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The Wilbraham-Hampden

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Dennis Lopata retires



Turley photo by Kristin Rivers
Dennis Lopata has retired after 19 years of serving as executive director of the Life Care Center of Wilbraham.

Served as executive director of Life Care Center of Wilbraham

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
krivers@turley.com

WILBRAHAM - Dennis Lopata has retired from serving as executive director of the Life Care Center of Wilbraham after 19 years.

His last day was Aug. 28 and he plans to spend more time with his family, enjoy life and play more golf.

David Carboneau will serve as interim executive director and Life Care will figure out the succession from there.

Lopata grew up in Wilbraham and is a graduate of Minnechaug Regional High School and was nominated as an Alumni Hall of Fame Inductee by prior Times Editor Charlie Bennett and the late David Miles.

Please see **LOPATA**, page 8



Hawaiian Shirt Day celebrated with festive luncheon

By Harold Anderson
Correspondent

HAMPDEN - Never ones to miss a great opportunity for a fun celebration, many area seniors joined in as the Hampden Senior Center observed National Hawaiian Shirt Day on Friday, Aug. 21 with a themed lunch and entertainment from the "Happy Ukes" play group consisting of members from the Senior Center's Advanced Ukelele Group.

On the menu that day was

a delicious plate of Hawaiian Chicken Salad, Ginger Lime Coleslaw, Macaroni Salad, a Hawaiian Roll—of course!—and Pineapple provided by Greater Springfield Senior Services.

To get in the mood for the event, each table had a centerpiece decoration of a large grass skirted display surrounded by small seashells and topped with a paper drink umbrella. In line with the day's celebration, many

Please see **LUNCHEON**, page 8

Turley photo by Harold Anderson

Bottom row, Cathie Morini (East Longmeadow), Karen Amerman (Monson), Beth-Ann Latsko (East Longmeadow) and Jan Kibbe (Hampden). Top row, Amy Scott (Hampden), the teacher of the group, and Sue Leto Devereaux (Springfield).

Select Board talks micro-mobility vehicles in town

By Ben Hernandez
Staff Writer

WILBRAHAM - The Select Board addressed concerns regarding motorized vehicles within town limits.

Select Board Chair Marc Ducey presented the item to the Board on Aug. 17.

"I asked for this next item to get on the agenda. Nick and I were talking about it last week. I've talked about this, about e-bike—and micro-mobility is the new term—legislation for some time now," Ducey said.

He stated the catalyst behind presenting this was in light of a 19-year-old who was struck and killed while on an e-bike in South Hadley on Aug. 13.

Ducey expressed concern about the issue and said the

Police Chief Ed Lennon and him have spoken about the subject on "a couple occasions."

"Since then, I actually reached out to Senator Oliveira's office," Ducey said. "I spoke to his chief of staff and I spoke to the senator today about this. I think it's time we really think about what we can do as a municipality."

He explained the governor "had filed some legislation" but, according to Oliveira, "he would be very surprised" if they saw any legislative changes occur "before a year from now."

Ducey also believed there wouldn't be any legislative action "any time soon" but also stated there were five different communities who

Please see **E-BIKES**, page 9

MSBA to visit WMS in September

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
krivers@turley.com

WILBRAHAM - The Massachusetts School Building Authority will be doing an on-site visit to Wilbraham

Middle School in September.

Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and Human Resources Dr. Douglas Slaughter shared this information during the Aug. 20 School Committee meeting.

This latest update comes

after the School Committee approved revisions to the FY27 budget on July 30 to include an interim plan for WMS as it awaits a decision from the MSBA on entering the Core program.

Slaughter explained the

MSBA would conduct their visit on Sept. 16.

"So, I believe we've mentioned to you before that the folks at MSBA have scheduled an on-site visit

Please see **VISIT**, page 13



Turley photo by Noelle Hisgen
Marianne Mercado holds up one of her plants.

Wilbraham Public Library hosts annual Plant Swap

By Noelle Hisgen
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM - The library hosted their Second Annual Plant Swap event in the Brooks Room on Aug. 15.

People entered the library with a vast amount of plants eager to trade with one another. There were also special tables to simply adopt a plant for free without any trading necessary.

Adult Services Librarian Emilie Lang, who oversaw

the program, spoke about the plant swap that afternoon.

"I'm a big house plant keeper myself, and I know a lot of people in Wilbraham are as well. So we wanted to be able to share this with each other," Lang said. "It is so great to see fellow houseplant lovers, and it's a great way to build community as well. We're not selling or buying plants or anything like that. So, it really encapsulates the

Please see **SWAP**, page 9

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COMMUNITY

Selectboard approves tobacco services

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
krivers@turley.com

HAMPDEN - The Selectboard approved tobacco services during a Board of Health discussion on Aug. 17.

The board met with Megan Dacosta from the Massachusetts Health Officers Association, who explained she was there to help on services related to tobacco compliance, inspections and youth access checks.

“So, this isn’t something that Hampden received in the last fiscal year, but we wanted to make sure that if there were any questions that you all had, we’d be happy to assist in that,” Dacosta said. “And I’m happy to go over what that process looks like and what that would entail for you.”

After Selectboard Chair John Flynn asked who does the “undercover work,” Dacosta replied there’s “a couple options.”

“So, we are offering three options. The third option being a mini grant, which would be if your municipality had the ability to do their own tobacco retail inspections. Like going in to check the stores, If you had that ability, you could apply for funding. It’d be a stipended opportunity,” Dacosta said. “But, the previous two would be done by MHOA staff. So, option one would be receiving just those youth access compliance checks, so that would be those undercover youth that are employees of MHOA that would be brought to each of the permitted retailers in Hampden. From what I saw, it looks like you guys have four stores that have tobacco permits.”

Board of Health Operations Coordinator Laurie Dutton noted that was correct and asked this question.

“How does a vending cigarette vending machine come into play?” Dutton said.

Dacosta said this depends on local regulations.

“They’re not banned in the state law. So, it’s actually something that has come up more frequently over the last few months with questions about vending machines. So, do you guys have one currently?” Dacosta said.

Dutton replied she was not sure but would look into it, later adding the VFW has one.

Flynn shared his thoughts next.

“I know that they were doing because I heard from people over the past years that they’ve been—what is it typically—if they sell underage, they’re on a timeout, if you will, for x number of whatever, depending on how many offenses it’s been,” Flynn said.

Dacosta said this was correct and “depending on your local regulations, if you have local regulations or they’re up to date, there’s always the fallback on the state laws.”

“So, the state law dictates that on a first violation for a sale to someone under 21, it would be a \$1,000 fine, and then it is a suspension of their ability to sell their permit for up to 30 days. On average, boards will select anywhere between one and three days,” Dacosta said.

“And then a progressive for more violations. It’s progressive,” Flynn said.

“It is, yep. So, it’s like a three-year probation period of sorts. So, a second violation, it would be a \$2,000

fine and up to a seven-day suspension,” Dacosta said. “And then on a third or subsequent it would be a \$5,000 fine and up to a 30-day suspension,” Dacosta said. “So, often, if there’s going to be violations, there’s additional education visits and things like that. It’s usually something that if a municipality finds that if they’re experiencing non-compliance that we do our best to bring them back into compliance and I’d imagine you folks as well because nobody wants an establishment to have extensive fines and be shut down for an extended period of time.”

On a question of fining money and who it goes to, the answer was it would go to the town.

“So what would happen is one of the inspectors that gets assigned to the municipality on behalf of MHOA would either go out to do their inspection, checking permits, signage, education on checking IDs and all of that or if they brought in a young person, then following that visit within two business days, you would get a summary of the visit,” Dacosta said. “So, if there were any violations found, what the corrective suggested action is to be then just an ask of you guys to keep us informed on what goes on from there. And there would be draft orders available. But it would be something that the municipality orders and delivers because, ultimately, it would be up to your board.”

Selectboard Member Don Davenport—who also chairs the Board of Health—asked this.

“So, would we have to have regulations?” Davenport said.

Dacosta said “not every

city or town has local regulations themselves” and their recommendations “would then be based on the state law.”

“If you guys know Cheryl Sabara, she provides policy technical assistance. So, she’s able to work with boards of health who want to do those updates. So, that’s certainly something that we could make that connection for you guys if that’s something that you want to pursue. But, not a necessity in order to have this,” Dacosta said.

“But, we could still go just by the state law. That would allow us to fine someone if they weren’t in compliance,” Davenport said.

“Correct,” Dacosta said.

On the town’s prior connection, Dacosta clarified when talking with a colleague, it was explained that the option is “given out to everybody” but there wasn’t record recently that Hampden received these services.

“We’re hoping to reach as many municipalities as possible to just kind of make it across the board that everybody is on the same page,” Dacosta said.

When Davenport asked what they need to do, Dacosta shared that a memorandum of understanding could be prepared between MHOA and Hampden. It is also free of charge.

“So, the goal of all this is to build the capacity with the town. So, we’re hoping to build these relationships with the town for you guys to see that tobacco isn’t a scary or hard thing to do. and that eventually, potentially, your food inspector may be able

Please see **TOBACCO**, page 3

Wilbraham Choral Society announces plans for 2026-2027 season

WILBRAHAM - The Wilbraham Choral Society is pleased to announce that Mary Mayo Williams will be the director of the Wilbraham Community Chorus (Fall 2026) and the Men’s Glee Club (Spring 2027).

Mary is a veteran music educator and a retired church music director with ties to the Wilbraham community. Mary is a 1982 graduate of Minnechaug Regional High School and was a student of Warren Amerman, founder of the Wilbraham Community Chorus and Men’s Glee Club. Mary (an alto) sang with the Mixed Chorus under the direction of Ray Drury during the Fall of 2024 and 2025, and conducted the final concert of the December 2025 season.

The Wilbraham Choral Society is seeking singers for the Fall semester. While there is no audition requirement to join this group, the successful choral member will possess a love of singing, excellent pitch match-

ing abilities, sufficient hearing (natural or assisted), basic music reading skill; the ability to follow a director; and regular rehearsal attendance. The selected musical program has a theme of “Heaven and Earth” and will consist of a mix of choral “classics”, familiar songs, and holiday favorites. Rehearsals for the Community Chorus will begin at 7 p.m. on Monday September 14, 2026, and continue on Monday evenings, at Christ the King Epiphany Church, 758 Main Street Wilbraham. For more information, visit the WCS Facebook page at <Wilbraham Choral Society (Men’s Glee Club & Community Chorus)>.

Mary Mayo Williams: “I am excited to have opportunities to give back to the community that raised me; that provided formative experiences in singing with school and church choirs; and that prepared me for my college studies.”

Barefoot in the Park Auditions

HAMPDEN – Auditions are currently going on for the Theatre Guild of Hampden’s production of “Barefoot in the Park.”

The audition dates are Sept. 14 and 15 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Hampden Town Hall (Formerly Thornton Burgess School) on 85 Wilbraham Road Hampden, MA.

For more info, please call Margie at (310) 210-6705.

CORRECTION

In our Aug. 27 edition of the Times, the headline “Parks Department holds pickleball program” was incorrect.

The correct headline should have been “Hampden Senior Center holds pickleball program” as the HSC hosts it and the courts at the Parks & Rec are used for court time.

We apologize for the error.

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SLD	258 Silver St., Monson	9 room, 3 bed, 2f, 1h bath Colonial Contemporary	\$599,900	\$610,000
SLD	267 Connecticut Ave., Springfield	4 room, 2 bed, 1f, 0h bath Cape	\$262,900	\$262,500
SLD	115 Pasadena St., Springfield	6 room, 3 bed, 2f, 0h bath Bungalow	\$274,900	\$274,900
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Creamsicle Lunch event hosted by HSC

By Noelle Hisgen
Correspondent

HAMPDEN - The senior center hosted a creamsicle lunch in honor of National Creamsicle Day on Aug. 14.

The lunch started off with a savory course of crispy mac & cheese with a side of chili, and then volunteers passed out creamsicles to all of the attendees.

Volunteer and Program Coordinator Tina Doran spoke about the creamsicle lunch.

“There’s a national day for everything you can imagine. So, when we saw that it was National Creamsicle Day, we always look for an excuse to do something. So why not? We’re doing it here, and anybody that comes for lunch or stops in until we run out of creamsicles, you get a cream-sicle,” Doran said.

Many people from neighboring towns come to Hampden for their senior center activities, such as volunteers Alison Buesing from Monson and Cathy Albert from East Longmeadow, who talked about the senior center.

“It’s a great place. They do a lot for the seniors. There are friendly people here, and I just love the atmosphere of this place. It’s like my happy place,” Albert said.

“There’s so much to do, so much volunteering, there are so many activities, and so many different types of peo-



Turley photos by Noelle Hisgen
From the left, Jerry Bennett, Bobbi Grant, Steven Butts and Ray Bourbeau enjoy their lunch together.



Renee Coro and her daughter Raven enjoy their creamsicles together.

ple here. They’re so friendly,” Buesing said.

Also in attendance at the Creamsicle Lunch was Renee Coro, who does the Memory Café program at the senior center as a music therapist, and her daughter Raven.

“This is a very welcoming place. It’s an excellent place for the community and the seniors. They do amazing programs. And I have been pleased to be able to serve as a music therapist in their programs here,” Coro said.

It was a fun afternoon for people of all ages to get together and enjoy a sweet treat.

The Hampden Senior Center would like to thank JGS Lifecare for sponsoring the Creamsicle Lunch as well.

Theatre Guild of Hampden presents ‘Gypsy: The Musical’

HAMPDEN – The Theatre Guild of Hampden will be presenting their fall production of “Gypsy: The Musical.”

Gypsy tells the story of the dreams and efforts of one hungry, powerhouse of a woman to get her two daughters into show business. Gypsy is loosely based on the 1957 memoir of famous striptease artist Gypsy Rose Lee, entitled “Gypsy: Memoirs of America’s Most Celebrated

Stripper.”

The memoir and the musical focus on the story of Gypsy Rose Lee’s mother, Rose, and earned Rose a place in the theatrical and literary canon as the quintessential, archetypal “Stage Mother.”

The musical features songs that have become standards of the musical theatre canon, including “Some People,” “Let Me Entertain You,” “Rose’s Turn,” and the show-stopping “Everything’s

Coming Up Roses”.

Gypsy is famous for helping launch lyricist Stephen Sondheim’s career, and features a book by Arthur Laurents that is widely considered to be one of the classic examples of a traditional “book musical.” At the heart of the musical is the gregarious Rose, whose journey made critic Frank Rich call Gypsy, “Broadway’s own brassy, unlikely answer to King Lear.”

Tickets go on sale Sept. 1.

The shows dates are Oct. 16, 17, 18, 23, 24 and 25.

The shows will be at the Hampden Town Hall, (Formerly Thornton Burgess School), 85 Wilbraham Road Hampden, MA.

The showtimes are Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday Matinees at 2 p.m.

To purchase your tickets, visit theatreguildofhampden.org.

TOBACCO from page 2

to integrate those tobacco inspections in with their food inspection of those stores,” Dacosta said. “We’re hoping for next fiscal year we’ll also have that many grant opportunity and then maybe next year you might be able to get stipended to do this work.”

Selectboard Member Erik Vanderleeden said that vaping “is a big thing” along with

e-cigarettes.

“I don’t see a lot of kids smoking cigarettes these days; it’s more vapes. That’s more the concern,” Vanderleeden said. “And I don’t know if this addresses, it’s those cartridges, inserts—or whatever you call them—

Juul or these other products that they’re selling. Does this also enforce that with nicotine-based products?”

Dacosta said it’s for all tobacco or nicotine products. After that explanation, Vanderleeden said he thought the plan was fantastic.

The board then approved the tobacco services, with Dacosta saying she’d be in touch the next day with the MOU and, once signed, MHOA would be appointed as Hampden’s tobacco agent.

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VFW Post 9397 hosts *Save Our Sign Fundraiser*

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
krivers@turley.com

HAMPDEN - The community gathered at the VFW Post 9397 on Aug. 15 for a Save Our Sign Fundraiser event.

The festivities included entertainment from DJ Bob, games, raffles, a cash bar, face painting, henna tattoos, members of the VFW serving BBQ beef, chicken, Corn on the Cob, Baked Potato, Burgers, Hot Dogs, Salads and Desserts and more.

WHT Editor Kristin Rivers was also asked to help choose the raffle winners with Bartender Amy Otto.

Many community organizations, residents and local businesses also served as sponsors.

All proceeds from the event supported the S.O.S. Fund.

Commander David Demers was thrilled with the turnout and community support.

"It's huge. We actually have the VFW State Commander here; we have the VFW Senior Vice Commander here today. We have a lot of volunteers. We have a lot of Hampden town residents, East Longmeadow, Wilbraham, some Longmeadow. They all came out and just volunteered. If they didn't volunteer, they bought tickets. They came here, they had some food, they're having a good time," Demers said.

Demers shared the fundraising plans began four months ago, as the current sign was first put up back in 1975 and had fallen over three times in the last two years.

"We've had local volunteers put our sign back up. They keep falling down. Our letters on the sign are plastic and we have to put them in little plastic holders and they keep falling out," Demers said. "You have to set them up on a table, tape them and try to get them set up inside the sign."

He explained the VFW wants to modernize the sign



with LED and work hand-in-hand with the town if there's an emergency, election or road construction or more, for example, to help put out information on their sign.

"Just anything. So, we're trying to work with the town to try to get our new sign put up and any help that we could get would be great," Demers said.

Demers added there will be more opportunities to fund-raise through the March and April Turkey Shoots next year, with raffle prizes to be presented there as well.

The projected estimated cost for the new sign is \$29,970. After this event, Demers projected that \$12,000 was already raised.

"So prior to today, we had only \$4,000 raised. So, this event, actually, would (have) made a big dent in the amount of money that we need," Demers said.

He also expressed his gratitude to everyone who donated and sponsored.

"I can't name them all, so I just want to say thank you to each and every person that donated in the community. We had probably 30 local businesses, actually, donated prizes," Demers said. "I just want to say thank you to each and every local business that do-

nated a raffle prize. We should do really good today and thank you very much."

VFW Massachusetts State Commander Craig DeOld shared that when he heard about the event, he wanted to come to Hampden to show his support.

"This is a great, vibrant Post. They do a lot of great things for the community and as a state commander, these are the places I need to be to show my personal support—and not just the whole VFW of Massachusetts support—but we want to make sure that all of our Posts have great opportunities and whatever I can do to help support the Posts, I want to be there for them," DeOld said.

DeOld noted the turnout said a lot about the Post and the community's support for them.

"It's a two-way street. The Post supports the community; the community supports the Post. What a better day to be out in Hampden than today," DeOld said. "It's great to see all the support from the Post members, the Auxiliary members and the community at large to be here for the Post."

For DeOld, supporting the local Veterans is also important.

“It’s a symbiotic relation-



A cupcake cake to celebrate during the Save Our Sign Fundraiser.

Attendees enjoy a game of cornhole.

put the uniform on, so there's already that well-established feeling of service in the Veteran. Those are the folks that are going to give back to the community."

Demers had this message: thank you for supporting the VFW Post 9397, there's more to come and help a Veteran.

“That’s our motto for this year: it doesn’t matter if they’re a VFW member, doesn’t matter if it’s just a regular Vet, doesn’t matter if they’re a wife, a spouse, a child of a Vet. Our message

Please see **SIGN FUNDRAISER**, page 13

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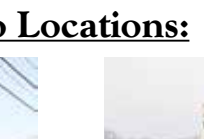


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VIEWPOINTS

Nature through the eyes of a child

By Julie Midura

We recently brought our 1-year-old grandson, Dustin, to a local woodland area. After carrying him for miles, we lifted him out of the child carrier so that he could stretch his legs. Not yet walking independently, he grasped each of my index fingers, then carefully moved along the trail on unsteady feet.

A white birch tree just off trail caught his eye, and he steered me towards it. Once we reached it, he let go of my fingers and leaned his hands against the tree. His tiny fingers fell upon a loose piece of dry bark.

His eyes widened and a look of surprise came upon his face when the bark slipped from the tree into his hand.

Dustin looked at it, examining it with curiosity. Then, with all the seriousness a 1-year-old can muster, he reached up and pressed the fragment back against the gnarled tree.

He held his hand over the bark for a moment, like someone gluing one object to another. Once he seemed certain he had mended the trunk, he pulled his hand away.

Unsurprisingly, the piece of bark fluttered to the ground.

Dustin bent down, picked up the wayward piece of tree, and once again pressed it back against the trunk.

This time, he patted it carefully. But when he withdrew



Dustin, age 1, held a piece of birch bark in his hand.

his hand, down went the scrap of wood once again.

Undeterred, Dustin repeated the process over and over and over again, certain that if he just kept trying, he could reattach the broken scrap of tree skin back onto the birch tree. But in spite of his tenderness and quiet determination, gravity won every time.

I stood beside him and watched. Half amused and half contemplative.

There was a lesson here, I was certain. Not for Dustin, but for me.

Dustin displayed no frustration. He was not aggravated or impatient. He just kept trying. With an open heart and a beautiful spirit. And a

determination that somehow, he could fix the world around him.

I don't know how long Dustin would have spent trying to reattach the bark to that birch tree. I finally scooped him up and settled him on the dirt path.

He immediately reached for a nearby stick. He picked it up. Turned it. Stretched out his arm to show it to me – looking up at me with wonder in his wide eyes. Smiling as though he had discovered the greatest treasure on earth.

He poked a dry leaf. Drew lines in the dirt. Stirred the pine needles.

Absent of batteries, on-off switches, flashing lights



Dustin explored nature with his grandparents.

day. He won't remember the rough texture of the twig he held. The beautiful white birch tree he attempted to mend.

He won't recall the day sunlight streamed through the trees above him, as the grandparents who love him sat beside him while he discovered the natural world around him.

Regardless, perhaps he would leave the forest carrying something with him that would remain. Perhaps the forest was filling something inside of him that would not come from actual recollection, but was being planted nonetheless, before he could even form a sentence.

The twig came home with Dustin – a treasure he refused to let go of when I placed him back in the child carrier. The wayward scrap of bark, however, remained on the forest floor, where it would eventually return to the earth.

But long after the bark has dried, the unspoken lessons will remain.

The author's grandson picked up sticks off the forest floor.

and instructions – he held the stick as though it was a prized possession.

I felt an urgency to continue moving. There were trails waiting to be explored. Miles waiting to be walked. A time frame to be adhered to.

Instead, I lowered myself cross-legged and settled on the pine needle path next to Dustin. And there we remained, lingering in a place where time has forgotten what it means to rush.

Years from now, my grandson won't remember this

SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

Will Social Security run out of money soon?

Dear Rusty:

I'm concerned about Social Security running out of funding, since I rely on it for my income and I'm at an age where my having to go back to work is not an option I can consider.

The job market for people my age is slim. I've been reading reports and it doesn't sound reassuring. Your thoughts?

Signed: Concerned Senior

Dear Concerned Senior:

Thanks for sharing your concerns. This topic is a fairly complicated one, but I'll do my best to explain it.

Social Security income from payroll taxes, interest on reserves, and income tax on SS benefits has been insufficient to pay 100% of SS benefit obligations since about 2020.

Since that time, SS has been drawing money from the Social Security Trust Fund reserves to pay full monthly benefits to everyone.

In 2020, there was nearly \$3 trillion in SS reserves held in the SS Trust Funds, but as of the end of 2025, those reserves have dwindled to about \$2.56 trillion because they are being used to pay full SS benefits to all.

Without program reform, the SS trust funds will be fully depleted in 2032, which would result

in an across-the-board cut of about 22% to everyone's monthly SS payment. And that would be devastating to millions of Americans!

However, Congress is acutely aware of this issue; they have been for years but have largely ignored previous warnings. Now, however, those predicted benefit cuts are dangerously close to becoming a reality.

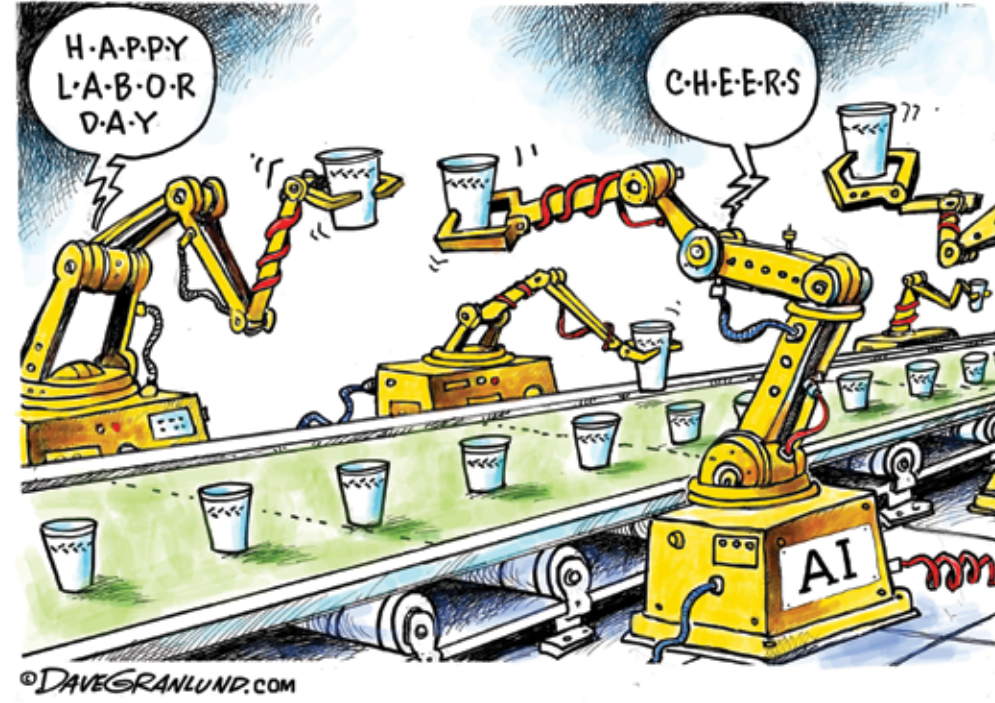
As a result, we are beginning to see serious, even bipartisan, discussions in Congress about reforming Social Security to restore it to solvency to avoid future benefit cuts.

For our part, AMAC and the AMAC Foundation have been working on a proposal to restore SS to full solvency for generations and we have offered our proposal to various Congressional Representatives and to the SSA Commissioner and his executive staff.

The proposal has been well received, and we are very optimistic that Congress will finally take real action to restore SS to solvency to avoid any benefit cuts. Frankly, doing otherwise would amount to political suicide!

AMAC is closely monitoring this situation and are very proactive in Washington, D.C. to ensure that benefits are not cut in 2032

Please see **SSI**, page 15



Some classrooms don't have desks

Habitat interns learn life lessons while raising money for affordable housing

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

WEST SPRINGFIELD - What started with a cup of iced coffee ended with lessons that will last a lifetime. Bean Boutique, a student-run business founded by interns at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH), has become a hands-on classroom in entrepreneurship, marketing, and teamwork while raising thousands of dollars to support affordable homeownership.

In spring 2025, the interns were challenged to



Yandel and Nate at Bean Boutique chalkboard: Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity Marketing Interns Yandel Alameda (left) and Nate Shlosser stand at their in-school coffee shop, Bean Boutique, in Chicopee.

raise at least \$1,500 through Bean Boutique to qualify for a \$2,000 State Farm/Habitat for Humanity International Youth Matching Grant. The

challenge gave the students an opportunity to put classroom lessons into practice

Please see **HABITAT**, page 13

The Wilbraham-Hampden

TIMES

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

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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.

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.

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Best Historical Display was awarded to Marc Boudreau.



Holly Pastrana got the Most Creative Award.

Photos and caption courtesy of Sherie Schaefer

The Great Front Doors of Wilbraham Winners are here!



The Children's Organization Project Award was awarded to Bethany P. Wheatley Child Care. This door was also awarded Most Patriotic.

The Great Front Doors of Wilbraham – America's 250 Celebration Winners have been announced.

The community judges for the contest were Diane Gerberich, Master Gardener and member of the Wilbraham Garden Club, David Bourcier, President of the Old Meeting House Museum,



RIGHT: Garden 250 went to Alesia Peck.

local historian and author and local artists Liz Pacosa-McEvoy, Holly Murray, and Michelle Stallworth and Lexie Burke of Magnolia and Maple Pottery.

Sherie Schaefer described the event in this way.

"It's not about the logistics or prizes alone. It's about the meaning and shared experiences it gifted to people across our community. The message in David and Kelley's book couldn't illustrate that better," Schaefer said.

The event also featured prizes donated by local businesses, authors and community partners: a Garden Design Consultation and Hydrangea Installation, A signed copy of "Wilbraham: A Journey Through History," a holiday-themed cupcake box from The Sugar Chalet, a signed copy

of "Marty's Big Day on the Lake" by local authors David and Kelley Bourcier, a Cima Restaurant and Chop House gift card, a gift basket including a \$25 gift card and Patriotic Canvas from The Scented Garden Gift Shoppe, a \$20 gift card to Neighborhood Pizza and Pasta House, a \$30 gift card for Rice Fruit Farm, four tickets to Rice's Fall America 250 Celebration and four Skating Passes for Interskate 91 South.

Also, in addition to the People's Choice Award, there were special awards for Best Floral Display, Best Historical Theme, Most Creative, U.S. Most Patriotic, Garden 250, Most Welcoming, Spirit of 1776 Award, Rocker 250 and the Children's Group Creativity Award.

To check out all the entries, visit wilbrahamcenter.org.



Randy Stebbins won the Spirit of 1776 Award for this display.



The Rocking 250 winner was Maureen Budrow.



Most Welcoming was awarded to Thomas Linnehan.



Best Floral Display went to Theresa Remillard.



The People's Choice Award went to Anthony DiNoia.

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Here are Jean White (Wilbraham) and Judy Fleury (Wilbraham).



Dolly Nicoli (Hampden) and Peggy Weber (Hampden) in their Hawaiian shirts.



Pat Howe (Springfield) and Ann Hadank (Springfield) also stopped by.

LUNCHEON from page 1

of the seniors who attended were decked out in their Hawaiian Shirts, with a few leis being worn as well.

As the Hawaiian-themed meal was being served to the appreciative crowd, an additional celebration suddenly joined the event when a chorus of “Happy Birthday to You” could be heard with members of the Hampden Senior Center’s Quilt Making Group singing for one of their own, Loretta Forsyth of Springfield, whose birthday was the day prior to the event.

After everyone enjoyed their meal, Tina Doran, Program and Volunteer Coordinator for the Hampden Senior Center, took to the mic and introduced the Senior Center’s popular Ukelele Group who had prepared a Luau-themed set of music for the occasion.

Before the group sang and played their “Ukes”, Doran encouraged the audience to pick up the song sheets that were on their tables and to sing along on some of the more memorable pieces.

“These are some really fun songs, you’ll recognize them,” Doran said.

The music set, which began with the classic Christian hymn “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” picked up the Hawaiian Theme in earnest when their teacher, Amy Scott, announced to the audience that the group would “get down to some Luau business!”, before the sing-along of “Tiny Bubbles”, made popular by Hawaiian entertainer Don Ho in the 1960’s.

Scott, who has been leading the “Happy Ukes” for the past one and a half years, also noted how much fun the group



Turley photos by Harold Anderson

A group photo comprising Jerry Bennett (East Longmeadow), Dave Norman (Hampden) and Sandy Selkirk (Hampden).

has together. Audiences, she said, “always comment on how we laugh and joke with each other.... We’re a little social group, really, but we’re also making music.”

The group certainly lived up to this billing with members even adding their own touches to the performance, such as before the song “Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini,” when group member Phil Bator from Hampden jokingly “warned” the audience that the upcoming tune was “scandalous.”

Jan Kibbe from Hampden also led the audience in the typical chant of “Salt!, Salt!, Salt!” at the mention of the “lost shaker of salt” during the parrot head classic “Margaritaville” and Beth-Ann Latsko from East Longmeadow added her “drumming” to songs as needed by slapping her hands against her ukelele.

During the show, the “Happy Ukes” added a cool break to their music set with their own version of Christ-

mas in August by performing the classic holiday tune, “Hawaiian Christmas Song (Mele Kalikimaka),” in keeping with the theme of the afternoon.

Speaking of cool...dessert, consisting of a large scoop of Chocolate Ice Cream topped with whipped cream, arrived at the tables around the time of the performance of “Sloop John B” to the special delight of Pat Howe of Springfield who added with a smile, “This is the best part of the meal, you know.”

Other songs in the “Luau Set” included “Summertime,” “Don’t Worry, Be Happy”, “Three Little Birds (Every Little Thing Gonna Be Alright)”, the rollicking song “Do You Love Me (Now That I Can Dance)” as well as “(Sittin’ On) The Dock of the Bay,” “Blue Hawaii,” “Jamaica Farewell” and “Limbo Rock”, even though no one present had their limbo stick handy for a demonstration. The closing number to a well-received performance was the traditional “Happy

Trails (to You)”.

The group, which also performs at Assisted Living Facilities and other area locations outside of the Senior Center, clearly demonstrated how much they enjoy what they do, much to the delight of those in attendance.

After the music, Doran again took to the mic to thank the crowd and ask Scott to pick the winner of the 50/50 raffle that was held to support the Ukelele program which takes place Mondays at the Senior Center and, also, includes a beginner group.

When asked, audience members expressed how much they enjoy attending events such as this and have done so in the past.

“Everybody is so happy here, it’s a great place,” said Judy Fleury of Wilbraham, wearing a trio of artificial flowers in her hair.

Jean White, also of Wilbraham, quickly added “and the food is great, too!”

LOPATA from page 1

He’s worked in healthcare for 44 years, having a bachelor’s degree with a Healthcare Administration Concentration from Worcester State College and previously working at Holden Hospital, Springfield Municipal Hospital, the Faren Care Center with the Sisters of Providence and in Gardner at a skilled nursing facility and with the LaChance Center.

An encounter with Mount Wachusett Community College later on—which Life Care was working with too—is what led him to discover Life Care. He then joined them in 2007 after a location in Wilbraham opened up.

Besides reflecting on his career, Lopata also recalled his community ties, noting Miles in particular.

“He was the best for helping us out. He called me up, ‘You got anything going today?’ ‘Well, not sure.’ ‘I need a picture. Come on, let’s do something,’ and he’d come up

with ‘What about this? What about that?’ and he was great. Dave was always wonderful, God rest his soul,” Lopata said.

For him, the Life Care Center of Wilbraham gave him an opportunity “to be involved with the community” from the chamber of commerce—serving as president for a time—to the Organizing Committee for the new Wilbraham Senior Center. He’s also a longtime member of The Country Club of Wilbraham.

“I was afforded the opportunity to be the executive director and it’s been a great ride. I’m blessed with a great staff who are very passionate about the patients, the residents and quality outcomes. Good things, and we touch lives,” Lopata said. “We have 123 beds, 120 people in-house today. So, there’s a need. We have two extended care units where people truly are residents of ours and then our third unit is truly a rehab unit where it’s truly a patient. Av-

erage length of stay probably somewhere around 24 days for rehab. New hips, new knees, cardiac rehab.”

Lopata said he was blessed that they were back to above pre-COVID levels of total patients and having 208 staff members.

“We lost a lot of good people that just got out of the business, unfortunately. So, we’re bringing those people back; we’re excited about that. We’re excited about working with Congressman Neal on workforce development funds, getting programs together to try and get CNAs to look at LPN and RN opportunities. Thrilled with things like that,” Lopata said. “Legislation locally too with State Rep. Angelo Puppolo.”

Lopata knew he was with the right company in Life Care Center of Wilbraham when a flat roof leak was fixed in a year’s time. He also emphasized besides being a passion for his work, it was also a passion for being back home

in Wilbraham.

“I’m with a company that recognizes that without the infrastructure, a good roof on the building, you can do nothing,” Lopata said. “I was appreciative of it and I knew I was with the right company. They’ve really put the patient first.”

They are also working to get volunteers back in.

“COVID took away our cafe, which had our volunteers come in and serve coffee and tea and ice cream and all that and, again, reaching out and being part of the community. We would have upwards of 20 volunteers a week coming in and doing it. So, we’re excited to get that going again,” Lopata said.

Lopata is most proud of his staff, noting their tenure ranging from 31 years to someone hired six months ago, with an average of 12 years for department managers.

“Great stability, great professionalism, very respectful people. At times knows

there’s a hard job to do, but let’s see how we do it and let’s see how we can get a good quality outcome and, again, that’s a testament to our staff here and Life Care that allows us to spend time and money in those areas and ensure that we are seeing those good outcomes,” Lopata said.

Lopata was recently honored at a retirement party at the Country Club of Wilbraham on Aug. 22 ahead of his last day, where he received citations from Puppolo and Neal. Neal also put his name in the Congressional Record.

“They both came to my retirement party, which was a big honor for me. We had 210 people at The Country Club on Saturday night. I had a great event and people were so kind in their comments. But, it’s, like I said, it’s who we are with regards to the field we’re in, the healthcare field and the challenges each day, but what we can do to meet those challenges and help those people out who need assistance,” Lopata said.

On what he’ll miss most, Lopata said the patients, residents, family members and staff, especially hearing stories from the residents, including the late Peg Stearns, a resident of Hampden, who passed away at the age of 109 in 2020.

“All you got to do is walk around our building and with 120 patients and residents in-house today, you’ll see individuals with challenges and all of a sudden your challenges or your issue of the day is not as pronounced as I thought it was. I will miss that interaction,” Lopata said.

He added he would stop by Life Care Center of Wilbraham to visit.

“They just gave me a bench this morning during morning meeting with a plaque on it that said ‘For Dennis Lopata when he comes back to visit’ and then I’m like, ‘Well, I will definitely will be back,’” Lopata said.

The biggest lessons he learned were how life has its challenges and how they were dealt with and put into perspective. He also reflected on his late wife, Sharon, who died in 2002 after a battle with breast cancer.

“I had to put things into perspective because that was

my huge loss, but yet I still had a job to do. Fortunately, my wife, Sharon, gave me a different perspective of, ‘Okay, I may not totally meet this challenge because cancer’s tough’ and she did everything possible. She almost made it to five years, which was huge for a cancer survivor to be diagnosed and five years later, hopefully be in remission. It didn’t happen,” Lopata said. “That was a life-altering event and she put things into perspective for me there.”

Lopata credited his work, family and patients and residents for also helping him during that difficult time.

“People are there to help you through some challenges and you’re going to take a punch and it’s going to knock you down, but you’re going to get back up because people need you, and that was my drive that I needed to be focused on the work at hand and those patients and residents,” Lopata said.

His message was this.

“Number one, thank you thank you thank you. Thank you for the support of Life Care Center of Wilbraham. Thank you for the support of what we’ve been trying to do to be an active member of the community and it’s been a great run,” Lopata said. “I love the community, growing up in Wilbraham. I just think it was just the icing on the cake to be able to do it for my career with regards to knowing so many people in the community, being able to help people in the community.”

As for his team? “I want to thank them for everything they’ve done. They do it every day behind the scenes to ensure a good quality outcome, to ensure that we’re doing the right thing for that patient and that resident and that family member who have concerns because they walked into a situation they’re not familiar with,” Lopata said. “So, I want to say thank you to them because they’ve done a tremendous job of being super professional in what they do every day with their respective departments to manage those outcomes in a very positive way. Thanks doesn’t seem like enough, but it needs to be said because they’re a great group of individuals.”

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A selection of plants are up for “adoption.”



Mary Bell holds up a plant she brought to the plant swap.

Turley photos by Noelle Hisgen

RIGHT: Plants have information cards showing how to take care of each plant.

PLANT SWAP from page 1
spirit of the library in terms of lending, borrowing, and sharing. And it’s great to see such a diversity of houseplants that are available as well.”

In attendance at the plant swap was Mary Bell. “It’s a fun way to get new plants and to pass on what they propagated instead of having it to ourselves,” Bell said. Also in attendance was

Marianne Mercado from East Longmeadow.

“I love plants. I have quite a good collection of indoor and outdoor plants around the house. I wanted to give it away, too. They’re so healthy and growing so much that you just need to share it,” Mercado said.

It was a fun day for all plant lovers to come together and share their love of plants with each other, along with being able to take a new plant home too.



Wilbraham Art League to hold Open House on Sept. 8

WILBRAHAM - The Wilbraham Art League is encouraging the public to attend an open house on Sept. 8, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Wilbraham Senior Center. The Center is located at 250 Springfield St., behind the Wilbraham Town Hall. The Wilbraham Art League (WAL) was founded in 2007 to encourage and support artists and the arts in Wilbraham and surrounding towns.

Anyone interested in art will benefit from stopping in. You don’t need to be an artist or even interested in doing art; come to learn about art in general and how the member artists create their work. You will have a chance to chat with the artists and view their work in the Center’s large activity room where the walls will be filled with paintings in

various styles and mediums. For most of the year you can view art created by the WAL members in the Activity Room. The displays change about every two months. The room is used for many Center activities so you may want to call the Center before stopping in to ensure the room is open.

The Wilbraham Art League holds art shows each These are an opportunity for our members to display their artistic talents. Most recently was a show at Christ Church Cathedral in Springfield. Currently scheduled are Wilbraham and Agawam libraries in November and Trinity Church (Springfield) in December.

For more information about the Wilbraham Art League visit their website at <https://wilbrahamartleague.org/> or their Facebook page.

Introduction to Law Libraries at the WPL on Sept. 10

WILBRAHAM— Did you know that there are 15 Trial Court Law Libraries located across Massachusetts to serve the courts, attorneys, and the public? You can receive legal reference assistance, borrow books, and use print and electronic resources. Two Law Librarians from the Hampden and Franklin Counties will

be at the Wilbraham Public Library on Thursday, Sept. 10 at 3 p.m. to provide an overview of TCLL and how they can assist in your legal information needs.

This program is free and open to the public. Registration is encouraged, not required. Sign up at wilbrahamlibrary.org, or call 413-596-6141.

E-BIKES from page 1

filed various independent ordinances on micro-mobility vehicles.

“I spoke to the superintendent last week because I think a big part of this isn’t necessarily about creating an ordinance,” Ducey said.

He noted how they should instead create some guidelines or guardrails around the vehicles and suggested most of the issue wasn’t about prohibiting the vehicles but providing education to qualify and mold expectations.

“What qualifies as an e-bike? What’s not allowed as an e-bike? If you’re 15 or 12 years old, what can you be doing? What can’t you be doing?” Ducey said. “I think it’s really gray and really nebulous and the Chief and I have had this discussion. But, I think a lot of this is education. The superintendent was supportive if we want to put some sort of educational plan in through the schools, maybe get the parents involved. We can do these sort of things with the district’s help.”

Lennon then offered his thoughts.

“We’ve been getting a lot of complaints about e-bikes, as you might imagine,” Lennon said. “I get emails almost every day from people asking about it.”

Lennon explained his department made a social media

campaign over the last few months to educate the public about e-bikes and other micro-mobility devices. Distributed education centered around the basics, such as defining what an e-bike is, what it isn’t and what Massachusetts law says about the vehicles.

“Unfortunately, it is extremely complex,” Lennon said. “There’s all different types of classes. The classes have subclasses. The laws, it’s complicated.”

Ducey also added this thought.

“If we could take a step back, this isn’t just e-bikes. It’s e-scooters, it’s skateboards, it’s a whole bunch of different things,” Ducey said.

After Lennon agreed, Vice Chair Sue Bunnell shared her perspective.

“Neither, apparently, are the manufacturers bothering to be clear about anything useful that might inform a consumer,” Bunnell said.

Lennon added how police efforts also involved using the in-place school resource officer to distribute pamphlets and brochures to students before school, as well as addressing students with motorized vehicles about the nature of their device.

Lennon said the SRO was still at work during summer-time.

“So, he’s assigned to the day shift for the summer-

time,” Chief Lennon said. “We’ve had him doing is to be along Main Street and in the center of town and doing the same thing. Seeing the people, going up to them, handing them the things. If there’s an aggressive thing, trying to notify the parents, trying to at least—on the street—try to face to face, handle by those means.”

Lennon noted in the last two weeks, Traffic Safety Ofc. Sgt. Brian Strong had a roll-call training and met with department officers in small groups to educate them on the subject, classes and laws. Despite the extra education for his department, he reiterated and understood how confusing it was to classify and tackle the issue.

“We do have books which break it all down,” Lennon said. “But like I said; that’s giant spreadsheets of exactly what lands where and what the violation is. So, Sgt. Strong, who’s really well-versed on this, he has done a good job in educating officers. At least they know. Also,

what our expectations are about enforcement and trying to get involved in this because we know that the town, it’s a really important issue for them. So, our expectations were brought forward to them for enforcement and education and what we really want to try to do the best we can in getting behind this.”

After further discussion, Lennon brought up a challenge in enforcement has been those that are a problem and aggressive are “we try to stop them or we try to catch up with them and they take off.”

“They go right into the woods, they go right into the thing,” Lennon said. “Tonight on my way home, saw a couple of aggressive ones. I tried to follow them into High Pine and they took off. They started waving and they went off into the woods when they saw me, before I could even do anything. They noticed what was going on and they just went right in.”

Also, several fleeing officers over the last couple of

weeks along the Main Street area.

Lennon added scooters and ATVs have caused issues as well, using Stony Hill Road, Boston Road and Old Boston Road for street takeovers from curbstone to curbstone, blocking traffic and not stopping for responding officers.

“We’ve had a couple of situations. We had one a few weeks ago. An officer was parked near the Stony Hill Road, Boston Road area, off to the side. He wasn’t trying to initiate any traffic enforcement. But, a group of them surrounded the cruiser and started to taunt him to try and get him to respond,” Lennon said. “He didn’t initiate that, they went after him to try and get him to respond.”

There was also a situation in late June where about 150 vehicles went into the Home Depot parking lot and took over by blocking entrances and exits, during burnouts and spinning the tires, with mutual aid from several communities sought to help stop

it.

“We have an officer that’s assigned to a task force right now—part-time—where we’re trying to figure out ways that we can track the individuals that are doing it, try to identify them,” Lennon said. “The state has a task force where we’re watching to see where these takeovers are going to occur each weekend. We get intelligence reports on them. So, we’re trying to stay ahead of it that way, but that is another variable that we’re trying to keep in front of.”

He also said the SRO will be working on education materials for when the school year begins for students and parents with education continuing and being addressed.

Additional discussion and thoughts included state legislation being worked on currently but has stalled at the moment, what could be done at the local level in the future as an additional option and other traffic safety concerns including riding on sidewalks.

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Now, it's true dogs don't see a full range of colors the way you or I do but they can see certain colors. For dogs, blues and yellows are the most prominent colors in their vision, where reds and greens may look more grey or brown to them. It's no wonder that blue frisbees and yellow tennis balls are so darn popular with pups, for them, they really are eye catching!

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Falcons girls soccer set for opener

Izzy Usher starts a dribble.

Ainsley Holden does a running drill in practice last week.

Coach Nundi Goncalves gathers his team.

Izzy Horne practices her footwork.

Turley photos by David Henry
www.sweetdogphotos.com

WILBRAHAM – The Minnechaug Regional High School girls soccer team worked out on the turf all last week and are preparing for the regular season opener next week. The Falcons

are on the road to start the season, facing off with Westfield on Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 4:30 p.m. Their home opener is on Friday, Sept. 11 against East Longmeadow at 6:45 p.m.



The Falcons get their running in.

Westfield State University girls volleyball ranked second in preseason poll

WESTFIELD – 2025 MASCAC Volleyball regular season and tournament champion Bridgewater State are the preseason favorites to win the 2026 crown as voted on by the coaches around the league. The Bears received seven first place votes to land in the top spot. Back-to-back tournament MVP Lily Welch returns after she helped the Bears to their first MASCAC Regular Season title since 2008. Last season, she led the team in kills with 234, hitting percentage (.313) and digs (262). Welch was also second with 46 total blocks and fourth with 31 service aces.

Westfield State is up next in second. The Owls were 7-1 in league play and bring back All-Conference honoree Lauren Carnes who earned first team honors as an outside hitter, racking up 185 kills while playing in just 17 matches after missing nine games during the middle of the season. Carnes per set numbers reflect her impact on a match-by-match basis with her 2.89 kills per set ranking third in the MASCAC. The Owls lost three of their top four hitters to graduation, but return a steady back line with Erica Majka (Agawam, Mass.) (266 digs) and Zurielys Rivera (264 digs)

tops among the Owls' defensive specialists a year ago. Westfield will tip off the 2026 season with a non-conference match at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy on Sept. 1 at 6:00 p.m. Sitting in third place is Framingham State with the final first place vote. Looking for her third straight MASCAC Offensive Player of the Year award is Natalie Reynolds. In 2025, she led the conference with 438 kills, 3.71 per set and 1,085 total attacks. She was second in hitting percentage at .279, fourth in solo blocks with 16 and fifth with 51 total blocks while adding

85 digs and 34 service aces. The Rams upset the Owls, 3-2 to eliminate Westfield from the conference tournament in 2025. MCLA comes in fourth in this year's poll. The Trailblazers were 5-3 with the help of reigning MASCAC Rookie of the Year Kaelynn Greeley who closed out her first year with the Trailblazers fourth in the conference with 221 kills, seventh in kills per set with 2.63 and 10th in hitting percentage with .217. She also tallied 36 service aces, 167 digs and nine total blocks over 25 matches. Up next in fifth is Worces-

ter State. Last season, the Lancers were also 4-4 in league play. During the 2025 season, Katherine Crateau finished second in the MASCAC with 477 digs and 654 receptions with third-most digs per set at 4.54. She also recorded 95 assists and 36 service aces to earn MASCAC Defensive Player of the Year accolades. Salem State is in the sixth spot. Returning for the Vikings is Celia Carbone who dished out a career-high 512 assists, averaged 6.10 assists per set, and set a new career-high in digs (222) last season. Rounding out the 2026 poll is Fitchburg State in sev-

enth and Mass. Maritime in eighth. For the Falcons, Madison Keohane returns after averaging 3.38 assists per set, 284 total assists, 171 digs and 25 service aces last season. For the Buccaneers, Holly Sanders is back after grabbing All-Conference honors in her first season. She led the MASCAC with 577 digs and 6.63 digs per set while tallying 25 kills, 89 assists, 48 service aces. The volleyball season gets underway the first week of September with the MASCAC teams in non-conference action.

New event added to Thompson Speedway calendar, Tri-Track Series

THOMPSON, CT – In an exciting addition to the Thompson Speedway calendar, the Monaco Modified Tri-Track Series has been added to the 64th Sunoco World Series of Speedway Racing to headline the Saturday portion of the three-day extravaganza! 2026 will mark the first time in series history that

the Monaco Modifieds have visited Thompson Speedway three times, this coming at a crucial point in the championship chase! While the championship will certainly be on the forefront of the driver's minds, the addition completes three-straight days of Tour-type Modified Racing at the Sunoco World Series.

It all starts Friday, Oct. 9 with the Modified Racing Series headlining the opening night with a 50-lap finale to crown their 2026 champion. The Monaco Modified Tri-Track Series now headlines the Saturday, Oct. 10 showcase while the NASCAR Whelen Mod-

Please see **RACE**, page 12

Umpires Association awards scholarship

Western Massachusetts Baseball Umpires Association Board Member Chris Anderson awards a \$500 scholarship earlier this summer Sean Krol. The umpires' association funds the scholarship through dues paid by its members. Anderson hopes in the future to fund more scholarships either through fundraising or donations, saying its important to give back to the sport they love, and promote education for high school seniors who play. Applications for next year's scholarship will open up early in 2027.

Submitted photo



Chaug volleyball ready to hit the court

WILBRAHAM – The Minnechaug Regional High School girls volleyball team is back on the court practicing. The Falcons are hoping to head back to the state tournament again this year and are getting ready to get started early next week. The Falcons season opener is against play-off rival Amherst Regional on Tuesday, Sept. 8 at 6:30 p.m.

Faith Rodrigues practices her hitting.

Jillian Rumplik makes a serve.

Turley photos by David Henry
www.sweetdogphotos.com

Kaylin Phillips goes left for a hit.



Monthly Highlights for September at the Hampden Senior Center:

Please call 566-5588 to RSVP for all events or register for classes at the senior center. Lunch is provided by Greater Springfield Senior Services daily at 12:00 noon. Suggested donation is \$3.00 per meal. You must reserve lunch by 11:00 am one day prior. Feel free to schedule reservations for the month.

Snuggles & Smiles: A Visit from Cloverbrook Farm Baby Goats

Thursday, September 10th from 10:00 AM to 11:00 AM. Baby goat snuggles are beneficial to your health and can boost your mood! You don't want to miss this experience. This event is scheduled to take place outside but will move inside if it rains.

Volunteer Meeting: Wednesday, September 16th at 10:00 AM. All CURRENT and NEW Volunteers!

Come and hear about new volunteer opportunities at the Senior Center and help us update our records with your current contact information. Refreshments will be provided.

Wicked Wednesday: Part 2

Wednesday, September 16th at 12:30 PM. Join us for Part 2 of the WICKED movie series as we watch WICKED: FOR GOOD. Light refreshments will be provided.

Grandparents Day/Thunderbirds BINGO

Thursday, September 17th, at 12:00 noon. Lunch: Beef & Bean Chili & Baked Potatoes provided by GSSSI. \$3 suggested donation. Dessert provided by Vantage Health and Rehab of Hampden. Followed by: BINGO with BOOMER and the Springfield Thunderbirds! We will have Thunderbirds prizes, including tickets to games, koozies, t-shirts, and more! This is a FREE event. Come and have your picture taken with Boomer and win great prizes!

Medicare Presentation with Trivia hosted by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts!

Friday, September 18th at 12:30 PM. Navigating the Medicare maze can be confusing - whether you're new to Medicare, just exploring available options, or trying to adapt to recent changes. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts will host 'Medicare Simplified', a fun, informative, and educational presentation designed to shed light on core concepts and provide much-needed clarity on the Medicare landscape. This presentation focuses entirely on providing clear, unbiased Medicare information - no BCBS product details, just the essentials. Many key topics will be discussed, including: What is Medicare? When can I enroll? What are the differences between Medicare Supplement and Medicare Advantage plans? Where do I go for additional help? To make this presentation even more engaging, this presentation will end with a fun Medicare Trivia "contest," providing you with an opportunity to test your knowledge - and the chance to win a small prize! Following the presentation, a knowledgeable BCBS Medicare Representative will remain on hand to answer all questions.

A Walk in Their Shoes Wednesday, September 23rd at 10:30 AM. Dementia experts from The Reserve at East Longmeadow will be here to lead you through a simulation to better understand and empathize with what living with dementia is like. You will be guided through the challenges of compromised vision, hearing, and dexterity, all of which affect cognition. Join us for this important and informative program.

Greeting Cards with Ellie Monday, September 24th, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. Cost is \$3.00 per person, paid to the instructor. All materials are provided. Come and discover endless possibilities for creating your own personal greeting cards. Learn new techniques each month. Class will meet on the 4th Monday of every month.

Memory Tips with Dr. Wendy Hurwitz Friday, September 25th at 12:30 PM.

Did you know that a recent study from Stanford University suggests that the techniques used by memory athletes* can be taught, learned, and can create changes in the brain that enhance memory skills? Come learn about the tips and techniques used by memory athletes.* *Memory athletes are Olympic-level memorizers who compete to see who can memorize large amounts of information.

PUZZLE PALOOZA:

Tuesday, September 29th from 1:00-3:00 PM. Join us for another fun afternoon of Puzzles! Work in randomly assigned teams to see which team can finish a 300-piece puzzle the fastest. Prizes will be awarded!! Puzzle Making is good for you! It can help improve your memory and reduce stress while providing a fun way to socialize and exercise your brain. Puzzles and refreshments are generously sponsored by All American Assisted Living at Enfield.

Monday Ukulele with Amy Scott New 8-week session: September 14th—November 9th (no class on October 12th). Beginner Ukulele – 11:45 AM to 12:45 PM. Cost is \$50 for the session if paid in full or \$7 per class for drop-ins. Advanced Ukulele – 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM. Cost is \$80 for the session.

NEW! Beginner Watercolors Classes with Trish Pilon Mondays, 12:30 PM to 3:00 PM. New 8-week session: September 14th to November 16th (no class on 10/5 & 10/12). Cost is \$80 for the session, paid to the instructor. All materials will be provided.

Common Threads Led by Joan Tompkins, PhD Mondays, from 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM. Do you ever feel lonely, discouraged, or overwhelmed? We all experience difficult times in our lives. Come and join our friendly group as we meet each week to share, connect, and support one another while navigating life's challenges and events. There is no charge, and everyone is welcome!

Living Stronger... Longer... with Lamar Moore Tuesdays from 2:15 PM to 3:00 PM. New 8-week session: September 1st to October 20th. Learn about balance and how it impacts your overall health and wellness. Get tips on strength training and cardiovascular endurance to increase mobility and flexibility. "It's never too late to start making progress on your health span. Muscles and balance are the two things you can train and improve even as you age." Cost is \$40 for the session if paid in full or \$6 per class.

Pickleball at Thornton Burgess, 85 Wilbraham Road Wednesdays, 8:00 AM—9:30 AM, 9:30 AM—11:00 AM, or 11:00 AM-12:30 PM. This program is for anyone 60 and older who is new to the sport or is a beginner to an advanced-beginner level who wants to learn the rules and practice playing. Please call the Senior Center to register.

Pickleball Clinics with Mary Grassetti

Our popular Pickleball Clinics return in September! We are offering a four-month series designed to help players build their skills through progressive instruction. Two sessions are available: Session 1: 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM / Session 2: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM Clinic Dates: September 23rd, October 21st, November 18th, and December 16th. These clinic dates will replace the regular Wednesday pickleball sessions. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. By signing up, you are committing to attending one clinic each month for all four months. Each session builds on the skills learned in the previous one; drop-ins are not accepted once the clinic begins. To get the greatest benefit from the instruction, please register only if you can commit to attending all four sessions. If you're unable to participate this time, there will be future clinic opportunities. The cost is \$40.00 for eight hours of non-certified instruction. Space is limited to 12 participants per session.

All proceeds from the instructional clinics will go towards funding the Senior Pickleball program. To register, please call the Hampden Senior Center to be placed on the list for your requested time slot. Your registration will be confirmed once payment is received. Thanks to the Hampden Parks & Rec Department for court time. Farm Share Program brought to you by Red Fire Farm. SNAP/HIP and CASH Shares are available. Located in Granby, MA, Red Fire Farm is a year-round local source for high-quality food and garden plants using organic principles that result in safe food and a healthy environment. If you are interested in participating in the Farm Share Program, please contact Wendy for a new Membership Agreement. Shares will be available twice a month on THURSDAYS, ending December 15th. Local deliveries in Hampden & East Longmeadow are available. Call to speak with Wendy about any questions or for enrollment paperwork. **Lobby Learning is Back!!** Don't have time to come in and sit for a long presentation? We understand! Lobby Learn-

ing welcomes businesses and organizations to provide helpful information to you. Stop in to pick up information and speak with a representative. Stay as long as you need to get your questions answered. If there's an organization you would like us to invite, please let us know, and we will do our best to bring them here. 9/3—Hampden County Regional SHINE Program 9/10—The Wellington 9/17—The Arbors at Chi-copee 9/24— New Growth NEW! Line Dancing with Mikki Thursdays, 2:15 PM to 3:15 PM. Join the fun and learn line dancing or build on the skills you already have! Line dancing is a great way to stay active, improve balance and coordination, meet new friends, and enjoy music. No partner is needed — just bring your enthusiasm and get ready to have fun! Cost is \$5.00 per class, paid directly to the instructor.

MEMORY CAFÉ EVERY FRIDAY AT 10:15 AM. Please call Wendy for more information. Sponsored by: Friends of Hampden Senior Citizens & private donations. The Memory Café is a welcoming place for individuals with memory challenges, along with caregivers, family, or friends, to gather in a safe, supportive, and engaging environment. Here's what's happening in September at the Memory Café: 9/4 – Ukulele with Amy 9/11 – Drumming with Jason 9/18 – Rhythm & Motion with Sara 9/25 – Mindful Movement with Lisa

"African Drumming" with Jason Fridays from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM New 12-week session: September 11th to December 11th (no class on 10/30 & 10/27) Cost is \$70 for the 12-week session if paid in full, or \$7 per class for drop-ins. All are welcome! No previous experience is necessary.

Did you know we offer the following services.... FREE Blood Pressure Clinic – Walk-in 9:15 am to 10:45 am. Tuesdays with Ann Maggio, RN, or Ruth Haley, RN Thursdays with Karen Blair, RN Chair Massage with Mindy – by appointment Wednesdays, September 16th, & 30th, from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. \$10 for a 10-minute appointment. Infinite Hair by Katie – by appointment Wednesdays, September 9th & 23rd, from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon. The 2nd & 4th Wednesdays of every month. Services offered include: Dry (Spritz) Cut—\$15.00 And Style—\$5.00 Men's Cut—\$12.00 Waxing Services Available: Brow, Lip, and "Nose Detail" - \$5 per service. A fast, low-discomfort wax to keep the stray hairs at bay. For those who are homebound, Katie is available for home visit appointments on September 2nd & 15th, from 9:00 am to 11:00 am. There is an additional \$10 travel fee for home visits.

Gift Cards make great gifts and are available for purchase at the Senior Center! Anyone of any age is welcome to schedule appointments for these services. Please call 566-5588 to schedule your appointments.

Need a button sewn? Pants hemmed? Fix a rip? Help is on the way! Fridays, September 11th & 25th from 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon. The senior center welcomes seamstress extraordinaire, Georgina Hamilton, on the second and fourth Fridays of every month to help with your tailoring needs and more. This service is FREE, but donations are graciously accepted for senior center programs and services.

Do you have a financial planning question or concern? Wednesday, September 16th. Pat Sherman from Edward Jones will be here on the third Wednesday of every month by appointment to discuss retirement planning, Social Security, investments, financial goals, and more. Call to schedule a 30-minute appointment. This is a FREE service.

Summer Puzzle Pacs are back and are available in the lobby at the Senior Center. Return your completed Puzzle Pac by October 1st for a chance to win a gift card. **HELP US STOCK OUR SHELVES with Tissues.** Thank you to those who donated dish soap last month. Every month, we will target a different item to help fill monthly Personal Needs Bags. Due to space constraints, please refrain from purchasing warehouse-sized items.

"Come What May" Boutique... is open in our lobby for all to shop during normal business hours. Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. We accept donations of new or gently used clothing, outerwear, accessories, and footwear. All proceeds from Boutique sales will benefit the needs of the Senior Center.

The Old Mill English Tea Room Royal Tea Experience Thursday, October 1st, starting at 11:30 AM. Enjoy Unlimited Tea, a selection of Queen Tea Sandwiches, and Dessert. The price per person is \$30.00 and includes the meal, gratuity, and tax. This is a DRIVE-YOUR-SELF event. Transportation will not be provided. To reserve your spot and pay for this event, please call the senior center.

October Crafts Come and enjoy making Fall crafts with us at the Senior Center! Projects will be displayed in the Lobby. Pre-registration is required. Call and sign up today. Friday, October 2nd, 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon. FREE Pumpkin Painting with Louise Sponsored by Bilton's Mountainside Orchard Tuesday, October 6th, 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon. FREE Paper Pumpkin Craft with Sandy Tuesday, October 13th, 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon. Fall Wood Shelf Decor – Kim Cost is \$10. All materials will be provided.

Annual FLU/COVID Vaccine Clinics sponsored by Big Y Pharmacy Monday, October 5th, 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM Wednesday, October 7th, 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM Vaccines will also be available for homebound individuals on Monday, October 19th. An appointment is REQUIRED to receive a vaccine, whether at the Senior Center or in your home. Insurance cards are required. Special thanks to Rice Fruit Farm and Big Y for donating delicious apples for our Flu/COVID Vaccine Clinics!

Mini Health Information Fair Wednesday, October 7th from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM. Stop by, even if you are not getting a flu/covid shot, to get information from these great organizations! STCC Dental: Learn about all the great programs the STCC Dental Program has to offer. InstED: Your in-home alternative to the Emergency Department Find out more about how you can access treatment for non-emergency medical needs in the comfort of home. Hampden County Sheriff's Department: Information will be available about the RUOK? Program and other programs offered by the department. Powerback Rehabilitation to You is excited to offer a Balance Clinic with Balance Assessments. This fun and informational clinic will offer a comprehensive approach to improving balance, reducing the risk of falls, and enhancing overall mobility and quality of life. A team of licensed therapists will conduct personalized balance assessments using equipment and assessment protocols to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Come join us to see where your Balance "Falls"!

Excel Home Care Sanitation Station will be here to provide FREE Walker, Wheelchair, & Cane Sanitation. Help keep your mobility equipment clean and reduce the spread of germs! Wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and rollators will be professionally cleaned and disinfected. **Medicare Open Enrollment Round Table Q&A Session with Becky & Ann** Wednesday, October 14th, 10:00 AM. Open Enrollment is October 15th—December 7th. This is a time to look at your current insurance plan and determine if making changes is beneficial to you. Join SHINE Counselors Becky & Ann for a roundtable discussion to answer any questions before Open Enrollment starts. *If you need an appointment during Open Enrollment, please call the senior center beginning September 8th. Hampden will have 2 SHINE counselors this year (Becky & Ann). More details in the October Scribe.

NEW!! Evening Yoga with Lisa Zizza Mondays from 5:45 PM to 6:45 PM. New 6-week evening session: October 19th—November 23rd We need at least 10 people to run this session, so call today to let us know you're interested. Cost is \$30 for the session, prepaid.



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RACE from page 11
ified Tour will crown their 2026 champion following the World Series 150 on Sunday, Oct. 11. "We are glad we got to add the Monaco Modifieds to this year's Sunoco World Series,"

said American-Canadian Tour managing partner Cris Michaud. "They always put on a great show at Thompson and the fans are sure to get their Modified fix before the snow starts to fall!" Thompson Speedway roars back to life on Wednes-

day, September 16 for the Eden Rafferty Attorneys Fall Showdown Late Model Special! The Late Models take center stage in their extra-distance showdown alongside the Thompson Sunoco Modifieds, SK Light Modifieds, Street Stocks and Crown Vics

with a 6:00pm Post Time. The North East Short Track Network (NESTN) will stream Wednesday Night Racing at Thompson Speedway all season long, visit www.nestn.tv for more info including Pay-Per-View pricing and ways to subscribe!



Hampden-Wilbraham welcomes new school staff

WILBRAHAM - Members of the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee and district administrators welcomed 49 new staff to a variety of roles, including lunch/recess monitors, food service workers, school nurses, paraprofessionals, and faculty for New Staff Orientation Day on Aug. 25.

These new staff come with a variety of prior experiences from schools and other employers in Hampshire County, the Lower Pioneer Valley and northern Connecticut. They also include Danielle Burke, Patty Grandfield, Kim Montano, Karli Ptazkiewicz, and Tanya Larson who are entering the teaching ranks via a para-educator to teacher career ladder.

Superintendent Provost opened the day by asking the new employees to share their experiences of being “completely immersed in the work” encouraging the new team to pursue those ‘flow’ moments in the classroom where teachers and students become so absorbed in learning that they lose track of time—the hallmark of truly great engagement.

Hampden-Wilbraham Education Association (HWEA) President Damian Konkoly and New Member Coordinator Julia Maturo encouraged the new teachers and paraprofessionals to build supportive relationships with their colleagues.

To support the district’s goal of creating a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment, Lisa Curtin, the district’s Director of Curriculum, Instructional and Professional Learning reviewed the district’s Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan with new staff. She also detailed the district’s comprehensive protocols for ensuring the safety and well-being of every student, emphasizing the staff’s shared responsibility as advocates for our children.

Additionally, Student Services Director, Joshua Dickson, explained the process for ensuring that educators have the information they need to educate their students with disabilities.

To ensure that technology serves as a support and not a barrier for new staff, Bill Powers, the district’s Director of Information Technology introduced the IT team, oriented new staff to the district’s technology platforms and explained how to request assistance when encountering a technical issue.

The orientation program concluded with a hands-on safety training ensuring that all staff were trained to use the first-aid supplies stocked throughout the district.

This orientation is an annual part of the district’s ongoing efforts to ensure that new faculty and staff receive the support they need to make the new school year a successful one for them and their students. With students returning to school on Aug. 31, the district is nearly fully staffed, and ready to welcome students back for a fantastic academic year.

VISIT from page 1

it to come and look at our middle school as part of our statement of interest for the Core program for the middle school,” Slaughter said. “They’re coming out on the 16th. They’ll spend half to three-quarters of a day poking around and looking at things and getting a firsthand sense of stuff, as well as senior program review. So, that’s the process that we’re in right now with that. So, that’s a good sign. We’re still in process on that.”

Slaughter also provided an update on the projects at Mile Tree Elementary School and Stony Hill Elementary School, which are through the MSBA’s accelerator repair program and are currently active.

“In the month of July, we were notified by the MSBA of who our designer would be and who our OPM or bonus project manager would be for the project. So, they notified us of that. They gave us the template for the contracts for both of them,” Slaughter said. “There was those two things plus a calendar and permission form so they can access our information on MSBA. So, we worked with our OPM and they helped put together—they helped fill in the blanks basically—on the



Turley photo by Kristin Rivers

The Massachusetts School Building Authority will conduct an on-site visit to Wilbraham Middle School on Sept. 16.

contracts, got those all together. Those were due the 17th. We got those turned in about a week ahead of that. The schedule that we got polished up around the 14th—but we got everything turned in, so we’re on track.”

He added that with those projects, the district is meeting the obligations of the MSBA process with more to come.

“As the fall rolls along, we’ll start to get into the details of actual design and preparation works for those two programs,” Slaughter said.

After a question on the date for the MSBA visit from School Committee Member Timothy Collins, Slaughter elaborated further.

“They send a couple of the MSBA staff that are doing that due diligence for the background so they can put together a recommendation to the board itself. So, these are people with technical expertise that are coming to make notes, compare what we’ve told them about our buildings what notes they got when they did a full review of the buildings. They did a survey through a third-party company about the time I came on, so right at the 24-25 school year,” Slaughter said. “Sort of taking information they have and firsthand walking through, making notes and posing questions about the physical structure of the building and seeing it in operation and collecting that data so they can build their recommendation to the full MSBA board for action.”

When Vice Chair Dr. Michael Tirabassi asked if they come while class is in session, Slaughter replied yes.

“That’s part of what they want to see is how full is the building. ‘You tell us it’s full’ but then they want to see that as part and parcel of it. They want to see the kids move around the building. They want to see the sort of physical stuff. They want to see the electrical, the electrical panels, the boilers. They’ll probably go up on the roof,” Slaughter said.

On the question of the fans and dehumidifiers, Slaughter said these would be examined as well.

“So, they’ll get to experience all that firsthand, but they do want to see some of the operational things like kids changing classes and how far are your classrooms and all of those things are part and parcel of what they’re going to be trying to keep an eye on and make notes on,” Slaughter said.

SIGN FUNDRAISER

from page 5

this year is just help a Vet. It doesn’t matter who they are. Reach out, we will help and that’s what we want to do this year is just reach out to a Vet or the Veteran’s family member, dependent. If they need help, they’re welcome to come down here and speak to myself or somebody else and we will help them in any way, shape or form,” Demers said. “Over the last year, we have donated more than \$15,000 to Veterans of the community and we want to continue that.”

DeOld thanked the community for supporting the Post.

“It’s well appreciated and, again, just looking forward to all of the good things that the Post is going to be able to continue to do for the community in the future that a brand new sign is going to highlight,” DeOld said. “Everybody coming down Main Street is going to see the sign and say, ‘Oh, that’s where the world famous Ledoux Post is.’”

HABITAT from page 6

while supporting GSHFH’s mission. They surpassed their goal just four months later and finished the grant period having raised \$2,281.

“I’m very grateful,” said Yandel Alameda, GSHFH intern and a senior at Springdale Education Center (SEC) in Chicopee. “It was the smartest thing we’ve ever done. We are giving families light and helping them achieve their homeownership dreams.”

The grant encourages youth leaders to engage in a community project that supports local affordable housing efforts, which is exactly the goal of Bean Boutique.

“We loved the students’ proposal and enthusiasm the students had for the project,” said Aimee Giroux, Greater Springfield Habitat executive director.

The idea for an iced coffee shop came from former GSHFH intern Dakota Wirf in summer 2024. Dakota then presented the idea to Jill Brewer, director of Education for Positive Regard Network, who approved the concept.

“It was a hot summer day and I was outside at Habitat with Nate (Shlosser) and just asked ‘Why don’t we sell iced coffee?’” said Dakota. “At school, we saw staff with coffee and they had to go to Dunkin’ Donuts to get it. But,

if they got coffee at work, they could step out for a minute and still help Habitat.”

Dakota, Nate, and Yandel quickly turned their idea into a business. They created the name “Bean Boutique,” a marketing guide — including logo, branding colors, and fonts — and a plan to get the word out. They designed flyers to be distributed in the school, drafted morning announcements to be read over the intercom, plus budgeted and shopped for supplies. Bean Boutique opened its doors to teachers and administrators at both SEC and its neighboring Center for School Crisis Intervention and Assessment in December 2024, just weeks before Christmas. Before the grant period even began, Bean Boutique had already raised \$1,200.

“Bean Boutique has taught us business skills, like advertising and marketing,” said Nate. “People at SEC and Center School now know about Habitat and what it does. Our flyers were a big part of that.”

In an effort to keep Bean Boutique profitable and fresh, the interns brainstormed other drinks to sell, including hot chocolate, apple cider, lemonade, and a non-alcoholic twist on dirty sodas. Nate and Yandel also created a campaign around the “Refined Pour.”

They welcomed ideas from peers, such as boba tea, which came from an elementary student at Center School. Later, they publicly recognized him and thanked him for his suggestion.

“They didn’t just create a coffee shop,” said Jill. “They created a space that brings people together, teaches real-life skills, and makes a powerful difference in the community. Their passion, drive, and heart have turned a simple idea into something powerful.”

Beyond Bean Boutique’s fundraising success, Yandel and Nate said Habitat has helped them as much as they have helped others.

“It’s the best thing that has ever happened to me,” Yandel said. After graduation in June 2027, he said he’d like to join the military. Today, Yandel oversees marketing for a business he and his brother started together, and has designed the company’s logo. “It changed my mindset. I only saw my life in the streets.”

Nate agreed.

“Habitat is amazing. It keeps me out of trouble. It keeps me focused,” he said. “Before Habitat, I didn’t see my life going anywhere.” Nate said when he graduates next June, he’s exploring three plans — enlisting in the military, attending college, or becoming a truck driver.



VETERANS DAY SALUTE

The Wilbraham-Hampden Times
~ November 5, 2026 ~

The Wilbraham-Hampden Times
will be saluting our local veterans
(from all wars and branches, including
honoring deceased veterans), reservists,
active duty U.S. Military members.

Please submit a photo of your veteran with his
or her name, rank, branch of military and hometown
by email to jamie@turley.com or drop off a photo to
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All photos will be returned.

Please submit your photo no later than
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