

Budget Roundtable:

The final departments

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
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HAMPDEN - The Times is wrapping up its full breakdown of the Jan. 12 Budget Roundtable discussion with the Selectboard and the Advisory Committee.

In the last few weeks, readers have learned about the budget projections and capital needs requests for the police, fire and highway departments, the senior center, the library, Health and Building Departments, the Conservation Commission, the Planning Board, Cemetery Commission, the Parks & Rec Department and the Facilities Department.

For the schools, check out this week's edition.

Town Clerk/Collector

Town Clerk Eva Wiseman said she didn't see anything on the horizon to note.

"Things are just I hope to be about normal," Wiseman said. "But the elections, we're going to be talking about the election budget, but we do have two additional elections coming up this year. We have state elections for fiscal '27 that we didn't have this year. So, that's going to hit the elections budget, but other than that I really don't see anything."

Town Accountant

Town Accountant Elise Diemand shared she's "pretty much on budget for everything in my department" and expects "that will be no increases for next year."

On Chair John Flynn's question of an audit, Diemand replied one was recently added.

Town Treasurer

Town Treasurer Richard Patullo shared "there's a few extra expenses we had to pay."

"We had to buy a few things when we moved into

Please see **BUDGET**, page 5



Photo courtesy of April Beston

April Beston in a family photo after being installed as Rotary District Governor to serve Rotary International District 7890.

April Beston serving as Rotary District Governor

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - April Beston, a resident of Wilbraham, is currently serving as district governor for Rotary International District 7890, which covers Western Massachusetts and most of Connecticut.

Beston, a member of the

Ludlow Rotary Club for 15 years, has served as its treasurer—which she still does today—and its president.

"Around the same time, I served as treasurer of the district. Kind of stepped up through the roles there and eventually was approached to be district governor and decided it was something I would love to do and took on that role," Beston said.

"The role is a progressive role, so you learn for about two and a half years before becoming district governor, so it's a learning path. So, I've been on that learning path for about three years now and now, finally, I'm in the midst of my district governor here and doing that and loving it. So, it's

Please see **BESTON**, page 11

Board discusses HWRSD facilities management

By Kristin Rivers
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Committee stood on this request.

Hampden Wants More Info

HAMPDEN - The Selectboard discussed a request on Feb. 3 to enter a discussion with the town of Wilbraham about the potential benefits and challenges of turning facilities maintenance functions over to the towns.

This topic first came up on Jan. 27 when the Wilbraham Select Board discussed a request presented by the Finance Committee to review transferring the facilities management of HWRSD buildings to the town of Wilbraham Facilities and Maintenance Department.

The Finance Committee had also voted unanimously on Jan. 21 to ask the Wilbraham Select Board to approve representatives to discuss with the School Committee to have the towns of Hampden and Wilbraham take over the facilities management of the schools inside the school district.

After much discussion at their Jan. 27 meeting, the Wilbraham Select Board agreed to have Wilbraham Town Administrator Nick Breault reach out to Hampden Town Administrator Brian Domina and Superintendent Dr. John Provost to get ideas on where the Selectboard and School

"I want no part of it. It's too nebulous. There's lease agreements that the region is responsible for doing the repairs up to \$30,000 on the schools. Apparently, there's been very little maintenance done in any of the schools," Davenport said. "So, it seemed to me that this is something we don't need to be involved in, or I would vote no to be involved in it."

Davenport noted how, in the past 10 years, Hampden spent \$134,000 on maintenance for the schools, "which the region should have probably paid for, but we put extra money in."

"We've been paying for that to maintain our portion of the building. So, I think that's where we are. I think this has all been generated by the fact of the problems at the middle school," Davenport said. "I don't know if the region has a maintenance budget, but it would seem to me that if you have these schools, either the custodian or the princi-

Please see **HWRSD**, page 8

Slaughter presents FY27 budget reductions

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and Human Resources Dr. Douglas Slaughter shared FY27 budget reductions during the Feb. 4 School Committee meeting.

Slaughter explained how two things "changed most significantly" the day before and after the recent release of

Gov. Maura Healey's FY27 budget.

The first was the projection for Chapter 70 state aid, which Slaughter had projected for \$100 per student. However, the governor's budget listed \$75 per student.

"That reduction from \$100 per student for Whole Harmless Type A to our district reduces our revenue by about \$68,000," Slaughter said.

The second projection was on health insurance.



For the current fiscal year, Slaughter said he had projected a 13% increase and the district received advice from advisors to the Scantic Valley Regional Health Trust "that it might be as high as 17%."

He added the trust met the day before and "debated for quite a while about what we should choose for our rates for the coming years."

"I think there were some

Please see **REDUCTIONS**, page 13

There's NO business like SNOW business



Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Emily

Killian LaBarre age 8, went snow tubing at Wilbraham & Monson Academy with friends.

Community shares their snow photos

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM/HAMPDEN - As the community continued digging out of the Jan. 25 snowstorm, many community members and residents shared their snow photos with the Times.

Readers may have seen our first spread in last week's center spread section, featuring fun photos of children playing in the snow, dogs enjoying their first big snow of the season—or for the very first time ever—some beautiful nature shots after the snowstorm left the area and more.

This week, we have even more that were sent in from you, the community and our readers.

Enjoy more snowstorm photos and, again, a huge thank you to everybody in Wilbraham and Hampden for sending in photos of your kids, families, dogs, nature photos and more to provide a snapshot of not just a winter wonderland in New England, but one of the bigger snowstorms this area has had in some time.

Whenever a snowstorm takes place throughout the winter, readers—and the community—are encouraged to share their snow photos any time with the Wilbraham-Hampden Times at krivers@turley.com. They may appear in a future edition.

Thanks again all and stay safe out there!

Photo courtesy of Barbie Rose

Barbie Rose shared this fun family photo outside in the snow.



SEE MORE SNOW PHOTOS ON PAGE 5.

School Committee shares thoughts on FY27 budget

By Kristin Rivers
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WILBRAHAM - The School Committee shared its thoughts on FY27 budget reductions on Feb. 4, which concerned the decrease in Chapter 70 state aid and health insurance impacts.

To learn more, check out this week's edition.

Superintendent Dr. John Provost shared the state budget process was not done yet, but expressed disappointment in the numbers released by Gov. Maura Healey's budget.

"Many people in this room were part of an effort to notify the governor and legislature of the dire fiscal consequences of towns and districts all across this Commonwealth. I hoped that would generate some more positive momentum starting the state budget process, but it seems like it hasn't because basically started the same place we were last year," Provost said. "However, the House and Senate did add money to the state budget and Chapter 70, in particular, that is the one that's most important for us."

Provost noted other funding programs funded at a higher level were reimbursement programs—which he appreciated—but it means "money that we receive next

year through fully funding, we won't be able to spend until the following year."

"Which really doesn't help us with the crisis of next year," Provost said.

Provost said there was opportunity for advocacy with the State House and Senate as "that is probably the place where we can pick up some more money."

"I don't think it's going to be enough to bridge the hypothetical gap you put on the table, but it is a place where I'm certainly going to focus my efforts and try and get more revenue," Provost said.

Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and Human Resources Dr. Douglas Slaughter said the other conversation that would need to be had—along with feedback from the committee—is "leveraging of certain other resources we have," including E&D.

"The amount that I've put on to this sheet is \$700,000. That's not the entirety of E&D. I would strongly recommend against using all E&D. However, it is a choice about how much we choose to use and how much we leave in our account to carry us in a subsequent year," Slaughter said.

Another item was school choice revenues, as an amount is held from one year to the next "to help us in times of good or bad."

"That may be another area we would tap into to help provide support. So, as we weigh the trade-offs of leveraging those resources, and what reductions or edits we make to our budget, that'll be part of the conversation that we need to have," Slaughter said. "But, those are one-time money, so the thing that it does is it only solves the problem for the coming year. It doesn't solve it systemically, but it does and

can be a help in providing more time."

Sean Kennedy said he would have a hard time "having to lay off an individual when we have money in the bank."

"I think we need to just use all of it to keep as many people on as long as you can keep them on. I mean, that's what makes the school system great. Students and parents and our administrators and teachers and paras. You don't have someone teaching the kids, we're not a school," Kennedy said.

Vice Chair Dr. Michael Tirabassi shared another problem, he thought, was the misuse of E&D for operating expenses.

"Because E&D is essentially the same as free cash for the towns. It's basically, at the end of the year, you balance the budget. If you did a good job, there's maybe a little bit of money still left in the door, right? And so that gets certified by the state and that sits there, but it's a one-time. So, when you use something like that towards operating expenses, you fund the stuff for a year, but it creates a bigger deficit for the next year because once you spend it, you don't have it the next year," Tirabassi said.

Tirabassi said last year, \$1.25 million from E&D was put into the assessment budget "to make this year's budget," with "a lot of it under direction and pressure from the towns."

"But, we didn't even have that much this year, and so right away we started off with a deficit before insurance costs were raised before inflation, before co, before everything that normally, it's supposed to go up in the school," Tirabassi said.

He also been advocating for "responsible use for E&D"

to "turn it around to cover the cost of capital projects at the regional high school because it is regional money."

"We could and we may end up putting all of E&D into the assessment budget, which is just going to create a bigger hole for the next year, and also leave us in a bit of a predicament if there's unexpected things like cracked asbestos tiles, cracked walls. Stuff happens. We have a big school district and stuff happens and we want to make sure that we're able to deal with it," Tirabassi said.

Timothy Collins shared a ballot question several years back raised "significant money" into public education, but that payment was "stretched out over seven or eight years" by the governor and legislature, followed by tax cuts.

"We raised additional revenue. If those taxes weren't cut, there would be money available to support the vast majority of school districts in this Commonwealth that are underfunded by the state. The most terrible way to fund anything as important as education is the property tax," Collins said. "And there's a limit to that."

Collins encouraged everyone to communicate with state reps and senators and the chairman and members of the House and Senate Education Committees about this.

"Shame on the governor for reducing her Chapter 70 money in times like this. The kind of situation you put School Committees and employees in puts us at odds with one another. We're trying to thread the needle, but the needle is too big and we need help wherever we can find it, and I urge everybody to communicate with the people in the legislature and tell them to do the right thing," Collins said.

HSC February events

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

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 to 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."

HPL February events

HAMPDEN - Here are some upcoming February Teen Programs at the Hampden Library.

Saturday, Feb. 14 at Noon Teen Silent Book Club

Bring your own book, audiobook, graphic novel, etc., or borrow one of ours! We will read quietly for the first 45 minutes and then talk about our books!

Saturday, Feb. 21 at Noon Teen Stitch and Sip

Do you like to crochet, knit, or embroider? Bring your project to work on while you enjoy a tasty mocktail! All skill levels welcome.

All programs are for grades 5-12. To see our upcoming programs, visit hampden-library.org/events.

Stuffed Animal Sleepover at Wilbraham Public Library

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 "stuffedie" 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.

Teen Glow-in-the-Dark Paint Party at the WPL

WILBRAHAM - During winter vacation, teens in grades 6-12 can join us for a Glow-in-the-Dark Paint Party at the Wilbraham Public Library.

On Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 4 p.m., Erin Boughamer of Paint Sip Fun will teach teens to paint "Neon Jellyfish" with glow-in-the-dark paint and step-by-step instruction.

Each teen will receive a glow stick and glow accessories for black light fun. If desired, teens can wear glow attire like white and

neon clothing. Light refreshments of lemonade and water will be available. No experience is necessary, all supplies will be provided, and each participant will take their completed artwork home.

Registration is required and space is limited. To sign up, please contact the library at 413-596-6141, or visit the Event Calendar at www.wilbrahamlibrary.org. This program is sponsored by the Wilbraham Friends of the Library.

Clarification

In our Feb. 5 story about winter events at the Hampden Free Public Library, there was a typo for a name mentioned in the story.

Sue Kendrick is, actually, Sue Kent.

We apologize for the error.

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Budget Roundtable:

• Schools •

By Kristin Rivers
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Human Resources Dr. Douglas Slaughter shared the budgets are on track.

HAMPDEN - As the Times wraps up its coverage of the Jan. 12 Budget Roundtable, there is one more department that needs to be noted.

That department is the schools. Read on for their report to the Selectboard.

The Schools

Superintendent Dr. John Provost explained the plan is for "a level-services light budget," after the reduction of transportation services to a three-tier model.

"The issue was we had very unreliable transportation service last year because it was designed for a number of buses that exceeded the number of drivers that we could hire. So, we went to a three-tier system. It has not been perfect, but has, to a large extent, resolved the problems with transportation and saved \$700,000 in the process," Provost said.

On achievement, Provost listed several, including the first year where students "who were not impacted by a COVID shutdown entered what we know is the testing window," which is grades three through 10; having "nice improvements" on test scores, improvements in middle school for math, increasing access of students to higher-level classes such as AP classes or vocational classes.

"In fact, we learned last Friday that we are going to be named in the National AP Honor Roll, which is an honor that you received by hitting certain metrics for the number of students who take AP classes, the number of students who score threes or better on their AP test, which means that they're essentially college-equivalent and the students who took five or more AP classes," Provost said.

On climate, Provost said there were decreases in student suspensions and expulsions, bullying, increased levels of student reported levels of culture in school, most teams qualifying for post-season play for athletics and the expansion of the music program through increasing class size.

"As we got towards the end of the year, we started to really have some concerns about our physical plant needs at the middle school, in particular," Provost said.

Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and

"We do have two contracts with our largest unions that has some questions as to where that will land. We're in a process of trying to get those finished up, hopefully, the next few weeks. That'll also impact our budgeting for the coming year," Slaughter said. "And so those will have impact on our budgets. Fully 75% of our operating budget is driven by personnel and the cost associated with those with health insurance and other benefits that we have, so how those contracts settle will really make a big difference as to what kind of pressure we have moving forward."

Slaughter said, presently, the goal is "we're trying to build a budget based on what we know at the moment," including health insurance which is "a pretty significant cost for us" and anticipating "a pretty high increase."

"Outside of that, the other challenges. Where state aid is going to come in, what Chapter 70 is going to look like, taking a modest approach to that. Hopefully, some of the conversations that are starting but won't be resolved, I'm sure by the time the budgets get settled about how Chapter 70 formulas might get changed. But, hopefully, those will work in a direction that are going to continue to support our schools," Slaughter said. "The challenge, generally speaking around that, is that the increase in our overall costs go up faster than the amount of state aid goes up, which puts a lot more burden on you guys."

On capital costs, Slaughter noted those were significant and will continue to be refined over coming weeks and work with the town on a set of projects and resources.

His final point focused on the change in number of students as a percentage between Hampden and Wilbraham, explaining how "it has shifted over the last couple years and continues to shift" to where Hampden has "a larger percentage of your budget of the assessment."

"So, you've got additional pressure on your budgets from the increased number of students enrolled as a percentage," Slaughter said. "It's about a 1% and it's shifting in that direction. So that's another added pressure on the overall ask of your community for funding."

Slaughter reiterated a first, full budget draft is still in process and being worked on.



Snowman Contest 2026

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

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

Young snow artists are encouraged to build their best, silliest, most creative snowman and snap a photo featuring the 2026 Snowman Building Contest flyer, which can be found on the club's website at www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org. Once the masterpiece is complete, parents or 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 interested in joining the Wilbraham Junior Women's Club? Visit www.WilbrahamJuniorWomens.org to learn more. You can also contact Barbara Croteau at barbcroteau@gmail.com.

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

Great Decisions returns to the Wilbraham library

WILBRAHAM - Registration has begun for the 2026 Great Decisions Discussion Group at the Wilbraham Public Library. Starting Feb. 4, the group will meet weekly on Wednesdays from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. through March 25.

Each year, Foreign Policy Association selects eight critical issues facing the country to be the subjects of conversation. The topics for 2026 include America and the World: Trump 2.0 Foreign Policy, Trump Tariffs and the Future of the World Economy, U.S.-China Relations, Ruptured Alliances and the Risk of Nuclear

Proliferation, Ukraine and the Future of European Security, Multilateral Institutions in a Changing World Order, U.S. Engagement of Africa, and The Future of Human Rights and International Law.

Participants are encouraged to order a briefing book to read in advance so they can be informed and ready to engage. Briefing books are available on the association's website, fpa.org. One copy of the briefing book will be available at the Service Desk for in-library reading. To register and learn more, visit wilbrahamlibrary.org, or call the library at 413-596-6141.

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WILBRAHAM - Open burning will begin on Jan. 15 and will run through May 1. Daily permits are required

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Art Show at Hampden Senior Center

HAMPDEN - Scantic River Artisans are back with another amazing show. It's the "Big Art Show of Small Works, with works 10"x16" or smaller. Dates for the show are Feb. 14 and 15. Hours on Saturday are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and on Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be a reception with music and refreshments from noon to 2 p.m. on Sunday, with awards presented at 2 p.m. The show will be in the Community Room of the Hampden Senior Center, located at 104 Allen Street.

Scantic River Artisans (SRA) have held numerous shows in the area presenting a diverse range of artistic mediums. The February show will include oil, watercolor, acrylic, pastel, mixed media, and photography. In addition to work you can hang

on your wall, this show will include pottery, metal sculptor, painted glass, cloth and woodworks. All of the works displayed will be for sale. There will also be a silent auction where you can bid on items donated by the artists. Celebrate Valentines Day by buying something for your sweetheart or yourself.

Scantic River Artisans mission is to connect the community through diverse, dynamic, and creative experiences. SRA provides opportunities for local artists of all ages and skill levels to explore, develop, and market their creations. The group has over sixty-five members from Wilbraham, Hampden and surrounding towns.

One of the artists' displaying work is Nan Hurlbert, an award-winning artist and longtime member of SRA. Nan



Nan Hurlbert Sniff

began drawing as a youngster. Over the years she has taken classes and developed skills in oil, watercolor, pastel, and color pencil, in addition to acrylic. Nan likes acrylic be-

cause, "it is so versatile and can achieve so many looks" she adds "it is nontoxic." Nan says, "I paint all subjects, but still life and animals are my favorites." She works mostly from photos she takes or on-site reference drawings.

Painting skills are not the limit of Nan's artistic efforts. In her early life she learned sewing skills and pattern making, ultimately becoming a garment designer, and developing a garment manufacturing company. More recently she is working in jewelry design and she says, "really loving gemstones and metals." Her jewelry company is Tangled Vine Jewelry. Being retired she spends many hours each week on her art passions. Visit the show to meet Nan and many of the other artists and artisans whose work you will see.

For more information about the Scantic River Artisans visit their website at <https://www.scanticriverartisans.com/>



Nan Hurlbert Flower Power



Nan Hurlbert White Petals

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.

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.

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Hampden - Wilbraham Regional School District
The Road to Kindergarten 2026-2027

Parents and Guardians please join us for **The Road to Kindergarten.** This program will address Kindergarten Readiness, Screening, Curriculum, and a typical Kindergarten day.

Date: Thursday, March 5, 2026
Time: 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
Location: Minnechaug Regional High School Auditorium

(In the event of a snow day, it will be rescheduled to Thursday, March 12, 2026.)



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It's all about the SNOW



Photo courtesy of Monty Moriarty
Monty Moriarty's grandson enjoyed a moment observing the snow outside.



Photo courtesy of Robin Fontaine
It wouldn't be a snow day—or two as the community had after this recent snowstorm—without a huge pile of snow and a happy kid.



Photo courtesy of Terri Rough
There's a trampoline here somewhere within the pile of snow.

• SCHOLARSHIPS •

Rotary Club Scholarship applications now available

WILBRAHAM - The Scholarship Committee of the Rotary Club of Wilbraham-Hampden has announced that applications for the 2026 Rotary Club Scholarships are now available in the Counseling/Guidance Departments of Minnechaug Regional High School, Wilbraham & Monson Academy, Pope Francis Preparatory School and LPVEC's Career and Technical Education Center. Applications are due no later than April 1, 2026. The scholarships are available to qualified high school seniors who are residents of Wilbraham or Hampden. The club will award nine scholarships, each in the amount of \$2,000. Applications may also be obtained from Brad Sperry by calling 413-537-4171.

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) and an application can be mailed to you. All applications must be postmarked by March 20, 2026 to be considered.

Wilbraham Junior Women's Club Scholarship

WILBRAHAM - The GFWC Wilbraham Junior Women's Club is pleased to announce the availability of its annual scholarship for graduating seniors at Minnechaug Regional High School. In keeping with the Club's mission to strengthen the community through volunteer service and support of others, a \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded to a student who exemplifies these values and plans to attend a two-year, four-year, or other accredited institution of higher education. Scholarship applications are available through the Minnechaug Regional High School Guidance Office. Completed applications must be postmarked by April 1, 2026 and mailed to Katy Reed, Scholarship Committee, 490 Glendale Road, Wilbraham, MA 01095. Students are encouraged to apply and take advantage of this opportunity to support their postsecondary educational goals.

Scholarship to Space Academy for middle schooler

WILBRAHAM/HAMPDEN - A committee from the Minnechaug classes of 1973 and 1975 would like to announce the opening for applications for a scholarship to the Space Academy in Huntsville, Alabama this summer for a middle school youngster from Wilbraham or Hampden. The application, along with a teacher recommendation, must be received by Monday, March 2, 2026 by mail or email to Linda Voss at inkings@compuserve.com or 1303 N. Ode St., Apt 224, Arlington, Virginia 22209. Applicants will be selected and contacted by our committee and their contact information provided to the Space and Rocket Center to complete the registration for the summer camp.

In honor of Minnechaug graduate Astronaut Dr. Janice Voss, the committee will sponsor a youngster ages 12-14 for the weeklong Space Academy summer camp. Students will be immersed in astronaut training techniques using equipment adapted from NASA's astronaut training program, including the one-sixth gravity chair and the multi-axis trainer. Team building and communication are promoted, as well as technology instruction. The following is the web page devoted to the Janice Voss scholarship on the website of the Space and Rocket Center. Voss was selected for the NASA Space Program in 1991 and flew five missions, traveling a total of 18.8 million miles in 779 orbits over 49 days: <https://rocketcenterfoundation.org/team-members/dr-janice-e-voss/>



Photo courtesy of Kathy Keller Snopek
Kathy Keller Snopek shared this photo of a red cardinal on a tree branch.



Photo courtesy of Lauren Scott
Louie the dog enjoys some playtime in the snow in Hampden.



Photo courtesy of Gabrielle RF
The kiddos on top of a snow hill with big smiles and laughs.



Photo courtesy of Jenny Major Podworski
Daisy (the big dog) and Ellie (the little dog) look at the camera as they check out the snow.



Photo courtesy of Terri Goodrich Chapdelaine
A visitor out and about amidst the snow.



Photo courtesy of Donna Hutchins
Stevie Nicks, the dog, has an adventure getting through the deep snow, but was loving it according to owner Donna Hutchins.

BUDGET from page 1

the new building, but, again, I want to thank everybody who made that move so smooth. I want to thank Herb and certainly Brian—hopefully watching the recording here and knows how much we appreciate that he made that thing work—it was absolutely amazing,” Patullo said. “Andre’s been pretty good. The computers were up and running first day for me.”

Patullo agreed with Flynn that it was going to be “a very difficult budget year.”

“Probably as bad as anything we’ve seen in 10 or 15 years. So, I am very concerned about that. But, we will do what we can do,” Patullo said.

Water Department

John Plaster, the chair of the Water District Commission, said as far as the current budget, “I think we’re okay, but there’s more to come than that.”

“We had to make two connections at ‘25. One was covered and the second one was covered by the new construction that was included, one of the homes that we’re going to hook up. So, it’s already in that quoted budget,” Plaster said. “Coming on this ‘26, we’re going to have a number of customers that are going to come online sometime in the first quarter, and so that’s going to have an impact as far as the meter readers, and so I don’t know what the budget’s going to be. It’s definitely going to be more than what we

have now.”

Flynn noted when the budget was looked at last year, the testing part was cut down “because we anticipated that many of these homes would be on the new service by at least the fourth quarter, if not the third quarter of the fiscal year.”

“You’re waiting for the skid to come in to get the pump house built. That may require testing for the third quarter because it’s not done, but at least the fourth quarter would only be testing the main line at that point,” Flynn said.

Plaster said that was correct.

“They only do the pump testing at the pump station and various other locations in the town. As far as testing all the properties,” Plaster said.

“We won’t have to do that anymore,” Flynn said.

“Right,” Plaster said. After a question from Patullo about the extra hookups, Flynn elaborated that it was in the budget.

“That we would hook up, say, 15 Smith Rd. but all of a sudden their testing showed that they hit the PFAs limit. So, to remediate that, we’re able to hook them up right away. The pipe was already run in front of them,” Flynn said. “And adding one house on the road to the 20-something we were adding was not going to strain the system that we had at this point.”

“Still good,” Plaster said. “At this point, I’m anticipating the first quarter we’ll have the pump house.”

“And there was no real extra expense because it was in the budget to hook that house up. So, it just decreases the number at the end,” Flynn said.

Assessors

MAA Principal Assessor Jane Ferrentino said the Board of Assessors “is right on track” for FY26.

“No major changes or anything like that. Fiscal ‘27, there is a vendor we use to do our permit inspections and home inspections we have to do every 10 years. He is not doing it anymore,” Ferrantino

said. “Sp, I have looked at another vendor to do it. It’ll be a little bit of an increase. Not too bad, but he is local which will help. Other than that, there doesn’t seem like any major changes for ‘27.”

On Flynn’s question about the tax bills and any phone calls, Ferrantino said there have been calls received and people stopping by.

“Which, I’d rather people come in and talk to us about it and understand it more and get educated on what’s going on with everything,” Ferrantino said. “It’s normal this time of year.”



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VIEWPOINTS

SOCIAL SECURITY Matters
By Russell Gloor

Why is my Social Security Retirement benefit so small?

Dear Rusty:

Can you help me understand?

I have paid into Social Security since I started working in 1978. I did have a lot of tax deductions, but I don't understand why I only receive \$350 a month from Social Security.

Signed: Befuddled Senior

Dear Befuddled Senior:

Your Social Security benefit is based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 years over your lifetime that you earned the most while contributing to the Social Security program; however, your benefit isn't based on your contributions to SS. Your average lifetime earnings amount is called your Average Indexed Monthly Earnings," which are adjusted for inflation for years before you turn 60. Your earnings, your net earnings if self-employed, are provided to the SSA by the IRS.

Your AIME is subjected to a formula which calculates your "Primary Insurance Amount," which is the SS benefit you receive if you start benefits in the month you reach your full retirement age. Your personal Full Retirement Age depends on the year you were born which, if you were born in 1960 or later, is age 67. However, if you claim Social Security before reaching your FRA, you will get only a percentage of your PIA, reduced from what you would get if you claimed at your FRA.

For example, if you claimed at age 62, you would only get 70% of the amount you would have gotten had you waited until age 67, or if you claimed at age 63 you would get 75% of your age 67 benefit. The reduction is less as you get closer to your FRA; if you claimed at age 65, you'd get about 87% of your full retirement age amount.

You can see your lifetime Social Security earnings record at your personal "my Social Security" online account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount (you will need to first create that online account), or you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to request an "Earnings Statement" be sent to you. That statement will show your lifetime earnings by year, the 35 highest of which were used to calculate your PIA (your Social Security ben-

efit at your FRA). Generally, your Social Security FRA benefit will be about 40% or less of your average indexed monthly earnings.

So, to recap, your SS retirement benefit isn't based on your contributions to the program; it's based on your average monthly lifetime earnings. If you had less than 35 years contributing to the program, SS would still use 35 years in the benefit formula by using zero dollars in earnings for some number of years, which would result in a smaller AIME.

Thus, if you claimed before your full retirement age of 67, your SS benefit was reduced because you claimed early. And if you had less than 35 years of SS-covered employment, your AIME was less, resulting in a smaller PIA. And that is likely why your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is low.

One other thought to consider: if you are married and your spouse's monthly SS benefit is considerably more than yours (e.g., more than twice as much as yours), you may want to explore your options for spouse benefits.

I hope this explains how your SS benefit is calculated, but if you still question your monthly SS retirement amount, I suggest you first obtain your "Earnings Statement" to review the lifetime earnings SS has on file for you. If there are any discrepancies in your Social Security's earnings record, there are correction remedies available to you. If that is the case, please feel free to contact us again for more information.

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



Participants from Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's first-ever Pickleball Tournament pose after the action on July 20, 2025, at The Picklr in Westfield.

Game On! GSHFH Pickleball Tourney returns March 29 in Westfield

By Brandice J. O'Brien
Marketing and Communications Manager, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity

WEST SPRINGFIELD - It's back and it's on! Get your team together and register for Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's (GSHFH) Pickleball Tournament on Sunday, March 29. The all-day event held at The Picklr in Westfield is sure to serve up kitchen-legal levels of fun.

That's right, we're down with the lingo and we mean this Habitat fundraiser will be all good. How could it not? The round-robin-style event features two-player teams. Play time will be divided into timed sections by skill level to ensure everyone gets worthwhile matchups and court time.

"The game itself is a fun way to get your body moving and is not as intimidating as tennis," said Olga Calligos, GSHFH Homeowner Services manager, who played her first match at last year's tournament. "Players are super welcoming to newbies who don't know what they're doing. It's definitely a community that looks out for one another. I'm still slowly learning the rules, though, because when I played, I just knew I had to hit the ball but not to hit it out of bounds."

We'll start the day at 8 a.m. with beginners on the courts, roll into intermediate play, and finish strong with advanced matches. Tickets are \$50 per person and pre-registration is required. Snacks will be available and bragging rights are up for grabs. Plus, raffle tickets and merchandise are on hand for purchase.

"Pickleball has a way of bringing people together across ages and experience levels," said Bree D'Amours, a member of GSHFH's Board of Directors who's also part of the planning committee. "I love the idea of being a part of an event that's genuinely fun while still promoting Habitat in a meaningful way. If people leave feeling energized,



Kids prove pickleball is an all-ages game at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's first-ever Pickleball Tournament at the Picklr in Westfield on July 20, 2025.



Expert players participate in a volley during Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity's first-ever Pickleball Tournament at the Picklr in Westfield on July 20, 2025

informed, and more connected to Habitat's network, then we've done well."

Greater Springfield Habitat's first pickleball tournament held in July 2025, attracted nearly 50 people, including children and Springfield Thunderbirds mascot Boomer. Among the raffle prizes were a tabletop charcoal grill, gift baskets, pickleball swag, and Funko POP dolls.

"I had some fun and met some great people," said Andy Szalai via a Facebook comment after last year's tournament. "I'm looking forward to this being a tradition."

GSHFH is a housing ministry dedicated to strengthening communities by empow-

ering low-income families to change their lives and the lives of future generations through homeownership and home repair opportunities. This is accomplished by working in partnership with diverse people, from all walks of life, to build and repair simple, decent, affordable housing. Habitat's mission to provide homeownership opportunities to low-income families is unique as it requires partner families to work alongside the community that is reaching out to help them. GSHFH has helped roughly 100 local families realize their dream of homeownership over the last 39 years.

For more information or to register, visit habitatspringfield.org/pickleball

in 1962 and shot during hunting season in Louisiana in 1981.

Christmas Bird Count

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts take place within a 22-day period, there are many state count circles and volunteers must be available. Despite snowy weather, compiler Jon Skinner said of the Groton-Ayer count on Dec. 14, "I was surprised that we were able to scratch our way to 81 species in such snowy conditions. It has to be a testament to the relentless nature of both our team and the birds." Two new species were added 13 black vultures soaring over Lancaster and a killdeer at Devens. Some of the other highlights were evening grosbeak in both Harvard and Groton, red crossbills in Townsend, Lapland longspur

at Fitchburg Airport and in Ayer, chestnut-collared longspur at Fitchburg Airport, American kestrel in Groton, two Baltimore orioles in Groton, eastern Phoebe in Shirley, redpoll in Lancaster and a long-eared owl in Devens. Species seen three days before or after the actual count date and noted as such were chipping sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, Peregrine falcon and sandhill crane.

Bluebird

I received an email on Jan. 26 from Jeffrey Landry. He had a visit from a bluebird on Friday, Jan. 23. He thought it was either the male parent or one of its offspring from a previous summer. He said, "For several years I have called him, 'Sunshine' and he arrived at my feeder on a

Please see **BACKYARD**, page 13

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Letters to the editor should be 350 words or less in length. No unsigned or anonymous opinions will be published. We require letter writers to include his or her town of residence and home telephone number. We must authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions deemed to be libelous or contain unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, defamation of character and offensive language. All unknown or alleged facts and quotations offered by the author need to cite credible, unbiased sources. Send letters to: Editor, Wilbraham-Hampden Times, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069, faxed to 413-682-0013 or via e-mail to krivers@turley.com. The deadline for submissions is Thursday at noon.

Correction Policy

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

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

Election letters to the editor welcome

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

in my BACKYARD
By Ellenor Downer



Male gadwall

On Dec. 20, compilers at the Athol Christmas Bird Count recorded a total of 58 species including a Gadwall, a first time for this species during a Christmas count.

Male Gadwall have grayish-brown heads, sometimes showing cinnamon on the forehead and faint purplish iridescence on the crown. Females resemble female mallards, but they have a thinner, darker bill.

Gadwall nest in tall vegetation near water and show a

preference for nesting on islands. Their choice of nesting location gives them some protection from predators. Female Gadwall produce an egg a day and lay a clutch of seven to 12 eggs. To meet their demand for protein during this stressful time, female Gadwall eat more invertebrates than males during this period in addition to using reserves of nutrients they've stored in their bodies during the winter. Their winter habitat is

fresh and brackish wetlands with abundant aquatic vegetation on which they primarily forage. Gadwall often snatch food from diving ducks as they surface. Gadwall number have increased in North America since the 1980s. This is partly because of conservation of their habitat, wetlands and adjacent uplands.

The oldest known Gadwall was a male, and at least 19 years, 6 months old. He was banded in Saskatchewan

A COMMUNITY GALLERY

Life in &

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

WILBRAHAM HAMPDEN

1,000 Books Before Kindergarten Milestone



Submitted photo and caption Jaime Hageman
Amelia Sucharski recently completed the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten reading challenge!

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Happy 7th Birthday to our princess Amelia!

7 years of light, laughter, kindness, and the most beautiful heart. 7 years of loving you, learning from you, and being amazed by you every single day.

Watching you grow is the greatest gift of my life. You are everything. Mama and Baba love you more than words could ever say.



Clear fire hydrants reminder

Photo and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Fire Department

With the recent snowfall, we kindly ask everyone to ensure that any fire hydrants on or near your property are cleared of snow, debris, and any obstructions. Please clear an area of at least three feet in all directions around each hydrant.



Students win Future City Competition



Submitted photo and caption Bill Wells

The Wilbraham & Monson Academy Middle School won this year's state Future City Competition in Boston on Saturday, Jan. 24. All but one of the kids are local. Future City is an event where students design a city 100 years from now. From the left, Mr. Mark Weber (faculty advisor), Jade Villamaino, Colleen Chesky, Charlie Proctor, Emerson Letendre, Henry Adams, Noelle MacDonald, Lily Hoar, Logan Sheffer, Gonzalo Baz Arroyo.



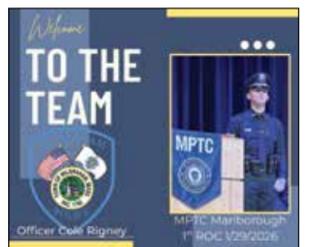
Photos and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Fire Department

WFD assists Ware in fire response

Ladder 1 and Car 2 assisted the Town of Ware at a third alarm structure fire on Feb. 1.



Photos/caption courtesy of Wilbraham Police Department



WPD welcomes Ofc. Cole Rigney

Please join us in welcoming our newest officer, Cole Rigney. Officer Rigney graduated from the Marlborough Academy's 1st ROC last week and will begin field training later this week. Please say Hi should you see him out and about. Officer Rigney is a lifelong Wilbraham resident graduating from Minnechaug Regional High School and looks forward to serving the town with honor and distinction.



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SCHOOLS

HCC 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 supporting HCC students as they work toward their goals."

To view scholarship opportunities and begin the application process, please go to: 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 advance 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.

DEAN'S LIST

Worcester Polytechnic Institute announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

WORCESTER - Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) has announced its Dean's List for academic excellence for the Fall 2025 semester.

The criteria for the WPI Dean's List differ from that of most other universities as WPI does not compute a grade point average (GPA). Instead, WPI students are named to the Dean's List based on the amount of work completed at the A level in courses and hands-on projects.

"WPI's academic programs are rigorous and re-

quire a level of independence beyond what is required in traditional courses. WPI students work on real-world, open-ended problems on campus and in communities around the globe.

Far from being simple academic exercises, the projects students complete have genuine and lasting impacts in our partner communities," said Provost Andrew Sears. "Some of this nation's best and brightest students come to WPI to study engineering, science, business, and the humanities. Those named to the Dean's List have excelled in all of their work, and we are exception-

ally proud of these outstanding students."

The following students were named to the Fall 2025 Dean's List:

William Bao of Wilbraham, class of 2029, majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering

Siena Dansereau of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, class of 2028, majoring in Chemical Engineering

Samuel Manteria of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, class of 2027, majoring in Chemical Engineering

Maggie Michels of Wilbraham, class of 2029, majoring in Computer Science

Molly Olsen of Wilbraham, Massachusetts, class of 2027, majoring in Computer Science and Data Science



HWRSD from page 1

pal or someone every year would say, "Look it. We need this door fixed, we need this window fixed, we need that fixed." I don't know if that happens over there."

Davenport recalled how, in the past, someone would talk to him about any concerns and also noted other recent fixes the town paid for.

"We paid for those and, really, under the agreement, they should have paid 80% of

it," Davenport said.

Davenport again said he was not interested.

"If they want to give us a real proposal, but I have no interest in spending an hour and a half every couple of weeks to talk about some nebulous thing that is going nowhere in the end," Davenport said.

Chair John Flynn agreed.

"It's ambiguous right now. I think from a 30,000-foot view, you could make an argument that well, the town should be able to do it cheap-

er than hiring Hurley & David because they don't need to make a profit. They do it for the cost. I got that," Flynn said. "But then the responsibility and my fear would be like, 'Okay, you're doing all this work for the schools now. You're hiring two more guys because it's basically almost full-time at that point.' So, I don't think we need to be in discussion now. If they came back with something a little more concrete and here's the dollar to you and the dollar

to them. We haven't got a big enough department to participate in the first thing anyhow. I'm still feeling his way through."

Selectboard Member Erick Vanderleeden agreed with his fellow board members, especially if a proposal is drafted and sent to them.

"They can throw an email and draft something up and we can take a look at it and if it seems like something we want to further discuss, we can at that point," Vanderleed-

en said. "But I agree."

"But, we're not saying no. Because we don't know enough about it," Flynn said. "We'll hear more."

School Committee expresses interest

On Feb. 4, the School Committee also discussed this topic at their meeting, with the members expressing interest in the conversation and voicing similar thoughts and concerns on seeking a

proposal and wanting more information on what the idea would look like.

The School Committee then voted 4-2 to show interest in continuing to have this discussion to better understand what the towns are interested in doing, their ideas and plan.

Chair Michal Boudreau said the committee will continue the discussion at a future meeting to be determined.

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SPORTS

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Falcons take down Shepherd Hill

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

DUDLEY—Having played against Western Mass. foes Holyoke and Northampton during the past couple of years, Shepherd Hill girls' varsity basketball coach Maura Hackenson really wanted to add Minnechaug Regional to her team's schedule this season.

Hackenson and her players probably don't want to face the Lady Falcons again in the upcoming Division 2 state tournament.

The Lady Falcons made their first visit to Shepherd Hill Regional High School, which is located down the street from Nichols College in Dudley, last Wednesday night. They didn't have very much trouble posting a 79-25 non-league victory.

"We experienced a lull a couple of weeks ago, but we've been playing very well since that time," said Minnechaug head coach Ryan Minns. "We scouted Shepherd Hill and we felt very good about our chances coming into tonight's game."

Minnechaug (13-3) won nine of their first ten regular season games before losing two of their next three games against Longmeadow and Pittsfield.

The Lady Falcons, who

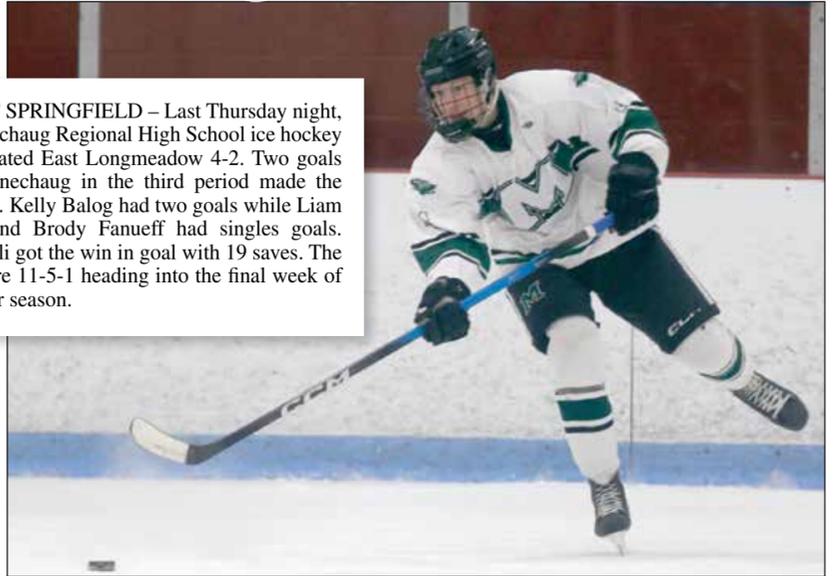
Please see **LADY FALCONS**, page 10

Falcons grab 11th win

WEST SPRINGFIELD – Last Thursday night, the Minnechaug Regional High School ice hockey team defeated East Longmeadow 4-2. Two goals from Minnechaug in the third period made the difference. Kelly Balog had two goals while Liam Faneuff and Brody Faneuff had singles goals. Chase Folli got the win in goal with 19 saves. The Falcons are 11-5-1 heading into the final week of the regular season.



Brody Faneuff looks to make pass to his left.



Nick O'Sullivan clears the puck up the ice.

Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli



Billy Lapalm attempts to sneak a shot in.



Chase Folli looks to defend a shot.



Liam Faneuff holds possession of the puck.

New look for sectional hockey tournament this year

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

WEST SPRINGFIELD—The 2026 Western Massachusetts high school hockey tournament is scheduled to take place from Feb. 16-19.

Six of the seven Berry Division teams will qualify for the Class A tournament.

The Berry Division teams, who are looking to qualify for the Class A tournament, are Westfield, East Longmeadow,

Greenfield, Minnechaug Regional, Longmeadow, Ludlow, and West Springfield.

The Westfield Bombers are the two-time defending Class A champions. They defeated the Greenfield Green Wave, 7-3, in last year's championship match.

All six of the teams in the Fay-Wright Division will be competing in this year's Class B tournament.

Those six teams are Easthampton, McCann Tech,

Amherst, Taconic, Agawam, and Chicopee High School.

Agawam defeated Taconic, 6-1, in last year's Class B championship match.

The top two teams in Class A & B will automatically advance into the semifinals.

Prior to playing the semifinal round, the top-seeded team in Class A will be facing the second-seeded team in Class B. The top-seeded team in Class B will also play the second-seeded Class A team.

Those games will boost the team's state power rankings.

The other four teams in each of the classes will be playing in the quarterfinals on February 16.

The higher-seeded teams will be hosting the quarterfinal matches.

Any of the quarterfinal games played at the Olympia Ice Center in West Springfield will be held during the daytime. The game times on rink

1 will be 11am and 1:30pm. The games on rink 2 will be at noontime and 2:30pm.

The losers of the quarterfinals will be playing non-playoff games against each other.

The Class A semifinals are scheduled to be played at Olympia on Feb. 17. The start times for those two games will be 11am and 1:30pm.

The Class B semifinals are scheduled for Olympia on Feb. 18. The start times for those two games will also be

11am and 1:30pm.

Both Western Mass. finals will be played on rink 1 at Olympia on Feb. 19.

The Class B finals will be held at 5:30 p.m. followed by the Class A final at 8 p.m.

The tickets prices for the semifinals and finals are \$8. Tickets are available through GoFan Only.

There is not a different price for students or senior citizens.



Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Christopher Duby locks up with an opponent at 106 pounds.



Kai Ly holds the advantage at 138.

Chaug wrestling tunes up before tournament



Liam Maher gets the takedown on his opponent.



Ryan Jacobsen locks up with his opponent.



Lincoln Stiles looks to turn over his opponent.



Yusuf Gunaydin starts a match at 215 pounds.

WILBRAHAM – Last Wednesday night, Minnechaug Regional High School wrestling had one of its final meets of the regular season because tournament season begins. The Falcons will send wrestlers to sectional meets and hopefully the state tournament as well coming up over the next couple of weeks.

SPORTS

Railers fall to Lions in OT

TROIS-RIVIÈRES, QC — The Worcester Railers HC (21-17-4-1, 47 pts) fell in overtime to the Trois-Rivières Lions (18-20-1-3, 40 pts) in front of a crowd of 2,793 on Saturday, February 7th, with a final score of 2-3 at the Colisée Vidéotron. The Railers will play Trois-Rivières next in Worcester on Friday, February 13th, with a 7:05 p.m. puck drop.

The Lions nabbed the first goal for the afternoon, as Anthony Beaugard (1-0-1) took advantage of the heavy traffic in front of the Railers net. Worcester answered Trois-Rivières' goal in the third period with two back-to-back goals from Anthony Callin (1-0-1) to tie the game and Ryan Miotto (1-0-1) to take the lead (2-1). Egor Gorionov (1-0-1) claimed the second Lions goal with a slapshot to retie the game. This tally pushed the game into overtime. The final goal of the afternoon came from Lions' captain Morgan Adams-Moisan (1-0-1) for a final score of 3-2 in favor of Trois-Rivières.

Trois-Rivières secured the initial lead of the afternoon

at 16:47 in the first. While Worcester saw a power play turned 5-on-3 chance in the midst of the period, the two-and-a-half-minute advantage would go unfulfilled. Worcester then went on the penalty kill and successfully barred the Lions from capitalizing. As the game neared the 17-minute mark, Trois-Rivières bested the Railers amidst ongoing traffic along Parker Gahagen's crease. While Gahagen remained tied up one side of the net, Anthony Beaugard (9th) played an opportune rebound off of a Railers' skate to score. Shots on goal were 11-8 in favor of Trois-Rivières. The Railers went 0-for-2 on the power play, while the Lions went 0-for-1.

The Lions held on to their 1-0 lead from the first through the second twenty minutes of action. The Railers received the only power play of the period at the 19-minute mark, as Trois-Rivières' Cédric Deruisseaux headed to the box for slashing. Worcester outshot Trois-Rivières 11-10, while the Lions added another infraction to their count for a total of three.

Worcester's scoreless streak ended in the third period. Anthony Callin (15th) broke the clean slate with a breakaway goal at 4:54. Callin charged the Lions' net, where Lavallière could not stop the momentum and pushed himself over the goal line. Just thirty-nine seconds later, Ryan Miotto (10th) capitalized on an attempted clear of the Lions' net by Charles Martin. Martin pushed the puck with a backhanded pass into the awaiting Miotto for another Railers goal. The Lions tied the match with a one-timer from Egor Gorionov (2nd) at 16:44. The tally pushed the game into overtime, the third appearance for the Railers in their past four games. Trois-Rivières ended up with the 3-2 OT win, the final goal a tip on the doorstep from captain Morgan Adams-Moisan (8th), the initial shot from Darick Louis-Jean. Final shots were 39 for Trois-Rivières and 25 for Worcester. The Railers and the Lions each earned one penalty in the third, which brought final totals up to two for Worcester and four for Trois-Rivières.

T-Birds suffer loss to Toronto Marlies

TORONTO, ON - The Springfield Thunderbirds (16-24-4-2) fell by a final score of 5-1 to the Toronto Marlies (23-15-4-3) on Saturday inside Coca-Cola Coliseum in what proved to be one of the nastiest games of the season.

Simmering tensions boiled over from the opening drop of the puck on this night, a result of an altercation in the clubs' prior meeting on Jan. 23. In that contest, Marshall Rifai of the Marlies fought Springfield's Simon Robertsson and threw multiple punches at a vulnerable Robertsson when he was lying prone on the ice. Robertsson has yet to play in a game since.

On this day, Steve Ott chose to start Kale Kessy for the opening puck drop, and Kessy immediately dropped the mitts with Rifai, which lit the fuse for three separate fights between the foes in the opening 15 seconds, resulting in 37 combined

penalty minutes, plus a game misconduct to Toronto defenseman Blake Smith.

Once the dust from the altercations subsided, the Marlies quickly threw their own punches on the scoresheet, beginning with Vinni Lettieri snapping a shot past Vadim Zherenko on the blocker side just 1:12 into the contest, giving Toronto the 1-0 advantage on a 4-on-4 goal.

Springfield's power play had a tough go to begin the night, failing to connect on a three-minute power play from the remnants of Smith's penalty time. Despite outshooting Toronto 15-5 in the period, the T-Birds' deficit grew as Logan Shaw and Michael Pezzetta each beat Zherenko just 1:22 apart, and with just over five minutes left in the first, it was 3-0, and Georgi Romanov was summoned to replace Zherenko in the net. Romanov more than did

his part as the game moved to the second, as Romanov denied 14 Toronto offerings in the period and helped Springfield kill off a Marlie power play in the process.

After nearly 120 minutes without a goal, former Marlie Calle Rosen finally got Springfield on the scoresheet with just 10 seconds left in the period, as he sneaked down the left wing and slammed a shot through Artur Akhtyamov on Springfield's 26th shot of the night to make it a 3-1 game into intermission.

However, the T-Birds did not have any offensive juice left in the tank in the third, and Romanov finally re-learned a power-play goal to Luke Haymes past the midpoint of the third, which restored Toronto's three-goal advantage, 4-1. Romanov finished his terrific night in relief with 26 saves on 27 shots. Bo Groulx would add an empty-netter with the T-Birds skating 5-on-4 with the extra skater to round out the scoring.

This week in recreation

Summer Employment Opportunities

WILBRAHAM - Although we all have winter on our minds, here at the Rec Department we are already planning for Spec Day Camp. With six weeks of camp and over 600 campers, it takes a dedicated staff to make camp a success. This year, we are hiring for both the Camp Director and Assistant Director positions. Both of these positions are incredibly important in the planning and implementation of Spec Day Camp to ensure campers have a memorable experience.

The Spec Day Camp Director should be a minimum of 21 years of age and have completed a course in camping administration or have at least two seasons of previous experience as part of the administrative staff of a recreational camp program for children. The Director is responsible for planning and developing a varied schedule of age appropriate themes and activities for the six weeks of camp. The Director plans the scheduled field trips, secures

all necessary supplies needed to execute the chosen themes,



Alex Soares • Recreation Clerk

provides proper guidance and instruction to campers during the day, and oversees parent/guardian communication. Ad-

ditionally, the Camp Director organizes and runs staff meetings and evaluations for hired staff, works closely with and updates the Parks and Recreation Director, supervises camp counselors, and ensures safety and emergency policies are in place and checks the program area daily for safety, cleanliness and repair.

The Spec Day Camp Assistant Director should be a minimum of 18 years of age and have experience working

with children. Under the direction of the Camp Director, the Assistant Camp Director is responsible for assisting in the running of the day to day program, which may include securing supplies, maintaining attendance and medical records, setting up and cleaning up after the day's events as well as assisting in the coordination of the entire camp program. The Assistant Director assists the specialty aquatic staff as needed, keeps accurate daily attendance, maintains positive relationships with participants and parents at all times, and coordinates arts and crafts activities. In addition to assisting the Camp Director with all camp operations, the Assis-

tant Director is responsible for developing and leading all aspects of the Counselor-In-Training Program.

The Spec Day Camp Director and Assistant Director positions are vital to creating a safe, successful, and diversified Spec Day Camp. Additionally, we are hiring Camp Counselors and Junior Counselors for Spec Day Camp, Lifeguards, and concession staff for the beach. Applications for those interested in applying for any of these positions, are available on the Town of Wilbraham Website at Wilbraham-ma.gov. All applications must be received by Friday, March 6.

FALCONS from page 9

won their third consecutive game against Shepherd Hill, were ranked fourth in the MIAA Division 2 State power rankings.

Forty eight hours before making the trip to Central Mass, the Lady Falcons defeated Valley League rival Springfield Central, 48-40 at home for the first time since 2020. Central was the second

ranked team in the MIAA Division 1 power rankings.

Freshman Zahara Wilson led the Lady Falcons with 15 points in that contest. Wilson, who leads the team this season with over 200 points, scored five points against Shepherd Hill.

"Beating Central the other night was a very big win for us," Minns said. "This is our best team in the three seasons that I've been coaching

the varsity team. We do have a very difficult schedule this year."

Minnechaug also defeated Wachusett Regional, 64-55, who's another Division 1 team, at home in the middle of January.

The Lady Falcons didn't have a letdown against the Lady Rams (8-6), who defeated Holyoke, 50-33, and lost to Northampton, 57-23, earlier this season.

Leading the way offensively for the Lady Falcons in last Wednesday's road win was junior Brie Foisy with a game-high 21 points. She made six of the Lady Falcons 13 three-pointers.

"Brie missed most of the regular season with an injury, so having her back is huge for us," Minns said. "She's an excellent shooter."

Foisy, who joined the varsity squad as a sophomore, reached double digits in three victories last season against East Longmeadow High School (12 points), Chicopee Comp (11 points), and Chicopee High School (10 points). She made a total of 22 three-pointers a year ago.

Minnechaug's only other double digit scorer against Shepherd Hill was senior Ava Manning, who finished the game with 18 points with the

help of four three-pointers.

Seven other Minnechaug players scored at least two points in last Wednesday's road game.

Senior Cailin O'Brien scored five of her seven points during the opening quarter, as Minnechaug raced out to an 11-0 lead. The trio of senior Elizabeth Woytowicz (5 points), Wilson (5 points) and Manning also contributed with lay-ups during the spurt.

After a jumper from junior Jillian Clarke finally broke the ice for the home team with 1:10 left in the first quarter, Foisy, who came off the bench, buried her first 3-pointer from the left corner before making a lay-up.

The Lady Falcons, who entered the second quarter holding a 16-2 advantage, never gave the Lady Rams an opportunity to get back into

the game.

Foisy and Manning combined to score 14 points during the second quarter, which gave the visiting team from Wilbraham a commanding 34-7 halftime lead.

Senior Kelly Cronin, who's planning to continue playing basketball at Amherst College next year, scored six points during the third quarter.

The Lady Falcons also made six 3-pointers during that quarter, which helped them build a 62-15 lead.

Minnechaug continued to pull away during the final eight minutes of the game.

Rounding out the scoring column for the Lady Falcons were senior Quincie Clayton (6 points), junior Ainsley Holden (5 points), junior Ava Disa (4 points), and senior Lyric Nelson (2 points).



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- Boys Grades 7th & 8th 9:45 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- Boys Grades 9th-12th 11 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
- Varsity players sign up if still playing with school**

- Girls Grades 4th-6th 12:15 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
- Girls Grades 7th-8th 1:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.
- Girls Grades 9th-12th 2:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Tryout # 2: Sunday March 1, 2026

Location: Oxford High School
(100 Carbuncle Dr., Oxford, MA)

- Boys Grades 4th-6th 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Girls Grades 4th-6th 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- Boys & Girls Grades 7th & 8th 5:45- 7 p.m.
- Boys and Girls Grades 9th-12th 7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
- Varsity players sign up if still playing with school**

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WNEU celebrates outstanding academic achievements

Nearly 600 students named to Fall 2025 semester President's List

SPRINGFIELD - Western New England University (WNEU) takes immense pride in recognizing the outstanding academic achievements of nearly 600 students who have been named to the President's List for the Fall 2025 semester. Students are named to the President's List for achieving a semester grade point average of 3.80 or higher.

- Rebekah Sherman of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Ella Henry of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Jacob Motyl of Hampden has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Jeffrey Duperre of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Emily-Jane Sullivan of

Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.

- Sydney Bonsant of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Steven Pollard of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Joseph Finnegan of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- David Noel of Hampden has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Elsa Cable of Hampden has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Mary Cable of Hampden has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Sophie Laird of Hampden has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.

- Ryan Lee of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Theodore Klostri of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Zachary Vigneault of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Caydence Pellerin of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Johanyliz Torres of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Cayla Bartosz of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Jeremiah Martin of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.
- Brady Suomala of Wilbraham has been named to Western New England University's President's List for the Fall 2025 semester.

AIC announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

SPRINGFIELD - American International College (AIC) in Springfield, MA, is proud to announce that 489 students have earned a place on the Dean's List for the fall 2025 semester. These full-time students have attained GPAs ranging from 3.3 to 4.0. AIC applauds the dedication and achievements of these enterprising students.

Alex Garete of Wilbraham
Chelsea Foulis of Wilbraham
Melissa Larochelle of Wilbraham

SNHU announces Fall President's List

MANCHESTER, NH - It is with great pleasure that Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) congratulates the following students on being named to the Fall 2025 President's List. The fall terms run from September to December.

Full-time undergraduate students who have earned a minimum grade-point average of 3.700 and above for the reporting term are named to the President's List. Full-time status is achieved by earning 12 credits over each 16-week term or paired 8-week terms grouped in fall, winter/spring, and summer.

Kathryn Dooley of Wilbraham
Taylor Reeves-Lopardo of Hampden
Christopher Goossens of Hampden



WNEU announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

SPRINGFIELD - Western New England University is proud to announce the outstanding academic achievements of nearly 800 students named to the Fall 2025 semester Dean's List including:

Patrick Sherman of Wilbraham, MA
Jacob Keller of Wilbraham, MA
Hayden Vreeland of Wilbraham, MA
Noah Love-Walsh of Wilbraham, MA
James Kumpulanian of Wilbraham, MA
Demetrios Patrakis of Wilbraham, MA
Bella Loddo of Wilbraham, MA
Christopher MacPhail of Wilbraham, MA
Justis Barbeau of Hampden, MA
John Dafonseca of Wilbraham, MA
Kyler Ittner of Wilbraham, MA
Alex Rickis of Wilbraham, MA
Jessica Leary of Hampden, MA
Davis Nelson of Wilbraham, MA
Morgan Conchinha of Wilbraham, MA
Jolene Lewis of Wilbraham, MA
Madison Duperre of Wilbraham, MA
Daniel Greene of Wilbraham, MA
Colin Leydon of Wilbraham, MA
Alexander Melluzzo of Wilbraham, MA
Jordan Dietz of Wilbraham, MA
Abdullah Khan of Wilbraham, MA
Taylor Labadorf of Wilbraham, MA
Brodie Martin of Wilbraham, MA
Jason Degray of Hampden, MA
Gavin Lee of Wilbraham, MA

Robinson named to Univ. of Alabama Fall 2025 Presidents List

TUSCALOOSA, AL - John Robinson was named to The University of Alabama Presidents List for Fall Semester 2025.

BESTON from page 1

been quite the journey." Boston has enjoyed meeting the Rotarians.

"The people in my district are fantastic and they do a lot of good in the communities that we serve, but I've also had the opportunity to meet the Rotarians around the world. There's literally a million Rotarians all over the world, so I've had the opportunity to meet, probably, thousands of people now at this point and it's been fantastic," Boston said. "It's really taught me that no matter where you go, people really are all the same and Rotarians, in particular, are just people who want to help. It's just been fantastic and quite an honor."

Boston got involved in Rotary through networking opportunities through her work as a branch manager at

a local bank, with a friend of hers suggesting she check out Rotary.

"I walked in the door and found out it was a service organization and I fell in love immediately and I said, 'This is great, I really want to do this. I really want to help out,' and it was a great way to not only build connections throughout a town that I was newly working in, but it was more importantly a way to serve that community in a meaningful way," Boston said.

The most fulfilling part has been the opportunity to change lives and form friendships.

"The things that you wouldn't get to do if you weren't involved in a global organization. The change that you get to make when you're working together with over a million people and you get

to contribute to such large projects and such meaningful work really does show you what we can do together when we come together and that's been amazing," Boston said. "My personal kind of passion project, Rotary International's largest project, is polio eradication, so it just started back in the '80s and went on for about 40 years now. We're really close to eradicating polio. I have friends who have had polio and just to see that I'm part of an organization that came together and really has eradicated a disease. That's just so cool."

In addition to encouraging new ideas and considering new ways for outreach, marketing and bringing in members, Boston also emphasized enrollment and membership.

"That's a huge focus. Just like other membership organizations, enrollment in North

America is a challenge. The way that people volunteer has changed in North America. People tend to be sort of one-off volunteering, which is great. I think it shouldn't be discounted that people of all ages are volunteering at a higher rate now than they have in the past, so it's tapping into that," Boston said.

Another strategy is utilizing tools for bringing people in communities into the fold of the "greater Rotary Family."

"Hopefully by doing that, we gain some members along the way. But even if we're not gaining members, we're gaining service throughout our communities no matter what we do," Boston said. "The whole point is to help our communities and whether it'd be through membership or just through outreach, I think

both are valuable. Ultimately, we just want to serve our communities in whichever way is most impactful."

For anyone who wants to join Rotary, Boston had this advice.

"They can go to their website at rotarydistrict7890.org and we have a 'Join Us' button and we'll connect them with their local club. But, it can be as easy as popping into a local meeting as well. Every single club out there is thrilled to have anyone just stop by for a local meeting. Or call the local president and say, 'Hey, I'm interested in doing something,'" Boston said. "So, whichever way you can connect with a local Rotary Club, they'd be thrilled to have you come in. I always say as long as you have a heart for service, you're welcome to Rotary."

On upcoming projects, Boston noted training Rotary Presidents for next year, a Thunderbirds game in April to raise money for polio, visiting other Rotary Clubs and a conference for the Interactors, the high school version of Rotary Clubs. She encouraged aspiring members to visit the district website for other projects at local clubs.

Boston said Rotary is here to serve.

"I'm very excited and honored that I get to serve in this role and represent the communities of Hampden, Wilbraham and Ludlow as district governor. I love these towns and it's humbling. It's humbling to be able to serve in this role and serve these communities," Boston said.

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CLUES ACROSS

- Breezed through
- Consumer protection agency
- Criminal syndicate
- Moves back from
- Satisfaction
- Feel concern or interest
- Monetary units
- Congressman (abbr.)
- Israeli city
- Restaurants
- 2,000 lbs.
- Grandmother
- North, South and Central
- In an early way
- Foes
- Social networking platform
- Early term for basketball player
- Another name for
- sesame plant
- Disallow
- Provide greater detail
- Inaccessible
- Evoke emotions
- Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- Celtic punk rockers
- A fencing sword
- Actor Idris
- Affirmative (slang)
- Afflicted in mind or body
- One point north of northeast
- Born of
- Social media hand gesture
- Hong Kong food stall
- Opposite of beginning
- Email function

CLUES DOWN

- Sign language
- Fashionable
- Borough in Helsinki
- Inability to hear
- More quickly
- An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
- Shrewdly
- Rooney and Kate are two
- Mediterranean port
- Benedictine monk
- Midway between south and southeast
- Town in Galilee
- Satisfy
- Mice genus
- Brass instrument
- Chest muscle (slang)
- Transmits genetic information from DNA
- Records electric currents generated by the brain
- Woman (French)
- Short route aircraft
- Pitching statistic
- Pointed end of a pen
- Popular sports league
- Body part
- Inoffensive
- Yellowish cotton cloth
- Feline
- Does not tell the truth
- Seduced
- Spiritual leader
- Abba __, Israeli politician
- Repair
- Olive genus
- Swiss river
- Prejudice
- C. European river
- Keep under control
- Father

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REDUCTIONS from page 1

folks that wanted lower than where we ended, some that wanted a little higher than where we ended. We found a sort of compromised number, but we also felt that the projections from the consultant were a little bit on the high side and we felt with some of the changes that are coming through, that we might see a little more modest impact," Slaughter said.

He added two plans that a small number of people are on will go up about 15%, while two larger plans that comprise "96% of all of our enrollments" had one going up 10.5% and the other at 11 or 12%.

"So the hope is that that will have a sufficient resource fund our insurance and our healthcare needs for the coming fiscal year. The impact, though, being at less than 13% versus what we had projected previously, was a reduction in our insurance costs," Slaughter said. "It's a little less than 2%, each percentage points roughly \$70,000, so that's roughly in the right neighborhood of what we think our costs will be at this new percentage. So, we have a little more certainty about that aspect of it."

Slaughter said the net effect "is our overall budget picture got better by about \$65,000 or so."

"So that's good news. It's not great news because we're still at a request of funding from each of our communities much higher than they're indicating they can fund, and so there's additional work we'll need to go through to get to a budget and get the support of the town Select Boards and Advisory Committee and Finance Committees and, ultimately, town meetings," Slaughter said. "So, we've got a fair amount of work to do, still more information coming in at all times, but a little bit of good news, a little bit of bad news, more good than bad, but I wanted to share those with you and give you the rationale on what changed, really, in the last week."

Vice Chair Dr. Michael Tirabassi asked how many FTES could be in jeopardy.

"We're talking about a \$2 million budget," Tirabassi said.

Superintendent Dr. John Provost said he hoped "that isn't where we end up and that's not true" as he's managed contraction with the budget since starting his tenure, including not giving a level-service budget.

"Every year has been some kind of cut. This year, and fortunately, we've been able to do a lot of what we needed to do through attrition. But, a \$2 million gap, just no; I would say an estimate of somewhere north of 20 FTES," Provost said.

Slaughter added "how exactly that would occur" also has multiple factors to

consider like salary and benefit impact.

"As we go through our work and think about what are those changes we're going to make, exploring what are those particular impacts of given choices will refine that over time and have impact on some other areas of the budget too," Slaughter said. "So, like I say, benefits is one area gets impacted but might also, depending on how choices are made, it may impact other aspects of non-personnel expenses as well. We'll just have to see."

Slaughter reiterated how all aspects of the budget would continue to be refined and reviewed "to look for any savings we can find in any other places."

"The challenge is that the parts of the budget that aren't sort of directly students don't have a lot of movement. Our buildings take about the same amount to heat, to light, etc year over year. So, those don't change much. The materials we need for curriculum in our classrooms doesn't change much. We got about same number of students, so things are fairly fixed in their costs," Slaughter said. "And there's inflation pressure along those. A lot of those go up from year to year, so it's really challenging to find non-personnel related things that make impact in a significant way in the budget. So, it's going to be really hard, really, month or so before we get down to the final sort of version you guys vote on."

On Sean Kennedy's question on how much of that \$2 million would he be able to find, Slaughter said he was unsure and "it's a small piece."

"I don't know that I want to hazard a particular guess on what that would be," Slaughter said. "But, it's going to be a pretty small sort of slice of that \$2 million. If we carve out, I don't know, \$150,000, that would be awesome, but I don't know if we can do that."

He added continued work on contract negotiations would be a "pretty critical piece of the puzzle" as well.

"We're having those honest and forthright negotiations in good faith and we'll see where that lands and then materialize those particulars into this as we move ahead," Slaughter said. "I wouldn't even begin to suggest that settling the contract is going to solve this problem. There is some level of reduction we're likely going to need to make, because I think where we are in bargaining positions at the moment and where we'll ultimately land is going to be such that holding our staff levels at the levels we have and projected level here is going to be a level of resource that the towns just don't have the resource to support whether they want to or not. They just may not have it to give. So, there's going to be tough choices ahead."

For more comments, check out this week's edition.

BACKYARD from page 6

bright beautiful winter's afternoon and this uncalled for visit was icing on my day's cake."

He offered to share this bluebird story. He said, "I was sitting on my meditation cushion yesterday watching my breath emerge from a deep silence and then gently return back into it. There was no counting, no manipulation, only watching, only flow. After some time had passed, I opened my eyes because I felt I was being closely watched."

"I have a bird feeder right outside of my window and sure enough a male bluebird or one of his offspring from a previous summer, was perched and staring directly at me. Two summers ago I named the parent bluebird, 'Sunshine' and last May he returned to the same nesting box in my front yard.

Quizzically, Sunshine leaned slightly forward. He was amazingly close."

"It was beautiful, glorious to see his blue rust colored body outlined by a background of white snow still clinging to frozen lilacs and tall trees. The sight of this sent ripples of love, that became currents of joy, to course through me."

"I felt a smile stretch a mile wide across my whole being. It was like being visited by a long absent friend. Within minutes this made me get up and fill another feeder with dried mealworms be-



Evening grosbeaks

cause bluebirds aren't seed eaters like many of the other birds that seek nourishment here. Like my breath, the mealworms disappeared into a well of silence. A contented peaceful silence that then took flight."

Evening grosbeaks

A Cummington resident sent a photo of evening grosbeaks at her feeder. She said they are part of a flock that come to visit the feeders often.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edownier@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005. The Palmer office has a new phone system and I will be getting an extension where messages may be left. I will publish the number as soon as it is set up.

PUBLIC NOTICES

TOWN OF WILBRAHAM PUBLIC HEARING: LIQUOR LICENSE MULTIPLE AMENDMENTS

The Wilbraham Select Board will hold a public hearing under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 138, Section 12, on Monday, March 2, 2026 at 7:15 pm, at the Town Office Building, 240 Springfield Street, Wilbraham, to hear public comment on an application to amend an annual Section 12: All Alcoholic Beverages License submitted by CCW Catering, LLC., located at 859 Stony Hill Road, Wilbraham. The applicant seeks the following amendments: Change of Manager, Change of Officers/Directors/LLC Managers, Change of Ownership Interest, and Change of DBA. All those wishing to comment on the referenced application will be heard. This hearing will be conducted in person and virtually.

Wilbraham Select Board Local Licensing Authority 02/12/2026

WILBRAHAM PLANNING BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 5, the Wilbraham Planning Board will hold a Public Hearing on Wednesday, March 4, 2026 at 5:45PM in the Town Office Building, 240 Springfield Street, to give interested parties the opportunity to comment on proposed amendments to the Wilbraham Zoning By-Law described below:

- 1) To amend Section 4.10 of the Zoning Bylaw, Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Regulations, to require 1 off-street parking space for all ADUs, except for ADUs within a 1/2 mile radius of a transit station.
2) To renumber and recaption the Zoning Bylaw by (a) designating the Zoning Bylaw as

Chapter 250 of the Code of the Town of Wilbraham; (b) renumbering each section and subsection of the bylaw accordingly; (c) inserting article, section and subsection titles; and (d) updating internal references to reflect the new numbering system

3) To make the following changes to the renumbered and recaptioned Zoning Bylaw (Chapter 250):

- a. General revisions to ensure consistency of terms and correction of typographical errors
b. Amend Section 250-1.3 to modify the following definitions: assisted living residence, building envelope, clearing envelope, family day care home, hazardous material, registered marijuana dispensary and sign
c. Amend Section 250-3.5B(14) to remove the special permit requirement for a family day care home consistent with recent changes to state law
d. Delete blank Section 3.9.4 "Accessory uses: industrial"
e. Amend Section 250-4.11.G. to remove a duplication of the word "snowplowing"
f. Amend Section 250-5.1 to clarify language in the Residential Multiple Dwelling District
g. Amend Section 250-6.5 to clarify applicable zoning districts for new vehicle sales
h. Amend Sections 250-6.5.1 & 250-7.2G to change "American Standards Association" to "American National Standards Institute"
i. Amend Section 250-7.6 to reflect changes in state law and regulations related to Registered Marijuana Facilities
j. Amend Section 250-9.1 to correct and update legal and map references applicable to the Floodplain Overlay District
k. Amend Section 250-10.4 to make grammatical corrections and to change "Federal Aeronautics Administration" to "Federal Aviation Administration"
l. Amend Section 250-10.5 to

correct terms related to civil engineers and land surveyors and to delete a reference to the MA Department of Environmental Protection "Division of Air Quality"

m. Amend Section 250-10.7 to correct scrivener errors
n. Amend Section 250-15.3 to increase the fine for violations from \$100 to \$300 for each offense.

o. Amend the appendix related to scenic roads to include the entirety of the language in MGL c. 40, Section 15C

The complete text of the proposed amendments is available for review in the Town Clerk's Office and the Planning Office during normal business hours and posted for public viewing on the Planning Board page of the Town of Wilbraham website at www.wilbraham-ma.gov/123/Planning-Board. All persons interested or wishing to be heard on this matter are urged to attend the public hearing. Both in person and virtual participation are available. To participate virtually go to https://meet.goto.com/684280605 or call 866-899-4679 (Access Code: 684-280-605).

James Rooney, Chair 02/12, 02/19/2026

Commonwealth of Massachusetts The Trial Court Probate and Family Court Hampden Probate and Family Court 50 State Street Springfield, MA 01103 (413)748-7758 Docket No. HD26P0192EA Estate of:

Elizabeth C Hetzel Date of Death: 11/12/2025 CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION To all interested persons: A Petition for Formal Pro-

bate of Will with Appointment of Personal Representative has been filed by Peter P Porowski of Belchertown, MA requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

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

IMPORTANT NOTICE

You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 02/26/2026. This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration. WITNESS, Hon. Claudine T.

Stoudemire, First Justice of this Court.

Date: January 29, 2026 Rosemary A Saccomani, Register of Probate 02/12/2026

Commonwealth of Massachusetts The Trial Court Probate and Family Court Hampden Probate and Family Court 50 State Street Springfield, MA 01103 (413)748-7758 Docket No. HD26P0227EA Estate of: Nan Hee McMinn Date of Death: 10/19/2025 CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION

To all interested persons: A Petition for Formal Probate of Will with Appointment of Personal Representative has been filed by Anthony D Valicenti of Burke, VA requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

The Petitioner requests that Anthony D Valicenti of Burke, VA be appointed as Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve Without Surety on the bond in unsupervised administration.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 03/03/2026. This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely writ-

ten appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration. WITNESS, Hon. Claudine T. Stoudemire, First Justice of this Court.

Date: February 03, 2026 Rosemary A Saccomani, Register of Probate 02/12/2026

Please check the accuracy of your legal notice prior to submission (i.e., date, time, spelling). Also, be sure the requested publication date coincides with the purpose of the notice, or as the law demands. Thank you.

Wilbraham-Hampden Times OBITUARY POLICY Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries. One is a free, brief Death Notice listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place. The other is a Paid Obituary, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice (with a word limit of up to 500 words) and may include a photograph. Death Notices & Paid Obituaries should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com. Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-paid.



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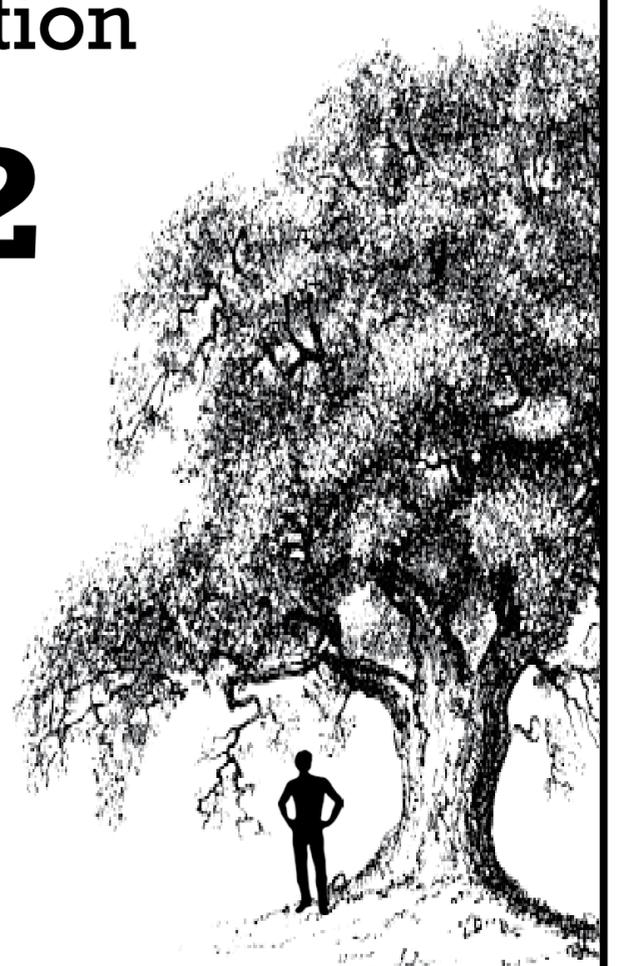
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