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## Santa, Mrs. Claus spread holiday cheer in Hampden

Minnechaug Key Club students volunteer at the library

By Dalton Zbierski  
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HAMPDEN – The line nearly went out the door at the Hampden Public Library last Saturday, as youngsters patiently waited to take photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Afterwards, they enjoyed a variety of crafts, games and snacks in the Town Hall auditorium, where students from the Minnechaug Regional High School Key Club volunteered their time.

“We love it; I think it’s our favorite day of the year,” Library Director Ellen Moriarty said. “We really enjoy seeing all the kids with their families coming to see Santa and Mrs. Claus. Some kids have their lists all ready to go. Some kids make their lists while they’re waiting. It’s all very, very cute.”

The multi-faceted event was sponsored by the Friends of the Hampden Public Library. Youth Services Librarian Kate Rumpalik invited the teens from the Key Club to help run numerous crafts and games.

“It’s really a great day,” she said. “I absolutely couldn’t do it without them. I’d never be able to pull it off. They always show up on time and help me clean up at the end. They’re just great kids.”

Photos with Santa and Mrs.



Photo courtesy of the Hampden Public Library.

Members of the Minnechaug Key Club joined Santa and Mrs. Claus in volunteering their time at the Hampden Public Library on Dec. 9.

Claus is a yearly tradition at the library, but this year it took on greater meaning after Hampden’s tree lighting ceremony was cancelled due to inclement weather. The presence of the Key Club members added an extra component to a fun event.

Members of the Key Club perform acts of service in Hampden and Wilbraham, and Minnechaug student Noelle Hisgen was happy

to be present at the celebration on Dec. 9. Her task was helping children make reindeer food for all nine of Santa’s reindeer.

“What you do is you fill two cups of oats, an assortment of glitter, and basically when you have the bag on Christmas Eve and you have the cookies and milk for Santa, you have to put the reindeer food right next to it so Santa can see it. Once he’s done giving you

your presents, he can take this and feed it to the reindeer,” Hisgen said.

Hisgen said her favorite aspect of being a Key Club member is the amount of service she can complete as part of the group. The festivities in Town Hall were right up her alley.

“I just love being able to be able to make people happy, especially through small events like

this. I love working with children so I can just be able to make them smile for this one day. This is the season of giving, so it’s really nice to do something like this for them,” she said.

Key Club members Carly Trangagse and Noemi Fraga helped children write letters to Santa during the two-hour event.

Please see **SANTA**, page 4

## Meet Hampden’s Veteran Service Officer Jason Burgener

By Kristin Rivers  
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HAMPDEN – Jason Burgener, a retired U.S. Coast Guard Veteran, is Hampden’s new Veteran Services Officer.

Burgener’s office hours are Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Town Hall auditorium, with coffee hours the first Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m. at the senior center.

Additionally, Burgener is available outside of these hours when needed.

Since beginning his role nearly five months ago, Burgener has met with over 60 veterans, answering their questions and helping them find information on benefits and what they qualify for from the Department of Veteran Affairs.

In addition to Hampden, Burgener also serves the towns of Wales and East Longmeadow.

Burgener shared he entered military service on a dare, speaking with a recruiter. After taking the entry test and examination for the Coast Guard, the



Turley photo by Kristin Rivers

Hampden Veteran Service Officer Jason Burgener, a retired veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, smiles as he awaits meeting with veterans at the Hampden Senior Center on Dec. 6. Burgener helps his fellow veterans find the resources and support they need and answers questions about benefits, services available for veterans and more.

only military branch there when he arrived at the recruitment office, he was accepted.

“So, three months later I was in the military,” Burgener said. “On a dare. It was the best dare I ever accepted.”

Burgener then was in the Coast Guard for 25 years, with a goal of serving for 30 years. However, after being diagnosed with diabetes, he was no longer

Please see **VETERAN**, page 8

## Muppet replica raffle leads to a major donation

Community Survival Center receives \$1,500 of food

By Dalton Zbierski  
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WILBRAHAM – Emily Engel, owner of Sew Special Wilbraham on Boston Road, paired her talent for creating Muppet replicas with a desire to give back, resulting in a large donation of food to the Community Survival Center in Indian Orchard.

For the past 10 years, Engel’s favorite pastime has involved making full flush replicas of Muppets of all different kinds. She considers the activity to be her greatest passion.

Each holiday season, Engel looks to give back by completing a food or clothing drive, and when she learned about Big Y’s Sack Hunger program, which donates to food banks, she knew she had a chance to do something big.

Inspired by The Muppets



Photos courtesy of Wilbraham Big Y Store Director Derek Kaczowka

Rizzo the Rat, a Muppet, pictured with \$1,500 worth of food for the Community Survival Center.

Christmas Carol, a 1992 musical/comedy, Engel set out on creating a replica of Rizzo the Rat, a limited-edition item.

Please see **DONATION**, page 8



# Kids, teens get in holiday spirit by creating gingerbread houses



Children gather in excitement at the candy table as they get ready to start making their gingerbread houses during the Kid's Gingerbread Houses workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.



Isabelle shows off her gingerbread house during the Kid's Gingerbread Houses workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.



A close-up of a gingerbread house designed with cereal pieces, sugar candies, gum drops and more during the Kid's Gingerbread House workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.



Mandy Roberge of Wicked Good Henna instructs attendees on how to decorate their gingerbread houses during the Kid's Gingerbread Houses workshop at Wilbraham Public Library on Dec. 5.



Eva Gagliarducci with her gingerbread house during the Teen Gingerbread House workshop at WP Library.



Joey Dickson gets creative as he works on his gingerbread house during the Teen Gingerbread House workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.

By Kristin Rivers  
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WILBRAHAM – Kids and teens got in the holiday spirit in the library's Brooks Room on Dec. 5 during two Gingerbread House workshops.

The workshops were sponsored by the Friends of the Wilbraham Public Library and the Wilbraham Cultural Council.

Led by Mandy Roberge of Wicked Good Henna, participants decorated gingerbread houses with frosting, fondant and many treats including gummy worms, cereal, marshmallows, Twizzlers, pretzels, gum drops, jellybeans and more.

Emerson Couture attended the Kid's Gingerbread Houses workshop, dubbing hers "a sugar rush," with candy canes, gummy leaves, Twizzlers, chocolate, gumdrops, sprinkles and

Airheads.

Couture said it was her first time at the workshop, having heard about it from her nana who found the event on the library's Instagram page.

"I'm really happy with what I'm creating," Couture said.

Couture's favorite part was the candy.

"I feel like it's relaxing just putting on candy and not really thinking, just doing," Couture said. "And plus, I love how people are here that I actually know from school and friends. I just love doing

crafts."

Couture also enjoys how the library offers programming with many different things to do, including winter crafts such as coloring and making ornaments.

"I just have fun here doing fun things," Couture said.

Roberge said she primarily works as a henna artist and brings the gingerbread workshops to libraries during the month of December, saying she has "the best job in the world" and is "living my best life."

After becoming a mom, Roberge went from working as a full-time reporter to a freelancer, doing writing, varying craft workshops and running an af-

ter-school program at a Waldorf School, later getting involved in libraries after doing kid's yoga and starting her henna workshops.

"Throughout that, I still loved working with librarians so while my henna workshop is my main workshop, it's about 75% of what I do, there's still times throughout the year when henna gets a little quiet, so I step up my other crafts like this one," Roberge said.

On the gingerbread house workshops, Roberge said it brings back memories of when she was a kid. She stressed how

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# Davenport becomes Select Board Chair

Markel agrees to stay on for several more months

By Dalton Zbierski  
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HAMPDEN – The Dec. 11 Board of Selectmen meeting began with a bang, as Donald Davenport was named the new chair.

The board did its regular reorganization this past May when Selectman Craig Rivest turned down the position of chair.

“Typically, as in years past, the member of the board in their third year would be the chair. It would have been Craig. Craig was offered the chair but had a much better offer and turned it down. So, as has been done in prior years, the board voted to have me remain for half the year, and Don would take over (after) half a year, and next year he would be voted chair and stay on for that year as well,” Selectman John Flynn said.

On Monday, Rivest also turned down a seat on the Board of Health. He explained his decision.

“I’ve just got a bunch of projects going on with fiber and water commission stuff, and a lot of other activities outside of the board that are pulling me into a lot of different directions,” Rivest said.

Rivest nominated Flynn to serve instead on the Board of Health. Flynn accepted the nomination, expressing that he understands why Rivest passed on the opportunity.

“I think that’s a very good point. The fiber and the water are two very high-profile things here. I have no problem with that. I certainly have experience being chair of the Board of Health before,” Flynn said.

During the meeting, the board voted to renew Town Administrator Bob Markel’s contract not to exceed three months. Markel had been scheduled to step down from the position at the end of the month, but it has been made clear that a replacement will not arrive until sometime next year.

Markel shared an update on the town administrator search after speaking with Bernie Lynch, Principal of Community Paradigm Associates, LLC, which is help-



Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.

**Hampden Town Hall**  
The Board of Selectmen covered a range of items during the meeting on Dec. 11.

ing Hampden with the search process. “I talk to him once a week,” Markel said. “He did tell me on the phone last Friday I think that he thinks he’s made some progress. He said the person that he had in mind was interested in Southampton, but the salary here is a little higher so there might be interest here instead.”

Markel said he will be available for at least the month of January, and Flynn was thrilled to hear that he will stick around a little longer.

“I think using your expertise even going longer for the grant part would be extremely valuable for the town. Even if we brought a new person on, you’d be available to bring that person up to speed,” he said.

On Dec. 11, the board decided to hire the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission to help create its digital equity plan, which will aim to ensure all residents have access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet.

Markel recommended PVPC and spoke recently with Director of Economic and Municipal Collaboration Eric Weiss. PVPC is also helping Wilbraham and Springfield complete the same type of project.

Markel spoke with Weiss about the estimated turnaround time and offered the following.

“(Weiss) said three to six months, but because Hampden is an uncomplicated situation, we don’t have equity issues or neighborhoods that would be underserved because we’ll do a town-wide project, and all areas of the town are going to be served. He said that makes it a lot easier; more like three months than six,” Markel said.

During Monday’s meeting, a public hearing was held for a septic tank variance at the Shell gas station at 42 Somers Road. A new, above ground septic system will be installed, and the board granted a variance from 100 feet to 73 feet.

Director of Public Health Finn McCool explained what jumpstarted the process.

“The neighbor was putting in a new fence and dug a fence post and saw that there was sewage coming out, so I went out and did an inspection, sent an enforcement letter to the Shell station, so we began the process of designing a new septic system,” McCool said.

Jim Bernardino, principal engineer for CMG Environmental, Inc., said soil testing was completed and there are no issues with the groundwater. There is an existing well on the site.

Bernardino explained why a new septic system with the variance will benefit the public and the owner of 42 Somers Road.

“This improvement is a benefit for public health all around even though we are encroaching a little bit. The only impacted party is the applicant himself,” he said. “The benefits for the applicants and the users of the site are we have a new state of the art septic system with accessible septic tanks for operation and maintenance. The other one was buried. No one knew it was even there.”

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Santa and Mrs. Claus were the most popular guests in the library last Saturday. Photo courtesy of the Hampden Public Library.



Children were able to share their Christmas wish lists with Santa and Mrs. Claus at the Hampden Public Library on Dec. 9. Photos courtesy of the Hampden Public Library.



Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.

Minnechaug Key Club member Noelle Hisgen helped children make reindeer food at the Hampden Public Library on Dec. 9.



Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.

From the left, Friends of the Hampden Public Library members Joan Shea, Jean Hall and Mary Luff passed out cookies to children during last Saturday's festivities.



Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski.

From the left, Minnechaug Key Club members Carly Trangagse and Noemi Fraga volunteered at the library on Dec. 9, helping children create their holiday wish lists.

**SANTA** from page 1

Trangagse heard requests ranging from an electric scooter to a computer to a telescope and was pleased to partake in the fun.

"I think it's huge because it really emphasizes the Christmas spirit and makes everyone really excited for the holidays with Christmas coming. I like spending time with the kids, making them happy and giving them something to do," she said.

Fraga said she loves talking to the kids, noting that some were really excited while others were quiet.

"Some have no clue what they want, and some are ask-

ing for a bunch of fun stuff," she said. "We do stuff like this pretty often, and it's fun."

Mary Luff, a member of the Friends, noted that some of the Key Club members were probably attending the event themselves 10 years ago. She was impressed by the community turnout.

"We have a whole bunch of fun, doing this with the kids, enjoying watching them," Luff said. "Hampden is a small town, isn't it? But hey when it comes to events like this, and everyone shows up, it's just great. It's a real community here."

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# Broadband Committee reviewing bids for Open Access Provider RFP

The update comes after the committee's Nov. 30 meeting

By **Kristin Rivers**  
Staff Writer  
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WILBRAHAM – During a Broadband Committee meeting held on Nov. 30, the members discussed updates on the bidding process for an Open Access Provider.

The ongoing project would help bring an Open Access Provider RFP to the town to provide options for fiber Internet service providers.

Since the meeting, Chair Tom Newton explained two bids were received after the committee's Dec. 6 deadline from EntryPoint Networks and Precision Pathways LLC of Leicester, MA.

With the bids in, Newton said the committee members will now review them.

"We have an evaluation process that all of our members will go through. We have a worksheet...we all answer the same questions about each bid. Each member basically is doing that on their own. At our next meeting, which is Dec. 21, we'll collectively come together. We will discuss each other's evaluation and then we'll come to a consensus as to which company, if everyone has agreement, will win the bid and move forward and become our open access provider," Newton said.

Newton said this update is "our biggest milestone to date" and the committee feels "the time is right for this" due to the technology available and the lower expenses.

After a provider is named, Newton said the next steps include determining the network architecture and design of the technical plant, examining the town's topography for placement and securing and identifying funding.

"It's taken us years to get to this point as a committee, but we feel we have the right solution. We really do. At this point, we've done our due diligence," Newton said. "We've looked at all sorts of other technologies, other providers and we think that we know the right path to take."

As the process continues, Newton expressed gratitude to his fellow Broadband Committee members, past and present, for their work.

"I'm very proud of the committee people that have come and gone, proud of this version of the committee," Newton said. "We had a really good group of people with all different strengths and really sort of held it well. We rolled up our sleeves and just went to town and did what we had to do. So, I'm very proud of the work that they put in."

Newton said while the technology plant is "a municipally owned or will be a municipally owned and operated plant," it is "not a profit center."

"So, there will be no profit made on this. Anything above 65% penetration will generate profit back to the plant and so that will go towards future maintenance and equipment, reinvestment and improving if we need to improve line quality or anything that needs to happen going forward. We hope that the plant itself will be self-sufficient," Newton said.

Meaning, that to become self-sustaining, there would need to be 65% of residents subscribed to the service.

Newton hopes residents understand the effort and work that has occurred when the committee presents to



should be able to own their own networks if they want to pursue that option, encouraging them to visit their website to learn more. Subscribing, if anyone chooses to, will help indicate interest, keep people up to date on the process and show potential funders or support status the 65% base is there.

"That's really what it's all about going forward. Doesn't mean they're going to actually commit to actually signing up, but it at least commits their interest at this point and that's what we need," Newton said.

He also hopes to get more information out to residents, whether through information forums, events or marketing and promotions, summarizing the project like this.

"So, what we're trying to do is lay down the groundwork for an advanced network that is more secure, faster, offers more competition, more choice and lower prices," Newton said. "We need to control our own destiny. It is time. It's time for Wilbraham to take control."

To learn more, visit [wilbraham-fiber.com](http://wilbraham-fiber.com).

them in the future, stressing the option is voluntary. "I just hope they get that sense, like we really didn't leave any stone unturned. We looked at every potential product, service and angle of how to get best to deploy that in the town, and I think we found that," Newton said. Newton wants the community to know that they

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<div style="text-align: center; background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Armata's Market</h3> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: small;">THE GOOD FOOD PEOPLE</p> </div> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. <b>Armata's</b> Peeled Beef Whole</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">TENDERLOIN</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$9<sup>97</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. <b>Armata's</b> Bone-In Whole or Half</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">PRIME RIB</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$9<sup>47</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. <b>Armata's</b> Top Sirloin</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SPOON ROAST</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>47</sup> LB.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Village FOOD MART</h3> </div> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. Whole or Half Boneless Beef</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">RIB EYE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$10<sup>97</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. Pork</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">CROWN ROAST</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$4<sup>29</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Store Made Italian</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SAUSAGE LINKS</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$3<sup>49</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA Gov't Insp. Fresh Grade A Boneless &amp; Skinless</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">CHICKEN BREAST</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$1<sup>57</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA CHOICE Certified Angus Beef Semi Boneless</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">PRIME RIB ROAST</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$16<sup>99</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">USDA CHOICE Certified Angus Beef Top Sirloin</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SPOON ROAST</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>99</sup> LB.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">Call to Order!</p> <h2 style="text-align: center; color: gold;">Holiday DESSERTS</h2> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Made from Scratch 9" Assorted Varieties</p> <h2 style="text-align: center; color: red;">CHEESECAKE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$21<sup>99</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Made from Scratch 9" Double Layer</p> <h2 style="text-align: center; color: red;">CARROT CAKE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$21<sup>99</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Made from Scratch (Serves 10-12)</p> <h2 style="text-align: center; color: red;">COOKIE PLATTER</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$24<sup>99</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Made from Scratch 9" Double Chocolate</p> <h2 style="text-align: center; color: red;">CREAM PIE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$17<sup>99</sup> EA.</p>
<h3 style="margin: 0;">HOLIDAY Favorites</h3>		
<p style="font-size: x-small;">Sugardale Fresh Bone In Shank Portion</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">HAM</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$1<sup>89</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Fresh Kayem Whole Boneless</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">PIT HAM</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$3<sup>79</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Fresh</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SPIRAL HAM</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$2<sup>99</sup> LB.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Best Yet Frozen 16-20 Ct 1 Lb. Bag</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">RAW SHRIMP</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>79</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Best Yet Frozen 31-40 Ct 1 Lb. Bag</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">COOKED SHRIMP</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>39</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Best Yet Frozen 31/40 Ct 1 Lb. Bag</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">RAW SHRIMP</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>99</sup> EA.</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: green; font-weight: bold;">Fresh PRODUCE</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;"><b>BERRY SALE!</b> Driscoll Strawberries 10 oz. Raspberries 6 oz or Blackberries 6 oz</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">2/\$7</h2> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Massachusetts Grown Little Leaf Farms</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">LETTUCE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$2<sup>99</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Native from Hatfield, MA</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">BUTTERNUT OR ACORN SQUASH</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">88¢ LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Red Seedless</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">GRAPES</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$2<sup>99</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">YAMS OR SWEET POTATOES</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">99¢ LB.</p>
<h3 style="margin: 0;">GROCERY &amp; DAIRY Specials</h3>		
<p style="font-size: x-small;">4 Lbs. Lifegoods Granulated</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SUGAR</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">2/\$7</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">or 5 Lbs. Gold Medal</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">FLOUR</h2> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Polar 1 L</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SELTZERS</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">88¢ EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Galbani 32 Oz.</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">RICOTTA CHEESE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$6<sup>49</sup> EA.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">Land O Lakes 16 Oz.</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">BUTTER</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$4<sup>49</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Philadelphia 8 Oz.</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">CREAM CHEESE</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">2/\$5</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Friendly's 48 Oz.</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">ICE CREAM</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$3<sup>88</sup> EA.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">3 Lb. Bag</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">CLEMENTINES</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$4<sup>99</sup> EA.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">BROCCOLI CROWNS</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$1<sup>79</sup> LB.</p>
<h3 style="margin: 0;">DELI Deals</h3>		
<p style="font-size: x-small;">Armata's Own Port Wine or Horseradish</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">CHEESE BALLS</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$5<sup>99</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Cittero Genoa</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">SALAMI</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$7<sup>99</sup> LB.</p>	<p style="font-size: x-small;">NEW! Grab 'n Go</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">OLIVE BAR</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$8<sup>49</sup> LB.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Sliced in Our Deli</p> <h2 style="margin: 0;">PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA</h2> <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold; color: red;">\$14<sup>99</sup> LB.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; background-color: black; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <h3 style="margin: 0;">Holiday Catering - Fast &amp; Easy</h3> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: small;">Meals for 4-6, appetizers and many a la carte options.</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-weight: bold; color: gold;">Take it easy this year!</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center; border: 2px solid red; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="margin: 0; font-weight: bold; color: red;">We will be OPEN on Christmas Eve SUNDAY December 24th 8am-2pm</p> </div>
<p style="margin: 0; font-weight: bold;">43 SOMERS ROAD, HAMPDEN, MA 413.566.8717 MON-SAT 8AM-6PM</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: x-small;">VILLAGE FOOD MART ARMATA'S MARKET VILLAGEFOODHAMPDEN.COM ARMATASMART.COM</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: x-small;">NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS. WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO LIMIT QUANTITIES. ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED. PRICES VALID 12/14-12/20/23</p>		

## The Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District

We will be taking applications for our early childhood programs for district residents for the 2024-2025 year. Programs are for 3 and 4 year olds. If your child will be three by September 1, 2024 you may obtain an application at [hwrtd.org](http://hwrtd.org) website under "Departments," "Student Services." "Early Childhood Program" or call Corinne Roberts, Student Services at 279-3863.

Applications will be available starting January 1, 2024. Priority screening and placement will be given to applications received prior to January 31, 2024, but we offer a rolling admission.



## VIEWPOINTS



By Ellenor Downer



Fox sparrow

I received an email last month from a Brimfield resident who reported an acquaintance from Hardwick had a fox sparrow and pine siskin in his yard recently.

The fox sparrow is a large sparrow, seven inches. It has rufous sneaking on a gray head and back, whitish underparts and boldly streaked with brown or rufous. It has an irregular central dot on its breast and a reddish brown

rump and tail.

These sparrows feed on the ground with seeds, fruits and insects making up its diet. They often jump forward and back to remove debris from the ground to uncover food. They come to feeders eating the seeds scattered on the ground by other birds.

The female lays four to six light blue, green eggs with darker marks in a cupcake nest if grasses, lichens and leaves lined with grasses, fur and rootlets. It is placed on the ground under a small tree or shrub. Their song is a series of clear melodious whistles and is more melodic than most sparrows.

### Loon life span

In the Loon Preservation Committee newsletter, they discussed the loon life span.

"How long do loons live?" is one of the most common questions that LPC biologists are asked.

The two oldest known loons in the world breed in Michigan, at the Seney Wildlife Refuge. They used to be a pair, however, in recent years they have gone their separate ways. The male's exact age is known because he was banded the year that he hatched. The female's exact age is unknown because she was banded as an adult, however, we know her minimum age. This summer, the female was at least 37 years old, while the male turned 36 years old.

New Hampshire has a male loon who was banded as an adult in 2000, making him at least 26 years old. In addition to his advanced age, he has another claim to fame: he is the only loon, so far, in New Hampshire that has produced chicks after surviving lead poisoning.

The oldest known loon in New Hamp-

shire is a female, who occupies a territory on Lake Umbagog. She was originally banded as an adult in 1993. Because she was banded as an adult, we don't know her exact age. We only know for sure that she was at least three years old in 1993. However, loons don't hatch chicks, on average, until they are 6 years old, and this loon hatched chicks the year she was banded. That means she was likely 6 years old or older in 1993. She is at minimum 33 years old, but more likely 36 or older.

### Decrease in bird activity

I received an email from a man who said this year he has a very noticeable decrease in bird population.

He reports he has a male and female bobcat and squirrels, rabbits and chipmunks have disappeared. He said "maybe that's part of it." He said he started to leave one feeder out overnight testing to see if there are still bears about. Here's hoping they have all gone into hibernation.

### Bird club

A Brimfield resident emailed, "On Nov. 30 I took part in a project for the bird club and afterwards we

went to Forest Park in Springfield and saw a black duck, a chilly looking great blue heron, a hermit thrush and several golden-crowned kinglets.

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



### Dear Rusty

My wife (born May 1962) and I (born April 1963) are retired and will soon be looking to start collecting our Social Security as we each hit 62. As this is new to us, I'm wondering what things we may need to be aware of or consider as we get closer to her 62 birthday in May. Any advice or information will be appreciated.

### Signed Planning Ahead

### Dear Planning

If you and your wife are both retired from working and have decided to start your (reduced) Social Security as soon as you are eligible at age 62, then there is nothing you need to do in advance of applying. The Social Security retirement benefit amount for each of you will be determined by your individual lifetime earnings record and your age when you claim. If either of you will be eligible for a spousal boost from the other, that will be automatically applied when both of you are collecting.

If your wife plans to claim her Social Security as soon as she is eligible, she should apply for her benefits about three months in advance and choose the option on the application which states "I want benefits beginning with the earliest possible month and will accept an age-related reduction."

For information, an applicant must be 62 for an entire month to get benefits, so your wife's first month of eligibility will be June 2024. Social Security deals only in whole months and pays benefits in the month following the month earned; so if your wife's birthday is between the 11th and 20th of the month her first Social Security payment will be received in her bank account on the third Wednesday of July. All subsequent payments will be on that same schedule.

Then, when it's time for you to claim, you should follow the same process as your wife and, if either of you is entitled to a higher amount as a spouse, it will be automatically applied when your benefits later start.

Applying for benefits is a relatively simple process if done online at [www.ssa.gov/apply](http://www.ssa.gov/apply). Note that to apply online your wife will need to first create her personal "my Social Security" account, which is easy to do at [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount).

To prepare for applying later, you can also create your personal online account now (it's

## We're planning to claim at 62; what do we need to know?

required to apply online), at which you will see what your estimated benefit will be at different ages. Of course, your wife first (and later you) can also call Social Security at 1-800-7721213 to request an appointment to apply for SS retirement benefits in person. Applications which are not done online are usually taken over the phone vs. requiring a visit to your local Social Security office, but applying online is, by far, the most efficient method; you can link to the application process from your online account.

One important thing to be aware of: By claiming at age 62, the monthly payment for each of you will be 70% of what it would be at your Full Retirement Age and that is a permanent reduction.

If you expect at least average longevity about 84 for you and 87 for your wife and if it is financially feasible, then waiting longer to claim would yield a higher monthly amount as well as the most in cumulative lifetime benefits. For those with an FRA of 67, SS retirement benefits claimed at FRA are 30% higher than at 62 and, if claimed at 70 are 75% more than at 62. And, although the decision on when to claim is always personal, a married couple

should also evaluate their joint needs when deciding.

One final word of caution: although you and your wife are now retired from working, be aware that if you claim SS benefits before your FRA and return to work, Social Security has an earnings test which limits how much you can earn before some benefits are taken away. The earnings test lasts until you reach your full retirement age.

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



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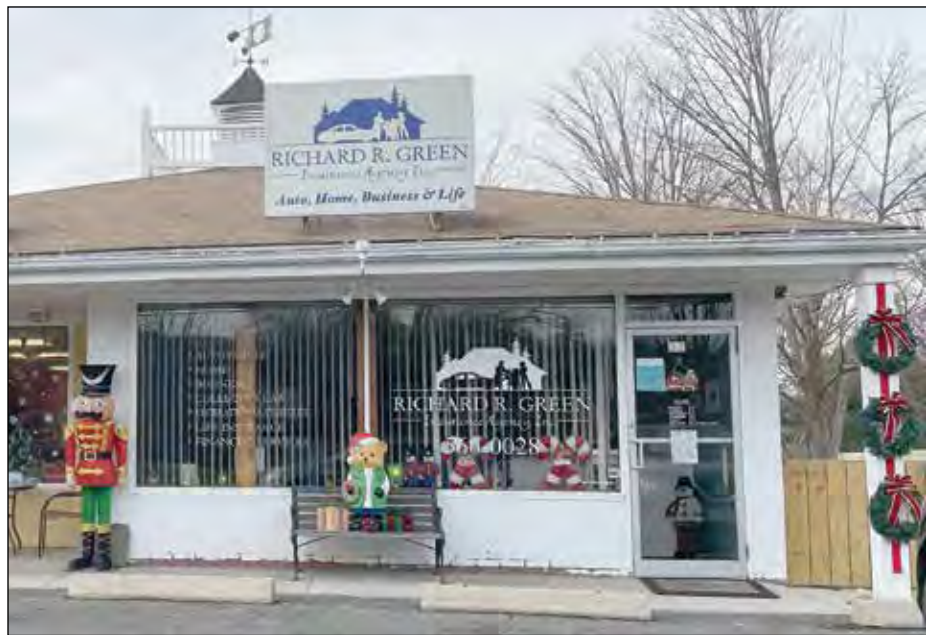
Letters to the editor should be 350 words or less in length. No unsigned or anonymous opinions will be published. We require letter writers to include his or her town of residence and home telephone number. We must authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold 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 [dzbierski@turley.com](mailto:dzbierski@turley.com). The deadline for submissions is Friday 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.

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Turley photo by Dalton Zbierski

The Richard R. Green Insurance Agency is finishing its 18th consecutive holiday collection drive.

## Richard R. Green Insurance Agency puts finishing ties on toy/supply drive

By Dalton Zbierski  
Editor  
dzbierski@turley.com

HAMPDEN – As the holidays near, the Richard R. Green Insurance Agency is wrapping up its annual collection of toys for children and supplies for veterans, but there still is time to donate.

The insurance agency is nearly done with its 18th annual holiday collection drive, but donations can still be dropped off at the Hampden office on Somers Road or the Monson office on Main Street.

“On one hand, we’re collecting toys for the kids, and on the other side, we’re collecting for the veterans,” Richard Green said. “One of the best parts about it is how much fun people have with the gifts they bring in.”

This year, the toy drive is benefiting I Found Light Against All Odds, a Springfield nonprofit dedicated to helping youths address social, emotional and economic issues. Meanwhile, Green will personally deliver the gifts for veterans to the VA Center in Leeds.

The insurance agency will also match the first \$500 in collected items for both children and veterans.

When the toy drive began, donations were given to Toys for Tots, a program run by the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve that distributes toys to children whose parents can’t afford to buy them gifts for the holidays. Several years ago, the insurance agency switched to I Found Light Against All Odds, as Green joined the Board of Directors of the Lighthouse Foundation, which is linked to the nonprofit.

While the collection drive officially ended on Dec. 13, the insurance agency is still accepting donations. A delivery of toys will be made to the nonprofit on Dec. 16, and Green has pledged to donate whatever toys he receives afterwards to Toys for Tots.

“They can continue to bring items to the office,” Green said. “Anything that comes in after the day we stop, and it does happen, I will make it a point to get it to the Toys for Tots. We have a phone number to call because we still have a contact there. We will make it a point to get it to Toys for Tots.”

Green doesn’t plan to deliver the veterans’ gifts to Leeds until around Dec. 20, giving residents about another week to donate. For

veterans, the women’s gift list includes clothing sizes 6-18, shoes sizes 9-12 and feminine products.

For men, suggested gifts include new socks and undergarments. Gifts for men or women could be gift cards to local stores, deodorant, toothpaste, razors, shaving cream, shampoo, conditioner, soap, lotion, body wash and blankets.

“The veterans’ side of the equation, I take up to the veterans’ facility up in Leeds, and they have a program where all these toiletries, t-shirts, clothes, work boots, anything we collect for the veterans plus our match, they put it into gifts and gift bags and gift packages for the veterans. They do it all right there on site,” Green said.

The insurance agency will also spend another \$100 to buy pizza for all the volunteers. From beginning to end, Green said the collection drive says an enormous amount about the community. He feels fortunate to be part of the process each year.

“You get to see the whole gamut of people’s feelings from giving to doing something for somebody who may not have anything,” Green said. “It’s all heartfelt, and you get to see it at the ground level. Really, it’s pretty great.”

Again, Green encouraged residents to continue bringing donations to the Hampden or Monson office, as the insurance agency will make sure they’re distributed. For more information, one can call 413-566-0028.

## School Committee tables Minnechaug Capital Needs Assessment quotes

Decision comes after quotes were above authorized amounts

By Kristin Rivers  
Staff Writer  
krivers@turley.com

WILBRAHAM - A decision on quotes for the Minnechaug Regional High School Capital Needs Assessment was tabled by the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee on Dec. 7.

Aaron Osborne, assistant superintendent for finance, operations and human resources, explained two quotes were received “significantly above the amount that the School Committee initially authorized.”

Osborne said his first reaction upon receiving the quotes was returning to the committee to see “if they’d like to do a higher amount,” but he realized the current policy for procurement levels “does not extend that high.”

“At these numbers, we would have to go out again for a formal invitation for bid,” Osborne said. “With that said, the School Committee does have policy DJE-I on the docket for a second read and I’d assume it would be a third. Next time, it would be a third read and approval. If the School Committee approved that, we would be using state law as our threshold and that would go up to \$100,000. These would fall under that.”

Osborne said the vendors would be contacted to see “if they would like to rebid it or amend their bids or hold their bid.”

“We would reach out to the third vendor who opted not to bid and see if

they’d be interested in bidding it and then we would bring that back to the School Committee if the School Committee wished us to do so,” Osborne said.

School Committee member William Bontempi focused on whether the people who work in facilities could do the assessment.

“So, let’s say you didn’t use the consultants, let’s say, but we have a list of specs that are listed here. Do our facilities people say, ‘Oh yeah this is pretty reasonable stuff,’” Bontempi said.

Osborne clarified they could, explaining how, annually, principals, head custodians and those who know the building sit down with them and walk the building as part of the 10-year capital plan.

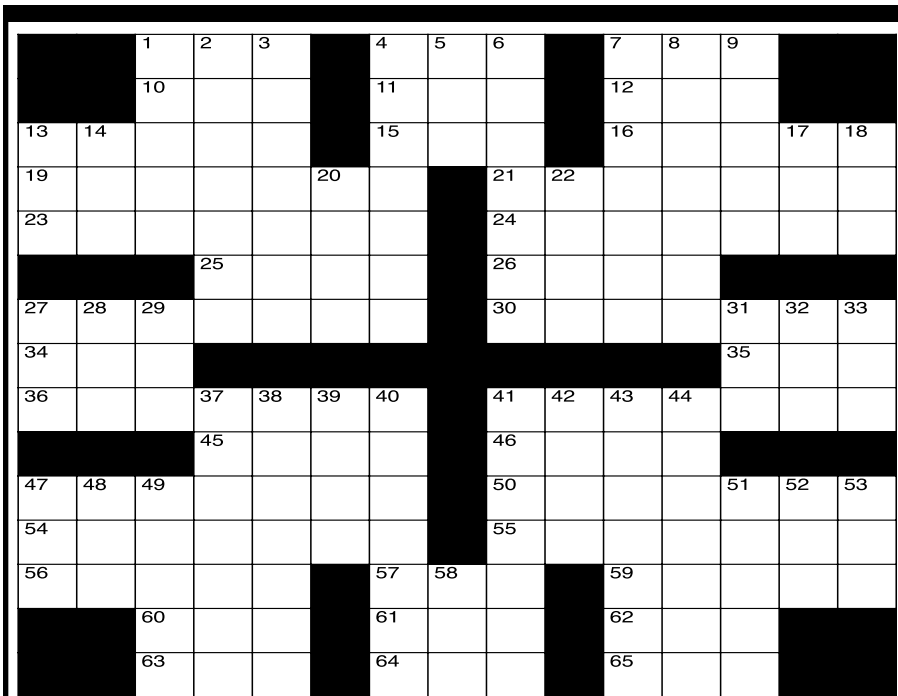
However, the committee would not be able to make a decision that evening.

“As it stands, we can’t do anything with this. The only avenue under the current policy that we would have would be to put out an invitation for bid which would take probably a full month to enact,” Osborne said. “If we do this in two weeks’ time, we can probably be ready to get a quick turnaround on these so the time wouldn’t change, and it would give us the flexibility.”

School Committee member Michael Tirabassi clarified the committee was not saying “their own people couldn’t give an assessment for cost.”

“But there was a very strong push from both towns that the amount of money that we’re looking at in terms of Minnechaug capital needs, you know, that they really felt strongly that we needed an outside consultant to come in to vali-

Please see **SCHOOL** page 8



**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. Mimic
- 4. Payroll firm
- 7. Perform in a play
- 10. Opine: \_\_\_ philosophical
- 11. Crony
- 12. Political action committee
- 13. 1991 Wimbledon winner
- 15. Affirmative
- 16. Exclamation of disgust
- 19. Action of connecting
- 21. A way to calm
- 23. Especially fine or decorative clothing
- 24. Walked proudly
- 25. Group of people related through male heir
- 26. Supplemented with difficulty
- 27. Soft touch
- 30. Erases
- 34. Spanish river
- 35. A princess can detect it
- 36. Clouds of gas
- 41. A way to get through
- 45. Part of a book
- 46. Southwestern US state
- 47. Fields where rice is grown
- 50. Area in Ghana
- 54. Sayings
- 55. Involve deeply
- 56. Compels to act
- 57. “Ignore all rules”
- 59. Indoor entertainment space
- 60. Born of
- 61. Back muscle
- 62. Sea dweller
- 63. Tools that resemble an axe
- 64. Prefix denoting class or kind
- 65. Tooth caregiver

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1. Inspiring (abbr.)
- 2. Put into a box
- 3. Breathes out
- 4. Pacify
- 5. Patriotic society for women
- 6. Fell down
- 7. Clothing
- 8. Dishwasher detergent brand
- 9. Former French republic
- 13. Single lens reflex
- 14. Men’s fashion accessory
- 17. Consumed
- 18. Marry
- 20. \_\_\_ up: intensifies
- 22. Body of water
- 27. People of southern Benin
- 28. Decorate a cake with frosting
- 29. Snag
- 31. Yearly tonnage
- 32. Records brain activity (abbr.)
- 33. Car mechanics group
- 37. Brought up to snuff
- 38. \_\_\_ faire: Economic approach
- 39. Phil \_\_\_, former CIA
- 40. Affixed
- 41. Period of adolescence
- 42. Substance
- 43. Danced
- 44. Baked without its shell
- 47. Parts per billion (abbr.)
- 48. Satisfaction
- 49. Balkans river
- 51. Christmas carols
- 52. Partner to tonic
- 53. “The Godfather” character Johnny
- 58. Swiss river

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### Christmas Community Dinner

WILBRAHAM – Evangel Assembly is eager to invite the Wilbraham-Hampden Community and neighbors to a Christmas Dinner. This free dinner will be served from noon to 2 p.m. on Christmas Day at 348 Stony Hill Road in Wilbraham. We look forward to celebrating Christmas with all those who attend.

### Library welcomes community feedback

WILBRAHAM – The Wilbraham Public Library is beginning to work on its next strategic plan and invites all community members to complete a survey to provide input on the library’s collections and services.

The survey is available to complete online through the library website, [www.wilbrahamlibrary.org](http://www.wilbrahamlibrary.org), and printed copies are available to pick up that the library, town hall, and senior center. The deadline to complete the survey is Jan. 12. The Strategic

Planning Committee will meet this winter and spring, and the goal is to complete the new plan before June. If you have any questions, please contact library director Karen Ball at [kball@wilbraham-ma.gov](mailto:kball@wilbraham-ma.gov) or 596-6141 ext. 159.

#### DONATION from page 1

“You can’t go out and buy a Christmas Carol dressed Rizzo doll because Disney doesn’t make them. Nobody does that,” Engel said. “So, I made the Rizzo replica and made the clothes the exact outfit that he’s wearing in the movie, and I put him up for a raffle.”

Using multiple social media platforms, Engel was able to spread word of the raffle throughout the country. Tickets cost \$5 a piece, and Engel decided to dedicate 50% of the proceeds to the Community Survival Center, a 37-year-old nonprofit that helps families struggling to provide food, clothing and household items.

Engel worked with the Wilbraham Big Y to donate a variety of nonperishable items to the survival center.

“I did not expect the response that I got. I never do. I’ve done raffles before, and they’ve been successful, but this one was pretty crazy,” she said. “I ended up being able to donate \$1,500 worth of groceries to the (survival center), and I had entries from all over the country. I think there were a couple from Canada as

well.”

Ultimately, a young lady in North Carolina won the Rizzo replica, and Engel mailed it out to her on Dec. 11. Engel explained that she chose the survival center because it’s local.

“I wanted to do something home-based, and I know that every food bank right now is struggling. I know they absolutely need these donations, and instead of me doing any kind of shopping myself or buying stuff that I’m not totally sure what they need, I went straight to the source at Big Y, the (Store Director Derek Kaczowka), I spoke to him directly and said, ‘Hey, I have this big donation I’m going to make, and I don’t want to do it online; how do I go about this?’”

Kaczowka walked Engel through the process and helped her order \$1,500 of food that the survival center specifically requested.

“It’s a wonderful story; we need more people like Emily,” Kaczowka said.

While Engel puts ample time and effort into creating the replicas, the process has become second nature to her, so she was happy to utilize her skill to give back and benefit her home area. Knowing that the Mup-

pets are beloved worldwide, she was confident she would receive a solid response but was blown away by the outpouring of support.

“It’s great; I love it, and it’s kind of neat that someone who’s not from here ended up winning, but still this area benefits,” she said.

Engel acknowledged that society can be upsetting and divisive but encourages people to give back in whatever ways they can, even though it’s overwhelming sometimes.

“Instead of focusing on the dark, you kind of focus on the light as much as you can,” she said. “And if you can do something creative while you accomplish that, then that’s even better.”

To learn more about Engel’s Muppets, one can follow her on X @BxPersonified or on Instagram @axepersonified.

Photos courtesy of Wilbraham Big Y Store Director Derek Kaczowka

**Emily Engel stands next to \$1,500 of food in Big Y, which she donated to the Community Survival Center after raffling off a replica of Rizzo the Rat, a Muppet.**



#### VETERAN from page 1

able to serve.

He became the veterans service officer after hearing of the opening from his girlfriend while in Texas to celebrate his grandson’s first birthday.

“I want to say I fell into it. I got lucky. I got lucky I think,” Burgener said. “I enjoy coming to work every day. I enjoy helping people, so I think I’m where I’m supposed to be right now; so it’s good.”

Burgener said helping veterans and their families stems from his own experience of filing a claim after his service concluded, explaining how someone was supposed to do it. When he later called the VA, he learned there was no record of him.

“So, I said I don’t want no one to go through what I did, waiting,” Burgener said.

For Burgener, helping people find and get the support they need fulfills his work.

“This week, I had three veterans go see me and say, ‘Hey thank you for doing my claim. I didn’t think I was going to get anything. We did it,’ and he said, ‘I got my third check,’ and ‘thank you,’” Burgener said. “And, ‘Hey, something was done wrong unintentionally by someone else. You fixed it so my late husband

(has) the right marker for his cemetery plot.’ You know? So, it’s just little things like that. It touched me inside and makes me want to find more information about the job to help more people.”

Burgener’s future goals include getting his recertifications done, helping three veterans currently with documentation for submitting federal claims, doing Veterans Day ceremonies in the communities he serves and setting up coffee hours in every town.

“So, Hampden’s is going to be the first Wednesday of every month, and I’m trying to get guest speakers in so that it’s not just me talking all the time and the veterans can come, pick and choose what topics,” Burgener said. “And it’s not just for the veteran. It can be a veteran’s immediate family.”

Burgener wants the community, including veterans and their families, to know he is here to support them, any time, any place.

“I would love to meet you all,” Burgener said. “If you want to reach out, I’m here. I can come to your house; I can meet you here. We can go get a cup of coffee, whatever you want, whatever you feel more comfortable doing. I am here for you.”

To schedule an appointment or learn more, contact Burgener at 413-640-0540.

#### SCHOOL from page 7

date what the needs were,” Tirabassi said.

Tirabassi said the topic became a big problem because Minnechaug’s capital needs “have been neglected by the towns.”

“They haven’t been appropriately planned for and there’s already a deficit because they don’t have anywhere near the money set aside right now of what the needs are going to be in the next few years,” Tirabassi said.

Bontempi clarified the town’s money is the taxpayers’ money and the committee members “are the stewards to the taxpayer.”

“So, when a number comes back 40% higher than what we had initially anticipated, and we can pretty much guarantee that the number on the IT assessment is going to come back higher than what we anticipate, I think it’s a legitimate question to ask where is that spill point,” Bontempi said. “I mean, at what point do you say

we really don’t need to spend this much money to find out that we need to spend money.”



School Committee Vice Chair Sean Kennedy responded, “If you look at it, the overall thing, we are in conversations of putting aside a million dollars a year over the next 10, 20 years as a way of keeping this building up to date.”

“So, if you look at it as just a million dollars a year, did that money spent to make sure that everything that we have is accurate and in order and help with timelines and stuff like that? It’s not just ‘Okay, yes you need to spend this money and whatever.’ It’s a lot more to it,” Kennedy said. “The investment that we’re looking at is significant enough that I think having some professionals come in and double-checking everything, I think, is fiscally responsible and prudent.”


The motion carried 6-1 to table the decision to the Dec. 21 meeting.

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# A COMMUNITY GALLERY

## Old Meeting House Festival of Trees, Wilbraham

The Wilbraham Garden Club decorated a floral inspired tree for the Festival of Trees on Dec. 3 at the Old Meeting House. From left, Pat Serra, president and Christine Scibelli, past president. Photo courtesy of Pat Serra.



*Life in &* **WILBRAHAM**

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

# WILBRAHAM

Polish National Credit Union made a donation on Friday, Dec. 8 to the Wilbraham Police Department's Stuff-A-Cruiser toy drive. From left, Assistant Branch Manager Carmen Santos, Branch Manager Zaneta Grasaki, Sgt. Brian Strong and Officer James Gagner. (Photo courtesy of PNCU)



## Yuletide at Storowton, Dec. 1-19.


Members of the Wilbraham Garden Club decorated the Gilbert House Parlor with period appropriate items, fresh greens/berries/hydrangeas/candles/pinecones/studded fruit and apples. Members from left, Lisa Lafleur, Kathy Luttrell, Christine Scibelli, Karen Feen, Halina Lefort, Judy Green, Pat Serra, Shirley Facey, Michele Axtmann and Norma Bandarra. Photo courtesy of Pat Serra.

## Library Wreaths and Planters Seasonal Display

On Dec. 5, the Wilbraham Garden Club decorated a number of wreaths with fresh greens/berries and pinecones for display on the outside of the Wilbraham Public Library. They also filled the four planters on the front and back walkways with fresh seasonal greens/berries and twigs. From left, Lisa Lafleur, Ginny McGovern, Judy Green, Christine Scibelli, Gail Manning, Karen Moreau, Harriet Pabich, Nancy Carlson, Shirley Facey and Pat Serra. Photo courtesy of Pat Serra.





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Please send to [dzbierski@turley.com](mailto:dzbierski@turley.com)**



On Saturday, Dec. 9, Rice's Fruit Farm hosted the St. Cecilia's Faith Formation toy drive! Carolee McGrath and Dave Yelle sang favorite Christmas songs as students donated toys. All donations went to help local families through the St. Cecilia's Knights of Columbus and the Wilbraham Police Stuff-A-Cruiser. Photos courtesy of Rosemary from St. Cecilia's.



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# 13th Annual Christmas Spectacular Concert Dec. 17

Concert will feature Female Vocal Ensemble The September Girls and Saxophonist David Jermakian, Wilbraham residents

SPRINGFIELD – St. Mark’s Annual Christmas Spectacular concert will be held on Sunday, Dec. 17, at 4 p.m. at St. Mark Armenian Church, 2427 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, featuring Wilbraham residents that make up the vocal ensemble The September Girls and David Jermakian on saxophone.

This year’s concert marks the 13th year the church has held this festive event. The concert is open to the public, and tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for students and \$5 for children 10 and under. This year, a



portion of proceeds from the concert will be used to help Armenians displaced from Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh).

This year’s concert will feature Christmas music from female vocal ensemble The September Girls and tenor saxophonist David Jermakian. A reception with



hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar will follow the concert, and there will be items from Armenia, including handmade jewelry, for purchase during the reception for attendees to shop for holiday gifts.

The September Girls are a four-women ensemble that includes Karen Drumheller, Jane Garabedian, Ellen Harris and Brenda Jermakian, all of Wilbraham. Garabedian and Jermakian are members of St. Mark Armenian Church. In addition to their Christmas repertoire they perform throughout the holiday season, the group performs a variety of music genres, from Motown to Broadway, Classical and

A Cappella. They are musicians, music teachers, choir directors, soloists, and members of the Springfield Symphony Chorus, all with a passionate love for music.

David Jermakian, also a member of St. Mark and a Wilbraham resident, has been playing saxophone most of his life, beginning as the lead Saxophonist with the Tech Tantrums of Springfield Technical High School. He’s enjoyed performing various genres of music, such as Glenn Miller-style, pop, blues and funk, and has been a member of several local bands.

Seating is limited and RSVPs are appreciated by contacting Talene Jermakian at talenej@gmail.com or 413-374-8556. For more information about the concert, contact Brenda Jermakian, a member of The September Girls, at (413) 537-4371 or brendajermakian@gmail.com.



A gingerbread house created with pretzel pieces, cereal pieces, chocolate, and candy canes was one of many unique designs children made during the Kid’s Gingerbread Houses workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.



Turley photos by Kristin Rivers  
Mandy Roberge of Wicked Good Henna walks around to see how attendees are doing on their gingerbread houses.



Teens show their creativity as they work on their gingerbread houses during the Teen’s Gingerbread House workshop at Wilbraham Public Library on Dec. 5.



A close-up of a gingerbread house designed with a marshmallow and cereal roof, candy canes and other sweet treats at the Teen Gingerbread House workshop at Wilbraham Public Library.

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**HOLIDAY** from page 2  
important it is to encourage creativity for kids and teens.  
“All of my craft workshops lean into my philosophy, which is to give kids all the supplies and access to things that they need in order to express themselves creatively,” Roberge said.

Eva Gagliarducci was at the Teen Gingerbread House workshop, decorating hers with treats including cereal, pretzels and frosting.  
Gagliarducci enjoyed the fun and inviting space the workshop offered. She explained that teen events provide an inclusive and fun environment for everyone and as well as a variety of things to do.

Like Roberge, she also appreciates the opportunity for creativity.  
“It fosters creativity because you just have this amazing space to just be creative and have fun and you’re supported. Everyone is super nice and supportive,” Gagliarducci said.  
Gagliarducci was happy to see so many people attend and highly recommends future workshops as “it’s super-duper fun.”

“It’s really nice to see that so many people care about the library, and they support them and stuff,” Gagliarducci said.

Roberge wants the community to know how much she enjoys holding workshops for the kids and teens in Wilbraham.

“The kids here are really down to earth and really appreciative and really grateful for the opportunities that they have here and it’s very, very apparent, so the parents of Wilbraham are doing a great job with these kids,” Roberge said. “It’s nice to be a little, small part of everybody’s library life here.”

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Turley photo by Kristin Rivers

(L to R) Select Board Clerk Michael Squindo takes notes as Chairman Theresa Goodrich and Vice Chairman Sue Bunnell listen to thoughts from Town Administrator Nick Breault during the Dec. 11 Select Board meeting in Wilbraham.

## Select Board seeking input on enhancing town website

By Kristin Rivers  
Staff Writer  
krivers@turley.com

WILBRAHAM - Residents are invited to share suggestions with the Select Board on enhancing the town's website.

During Selectmen's Updates on Dec. 11, Chairman Theresa Goodrich explained how working on the town website was brought up at previous meetings and she was asked about it recently.

Some of the concerns include navigation and struggling to find information and materials.

"It so very difficult for seniors, so they tell me, to navigate, and I don't consider myself a senior, but I find it difficult myself," Goodrich said. "So that is something I think we need to reexamine and start discussing again a little bit to see if we can make it more user friendly."

She also looked at multiple town websites and saw what people were saying.

"I think it's something that in this day and age when everything is online and digital, it's something we really need to embrace and look at a bit," Goodrich said. "Our town website is lacking, and many people comment all the time, so I think we need to look at that."

Town Administrator Nick Breault understood Goodrich's thoughts and has heard similar thoughts on several occasions also, adding the Select Board had made prior enhancements four or five years earlier.

The platform the town website uses, CivicPlus, is also one most Massachusetts cities and towns use.

"I would encourage if people have city or town websites that they find useful more so than ours to let me know which ones they are so that we can have an idea of what the kind of fixes are," Breault said.

Breault suggested this action to provide a vision of what people are talking about so the board has "specific guidance."

"I think that the committee that worked on it the last time, which was a combination of citizen volunteers and staff, this website is what came out of that effort," Breault said. "Again, could it be improved? Sure, it could."

Sue Bunnell said her sense from conversations she's had with IT Director Nathan DeLong after the last website renovation was "one of the things that was lacking was kind of clear direction of how to refresh the website with the content that had been delivered."

"For example, there are a bunch of images that have never been swapped out and, in fact, the department was never told, you know, 'Swap out these images on this kind of a timeline and so forth.' So, I think that needs some attention and if that means that we put another group of people together to really get into this then maybe that's an approach," Bunnell said.

When Goodrich encouraged residents to share what they like on a town website, Breault said "It would be helpful."

"CivicPlus is a widely used platform, so if folks are telling us that there are things that they like, we can go to that website," Breault said. "If it's a CivicPlus website, we can take a look at what they like about it and try to adopt those features and maybe get an idea of how they maintain that currency that's being talked about and if it's staffing, then that's what I'd come back to the Select Board and say, 'It's staffing.'"

Michael Squindo said he can send Breault a training through an EDA program that specifically looks at websites to contrast and better understand them along with links to other town websites.

"I think if we can make it easier for everybody to read it, it inherently becomes easier for everyone else to read," Squindo said.

To send your suggestions, email the Select Board at [selectmen@wilbraham-ma.gov](mailto:selectmen@wilbraham-ma.gov) or Breault at [nbreault@wilbraham-ma.gov](mailto:nbreault@wilbraham-ma.gov).

## Federated Community Church of Hampden updates

HAMPDEN - The Federated Community Church of Hampden, located on Main Street, will be offering Spiritual Healing on the first Sunday of each month at 11:30 a.m., beginning in January.

Christmas Eve - Due to Christmas falling on a Monday, there will be one Christmas Eve service at 10 a.m. Dec. 24. This will allow for families to focus on their home celebration without rushing out to an evening service.

## Margolis Orthodontics to hold January food drive

WILBRAHAM - Margolis Orthodontics, 3 Crane Park Drive, Suite 5, Wilbraham, is holding a food drive for the month of January. They are hoping to help the needy families in the area. Any non-perishable items would be appreciated. Anyone who makes a food donation will be entered into a gift card raffle.

## AGING WELL IN WILBRAHAM

In follow up of our last article about the "Skin You are In", normal skin changes in aging can account for some frustrating skin issues.

Bruising occurs much more easily as we age. Thinner skin offers less protection to blood vessels that lie beneath the surface. When damage to these vessels occurs, blood can leak out beneath the skin's surface and cause hematomas, or "black and blue" marks. These can be worse or happen more frequently in individuals who are taking blood thinners for other medical conditions. It takes a little longer for their blood to clot, therefore more oozing from damaged vessels can occur. Because the skin is thinner, the bruises are much more obvious and take much longer to be reabsorbed into the body. Often a hematoma will go through various colors on its way to healing, going from dark blue, almost black, to various shades of yellow, before returning to normal skin tones. If you notice an increase in the amount of bruising, especially in areas of your body that are protected by clothing, seek an evaluation by your health care provider.

As a society, we seem obsessed with wrinkles! Rather than accepting them as a sign of maturity and wisdom, we worry about them! As we age, our skin becomes less elastic. This can be worsened by prolonged exposures to ultraviolet light from the sun and from smoking. Gravity causes the skin to droop and crease in new patterns. Weight loss may not always allow skin to return to its tighter or firmer profile. There are prod-

ucts and procedures aplenty that claim to address this issue. Some may help, others may not. If you are concerned, seek the advice of a trained health care professional, specifically one trained in the specialty of dermatology, to learn what safe options are available to you.

Age spots or what used to be called "liver spots" are as a result of years of sun exposure. They appear on parts of the body that are/were sun exposed. They present as flat blown spots that may increase in size. Use of sunscreen with a SPF (sun protection factor) of 15, or higher and that indicates "broad spectrum" on the label can prevent these from getting worse. Most importantly, be screened yearly by a skilled health care provider to monitor changes in your skin and for early recognition of skin cancers.

In general, Make the most of the skin you are in!

- Limit your time in the sun
- Protect your skin by wearing sunscreen on exposed areas, reapply at intervals suggested on the product
- Wear protective clothing, wide brimmed hats, sunglasses
- Avoid tanning by natural or artificial means
- Check your skin often, seek professional evaluation of questionable areas

As always, feel free to send questions/ comments to [seniorinfo2021@gmail.com](mailto:seniorinfo2021@gmail.com) or leave a voicemail at 596-2800 ext 315.

Linda Tatko Cooper RN for Wilbraham Senior Center Building Committee

## BBB: What to do when an item is 'out of stock'

National experts are predicting an increase in spending this holiday season. There is also a concern if many of the items on consumers' holiday lists will be available on the shelf or online and are faced with the disappointing words: "Sorry, this item is currently out of stock." That's especially true when there are challenges with supply chains.

But does that mean the words "out of stock" are the end of the line? Not at all. With a little determination and some creative thinking, the item might be found and purchased. Here are BBB's tips for finding items that are sold out in stores.

### How to buy out-of-stock items

**Try a different store.** Avoid limiting the search to the most popular brick-and-mortar stores. Consider researching multiple vendors' websites to see who is carrying stock. If the large chain stores are out of what you need, try a reputable independent shop or a different type of store entirely. For example, when toilet paper was in short supply at grocery stores, some consumers found stock in unlikely places, such as hardware stores, restaurant suppliers, or office supply stores.

**Check websites frequently.** If there is an item out of stock when shopping online, don't give up hope right away. Bookmark the product page and check back daily. Many vendors restock high-demand products on a regular basis.

**Sign up for restock alerts.** Many companies offer restock alerts, which are usually sent by email. For example, on Amazon, look for an availability alert on a product's information page. Amazon will send an e-mail when the item becomes available. Keep in mind, you still must go to the website or store to make the purchase once the alert arrives.

**Go straight to the product's source.** If a brand name item isn't available from a favorite retailer, check the brand's official website to see if it's in stock there. If not, consider getting in touch by emailing customer service or reaching out through social media.

**Take advantage of return policies.** If you suspect that an item will sell out quickly, but you aren't sure if you really need or want it, review the store's return policy. If a store gives you the option to return an item and offer a refund, you may want to purchase the item as soon as it's available. You can always send it back if it doesn't fit your needs, but you may regret not purchasing if the stock runs out for good.

**Search for products on resale sites.** If a product appears to be gone for good, don't lose hope just yet. Some resale sites may offer hard-to-find products. That said, watch out for scammers when looking for this year's hottest toy or a product that is very popular. Con artists prey on desperate shoppers by pretending to have an item that is impossible to find, accepting payments, and then never delivering the product.

**Consider a personal shopping service.** Personal shoppers can do the heavy lifting if there is a very specific product you are hunting for. Be sure to read reviews and ask for recommendations from friends and family members before deciding to hire.

**Try out a subscription service.** Subscription services offer regular deliveries of cleaning products, clothing and more. If the local stores are running out of fresh produce, for example, consider a meal delivery service.

**Be patient.** Sometimes, despite the best efforts, it just may not be possible to find most popular items. If this happens to you, be patient. You may have to wait a few months until suppliers can meet consumers' demands.





Photo courtesy of Monson Savings Bank.

(L to): Michael Rouette, Monson Savings Bank EVP & COO; Mark Giza, president & director of the Theatre Guild of Hampden; and Adriano dos Santos, Monson Savings Bank Hampden branch manager.

## MSB Congratulates the Theatre Guild of Hampden

HAMPDEN – As 2023 comes to an end, Monson Savings Bank is congratulating their friends at the Theatre Guild of Hampden on a successful 2023 season! The community bank was a season sponsor of the Theatre Guild of Hampden, donating \$1,500 to the local organization.

Michael Rouette, Monson Savings Bank EVP & COO, shared his appreciation for the Theatre Guild of Hampden and the local arts.

“Congratulations to all at the Theatre Guild of Hampden on a job well done this year,” said Rouette. “I know that a lot of hard work goes into organizing and executing each production. It is amazing that you all are able to put together three to four productions every year. Thank you for helping to keep the local arts alive and well in the Hampden community!”

Mark Giza along with Rick Rubin founded the Theatre Guild of Hampden in 2005. For nearly 25 years, the nonprofit organization

has dedicated itself to providing the Town of Hampden and surrounding communities with quality theater experiences. The Theatre Guild of Hampden has premiered many Broadway shows such as “My Fair Lady”, “The Full Monty” and “The Producers”. They are currently preparing for “Oklahoma”, which will debut in April 2024 at The Red Barn at Fountain Park. To learn more about the Theatre Guild of Hampden, please visit: <https://www.theatreguildofhampden.org/home-1.html>.

“We are so grateful to have a partner like Monson Savings Bank who is so willing to offer their support year after year,” said Giza. “We are a small, non-profit theatre group that operates solely on donations and ticket sales. So, we couldn’t do what we do without the help of our community partners, like Monson Savings.”

To learn more about Monson Savings Bank, please visit: <https://www.monsonsavings.bank/>.



Photo courtesy of Pioneer Valley Financial Group

## Pioneer Valley Financial Group is a 2023 Super 60 Award winner

LUDLOW – The Springfield Regional Chamber announces Pioneer Valley Financial Group as a 2023 Super 60 Award winner in their newest Give Back category! For over 30 years, the Super 60 Awards have honored the accomplishments of excellent businesses that call the Greater Springfield Area home. In addition to the traditional categories of Revenue and Growth, the Super 60 program was reimagined and expanded to include Start-Up, Non-Profit and Give Back categories to celebrate additional measures of success. The Give Back category recognizes companies that give back to the community, emphasizing the impact of their charitable work and employee engagement in their efforts.

As a four-time Super 60 Award winning recipient, PV Financial has demonstrated a significant financial

impact on the region, being honored in the Growth and Revenue category in 2022 and the Growth category in 2019 and 2015.

“Being recognized in the Springfield Chamber’s newest Give Back category speaks volumes to our company’s mission of helping our clients and community live better,” said Managing Partner Edward Sokolowski.

Since 2002, PV Financial has provided a comprehensive, relationship-focused approach to financial planning. Over two decades later, the financial firm has grown exponentially in the size of their clientele and team. What hasn’t changed is their unrelenting commitment to providing first-rate service and guidance, while continually giving back to our community.

# Minnechaug Regional High School Honor Roll

WILBRAHAM – Minnechaug Regional High School recently named the first term Honor and High Honor Roll.

**GRADE 9 HONORS** - Jason Abeid, Gana Abuata, Lilianna Bennett, Nathan Bosworth, Adrianna Brandoli, Darby Burgmyer, Abigail Camire, Benjamin Carpenter, Philip Castellano, Ivy Christensen, Kiera Connors, Barbara Luyza Costa, Gavin Coughlin, Katie DeGray, Addison Derosia, Tucker Derosia, Ava Disa, Brady Dones, Darren Duah, Angelina Dunn, Elizabeth Espinal, Isabella Esteves, Saniah Evans, Liam Faneuff, Emma Grzebieniowski, Eliana Gunn, Richard Hale, Jacob Hall, Liam Harrigan, Jacob Hisgen, Katelyn Hoar, Ainsley Holden, Paige Holt, Carson Humphries, Kadence Illig, Ryan Jacobsen, Kallhan Kar, Ethan Kelliher, Abyaan Khan, Liam Kiernan, Gabriel Kishinevski, Sophia Kozub, Drew Lang, Peter Langone, Leah Lomascolo, Caelan Luszc, Molly Lynch, Andrea Lyon, Reese Magee, Liam Maher, Ezekie Maldonado Pagan, Mason Mish, Jameson Murray, Athena Nguyen, Selena Nguyen, Jasper O’Connor, Madilyn Ortiz, Veronica Ouimet, Nicholas Pelletier, Natalie Petit, Anthony Powers, Devin Purchas, Jaison Richard, Patrick Roach, Karolina Robles-Maurer, Sydney Rocha, Emanuel Roman, Layla Rosati, Anne Rowland-LaValley, Jillian Rubner, Jack Rumplick, Makenna Sacco, Madelyn Sackrider, Quinn Salerno, Cameron Salvador, Jolena Sanchioni, Mia Savoie, Adelyn Scarfe, Ava Scatolini, Moira Shannon, Savannah Sheerin, Norah Smith, Benjamin Stebbins, Cole Stone, Grayson Sweet, Kaleb Sweetman, Dominick Tessier, Logan Thomas, Autumn Thompson, Connor Tillberry, Hope Trombly, Brayden Tugie, Noah Turner, Owen Tzoumas, Luis Vega, Max Waskiewicz, Drew Weinberg, Azary Wheeler Montanez, Kei Williams, Jade Wong-Vallejo, Thomas Wurm

**GRADE 9 HIGH HONORS** – Angelina Bontempi Katherine Britt, Samantha Catellier, O’Brien Chen, Annabella Cianflone, Catherine Dickson, Jonathan Dyer, Nehir Elcin, Marion Fil, Brielle Foisy, Alyssa Fortune, Ella Gagliarducci, Olivia Gencarelli, Brooke Germain, Naomi Griffin, Lucy Haile, Caitlin Hebert, Madelyn Hoskinson, Amelia Kellogg, Isabella Kirton, Ryan Knox-Nelli, Isabella Lafield, Teagan Lawor, Abigail Lee, Caroline Maloni, Alec McInnes, Liam Metzger, Molly Michels, John Morley, Chelsea Ortega, Riddhi Patel, Shiv Patel, Ainsley Patterson, Matthew Perkins, Collin Purcell, Lauren Roberts, Aniya Romero, Nico Santucci, Dillon Shaughnessey, Gracie Smith, Alison Souza, Andrew Stark, Olivia Stephen, Tyler Supczak, Faith Trombly, Grace Trombly, Isabella Usher, Ariella Velez, Sarah Rose Walsh

**GRADE 10 HONORS** – Angelina Acevedo, Lucas Akers, Victoria Ambrose, Emma Balog, Logan Barcome, Maxwell Baroni, Donovan Belton, Emily Benoit, Corinne Brewer, Lila Britton, Luke Bruno, Kennedy Burgmyer, Trinity Burgmyer, Alyssa Capen, Hayden Carlotto, Alexis Carreira, Desyree Charles, Nicholas Cianflone, Logan Clark, Natalia Clarke, Steven Cocchi, Caleigh Conboy, Jonathan Correa, Ava Croteau, Alexander Danio, Gabriella Duffany, Samuel Eaton, Cody Erskine, Jacob Fahy, Isabella Fraser, Margaret Fulton, Lucas Fytrilakis, Khaliyah Gagner, Yong Ming Gao, Eliana Gaudreau, Moriah Gentile, Ryan Giombetti, Madysen Giroux, Andrew Grasso, Brody Harrison, Laila Hosnander, Laya Ibrahim, Mason Jones, John Kavanagh, Ava Kearney, Brady Laliberte, Mai Le, Aidan Lee, Evan Liversedge, Kaitlyn Lopez Pham, Savannah Loubier, Christian Lowe, Jack Lucarelle, Hannah Luff, Kai Ly, Natalie Madison, Ava Manning, Jaymiel Martinez, Max Mayuski, Nolah McConnell, Sean McSwain, Jordan Miller, Daniella Moraru, Morgan Morrow, Evan Mumblo, Anastasia Mutti, Lyric Nelson, Hao-nam Nguyen, Vinh Nguyen, Alexandra Nichols, Alyssa Nogueira, Cambria Norval, Stephen Nowicki, Cailin O’Brien, Luke O’Connor, Michael O’Connor, Anna O’Toole, Zachary Parent, Caydence Pellerin, Sarah Perkins, Natalie Proulx, Kameah Pryce, Gwyndolyn Roszko, Connor Roy, Lauren Rucki, Kayleb Russo-Rock, Andreas Saabye, Mostaffa Saleh, Nina Semanie, Cayden Silva, Linda Stanco, Bianca Stewart, Lincoln Stiles, Owen Sullivan, Ava Thompson, Carly Traghese, Thatcher Trumbull, Matthew VanDerBeken, Ezekiel Vargas-Nunez, Dylan Walker, Journey Waters-Brown, Nathan Wesloski, Celena Williams, Alexander Wright

**GRADE 10 HIGH HONORS** – Ian Angelica, Ali Awkal, Kelly Balog, Callan Blanchard, Austin Buckert, Issiah Carattini, Lilianna Catellier, Irene Chen, Anthony Cianflone, Kelly Cronin, Maliha Daubon, Allison Demetri, Madeline Dos Santos, Aidan Dzierwinski, Miles Fergus, Noemi Fraga, Mateo Garcia, Colin Haines, Tyler Jaslanek, Maeghan Joyce, Molly Kinsman, Jacob Long, Austin Marques, Jacob Moore, Ava Moretti, Alina Narvaez, Cora Pace, Alexander Parent, Mia Peck, Grayson Placzek, Jackson Pouliot, David Preston, Katelynn Pronovost, Hannah Przechocki, Chloe Robins, Aezlin Rost, Connor Seymour, Colin Sheehan, Alexa Sherman, Isabella Strand, Lilianna Sullivan, Ella Trosky, Madysyn Vazquez, Elijah Webster, Elizabeth Woytowicz, Josiah Zayas, Nicholas Zayas

**GRADE 11 HONORS** - Joseph Aguiar, Emmamarie Annear, Kyle Atkin, Antonio Baltazar Jr, William Bao, Lilliana Barkyoumb, Bryce Barlow, Matthew Beaudin, Mason Belcamino, Hunter Bennett, John Bermudez, Audrey Bernard, Derek Beston, Joseph Bonavita, Evan Bowler, Noah Brathwaite, Joseph Butts, Jeremiah Campbell, Noah Caress, Emmett Chen, Olivia Christenson, Logan Conboy, Angelina Cross, Benjamin Daniels, Saniyah Dawkins, Jason DeGray, Paul Diehl, Jordan Dietz, Joshua Disa, Lucie Dones, Nicholas Dufresne, Nicholas Fopp, Aaron Foy, Brodie Fraser, Deacon Gardner, Noelle Giombetti, Hunter Gormally, Alexander Gormley, Renee Goulet, Jaiana Hall, Tyshau Harvey-Martinez, Noelle Hisgen, Imani Ibrahim, Ryan Ice, Audrey Izzo, Alita Johnson, Kalli Joyce, Ashley Kane, Lila Keegan, Taylor Labadorf, Caitlyn LaBonte, Arthur Lam, Wyatt Lewis, Alayna Lucas, Matthew MacPhail, Jeremiah Martin, Cailin McEwan, Catherine McMahon, Alexander Melluzzo, Margaret Michels, Sean Miller, Sean Moriarty, Bailey Murray, John Peter O’Connor, Kelvin Ohemeng, Brayden O’Sullivan, Thomas O’Toole, Makenzi Pastreck, Owen Perry, Abby Peyman, Kamaria Pryce, Gus Przybyl, Ethan Purcell, Ryan Purchas, Sophia Rachele, Ciara Reilly, Alexander Rice, Dawson Rice, Abigail Rief, Sean Rooney, Mialece Rosado, Matthew Ryan, Christopher Salvi, Amaderis Santiago, Ella Sarno, Gabrielle Scheer, Geeta Sharma, Nicholas Shea, Corey Smith, Joseph Smith, Sheyenne Smith, Katherine Socha, Chloe Sullivan, Jack Sullivan, Brady Suomala, Isabella Tirabassi, Johanyliz Torres, Angela Verdon, Gabriella Viruet, Ian Wall, Skylar Weinberg, Caeli Whitcomb, Anja Wingfield

**GRADE 11 HIGH HONORS** – Alexa Abeid, Hannah Alves, Mackenzie Barlow, Cayla Bartosz, Jayden Beck, Bryan Beckel, Nicholas Benninger, Marissa Bontempi, Alani Botas, Bryanna Brown, Samantha Burnham, Robert Bustamante, Margaret Capuano, Kayla Coolbeth, Mackenzie DaFonseca, Lukas Dzierzowski, Samuel Ey, Grace Fallon, Nina Gallagher, Wen Xi Gao, Aaron Gasteyer, Victoria Gonzalez, McKenna Hale, Giana Hall, Ian Horne, Andrew Lang, Morgan Lape, Antonia Mascaro, Makenzie McEwan, Aidan McMinn, Collin Meunier, Taylor Meunier, Tiffany Nguyen, Alyah Nogueira, Ava Ofarcik, Trey Pavoni, Ava Peabody, Laura Pecoy, Nicole Pollard, Emma Powell, Marily Remaly, Hayden Richard, Gabriella Robinson, Rafa Rodriguez Alvarez, Madeleine Rooney, Gianna Siciliano, Landon Smith-Devenitch, Quinn Symington, Leah Tassinari, Sofia Villanueva, Rylee Welch, Domenic Yacovone

**GRADE 12 HONORS** – Makayla Acevedo, Timothy Arendt, Ryan Atkin, Candyce Baldwin, Alexander Barthelette, Michael Bigda, Ian Bonsant, Brent Botas, Norah Bottum, Alaina Brathwaite, Kelsey Brennan, Christopher Capen, Lindsay Carra, Serina Chan, Vince Chiarizio, Christina Clark, Jayla Comes, Morgan Conchinha, Benjamin Cooney, David Cordova, Gianna Danielle, Ellaree Daniels, Abigail Dean, Samuel Dean, Jackson Derosia, Mackenna Donahue, David Duah, Norah Dumala, Christian Erskine, Emily Esteves, Madison Faneuff, John Finnegan, Evan Foulis, Kalliana Gagnon, Daniel Gardner, Jacob Gordon, Abyssinia Haile, Chase Harrison, Paige Hebert, Mary Heinold, Lylah Jeannotte, Dajzuan Johnson, Dakota Joseph, Lauren Kasper, Roman Kavanagh, Kayleigh Kinsman, Theodore Klostri, Evelyn Labbe, Hunter LaDouceur, Sophie Laird, Rory Lavelle, Jessica Leary, Olivia Lee, Jolene Lewis, Lauren Lomascolo, Julia Long, Taylah Lopez, Anna Lucarelle, Alexander Maurer, Jonathan Maurer, Victoria Miller, Aviana Mitchell, Hector Mojica, Billy Montoya, Nathan Moraru, Ava Murray, McKenzie Murray, Davis Nelson, Matthew Nordstrom, Kate O’Connor, Matthew O’Keefe, Caitlyn Osmani, Veera Patel, Madeline Patterson, Claire Poindexter, Ann Marie Prairie, Jayme Ray, Jonah Rost, Cameron Roy, Olivia Rucki, Jonas Saabye, Gabriella Salvador, Javien Santiago, Jenna Scatolini, Derek Semanie, Ainsley Sheehan, Aiden Simpkins, Lilian Smith, Carl Socha, Jack Tassinari, Katherine Tzoumas, Alina Wawrzonek, Benjamin Wilson, Alyssa Woodward, Lariah Young, Lily Young

**GRADE 12 HIGH HONORS** – Anissa Barnes, Haile Barnett, Jonathan Barton-Cimino, Jacob Bottass, Aren Brubach, Rose Caltabiano, Zoey Cardano, Lillian Christensen, Paitan Closser, Ava Connors, Sophia Crooks, Siena Dansereau, Jaden Desmarais, Lilliana DiGrande, Sofia DiGrande, Nicolas Disa, Danielle Dulude, Amy Dunklee, Madison Duperre, Ryan Eldridge, Mia Figueroa Rodriguez, Mia Fraga, Isabella Gahres, Sophia Gravanda, Gavin Grout, Victoria Harrington, Mia Hickson, Jonas Kefalas, Mia Korzec, Lindsay Labadorf, Aidan Lang, Gavin Lee, Parker LeTendre, Sawyer Lisowski, Samantha Long, Grace Maloni, Diella Martell, Brendan McDonald, Presley Mish, Adison Oliveras, Owen Ordynowicz, Abigail Pastore, Vyan Patel, Nicolas Patrakis, Allison Patrick, Laila Phok-Smith, Erika Przedziecki, Ethan Ray, Kylie Ray, Michael Roy, Daniel Ryzewicz, Gianna Sakowski, Aiden Sergienko, Georgia Serra, Ava Sheehan, Cecilia Sheehan, Jack Straut, Andrew Szpakowski, Cassidy Trask, Zachary Vigneault, Ailsa Wilson, Katja Wurm



# SPORTS

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## Falcons offense flies in season-opening win over Monson

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

WILBRAHAM—Ryan Minns was the head coach of the Palmer boys' varsity basketball team for more than 10 years.

The highlight of Minns coaching career took place during the 2016-17 season. The Panthers put together an amazing 23-game winning streak during that season. They also captured the Western Mass. title for the first time in 50 years and played in the Division 3 state finals at the DCU Center in Worcester.

After taking a couple of years off from coaching, Minns is back on the sidelines again this winter as the girls' varsity basketball coach at Minnechaug Regional.

The Lady Falcons opened the 2023-24 campaign with a 58-22 non-league home victory over the Monson Lady Mustangs, last Friday night.

"Winning the first game is a very good way to start off the season," Minns said. "We do have a lot of very good athletes and I'm really enjoying coaching this team."

The duo of senior Jayla Comes and sophomore Elizabeth



Elizabeth Wotowyicz communicates with her team on a play.



Kelly Cronin dribbles toward the arc.

Turley photos by Sofia DiGrande



Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com  
Goalie Gate Vedovelli hopes to make a stop.



Ben Daniels heads up the ice.



Tim Harrigan races away from an opponent.

## Falcons start season 1-1

WEST SPRINGFIELD – After starting the season out with a defeat against Longmeadow, Minnechaug hockey defeated West Springfield 2-1 thanks to goals from Ethan Kelliher and Ben Daniels. Gage Vedovelli got the start in goal and made an impressive 39 saves while allowing just one goal in his varsity debut.



Ethan Kelliher heads for a shot on goal.



Nick Garib catches up with the puck on the right side.



Brayden O'Sullivan fights to keep the puck.



Mike Roy takes over possession.



## Local youngster competes in national meet

WILBRAHAM – It was a dream season for six-year old Callan Weber of Wilbraham, who competes in cross country. He is trained by his parents Jason and Kelsey Weber, both track and field coaches at WPI and Minnechaug Regional High School. Callan took on the Elementary School State Championships representing Mile Tree Elementary School in Wilbraham. On Nov. 10 in Lynn, Callan took third place. He covered the hilly 1.1K course in 5:19. A week later in Louisville, Kentucky at the E.P. “Tom” Sawyer State Park, Callan competed at the Cross Country Coaches Youth National Championships in the 2K race where he placed sixth with a time of 10:00.56 earning his first All American Honor of the season. Callan rounded out his season at the AAU National Championships at Apalachee Regional Park, in Tallahassee Florida on Dec. 2 in the 1K race with a time of 4:21.2 placing third in the country and taking home the bronze medal while earning his second All-American honor.

## T-Birds stuff Islanders on Teddy Bear Night

SPRINGFIELD – The Springfield Thunderbirds (12-8-2-0) thoroughly controlled the game and came away with a defiant 5-1 win over the Bridgeport Islanders (6-15-1-0) on Saturday night before a sold-out crowd of 6,793 for the annual Teddy Bear Toss.

Fans did not have to wait long to chuck their stuffed animals onto the ice, as Mathias Laferriere cleaned up a loose puck rebound in front of Jakub Skarek and tucked it home on the backhand just 1:40 into the game, bringing about thousands of bears raining onto the ice sheet.

After a delay in picking up all the stuffed donations, the T-Birds picked right up where they left off, and just 6:10 after the Laferriere goal, the top line generated another marker. Adam Gaudette connected on a pass to the right side to Nathan Walker. Dylan Coghlan quickly raced up into the play as a trailer and perfectly placed a wrist shot over Skarek’s blocker

arm to make it a 2-0 game at 7:50.

Vadim Zherenko was mostly untested in the T-Birds’ net, as the offense for both teams went dry for well over the next 30 minutes of game action.

The game’s temperature then rose at the 3:18 mark of the third as Sam Bitten and Travis Mitchell dropped the mitts in an old-school style scrap, bringing up the noise on both benches and inside the building. When the game moved to 4-on-4 following matching minors three minutes later, the T-Birds put the game out of reach with two goals in short order.

First, Calle Rosen drifted back toward his blue line and stunned the Islanders with a perfect diagonal pass to a streaking Walker, who beat Skarek with a backhander to make it 3-0 at 7:18 of the third. Just 22 seconds later, Walker was the distributor off the rush, setting up Wyatt Kaly-nuk for a snapper through Skarek’s five-hole, and in a matter of a half

minute, the lead had ballooned to 4-0 for the T-Birds.

Matt Maggio broke up Zherenko’s shutout bid with a shot that caromed off a defender and through Zherenko’s legs at 10:27 to make it a 4-1 game, but that would be all the Isles could muster on this night.

Coghlan would add his second of the night on Walker’s fourth point of the evening, blasting a one-time power play slapper through Skarek’s legs at 13:59, rounding out the scoring with his seventh goal of the year and his second multi-goal game.

For the first time this season, the T-Birds went the full 60 minutes without having to play shorthanded, and Springfield scored on their lone power play chance to make it a perfect night in special teams. Zherenko got his fourth straight win with 34 saves. In his last four outings, the second-year netminder has stopped 126 out of 132 shots.



Laila Smith circles around the perimeter.



Jayla Comes follows through on a shot.



Lylah Jeannotte covers a Monson player on defense.

Turley photos by Sofia DiGrande

### FALCONS from page 15

Woytowicz finished the season opener with 11 points for the home team. Woytowicz also had a team-leading six assists and five steals.

Minns, who lives in Wilbraham, is a physical education teacher at Palmer High School. He was inducted into the Palmer Athletic Hall of Fame in 2018. He took over the coaching reins at Minnechaug from Alyssa Darling, who scored 1,000 career points as a member of the Palmer girls’ varsity basketball team. Darling is currently a first-year assistant coach for the Elms College women’s basketball team.

“Alyssa did a really nice job of coaching this team during the past couple of years,” Minns said. “I knew that this was a very good program, so I decided to apply for the coaching position.”

Minnechaug, who went 10-11 a year ago, lost to Amherst in the semifinals of the Western Mass. Class A tournament and to Holyoke in a preliminary round game of the Division 2 state tournament. They did celebrate 48-36 victory at Monson.

The Lady Mustangs, who have never defeated the Lady Falcons on the hard-

wood, also have a new varsity coach this winter. Walt Jackson replaced Tim Pascale, who retired from coaching at the end of last season.

“Tonight’s game was a very good learning experience for my basketball team,” Jackson said. “I thought that we played well in the first half, but there are some things that we need to work on.”

Jackson previously coached the girl’s junior varsity basketball team at Pope Francis. He also coaches a youth basketball team in Springfield.

The Lady Mustangs finished with a 10-13 overall record last year. They lost at Lenox in the Western Mass. Class D semifinals before losing to rival Palmer in the Division 5 round of 16.

Junior Olivia Chrzan, who scored her 1,000th career point as a sophomore, led the Lady Mustangs with 11 points in the season opener. She only made two field goals, which both came in the first quarter.

“Chrzan is a very good basketball player and we tried to make it hard for her to score,” Minns said. “We’re a little bit better defensively at this point of the season than we are offensively.”

Minnechaug sophomore Kelly Cronin guarded Chrzan for most of the game.

Cronin also helped offensively with eight points.

“Kelly did a very good job of defending Chrzan,” Minns added. “She also contributed offensively.”

Junior Ava Ofcarik (4 points) and sophomore Cailin O’Brien (4 points) also took turns guarding Chrzan in the second half.

Monson was trailing 12-6 entering the second quarter.

Chrzan, who made a 3-pointer, a lay-up, and a free throw, in the first eight minutes of the contest, made two more foul shots during the first minute of the second stanza. Then freshman Chelsea Hull buried a 3-pointer from the top of the key, which closed the gap to 12-11 with 6:30 remaining in the opening half.

The visitors wouldn’t get any closer than that.

Comes, who scored all her points in the first half, began a 13-0 run by sinking a pair of 3-pointers from the right side.

Following a pair of made free throws by senior Lylah Jeannotte, which were her only points, sophomore Lyric Nelson (8 points) made another 3-pointer giving the Lady Falcons a double digit lead (23-11) for the first time.

During the final seconds of the opening half, Nelson hit a runner in the lane sending her team into the locker room holding a commanding 27-12 halftime lead.

The home team continued to pull away during the second half, as senior Laila Phok-Smith (7 points) and Cronin led the way offensively.

Monson only made two field goals of the second half were inside hoops by junior Emily Provost, which were her only points of the game. Chrzan made three foul shots. The Lady Mustangs other three points were made free throws by senior Aniah Myrie, senior Delianah Wolf, and sophomore Sedona Arbour.

“The girls are still learning my coaching style and I’m still getting to know them,” Jackson said. “Hopefully, they keep working hard and continue to improve during the season.”

The Lady Mustangs were scheduled to face Wahconah Regional in their home opener on Tuesday night.

The Lady Falcons, who hosted Northampton on Tuesday night, will be traveling to Holyoke High School on Friday night.



# Candlepin League News

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
rdrago@turley.com

## Tuesday Night Commercial Elks League

PALMER – December has arrived in the 2023-2024 candlepin bowling season at Diamond Junction Bowling Lanes.

The Tuesday Night Commercial Elks has had momentum shifts happening so far in round two of their league. As of Nov. 28, Life is Good ranks #1 with a 7-1 record.

This past week, Life is Good bowled against Last in Line who is currently tied for fourth place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round. In game one, Last in Line won a close game 333-329. In game two, Life is Good turned the tides by dominating game two 380-340.

Jeff Knight of Life is Good was over his average by bowling 106. Paul Cyr led the team confidently by scoring 122.

In game three, the two teams tied at 338 and received one point each. Life is Good won total pinfall by a final score of 1047-1011.

Blue B's bowled against Champs R Here. In game one, The Champs were victorious by a score of 389-374. In game two, The Champs won again 385-371. In game three, The Champs won 404-381 for the sweep. John Kolkos of the Champs had a strong finish by scoring 121.

The Champs R Here won total pinfall by a final score of 1178-1126.

Team BK bowled against the 1<sup>st</sup> round winning team, Compression. In game one, Compression bowled well and took the first game 383-335. In game two, BK rebounded with a win of their own by a score of 376-315. In game three, BK managed to win the last game 372-354.

BK won total pinfall with a final score of 1083-1052. Acres bowled against their average and won two out of three games.

## Thursday Night Mixed League

The Thursday Night Mixed League witnessed a momentum shift as one team took over the #1 spot as of Nov. 30.

Team Six is the current leader with a record of 29-19 and is 1.5 points ahead of Team One. Team Three was the team to bowl Team One this past Thursday night. In game one, Team Three was victorious by a score of 403-399.

In game two, Team One came back with a win 415-383. In game three, Team Three won the last game of the night 408-386.

Team One took total pinfall by a final score of 1200-1194. Each team received two points.

Team Five bowled against Team Two as both teams were trying to move up in the ranks before the conclusion of round one. In game one, Team Two was the winner in a close game 383-377. In game two, Team Five managed to come up with a close win 399-396. In game three, Team Two had a strong last game and won 448-412. Team Two took 3 out of 4 points as they won total pinfall 1227-1188.

Team Four bowled against the #1 seed Team Six. In game one, Team Six had a strong showing as they won 438-409. The first game victory was thanks to anchor bowler Ron who bowled 113, 28 pins over his current league average (85).

In game two, Team Six won a close game against Team Four, 429-428. In game three, Team Four won the last game of the night 426-402.

Team Six won total pinfall 1269-1263.

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# Winter Showdown to feature SK Type Open Modified programs

WINTER HAVEN, FL – As tradition has it, motorsports fans from coast to coast will soon be flocking to the Sunshine State, ready to elude the abrasive winter chill in exchange for a full month of racing at a variety of ovals across the peninsula. Auburndale Speedway in Winter Haven, Florida, centrally located between Tampa and Orlando, will join in on the winter action, ready to host its highly-anticipated Winter Showdown on February 6-10.

In total, seven different asphalt divisions will be taking to the Auburndale shorttrack, all of which anchored with the 602 Tour Type Modifieds, and the Tour/SK Type Open Modifieds, that will headline the week-long Winter Showdown agenda on Thursday through Saturday. The 602 Modifieds, battling for \$500-to-win in each of their respective programs, will compete on all three of the aforementioned evenings with the Tour/SK Type Open Modifieds competing for \$2,000-to-win paydays on Friday and Saturday, only.

A true must-see for any short track enthusiast, the Tour Type Modifieds have never competed at Auburndale Speedway giving fans the opportunity to witness a new piece of Florida history.

Competitors should note, Modifieds will utilize the F45 Hoosier; additional rules will be posted in the coming days.

In addition to the aforementioned Modified divisions, Legends/Bandoleros (highlighted with double programs on Wednesday and Thursday), Mighty TQ Midgets (chasing a \$5,000 total purse), USAC Eastern Midgets, the National Compact Tour, and the infamous Crown Vics, will also join in on the Winter Showdown, activating officially with open practice and track rental sessions beginning Tuesday, February 6.

Registration for Auburndale Speedway's Winter Showdown is officially open. Competitors seeking to pre-register can do so by clicking the link below. Online registration will close on February 1 with additional registration opportunities available at-track during each day's respective program.

Speed Sport TV, home to the widest variety of motorsports events, award-winning shows and exclusive features with live and on-demand capabilities, is the official broadcast partner of the annual Winter Showdown and is set to broadcast each evening live. Race coverage packages and pricing will be available soon. Learn more at [www.speedsport.tv](http://www.speedsport.tv).

# Railers suffer loss to Thunder

WORCESTER – The Railers dropped a 3-2 shootout to the Adirondack Thunder here Saturday before a loud Teddy Bear Toss crowd of 5,029. While Worcester did not dominate play in this one as much as it did in Friday's 4-2 triumph, the Railers had more and better chances than the Thunder.

However, Adirondack was 1 for 2 on its power plays, Worcester 0 for 1. This marked the ninth time in 21 games this season the Railers were outscored by the opposition on special teams. Worcester is 2-4-3 in those games.

The Railers did not get a power play until overtime. At 3:08 of the fourth period, something happened that typified the night. A Worcester shot rang off the post, rolled into the back of Thunder goaltender Vinnie Purpura, then bounced back towards the net.

It stopped on the goal line. Worcester outshot the visitors, 38-28. That included a 21-6 edge in the first period, which ended 1-1 but could have been 5-1.

"Stay the course," was coach Jordan Smotherman's advice to his team in the dressing room. "That's two really good games out of us. We have 80 shots in two nights and we should win both those games. Obviously, we'll take the three-point weekend but prefer the four.

"There's a lot to build on." The seven-minute overtime was exactly what hockey's honchos had in mind when they thought up the idea. It was non-stop offense with great goaltending from Worcester's Tristan Lennox and Purpura, both of whom stopped five shots.

The shootout was the kind of thing hockey's honchos are trying to avoid. The teams traded slow-motion approaches to the net. Adirondack's Patrick Grasso had the only goal in eight tries, a 12-foot wrist shot along the ice.

Keeghan Howdeshell and Anthony Repaci had the Railers goals. Worcester never led. Jack Jeffers and Mike Gillespie scored for Adirondack.

Howdeshell's goal came at 19:07 of the first period. It was set up by a physical play by Riley Piercey along the right boards. Repaci redirected a long pass from the right point by Todd Goehring at 13:33 of the second period.

In the last four games the Railers have outshot the opposition by 160-108 but have been outscored — goalie in the net — by 11-8. Worcester's shots have not been time-to-change lines softballs, either. The Railers are pummeling opposing goalies.

"It's the old adage in hockey," Smotherman said. "If you keep getting the chances they're gonna go in at some point. I'd rather be getting them than not."

Saturday night's game marked the 16th time the Railers and Thunder have met in the last 30 games going back to the end of last season. That ridiculous overload is almost over. The teams play just three more times this year, one of those games next week.

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Further information can be found on the Town's website: [www.worthington-ma.us](http://www.worthington-ma.us)  
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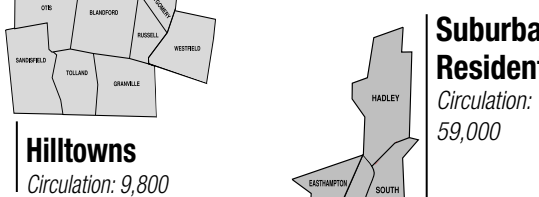
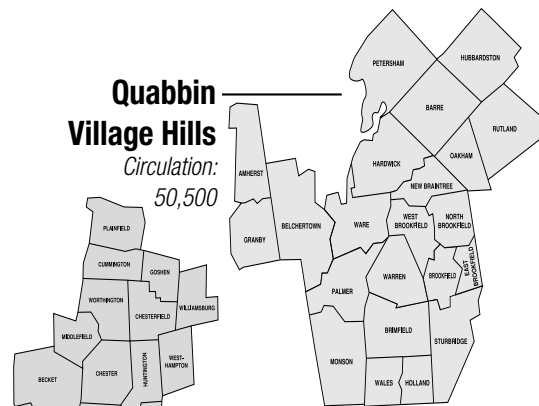
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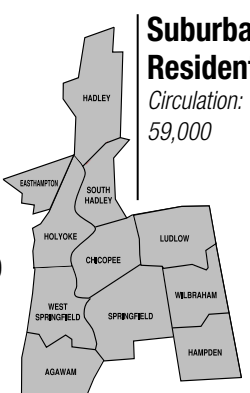
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# Shout out to the Super Bowl champs!



The Falcon Youth Football Association won its Super Bowl on Nov. 11 against Westfield by a score of 38-26. Photos courtesy of the Falcon Youth Football Association.



The Falcon Youth Football Association won its Super Bowl on Nov. 11 against West Springfield 14-6, securing a Super Bowl championship. Photos courtesy of the Falcon Youth Football Association.

## Falcon Youth Football junior, senior teams each win title

By Dalton Zbierski  
Editor  
dzbierski@turley.com

EAST LONGMEADOW – Nov. 11 was a banner day for the Falcon Youth Football Association, as both the junior and senior squads won the Super Bowl, earning their respective titles on the turf at East Longmeadow High School.

Falcon Youth Football is the youth football program for Wilbraham and Hampden. Both the junior and senior teams compete in the Suburban Amateur Football League; the junior team consists of players in grades five and six, while the senior team is made up of seventh and eighth graders.

Both title-winning teams took unique paths to the final, where they handled business and brought home the crown. Along the way they learned life lessons that are meaningful beyond the football field.

### Falcon Youth Football Seniors

The Falcon Youth Football Seniors defeated top-seeded and then-undefeated Westfield in the SAFL Senior Bowl, or Super Bowl, 38-26 on Nov. 11 to cap off a championship season. Matthew Bean, the senior team coach, used the words selflessness and comradery to describe his squad.

“They were so willing to do whatever it took to help their teammates and put their teammates before them. In a team sport, that’s so important,” Bean said. “The friendships they built, the relationships they built for each other... there’s a lot more to why we play football than winning a game.”

Bean praised his team for its willingness to be coached hard and ability to meet chal-

lenges. En route to averaging over 35 points per game, the senior team took pride in its ability to make in game and in season adjustments.

Major adjustments were necessary after the first game against Westfield, a tough loss. Bean said the players responded well after getting beat up in the regular season matchup, when they managed only six points.

“I think that was a turning point for our players, as we had a very honest conversation about who we are, who we want to be and knowing we would most likely see them down the road,” Bean said. “If we were willing together to put in the work and face some fears, (Westfield is) a strong team and comes out and hits hard; we had to look in the mirror and decide if we could match that.”

After being held to single digits in the first matchup against Westfield, the Falcons nearly put up 40 points to secure the upset in the championship game. Bean said it is a testament to the players willingness to learn and grow.

“They faced their own challenges and were able to take on their own fears and push past those,” he said. “I think that really helped set a tone for their lives that if you get some challenges, you’re going to have to face them head on, and if you do that you’re going to do okay.”

Following the victory, Bean said there were tears amongst the players, coaches and parents. He circled back to the parents, crediting them for their support and noting that they were as big a part of the team as anyone else.

“It was like this complete team effort; players, coaches, parents and community just rooting for what we wanted to accomplish,” Bean said.

Winning the championship was a mile-

stone moment, as many of the players and coaches had been together since the children were in the third grade. As the eighth graders move to high school next season, Bean said completing the journey by beating Westfield was “nothing short of magical.”

At the end of the day, however, Bean is confident the players know the game is about more than the final score.

“Wins and losses are great, but supporting each other, having each other’s backs and creating that family environment is the pinnacle to all of this,” he said.

### Falcon Youth Football Juniors

The Falcon Youth Football Juniors were a juggernaut, finishing a championship season with a perfect 10-0 record after a 14-6 victory against then-undefeated West Springfield in the SAFL Junior Bowl, or Super Bowl.

“Entering the Super Bowl, we were undefeated; we hadn’t let up a point yet on the whole season,” Junior Team Coach Ryan Minns said. “So, it was two undefeated teams who kind of beat up on everybody the whole year, and (West Springfield was) very good. They were very big. They were tough kind of like us.”

The Falcons jumped out to a 14-0 lead after two long touchdown runs by Dylan Bean. However, adversity struck early in the second half when West Springfield recovered a fumble and proceeded to score a long touchdown on a pass play.

“That was the first points we let up all year, so I was kind of nervous how we’d respond, but we actually intercepted the two-point conversion, which got momentum back on our side,” Minns said.

From there, the defense took control. When West Springfield was driving deep in Falcon territory, Jeremiah Frazier stepped

up with a big interception. When the Falcons stalled out on offense, Dylan Bean struck again, with a 51-yard punt to flip the field.

After one more stop, and a first down on offense, the junior team was able to take a knee and run the clock out, securing the championship. Minns was impressed by his team’s resiliency.

“It was the first time we really had a tough game all year. We basically blew everybody out the whole year,” he said. “It made the coaching staff a little nervous going into the final game because we hadn’t been punched in the mouth yet, and West Springfield was tough... I think our guys finally got a challenge, and they stepped up to it.”

Minns is proud of how his team locked in mentally and worked hard throughout the season without the coaches having to constantly remind players to focus on their goals. He said his team plays the game the right way.

“They’re tough kids, smart kids, they cheer for one another,” Minns said. “We have a bunch of different guys who scored touchdowns for us and who got big sacks and tackles and all that. Our guys are really happy for each other when we do things like that. There’s a real good team spirit.”

Minns described football as the ultimate team sport. He said it is a privilege and a blast to be able to coach the players. He explained why he and his team have such an affinity for the game.

“You have to sacrifice physically to play football. It’s not like some of these other sports where you kind of get by, so you kind of get that action too where you’re sacrificing for your teammates and they’re sacrificing for you. They’re really good life lessons,” Minns said.

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In accordance with the provisions of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, (MGL CH 131, S 40), it’s implementing regulations (310 CMP 10.00) and the Town of Hampden’s Wetlands Protection Bylaws,

the Hampden Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, December 20, 2023 at 6 PM at the Town House, 625 Main Street, Hampden, for a Notice of Intent, (NOI), submitted by Rory Walker for the purpose of installing an agricultural ground mounted solar system at 530 Glendale Road. Additional information relating to this request is on file in

the Conservation Commission office and available for review by the public by contacting the Commission. Anyone interested in or wishing to be heard on the request may appear at the time and place designated.

On Behalf of the Conservation Commission,  
Judy McKinley-Brewer,  
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9:30 am & 11:00 am



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