Member for 5 years
- 1 Wilbraham Housing Authority member for 5 years.

The deadline for submission to the Registrars for certification is Friday, March 27, 2026 at 5 p.m. Fifty (50) signatures from registered Wilbraham voters are required to have a name listed on the ballot as a candidate.

We suggest calling our office to set up an appointment to pick up the papers. Contact the Town Clerk's Office at 596-2800, ext. 200 if you have any questions.

Office hours are Monday thru Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Cookbook Club at the Wilbraham Public Library

WILBRAHAM - The Wilbraham Public Library Cookbook Club is meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 4, at 6:30 p.m.

This month's selection is "What Goes With What" by Julia Turshen.

Please let the library know what you're bringing when registering so we do not duplicate recipes. Cooking is encouraged but not required

for attendance. Copies of the book are available now at the Service Desk.

The Cookbook Club meets on the first Wednesday of every other month at 6:30 p.m.

This program is free and open to the public, and registration is required. For more information or to register, please call the library at 413-596-6141.

PV Partners with Rachel's Table of WMass

REGION - Pioneer Valley Financial Group is proud to partner with Rachel's Table of Western Massachusetts, donating \$10,000 in support of the organization's mission to alleviate hunger and reduce food waste throughout the region.

Rachel's Table works to address food insecurity by rescuing surplus food and redistributing it to those in need, while also offering programs that educate and empower the community. Through food rescue, gleaning initiatives, gardening, and cooking education, the organization helps individuals and families build skills, resilience, and access to nutritious food.

"Support like this helps ensure our neighbors can grow food, build resilience, and nourish their communities for years to come," says Jodi Falk, Executive Director of Rachel's Table.

PV Financial is excited to be part of Rachel's Table's journey through both learning



and hands-on volunteerism. The two organizations have already begun working closely together to identify meaningful ways to support the mission based on team members' skills and interests. Early discussions have focused

on the various locations Rachel's Table serves and how PV Financial can best contribute to their ongoing efforts.

"Their story is so compelling, and they give back to the community in a truly unique way," says Karen Nogueira,

Partner and Director of Client Relations at PV Financial Group. "Both PV Financial Group and Rachel's Table have come so far since their beginnings, and there really is no better feeling than doing good for those around us."

FlashVote sign ups coming soon to Wilbraham

WILBRAHAM - Do you have about one minute a month to help make Wilbraham better?

The Town of Wilbraham is working with FlashVote to engage the community and gather valuable input from residents to inform our decisions.

We encourage residents to sign up here now: [https://www.flashvote.com/wilbra-](https://www.flashvote.com/wilbraham)

hamma or call 775-235-2240 to participate by phone or text only.

Sign up takes less than one minute and your input is always kept anonymous. Personal or demographic information collected by FlashVote is never shared with the Town or anyone else. When residents sign up, they can determine how surveys are

received - whether by email, text or phone call. They will receive a notification whenever there is a new survey, and they will have 48 hours to participate before voting closes. Once a survey is closed, everyone who participated will automatically receive a summary of the overall results and be able to see how their responses compare to the group.

Select Board Chair Michael Squindo said, "The Select Board is very excited to use the input collected in these surveys to inform decision making for the Town in ways that serve our residents better."

Sign up now so you don't miss the first survey - coming soon!

BUDGET from page 1

ary line is also on track.

"Absent any major problems. Hopefully, no injuries or anything like that. We never know what could happen. I mean, recently, we've had some slips and falls on ice in town, just with police officers. So, you never know when someone's going to get injured or anything like that. We can't really anticipate that," Bruno said. "Otherwise, we're in pretty good shape right now, so on track."

For future items, Bruno said the police department is working on getting fully staffed through one additional officer, a detective position.

"That being said, with contractual obligations and everything going into fiscal '27, I'm hopeful that we can stay level-funded. Obviously, we have those contractual needs that we need to meet and at full-staffing, I think it will be a little bit tight, absolutely," Bruno said. "The building's in pretty good standing. I've been working with Herb on a couple of things there. Hopefully, no huge costs coming in there in terms of building and maintenance. A few heating issues there that we're working on."

Another goal is recruiting more reserve officers.

"Talking to the current staff at the union and looking



Photo courtesy of Brian Domina

The Selectboard, joined by the Advisory Committee, hosted their budget roundtable with town departments on Jan. 12.

at the bigger picture, we are certainly down numbers in that reserve core. So, that's something I'm looking to try to bolster up a bit, adding one or two because it's very little cost to us to add them, but it saves us on the bottom line on that salary line," Bruno said.

Another capital need is a police cruiser.

"We haven't had one in a couple of years. That's something we certainly need. We're getting, as we say, long in the tooth on mileage and wear and tear on those cars. It will end up costing us more in the long run," Bruno said.

He added he's interested in discussing with other department heads on how to work on this.

Another item was the re-

placement of firearms, including on-duty handguns.

"I'm working on some estimates now and some other ideas on how to reduce those costs. But, that is another capital-type request that I'm going to be coming to the board with," Bruno said.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Ed Poulin said the fire department is doing well, with a new forestry truck arriving in February and new reporting software going live on Feb. 1.

"As far as budgets, we've had a few hiccups in maintenance. We've had to buy some tires for the tanker and we just had the manifold go on our engine too. So, that's out of service for a couple weeks,

it's over getting repaired. It's going to be custom-part. The truck's 26 years old, so no one has that part in stock. It was custom-built probably anyway," Poulin said.

Chair John Flynn noted the fire department has "a reputation of doing a lot of the work as you can."

"As these get more and more complex, the opportunity for self-service goes away, right?" Flynn said.

Poulin replied yes, with a few vendors switched over time to save money, including WB Hill in East Longmeadow who works with tanks and pumps and other items.

The fire department itself is doing the small repairs, thanks to help from Peter Hatch.

"They're willing to take the job on. We've used it for a few other problems we've had in the past. They've been reasonable, they've been really quick to take it in and get it back to us," Poulin said. "So, it's a win-win. We don't have to travel very far with our truck."

On capital needs, Poulin said they're good as the current focus is the new fire station and signing the OPM contract, Flynn added was revised to better support the town. Another contract for the design architect is also on the list.

Another item will be fill-

ing a position as a firefighter was promoted to lieutenant.

"I think we should be pretty solid going forward," Poulin said.

Highway Department

Highway Superintendent Mark Langone said FY26 is looking on track.

"There is one account I am a little concerned about and that's our Road Machinery Maintenance Account. We're lucky to have a few employees who are pretty mechanically inclined. That's really helping to save with some repairs and stuff," Langone said.

Langone agreed that sending things out "is not getting any cheaper" and with the technology "that these trucks have, even our dump trucks, you're looking at specialized technicians that need to work on it."

"Of course, the labor rate or the shop rate goes up, the parts are up," Langone said. "I'm not throwing in the towel yet, but I'm watching that account."

On FY27, Langone said he'll see how he ends the year.

"I still have inspections to do for the whole fleet. I may look to bump that up a couple thousand. On the flip side, there's some accounts that I think I can scale back a little on. So, I think that'll help," Langone said. "One of

them will be my catch bases and cleaning account. So, I've been watching that account the last few years...we're at the point where we're not using any sand, period. That's helping a lot with our catch basing, cleaning and also our street sweeping. With the catch basing and cleaning, I haven't scaled back on that account yet, only because that's by the hour and anything could happen. I think I'm at a point where I can maybe trim a decent amount off of that account."

Langone added he's been fortunate to have a low-bid contractor and they are interested in renewing their contract, praising the worker who "helped really save us a lot of money."

Langone's capital concerns were the loader—which would help with plowing the new town hall parking lot—and replacing a 2004 dump truck.

"But with that, one of my thoughts is to downsize a little bit. Not get such a big, expensive dump truck," Langone said.

On if Chapter 90 could be used to buy the loader, Langone explained purchase of equipment does qualify.

Langone said, overall, the department is in good shape and will review what FY27 will look like.

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VFW presents 8th annual first responders appreciation dinner

By Amanda Munson
Staff Writer
amunson@turley.com

LUDLOW – In the evening of Jan. 8, the Gremio-Lusitano Club opened their doors for the Eighth annual First Responders Appreciation Dinner, hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Pioneer Valley Financial Group. From a photobooth and a dance area, a friendly competition of battle of the badges, and numerous raffle prizes for adults and toys for kids, the dinner was only a part of the fun!

The night was open and free to first responders who work and live in Ludlow, Wilbraham, Hampden and included police, fire, state police, EMTs, dispatchers, department retirees, and all families. The event by Sgt. Joshua D. Desforges VFW Post 3236, which recently merged with VFW Post 625 in Chicopee and Holyoke last year, had a goal to recognize first responders and their ongoing efforts within the communities.

Speaking with Director of Veterans Services Eric Segundo, he explained how he defines the title first responders and the partnerships within the community to make this event happen.

“First responders represent courage under pressure,

compassion in crisis, and professionalism in uncertainty. They are the calm voice on the phone, the steady hands in the chaos, and the reassuring presence when everything feels out of control. At their core, first responders are people who choose-again and again-to place the safety and well-being of others ahead of their own comfort, and sometimes ahead of their own lives. That commitment deserves not only our gratitude, but our respect, support, and care. For the last eight years we have partnered with PV Financial to honor our first responders. Other businesses have provided support to complete the event,” said Segundo.

Speaking with Auxiliary President Kara Smith of VFW Post 3236, Smith explained how she got involved within the group and how it soon became a family affair. “The auxiliary are the family members of the VFW, so we also come and support the event. We are selling calendars and that’s for the auxiliary to help raise money and do all this, we come and help out. Auxiliary



Turley Photos by Amanda Munson

Held at the Gremio Lusitano Club in Town, people came from all over to eat and have a chance to win some prizes.



The First Responders Appreciation Dinner was proudly hosted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Pioneer Valley Financial Group of Ludlow.

is mostly the family members, the daughters, sons, grandchildren, wives, spouses of the people that are in the VFW. We are here to support them and all the events they

do, but we also do our own. I’m part of the auxiliary because my mother and my father are both part of the VFW. We try to be the family support and these types of events,

you have people commending the military and the veterans and also the family behind them,” said Smith.

Smith continued, “The event was 100% free and a way to give back and thank them for everything they do. I grew up in the military and the first responders are doing the same thing military, they’re just protecting closer to home. We want to show

them that we support them, just like they support us. We always want to be there for them,” ended Smith.

Segundo ended by thanking our first responders, “Thank you to our first responders for your courage, sacrifice, and unwavering service. We are grateful for all you do to keep our community safe-today and always.”

Friends of the Veterans of Wilbraham to meet Feb. 11

WILBRAHAM - Following a well-attended initial information session earlier this month, the Town of Wilbraham’s Department of Veterans Services is inviting community members to continue participating in the formation of a new volunteer-driven veterans support organization.

The first meeting drew 15 participants, including Veterans, family members, and community supporters. Veterans Services Director Patrick Renna expressed appreciation for the strong turnout and productive discussion.

“The engagement at our first meeting showed there is real interest in building a meaningful, communi-

ty-based effort to support Veterans,” said Renna.

At the upcoming meeting, participants will focus on several key next steps, including:

Determining the organization’s official name

- Seeking volunteers for founding leadership roles, including Chair, Co-Chair, and Secretary
- Developing a clear mission statement
- Defining the group’s identity as a Veteran-friendly organization focused on outreach, benefit awareness, and fostering connection and camaraderie
- Gathering ideas to begin building an events calendar

One of the first concepts discussed was the creation of

a Veterans Coffee Hour, likely to be held on a monthly basis, to provide connection and fellowship for local Veterans.

The next meeting will focus on further formalizing the group’s structure and direction.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, Feb. 11, 5 p.m., Wilbraham Senior Center

Participation is open to all Veterans, family members, and community residents of Wilbraham and Hampden.

Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP to Patrick Renna to help ensure adequate planning: prena@wilbraham-ma.gov 413-596-8379, ext. 314 (voicemail accepted)

ATM Warrant Articles deadline

WILBRAHAM - The Select Board announces the deadline to submit petitioned warrant articles for the Annual Town Meeting is Friday, January 30, 2026 at Noon.

The Annual Town Meeting will be held on Monday,

May 11, 2026. Petitions may be obtained in the Town Clerk’s Office.

Petitioned warrant articles must be returned to the Select Board’s Office. Petitioned Articles must have signatures of ten (10) registered voters, as verified

by the Registrars, to be included on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant.

Petitioned articles will be placed in the Warrant verbatim. The Town of Wilbraham does not provide legal review or counsel on the text of the petition language.



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VIEWPOINTS

SOCIAL SECURITY

Matters

By Russell Gloor

Why didn't my friend's wife get all her SS immediately?

Dear Rusty:

A friend told me about what he believes is a strange thing in the Social Security system.

His wife reached her full retirement age of 66 several years ago. She delayed filing for Social Security past her FRA and claimed on her 68th birthday in June of that year, exactly two years after her FRA. When she filed, she was told she would receive approximately \$300 per month, which, of course, was more than she would have received at her FRA.

She was told however that she would only receive \$300 per month as of Jan. 1 of the following year. Between June of the year she turned 68 and filed for SS until the end of that year, she would receive an amount less than \$300. This lower amount was the amount she would have received if she had filed in December, the year she turned 67. She said she was told that was how SS works. She would never receive the difference in benefits she lost from June through December of the year she filed. If the above is true, can you explain?

Signed: Astounded Friend

Dear Astounded:

What your friend described is, indeed, a unique methodology for how Social Security handles benefit payments for those who choose to wait beyond their Full Retirement Age to claim SS benefits. To understand it, let me first describe how Social Security retirement benefits are calculated.

At Full Retirement Age, a person is entitled to 100% of the SS benefit they have earned from a lifetime of working. That FRA benefit amount is known as the person's "Primary Insurance Amount" and is based upon the highest earning 35 years over the individual's lifetime.

From those past years, average lifetime monthly earnings are computed, known as the person's "Average Indexed Monthly Earnings." Their AIME is subjected to a formula which yields their Primary Insurance Amount – the benefit the person is entitled to in the month they attain their full retirement age – typically about 40% of the person's average monthly lifetime earnings. However, if the person chooses to do so, they can wait beyond their FRA to claim Social Security to get a monthly benefit even higher than their PIA, by earning Delayed Retirement Credits.

DRCs are applied to the person's PIA when they claim Social Security. For each month after FRA

the person claims, they will have .667% added to their PIA. That means that for each full year of delay, that person will get an extra 8% added to their PIA. For someone (like your friend's wife) who claimed 24 months after her FRA, she would receive a benefit 16% higher than her FRA amount. However, Social Security normally only applies DRCs in January of each year.

So, even though your friend's wife claimed her SS benefits in June, 24 months after her FRA, she would initially only get the DRCs she had accumulated through the end of the previous year - in this case, about 18 months' worth of DRCs or an SS payment about 12% higher than her PIA (her FRA amount).

She would not get her remaining earned DRCs (another 4%) until January of the following year. So, in effect, the wife's initial benefit didn't reflect all her earned DRCs until her later January benefit payment. Thus, the wife essentially lost that extra benefit money for the period between June and December of the year she claimed Social Security. In other words, she wouldn't get the full 16% amount until SS applied the additional 4% DRCs to her benefit payment the following January. And that is why your friend's wife initially received a payment a bit less than the \$300 Social Security said she was entitled to by waiting two years after her FRA to claim.

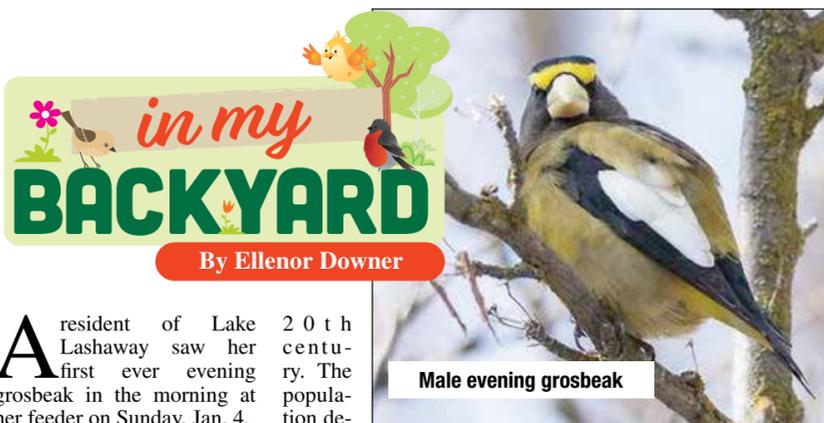
This surprises many who choose to wait beyond their full retirement age to claim Social Security. But, curiously, this process doesn't apply to those who wait until age 70 to claim their SS benefits. For those who wait until age 70 to claim, Social Security will immediately apply all DRCs that they have accumulated and provide them with their maximum SS benefit immediately.

The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.

SEND US YOUR EVENT PHOTOS



As a free service for our readers we accept and will print when space allows community event photos and announcements. Just scan the QR code above and send us your photos and any information.



Male evening grosbeak

A resident of Lake Lashaway saw her first ever evening grosbeak in the morning at her feeder on Sunday, Jan. 4.

The evening grosbeak is an eight inch long, chunky, thick billed finch, which wanders widely in winter.

The males are yellow and brown with black and white wings. The females are gray with white and black wings. Both sexes have a thick bill. They have notched, square tipped tails and pointed wings.

Often evening grosbeaks visit feeders in large flocks. They inhabit conifer forests and in winter are seen in box elders, maples and fruiting shrubs. They breed in the coniferous and mixed forests. They are seen in spruce and fir trees in the northern forests and pines in the western mountains. They are seen in winter in deciduous woodlands and semi-open country. Their song is a series of short, musical whistles. Their call note is similar to the chirp of a house sparrow, but louder.

The female lays three to four pale blue to blue green, blotched with brown, gray or purple eggs. The female does all the incubating, but the male may feed the female during this time. Both parents feed the nestlings.

Their diet is mostly seeds and some berries and insects. They prefer seeds of box elder, ash, maple, locust and other trees. At feeders, they prefer sunflower seeds. They also will feed on oozing maple sap. They extended their breeding range eastward in the 19th century and early

20th century. The population declined in the east in recent years.

Other birds at Lake Lashaway

The Lake Lashaway resident also had red cardinals, blue jays galore, gold finches and a red bellied woodpecker. She said bald eagles are very common visitors on the lake.

Brimfield birds
I received an email from a Brimfield resident on Jan. 5. He said, "Not much happening in the yard. We've seen one white-throated sparrow after recent snow storms and a group of about a dozen house finches show up often. Yesterday there was a group of American goldfinch in a birch tree eating seeds but they didn't come to the feeder."

Christmas bird count

He said, "My wife and I did the Christmas Bird Count with the Allen Bird Club again this year. We cover the town of Ludlow. The weather was fine but the birds were not cooperating. We managed 26 species which is a few below our average. Woodpeckers (only 1 downy) and sparrows (3 junco) were hard to find."

He also said, "At the Ludlow Reservoir there was a good amount of open water but few birds, eight hooded mergansers and four mallards. Curiously last year there was a lot less open wa-

ter at the reservoir but a lot more birds. Go figure."

People may visit <https://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx> to obtain Christmas Bird count results. Enter the county and state to get Massachusetts counts. He said he did not know the Springfield count results, but the Worcester count had 78 species.

Snowy owls

He also heard there have been two snowy owls in Northampton for a few weeks now. Initially they were seen in fields north of Route 9, but lately have been seen in the fields near the airport.

Barred owl and pileated woodpecker

I saw a barred owl and a pileated woodpecker in the same day, Jan. 6. The barred owl was perched in a tree and stayed awhile before flying off. When I went to pick up my grandson at the bus stop, I saw a pileated woodpecker on Lincoln Road.

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.

Baking bread with herbs

There has been a resurgence lately in doing things the "old fashioned way!" I am definitely all for that, since I have often felt I was born a century too late.

People are making their own soap and laundry detergent, growing gardens, and canning and preserving the harvest. Many have also gotten the sourdough itch, and are baking all sorts of breads, rolls and treats using sourdough starter. My niece shared some of her starter with my husband and I! It traveled several states to make it to us and boy was our first loaf delicious.

I don't feel as if I will give up making yeasted bread entirely, though, especially since my favorite bread of all time is a braided bread that incorporates herbs. (You knew that eventually I would weave in a gardening topic!) I'm excited to share the recipe with you.

Maybe you will even become inspired to grow your own herbs to use in this or any number of recipes down the road.

This time of year it is likely you won't have fresh herbs on hand, so before we begin, I'd like to give you some tips for using dried herbs.

First, remember to break

them up finely just before you incorporate them into any recipe. Honestly, there is nothing worse than coming across a full-size piece of Rosemary foliage, for example. It's like you are chomping on a pine needle!

even so, they will start to lose their flavor after about a year. When I buy a new jar of dried herbs, I find it helpful to mark the date right on the bottle.

Without any further ado, here is the recipe for that wonderful bread – as pretty as it is flavorful. Certainly a nice addition to a bowl of soup on a winter's night! And it makes the best croutons, too!

in the Garden

by Roberta McQuaid



COUNTRY HERB BREAD TWIST

1 envelope active dry yeast
1 teaspoon sugar
¼ cup water (110 degrees)
¼ stick unsalted butter, melted (2 tablespoons)
2 ½- 3 cups all-purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon minced fresh oregano
1 tablespoon minced fresh



Besides making the herbs more palatable, the flavor will be released ever so nicely once they are finely ground. Small amounts of herbs can be crushed between your fingertips – larger amounts can be ground up using a mortar and pestle.

Pulverize whole spices in a coffee grinder. Some folks gently roast them first to intensify their flavor. If you want to substitute fresh herbs for dried in any recipe, use at least twice as much; likewise in this recipe you would use only have the amount if using dried.

Store dried herbs and spices away from heat and light;

thyme
1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
Sprinkle yeast and sugar over ¼ cup warm water in a large bowl; stir to dissolve. Let stand until foamy (approximately 15 minutes).

Blend 1 cup water and 1 tablespoon of the melted butter into the yeast mixture. Combine 2 ½ cups flour and salt.

Stir into yeast mixture ½ cup at a time to form a slightly sticky dough, adding up to ½ cup additional flour if necessary.

Please see **GARDEN**, page 10

The Wilbraham-Hampden TIMES TEAM



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The Wilbraham-Hampden Times is published every Thursday by Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069. Telephone (413) 283-8393, Fax (413) 289-1977.



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Correction Policy

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.

The Wilbraham-Hampden TIMES is published every Thursday by Turley Publications, Inc. One year out of town subscriptions are available at \$45, out of state \$50 by calling 800-824-6458 Ext. 201. The deadline for submission of news material, letters to the editor and photos is Monday at 12 p.m. The TIMES is not responsible for submitted photos.

Election letters to the editor welcome

The Wilbraham-Hampden Times welcomes readers to participate in this year's election campaigns by writing letters to the editor for publication on these pages. Letters of up to 250 words from local residents endorsing candidates on the ballot or discussing campaign issues should be sent to Wilbraham-Hampden Times, care of Turley Publications, 24 Water St., Palmer, MA 01069, faxed to 413-289-1977 or emailed to krivers@turley.com. Please include a daytime telephone number for verification purposes (it will not be printed). Letters must be received by noon Monday to be considered for that Thursday's newspaper. No attack letters will be printed. No letters written by candidates supporting their own candidacy will be printed. If the volume of letters received is larger than the space available in the newspaper, the newspaper reserves the right to print a representative sample. No endorsement letters will be printed in the last edition before the election.

For more information, call the editor at 413-283-8393.

Campaign news

As part of its election coverage, the newspaper plans to print stories about contested races for Congress, state Senate, state House, district attorney and Governor's Council during the weeks leading up to the election, as well as a question-and-answer voters guide. In order to ensure fairness to all candidates, no political press releases will be printed, nor will reporters cover political rallies or fundraisers.

Candidates who wish to further publicize their candidacy, beliefs and events may contact advertising, 413-283-8393 about paid advertising in Wilbraham-Hampden Times.

A COMMUNITY GALLERY

Life in &

Readers are encouraged to send in medium to high resolution photos for this page by e-mail to krivers@turley.com or mail to TIMES, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069.

WILBRAHAM HAMPDEN

VFW Post 9397 thanks Turnberg for fixing flag pole

Submitted photo and caption Jered Sasen

We at VFW Post 9397 would like to give a huge shout out to Nick Turnberg of East Meadow Enterprises LLC for coming out to fix our flagpole at the Post. We truly appreciate your time and effort to our Post!



COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

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 krivers@turley.com

HPL holds first yoga class of 2026



The Hampden Public Library officially held their very first yoga class of 2026 on Jan. 8. It also marked the first time the class took place at the library's new location at 85 Wilbraham Road, the new Hampden Town Hall. Readers can learn more about the yoga classes by checking out the library website or the event posting in the Times.



Submitted photos Ellen Moriarty

WFD takes on ice rescue, cold water training

Photos and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Fire Department

Throughout December and January, Wilbraham firefighters have been actively engaged in ice rescue and cold water training. As a reminder, any ice on open bodies of water is not safe due to the ever-changing weather conditions.



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Saturday Jan. 24 FLOYD PATTERSON	Saturday Jan. 31 ATOA RIPLEY	Saturday Feb. 7 ATOA RIPLEY	Saturday Feb. 14 PETER NEWLAND	Saturday Feb. 27 BRAD SHEPARD	Saturday Feb. 28 LUTHER



Minnechaug Regional High School National Honor Society members take a moment for a group photo during their morning volunteering for the Girl Scout Cookie Drop.



Minnechaug Regional High School National Honor Society members strike a pose as they volunteer at the cookie drop.



A shot of the many boxes of Girl Scout cookies ready for distribution to the Girl Scout troops.



Trucks of troop leaders begin to fill up with Girl Scout cookies.

COOKIE DROP
from page 1

NHS," another member said. "Not only all the students are academically driven, but they care. They're always willing to lend out a hand when someone needs it. The NHS is like a connection between modern youth and the community. By working together, we can accomplish so many things!"

"I liked that I was helping out and I think it's good to provide service to the community and it was enjoyable to do these things for the community," another member said.

"I think what I enjoyed the most about partaking in this event is the community aspect of it. Not only was I able to contribute, even if only in a small manner, to my community as a whole, but also to the NHS community. I was granted the opportunity to talk to people I don't normally talk to which I think can be said for everyone in attendance, which contributed significantly to the sense of the community within the NHS. I am a big believer in the idea of civic responsibility and I think

this was a great opportunity for me and my fellow students to involve ourselves," another member said. "Community service, especially at this age, teaches kids a lot about responsibilities they will be expected to handle as adults. I think it's beneficial to get hands-on experience and involvement in the community as early as possible. I think opportunities such as this one teach students about the importance of giving back to the community."

"I think I enjoyed just being able to help the community directly with this event, which made it fun for me," another member said. "And then I think NHS is really influential in partaking in community service and offering services to the community as a whole, which I think many people appreciate."

Chen looks forward to more NHS events and said the group will be back at it again very soon.

"We will again be assisting the Coalition for Hampden Wilbraham Partners 4 Youth Coalition Night at the Y Jan. 23," Chen said.



Photos courtesy of Irene Chen
The Minnechaug Regional High School National Honor Society members were all smiles as they gave back to the community.

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CLUES ACROSS

- Paddles
- Baseball's best pitchers
- ___ Nui, Easter Island
- Invests in little enterprises
- Constant
- Hobby
- A place to store food
- Short-tail marten
- Burn with a hot liquid
- Left his heart in San Francisco
- Swedish krona
- Former measure of length for textiles
- Opaque glassy substance
- Residue of burned item
- A place to unwind
- Japanese honorific
- Terminus

CLUES DOWN

- Former CIA
- One who removes antlers from a flower
- Potluck dish
- Discount
- Airborne (abbr.)
- Cavalry sword
- Basics
- Hollywood director Howard
- Afflicted in mind or body
- Horsley and Majors are two
- Midway between northeast and east
- Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
- Malaysian isthmus
- Fall back
- Cheek
- under Turkish rule
- Journalist Tarbell
- College hoops tournament
- Monetary unit of Macao
- Of she
- Spoke ill of
- Elements
- Kilocalorie (abbr.)
- Shades
- Poem of fourteen lines
- Pole used in Scottish sport
- Hollyhocks genus
- Street name for marijuana
- Polio vaccine developer
- Swiss river
- Prejudice
- Actor Idris
- Confederate soldiers
- Criticize

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SPORTS

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Consistent offense leads Chaug over Ludlow



WEST SPRINGFIELD – Last Thursday night, Minnechaug High School scored three goals in each period to lead it to a 9-4 win over Ludlow. Minnechaug got goals from nine different players, including Nicholas O’Sullivan, Laim Faneuff, Enzo Hrycay, and Jason Abied. Tannar Sev-eryn had a pair of goals for Ludlow while Connor Kokosa had two assists. Minnechaug is now 9-2 on the season while Ludlow is 6-5.



Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com
Dom Fiorentino advances past center ice.

Brody Faneuff collects a puck on the defensive end.



Joey Comes sends a puck toward the goal.



Billy Lapalm wrists a shot to the other end to allow for a line change.



Jake Moore makes a run up the ice.



Ava Manning crosses the court, looking to start a play.

Falcons get off to slow start, come back to beat Northampton

WILBRAHAM – Last Thursday night, Minnechaug girls basketball managed just two points in a tough first quarter. But they came back with 18 points in the second to take a 20-16 lead to halftime. The Falcons would go on to beat the Blue Devils 48-36 to improve to 6-1 on the season. Cailin O’Brien led the Falcons with 14 points while Kelly Cronin added 12 points in the win. The Falcons are back in action on Jan. 22 at Longmeadow High School at 7 p.m.



Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Cailin O’Brien lunges for the ball to keep it inbound.



Kelly Cronin sets to shoot a three-pointer.

Falcons fall at Invitational event

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

SPRINGFIELD— The Minnechaug Regional boys’ basketball team held an eleven point lead late in the third quarter against the Stonington (Conn) Bears in a Hoophall Invitational game.

The Bears would then put together an impressive 18-0 run and wound up beating the Falcons, 60-56, at Kamari B. Williams Gymnasium, which is located inside Sci-Tech, last Saturday afternoon.

“We just had too many turnovers, and we didn’t score any points between the end of the third quarter and the beginning of the fourth quarter,” said Minnechaug head coach Mike Orzech. “I thought we were playing very well up until that point.”

A total of 78 boys and girls high school basketball teams from New England, New York, and New Jersey participated in the 2026 Hoophall Invitational. The games took place at seven different high schools in Springfield and at Western New England College. Each team was put into a bracket with three other teams.

All the Hoophall Classic games were held at Blake Arena located on the Springfield College campus.

“This is an outstanding tournament and it’s the first time that we’ve been invited to play in it,” Orzech said. “We’re playing against teams that we haven’t faced before. It’s a fun experience for both the players and the coaches.”



Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com
Max Fergus charges to the hoop.

The Falcons (6-4) were scheduled to face Ocean Township, N.J. in another Hoophall Invitational game held at Sci-Tech the following day.

Senior Miles Fergus, who’s the Falcons leading scorer this season, didn’t play in either game. He’s sidelined with an ankle injury.

“Miles averaged 20 points per game last season, so not having him on the court is a huge loss for us,” Orzech said. “He’s a tremendous basketball player and I’m not sure when we’ll have him back.”

The trio of sophomore Maxwell Fergus, who’s Miles’ younger brother, senior Caden Duke, and senior

Drew Grasso picked up the slack offensively for the Falcons.

The younger Fergus, who transferred to Minnechaug from Pope Francis prior to the start of the school year, scored seven of his team-leading 15 points during the first quarter. He made five field goals, including a 3-pointer, in the first 16 minutes of the contest.

Duke scored eight of his 14 points after halftime and Grasso also reached double digits with 11 points.

Freshman Cohen Nelson came off the bench and chipped in with nine points.

“With Miles out of the lineup, we need some other guys to step up offensively,” Orzech said. “We performed well offensively in the first half.”

The other two Minnechaug scorers against the Bears were junior Darren Duah (4 points) and senior Grayson Placzek (3 points).

The first six minutes of the contest was evenly played.

The Falcons took a 13-12 lead with 1:48 left in the first quarter when Duke made a pair of foul shots.

Ten seconds later, Nelson was fouled while making a lay-up and he made the bonus free throw. Another lay-up by Grasso pushed Minnechaug’s lead to 18-12.

The Falcons wouldn’t trail again until the start of the final quarter.

Stonington High School (8-2), which is located near

Please see **FALCONS**, page 10



LEFT: Zahara Wilson receives a pass near the edge of the arc.



Elizabeth Woytowicz hustles a pass near the court.

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SPORTS

Railers pick up overtime win over Pirates

PORTLAND, ME — The Worcester Railers HC (16-15-2-1) fell to the Portland Pirates (15-10-5-2) in overtime on Saturday, January 17th, in front of a crowd of 6,076 with a final score of 3-2 at the Cross Insurance Arena. The Railers will take on the Pirates next on home ice on Sunday, January 18th at 3:05 p.m.

Portland nabbed the first goal of the night just 2:08 into the first off a goal from defenseman Andrew Nielsen (1-0-1). Nielsen's goal was the only one in the first period. Worcester answered the 1-0 lead from Portland with a goal from Jesse Pulkkinen (1-0-1) at 0:33 into the second to tie the game. Portland took back the one-goal lead halfway through the second, this time from Mitch Deelstra (1-0-1), Worcester once again evened the score with a goal from

Drew Callin (1-0-1). A final goal from Max Andreev (1-0-1), at 3:27 in overtime secured the Pirates' 3-2 victory.

Worcester kicked off the night shorthanded just 16 seconds after puck drop. An early penalty against Lincoln Hatten for high-sticking put Portland on its first power play of the game, which forced Worcester to fight the first two minutes of play for the night down a man. With just eight seconds remaining on Hatten's call, Portland defenseman Andrew Nielsen (5th) grabbed the only goal of the period for either team, which gave the Pirates a 1-0 lead to close the first twenty. Shots for the period with 11-4 in favor of Portland.

Worcester didn't wait long to tie the game in the second. Jesse Pulkkinen (3rd) picked up his 5th point of the season with a goal at 0:33. Portland went back on the power

play soon after the score on a hooking call on Anthony Callin. Worcester had their first chance at the man-advantage about five minutes into the period, as Anthony Callin was tripped up by Max Andreev. Portland re-gained their one-goal lead once more around the halfway mark of the period, scored by Mitch Deelstra (2nd) at 9:35. Neither the Railers nor the Pirates could break past the blue line for the remainder of the second, which left the Railers down by one for a second time in the evening. Portland out-shot Worcester nine to seven. Penalties for the period were one for Worcester and two for Portland.

The Railers came out fighting in the third and tallied their highest shot total for any period of the night. A roughing call on Loke Johansson put Worcester on their third

power play just over seven and a half minutes into play for the third. Unable to capitalize on their previous two power play chances, Drew Callin (10th) drove the puck home at 8:28 to even the score once more for the Railers. A late-game goal from Anthony Callin had Worcester celebrating an early win; however, the goal was waved off for goaltender interference as Callin fell into the net of Brad Arvanitis. The game once again was 2-2 and went into overtime for the second consecutive night. In the end, the Pirates would take the win in overtime with a final score of 3-2, the last lamp lit by Max Andreev (7th) on a shot from atop the circles to beat Gahagen in net for Worcester. Final shots were 27-25 in favor of Portland. Final penalties were five for Portland and four for Worcester.

This week in Rec

Dina LaMotte
Happy New Year from the Wilbraham Pickleball Association!

WILBRAHAM - As we ring in the New Year, the WPA would like to wish everyone a happy and healthy year ahead and take a moment to celebrate what a fantastic season 2025 was for pickleball in Wilbraham!



it's a perfect time to learn the game, brush up on the rules, and get ready for another fun season ahead. Pickleball is easy to learn, great exercise, and a wonderful way to meet people—players of all ages and skill levels are welcome! Check out Wilbrahamrec.com to keep up to date with indoor instructional clinics for all levels being offered all year by our local pros.

It was a big year at our outdoor courts! With the help of dedicated volunteers and the support of our town, we made some exciting improvements that really enhanced the pickleball experience. We hosted a free adult Learn-to-Play clinic, welcoming many first-time players to the game. We added new court signage, installed a shade structure for those hot summer days, and built a new storage shed to help keep our programs running smoothly. We introduced a daily Open Play program that regularly saw up to 40+ players using our fair, fast organized format.

One of the season's biggest highlights was wrapping things up this fall with our very first WPA Open tournament. Thanks to all, the energy was great, the competition was friendly, and the sense of community was exactly what pickleball is all about.

So what's next? Buckle up! 2026 promises to bring Wilbraham Pickleball to the next level! Friday night blind draw pizza socials, mid-week ladders, inter-town tourney leagues, clinics, and Kings and Queens of the court. There will be something for everyone!

Even though it's winter,

Nets are up year-round. 40 degrees and no wind bring many players out and the die-hards are out there in even colder temps! We want to keep our courts in perfect shape so no shoveling but if the gate is unlocked, you can consider the courts open and are welcome to play! Regular play started in March last year so stay tuned for our "official" season kick-off open weekend. It will be here before we know it!

Want to join the action and keep up with all things pickleball? We invite you to follow us on Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/wilbrahampickleball> to join the conversation and stay connected. Drop us a message with any '?'s or suggestions, we'd love to hear from you!

If you haven't checked out pickleball yet, we hope 2026 is your year to give it a try. Here's to another year of fun rallies, good laughs, and great community—see you on the courts!

PJ Cambo,
Elveer Kovarik,
Dina LaMotte,
George McLean,
Miriam Siegel
Board Members
Wilbraham Pickleball Association

T-Birds offense dries up in loss to Bridgeport

BRIDGEPORT, Conn. - The Springfield Thunderbirds (13-18-4-2) continued to have a tough time location offense, falling 4-1 to the Bridgeport Islanders (16-17-2-1) on Saturday night inside Total Mortgage Arena.

A bad break for T-Birds netminder Vadim Zherenko resulted in Bridgeport's game-opening tally at 6:37 of the opening period, as Zherenko lost his balance and fell in his blue paint, allowing Daylan Kuefler to carry the puck around the net and wrap it past the fallen goaltender to make it 1-0 Bridgeport.

Aside from that unfortunate break, the T-Birds and Islanders played a mostly defensive-minded first period, as Zherenko's nine saves and Henrik Tikkanen's eight stops in the Bridgeport crease accounted for much of the action on the score-sheet.

Matthew Peca quickly got his troops back on track, as the T-Birds captain slipped a wrister through

Tikkanen just 49 seconds into period two, tying the score, 1-1, and extending his point streak to five consecutive games. Matt Luff also extended his season-long point streak to seven games with the primary assist on Springfield's first marker of the evening.

However, that potential momentum-changer was quickly washed out when Cam Berg connected on a wrister from the left circle just 2:08 later, restoring a one-goal Bridgeport lead, 2-1.

Shots and chances continued to come at a premium for both teams, as the clubs combined for only 43 shots all evening, including just 25 in the final 40 minutes of play.

The T-Birds never did receive a power play in this one, and the club's last-minute efforts with Zherenko on the bench proved fruitless, as Adam Beckman and Eetu Liukas each connected on empty-netters to give Bridgeport the final goals of the night.

Registration set to open Feb. 1 for Quabbin Valley

SOUTH HADLEY - On Sunday, Jan. 11, the Quabbin Valley Baseball League, an over-28 recreational league, held its first meeting of 2026 to prepare for the upcoming season.

At the meeting it was determined registration for players will open up on Sunday, Feb. 1.

For the 2026 season, the cost will be \$215 and will include a 16th game added to the regular season schedule.

During the 2025 season, the league experimented with playing on Mother's Day Saturday as well as a week-night game to allow players an opportunity to play under the lights. While the night games were very successful, the Mother's Day Saturday games were rained out.

Those elements will return along with a 16th game with an opponent to be determine as the league's board explores possibilities for interleague matchups with another league in the region.

For returning players to the league, the deadline is Mar. 22 at 12 noon to be reg-

istered for the 2026 season in order to be guaranteed a roster spot. There will be open practices for all players but specifically targeted at new players scheduled for March 29 and April 4 at times and locations to be announced. The draft is currently scheduled to take place on April 4 following that practice.

The season is currently slated to start on Sunday, April 19 and following the success of the six-team fall league last year, the league will also have a fall league in September and October this season.

The registration link will be live on Feb. 1 at www.quabbinvalleybaseball.org. Players must register and then pay the league dues via Venmo or contact the league leadership if an alternate form of payment is needed.

Aside from the weeknight and Mother's Day games, other games take place Sundays at 10 a.m. outside of Mother's Day, Memorial Day and July 4 weekends. Playoffs will be in August.

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www.turley.com

GARDEN from page 6

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. Place dough in a large bowl that has been lightly buttered.

Turn dough to coat entire surface. Cover with a clean cloth and let rise in a warm, draft-free area until the dough has doubled in volume, about 1 1/2 hours.

Punch dough down. Divide into thirds.

One by one, take each third and knead in the individual herbs. Roll each dough ball between the palms of your hands into a rope about 20 inches long. Taper the ends.

When complete, lay the three side by side and working from the middle, braid each end. Transfer the bread to a buttered baking sheet and cover loosely with a clean cloth.

Allow to rise in a warm place for 45- 50 minutes, until doubled in size.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Brush loaf with remaining 1 tablespoon of melted butter and bake for 20-30 minutes or until golden and loaf sounds hollow when tapped.

Cool for 30 minutes before serving. Serve it warm with a pat of butter or have some olive oil handy for dipping!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 33 years she has held the position of staff horticulturist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.

FALCONS from page 9

New London, was led offensively by 6-foot-7 sophomore Elijah Cornell with a game-high 17 points. Their only other double digit scorer was junior Sean Durham, who scored eight of his 11 points after halftime.

The Bears began the second quarter with an 8-2 run.

The score was tied 24-24 with 5:20 remaining in the half following a fastbreak lay-up from junior Brayden Landgren, who scored eight points off the bench.

The Falcons retook the



Caden Duke gets the open layup.



Darren Duah goes for the tip.



Cohen Nelson attempts the three-pointer.



Andrew Grasso competes with a pair of opponents for the rebound.

lead less than a minute after Placzek buried a 3-pointer from the right corner.

A Duke lay-up began an 8-0 run late in the first half. Nelson capped off the run by hitting a jumper in the lane, which gave the Falcons a 37-26 lead.

Minnechaug also held a 43-32 lead with 2:58 remaining in the third quarter following two free throws by Duke.



Max Baroni makes his way up the court to start an offensive play.

That's when the momentum began to shift sides.

After scoring the final nine points of the third quarter, a Durham 3-pointer from the top of the key 15 seconds into the final quarter gave the lead back to the Bears (44-43) for the first time since the opening quarter.

The Falcons were trailing, 50-43, before Nelson finally ended the Falcons scoring drought by sinking a baseline jumper with 5:25 left in regulation.

The Falcons, who only scored 19 points in the second half, closed the gap to 53-49 with 2:40 left following a Duke inside hoop and two free throws.

The Bears answered by scoring the next four points before Grasso drained a 3-pointer from the right corner.

Then Stonington senior Brady O'Neill (9 points) sealed the deal by making three of his free throw attempts with 20.9 left on the scoreboard clock.

ART from page 1

both of us. He wanted to get rid of it and I wanted it, and I had a place to put it," Allard said. "So, the furniture was a big part of it and then the art pieces are easy enough to get. Then I could throw in a few pieces of my own in between."

On the other art pieces, Allard's inspiration came from looking for pieces "that caught my eye."

"Usually from local artists, if possible, or shops on the side streets. Just a different cultural type of whatever artists in other countries are doing. It all ends up being art, but it's a little different. Each country has their own little slant on things," Allard said.

Allard especially enjoys Chagall's art pieces too.

"Picasso, you can still kind of tell what he's depicting, and Chagall just takes it to another level. You don't even know what he's depicting half the time, the messaging and whatnot, and his complexity and use of colors is more complicated than Picasso," Allard said.

On a favorite piece of art, Allard said it's a table from Morocco.

"There's mountains in Morocco which are very high, actually, called the Atlas Mountains and because of the change in geography over the millennia, the seabed is part of those Atlas Mountains, and so a lot of the mountains are these limestone deposits from long, long ago and within those limestone deposits are ancient creatures called ammonites. That they know went extinct 250 million years ago," Allard said. "That table has ammonites in it, so we know that it is 250 million years old, at least. To carve through the limestone and expose the squid and ammonites, to expose them without ruining the shell takes a lot of patience."

Besides his leopard statues—which he rubs their heads every day for good luck—he also enjoys being in a place "where's this all historical, beautiful art."

"It's like if I was younger, I'd want to have a beautiful girlfriend or whatever. So, here, I'm too old for a beautiful girlfriend and so I have beautiful art," Allard said.

The history is also import-

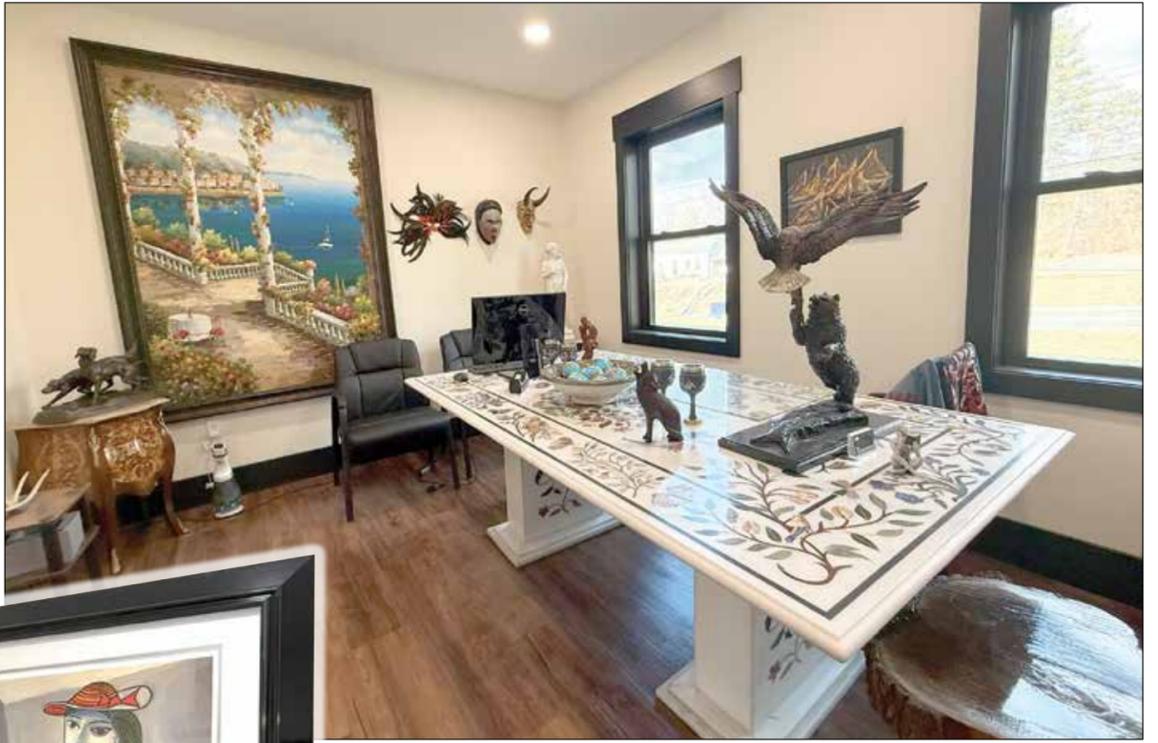
ant. "The regional different areas of the world, what they conceive of as art is different and different types of art, how it's changed. Obviously, my collection is geared towards what's abstract stuff, but everything, I think, that is art is a story of something historical and something cultural and it's always something that is part in your imagination too. What exactly was someone trying to show," Allard said. "You can look at pieces and just kind of get a whole different story or feeling out of it. Whether it's intended or not doesn't make any difference."

Besides the art, Allard hopes to offer community lectures on the last Friday of every month. On Jan. 30 at 5 p.m., he will give a presentation on "Latest research on longevity and healthy aging."

"People are getting too caught up in the Internet with all sorts of craziness. Once they get too far into these weird things, they lose sight of what is actually true. COVID screwed everyone's idea of science, and there is actual science. It's not absolute, but there's 'evidence,'" Allard said. "The longevity talk I want to give is based on science. Actual studies where they have compared results with different drugs or supplements and it's not like a TV advertisement where they're toting something that's totally unproven and saying how wonderful it is."

Allard encourages the community to stop by, also noting that contrary to claims about the museum name, it is not a Satanic cult. "As long as there's a car here, that means someone's here and you're welcome to stop by, have a chat, have a look and open for business," Allard said.

To learn more, visit manomednet.com/art.html.



This space contains paintings, masks, statues and a table by Antonio Medici.



A painting by the famed Pablo Picasso.



These pieces from South Asia are also part of the collection.



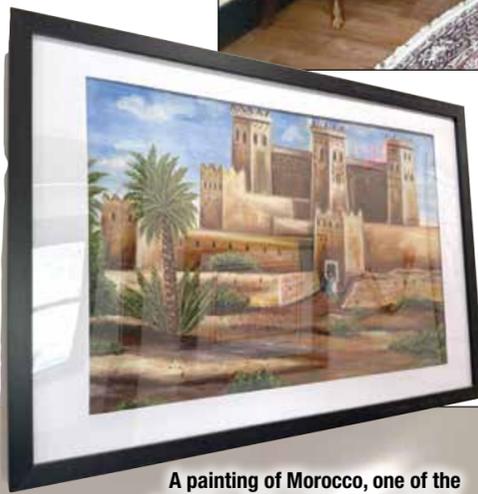
Jeffrey Allard also has his own paintings, including this brain. He shared he also hangs art by other people when asked.



Here, we have Italian furniture on display in this room.



Jeffrey Allard's favorite art piece is this table from Morocco.



A painting of Morocco, one of the countries Jeffrey Allard has visited.



A piece of artwork by Marc Chagall.



The Egypt room showcases varying art pieces from Egypt.



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Wilbraham United Church is hiring a part-time, experienced **ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/BOOKKEEPER.** Apply to **Wilbraham United Church, Attention: Alesia; 500 Main Street; Wilbraham, MA 01095.** More information at www.wilbrahamunitedchurch.org/about-us-2/

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The athletic fields of Spec Pond lie under historic farmland that was so vital to Wilbraham farmers. (Charles F. Bennett photo)

HISTORY from page 1

space for outdoor fun and a swimming area.

The goal was to get the proposal on the town meeting warrant and take the pond and adjacent former farmland by eminent domain or purchase it outright.

In Ethel's story, she alludes to a local historian's tales that arose in the debate to have the town acquire the pond. Spec Pond was one half of a matching set of glasses (spectacles). It is an ancient kettle pond formed by the retreating glacier that used to cover part of Wilbraham, all the way to the base of Wilbraham Mountain, which was once a glacial lake with its sandy shore running along what would eventually be called Main Street. All that farmland around the pond had a nickname called "The Plains."

Farmhands

The Spec Pond end of Boston Road ran east and west next to the railroad tracks built there in the 1840s. It was fertile farmland and comprised the area where the cement terminal, Construction Service Co., is now located at 2420 Boston Road. The land that is now on the busy artery up to where Post Office Park is now, was well-sought-after farmland and not far from the drainage basin of the Chicopee River.

My mom wrote, "In 1852 and 1855 the records show that Cyrus Edson purchased from Harriet Bliss about 56 acres west and south of William Tupper's land for \$600. The land ran along the Spec Pond to Boston Road for 107 rods (an early-American measurement of land)."

The access road was built on land believed to be bordered by Tupper and Edson's parcels.

Some time around 1855 Edson farmed a large field of buckwheat on his land and hired a gang of men to harvest the buckwheat. The job had to be done right away because a killing frost was imminent. The crop would be ruined if they didn't get to work right away.

It was said that Cyrus Edson was a hard drinker in his early days. But, he had "gone straight" at a revival in one of the red schoolhouses in the Glendale section of the Mountain and never touched liquor again. And, also wouldn't let his hired hands drink it either.

So, the gang of hands who were employed to gather the buckwheat told Edson that if he didn't go across Boston Road and buy some

rum for them from the Blisses, they would not swing a scythe for him and go "on strike". It was quite a test for Edson, who could expect quite a loss if the buckwheat wasn't brought in ahead of the weather.

Cyrus was true to his word and refused to buy the booze. And, he started the back-breaking work of cutting the wheat all by himself without the help of his stubborn helpers.

Well, the records show that the hired hands, out of admiration for the principles exhibited by Edson, became ashamed, went back to work and saved the crop.

Railroad Tracks

Before Edson had purchased the land it was long owned by Abel Bliss Jr. Bliss's heirs sold various parcels to farmers from eastern Wilbraham whose farmland was not as productive as the acreage around Spec Pond.

The soil was said to be "light" and excellent for rye and buckwheat. It was good for cultivation, had few weeds and made the growing of corn profitable. Some farmers leased land on both sides of the railroad tracks that run along that property.

(Today you can still see freight trains and Amtrak passenger coaches traveling by the baseball fields at Spec Pond blowing their whistles. When we lived on Federal Lane, near Minnechaug, you still hear the trains miles away in North Wilbraham blowing their whistles on their way to Boston or the Berkshires.)

The farmer, William Tupper, bought a 24-rod wide strip south of the railroad tracks of the Boston & Albany Railroad along the western border of the pond for 60 to 70 rods from the Blisses. He would let the land lie fallow one year and then planted it the next year.

Corn

According to my mother's reporting, when corn was grown near the pond it had its own way of bringing a certain farming culture to our town's hard-working early residents. After the land was plowed, smoothed and harrowed, the farmer would prepare a tub of early Canada seed corn. The farmhands would each have a hoe and a "planting bag" tied around his waist in preparation. It was made from the upper six inches of an old cowhide boot tacked to a wooden base. Then the seeds were sown into the earth.

When the planting bag needed refilling it provided a

break for the workers to refresh themselves with fresh cider. (She didn't say if it was hard cider or the kind you get a Rice's these days.) Anyhow, the entire farm activity, in the shadow of Spec Pond was called "Planting Day on the Plains".

Nevertheless, the 1961 Lions Club, in their fervor to sponsor Spec Pond for the town, were proud saying the farmers from 100 years earlier would also have been proud how the Spec Pond Recreation Area would turn out. And, they would be even prouder if they knew what it does for our town in 2026 as the country celebrates its 250th birthday

Revolutionary Moment

We continue to honor our country's birthday, 250 years of freedom, each month. Since this month is the 250th anniversary of Col. Henry Knox's Train of Artillery that traveled through Wilbraham in January 15 and 16, 1776, we are listing his route according to "The Military Rolls of the Outward Commons" by Bruce Tingle.

Knox hauled captured British cannons from Ft. Ticonderoga at Crown Point, N. Y. and traveled through Wilbraham to Boston in 1775-76 at the start of the Revolutionary War.

"The procession went up Maple Street and Mountain Road and then downhill, over a stone bridge and spanning Spear Brook and then onto Boston Road near the foot of Butler Hill. The only section of the bridge still visible is a small section over which the driveway to Co-Ed Billiards travels."

Col. Knox reported to Gen. Washington in Boston on January 24, 1776. The cannons were positioned in March and the British evacuated the town. Knox went on to become a major general and the first Secretary of War.

Sources: "History of Wilbraham Bicentennial Edition 1763-1963" edited by Charles Merrick; "The History of Wilbraham, 1731, 1763-1913 by Chauncey E. Peck; "Military Rolls of Outward Commons" by J. Bruce Tingle. The Springfield Morning Union.

Editor Emeritus Charlie Bennett is a member of the Historic Commission and a trustee of the Wilbraham Atheneum Society. Readers can contact him with comments or ideas for the column at cbennett4765@charter.net.

Hampden Parks and Recreation announces programming

HAMPDEN — Hampden Parks & Recreation is excited to announce a variety of new and returning programs for youth and adults this winter and spring. Thanks to the recent move into a new facility with expanded classroom and recreation space, Parks & Recreation can offer more diverse programs, increased capacity, and new opportunities for the community to connect, learn, and stay active.

February Vacation Youth Programs

Mad Science Secret Agent Lab (Grades 1-6) A hands-on science and forensics program where young detectives explore fingerprinting, evidence collection, and investigative science.

Feb. 16 to 20 9 a.m. to Noon

Hampden Town Hall, Classroom E2 Cost: \$180 | Register: Dec. 30 to Feb. 10

Youth February Vacation Futsal Clinic An energetic, skill-building soccer clinic led by FSS (Futsal and Street Soccer)

coaches. Open to all experience levels.

Feb. 16 to 20 9 a.m. to Noon

Hampden Parks & Recreation Gym Cost: \$150 | Register: Dec. 30 to Feb. 11

Youth & Adult Art Programs

Multicultural Art Adventures (Grades 1-6) A 6-week hands-on art program exploring global art traditions. Students create five finished artworks and participate in a student-curated gallery.

Wednesdays, Feb. 25 to Apr. 1

Cost: \$135 | Register: Jan. 7 to Feb. 23

Calming the Chaos: Studio Sessions (Ages 18+) A relaxing art and mindfulness series focused on stress relief, creativity, and connection. No experience required.

Thursdays, Feb. 26 to Apr. 2

Cost: \$135 | Register: Jan. 7 to Feb. 23

Both programs are taught by Hampden resident Erin Leigh Boughamer, Professional Artist and MA Licensed Art Educator.

Ongoing Recreation Opportunities

Golf Simulator: Year-round play and practice; reservations begin January 19, 2026

Pickleball: Level-based weekday play at Thornton Burgess Gymnasium; \$3 per session

The expanded space at the new Parks & Recreation facility allows for increased programming, improved scheduling flexibility, and new offerings for residents of all ages. Hampden Parks & Recreation looks forward to continuing to grow and serve the community.

For more information and registration details contact Hampden Parks and Recreation at parks@hampdenma.gov or (413) 566-2151 Ext 108.

PUBLIC NOTICES

Commonwealth of Massachusetts The Trial Court Probate and Family Court Hampden Probate and Family Court 50 State Street Springfield, MA 01103 (413)748-7758 Docket No. HD26P0048EA Estate of: Tyrone Jaymes Osoimalo Date of Death: 11/21/2025 CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION

To all interested persons: A Petition for Formal Adjudication of Intestacy and Appointment of Personal Representative has been filed by Amanda Walker of Wilbraham, MA requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

The Petitioner requests that Amanda Walker of Wilbraham, MA be appointed as Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve Without Surety on the bond in unsupervised administration.

IMPORTANT NOTICE You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a writ-

ten appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 02/09/2026. This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administra-

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

WITNESS, Hon. Barbara M Hyland, First Justice of this Court. Date: January 12, 2026 Rosemary A Saccomani, Register of Probate 01/22/2026

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- 3 Find a quick link to the state of Massachusetts' public notice web site to search all notices in Massachusetts newspapers.

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Wilbraham-Hampden Times OBITUARY POLICY

Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries. One is a free, brief **Death Notice** listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place. The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice (with a word limit of up to 500 words) and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com.

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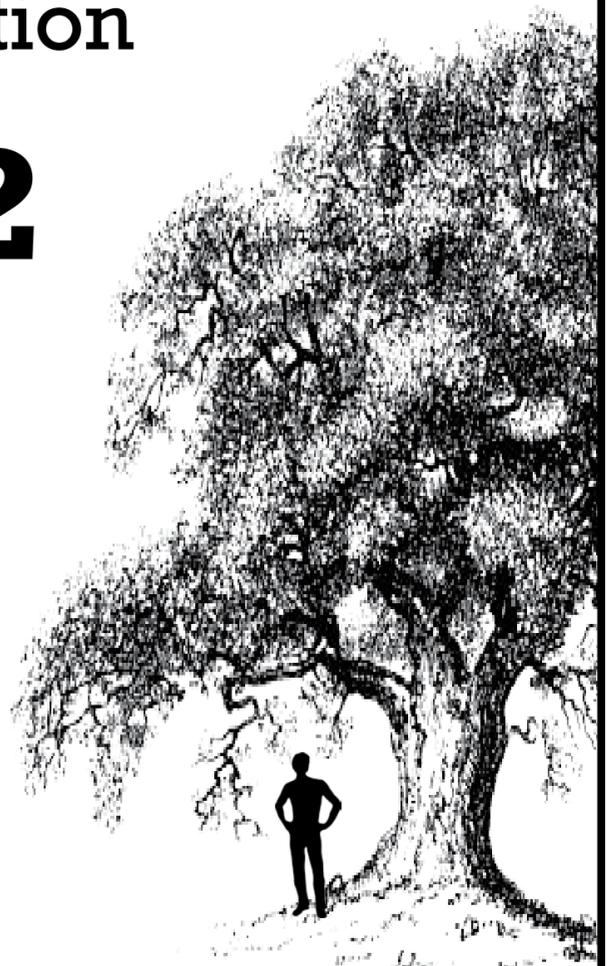
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