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## HSC celebrates Pie Day

By Kristin Rivers  
Editor  
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HAMPDEN - The senior center celebrated National Pie Day with a Pie Day event on Jan. 23.

During the event, attendees enjoyed a slice—or two, or even more—of pie, with entertainment provided by Rick Gilday.

National Pie Day is a day that celebrates one of the country's favorite desserts and is celebrated on Jan. 23, where people enjoy a favorite pie whether it'd be apple and pumpkin to blueberry and chocolate cream and more.

The flavors at Friday's event included fruit of the forest, apple, peach, strawberry rhubarb, blueberry, cherry and chocolate cream.

National Pie Day is not to be confused with Pi Day, which is typically celebrated on March 14 and celebrates the math symbol of pi.

Tina Doran, the senior



Caryn Greco showcases the chocolate cream pie, which was a popular favorite.

Turley photo by Kristin Rivers

center's program and volunteer coordinator, shared how 40 pies were donated for the event from several local businesses including Rice Fruit Farm, The Sugar Chalet, Vantage Health of Hampden, Pan'e Dolcetti, Armbrook

Village, Bluebird Estates and Village Food Mart, expressing gratitude for their support along with the volunteers and community.

Doran said, "Like everything we do, we have to celebrate."

"It's just nice to see people getting out and the fact that they do want to come here," Doran said. "It's good to see people come for events. Also, we hope that with that, they

Please see **PIE DAY**, page 5

## Budget Roundtable

• Part 2 •

By Kristin Rivers  
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HAMPDEN - The Times is continuing to highlight what the town departments shared with the Selectboard and Advisory Committee during the Jan. 12 Budget Roundtable meeting.

Last week, we highlighted the police, fire and highway departments.

### Hampden Senior Center

Executive Director Rebecca Moriarty shared the senior center is doing good and did not see any issues for the current budget year.

"I think we're in good shape, tracking appropriately and things are moving along swimmingly," Moriarty said.

For next year, Moriarty said she only sees increase-wise is around utilities.

"Utilities are going up. The electric, gas, expenses for our supplies increase every year. So, I always put in a little bit of extra money in those utility and building maintenance line items for those expenses," Moriarty said.

She asked Advisory Committee Chair Doug Boyd this question.

"When we submit our initial service level budget, are we holding where it is...?" Moriarty said.

Boyd replied yes. "Please just hold the salaries even," Boyd said. "We haven't had any discussions yet about what those colas will be."

On the bathroom project at the senior center, Moriarty noted it's "currently preparing to start" and the Building Committee is looking at the HVAC project.

"So, they're working on that and then probably next year is a look again at the roof, potentially, and the window project that we pushed out as well," Moriarty said.

On Chair John Flynn's question of any grant funding changes, Moriarty said nothing she heard of as of yet.

"We only currently receive the state grant funding now. The federal funds are gone," Moriarty said. "If the federal funds come back around, then I'll reapply

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Photo courtesy of Damian Konkoly

A shot of the crowd of teachers, paraprofessionals and students in attendance at the Jan. 22 School Committee meeting to show their support as contract negotiations continue.

## Educators, students voice support during contract negotiations

By Kristin Rivers  
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WILBRAHAM - Several educators and students voiced their support for teachers and paraprofessionals as contract negotiations continue in the district.

The latest public comments took place during the Jan. 22 School Committee meeting, following the voices of other educators who had spoken earlier this month.

As previously reported, the current three-year contract expired at the end of the 2024-2025 school year, and, since then, an agreement has not been reached despite negotiations over the past year.

On November 25, 2025, the Hampden-Wilbraham Education Association and the district jointly filed for contract mediation through the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations after the negotiations reached an impasse.

In December 2025, five

standouts were also held at Wilbraham Middle School, Minnechaug Regional High School and on Main Street.

According to HWEA President Damian Konkoly, the latest public comment had around 75 teachers and paraprofessionals and a dozen students in attendance to show their support.

Among the highlights was Rosemary Lee, an inclusion

Please see **CONTRACT**, page 13

## STOMP taking over WMS!

By Calla Minahan

WILBRAHAM - You use plastic every day from plastic water bottles to grocery bags to even your toothpaste. But where does this all go?

Well, that would be the ocean. Every year we dump 10 million tons of plastic into the ocean. 50% of that is only for single use and only 9% of all plastic is recycled. And you as a human consume around 40 pounds of plastic in your lifetime. Most ocean pollution is made by humans. About 70% to 80% is from land-based activities.

But climate change is actually a part of ocean pollution too. The rising temperature causes coral bleaching, rising sea level, and reduced dissolved oxygen. There is also the topic of animals consuming plastic: 86% of sea turtles, 44% of seabirds, and 43% of marine mammals consume plastic each year. One million of those die due to consuming plastic.



Photos by Calla Minahan and Amy Schulze



After all this, there are still things that we can do. Here at WMS, the eighth

grade is working on project STOMP (Students Taking On Minimizing Plastic) to explain our worldwide problem and to find ways to Recycle, Reduce, Refuse, Repurpose, and Reuse. We are making posters, planters, bookmarks, ornaments, doing interviews, writing letters, making videos, and even writing for the newspaper (like me!) But what

can you do? You could bring your reusable grocery bags when shopping, you can use a reusable water bottle, switch over to a wooden cutting board instead of a plastic one to reduce the amount of microplastics, and more.

There is so much you can do, but the ocean is still affected. So we ALL need to make a change. As Alan Gratz, the author of Two Degrees, said "Because we are not tourists here. Planet Earth is our home. All of it." And our oceans can't wait another minute of us sitting around doing nothing. So, I guess the big question is, What are you going to do about it?

## Updates from the Minnechaug Regional High School Booster Club

By Kristin Rivers  
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WILBRAHAM - Athletic Director Steven Burndrett provided updates on the Minnechaug Regional High School Booster Club on Jan. 22.

He was also joined by Karen Hoar, the Falcon Athletic Booster Association's treasurer, for the discussion. Burndrett shared the district's "sincere gratitude to all

past and present members of the Falcon Athletic Booster Association, further unwavering commitment to Minnechaug athletics."

"The dedication and generosity demonstrated by the organization has directly enhanced the experiences and opportunities available for all of our student athletes. These contributions reflect a genuine commitment to excellence in our community and partnership," Burndrett said.

After acknowledging other members for what they did



behind the scenes from fundraising to donations, Burn-

drett presented requests for consideration.

"Moving forward, looking for four different approvals of donations for January of 2026. The first one looking for approval is a golf cart that the booster club has graciously paid and donated for up to \$11,250 for a new athletic training cart, and the purpose of this cart is just multi-purpose for our trainer. It helps with weather, medical supplies, equipment," Burndrett said. "The capacity is what you need to be a successful athletic trainer to help our students. Whether it's carrying

medical supplies and the appropriate things or, now, that has the ability to transport kids off the field. Whereas the original golf cart that's over 20 years old is a four-seater that rattles on the slightest rock. So, it's a lot safer, it's more stable and that was 100% funded by the booster club for the golf cart."

Item two was the booster club donating \$6,200 to "help offset with the difficulty of

Please see **BOOSTER CLUB**, page 13

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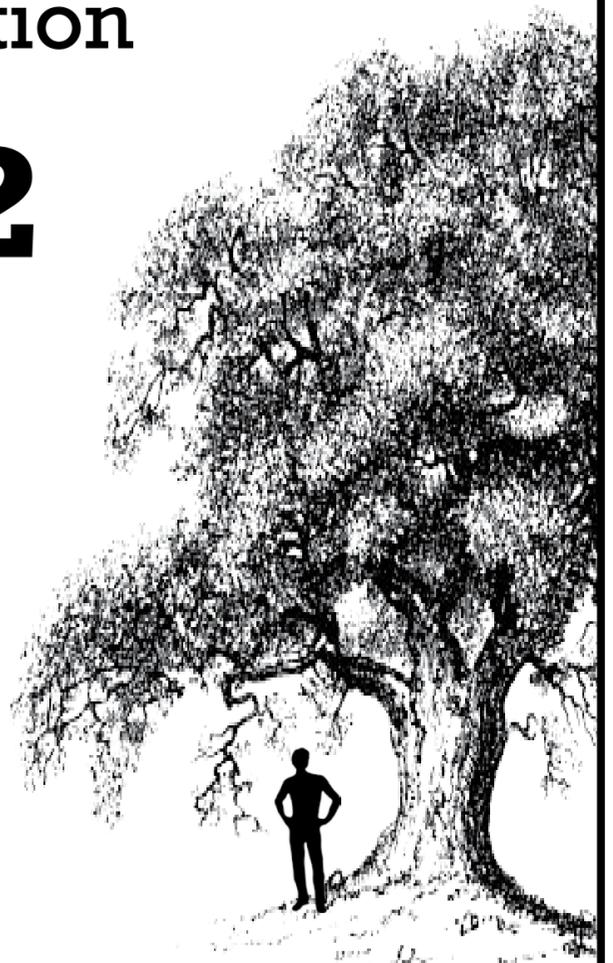
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# DL&G TREE



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# SB receives quarterly financial review update

By Kristin Rivers  
Editor  
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HAMPDEN - The Selectboard received a quarterly financial review update during their Jan. 20 meeting.

After Chair John Flynn praised Town Account Elise Diemand for "sending out information to different boards and committees and departments on where they stand financially and what potentially could see a problem down the road," Town Treasurer Richard Patullo provided his perspective on where things stand currently.

"First of all, I have not executed the borrowing that was authorized. I have not had to yet. I am trying to squeak through this last 10 days. I got a \$1.1 million payment due to the school on Monday that I'm hoping I can make it. I made it through the traditional payments today without doing any borrowing," Patullo said.

Patullo said "we're a little complicated" in how the tax receipts "were a little bit delayed."

"They were having a problem with that air gap radar system. It was down for two days last week and it's operating a little bit slow now. So, that is slowing down that Shield has been able to process a little bit," Patullo said. "It's a short-term problem."

Due to this delay, Patullo added, "we're probably a few \$100,000 behind in by a day or two or three."

"I'm hoping we can catch up this week. There's a chance that I can actually pull this off

without executing any borrowing," Patullo said.

Patullo also confirmed he has authorization and will come to the town offices that Friday "to move the last money around to make everything work."

Flynn then asked about the excise projections.

"Typically, we always go low. Do you see it trending that we are going to exceed our expectations?" Flynn said.

Patullo replied he was not sure.

"So, the registry normally see that excise commitment go out—I don't know, first week of February, second week of February—so, we should be seeing it pretty soon," Patullo said.

Flynn recalled how the prior Town Accountant, Cliff Bombard, said "there was like a large one and several little ones that come out," which Patullo agreed was correct and the data for that "wouldn't have come in 20 days into the year yet."

Flynn agreed. "Typically, Cliff used to project low on that. So, always a little wiggle room," Flynn said.

Selectboard Member Don Davenport brought up the transfer station.

"How close are we to a two-and-a-half override?" Davenport said.

After Patullo said he could look up the information for him, Davenport added he was also concerned about the schools.

"They haven't gotten a contract with the teachers yet or with their paraprofessionals

either," Davenport said.

Flynn noted how the board was sent information "that showed some projected capital cost."

"That may not be this year, but one thing that did show up—and I talked to Brian about this—where they had a bit of a historical lookback at this building and I don't think we had enough of that data beforehand before we set the budget, but back in '21, '22, the gas bill, for instance, for this building was \$30,000 to \$40,000," Flynn said. "And that wasn't even with full population at that point."

Flynn and Town Administrator Brian Domina reviewed what was appropriated for utilities.

"We could be running short big time in that account. We need to take a look at a, how we're maintaining our heat here, and I think we've seen a bit of an increase since that time in the Eversource," Flynn said.

"Gas bills have gone up," Davenport said.

"So, we could be surprised," Flynn said. "So, I think it's something we got to keep track of."

Diemand said on this, "We're at a 70% use of the appropriation."

"Counting today's warrant," Diemand said.

After further discussion on this, Flynn noted it would be a good idea to look at "the latest Eversource gas bill we got and project that going forward."

Patullo said Flynn was "absolutely right."

"I mean, I got a feeling this is going to be the worst budget

year in 15 years," Patullo said. "I don't remember me being this nervous before."

Flynn agreed. "But, I think we're going to see challenges inside this year for things, of unknowns of a, this building might see accounts that are a little—I want to say, challenging—I see some there are like 'Oh gosh, this is a little higher than I would have seen at this type of year' and the \$25,000 that I think Advisory has, I think we're going to be tapping into that a lot sooner than years in the past," Flynn said. "Requesting them for a little help on different things. So, that's why it's good to have this type of meeting."

On Davenport's question on the public health trust, Patullo said two weeks ago, they were talking 5% to 10%.

"I'm hoping to get down to the 4% or 5% range," Patullo said. "We have some reserves still. We have burned them down, and there's no reason for them to be sitting in the bank. There's about an extra \$3 million in there that we have worked out from the desired point. But, it used to be \$6 or \$7 million. I've been fighting for 10, 15 years, to turn that money back to the town. This is a good year to push hard."

Other items Davenport noted included renegotiating the dispatch contract and ambulance is going up 3%.

"But, we do take part of that rebate money and we do the same thing again this year," Davenport said.

After further discussion, the board moved on to the next agenda item.

## BUDGET from page 1

for those. But, currently, the state grant funding is picking up where the federal grant fell short."

On the tax write-off program, Moriarty said there were "a significant amount more that applied this year."

"We have 14 positions that were filled. I believe there were 24 applicants for the program this year which is a lot, a lot more. But, I think every department that requested a position or multiple positions was able to be filled," Moriarty said.

## Hampden Public Library

For the library, Library Trustee Kathleen Hutchison said the library is in good shape budget-wise as well.

"We'll be fine by the end of the year, and (the) move over to this building was challenging, but our staff did a great job and we're settling in and people are coming and finding the library," Hutchison said.

On preparing for next year, Hutchison shared "really nothing other than things that are already scheduled for this building."

"Like the HVAC and maybe somewhere down the road, the new light fixtures, but I know that's out a little bit," Hutchison said. "Our immediate needs have been taken care of by Herb and continuing. He's great; bathrooms are up and running and changing ta-

bles there and he's addressing the outside lighting. So, right now, library is in good shape."

On the HVAC, Hutchison emphasized making sure the library and trustees are kept in the loop on this.

## Health Department and Building Department

Laurie Dutton, the Board of Health and Operations Coordinator, anticipated no increases.

"I think we're rolling pretty good. Some might not be to my attention at this time," Dutton said. "Bear with me, but I think we're okay."

Flynn then asked Dutton about the transfer station.

"Obviously, that budget and I know Don's been working with you on that. Do you anticipate—and this, of course, would come back to Advisory—that we're going to continue to need something from the tax rate to fund that program going forward," Flynn said.

Dutton replied she's still educating herself about this.

"I will have numbers. I have some for Don I'll get to him a little later," Dutton said. "And I am looking into a few opportunities to bring in a little bit more revenue."

After Flynn said the battery issue was addressed "and is completely up and running at this point," Building Commissioner Wendel Hulbert said he now has the construction control documents for the

storage.

"There's a UL testing that the battery undergoes, but the good news is the battery was kind of gone through. Instead of being piecemeal, it was a whole system UL tested. So, we just received all that documentation last week. Inspector Courtney's looking through everything just to make sure we're hitting at the UL, NFPs and guidelines that we need, but I've got all the construction control documents," Hulbert said. "So, it's just a matter of dotting the i's and we'll be able to finalize that."

For his department, Hulbert said building permits continue to be serviced that were written last year.

"We did all of our yearly inspections and everything. Actually, with churches, daycares, restaurants and bars. Working with fire. Recently, they had a chimney fire that I was responded to with them," Hulbert said. "Our capital needs are easy math. We do education, postage, clerical stuff. So, it really doesn't change from year to year too terrible much unless the phone bill goes up a little or whatever. But, I don't anticipate anything crazy going in the future year. But, it's hard to know."

## Conservation Commission

Bonnie Geromini, the administrative assistant for the Conservation Commission, introduced Joe Zeno, the new Conservation Agent for the

town.

"We've been trying for several years to find a person qualified to do the job and Joe just happened to come along, and I just want to say that he's doing an excellent job. He's really putting over 100% into his work," Geromini said. "Fortunately, Dick Patullo and I have been working for several years on the conservation budget and we have continually budgeted for a position of conservation agent even though one hasn't been hired. So that now, I believe, that we're going to be okay at least for '26 as far as the salary I make and the salary that Joe makes also."

After Zeno shared he's now beginning work on the Open Space & Recreation Plan and coordinating with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to start meetings, form the committee and get the process moving, Flynn credited Parks & Rec Director Dan Blanchard for his help on this item through obtaining a grant.

"I think he made a good point that this really falls into ConCom and the expertise that Joe has to honcho it going forward. So, kudos to both of you," Flynn said.

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## Welcome Dr. Meunier

We are excited to introduce the newest addition to Ludlow Family Dentistry, Dr. Zachary D. Meunier. Dr. Meunier is returning to Western Massachusetts and is a general dentist who has earned his D.M.D. degree from Midwestern University in Illinois.

During dental school Dr. Meunier presented research nationally at the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOCR) conference in Portland, Oregon through the Academic Dental Career Fellowship Program (ADCFP). He also lectured and taught dental students reflecting his dedication to both excellent patient care and continued dental education.

Dr. Meunier has shadowed and trained alongside specialists across every dental discipline and completed one-on-one implant training through the Implant Pathway program. As a general dentist, he provides endodontics, implant dentistry, and oral surgery while referring highly complex cases to specialists to ensure the best outcomes for his patients.

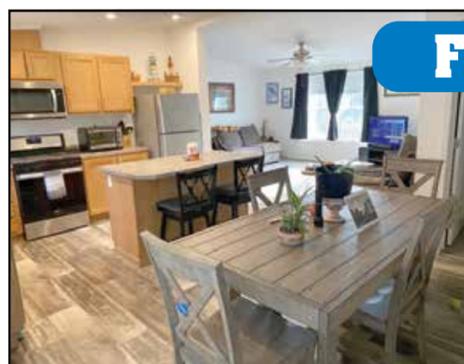
He believes in listening carefully to his patients to fully understand their needs and concerns, allowing him to provide personalized, high-quality care for every individual.

Outside the office, Dr. Meunier and his wife, Joyce, share their home with their three loving cats. He enjoys cooking, mountain climbing, hiking and camping.

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## BUSINESS

# Viola Aesthetics & Day Spa open for business in Wilbraham

By Kristin Rivers  
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krivers@turley.com

WILBRAHAM - Viola Aesthetics & Day Spa, a medical spa, lash bar and skin care business, is open for business in Wilbraham.

It's located at 2038 Boston Rd., across the street from the Big Y Plaza on Boston Road and is open by appointment only, with residents encouraged to book online. People can also message through Vagaro, email [violaestheticsanddayspa@gmail.com](mailto:violaestheticsanddayspa@gmail.com) or call 413-265-1278.

The offerings include facial treatments, chemical peels, Botox, eyelash enhancements, facial waxing, vitamin injections, AeroLase NeoElite and add-ons including LED light therapy, dermaplaning, Bioreepel, GM Collin chemical peel, Extra Extraction and High Frequency Wand.

Private events and private spa parties—which can range from five to eight people—are also available.

There's also online purchasing and shipping for products.

There will also be new events coming up, including a Valentine's Day event in February.

Owner and Founder Viola Guberow, who came from Poland when she was 13 years old, shared her business was originally in Northampton for five years, but she came back to Wilbraham, saying "it's so nice to be back home."

Guberow originally went to school for occupational therapy, but by graduate school, changed her mind and took a year off. From there, she went to the Monarch School of Cosmetology where she discovered her passion for beauty.

"My family's here, my house is here, so much closer. A lot of my clients are from around here; they have an easy access from Hampden or East Longmeadow or Longmeadow. I have clients in Enfield, I have clients who are traveling from Hartford as well. So, now we have clients



An exterior shot of Viola Aesthetics & Day Spa in Wilbraham.

Turley photos by Kristin Rivers



An interior shot inside one of the rooms at Viola Aesthetics & Day Spa.

traveling from Northampton, Granby, Deerfield," Guberow said. "I feel like closer to Springfield there is more, but people from Northampton didn't want to go to Springfield. So, this is more like a nicer, quieter area for them."

On the location, Guberow explained she was thinking of the Post Office Park area, but she "liked this location so much better because there's always something going on."

Also, she felt this area was "so much more open to different services and trying new

stuff."

"Honestly, all the businesses, they kind of promote each other too," Guberow said. "That was one of the main reasons why I moved here because everyone knows each other. It's really like business-oriented, but also family-oriented. So, everyone knows each other."

Guberow stressed education and staying up to date on certification are important as things are always changing, including different lasers and different devices, for exam-



Another shot inside one of the rooms at Viola Aesthetics & Day Spa.

upkeep with your education, but also stay on track."

When she meets a new client, Guberow said she gives them a custom facial "to see what their goal is" and build from there, also going over their skincare products, routines and diet during a consultation.

"We do medical-grade, chemical peels, we do have, I believe, six different chemical peels that where you have to get trained on it too," Guberow said. "So, lighter chemical peels to more medium to more like a chemical peel (that's) deeper, that you're actually shedding your skin. So, that's nice to do like once in a year, especially around this time, especially around winter."

The business inspiration came from Guberow's own struggles with problematic skin, such as acne, pigmentation and dryness.

"I had pimples for my wedding, I was never taking care of my skin, I did one facial," Guberow said. "Not just because of the wedding, but I'm like, 'Why did I not do my own research before?'"

Even if you can't afford expensive products, there are also products out there that are affordable. But, the most important for me is not to push clients to buy the most expensive products and more 'Let's focus on your skin. Let's see where your budget is. Let's see what we can do

for treatments.'"

What fulfills her is how she makes people feel; seeing the confidence in her clients and being able to help them. Also, creating a welcoming space for them to enter and cherishing each client and moment.

"To me, at the end of the day, this is more important. Making somebody happy with their own skin," Guberow said.

Her goal for 2026 is to make services more exclusive for clients.

"I feel like they spend their time and they take the time out of their day to come here, so that's my goal for this year. Just to make it a little bit more special," Guberow said.

Guberow thanked the community for their support, encouraging them to stop by.

"We're so happy to be here because I feel like it's just closer to everything, to the community, and especially, the community is just everything that I always wanted. Really welcoming, really nice...I feel like everyone is just lovely here. We're happy, obviously, to be here, we're happy to just serve the community and see what the next year's going to offer us," Guberow said.

To learn more, visit [www.vagaro.com/violaestheticsanddayspa](http://www.vagaro.com/violaestheticsanddayspa) or check them out on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.



A posterboard explaining the different AeroLase NeoElite options for clients.

ple.

"We try to upkeep with the beauty industry too because there's so much new stuff always coming through. So, I feel like it's so important to get your education as well," Guberow said. "To me, this is really important as an esthetician, you're always learning something and, to me, it's so important to not even (only



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COMMUNITY



The Hampden Senior Center was packed to celebrate Pie Day.

Turley photos by Kristin Rivers

PIE DAY from page 1

see it's a place that they're welcomed and we want them to participate in other things as well."

Doran added an event like Pie Day brings people out together and make new friends.

"It takes a village. It's not just the staff coordinating; that's where it starts, we get it going. But being able to have somebody like Rick come. He's somebody in the community, that lives in the community," Doran said. "All these pies that were donated. The people that come in. This is what brings everybody together. You see people coming in as groups, you see people that it may be one or two people, but they're filling in to these tables, making new friends. We're hoping that brings people together more and people talk about what they do here and invite people in. I think these events have to happen to make people realize that this is a great place to come."

On her favorite pie, she has many favorites.

"I love chocolate cream pie, but I love apple and peach and fruits of the forest, you name it. Is there a bad pie?" Doran said.

Gilday shared he's performed at the senior center for a number of years and enjoyed seeing everyone enjoy the pie and music. He enjoys performing the Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, Peter and Gordon, 50s and 60s music and more.

"We have a great group of people here. Not only the people that work here, but the people that come to these things itself. It's really a nice, nice group of people," Gilday said.

He was also thrilled with the turnout and support.

"With days like this, where it's 10 degrees, I'm surprised that this many people showed up for events. I was very happy to see that the tables were all filled up," Gilday said. "I love getting up here and play-



Pie Day at the Hampden Senior Center celebrated National Pie Day, with attendees enjoying a variety of pies.



A close-up shot of one of the pies.

ing songs, especially when I see people enjoying what I'm playing."

His favorite pie flavor is apple.

"Strawberry Rhubarb would be number two, but apple is way ahead of them all," Gilday said.

Gilday said events like this help seniors come out to socialize or connect, especially if new to town or around for many years. Also, noting the meals made by the senior center.

"It really is nice to see people get out of the house in the winter. The winter is a tough time for people, including myself," Gilday said. "If you just kind of push yourself and get out there and have some fun and enjoy the peo-

ple in the town. We have a great senior center here, we do, and Wilbraham does also. Wilbraham has a very good senior center there and we're really lucky as residents of the town to have these kind of people doing this work. Most of these people are volunteers and the same with Wilbraham, they're mostly volunteers. It's nice to support them and get out and show them that we appreciate what's going on here."

Doran encouraged the community to check out future events, including the Souper Bowl event on Feb. 6 with homemade soup made by Executive Director Rebecca Moriarty and Outreach Coordinator Wendy Cowles.

"So you definitely want to sign up for that. It's going to be like a Super Bowl celebration, so we're going to have Paul Federico, the trivia guy, doing football trivia and they'll be prizes with that," Doran said. "Once again, can't do it without our community."

She also thanked everyone for coming out for Pie Day.

"It makes us happy to see that so many people will come and just enjoy. It was good, I think it was a very successful event," Doran said. "So, everybody come again. There's lots of things coming up, keep an eye out for everything that we do. Try it out."

This month the Random Acts of Kindness is about the Hands. Not literally hands, but Ray and Barbara Hand whose hands were very busy as the parents of five children! All their children are grown with their youngest now eligible for Medicare! If you haven't guessed, the Hands are in their mid-90's and still very active members of the Keystone Commons community where they've lived for approximately two years.

Ray and Barbara met while both serving in the Air Force, he obtaining the rank of Staff Sergeant and she, Airman 2nd Class. While in the service and after retirement, they traveled to many places including France, Germany, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and Holland where they honeymooned. They've also enjoyed traveling extensively throughout our states.

Ray worked for various companies in sales so was on the road a lot, plus would take on part-time jobs for extra income. When the kids were young, Barbara was a 'stay at home' mom, then when they were older, she went back to work, eventually retiring from Hasbro as a Product Manager. She also started her own copy writing service. She said, "I have held numerous positions in my life but being a homemaker was one of the toughest. Bringing up five kids born within seven years is hard to describe."

When the children were younger, because Ray was gone so often, they set up a once-a-month family Sun-

day. They'd go hiking, check out the parks or go watch the planes come in at the airport. Barbara said, "Those family Sundays were wonderful."

them.

Ray volunteered by coaching various little league teams over the years. He was a crossing guard for many years and also delivered 'Meals on Wheels' for twenty of the thirty years they lived in East Longmeadow. Barbara was very active in the community as the children were growing up, however, there wasn't a lot of spare time or energy after parenting all the kids.

Together, Barbara and Ray also enjoyed playing tennis and relished a good game of golf. Barbara bragged at what a good golfer Ray was as he humbly admitted his games were generally in the 80's with a 14 or 15 handicap. He worked as a Golf Ranger on a nine-hole golf course that allowed him liberal access to golfing. That might explain why he was such a good golfer, of course besides his natural ability.

We talked about how things today were so different than when they were young parents, explaining how money was always at a premium. They shared how Christmas meant one special gift for each child and now they see their grandchildren with hundreds of dollars' worth of gifts and their rooms filled with all the latest gadgets. They also revealed that they were both very strict parents, justifying with so many kids they had to be. They said their children were and are much more lenient, but bragged what good children their kids raised. They also said their children have since

Please see **KINDNESS**, page 8



By Barb Turcotte

When I asked what their secret was to their 73-year marriage, they chuckled, looked at each other in wonderment and agreed there were times when they weren't so sure they'd make it. They also agreed, they always wanted the complete family dynamics for their kids so they just made it work. Barbara also explained, "That was back when only men were considered heads of household, women homemakers, and divorce or separation was considered shameful, scandalous and in many cases, a mortal sin, no matter what the cause." But they also clarified it was their humors and respect for one another that kept them together.

Barbara, who is mostly a wheelchair user, is aided by Ray to get to various places. They are very involved with many of the activities offered such as Jeopardy, coffee chats, as well as Barbara writing articles for the monthly Newsletter. She's also a published writer so a great addition to the team. They also enjoy the entertainers who perform and you can see them singing along while holding hands as they reminisce about so many memories those tunes bring



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## VIEWPOINTS

SOCIAL SECURITY  
*Matters*

By Russell Gloor

Claiming Social Security  
early and investing it

## Dear Rusty:

*I am a 63-year-old single lady and I have questions regarding Social Security "early retirement," though I will still be working full time.*

*I know there is a maximum allowable income limit and, if I exceed that, I will need to return probably 2/3 of my received Social Security benefit. I'm thinking about taking those early SS benefits about \$1,400 per month and putting them in my high yield savings or CD where I can gain the interest on it and have it stay "liquid" so I can return what I need to.*

*My current interest rate is 3.65% on the savings and over 4.25% on CD, with options for 3,6,9 mos. or longer- but I want to be able to access the money to pay Social Security back at the end of the year. Can you advise me on this?*

**Signed: Still Working but Wondering**

## Dear Still Working:

I commend you, for investigating your options before claiming early Social Security benefits while still working. FYI, the 2026 annual earnings limit for those collecting early SS benefits is \$24,480 (changes annually). If your 2026 work earnings exceed the annual limit, Social Security will take away \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. The annual earnings limit lasts until you reach your Full Retirement Age and the limit is about 2.5 times higher during the year you attain FRA.

FYI, when you apply for benefits, Social Security will ask if you are working and, if so, how much you make. Using that information, they will evaluate whether you can take benefits now and, if so, how many months they can actually pay your benefits.

For example, if your projected 2026 earnings are, say, \$100,000, you would be about \$75,000 over the annual limit which means that half of that \$37,500 would need to be paid back to SS. Since your monthly SS benefit at your current age would be about \$1,400 per month, Social Security will say that you are temporarily ineligible to collect early benefits because you cannot pay back within one year what you would owe for exceeding the limit. In other words, they won't pay your SS benefits just yet because your earnings are too high and they do not want to overpay benefits, which you will only need to return.

For additional perspective, if your expected 2026 earnings are less say about \$50,000 that means you would be about \$25,000 over the limit about half of that (about \$12,500) would need to be paid back to SS.

In that event, SSA would tell you they will withhold nine months of your SS payments in advance and pay your benefits for only 3 months. This because the overpayment, with your current benefit of about \$1,400, could be recovered by withholding your SS payments for nine months. They do not want to intentionally overpay your SS benefits.

So, despite your best repayment intentions, Social Security will not favor intentionally overpaying your benefits. Historically, overpayment of benefits due to exceeding the annual earnings limit has been a notoriously difficult issue for the Social Security Administration. So, to get your early SS benefits while you are working full time, you would likely need to lie about your anticipated 2026 earnings on your application for SS benefits, which we strongly discourage.

Keep in mind that this all changes when you reach your FRA (67), because the earning limit goes away entirely when you reach FRA and the limit goes up by about 2.5 times in the year you attain full retirement age. So, depending on your earnings level, you may wish to either wait until your full retirement age, or until you stop working full time, to claim SS.

Now, as for the general idea of taking early benefits and investing them, many have said they wish to do that and we understand that logic. Our caution is that it requires religious discipline to put the SS money into a higher yield investment vehicle to accomplish the goal of beating the SS increase realized when you wait to claim. Many who try it succumb to the temptation to use the invested funds for emergency needs and sometimes non-emergency needs. I offer this only as something to be aware of, as some have shared that they failed in their investment objectives with their Social Security money.

*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](http://amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at [ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org](mailto:ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org). Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.*

A final hike  
of 2025

By Julie Midura

**“Y**ou know, honey, we always talk about how we'll REALLY start living 'some day.' Once the kids are grown. Once we have more time and more money. Once we retire. But how do we know that we'll both be physically capable of doing something so demanding if we wait for 'some day' to arrive? How do we know that we will even reach that elusive 'some day'?”

It was a beautiful August day in 2016, and Tom and I were standing on the summit of Mt. Lafayette in the White Mountains of New Hampshire.

We were completing Tom's lifelong dream of hiking the Franconia Ridge Loop-a majestic 9-mile hike featured on a National Geographic List of the 20 Best Hikes in the World.

On that summer afternoon almost ten years ago, I was trying to convince my husband that we should attempt to hike all of New Hampshire's 48 tallest peaks. I was 51, and he was 59 at the time. There were numerous reasons not to pursue such a time-consuming and physically challenging endeavor. One of which, as Tom stated, was because "We're far too old and there's no way we can hike up all those mountains in our lifetime."

It took a bit of persuasion on my part, but he finally agreed to chase after those 48 mountain peaks.

Since that day, Tom and I have not only completed the entire White Mountain 4,000 Footer List once, but twice including climbing every peak during the winter season. And we've repeated several of our favorites over a half dozen times. In addition, we've backpacked 800 miles on the Appalachian Trail, completing 8 of the 14 states. We have also climbed the second highest peak in the continental United States-14,440' Mt. Elbert in Colorado-when I was fifty-eight and Tom was sixty-six years old.

The thousands of miles we have walked over the past ten years have not just proven what our bodies and minds are capable of. Every mile has been a journey of adventure, self-discovery, courage, humility, resilience, contentment and gratitude. And every footprint we have left on every woodland trail and every slab of granite has propelled us forward to the next.

Our final hike of 2025 in New Hampshire, just two weeks ago, continued to do the same.

It's minus 2 degrees when we start up the trail toward the summit of Mt. Jackson at 4:15 a.m. The sky is black



and the beams of our headlamps pierce the darkened forest. When we lift our heads upward, our lights illuminate the trees, and they appear like figures standing guard over the landscape. The snow-laden evergreens groan under the weight, pressing closer to the ground, seeming to bow to us as we pass. The silence is full, broken only by the crunch of our boots on the hard-packed snow.

When we break treeline, everything changes. We brace ourselves against the onslaught of howling wind. The sheer force pushes our bodies backward. We slam our trekking poles into the hard-packed snow to steady ourselves, while hoping that our spike-clad boots anchor us to the icy granite. The final steep pitch makes my heart tremble. Adrenaline is coursing through my body. I grab onto rocks and pull myself upward, eyes watering, skin pierced with the sting of icy needles. I breathe a sigh of relief when we reach the plateau, and we rush to the leeward side to escape the wind's torment.

We find a partially sheltered ledge and quickly spread our bright green sleeping bag over our sleep pads atop several feet of snow. We crawl inside of the double-wide down bag and snuggle close together. Based on the weather, we know we can't remain immobile for long. Movement keeps the body warm. Stillness allows the cold to penetrate the numerous layers of clothing we are wearing. Today, even the

trees are shivering.

We sip hot apple cider in an attempt to warm our insides while waiting for the sun to crest the distant horizon. The cold kisses our cheeks and the wind fills our ears. We inhale the frigid mountain air and watch plumes of vapor rise as we exhale. We remain snuggled in our lofty sleeping bag on this snowy perch for over an hour, unwilling to leave in spite of the cold settling into our bones. For we don't want to miss ONE. SINGLE. MINUTE. of this unforgettable moment that is unfolding before us.

The earth itself seems to be holding its breath, waiting for the show to begin. With eyes focused eastward, we watch the black of night turn into the blazing red of dawn. The stars above are being replaced with an inferno of fiery reds and blazing oranges-like molten lava spreading as the horizon slowly burns.

And there it is. The shimmering golden sphere we have been waiting for, spreading its golden light down the mountainside and awakening the earth from its slumber. The brilliant rays stretch from the heavens and dance upon the earth, giving life to everything they touch.

This experience is just one of the many that will burn in our hearts and memories for as long as there is breath in our lungs. An experience that we may never have witnessed had we not decided to chase a dream ten years ago. Had we

Please see **HIKING**, page 13

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@Wilbraham-Hampden Times

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## Correction Policy

The TIMES gladly corrects 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](mailto: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, or if the letters become repetitive, 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.



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

# WILBRAHAM HAMPDEN

Nowicki completes internship with Wilbraham Fire Department

## 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](mailto:krivers@turley.com)



Photos and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Fire Department

Minnechaug High School Senior Steven Nowicki completed a six-month internship with the Wilbraham Fire Department on Friday, January 17. During this time, he had the opportunity to work alongside members of the department, gaining valuable insights into the firefighting profession. Throughout his internship, Steven participated in hands-on training, responded to emergency calls, budgeted, shopped and prepared for our retiree breakfast and even took part in a mock interview to prepare for a future in firefighting.



## Knox Trail 250 Celebration commemorates 'Walking in Knox's Footsteps'



The community gathered at the Old Stone Bridge and the Old Meeting House Museum in Wilbraham and the Springfield Armory Historic Site throughout the day on Jan. 17 to mark 250 years of Henry Knox's winter journey along the famous Knox Trail during the Knox Trail 250 Celebration.

The celebration also included a presentation led by Rich Howell at the Old Meeting House Museum and State Sen. Jake Oliveira (D-Ludlow) later presenting

a plaque to recognize the town of Wilbraham and Hampden's contributions 250 years ago and an important moment in the towns' shared history.



Rich Howell, David Bourcier and State Sen. Jake Oliveira (D-Ludlow) with the commemorative plaque.



Rich Howell leads the presentation inside the Old Meeting House Museum.



David Bourcier with the Knox Trail 250 poster highlighting the town of Wilbraham.

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# COMMUNITY

## 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](http://www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org). Once the masterpiece is complete, parents or guardians 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 interest-



ed in joining the Wilbraham Junior Women's Club? Visit [www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org](http://www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org) to learn more. You can also contact Barbara Croteau at [barbcroteau@gmail.com](mailto: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!

## Hampden Senior Center February Events

HAMPDEN - Here are two upcoming events to keep an eye on in February.

### SOUP-er BOWL Lunch

Friday, Feb. 6 at Noon \$3 per person

Join us for a delicious lunch of Turkey Rice Soup and a sandwich made by Becky & Wendy with dessert generously donated by JGS Lifecare.

Stay to play Super Bowl Trivia with The Trivia Guy, Paul Federico, with a chance to win some great prizes.

Please call 566.5588 to RSVP for this event.

### Valentine's Day Luncheon

Friday, Feb. 13 at Noon, \$3.00 per person suggested donation for lunch

Come and enjoy a delicious meal of Rosé Chicken, Pasta, Salad, and Garlic Bread, provided by GSSSI, and Tiramisu for dessert, provided by The Reserve at East Longmeadow.

Patrick Tobin will be here to sing and entertain you with the sounds of Frank Sinatra.

Please call 566-5588 to reserve your seat. Space is limited.

"This program is funded in part by a grant from the Hampden Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by Mass Cultural Council, a state agency."

## Stuffed Animal Sleepover at WPL

WILBRAHAM - Have you ever wondered what happens in the Wilbraham Public Library when it is closed?

The WPL Teen Advisory Board announces their annual Stuffed Animal Sleepover on Thursday and Friday, Feb. 19 and 20 during school

vacation week. Your child's stuffed animal can spend the whole night in the library having fun!

Children bring their stuffed animal to the library and our teens will help them fill out a "permission slip" for their stuffed animal, listen to a bedtime story, and

tuck their animal in for the night. In the morning, join us to make a craft, pick up your "stuffie" and see a slideshow of all the fun things the animals did overnight! Starting on Feb. 2, sign up at the Children's desk of the library or call 413-596-6141.

## Annual Town Meeting 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.

## Women's Club February Meeting

WILBRAHAM - St. Cecilia's Women's Club February meeting is on Tuesday, Feb. 10 beginning at 6 p.m.

Sip n' Paint with Kim!

Dive into creativity at our fun-filled, hands-on event!

Join club member Kim Lawler as she guides us in painting a stunning scene on canvas using watercolors. NO experience needed, just your imagination and enthusiasm! Hope to see you there!

### KINDNESS from page 5

thanked them for their guidance, always knowing they were loved.

Their first son is also named Raymond so if you call Ray, you might get both answering and if you call to Barbara, you might also get a response from their daughter-in-law, as Ray Jr.'s wife is also named Barbara. And that's just one of the

funny things about this very humorous family. They all make you want to be part of their fun-loving crazy crew.

It's pretty hard summarizing over ninety years of living and seventy-three years of marriage to incorporate all the wonderful gestures they've extended, but hopefully I've captured the essence of this incredible couple.

*If you'd like to share a Random Act of Kindness story or if this one has touched you, please contact me at [bdt514@aol.com](mailto:bdt514@aol.com) or 413-575-9385. Who knows, you might see your story. 'Just 'Cause' you witnessed, you did or maybe received something nice being done for you. See you soon with another Random Act of Kindness! ~ Barb*

## A 30-year tradition at risk:

### Minnechaug's Ultimate Party needs the community-now

WILBRAHAM/HAMPDEN - For more than 30 years, Minnechaug parents have come together with one shared goal: to keep our graduates safe on one of the most important-and risky-nights of their young lives.

That tradition is now in serious danger.

Since 1992, the Chaug Ultimate Party has provided Minnechaug Regional High School graduates with a fully supervised, all-night, alcohol- and drug-free celebration on graduation night. The event-planned entirely by parents-offers students a safe place to be together, have fun, and celebrate without the pressures of drinking, impaired driving, vandalism, or other high-risk activities that too often accompany graduation night.

For decades, this event has worked.

And now, it may end.

Due to declining community support, a shrinking volunteer base, and critical budget shortfalls, the Ultimate Party is at risk of not continuing beyond this year's senior class. If action is not taken soon, there will be no Ultimate Party for the current juniors or underclassmen-ending a tradition that has protected generations of Minnechaug students.

This is not a school-sponsored event. The Ultimate Party is privately funded and relies entirely on fundraising, donations, and volunteers. Every dollar raised helps cover transportation, venue costs, food, entertainment, and supervision to ensure graduates have a safe and memorable night.

The reality is stark: Without renewed support over the next few years, this program will disappear.

And once it's gone, it will be incredibly difficult to bring back.

### This Is Bigger Than One Class

Fundraising for the Ultimate Party is not just about the current senior class-it's about sustaining a tradition for future graduates. Every donation and every volunteer hour helps ensure that Minnechaug students continue to have a safe alternative on graduation night.

### How the Community Can Help-Right Now

Donate: Cash contributions, merchandise, or gift certificates from individuals or local businesses are urgently needed.

Volunteer: Volunteers are the backbone of this event. Parents, guardians, and community members are needed to help plan, fundraise, and work the night of the party.

Spread the Word: Community awareness is critical. Please share this message.

Photos of recent graduates enjoying the Ultimate Party can be found on Facebook at Chaug Ultimate Party-a reminder of what this community has built together.

### Volunteers & Support Needed

Anyone interested in learning more, donating, or volunteering is encouraged to contact committee member Jen Pelletier at [jpelletier18@gmail.com](mailto:jpelletier18@gmail.com).

This is a call to action. If the Ultimate Party matters to you-if student safety matters to you-now is the time to step forward.

Because graduation night should end with memories, not regrets.

## 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 re-

quired 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.

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# SPORTS

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## Falcons ice hockey suffers setback against Green Wave

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

WEST SPRINGFIELD—Minnechaug Regional has qualified for the Division 2 state hockey tournament just two times since the MIAA changed the postseason tournament format before the start of the 2021-22 regular season.

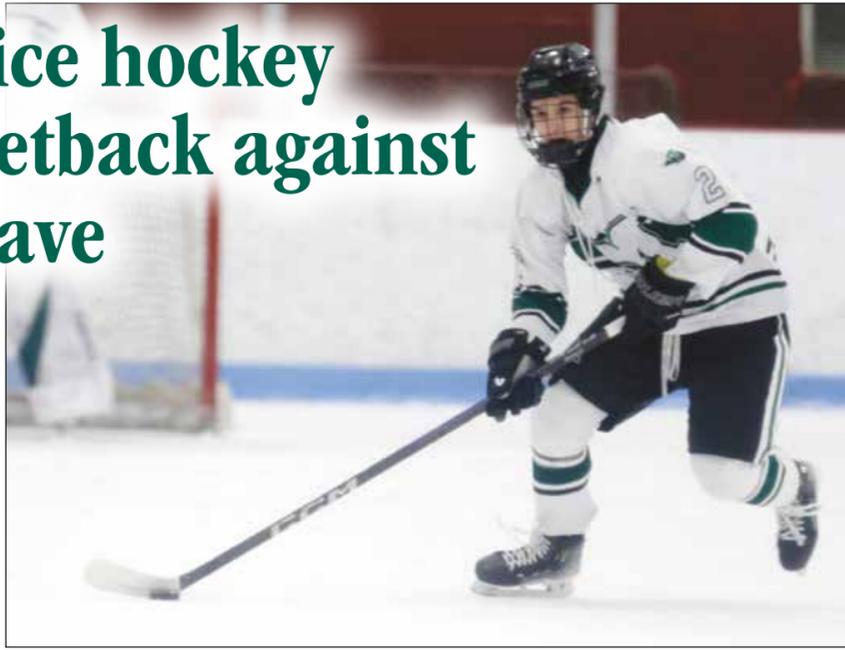
The Falcons entered the Berry Division match-up with Greenfield on Martin Luther King Jr. Day with a 9-2 overall record. They needed only one more win to become the first high school hockey team from Western Massachusetts to clinch a berth in this year's state tournament.

The Falcons had to wait a couple of extra days to accomplish the milestone after suffering a 7-4 loss to the Green Wave at the Olympia Ice Center in West Springfield.

"This is a very frustrating loss," said Minnechaug head Kyle Bousquet. "If we could've won today's game, we would've qualified for the state tournament with ten wins. We're also trying to finish in first place in the Berry Division standings, so every league game is very important."

The Falcons had a 4-3 league mark following their first meeting of the regular season against Greenfield. They were ranked 29th in the Division 2 state power rankings which was released on January 20.

The top 32 teams in the



Brody Faneuff readies to clear the puck up the ice.

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com

Division 2 rankings will automatically qualify for the state tournament.

The last time that the Falcons, who have allowed five or more goals in their first three losses of this season, qualified for the state tournament was two years ago when they lost to Agawam, 3-1, in a preliminary round match. The 2022-23 squad also lost in the preliminary round to Somerville High School.

A year ago, Greenfield and Minnechaug spilt their season series.

The Falcons won the first meeting, 4-3, before the Green Wave celebrated a 4-2 victory two days later. Greenfield had a 6-5-1 overall record and a 5-3-1 league record following the road win.

The Green Wave took a 1-0 lead against the Falcons at the 12:02 mark of the opening period following a goal from sophomore Chase Zraunig.

Please see **FALCONS**, page 10



Kelly Balog looks for an opening to shoot.

## Swim teams head into postseason strong

WILBRAHAM — It's been another strong season in the pool for Minnechaug swimming. So far this season, Boys swimming has gone 7-1 with their only defeat coming against East Longmeadow where the Falcons lost by just seven points. More recently, the Falcons have won their last four meets, including a dominant win 141-35 over Westfield on Tuesday, Jan. 20. The Falcons had a winner in every event. Zach Parent and Alex Parent had two event wins each as did Ben Latourelle. Colin Purcell and Owen Messina also had event wins.

This season, girls swimming has gone 5-2-1 so far.

The Falcons had a rare tie in a meet against Amherst Regional with both teams scoring 85 points. Earlier this week, the Falcons defeated Westfield 114-62.

In the win, Chelsea Ortega and Olivia Parent both had two wins for the Falcons. Parent took the 500 freestyle and 200 freestyle. Ortega won the 100 freestyle and the 200 individual medley.

The postseason meets will be coming up in the next couple of weeks, though prior to that, a "second chance" meet will be held for swimmers who are looking for another chance to qualify for the sectional and state meets.



Joey Comes makes a play up the right side of the ice.

## Girls basketball grabs win in Invitational matchup

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

SPRINGFIELD—Zahara Wilson scored more than 500 points as a member of the Springfield International Charter School girls' varsity basketball team during the past two years.

Wilson transferred to Minnechaug Regional before the start of the 2025-26 school year.

She and her Lady Falcons teammates faced Ridgefield High School (Conn) on the

Cailin O'Brien considers her next move while on an offensive play.

S.I.C.S. parquet court in a Hoophall Invitational game.

It turned out to be an enjoyable experience, as Wilson scored a game-high 15 points leading the Lady Falcons to a 46-27 victory over the Lady Tigers, last Saturday morning.

"It was a lot of fun coming back here and winning a game," said Wilson, who has scored more than 100 points during her freshman campaign. "I didn't know any of the Minnechaug players before the basketball season began, but they've been very welcoming to me. We've been playing very well so far this season."

The Lady Falcons (7-1) were ranked second in the MIAA Division 2 power rankings.

"We've been playing very good basketball so far this season," said Minnechaug head coach Ryan Minns. "We're just going to take it one game at a time."

A couple of days earlier, Minnechaug defeated Wachusett Regional, who are the defending Division 1 state champions, 64-55, at home. The Lady Falcons only setback this winter came at Springfield Central, 62-39, who's currently the top-ranked team in the Division 1 power rankings.

The Lady Falcons only other double digit scorer in their first Hoophall game was senior Cailin O'Brien, who scored six points in each half for a total of 12.

No other player scored more than five points.

The Lady Falcons defense held the Lady Tigers (5-3) to only nine points during the first 16 minutes of the contest.

"We played very well defensively in today's game," especially during the first half," Minns said. "We guarded the ball very well. We also had a lot of rebounds in today's game."

The Lady Falcons were trailing, 5-4, before Wilson

made a steal leading to a jump shot from the top of the key with 3:15 left in the opening quarter.

Two minutes later, O'Brien made two shots from the charity strip, which gave the Lady Falcons a slim 8-5 advantage.

Ridgefield junior Cathryn Mills, who scored all her team's seven first quarter points, converted an inside hoop with 30 seconds remaining which closed the gap to 8-7. Mills finished the contest with a team-leading 13 points.

Wilson started the second quarter with a driving lay-up

Please see **GIRLS**, page 10



Cailin O'Brien considers her next move while on an offensive play.



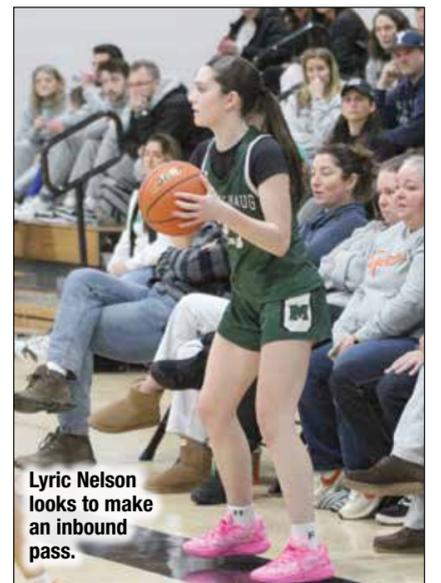
Ava Disa is pressured near the arc.



Zahara Wilson gets around an opponent.



Ava Manning keeps the ball away from her opponent.



Lyric Nelson looks to make an inbound pass.

SPORTS

Ott named new head coach of T-Birds

SPRINGFIELD – St. Louis Blues President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Doug Armstrong announced today that Steve Ott will assume the role of head coach for the team's AHL affiliate, the Springfield Thunderbirds, for the remainder of the season. Ott replaces Steve Konowalchuk, who has been relieved of his duties. Current Thunderbirds assistant coach Chad Wiseman will serve as the interim head coach for today's Thunderbirds game against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins until Ott can join the team later this week.

"The Blues want to thank Steve Konowalchuk for his contributions to our organization over the last two years and wish him all the best moving forward," said Armstrong. "We're looking forward to Steve Ott taking over in Springfield to push our young players to get better every day and further their development path to become St. Louis Blues. The current staff will take over his duties with the Blues for the rest of this season."

Ott, 42, has nine seasons

behind the Blues' bench after first joining the staff as an assistant in the summer of 2017. During his tenure, the Summerside, PEI, native has helped the Blues compile a 350-244-74 (.588 points percentage) regular-season record and four postseason appearances. In 2018-19, just his second season as a coach, Ott played an instrumental role in helping the Blues make a historic rise in the standings during the regular season, ultimately capturing the 2019 Stanley Cup championship. Ott becomes the fifth head coach in Thunderbirds history

As a player, Ott enjoyed a 14-year NHL career, including 122 games with the Blues from 2014-2016. Overall, he accumulated 288 points in 848 career regular-season games, including stints with Dallas, Buffalo, St. Louis, Detroit, and Montreal.

Konowalchuk, 52, was in his second season as head coach of the Thunderbirds and has recorded an overall record of 47-50-4-8 (.486 points-percentage) during his time in the organization, including a record of 13-18-4-2 (.432) this season.

Baldwin to chase unprecedented third straight SMART Modified Tour Championship

Sadler-Stanley Racing announced Wednesday that Luke Baldwin will return to the Pace-O-Matic No. 7VA for another season of SMART Modified Tour racing in 2026.

Baldwin will be searching for an unprecedented third straight championship on the SMART Modified Tour powered by Pace-O-Matic, after capturing the title in his rookie season in 2024, and following it up with another crown in 2025.

Baldwin won three of 13 series events in 2025 to go along with top-10 finishes in all but two races. Baldwin also won twice during the 2024 season, including capturing the \$20,000 to win 'King of the Modifieds' at South Boston Speedway in its

inaugural season as his first career win.

The team will continue with a PSR Chassis, partnered with Pace-O-Matic.

"What Luke has accomplished both on and off the track the last two years has been impressive and fun to watch," Sadler-Stanley Racing co-owner Hermie Sadler, said. "Luke has a great future ahead of him and it will be exciting to watch him race in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, along with on the SMART Modified Tour. We are truly excited to have him back in the Pace-O-Matic Modified in 2026 trying to chase some history."

"Going back to Sadler-Stanley Racing for a chance to win a third con-

secutive SMART Modified Tour championship - it's incredible," Luke Baldwin said. "Hermie and Bill took a chance on me, and it has paid off in many ways. I expect no different in 2026."

"We are just thrilled that Luke will lead Sadler-Stanley Racing for the 2026 SMART Modified Tour season, and run for this third consecutive championship," co-owner Bill Stanley said. "He brings excitement and a winning attitude to the track every week, and we can't wait to get the season started with him behind the wheel of the Pace-O-Matic 7VA."

"Pace-O-Matic is proud to once again be the premier sponsor of the SMART Modified Tour and Sadler-Stan-

ley Racing for 2026," Paul Goldean, President and CEO of Pace-O-Matic, said. "The SMART Modified Tour is an exhibition of cutting-edge innovation and excitement, just like the skill games we develop. We are excited to watch Sadler-Stanley Racing pursue a historic third consecutive championship, and we wish all the drivers luck this season."

Information on the driver lineup for the No. 16 Pace-O-Matic entry for the 2026 season will be released in the coming weeks.

The SMART Modified Tour 2026 schedule includes 14 events at 13 different tracks. All SMART Modified Tour races are streamed live on FloRacing.

FALCONS from page 9

It was the only goal scored by either team during the opening period.

A little more than four minutes into the second period, senior Luca Siano fired a breakaway shot into the net past Minnechaug sophomore goalie Chase Folli (29 saves) giving Greenfield a 2-0 advantage.

A minute later, sophomore Billy LaPalm netted his sixth goal of the season, cutting the Falcons' deficit in half. The duo of senior Kelly Balog and junior Nick O'Sullivan were credited with assists.

The score didn't remain 2-1 for very long.

The Green Wave retook a two-goal lead when Luca Siano sent a pass from the left circle across to the right circle where his younger brother, Nico, who's a sophomore, put a shot into the net with 8:15 remaining in the second period.

The score was tied 3-3, entering the final period as the Falcons scored a pair of power-play goals during the final two minutes of the middle period.

Senior Brody Faneuff, who's a first-year member of the Falcons hockey team, put a shot past Greenfield senior goalie Cooper Smith (26 saves) for his 13 goal of the season, which was assisted by senior Dom Fiorentino.

Fiorentino is an assistant captain, along with senior's Enzo Hrycay and Anthony Garib. He assisted on two other Falcons goals against Greenfield and has a team-leading 18 assists in the first ten games of the regular season.

With 27.1 seconds left in the period, Balog, who's another first-year member of the team, scored the equalizer.

"The power-play has been an asset for us this year," Bousquet said. "We scored two power-play goals late



Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com

Dom Fiorentino makes a backhand stop.

in the second period, but we also must score 5-on-5 goals as well. We came out strong at the start of the third before they scored another goal."

Greenfield senior Brady Poreda netted the go-ahead goal three minutes into the

third period. Then Nico Siano scored his team's first power-play goal, increasing the Green Wave lead to 5-3.

"It's very difficult playing from behind the whole game," said Minnechaug senior captain Jake Moore. "We're still a very good hockey team, but this is a very tough loss for us."

Minnechaug continued to battle back, as O'Sullivan delivered a shot from the blue line into the net cutting the deficit to 5-4 with 7:27 left in regulation.

The Falcons were unable to score the tying goal, as senior Jack Laurie scored an unassisted goal with 5:22 remaining before sealing the deal with an empty net goal during the final seconds.



Cameron Faneuff dekes before shooting.



Jason Abeid heads for the goal.

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 weeknight 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 registered for the 2026 season in order to be guaranteed a ros-

ter 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.

This is the 30th season for the league and league officials are looking to celebrate the anniversary with a couple of events.

UW-Madison announces Fall Deans List

MADISON, Wis - The University of Wisconsin-Madison has recognized students named to the Dean's List for the fall semester of the 2025-2026 academic year.

Students who achieve at a high level academically are recognized by the dean

at the close of each semester. To be eligible for the Dean's List, students must complete a minimum of 12 graded degree credits in that semester. Each university school or college sets its own GPA requirements for students to be eligible to receive the distinction.

To view an online listing, visit https://registrar.wisc.edu/deanslist/.

Here are the students from your circulation area who have received this honor. Wilbraham, MA

Farrah Kanorwalla, Col of Agricultural & Life Sci, Dean's List

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GIRLS from page 9

before sophomore Tessa Garcia (8 points) also made a lay-up down at the other end of the court.

It was the Lady Tigers final points of the opening half.

The Lady Falcons pulled away with a 3-pointer from senior Lyric Nelson, which were her only points, a pair of free throws from junior Ainsley Holden (5 points) and an O'Brien inside hoop, which made the score 17-9 at half-time.

Mills began the second half with an inside basket before Minnechaug put together a 14-2 run.

With 6:40 left in the third quarter, senior Ava Manning drained a 3-pointer from the left side giving Minnechaug a double digit lead (21-11) for the first time.

Holden hit another shot from beyond the three-point arc with two minutes left increasing the Lady Falcons lead to 31-13.

The Lady Falcons, who entered the final eight minutes of the game with a com-



Turley photo by Gregory A. Scibelli

Elizabeth Woytowicz looks to get the ball to the other side of the court.

manding 34-18 lead, never allowed the Lady Tigers to get any closer than eleven points the rest of the way.

Wilson and her Lady Falcons teammates were slat-

ed to face Bishop Ludden High School of Syracuse, New York at SICS in another Hoophall Invitational game the following day.

A crossword puzzle grid with letters filled in. The letters are: A T P, T U L A, O V A L, M A N E T, I L E U S, C U T T H E M U S T A R D, G I B B I R S, I R A R E M, N N E S A T, P A S S E S T H E B U C K, D E V I S O R, T O P H I, A R C A D E S, H A R A N, B A T H E S, S O L D, A P I O S, T O K E, S E N S, T Y R.

## This week in recreation

### Falcon Girls Lacrosse Signups for the 2026 Spring Season

WILBRAHAM - Does your daughter want to be part of the fastest growing youth sport in the United States? You are in luck! Registration opened for the 2026 Falcon Girls Youth Lacrosse program on January 13 and will run through March 10. The Falcon Girls Lacrosse Association (FGLA) will be fielding teams for the following age groups this season: Mites K, Lightning (grades 1-2), Bantams (grades 3-4), Juniors (grades 5-6), and Seniors (grades 7-8). This is a Wilbraham Parks and Recreation Department (WPRD) program that is co-managed by the FGLA. The program has a strong history and is supported by a small group of dedicated volunteers. We are open to players and volunteers of all abilities. The goal is to expose your daughter to the dynamics of team play, build/enhance coordination and the fundamentals of lacrosse in a competitive and fun environment. Fun fact, the odds of a female High School lacrosse athlete playing for an NCAA Division I school are 23:1. The best odds of all female collegiate sports! Odds of placement on any college roster are 7:1, only second to

Ice Hockey at 5:1. (<https://scholarshipstats.com/varsity-yodds>)

Your daughter can be signed up in-person at the WPRD office located at 45c Post Office Park Wilbraham, MA. Registration fees are: Mites \$125, Lightning \$150, Bantam \$175, Juniors \$200, Seniors \$200. This will include a custom FGLA uniform that the players can retain post season for Bantams-Juniors-Seniors. Mites and Lightning players will be provided with a shooter shirt and a stick that they can keep post season. All other level players are asked to provide their own girls lacrosse stick. A face mask and mouth guard will be required for all levels. USA Lacrosse has an equipment guide that can be found on their website: [www.usalacrosse.com/equipment](http://www.usalacrosse.com/equipment)

We are scheduling 2-3 tournaments for the season. Tournament play has been very well received in the past and is a fantastic opportunity to expose our players to other organizations outside of our league (CT Valley Youth Lacrosse). Your daughters will also have a chance to warm up with the "big kids" on the turf at Minnechaug during the season and have some game time on the new high-tech playing surface we are so fortunate to have. Regular season play for the Junior and Senior teams will be held on the incredi-

ble grass surface at the Spec Pond Recreation Facility.

Additionally, there will be (3) indoor clinics for Bantam, Junior, and Senior age divisions held on Tuesday 3/3, 3/10, 3/17 at Soccer City, 2041 Boston Road Wilbraham (Field # 3 - the back indoor field). Start time is 4:30 PM and these will run for 1-hour. Cost is \$20/player/session (collected on site at the clinics) and all participants should be previously signed up as a Falcon Girls Lacrosse player through the WPRD. FGLA will have an insurance waiver form available for any athletes looking to feel out the sport prior to signing up and making a team commitment for the season. This is a great opportunity to introduce the game to new athletes, dust off the sticks for returning players and meet some of the coaching staff.

FGLA is also planning an Exhibition Day to generate interest in the program for all levels. This will include demonstrations from collegiate level players and coaches, radar gun "fastest Shot" competitions, and other activities. Date is planned for pre-season/early March. Exact date TBA.... stay tuned!

Any questions can be directed to the FGLA through the WPRD and financial assistance can be provided if this is an obstacle for any aspiring players.

## Hampden Parks and Recreation announces upcoming 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 at Hampden Town Hall, Classroom E2

Cost: \$180 | Register: through Feb. 10

### Youth February Vacation Futsal Clinic

An energetic, skill-building futsal and street soccer clinic led by FSS (Futsal and Street Soccer) coaches. Open to all experience levels.

Feb. 16 to 20 | 9 a.m. to Noon at Hampden Parks & Recreation Gym

Cost: \$150 | Register: through 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

**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 [parke@hampdenma.gov](mailto:parke@hampdenma.gov) or (413) 566-2151 Ext 108.

## Wilbraham Women's Club to award scholarships

WILBRAHAM - The Wilbraham Women's Club will be awarding \$1,500 scholarships to graduating seniors who are residents of Wilbraham or Hampden and who will be attending a four year college or university this

fall. The criteria considered are academic achievement, character, and leadership. Applications are available in the Guidance Office at Minnechaug Regional High School. For those attending

other high schools, please email Mrs. Rae Teed ([rae.teed@gmail.com](mailto:rae.teed@gmail.com)) and an application can be mailed to you. All applications must be postmarked by March 20, 2026 to be considered.

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**BOOSTER CLUB**  
from page 1

transportation this past fall for fall athletics.”

“It was a little bit more anticipated than past years based on the lack of drivers that we were originally not anticipating at the start of the fall season and we had to do a quick change-up in terms of outsourcing a lot more this year than we have in the past,” Burndrett said. “This year alone, we had to coordinate 18 different away contests in terms of whether it was Coach Bus companies, other yellow bus companies, whatever was made available for us kind of within the week of the change.”

Burdrett added how multiple lower-level games had to be canceled “due to zero availability” and to “reschedule over 39 away contests to move back times or move back dates to accommodate what that could accommodate for us.”

“But, not every school can move days and times and venues at call or at request. So,

the booster club has donated \$6,200 to help offset the fall transportation budget,” Burndrett said.

Next was pool equipment, with Burndrett noting it’s 15 years old with the panels in the touch pads “in dire need of replacement.”

“The estimated cost for the overall pool pad replacement is \$8,000. Booster Club is donating \$3,000 to help offset the cost of the pool pad replacements. \$1,500 coming directly from the booster club and \$1,500 coming from the Swim Fundraising Account, which is within the booster club,” Burndrett said.

Lastly, the volleyball programs for a service machine.

“It’s a lot less movement for the coach. She can, now, actually instruct rather than just serve ball after ball after ball over the net and not be able to pause and give those coachable moments to our student athletes,” Burndrett said.

Burdrett ended with this. “With the total donations for this month of just under \$25,000, these contributions

demonstrate strong community support for Minnechaug athletics. They address critical needs in transportation, medical services, facility maintenance and equipment,” Burndrett said.

School Committee Member Sean Kennedy asked about the fall transportation, thanking the booster club for the donation.

“What was the full cost in 2025 of the fall transportation?” Kennedy said.

Burdrett said he could look up the number.

When Kennedy next asked what the percentage of the \$6,200 is of that, Burndrett said he calculated the 18 trips that were not accommodated.

“We covered a 66%, they did a 33% cover type of donation,” Burndrett said.

Superintendent Dr. John Provost asked a clarifying question.

“So, are you saying that the impact of LPVEC not being able to provide transportation for your teams was about \$18,000 for the fall’s? That would be three times the amount of the donation?” Pro-

vost said.

Burdrett replied he’d have to review it, but said “roughly, yes.”

“Even with outside yellow bus companies, you’re looking at least quadruple the price of what LPVEC would accommodate. When they’re available, they’re great. The cost is super low,” Burndrett said. “Going into this school year, it was understood that it would be 2:45 bus departures. We were able to accommodate that the first week and a half, and then, based on the lack of bus drivers available, we then had to pivot in the middle of the season to 4 p.m. or later bus departures, and that’s 40 different contests that we had to change as best as possible. Unfortunately, other schools don’t have lighting like we do, other schools don’t have turf like we do. So, in the past, I was aware of it well in advance to move dates around when we could. This year was just kind of an anomaly based on what we thought and what ended up occurring.”

All four donation requests were carried unanimously.

**OBITUARY**

**Robert Joseph Bready**



Robert Joseph Bready, of Monson, passed away peacefully on January 19, 2026, at Life Care Center of Wilbraham, surrounded by his daughter, Kristal, who was his caregiver. He was 87 years old.

Robert was born in Springfield on June 26, 1938, the son of the late Joseph and Lillian (Nash) Bready. He was raised in Springfield, and a graduate of the Springfield school system. Robert had an honorable discharge from the United States Army in 1962. He continued his education at Western New England College, where he earned his bachelor’s degree in engineering. After graduating from college, he met his wife and moved to Somers, CT where they made their first home. They raised their children in Ware, MA. While living in Ware, he served on the police department as a special police officer and was the tax assessor for several years. Robert was employed for many years as a Senior Project Manager with the Physical Plant at UMass Amherst, where he was known for his dedication, professionalism, and strong work ethic. In 2000, he and his wife retired on the Cape where his love for golf took off. Robert was also an avid Red Sox and Patriots fan. After his wife, Roberta, passed away he moved back up to Monson to be near his daughter, which is where he met his girlfriend, Shirley, and spent many years with her.

In his free time, Robert enjoyed golfing and playing bluegrass music with his cousin, Pat. He also found simple joy in the occasional scratch ticket. He was a proud member of the Mason-

ic Lodge where he was a past master of Eden Lodge, an organization that held special meaning to him. He was a member of the Shriners and served on the director’s staff.

In addition to his parents, Robert was predeceased by his beloved wife, Roberta J. (Rice) Bready; his two brothers, Richard and Joseph Bready; and his girlfriend, Shirley Connors.

He is survived by his two daughters, Kristal S. Bready and her fiancé, Billy Manegre of Monson and Sharon Carey of Skokie, IL; his five grandchildren, Lily, Matthew and Sean Carey (“The Trips”) and Jacob and Travis Rock; his former son-in-law, Dan Carey (Terri) of Sturtevant, Wisconsin; he also leaves his cat, Cecil at home, along with extended family and friends who will miss him dearly.

His daughter, Kristal, would like to thank the staff at Lifecare Center for the endless phone calls and support throughout his time there. She would also like to thank all the staff at D’Amour Cancer Center, including Gary, who was the chocolate dealer for “Chocolate Bob.”

Family and friends are invited to gather on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, from 1 to 2 p.m. at the Byron Keenan Funeral Home and Cremation Tribute Center, 1858 Allen Street, Springfield, MA., followed by Masonic Service and Funeral Home Service. A private burial will be held at a later date in Hillcrest Park Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital.

**CONTRACT** from page 1

paraprofessional at Stony Hill Elementary School, who told the School Committee how the room was filled with their children’s favorite teachers and are “mentors, they shape our children’s minds, they are people our children look up to and confide in.”

“Teachers are professionals; teachers shouldn’t have to beg for raises. Treat them as professionals. Pay them a competitive salary. In the last few years, more responsibilities have been added on to paraprofessionals in the district. We sub for teachers due to a shortage of substitutes,” Lee said. “I don’t mind subbing for the teachers I work with directly under. Then, I can still keep an eye on the students I pursue with IEPS. However, it is very difficult to catch our students up that we provide services to when we sub for other teachers.”

Lee added how other needs are also covered by paras.

“We support teachers and students by providing instruction, mentoring behavior, working one-to-one with students or with small groups, especially those with IEPs. We reinforce lessons, help manage classrooms, we ensure positive, effective learning environment. We work under the supervision of professional teachers, extending the teachers’ reach, helping all students access learning,” Lee said. “Paraprofessionals shouldn’t have to pay for raises. Treat us better. Pay us a competitive salary. 200 days without a contract. HWRSD School Committee, do better.”

Among the students was Irene Chen, a senior at Minnechaug Regional High School, who wanted to emphasize “how much our teachers do for us,” and “often, it’s beyond what’s required of them.”

“Before the schedule change, Mr. Labadorf arrived to school as early as 6:30 in the morning to help students one-on-one. Ms. Miracle, the

only calculus teacher in the schools, stays around 4:30 p.m. on extra help days,” Chen said. “As I am part of a self-formed band with two other students, Mr. Ingram, who consistently stays after school to support us with music even though it’s not school-related, and Ms. Raffaele, our Asian Cultural Club advisor, paid out of her own pockets for our Lunar New Year decorations so our students could feel celebrated and felt represented by their culture. And there’s so much more that are unmentioned.”

Chen said these actions reflect “a pattern of dedication, care and commitment that defines our teachers at both Minnechaug and all of HWRSD.”

“And like Ms. Miracle said, you’ll never find another group of teachers that care so much for their students,” Chen said. “And once again, we as the students of Minnechaug and all of HWRSD ask you to truly acknowledge what our teachers do every single day and show where it matters most. By settling a fair contract.”

Chen then mentioned student outcomes, explaining that everyone is here “to show these amazing teachers are the work of our teachers throughout every school through the HWRSD district.”

“Supporting our teachers is not optional. It’s an investment in the student and, also, the future of this community,” Chen said.

Laila Hosnander is a recent graduate of Minnechaug and the daughter of a teacher, sharing that a school “is not defined by hallways or test scores,” but “by the people who refuse to give up on students inside of it.”

Hosnander reflected on the teachers who changed her life and helped her to stay in school during very difficult times, pursue her dreams of becoming a musician and having a safe space in classrooms.

“As many of us know,

the music program is often the first to face budget cuts and when they happen, it’s unfortunate. These programs are crucial for development of our children and as a creative outlet,” Hosnander said. “Our teachers need a fair and equitable contract not only because they deserve it, but because they go above and beyond every single day to change the lives of students. As the daughter of a teacher, myself, I see how hard they work and how much they sacrifice to ensure the success of their students as many believe children are our future, and without teachers they are nothing.”

Hosnander said she is “living proof that when teachers are supported, students don’t just learn, they survive.”

“I am here today because my teacher showed up for me when I couldn’t show up for myself, and now it’s our responsibility to stand up for the people who stand up for our students every single day,” Hosnander said.

Dr. Georgina Trebbe, the MRHS licensed library teacher and HWEA vice president for the high school, noted how in 2013, “headlines celebrated the contract that restored critical teaching positions,” but “didn’t show the cost.”

“Educators absorbed the district’s financial pain, accepting a 1% COLA, forgoing staff increases, taking furloughs and paying more for healthcare. We didn’t just do work here. We partnered with you, the previous School Committee to keep the district afloat,” Trebbe said. “For many of us who have been here since 2013—and most of us here have—our history is defined by doing more with less. Pink slips, program cuts and band-aid technology. At times, we see the capital needs of our buildings not as line items, but as our daily reality.”

Trebbe said it was perplexing “to see the district’s share of town budgets fluctuate, knowing that even 1%

shift has a detrimental impact to our classrooms.”

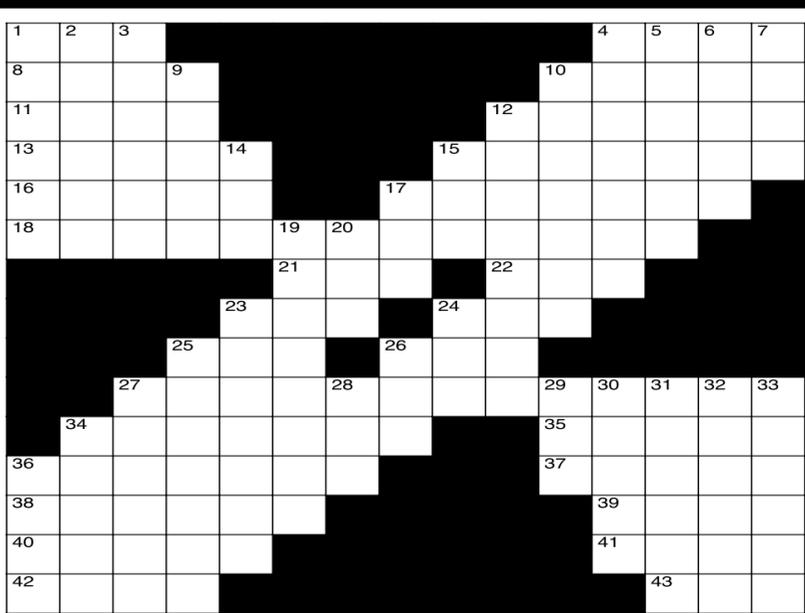
“We, the educators of this district are asking this committee to be the one. Be the one that moves beyond the word ‘partner’ and into the action of partnership. We rely on you to be our voice before the towns. It is time for a recalibration. Last year, town leaders asked for tangible goals to justify funding. Let’s see those goals now,” Trebbe said. “We are asking you to be the champions of our school district who finally defend a budget that provides a living wage and a strong future for our schools.”

To hear more comments, check out the meeting recording on YouTube by looking up “Erin Dowding” and the HWRSD 1.22.26 School Committee Meeting.

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**CLUES ACROSS**

1. Racket sport pros
4. Make tea
8. City South of Moscow
10. Spanish bullfighting term
11. Egg-shaped
12. Could not remember
13. French modernist painter
15. Persons
16. Painful intestinal obstruction
17. Professions
18. Is up to the task
21. Wood or metal bolt
22. Tax collector
23. A way to save for the future
24. Georgia rockers
25. Midway between

**CLUES DOWN**

1. Type of bomb
2. South Pacific islands
3. Celestial body
4. Negotiates
5. Consider in a specified way
6. Type of group in organic chemistry
7. Buddhist monasteries
9. Inhabitant of Bering Sea island
10. Body part
12. Milestone birthday
14. Thyroid-stimulating hormone
15. More (Spanish)
17. Chicago ballplayer
19. Leaves a place

20. Cannot be found
23. One’s internal body parts
24. Tell on
25. North American peoples of southwest
26. Soviet Socialist Republic
27. Extract used for jams and jellies
28. Greek goddess of the dawn
29. Old English letter
30. A way to exaggerate
31. Get up and leave
32. “Boardwalk Empire” character
33. More generous
34. Hanging cloth used as a blind
36. Ancient Greek sophist

**HIKING** from page 6

waited until we retired. Had we waited for ‘some day’ to arrive.

I implore you to not allow your age, fitness level, current circumstances, past failures or ANYTHING ELSE dictate what you are capable of! I encourage you to chase the dream, seize the opportunity and never live regretting what could have been if only you had taken the chance. We have but one wild and crazy life. TODAY is the day to go out and LIVE it.

Tom and I have lived life to the absolute fullest over the past 10 years. Adventuring on weekends and vacations from work. But for one of us, at least, life is opening up to even more possibilities and opportunities. I’m thrilled to

announce that after dedicating fifty years of his life to his career, Tom completed his final day as a working man on

the last day of 2025! See you in the wild places, my friends!

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# Holyoke Community College scholarship season open for 2026-2027

HOLYOKE - The Holyoke Community College Foundation is now accepting scholarship applications for the 2026-2027 academic year.

The application deadline is Friday, March 13, 2026.

Last year, the HCC Foundation awarded 410 scholarships worth about \$364,000 to 379 incoming, current, and transferring HCC students. Some students received multiple scholarship awards. The average scholarship award is typically around \$900.

"The scholarship program is the flagship initiative of

the HCC Foundation, and it reflects the incredible generosity of our donor community,"

said Amanda Sbriscia, vice president of Institutional Advancement and executive director of the HCC Foundation. "Every scholarship tells two stories - one of a donor who believes in the power of education, and one



of a student whose path forward is made possible by that belief."

Students must be currently enrolled at HCC or have been accepted for the upcoming academic year to be eligible for scholarships.

Applicants only need to fill out a single online form to be automatically matched with the scholarships they are most qualified

to receive. There are scholarships for new students, current students and students transferring to other institutions, scholarships based on financial need, scholarships for students in specific majors, scholarships for residents of certain communities, and scholarships that recognize academic achievement.

"Last year's 410 scholarship awards represent 410 opportunities for students to focus on their studies rather than financial stress," said Sbriscia. "We're proud to continue this tradition of sup-

porting HCC students as they work toward their goals."

To view scholarship opportunities and begin the application process, please go to: [www.hcc.edu/scholarships](http://www.hcc.edu/scholarships).

The HCC Scholarship Resource Center, on the first floor of the Donahue Building (Room 158), is open Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., to help current and incoming students navigate the process of applying for scholarships.

The HCC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) that works to ad-

vance the college's mission, vision, and values. Founded in 1968 as the Friends of Holyoke Community College, in response to a devastating fire that forced the college to rebuild on a new campus, the Foundation now manages assets of more than \$20 million, the largest community college foundation endowment in Massachusetts.

Questions should be directed to the HCC Foundation office at 413-552-2182, or by email to [scholarships@hcc.edu](mailto:scholarships@hcc.edu).



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*Valentine's Day*  
♥ SATURDAY, FEB. 14TH ♥  
We will be serving special Valentine dishes & cocktails!  
♥ Make your reservations today! ♥



**CALL TODAY!  
413-566-8015**

**GIO'S LOUNGE**  
Beer - Wine - Spirits - Cocktails  
*Extended Hours for Lounge*  
Keno & Lottery Available  
**ENJOY ALL THE GAMES IN OUR LOUNGE!**

**COME DINE WITH US!**  
Gourmet Pizzas • Grinders  
Giant Calzones • Seafood  
Salads • Wings & More

**Order from Gio's For Your BIG GAME Watch Party!**

Playoff Games, the Big Game and March Madness.

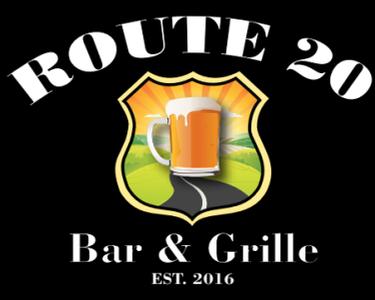
Visit Our Website to Enroll In Our **NEW CUSTOMER LOYALTY REWARDS PROGRAM!**

9 Allen St., Hampden Mini Mall • Hampden, MA (413) 566-8015  
Open 6 DAYS CLOSED TUESDAYS | [www.giospizzeria.com](http://www.giospizzeria.com)

**JOIN US FOR LUNCH!**  
Friday, Saturday, Sunday  
LIVE MUSIC!!!  
Every Friday & Saturday • Visit Facebook For Lineup

**BOOK YOUR NEXT FUNCTION WITH US!**  
For more information contact Lori Atkinson  
413-566-8324 • [lacucinagreenhouse@gmail.com](mailto:lacucinagreenhouse@gmail.com)

See our website for our Banquet & Catering Menu  
[lacucinahampden.com](http://lacucinahampden.com)  
Mon.-Thurs. 3-9pm, Fri. & Sat. 11:30am-10pm & Sun. 11:30am-9pm  
**LOUNGE OPEN & PIZZA 7 DAYS**  
**BAR OPEN LATE!**



**JOIN US**  
*Valentine's Weekend*  
WE'LL HAVE **SWEET** dinner specials & **LIVE MUSIC** w/Lisa Martins!  
(NO RESERVATIONS REQUIRED)

**JOIN US FOR THE BIG GAME**  
**Sunday, Feb. 9th**  
Pre-Game Tail Party!  
Specially Priced Apps  
2-6pm in the bar

**LIVE MUSIC!**  
Thursday 1/29 Frank Serafino  
Friday 1/30 Eagle Eyes  
Saturday 1/31 Deanna Rae  
*Meet up with friends at Route 20!*



**SERVING LUNCH** Thurs. - Sat. 11:30 Sun. 10:30  
**BRUNCH** Sundays 10:30-2:30 PLUS OUR REGULAR MENU UNTIL 8PM

**\$18 PRIME RIB NIGHT EVERY TUESDAY**  
Dine In Only • While Supplies Last

**WINE DOWN WEDNESDAYS \$20**

**APPY HOUR THURSDAYS 4-7:30PM!**  
Specially Priced Apps & Live Music

**\$20 STEAK N' BREW EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT!**

**2341 Boston Rd., (Rt. 20), Wilbraham, MA**  
**413.279.2020**  
[route20barandgrille.com](http://route20barandgrille.com)

SERVING: TUES. & WED. 4-9PM  
THURS. 11:30AM-9PM • FRI. & SAT 11:30AM-9:30PM • SUN. 10:30AM-8PM  
WITH EXTENDED BAR HOURS EVERY NIGHT  
RESERVATIONS ACCEPTED FOR PARTIES OF 6 OR MORE **KENO**

Advertise Your Pub or Restaurant in Your Local Community Newspapers On The "Let's Go Out" Page. Email Jocelyn at [jwalker@turley.com](mailto:jwalker@turley.com) for Details.