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Gracious residents stuff cruiser with toys

By Patricia Sullivan
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM - Carloads of generous gift-givers braved a snow squall on Dec. 6 to ensure that local children will receive toys this holiday season.

They filled up a Wilbraham Police Department cruiser and the bed of a police pickup with hundreds of new, unwrapped toys for the Wilbraham Police Relief Association's Annual Stuff-a-Cruiser event held in the frosty parking lot of the Wilbraham Big Y.

This is the 9th year of the event. The Scantic Valley YMCA will distribute the toys locally.

"We just want to make sure that all local children have a happy holiday," Ofc. Justin Wall said. "It's part of giving back to the community."

Two employees of the Wilbraham's Town Clerk's office came to the Big Y with sleds and large bags of toys donated by their coworkers as well as their own contributions.



Turley photo by Patricia Sullivan

The Wilbraham Police Relief Association's annual Stuff-a-Cruiser event was a success thanks to generous donors and volunteers and families from the Wilbraham Police Department.

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Board approves letter of support

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
krivers@turley.com

HAMPDEN - The Selectboard has unanimously approved a letter of support to the School Committee to withdraw from the accelerated repair program and apply for the core building program for Wilbraham Middle School.

The Dec. 8 announcement comes after the board, Wilbraham Select Board and School Committee's joint meeting on Dec. 2.

Chair John Flynn provided a recap of the prior week's discussion.

"I thought we had a pretty vibrant discussion focusing on the potential need to, perhaps, shift the course towards a new structure or total rehabilitation of the current structure. A lot of back and forth, a lot of great information from school officials was brought forward," Flynn said.

Flynn also clarified with the letter of support for the School Committee, "they don't need it, but they are looking for the endorsement" of both boards "to go with their application."

"Showing that we feel both towns should have the opportunity to weigh in on this and we would bring the support forward," Flynn said.

Selectboard Member Don Davenport stressed his comments "have nothing to do with the current administration because they weren't here during the time of the issues," and "they've been working really hard to resolve them."

He then read his prepared comments into the record.

"The years of neglecting routine necessary maintenance and long-identified repairs at the over-crowded Town of Wilbraham-owned Wilbraham Middle School has finally reached a point where doing nothing is no longer an option," Davenport read. "The Select-

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Lemon honored for tending birdhouses

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
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WILBRAHAM/HAMPDEN - Dana Lemon, a resident of Hampden, was honored by the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee on Dec. 9 for his long-time volunteering tending birdhouses in open space areas in Wilbraham and Hampden.

Chair Joe Calabrese explained Wilbraham is fortunate "to sit in the middle of a thriving ecosystem filled with rivers, streams, ponds, mountains, valleys, woodlands, flora and fauna" and "you can't walk a mile in town without reaching a beautiful woodland area."

Also, it's the responsibility of the Wilbraham Open Space Committee, the Conservation Commission and the Minnechaug Land Trust "to preserve and protect these treasured habitats."

"Of course, we can't do this alone. We rely on many volunteers for help. However, when someone takes it upon himself to do something profound to enhance these areas, Open Space feels that it has to do more than just say 'thanks,'" Calabrese said. "Dana Lemon is such an indi-



Turley photos by Kristin Rivers

Dana Lemon, a resident of Hampden, was presented with a certificate of appreciation from the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee in Wilbraham on Dec. 9 for his longtime volunteering of tending birdhouses and the blue birds.

vidual."

Member Bill Shepard, who nominated Lemon, shared as a volunteer himself, "it's wonderful to see examples of volunteerism and devotion to a cause that Dana brings to his work maintaining and installing" 144 birdhouses over the last 20 years.

Shepard said the areas where these birdhouses are include Laughing Brook in Hampden and the Rice Nature Preserve in Wilbraham and, recently, Lemon has worked

with Bob Rusczek to replace old birdhouses at Rice's Nature Preserve and install new ones at the McDonald Farm Nature Preserve in Wilbraham.

"The work is year-round, to prepare for spring arrivals and monitor them all the warm seasons is a lot of work.. And of course, getting to them involves a lot of hiking during all seasons. It's a demanding job that Dana has done well

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Turley photos by Kristin Rivers

Santa Claus arrives in Wilbraham for the Annual Tree Lighting on Dec. 7.

Wilbraham kicks off Christmas season

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
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WILBRAHAM - The community gathered at Gazebo Park on Dec. 7 to kick off the Christmas season at this year's Annual Tree Lighting.

Free refreshments of festive treats from hot chocolate, cookies and candy canes to cupcakes were served by LUSO Federal Credit Union and The Sugar Chalet, along with welcome remarks from Select Board

Chair Michael Squindo, Chris O'Connor, president of the Rotary Club of Wilbraham-Hampden, and, of course, the arrival of Santa Claus via a ride from the fire department.

Attendees also presented donations of hygiene products to support the Community Survival Center.

The event was made possible with support from many other people and organizations including Heidi

Please see **WILBRAHAM**, page 9



Allison Henry, owner/chef of The Sugar Chalet, with her festive cupcakes.

Hampden holds Tree Lighting at new town hall

By Natalie Proulx
Correspondent

HAMPDEN - On Sunday, Dec. 7 at 6 p.m., Hampden's Annual Tree Lighting event was held at the new town hall.

The night consisted of caroling from Green Meadow's elementary school choir, a visit from Boomer, the Springfield Thunderbirds' mascot, a parade for Santa by the police and fire departments, and, also, sweet treats and hot cocoa from the Green Meadow's PTO Bake Sale.

Cara Canedi, the choir teacher at Green Meadows Elementary School, explained the work that the students took on to prepare for Sunday's event, spending about four combined rehearsals on the music they planned



Turley photo by Natalie Proulx

Santa and Mrs. Claus in a festive fire truck parade as they arrive in Hampden.

to perform.

"We don't have a lot of time," Canedi said. "So, I tried to choose holiday carols that they are familiar with and things that they really enjoy

singing."

The choir sang a great variety of songs alongside the hockey mascot of the Springfield Thunderbirds, Boomer. From, "Deck the Halls", to

"Feliz Navidad", and every song relating to "Jingle Bells," the students caroled

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COMMUNITY

Wilbraham Selectman Ducey offers report after touring WMS

Ducey addressed several issues he noticed in the building.

By Dalton Zbierski
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM - Wilbraham Select Board Vice Chair Marc Ducey had much to offer in his weekly report during the meeting of the board held on Monday, Dec. 8 at Town Hall.

Ducey recently toured Wilbraham Middle School alongside top district officials, including Principal John Derosia and Superintendent Dr. John Provost.

"Two major takeaways I had just for the public more than anything, but I was surprised that throughout the building there were fans placed in many of the larger hallways and a lot of the common areas simply to move air through the building. I did not realize that was ongoing. I found that to be bothersome, I guess," Ducey said.

He added that one of the fans was placed in a hallway

blowing outward, as if it was trying to blow cold air back out of the building.

"I thought that doesn't look too good," Ducey said.

According to Ducey, there is also asbestos in the glue found below many of the floor tiles located throughout the school.

"Now, as these floors become older, they're starting to fray. We knew about this just recently, but they are scattered throughout the building," Ducey said.

Ducey also described what he categorized as "serious space limitations" in the middle school.

"In many classrooms, you enter one classroom and have to walk through one classroom to enter another classroom just because of the way they've been subdivided so many times," Ducey said.

Ducey added that that there were a lot of "bothersome" things he noticed throughout the building.

"I'm happy we're moving in the direction we are. I think it would have been unwise to just put doors and windows on a building where you're

not sure what the real issues are in the building, so I'm happy we're - or the district is - probably going to move forward in that direction," Ducey said.

Ducey acknowledged that it was commonly known that many of the exterior doors in the middle school need replacement. He hopes this can be addressed quickly.

"I think we, or at least the district, can do a better job of at least putting temporary measures to stop the holes in the doors, replacing some pick plates or something to stop the air and the heat from escaping the building or cold entering the building," Ducey said.

Ducey finished his report by saying that action should be coming soon to better enhance the building. He was glad to let the public know where it all stands.

"There's a lot of issues there," Ducey said. "I just wanted to introduce some of these issues to the public if they're watching. I do think it's something we'll be addressing in a much more vigorous way over the next many months."



Turley photos by Patricia Sullivan

A group of Big Y employees answered attendees' questions about the Mediterranean Diet.

An old way of eating

By Patricia Sullivan
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM - Kathy Jordan, MS, RDN, CPT, consulting dietitian for the Big Y, came to the Wilbraham Senior Center on Dec. 9 to talk about the Mediterranean Diet and share some of the "gazillion" nutritional facts she says fill her brain.

The Mediterranean Diet is an old way of eating centered in Italy, Greece and Crete, she explained to a group of about 25 attendees, and following the old ways can lead to better health.

"It's not just diet, it's

also about having an active lifestyle and close social networks," Jordan said. "It's eating fresh, local fare, whole grains and minimally processed foods."

Fit, trim and energetic, Jordan cautioned that her presentation was not meant to replace your doctors' guidance, but she made a compelling personal and research-based argument for the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle.

Studies have shown that following a Mediterranean Diet can help you maintain a healthy weight, lower your risk of cardiovascular dis-



Big Y provided a platter of healthy Mediterranean Diet foods for the Senior Center.

ease, lower your blood sugar and reduce the risk of certain cancers.

Other reputable studies have found that this way of eating can lower the risk of Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia.

"Dietitians like to say, 'What you do for your heart, you do for your brain,'" Jordan noted.

Dietitians also advise: "Eat the rainbow."

"I've been a dietitian since the 1970s and I've always said to think of different colors, textures, and ways of preparing foods. The more variety you have

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Wilbraham Men's Glee Club to begin rehearsals

WILBRAHAM - The Wilbraham Men's Glee Club (TTBB), accompanied by Marcia Jackson and conducted by Raymond Drury, will begin rehearsals for the 2026 concert season on Monday evening, Jan. 5, at Christ The King/Epiphany Church on Main Street in Wilbraham at 7 p.m.

Rehearsals will continue

each Monday thereafter and culminate with two concerts in the spring, one in Wilbraham and one in Longmeadow.

Drury has chosen an eclectic and compelling program, consisting of classical pieces, contemporary works, folk songs, pop tunes with a few surprises along the way.

While no auditions are

required, singers should be able to sing a tenor, baritone bass part independently and comfortably within the context of traditional 2, 3 and 4 part choral music. A modest fee will be imposed to cover the cost of sheet music.

For more information, please visit us at Wilbraham Choral Society on Facebook.

Hope to see you there!



Kathy Jordan spoke about the Mediterranean Diet food pyramid at the Wilbraham Senior Center.



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Loaves and Fishes serves needy, hungry

Photos courtesy of Cheryl Wesolowski
A group photo of the volunteers part of the Loaves and Fishes ministry for the St. Cecilia Women's Club.

By Kristin Rivers
Editor
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WILBRAHAM - At the St. Cecilia Women's Club, there's a ministry that helps serve the needy and hungry several times throughout the year.

This ministry is called Loaves and Fishes.

On Nov. 17, club members gathered together in the St. Cecilia Parish Center kitchen to prep these meals, which would then be delivered to unhoused people in the community.

Debbie Montgomery co-chairs the ministry with Mary Jerz, explaining it was founded by the club in the 1980s and continues to this day.

"When I joined the Club about seven years ago, I was working at the time and found that Loaves & Fishes fit into my schedule," Montgomery said. "I began volunteering and found the experience very satisfying. About five years ago, I became co-chair with Mary."

Montgomery shared how they recruit volunteers and



The volunteers get to work on prepping the meals.

how the preparation dates are organized.

"The way the process works is at the end of the club's year, a volunteer sheet is sent to the members, and they can sign up for the ministry they would like to be in for the following year. As for

the L&F, I will get a list of the members that want to volunteer to help prepare and serve meals and members who wish to donate bread products for the meal. We also receive monetary donations that we collect on our monthly meetings," Montgomery said.

"Mary and I plan the dates and meals for five meals per year, usually in October, November, January, March and April. Some of the meals that we serve are homemade soup and sandwiches and pasta and meatballs."

Jerz joined the ministry seven years ago and said, "It seemed like an interesting and rewarding way to volunteer my time."

She added there's desserts "with all the fixings" included on the meal preparation list.

It should also be noted that the ministry also makes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for one of Springfield's children's afternoon snack programs.

"We have a wonderful group of volunteers who shop, donate, prepare and serve. We have 'Bread Angels' who donate all the bread and numerous people who contribute financially. Everyone is so giving and helpful when called upon," Jerz said.

Montgomery said many of the club members volunteer for this ministry, adding

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DIET from page 2

on your plate, the more nutrients," Jordan said.

Jordan guided listeners through a visual of the Mediterranean Diet pyramid, which was created by the non-profit Oldways in partnership with the Harvard School of Public Health and the World Health Organization.

Being active and enjoying meals with others is at the base of the pyramid.

Jordan, an avid pickleball player, urged the group to follow recommendations from the American College of Sports Medicine and get at least 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity and to do muscle-strengthening for all major groups twice a week.

The largest part of the Mediterranean food pyramid consists of fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, whole grains and olive oil.

"This is a plant-forward and anti-inflammatory diet," Jordan said.

She reminded the group that frozen foods are frozen at peak freshness, making

it easy to enjoy them year-round.

"Eat tons of veggies," Jordan advised.

Higher on the pyramid is seafood, which should be eaten at least twice a week. You can remember the healthiest seafood, Jordan said, with the word SMASH—salmon, mackerel, anchovies and albacore tuna, sardines and herring.

Even higher on the pyramid are dairy and poultry, which should be enjoyed only in moderate portions daily to weekly.

At the very top of the pyramid are red meat and sweets, which should be eaten sparingly.

"Be careful with the portion size when you have these," Jordan said. "Meat should be no bigger than a deck of cards or the palm of your hand."

To keep portion size down, think of red meat as a condiment. Eat fruit rather than pastry for dessert.

"What could be better than a perfectly ripe peach with the juice running down your chin?" Jordan asked.

Throughout her presentation, Jordan shared some of the ways she eats healthy:

If you use mayonnaise, cut it 50/50 with plain yogurt.

Roasted chickpeas make a delicious healthy snack.

Toast pita bread to make

your own crunchy crackers.

Wash, dry and freeze grapes for a refreshing treat.

Flatbread with pear and fig is a great snack.

Buy tuna packed in water rather than oil.

Grilling fruit, such as watermelon, enhances its flavor.

Canned legumes are one of the most nutritious and inexpensive foods you can buy.

Don't go overboard with olive oil; try a non-propellant non-stick olive oil spray.

Finally, Jordan cautioned the group, "A lot of the stuff you read about food on the internet is not based on science." She advised: "Use the pyramid as a guide. Stay active, stay social. Laugh a lot."

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St. Mark's 14th Annual Christmas Spectacular Concert returns Dec. 21

SPRINGFIELD - St. Mark's Annual Christmas Spectacular concert, a fourteen-year tradition for the parish, will be held on Sunday, Dec. 21 at 4 p.m. at St. Mark Armenian Church, 2427 Wilbraham Road, Springfield.

The event is open to the public, and tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for students and free for children 10 years and under. This year's concert will feature Christmas music from female vocal ensemble The September Girls and tenor saxophonist David Jermakian. A festive reception for concertgoers with refreshments and a cash bar will follow the concert.

The concert will feature Christmas music from a variety of artists and genres and has become one of the parish's signature Christmas-time events, welcoming the Greater Springfield community to attend with family and friends and ring in the holiday season.

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, 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.

TOYS from page 1

"We work closely with the police and we are here to show them our support," Lynne Frederick, assistant treasurer, said. "I always had a great Christmas growing up and I want other kids to have that, too."

Laura Miller, assistant tax collector for the town, stuffed the cruiser with a soccer ball, a football, a basketball and a Wiffle Ball and bat.

"I'm keeping to the sports theme," Miller said, as she introduced her dog, Remington, to the officers.

Wilbraham residents Rick and Judy Seldow drove to Big Y to donate a Spiderman toy and a laser tag set.

"We do this every year," Rick Seldow said. "It's fun to shop for toys for kids and feels good to give to families in need."

As carols played and Legos, dolls, stuffed animals, books, board games and more filled the cruiser, a call came over the police radio. A Wilbraham resident was reporting an "unfamiliar person" taking clippings of trees on their property. Presumably someone was pilfering branches for an evergreen wreath—another sure sign of the holiday season.

A short distance down Boston Road, Rik Alvarez, owner of HasBeen Toys and Comics, also took up a toy collection at his store, partnering with the Wilbraham police and his friend Mike Bolduc. Bolduc has a YouTube channel, Lunch Money Comics, with more than 22,000 subscribers.

"This is our second year doing the toy drive, so now we are a well-oiled machine, promoting the drive on our channels," Alvarez said. "Every kid who comes to our store leaves with something, year-round. On the holidays we want to give more to kids."

Last year, Alvarez and Bolduc collected more than \$400 worth of toys and \$800 for the Muscular Dystrophy



Turley photos by Patricia Sullivan
Mike Bolduc and Rik Alvarez spearheaded a toy collection at Wilbraham's HasBeen Toys and Comics.



While stuffing the cruiser, donors also packed a police pick-up with toys.

Association. They add the toys they gather to the Wilbraham Police Department's Stuff-a-Cruiser collection.

The Wilbraham Public Library, Monson Savings Bank and Country Bank contributed to the toy drive as well. Library patrons filled a large box with gifts and even donat-

ed a baby swing. When the event concluded at 1 p.m., Peppa Pig, Harry Potter, Spiderman, Barbie, Bluey and others stuffed in the back of the cruiser eagerly awaited being delivered to local homes to be played with by delighted children.

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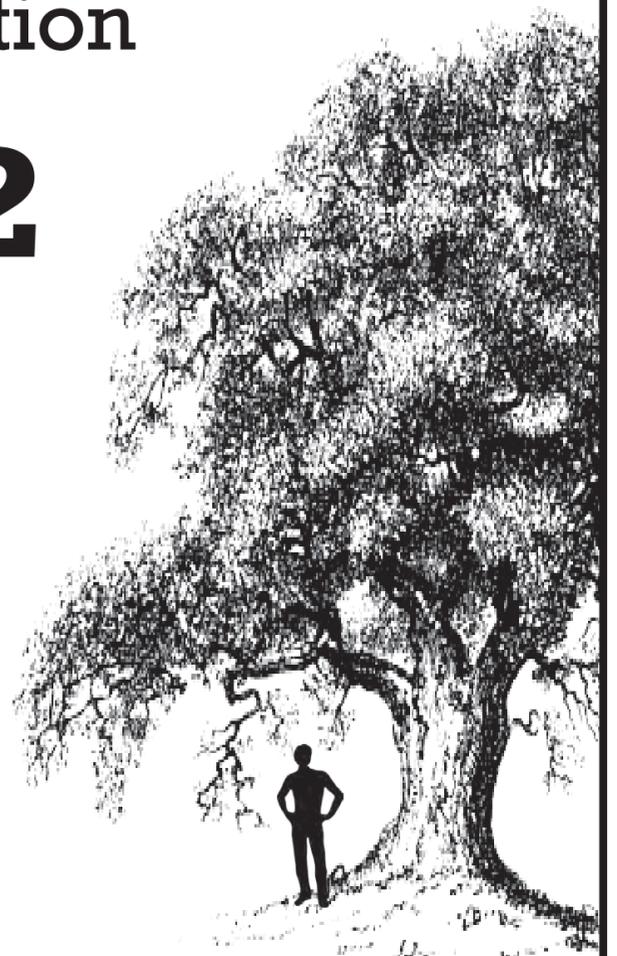
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SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

About remarrying and benefits from an ex-spouse

Dear Rusty:

I am almost 57, divorced after a 14-year marriage. My former spouse is 15 years older than I and made significantly more money than me. I am required to retire from my job at age 60 but expect to keep working in some capacity.

I have a girlfriend of a similar age to me. She did not earn as much as her former husband as she mainly raised their children. She is also divorced from an older spouse who made more money than she did. I am trying to figure out if we will be penalized if we marry or if it matters if we wait until after we reach 60 years of age. Can I claim my own benefits when I become eligible at 62, then claim survivor benefits later, whenever my former spouse passes? Is that affected if, or when, I remarry? I do not want to give up my potential survivor benefits from my ex-spouse. Are those affected if I remarry?

If I understand correctly, if I remarry even after 60, we would both forfeit divorced spousal benefits, is that right? Given that my girlfriend's former spouse probably made more money than I, would she be forfeiting her former spousal benefits if we were to marry, even after age 60?

Lastly, I am considering retiring abroad as an expat. Any suggestions about how that would affect our Social Security benefits?

Signed: Starting Over

Dear Starting Over:

With certain exceptions, benefits from a living ex-spouse cannot be collected if you remarry (regardless of your age when you remarry). So, from what you've shared, whenever you remarry both you and your new wife will forfeit eligibility for benefits from your respective ex-spouses while they are living (FYI, there are exceptions for those who are disabled).

However, the rules are different for a surviving ex-spouse: if you remarry before age 60, you will forfeit your surviving ex-spouse benefit. But if you remarry after age 60, you retain eligibility to collect survivor benefits from a deceased former spouse. So, if you and your girlfriend remarry after you are both age 60, you will both still be able to claim survivor benefits based on your former spouses' records.

And, yes, it is possible for you to initially claim your own SS retirement benefit at 62 and claim your surviving ex-spouse benefit later after your former spouse dies. Provided you remarry after age 60 you do not lose that option, but if you were to claim a surviving ex-spouse benefit before reaching your Full Retirement Age, the monthly payment amount would be reduced, all SS benefits taken before FRA are reduced.

Note too, that if you plan to continue working after you are first eligible for SS benefits, Social Security has an "earnings test" which limits how much you can earn from working while collecting early benefits. The limit changes yearly for 2025 it is \$23,400 and if exceeded, SS will take back \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. And, as you likely know, claiming at age 62 will also mean a benefit payment of about 30% less than available at your FRA of 67. So, if you plan to work after age 62 and plan to claim early SS, you should take the "earnings test" into consideration. FYI, the earning test no longer applies after you reach your Full Retirement Age.

Now, regarding retiring overseas, be aware that Social Security has limits on where you can collect U.S. Social Security benefits. I suggest you use Social Security's Payments Abroad Screening Tool to find out if benefits are payable wherever you plan to retire abroad. That SSA tool can be found here: https://www.ssa.gov/international/payments_outside-US.html.

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

VIEWPOINTS

Iconic Christmas tree benefits Habitat for Humanity

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

WEST SPRINGFIELD - The season of giving is here and in true community spirit, many will say no one does Christmastime quite like New York City or Habitat for Humanity. Each year, a Norway Spruce is donated, decorated, and displayed outside of Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. After the tree is taken down in the New Year, the trunk is milled into lumber and donated to Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) where it will be used for a future build.

The partnership between Real Estate Company Tishman Speyer, which owns and operates Rockefeller Center, and HFHI formed in 2007. The collaboration inspired "The Carpenter's Gift," by David Rubel, a children's book that follows the journey of a young boy who wished for a decent home and how it comes true in an unexpected way. Books are available for \$10 each at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) by calling (413) 739-5503.

"The heartwarming tale told in 'The Carpenter's Gift' brings together - through beautiful illustrations and a moving, multi-generational story - two great traditions: the Rockefeller Center tree and the neighbor-helping-neighbor program of Habitat for Humanity," said late President James "Jimmy" Carter in a previous interview. "The tree annually brightens the Christmas season for millions who see it. Habitat houses brighten the lives of families all over the world - for those who live in them and those who build them."

Since 2007, trees have been harvested from and used in Mid-Atlantic and New England states, with the exception of the first tree. That spruce came from Connecticut, and its lumber was used in Mississippi.



Photo credit: today.com

ABOVE: The 2025 Rockefeller Center Christmas tree is lit up with more than 50,000 multicolored lights and 5 miles of wire wrapped around it. A three-dimensional star, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind in 2018, is perched on top. The star weighs approximately 900 pounds, has 70 spikes, and is covered in 3 million crystals.



Photo credit: The Center Magazine

The 2025 Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, before it was cut down, on its property in East Greenbush, New York. Owner Judy Russ said donating the tree is a way to honor her late husband, Dan, and other family members who have passed away.

This year's Norway Spruce hails from East Greenbush, a suburb of Albany, New York. It's 74 feet tall, 45 feet wide, and weighs roughly 11 tons.

The tree is topped with more than 50,000 multi-colored lights and 5 miles of wire wrapped around it. A three-dimensional star, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind in 2018, is perched on top. The star weighs approximately 900 pounds, has 70 spikes, and is covered in 3 million crystals.

"That's so cool," said Trina Winans, Greater Springfield Habitat volunteer and supporter.

juncos in the yard and one white-throated sparrow.

Bird bath visitors

The Brimfield resident said he went looking for his bird bath heater and could not find it.

He said, "Eventually I did find it, in the bird bath. It wasn't connected and grass had grown over the cord so I couldn't see it, but dug around and eventually found the cord, got it plugged in and now the bath isn't freezing."

He has a trail camera near the bird bath. Lots of birds are using the bird bath, mostly to get a drink. Birds coming to the bird bath include blue jay, Carolina wren, cardinal, cedar waxwing (six), chickadee, goldfinch, mourning dove, robin (three), titmouse and white-throated sparrow.

He said, "Robins took a bath but when it was warmer, temperature in the upper 40s. Junco are the only cold weather bathers." Mammals seen at the bird bath are opossum, raccoon, mouse at least two and a mole.

He thinks the tub he uses for the bird bath has a leak

because the water level goes down and he has to refill it ever couple of day. He said, "The local pond are now frozen. We did a few trips around the area and never saw any migrating ducks, just mallards and Canada geese.

Helping birds

Birds are attracted to water during winter months. They do not bath when temperatures are below freezing, but they do take a drink. A source of unfrozen water will attract birds.

Providing wild birds with clean drinking water is helpful. However, providing a roomy bathing area that stays thawed even in severely-cold weather can be harmful in some cases. Before heating devices kept birdbaths ice free, birds could bathe in naturally-melted water and be able to fly off without their feathers freezing. According to the blog Cool Green Science-Stories of The Nature Conservancy, birds bathing while air temperatures are frigid risk harm due to fro-

Please see **BIRDS**, page 15

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Correction Policy

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

The Wilbraham-Hampden TIMES is published every Thursday by Turley Publications, Inc. One year out of town subscriptions are available at \$45, out of state \$50 by calling 800-824-8458 Ext. 201. The deadline for submission of news material, letters to the editor and photos is Monday at 12 p.m. The TIMES is not responsible for submitted photos.

Election letters to the editor welcome

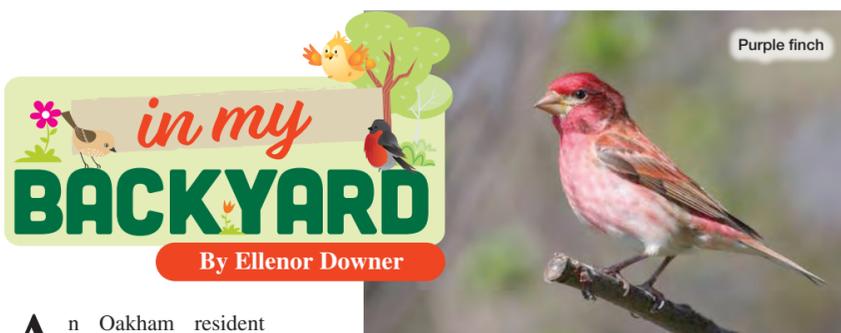
The Wilbraham-Hampden Times welcomes readers to participate in this year's election campaigns by writing letters to the editor for publication on these pages. Letters of up to 250 words from local residents endorsing candidates on the ballot or discussing campaign issues should be sent to Wilbraham-Hampden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

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

Campaign news

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

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



An Oakham resident saw a purple finch in her yard recently.

The purple finch is about six inches long. It has a sturdy body, short tail and a conical bill designed to crack seed. The male has raspberry red covering its head, chest and back. The color fades into a lighter pink tone on the belly. The wings and tail are brown with red highlights. The female has no red coloring and is brown and white with heavy streaking. It has a white eyebrow stripe.

The purple finch and house finch are often confused. The purple finch as a more uniform raspberry color and the house finch is more orange red color. The house

finches color is limited to the head and upper chest. The purple finch also has notch at the base of its tail and is larger.

Purple finches breed primarily in Canada and the northeastern United States including New England and the Great Lakes region. The purple finch is the state bird of New Hampshire.

A typical clutch consists of four or five pale blue eggs with small dark speckles. The female incubates the eggs for about 12-14 days while the male provides food. Once hatched, both parents feed the nestlings a mixture of regurgitated seeds and in-

sects to ensure proper nutrition. The fledglings leave the nest roughly two weeks after hatching, though parents continue feeding and protecting them for another week or two.

They are fond of black oil sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, and millet offered in tube or platform feeders. In summer they supplement their diet with insects and caterpillars as well as blackberries and cherries.

Birds during snow storm

A Brimfield resident emailed, "During the recent snow storm (Tuesday, Dec. 2) there were 30 plus dark-eyed

A COMMUNITY GALLERY

Life in
**WILBRAHAM
HAMPDEN**

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

WILBRAHAM HAMPDEN

COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD

Send us in your announcements!
Happy Birthdays, Anniversaries, etc.

We will pick one each week to run here free of charge, please keep it to less than 50 words. Please send to krivers@turley.com

CONGRATULATIONS & BEST WISHES TO Taylor Colkos and Cassie St. Jean on their recent engagement.

WFD Retiree Breakfast

On the morning of Dec. 9, we had the pleasure of hosting a retiree breakfast. It was a great opportunity to reconnect and share stories with our retirees. Thank you to everyone who joined us.



Photos and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Fire Department

HFD reviews safety practices and ladders

Photos and caption courtesy of Hampden Fire Department



As the nights grow colder, more households are turning to their fireplaces for warmth. On the night of Dec. 8, firefighters are reviewing essential safety practices and the operational use of ground ladders, ensuring they're prepared to access chimneys safely if needed.



Toys toys and more toys!



Photos and caption courtesy of Wilbraham Police Department

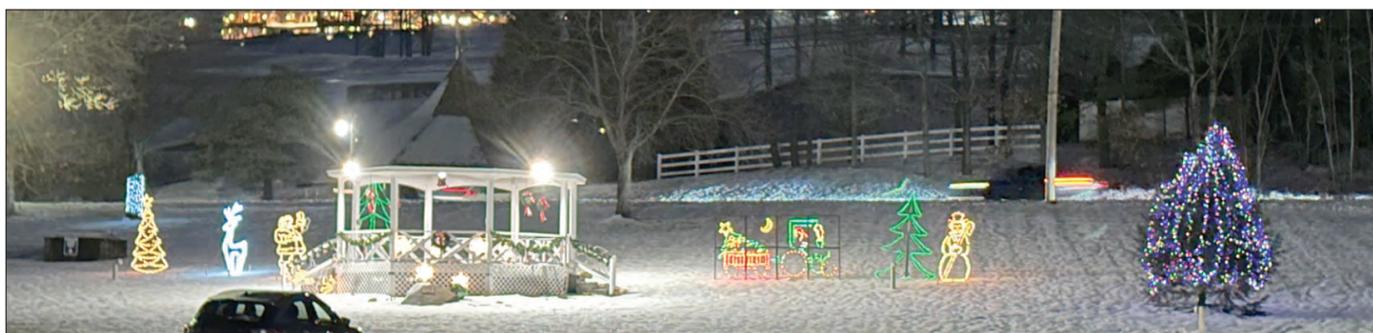


Annual Stuff-a-Cruiser Success! The Wilbraham Police Relief Association would like to sincerely thank everyone who stopped by our Stuff-A-Cruiser event on Dec. 6 at the Big Y World Class Market whether it was just say hi, make a donation or drop off treats. We would like to especially thank HasBeen Toys and Comics, Country Bank, Monson Savings Bank, Wilbraham Public Library and the Town of Wilbraham Collectors/Treasurers Office for their very generous donations. We received hundreds of toys that will be distributed to local families in need that have been identified through our professional contacts, community connections, the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District and the Scantic Valley YMCA Branch. THANK YOU Wilbraham, we could not do this without you and the officers & their families who volunteered their time to make this event a success. *Editor's Note: Check out Patricia Sullivan's story on this event in this week's Times for even more photos!*

Hampden lit up for Christmas!

Submitted photo John Flynn

Ahead of this past Sunday's tree lighting, Selectboard Chair John Flynn spotted the gazebo at the new Town Hall on Wilbraham Road alight with Christmas lights and colors.



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Tues 12/23 10 - 5
Wed 12/24 Christmas Eve 10 - 3
Thurs 12/25 Christmas Day Closed
Fri 12/26 10 - 5
Sat 12/27 8 - 2
Tues 12/30 10 - 5
Wed 12/31 New Year's Eve 10 - 3
Thurs 1/1 New Year's Day Closed
Fri 1/2 10 - 5
Sat 1/3 8 - 2

January 6 - 13 Joelene will be on vacation BUT THE SHOP WILL BE OPEN
Tues-Fri 11-5 Sat 10-2

Breault touches on numerous items in TA report

By Dalton Zbierski
Correspondent

WILBRAHAM – Wilbraham Town Administrator Nick Breault gave a very informative report during the meeting of the Select Board on Monday, Dec. 8.

He began by noting that National Grid has rolled out its Smart Meter program.

According to National Grid's website, the company is in the process of swapping out all traditional electric meters with smart meters, which connect to Wi-Fi. These smart

meters offer more control over energy usage, improved service, real-time data and faster response times with more advanced technology.

"Folks should have received the first communication by now. It's my understanding that there will be a second one coming out. So, keep an eye out on that. We'll publish on the website information as we can," Breault said.

He also gave an update on FlashVote, a survey platform that the town is using to gather residents' thoughts on a variety of important topics.

This will allow town officials to better serve the community and meet its needs.

"So, after an initial push, we have as of this morning 175 people signed up," Breault said. "I think we need 125 more to get to where we need to be for the full panel, but that was a good start. I think that was maybe with seven- or 10-days' worth of push. We encourage folks to sign up for that."

Breault added that the next step will be for the Select Board members to provide guidance for what the town

wants to accomplish with the first survey.

"It doesn't necessarily need to be the most important one or a very hard-hitting one," he said. "Certainly, we want to use it properly and get information but just start thinking of a topic you think would be suitable."

Breault estimated that there will probably be questions or an entire survey dedicated to the Building Utilization Committee to address how residents would like to see it move forward. He did say it may be a bit early for

that one. In the folders Breault gave the Select Board members before the meeting, he included information about next spring's Town Meeting.

"It's not too early to start thinking about Town Meeting in my estimation. We've been gathering warrant articles," Breault said. "There's a few different drafts. Most of them before you will probably make it in some form, but I just wanted to bring those to your attention... It's food for thought."

Lastly, Breault gave his

best wishes on behalf of the board to a long-tenured town employee who recently retired after more than three decades of service to Wilbraham.

"I want to take a moment and recognize Dennis Dumais. Mr. Dumais is now a retiree of the town of Wilbraham," Breault said. "He had his last day, and his last assignment was basically running the day-to-day over at the town dump. Just want to wish him well in retirement. He ran a good shop over there, and a lot of folks appreciate the work that he did over 32 years with the town."



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Thursday, January 1
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WILBRAHAM from page 1

and Mark Pafumi of Pafumi's on Main, Derrick Biermann of Biermann Services, Bobby Ward of The Guilty Grape with help from Mark Pafumi Jr., David and Lisa Gomes for the sound system, the police and fire departments, Parks & Recreation for the "bistro" lighting, Jason Dominick and Kayla Slessler for decorations and Facilities Manager Sam Boyd. Also, Wilbraham Scout Troop 359, who installed the Nativity Scene.

The Times was the media sponsor.

Squindo thanked everyone for coming out for the event.

"It's holiday get-togethers like this that I appreciate the most. It brings us together, reminds us that we're here for each other, to the community, make some snowballs, throw some snowballs, have some cocoa, see the tree light," Squindo said. "And with that, on behalf of the Wilbraham Select Board, I just want to wish you all Merry Christmas, a Happy Hannukkah, a joyous Kwanzaa and a holiday season full of light and cheer."

O'Connor shared the history of the club, which is an international service organization "that tackles some of our world's most persistent issues," with a global network of 1.2 million members that volunteer their skills and resources "to solve problems and address community needs."

"Locally, the Rotary Club of Wilbraham-Hampden keeps very busy running educational or charitable projects that support children, seniors, families and needy individuals," O'Connor said.

One project the club focuses on is the Dictionary Project, which for 25 years has provided more than 4,500 third-graders with their own personal dictionary, promoting literacy for all.

"This year, our members visited third-grade classrooms in Hampden and Wilbraham, where we delivered personal dictionaries to almost 200 enthusiastic young readers," O'Connor said.

The club, O'Connor said, has also awarded scholarships to high school seniors for more than 40 years.

"Next month, we will start



Per tradition now, the members of the Rotary Club of Wilbraham-Hampden pose for their annual photo with Santa Claus.



A family photo with Santa Claus as he meets children and families in Wilbraham.

Turley photos by Kristin Rivers



The Christmas tree at Gazebo Park officially lit for the holidays.

recruiting high school seniors from Wilbraham and Hampden to apply for the club's \$2,000 post-secondary school scholarships that we grant each year," O'Connor said. "We are busy, but with the help of our community partners, we stay very focused."

Allison Henry, owner/chef of The Sugar Chalet, was excited to provide treats for attendees.

"I did mini red velvet and

chocolate cupcakes with a vanilla frosting. I think a lot of people enjoy chocolate this time of year, especially, so I figured it would be something everybody would enjoy," Henry said. "I brought our cookie box forms so that people can learn about the cookies that we're doing for the holiday season."

Henry enjoyed seeing familiar faces and new friends stopping by.



You're never too old to see Santa Claus as this group of teens poses for a fun photo.

"I think it's cool to see all the people that I know come to the bakery also be here and to just meet new members of the community," Henry said. "This is my first tree lighting that I've actually been to, so I think it's fun to be a part of it and just see everyone in the community come together and enjoy being together."

She got involved in the event through knowing Peter Salerno, the rotary club's vice president, and from there, has gotten more involved with the club.

"I try and go to the meetings whenever I can and help out and we have the donation boxes in the bakery, so we're just kind of collecting more donations for the holidays because there's people in need. So, I think it's a good time to collect all of those things and give them to people who need them," Henry said.

Henry is looking forward to making the Christmas cookie boxes ahead of the holiday.

"I like to decorate the little gingerbread men, put them all in the boxes," Henry said.

As for her wish for Santa, a second oven.

Henry wished the community a Merry Christmas and thanked the Rotary Club for inviting her to take part in the event.

"I'm happy to just be involved and meet all these new people!" Henry said.

To learn more about the Rotary Club of Wilbraham-Hampden, visit the Rotary Club's Facebook page or contact Secretary Brad Sperry at 413-537-4171 or Salerno at 203-214-7954.

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Hampden Post Acute supports animal shelters

Launches 'Operation Santa Paws'

WILBRAHAM - Hampden Post Acute in Wilbraham, where residents often benefit from animal-assisted therapy visits, has launched "Operation Santa Paws" to collect pet supplies and donate them to a local animal shelter.

Through Dec. 22, the skilled nursing facility at 9 Maple St. welcomes donated items such as blankets and towels, dog and cat beds, unopened pet food/treats, pet toys, grooming products, collars and leashes, and food/water bowls.

Therapy animals play a vital role in long-term care residents' lives, particularly those living with dementia and Alzheimer's. Benefits of animal therapy for seniors include emotional uplift, increased self-esteem, improved social skills, and reduced risk of depression and anxiety.

For more information, call (413) 596-2411.

Shop Till You Drop is back

HAMPDEN - Our annual fundraiser is back! Great gifts for everyone on your gift list are available at the Hampden Senior Center, 104 Allen St.

Open for shopping on Monday Noon to 3 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Thursday 9 a.m. to Noon.

Don't delay, sale ends Dec. 24.

SUPPORT from page 1

board is now being asked by the Regional School Committee to support the Committee's decision to withdraw its invitation from Mass School Building Assistance to participate in Accelerated Repair Program to repair and replace the windows and doors at the Wilbraham Middle School and instead seek inclusion in the Massachusetts School Building Assistance CORE program for the purpose of assisting in much larger assessment of the options available."

The next two points concerned how the School Committee "does not need the approval of the Selectboards to withdraw or to file a statement of interest" and it's at the committee's sole discretion and the issue is not new.

"Since 2015, it has been recommended to the Regional School Committee that they seek assistance through the Mass School Building Assistance Program to address Middle School issues. In February 2015, 'The Middle School Task Force has voted to recommend that the Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School Committee submit an application to the Massachusetts School Building Authority for partial state reimbursement of a renovated or new regional middle school.' In October 2015, The Middle School Task Force (MSTF) delivered recommendations to the School Committee at its Oct. 13 meeting that Wilbraham Middle School (WMS) should become the location for a single unified middle school," Davenport read. "The short-term plan entailed combining Hampden's Thornton W. Burgess' (TWB) population with WMS. The long-term approach focused on the district partnering with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to renovate the existing building or create

a new one that 'supports the educational, social, and emotional needs of the children of Hampden and Wilbraham.' Yet here we are, 10 years agonizing over the same issues. In the meanwhile, over those 10 years, little to nothing has been done to implement the recommended repairs or relieve the overcrowding. The answer is clear, we should be looking toward the long-term future."

Davenport then noted the "most immediate and serious question," about "what must be done now and over the next two to three years while the CORE process plays out to protect the health and safety of students and faculty and improve the educational environment for the students currently in the building and for those who will soon be in the building until a long term solution is formulated."

"The issues are clearly outlined in a recent communication from the Regional School Committee: 'A feasibility study conducted in 2015 noted that several building systems, including water and sanitary systems, the HVAC system, the electrical service, walls and insulation, windows and doors, the fire protection system, and the kitchen require extensive upgrades. Additionally, many more building modifications would be required to provide accessible spaces for students, staff, and visitors. We are also aware that there are serious air quality problems in the building, but at this point a study has yet to be conducted to help us understand what needs to be done to correct the problem. And most recently and urgently we have learned there are problems with the asbestos containing floor tiles in a few rooms cracking and pulling up from the floor. Unfortunately, during the floor tile assessment some crumbling of the walls was also noted,'" Davenport read. "And, this

does not include the problems with over-crowding and spaces that are not conducive to learning."

Davenport also made two points clear.

"The majority, if not all of those defects outlined in the letter were identified, 10 years ago. Over those years, nothing has been done to address any of them," Davenport read. "I want to be equally clear that the Regional Agreement and the Lease Agreement between the Town of Wilbraham, which owns the building and the Regional Committee states it is the responsibility of the Tenant (in this case the Region) to maintain and repair all the property 'in good, safe, usable, workable, operating condition.' And that costs of more than \$35,000 'shall be considered capital costs.' Further, the regional agreement states 'All expenses in the nature of capital outlay for leased elementary and middle schoolsshall be the responsibility of the town(s) in which the elementary or middle school(s) is located.' It could take years before a final resolution is achieved."

Davenport said he would support the letter of support "contingent upon the Region and the owner of the building (the Town of Wilbraham) in compliance with the Regional Agreement and the Lease agreement taking immediate and constructive action to prioritize and develop an action plan to mitigate the current deficiencies while the CORE program progresses."

"In my view, it is unfair to the students and faculty and irresponsible to delay any further steps to mitigate the many issues presented," Davenport read. "I believe that should be made clear if the Board votes to offer a letter of support."

After thanking Davenport for summarizing the prior meeting discussion, Flynn noted he was on the Middle

School Task Force as well.

"I think, in our eyes, it was pretty apparent that that would have been the right time to do the two approach, which was while a middle school was being constructed, we do a sharing of the population between Thornton Burgess and Wilbraham Middle, which would have mitigated any overcrowding towards, what we felt, would have been the proper outcome would have been a Minnechaug campus, basically, six through 12, which would have been an incredible thing," Flynn said. "Now, if that's the goal we're doing this year, great. Although, probably would have been done for 40% of the cost we would see now. That's water over the dam. We need to move forward."

After reiterating Davenport's concerns about what the students will experience over the next couple of years during this process, Flynn emphasized how "that needs to be addressed."

"The overall concept is good, I think we see that, but there's nuts and bolts that need to be addressed as part of it," Flynn said.

Selectboard Member Erik Vanderleeden has children in the middle school right now, sharing "at the end of the day, we are faced with the reality that nothing has been done, and here we are."

"So, we've reached an impasse and the accelerated program is just, kind of, putting Band-Aids on a bigger problem. So, we need to move forward and think bigger. I agree it should have been done years ago, but here we are," Vanderleeden said. "So, based on that, I think we need to move forward with that and, yes, I do agree that there needs to be something done to the existing school while the core program is being evaluated."

Vanderleeden said "these things take time" and thinks

"there could be some stopgaps and some ways that may, at least do some—I'm not calling it the bare minimum—but just enough to kind of make the air quality better, things like that."

"Things, little steps, so we don't have to put \$1 million HVAC systems in to do that, but maybe there's an opportunity to do ventilation or do some other stopgaps in the meantime to just kind of kick the can down the road until they can either say, 'Hey, we're going to fix up this whole school and do a whole gut or we're going to replace the whole school,'" Vanderleeden said. "I think that we all kind of think based on the condition that the school's in, that we're going to most likely be recommended that it'd be replaced, but we will kind of see when that core evaluation comes through."

Flynn added the students going to the middle school in the future need to be considered as well.

"Their education is important also," Flynn said. "As Don said, we have to have a clear plan in place. What's the five-year plan until that happens?"

After former Hampden School Committee Member Fran Netherwood shared his thoughts and asked about the cost to Hampden—which Flynn noted, according to recent data shared by Assistant Superintendent for Finance, Operations and Human Resources Dr. Douglas Slaughter, the cost would be in the 58% range, meaning 42% of costs would be the two towns' responsibilities, with Hampden's "roughly 20% of that"—the board cast their vote "with an understanding that meetings will continue" and a five to six year plan for the current WMS will be part of the process.

Slaughter also noted the core building program application will open in January and be due in April 2026.

EARLY DEADLINES FOR ADS & LEGAL NOTICES

New Year's will bring early deadlines for all ads & legal notices to run in TURLEY PUBLICATIONS the week of Dec. 29, 2025 - Jan. 2, 2026:

Friday, December 26 at 2 PM for January 1 issue

- Country Journal • The Register • Wilbraham-Hampden Times
- Agawam Advertiser News

Monday, December 29 at 2 PM for January 1 issue

- Sentinel • The Journal Register
- Ware River News • Barre Gazette

Tuesday, December 30 at 2 PM for January 2 issue

- Quaboag Current • Town Reminder
- The Holyoke Sun • Chicopee Register

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HUNGRY from page 3

she enjoys working with them throughout the year.

"We have many volunteers for this worthy mission and it is a pleasure working with them. They are willing to do anything needed to make a wholesome meal. It is a 'happy' kitchen," Montgomery said.

Jerz said the preparation process begins early in the day.

"Usually expecting to serve 100 people, the ladies arrive by 8 a.m. to start the preparation. There is a sandwich-making station, a cooking station and a dessert station. The meals are all put together for transport to the church," Jerz said. "It is truly

a working production. All of the ladies love to come. It is such a rewarding experience and a lovely social event for everyone."

Come 11 a.m., Jerz added, it's time to pack everything up for transportation.

"We're very fortunate to have two members from the Knights of Columbus, Ed and John, to help with the lifting of the heavy pots," Jerz said. "When we arrive at the homeless shelter, the food is brought in with help from the workers at the shelter and we go to work and serve everyone. It is so rewarding to see how grateful each and every one is to have a good meal."

Montgomery said serving the needy is what fulfills her and the volunteers the most.

"After the meals are prepared, we transport them to the soup kitchen at the South Congregational Church on Maple Street in Springfield. We usually serve around 100 people. It is very gratifying and satisfying to be able to serve a meal to people who depend on the soup kitchen for food," Montgomery said.

"The people are very appreciative for a home-cooked meal and the soup kitchen is grateful for our help and support."

For Jerz, it gives perspective on those who need help and support.

"It truly opens your eyes to people who are less fortunate than we are. They are all so grateful, leaving our hearts warm that we gave them a warm smile and a warm meal," Jerz said.

Montgomery encourages the community to get involved and lend their support to those in need.

"Our club will continue to support Loaves & Fishes as there is a growing need to serve the meals to the hungry, as government programs are reduced or cut altogether. I think the number of meals will increase because of the cold season coming," Montgomery said.

Jerz had this message.

"Everyone is welcome to join the Loaves and Fishes. It is a welcoming and rewarding ministry that brings out the good in everyone," Jerz said.

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Miles Fergus is pressured near the end line.



Andrew Grasso drives into the arc.

Falcons suffer loss to Amherst

AMHERST – Last Saturday evening, Minnechaug Regional High School boys basketball participated in the Pioneer Valley Tip-Off Class at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. The Falcons fell 54-48 against Amherst Regional. In the defeat, Miles Fergus led the Falcons with 12 points. Andrew Grasso finished nine points. Minnechaug is 0-1.



Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli
Caden Duke avoids a jumping defense with a move around him.



Darren Duah looks to pass out of the paint.



Max Fergus drives to the hoop.



Caden Duke avoids a jumping defense with a move around him.



The Class A and B all-stars

Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com



Minnechaug's Zoe Pinnock, Ava Nuzzle, and Zorih Wray.

Falcons take part in all-star game

SPRINGFIELD – On Nov. 24, Minnechaug girls soccer players Zoe Pinnock, Ava Nuzzle, and Zorih Wray took part in the Senior All-Star Game held at Pope Francis High School. The event has become a tradition following the state tournament games.

Zorih Wray dribbles down the field.



Falcons girls basketball gets first win of season

WILBRAHAM – Last Friday night, Minnechaug Regional High School girls basketball opened up the regular season with a victory against Westfield High School.

Minnechaug opened up with a shutout in the first quarter against the Bombers, up 14-0. That momentum carried the Falcons to a 60-17 win as Westfield could not mount any offense against the Falcons.

Zahara Wilson had a huge game in the season opener as she finished with 22 points. She had five three-pointers. Elizabeth Woytowicz and Cailin O'Brien had nine points each in the win.

Minnechaug faced Northampton earlier this week, then the Falcons will have eight days off before facing Longmeadow on Tuesday, Dec. 23 at 6:30 p.m. at home.

SPORTS

Railers score win over Pirates

PORTLAND, ME - The Portland Pirates ruined a lot of nights for the Worcester IceCats and Sharks through the decades.

The Railers got some revenge here Saturday evening by beating the Pirates, 4-2, in front of 4,803 fans as the Maine Mariners did a nostalgia game playing as the old AHL team.

The game went down to the final minutes with Worcester clinching it on Drew Callin's empty net goal with 26 seconds left in the third period. It was a 2-2 game with less than 10 minutes to go in the third, then Ryan Miotto broke the tie with a great wrist shot from the left circle at 10:25.

Cole Donhauser and Matt DeMelis had the other Railers goals. Max Andreev and Robert Cronin scored for the Pirates. Once again Worcester got splendid goaltending from Parker Gahagen who stopped 32 of 34 shots.

It was an outcome that

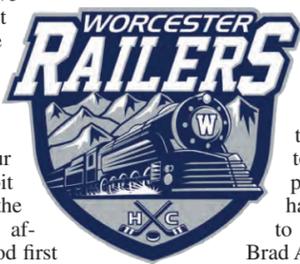
could easily have been reversed except that Worcester refused to give in.

"I think we stuck with a lot of our game plan," coach Nick Tuzolino said. "We got put back on our heels a little bit at the start of the second period after a pretty good first period but I thought we responded well."

The victory allowed the Railers to finish a seven-game road trip with a 4-2-1 record. They earned nine of a possible 14 points, a .643 pace. Worcester is 9-3-1 in its last 13 games.

The first period was played at a yellow light pace and ended 0-0 although Worcester outshot the home team, 13-7. Things quickened in the second and intensified just before the clock hit the game's midway point.

The Railers were a man short when they developed a 3 on 1. They crashed the



zone but probably got in too deep. Ross Mitton was the last man to touch the puck but had no room to beat goalie Brad Arvanitis.

On cue, the Mariners came back with an odd-man rush of their own. They finished this one well with Andreev firing 20-foot-er under the crossbar from the left circle.

Worcester did not trail for long.

Donhauser stole the puck at center ice and outskated a pair of defenders. He made a little move between the circles and as Arvanitis reacted, Donhauser put a short shot between his pads.

DeMelis gave the Rail-

ers a 2-1 lead at 5:41 of the third period, scoring from in close. Cronin tied it on a power play at 9:12. Once again Worcester responded quickly as Miotto hit the top far corner from the left circle at 10:25.

The home team pressed but Gahegan shut them down until the buzzer sounded.

The two Worcester AHL teams had played the Pirates many times through the years and it was a very intense rivalry. Including play-off games, they battled 206 times. Worcester's record was 91-86-29. The IceCats were 43-45-16, the Sharks 44-37-13.

The city's AHL teams were 36-45-18 in what is currently called Cross Arena.

The American Hockey League won't put this one in the standings, but the Railers were very happy to issue some payback for their predecessors.

T-Birds get clutch goals for win over Utica

UTICA, N.Y. - The Springfield Thunderbirds (7-11-3-2) received a pair of clutch, tie-breaking goals in the final period en route to a 3-2 win over the Utica Comets (5-14-3-1) on Saturday night inside Adirondack Bank Center.

For a second straight road contest, the T-Birds had to lean on their goaltender in the opening period, as Georgi Romanov was a frequently-tested goalie, making 14 saves in the opening period, including a flashy left pad save on an in-tight chance from Utica captain Ryan Schmelzer on the first shift of the night.

Springfield had the lone power play in the first, but instead, Romanov was pressed into duty again, to which the Russian backstop answered the bell with a 2-on-1 denial on Nathan Legare.

The Comets' efforts finally led to a breakthrough at 6:14 of the second as Dylan Wendt slid a pass to a streaking Jon-

athan Gruden, who threw a forehand from the left side to give Utica the 1-0 advantage.

Just over six minutes later, Springfield equalized as Chris Wagner drove the puck down the left wing to the goal before stuffing a forehand through Nico Daws to make it 1-1 at 12:39. The goal was Wagner's fifth in his last six games.

As the game entered the third, the T-Birds were about to receive two clutch connections from a pair of rookies. First, Nikita Susuev netted his first AHL goal, as he swooped to a rebound behind Daws' net before wrapping it around to the right post and behind the Comet netminder to give Springfield a 2-1 lead just 1:48 into the third.

Lenni Hameenaho swiftly got Utica back to a tie score at 4:09, as he unleashed a

Please see T-BIRDS, page 15

This week in recreation

Wilbraham Hiking Club Sue Burk

WILBRAHAM - 2025 was a great year for the Wilbraham Hiking Club! The club's TeamReach App membership passed 360, with more than 90 members who hiked at least one hike. There's been at least one hike nearly every week year-round, and sometimes more than one. The club offered relaxed-pace and moderate-pace hikes, as well as some long-distance walks and challenging hikes. Recent special jaunts included a rugged challenging hike along Section 8 of the New England Trail in Granby, an easy woodland hike at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton, which included a chance to see the sculptures which are part of their Art in The



Orchard exhibit, and a moderate hike at a relaxed pace to Bear Mountain within the Norcross Wildlife Sanctuary, led by Norcross staff along roads and trails that are usu-

ally closed to the public. The club also continued to explore Wilbraham's wonderful hiking areas and as well as heading north as far as Petersham, south as far as East Windsor, east as far as Boston, and west all the way to Cummington.

We now have several folks who lead hikes regularly, along with several other folks who step up and lead one or more their own favorite hikes, enabling other club members to explore trails that are new-to-them. And we've had a few scouting hikes, choosing a trail that is new to everyone, including the leader, and using maps and apps to navigate a totally new area for all the participants.

The Wilbraham Hiking Club welcomes new members, both town residents and folks from other locations. It's easy to join: either

download the TeamReach App and join using Group Code WHC01095 or write to wilbrahamhiking@gmail.com and ask to become an email-only member. To learn more about the club and its guidelines, follow the link to the Hiking Club page at our co-sponsors' sites: www.wilbrahamrec.com for the Wilbraham Parks and Recreation Department or https://wilbraham-ma.gov/120/Open-Space-Recreation-Plan-Committee for the Wilbraham Open Space Committee. Hikes for the next month are usually posted on TeamReach around the 20th of the preceding month, and all members can choose to receive reminder notifications of upcoming hikes. You can join (or lead) one hike a year or once a week or anything in between and you will always be welcome!

HOMETOWN SPOTLIGHT WILBRAHAM-HAMPDEN TIMES

THE GUILTY GRAPE. A specialty shop offering a wonderful variety of fine wines, craft beers - domestic & imported, sake, soju, mead, ciders and a nice selection of non-alcoholic beers & wines. 6 Burt Lane, Wilbraham (In the rear of the building) 413-279-1252. Open: Mon.-Wed. 11am-8pm Thurs. - Sat. 11am-10pm • Sun. 11am-7pm

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The town Christmas tree is lit.

Turley photo by Natalie Proulx

HAMPDEN
from page 1

with tons of Christmas cheer. “Hampden is such a close-knit community,” Canedi said. “And I think spreading a little bit of holiday cheer is great for its residents. It’s a fun way for the whole town to come together in solidarity for a really nice holiday event!”

The final song before the tree lighting began, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town,” was sung just as the parade of fire trucks, dazzling with Christmas lights holding Santa and Ms. Claus, came pulling into the new town hall’s entrance. Little ones cheered seeing Santa come out from one of the firetrucks with Mrs. Claus, walking up to the gazebo to begin the official tree lighting ceremony.

John Flynn, the chair of the Selectboard, shared his favorite part of the tree lighting.

“Having been in town decades and going to this many times, the lighting of the Christmas tree has always been something,” Flynn said. “That’s made the start of the Christmas season in the town of Hampden.”

Flynn noted this community event has gone on for many years.

“One important thing is that we’ve been doing this for decades. So, what made this year unique was the effort of the town citizens,” Flynn said.

Flynn credits the citizens of Hampden, including the fire department, the police department, those who helped restore the gazebo, those who donated the lights, and everyone who attended, for Sunday night’s production.

It should be noted the following folks, also, made this year’s tree lighting possible: Paul Marcelina, Paul Picknelly, Valerie Santilli and her parents, John Chakalos and Rita B. Chakalos, Reverend Mark S. Stelzer, pastor at St. Mary’s Parish and co-vicar for clergy for the Diocese of Springfield and local business support from Lou’s Bagel Nook, Nick Tourberg with East Meadow Enterprises, Kevin Sacco with KSacco Electrical, Sami Hajrizi from Green Stone Landscaping, Springfield Thunderbirds and Uno’s Chicago Grill.



Boomer from the Springfield Thunderbirds poses for a group photo with attendees in front of the Hampden Fire Department’s fire truck.

Turley photo courtesy of Paula Marcelina

“There was not one person who did this,” Flynn said. “It was everybody here. And it’s a great kickoff for what we hope to be the center of town going forward.”

After the tree was lit by Santa himself, the town of Hampden were welcomed inside the new town hall to visit with Santa and Ms. Claus. Little ones were able to line up with excitement, ready to tell Santa and Ms. Claus their ultimate Christmas wishes.

Santa said that his favorite part of the Christmas season for him is that “it’s such a pleasure to talk to all the boys and girls and ask them what they would like for Christmas!”

And, his wish for this holiday season is that he would, “really love to see peace, and healthiness.”

“All of the children, I want them to grow up in a peaceful world. That’s my main wish,” he said.

During the excitement, the

Green Meadow’s PTO, was, also hosting a bake sale filled with hot cocoa and other little treats made by the fifth-grade students and their families. This bake sale was to support their fifth-grade students, trying to raise money for them to go to Boston at the end of June.

Melanie Joy-Cooper, co-chair for the Hampden MA PTO, said this.

“They’re going to see the U.S. Constitution and do some other really cool things in Boston, but it’s really pricey to get them there,” Joy-Cooper said.

She mentioned that the PTO appreciates any help that they can get in making it a memorable experience for the students.

If you would like to make a donation to help the fifth graders fund the end of their experience at Green Meadows, contact the Hampden PTO at Hampden.MA.PTO@gmail.com.

Christmas Eve by Candlelight Service

St. Paul’s Church of Palmer invites you to a joyful and reflective Candlelight Celebration

PALMER – St. Paul’s Church of Palmer warmly invites the community to its annual Christmas Eve by Candlelight Service on Wednesday, December 24, at 5:30 p.m. This cherished holiday tradition will bring together music, scripture, and the gentle glow of candlelight in a service that celebrates the timeless story of hope and love at the heart of Christmas.

The evening will feature beautiful carols, readings, prayers, and candle lighting, creating a space for both joy and quiet reflection. Guests

will hear the story of Jesus’ birth retold through word and song, along with a reading of The Night Before Christmas and other inspirational selections for the season. The service concludes with the beloved singing of “Silent Night” as the sanctuary fills with candlelight — a moment of peace and unity shared by all who gather.

Reverend Steven Sousa, minister of St. Paul’s, shares: “Christmas Eve invites us to pause in the midst of the season’s busyness, to let the light of faith and love rekindle something gentle within us. Whether this is your first time visiting St. Paul’s or a return to a familiar place, you are welcome here — just as you are. We look forward to celebrating the wonder of Christmas together.”

The Christmas Eve by

Candlelight Service will be held in the Fellowship Hall of St. Paul’s Church, located at 1060 Central Street, Palmer, MA.

About St. Paul’s Church of Palmer:

Since 1937, St. Paul’s has been a spiritual home for the greater Palmer community, offering outreach, worship, and connection rooted in grace, acceptance, and love. Regular worship services are held each Sunday at 10 a.m., with special programs and community events throughout the year.

For more information, please contact St. Paul’s Church of Palmer at 413-283-8185 or email StPaulsUUChurch@gmail.com.

Evangel Assembly to host free Christmas Dinner

WILBRAHAM - Evangel Assembly is delighted to open its doors and hearts this Christmas, inviting the Wilbraham-Hampden community and neighboring towns to a complimentary Christmas Dinner on Thursday, Dec. 25.

The free dinner will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Evangel Assembly, located at 348 Stony Hill Road, Wilbraham, MA. Ev-

eryone is welcome-no registration required.

Whether you’re spending the holiday alone, looking to share a meal with loved ones, or simply wanting to celebrate with new friends, you’ll find a warm welcome, delicious food, and the joy of the season.

“This Christmas Dinner is our way of sharing the love and hope of Christmas with our neighbors,” said

Outreach Pastor Lori Phillips. “No one should spend Christmas Day without a hot meal and the company of others. We can’t wait to celebrate together.”

The event is open to all ages and backgrounds. Volunteers from Evangel Assembly will serve a traditional holiday meal in a festive, family-friendly atmosphere.

Candlelight Concert Dec. 18

HAMPDEN - The Federated Community Church of Hampden, MA, is hosting a free Candlelight Christmas Concert that is open to all.

The concert will be held on Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. at the church, located at 590 Main Street. The concert will feature a variety of musical talents performing songs of the season in a candlelit venue at this beautiful and historic New England church. Come relax, unwind, and celebrate the season and your Christmas spirit with “A Little Taste of Christmas”!

Free DIY Gift Wrapping Station at the Wilbraham Library

WILBRAHAM— Need more space to wrap gifts, or want some privacy away from prying eyes? Wrap your gifts at the Wilbraham Public Library!

The library will provide scissors, tape, wrapping paper, and basic ribbon and

tags, along with plenty of room for you to work. Available during select afternoons in December, while supplies last. For information about upcoming dates, contact the library at 413-596-6141, or visit www.wilbrahamlibrary.org.

First Responders Appreciation Dinner

LUDLOW – The First Responders Appreciation Dinner is coming up on Jan. 8, 2026, 5 to 7 p.m. at the Gremio Lusitano Club THE CHIEF GAMES - WINNING DEPT RECEIVES \$1,000. Raffles,

toys for all kids attending. Dine in and takeout available.

For more info contact esegundo@vfwma.org, 413-893-8800. Proudly Hosted by: PV Financial Group and the VFW.

Thayer Academy Honor Roll announced

BRAINTREE - Thayer Academy in Braintree - an independent coed day school for grades 5-12 - recently an-

nounced its Middle School (grades 5-8) honor rolls for the first term. Students include:

From Wilbraham:

Honors:
Solwazi Browne-Vargas

LEMON from page 1

and with notable enthusiasm for many years,” Shepard said. “I cannot express my gratitude enough for this selfless and meaningful contribution, and the members of this committee congratulate him for this well-deserved recognition.”

Calabrese then presented the certificate of appreciation to Lemon.

“The Wilbraham Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee would like to convey our immense gratitude to you for your work over the last 21 years to establish, maintain and grow the (144) birdhouses at the Rice Nature Preserve and soon, at the McDonald Nature Preserve,” Calabrese read. “These birdhouses have contributed to making these beautiful recreation sites true nature hubs with hundreds of seasonal bluebirds in particular taking advantage of this asset. This project required an ongoing high level of effort and skill, and the result is a significant contribution to the comeback of bluebirds to Wilbraham as a thriving population, though they were once on the endangered species list. As a result, the Wilbraham Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee presents you this letter of recognition for your noteworthy example of individual ini-



The September 16, 2004, edition of the Wilbraham-Hampden Times with Patricia Sullivan’s story “The Bird Man of Wilbraham,” which inspired Dana Lemon to tend to birdhouses and the blue bird population.

tiative and volunteerism.”

Lemon explained the journey began in September 2004 when he read an article in the Times—written by our very own Patricia Sullivan—about Ken Johnson, aka “The Bird Man of Wilbraham.” The journey then fully took off the following year and, since 2005, he’s tended to the birdhouses and bluebird population.

In 2005, there were only 17 of these birdhouses around, according to Lemon.

Other places his birdhouses are found include his house, Somers, CT, Mass Audubon, Peaked Mountain in Monson, Four Bridges Road, Hampton Road and neighbors near him and across the street in Hamp-

den. “That’s my spread right now, so I’m well-dispersed,” Lemon said. “That’s what, I think, makes it better.”

When he met Johnson—who was avid about the bluebirds—Lemon explained how he reviewed his property and said, “Perfect,” leading to the first boxes.

“I had like 18 boxes and, of course, that’s too many, so I spread them around. I don’t overpopulate, but I do double boxes and single spaced around, because when you put two together, close enough, you get swallow and bluebird. Which if there’s a bird that wants to get in there that don’t belong there, there’s double

the fight,” Lemon said. “When you open a box and see this, and they look at you—and I don’t know whether they remember you—but, to me, it seems like they do.”

Lemon said he’s been asked many times what he gets out of doing this project. The reason is simple.

“It’s for a good cause. It takes time, but exercise is good and I get to add on the Rice Nature Preserve. McDonald is a little easier, but Rice Nature Preserve, that’s three and a half miles of hiking and I do that in three, three and a half hours,” Lemon said. “But, I open every box, count the eggs, mark it down. It used to be once a week. Now it’s more like a week and a half because there’s just so many.”

He also worked at American Saw for 15 years on the night shift, which was tough as it gave him only so many hours to go out and do this work. But, he pressed on.

“I didn’t give up. I kept going,” Lemon said.

The first brood of bluebirds, Lemon emphasized, is always the most important.

“That first brood is where you get your big number first and then the second brood, there’s usually a few less eggs, anywhere from three to four, and then there’s a possibility of a third brood. This year, they actually didn’t want to stop because I did

Laughing Brook, I removed the nest—which is what I do with all the boxes—I remove them once they’ve fledged, look for blowfly and get rid of the parasites out of there and hope for another nesting—and sometimes they do—but I clean them.”

What fulfills him most is the interactions, including one time on Four Bridges Road when a chick was almost out of the birdhouse hole looking at him and you could see the speckles on its breast, calling it “worthwhile.”

“It’s the reaction that you get from the birds themselves. I’ve told people when I’m up on the Nature Preserve, if you see me what looks like I’m talking to thin air, I’m quite sane. I’m having a conversation with the bluebirds, and that’s the thrill,” Lemon said.

Lemon is also seeking a successor, which involves box checks beginning in March, pausing for a week and then checking the boxes for activity such as a nest with eggs. From there, once every week and a half, you monitor the boxes and count the eggs.

Also, monitoring territory, especially during the summer months, with things winding down by August.

“If I could catch them at a certain stage, like say there’s one or three eggs in there and then the next time I check there’s five, I can tell you

when they’re going to hatch. So, I’m expecting to see them hatch at that point. If they hatch at that point, I can say when they’re going to fledge,” Lemon said. “What I’m looking for is somebody that will do that routine. It’s probably going to take several years if I could. It doesn’t mean that somebody has to come along every time I go. When I go to a certain location, it depends on the cycle.”

Supplies to replace birdhouses when needed including conduit pipes, clamps, screws and the box are also part of the work. Also, someone eager to learn.

“It’s a commitment,” Lemon said.

He also has a goal of expanding and reaching 150 birdhouses.

Lemon thanked the committee, sharing he was honored to be recognized and their appreciation keeps him going.

“Knowing the people that I’m working with, it was a pleasure. It was rewarding,” Lemon said. “These people, they’re part of what makes what happens to happen and they’re a good bunch.”

For anyone interested in connecting with Lemon, contact the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee at oschair@wilbraham-ma.gov.

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In observance of **NEW YEAR'S** for Dec. 29-Jan. 2 newspapers there will be an **EARLY CLASSIFIEDS DEADLINE!** Place your advertisement no later than **Thurs., Dec. 26 at 3 p.m.**
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T-BIRDS from page 12
wicked one-time slapper through Romanov's stick side, bringing the game to a 2-2 deadlock.

One more time, though, the T-Birds had a rebuttal, this time from Marc-Andre Gaudet, who uncorked a slap shot that ricocheted off a Utica defender before bouncing behind Daws at 8:47 for the go-ahead goal,

3-2. Romanov and the Springfield defense batted down the hatches from there, killing off a Utica power play and receiving numerous shot blocks in the closing minutes, including a clutch denial by Alek Kaskimaki in the dying seconds. Romanov improved to 2-0 for the season against Utica, stopping 65 of 67 Comets shots over his two victories.

BIRDS from page 6

zen feathers: <https://blog.nature.org/2022/01/31/should-you-provide-birds-water-in-winter/>.

The article suggests modifying heated bird-baths so that birds can safely drink, but not bathe. A metal heating element that keeps a small section of the birdbath thawed works well. People, who have bird feeders or simple feeding stations may add shallow unbreakable container around the area. Yes, it can be labor-intensive, but they can easily pour water into

them (hot water when it's below freezing) and provide fresh water for at least a short period of time. As a source of drinking water, the containers can be filled with pebbles that will form small pockets of water where birds can get a drink of water.

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.

TOWN OF WILBRAHAM PUBLIC HEARING: LIQUOR LICENSE MULTIPLE AMENDMENTS
(Posted 12/10/2025)

The Wilbraham Select Board will hold a public hearing under Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 138, Section 12, on **Monday, January 5, 2026 at 7:10pm**, at the Town Office Building, 240 Springfield Street, Wilbraham, to hear public comment on an application to amend an annual Section 12: All Alcoholic Beverages License submitted by Dominic John Inc., located at 2039 Boston Road, Wilbraham. The applicant seeks the following amendments: Change of Manager, Change of Officers/Directors/LLC Managers, and Issuance/Transfer of Stock/New Stockholder. All those wishing to comment on the referenced application will be heard. This hearing will be conducted in person and virtually.

WILBRAHAM SELECT BOARD
Local Licensing Authority
12/18/2025

LEGAL NOTICE
Sale of Motor Vehicle
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NOTICE OF MORTGAGEE'S SALE OF REAL ESTATE

By virtue and in execution of the Power of Sale contained in a certain mortgage given by Felix L. Santana, Jr. to Thames Realty, LLC, dated August 9, 2024 and recorded in the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Book 25526, Page 548 of which mortgage the undersigned is the present holder, for breach of the conditions of said mortgage and for the purpose of foreclosing the same will be sold at Public Auction at **11:00 A.M. on Thursday, January 22, 2026** at 3281 Boston Road, Wilbraham, Massachusetts, all and singular the premises described in said mortgage.

To wit:
The land with the buildings and improvements thereon located at 3281 Boston Road, Wilbraham, Hampden County, Massachusetts being shown as a parcel of land identified as the Land belonging to Felix L. Santana on a Plan entitled "Plan of Land In Wilbraham, Massachusetts Surveyed and Mapped For Felix Santanta", said plan being dated July 19, 2024 and recorded with the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Plan Book 400, Page 111.

The above parcel contains approximately 8,349.20 square feet or 0.19 acres according to said Plan.

Being the same premises conveyed by Manomednet LLC to Felix L. Santana, Jr. by Deed dated September 26, 2022 and recorded with the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Book 24797, Page 10.
Subject to a Driveway Ease-

ment between Give Them Sanctuary Inc. and Felix L. Santana, Jr. dated August 3, 2024 and recorded in the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Book 25526, Page 545.

Premises to be sold and conveyed subject to and with the benefit of all rights, rights of way, restrictions, easements, covenants, liens or claims in the nature of liens, including condominium fees and assessments, improvements, public assessments, any and all unpaid taxes, tax titles, tax liens, water and sewer liens and any other municipal assessments or liens or existing encumbrances of record which are in force and are applicable, having priority over said mortgage, whether or not reference to such restrictions, easements, improvements, liens or encumbrances is made in the deed.

Terms of sale: A deposit of \$10,000.00 by cash, certified or

bank check will be required to be paid by the purchaser at the time and place of sale. This sale is subject to a 5% buyer's premium. The balance is to be paid by certified or bank check at the Mortgagee's law offices within thirty (30) days from the date of sale. Deed will be provided to purchaser for recording upon receipt in full of the purchase price. In the event of an error in this publication, the description of the premises contained in said mortgage shall control.

Other terms will be announced at the sale.

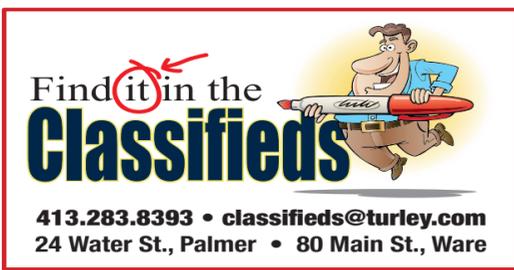
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Lyon & Fitzpatrick, LLP
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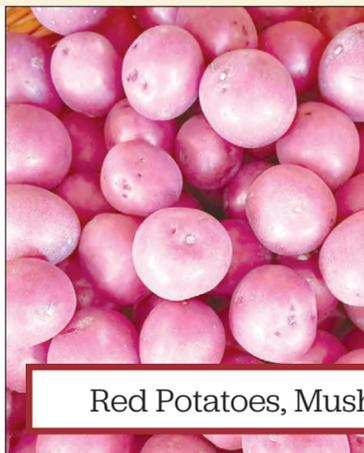
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