

# The Montague Reporter

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

NOVEMBER 16, 2023

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

## Chemicals Found in Land Designated for Housing

By JEFF SINGLETON

TURNERS FALLS – The Habitat For Humanity Pioneer Valley project to build six units of affordable housing on First Street where a town-owned parking lot now sits has hit a snag. Assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey told the selectboard at its Monday meeting that a Phase II environmental assessment of the land under the lot had revealed “some hazardous materials” that would need to be removed.

“We had anticipated that the site has some urban fill in it, meaning non-native soils,” Ramsey said. Testing of the fill, however, re-

vealed six hazardous chemicals – arsenic, barium, lead, zinc, benzo(a) pyrene, and acenaphthylene – so the lot is “not in a reportable condition” for a project to be approved by the state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP).

Though he described the level of contamination as “low,” Ramsey explained that because housing is planned, “most likely the fill will have to be removed... and replaced with clean soil, which will of course add time and cost to the proposed housing project.” The town has 120 days to formally notify MassDEP of the study results.

see MONTAGUE page A5

ANALYSIS

## Tax Overhaul Prompts Debate Over State’s ‘Competitiveness’



Governor Maura Healey (right) touts the economic benefits of the state’s recent tax cut package at State Street’s global headquarters on State Street in Boston.

By SARAH ROBERTSON

BOSTON – Last month Governor Maura Healey signed into law some of the most dramatic changes to Massachusetts tax law seen in decades. The sweeping tax bill, she said, is intended to make living in the state more affordable, stop the outflow of workers, and incentivize high earners and businesses to stay.

Increases to the earned income and child tax credits, rental deductions, and incentives for housing developers were among the provisions aimed at reducing the cost of living. However, the tax package also gives hundreds of millions of dollars back to businesses, day traders, and the heirs of multi-million dollar estates.

The changes are expected to cost the state \$561 million in foregone revenue this fiscal year, and over \$1 billion annually by 2027. Critics say

these cuts are contrary to the spirit of the Fair Share Amendment, a bill that expands the state’s tax base with a 4% surtax on income over \$1 million. Voters passed the so-called “millionaires’ tax” last year by ballot initiative, and it is expected to generate close to \$2 billion in tax revenue annually for public education and transportation.

Ian Rhodewalt, a field organizer with the Western Massachusetts Area Labor Federation, said the new tax package undermines these intended investments. “While it truly is historic that we now have an additional billion dollars in the state budget for these specific sectors,” Rhodewalt told the Reporter, “the cuts that the governor has put in place end up removing a significant amount of public investment in public goods.”

Jo Comerford was among a

see OVERHAUL page A4

## Watershed Restaurant Doors To Close in Early December

By JULIA WALKOWICZ

MONTAGUE CENTER – Partners Melissa Stetson and James Fitzgerald, who opened the Watershed Restaurant at the Montague Bookmill in 2021 after the Alvah Stone closed, have announced that the restaurant is set to close after December 2, a decision they say is more related to new opportunities than a result of economic pressures.

In an interview with the Reporter, Fitzgerald, currently a full-time police officer in Deerfield, said he was recently offered an opportuni-

ty to lead workshops and training classes under the National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers and VALOR Officer Safety and Wellness programs, both sponsored by the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance. He will also be taking a role in crisis intervention team training in western Massachusetts.

“When we opened the restaurant I was working part-time as a police officer,” he said. “It’s going to be pulling me away – I didn’t have the time commitment to stay and run the restaurant on a day-to-day basis.”

see WATERSHED page A7

TURNING POINTS

## Rabbits to Leave Avenue A After the Holiday Season



Alexandra McGuigan says it is no longer realistic to try to cover her overhead.

By MIKE JACKSON

TURNERS FALLS – “This is not sustainable,” Alex McGuigan tells me. “It hasn’t been sustainable in a really long time.... There is no way forward here except for me to pull the plug, and reorganize.”

We are sitting for this interview in the children’s nook in Buckingham Rabbits, surrounded by brightly colored vintage clothes and toys, and outside the street is completely dark and empty, as it has been ever since daylight saving time ended.

“I need to stop the bleeding,” she says cheerfully. “Cauterize the wound, whatever metaphor you want to use. And consolidate, sell as much as I can in lots of different vintage contacts. I have plenty

of stock – it has actually been kind of paralyzing – but the overhead doesn’t make any sense anymore.”

McGuigan, who fled a career in Boston’s high-end vintage garment scene to start a family and shop of her own in the woolly rural West, has had a shingle out for four years in Turners and three on the Avenue. As it turns out, it has not been an ideal time to sling secondhand clothes in a brick-and-mortar venue.

Buckingham Rabbits first opened in April 2019 on Canal Road, in a rental space McGuigan renovated and prepped largely on her own, and then scrambled to reopen on the corner of Third and A in February 2020.

“The real heartbreaker is, I see RABBITS page A7

## Towns Delve Into Question Of Dividing New School District Costs

By JEFF SINGLETON

GILL – Forty-five residents, mostly members of the selectboards and finance committees of Montague, Gill, Northfield, Bernardston, Leyden, and Warwick, packed the second floor of the Gill town hall Tuesday night to hear a report on the financial impact of a potential merger of the Pioneer Valley and Gill-Montague regional school districts.

The meeting was organized by the Six Town Regional Planning Board (STRPB), which is studying the idea of creating a new consolidated district, and the report focusing on the new district’s finances was prepared by the consulting firm Abrahams Group LLC. Abrahams has worked on a number of regional school consolidation proposals over the years including for the Amherst-Pelham district.

Alan Genovese, who serves on the Warwick school committee and chairs the STRPB, briefly reviewed the history and future of the planning process and the board’s recommendations to date. Originally formed in late 2019, the STRPB has issued a formal recommendation stressing the possible educational benefits of six-town consolidation, finding that merging the enrollments of the two districts at the middle and high school levels would create “a more robust educational program.”

see DISTRICT page A3

## High School Sports: Post-Season Spiked

By MATT ROBINSON

TURNERS FALLS – This week the Turners Falls Volleyball Thunder saw its coach-and-four turn back into a pumpkin when they ceded a match to the Bourne Canalmen out in Worcester. Blue actually finished 1-1 this week, but in the postseason, your first loss sends you home.

For Turners, the loss was bitter-sweet. Although they were eliminated from the playoffs, quashing their dreams of a state championship, the loss was against one of the best teams in the state. And one loss does not tarnish a remarkable, entertaining and exciting season.

Across the road, Franklin Tech was almost bounced from the Vocational football playoffs. The Eagles spotted Cape Cod Regional the first 12 points last Friday, and needed every player to mount a comeback and keep their championship hopes alive.

students thundered their voices to the rafters to root the home team on.

The first game was rife with scoring runs, but neither team was able

to build a substantial lead. After an initial surge by the Thunder, the Raiders pawed their way back in to

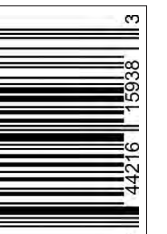
see SPORTS page A6



Turners Falls’ Madi Liimatainen smashes the ball over Bourne defenders in the MIAA Division 5 state semifinal at Worcester North on Tuesday. Beneath her (at right) is Turners’ Keira Richardson-Meattey.

Blithely Molding The Worldviews Of Newspaper Readers Everywhere

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# The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Area Labor Federation Calls for Gaza Ceasefire

The Western Mass Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO (WMALF), voted unanimously at its delegate body Monday, November 13 to call for a ceasefire in Gaza. As unions across the country are increasingly advocating a ceasefire, the WMALF joined by signing onto a letter [see at right] titled *The US Labor Movement Calls for Ceasefire in Israel and Palestine*.

The letter was initiated by United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 3000 and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), and has been signed by a growing list of unions and labor organizations including the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), United Auto Workers (UAW) Region 6, UAW Region 9A, and many others.

In calling for an immediate ceasefire, the WMALF urges the Massachusetts state chapter of the AFL-CIO to recommend to the national AFL-CIO that it endorse this statement. "We are demanding that the labor movement call upon the US government to join a vast majority of the American people, and a vast majority of the world population, in demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza," said Jeff Jones, president of the WMALF and of UFCW Local 1459.

The WMALF also calls upon Representatives Jim McGovern and Richie Neal to cosponsor H.R. 786: Ceasefire Now, and for Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey to introduce a corresponding resolution in the Senate.

"As American workers, it's necessary for us to demand that elected officials endorse an immediate ceasefire," said Hoang Phan, a delegate from the MTA who helped to organize the resolution. "In the past month, our taxes have paid for Israel's military killing over 11,000 Palestinians, with 4,000 of the dead being children."

"As a Jewish member of the Western Mass Area Labor Federation and president of the Hampshire Franklin Labor Assembly, I am proud that we have unanimously supported this resolution," said Rose Bookbinder of the Massachusetts Nurses Association. "It's imperative that as labor leaders we recognize how war harms workers and the most vulnerable among us. Working people must condemn this war and call for a ceasefire now. 'Never again' means never again for anyone."

*We, members of the American labor movement, mourn the loss of life in Israel and Palestine. We express our solidarity with all workers and our common desire for peace in Palestine and Israel, and we call on President Joe Biden and Congress to push for an immediate ceasefire and end to the siege of Gaza. We cannot bomb our way to peace. We also condemn any hate crimes against Muslims, Jews, or anyone else.*

*In issuing this call, U.S. unions are joining the efforts of 13 Congressmembers and others who are calling for an immediate ceasefire.*

• *The basic rights of people must be restored. Water, fuel, food, and other humanitarian aid must be allowed into Gaza, power must be restored, and foreign nationals and Palestinians requiring medical care must be allowed out of Gaza.*

• *The Israeli hostages taken by Hamas must be immediately released. Both Hamas and Israel must adhere to standards of international law and Geneva Convention rules of warfare concerning the welfare and security of civilians.*

• *There must be a ceasefire in Gaza. The cycle of violence must stop so that negotiations for an enduring peace proceed.*

• *The U.S. must act. We call on President Biden to immediately call for a ceasefire.*

*The road to justice cannot be paved by bombs and war. The road to peace cannot be found through warfare. We commit ourselves to work in solidarity with the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to achieve peace and justice.*

*Union members come from diverse backgrounds, including Jews, Muslims, and Middle Eastern communities. The rising escalation of war and arms sales doesn't serve the interests of workers anywhere.*

*In the end, we all want a place to call home and for our children to be safe. Working people around the world want and deserve to live free from the effects of violence, war and militarization.*

*Thousands of Americans have joined the groundswell of global solidarity demanding a ceasefire now.*

*It's the labor movement's turn to make our voices heard and demand a ceasefire. Together, we can stand for peace, justice, and a better future for working people everywhere.*



Wendy Gaida takes delivery of some Mo's Fudge from Michelle ("Mo") Olanyk at the Pub General Holiday Pop Up in Millers Falls. The pop-up shop, at 27 East Main Street, features the work of over 30 crafters as well as a selection of fudge and chocolates, and is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Tuesdays through Sundays, through Christmas.

## Letters to the Editors

# All Things Theater

Two well-directed and well-performed plays are currently available locally for your inspiration and entertainment. Each of them, though very different in context, relates to the "now" of our lives, individually and communally.

Greenfield Community College has undertaken a monumental task in bringing us the Pulitzer-prize winning play, *Angels in America (Part One: Millennium Approaches)*. It is brilliantly directed by GCC's Theater Chair, Tom Geha. You are treated to a sparkingly dark performance including exceptional acting, effective staging of space, lighting and the fantastic invisibles. Performances continue through the 16th, 17th, and 18th.

Up the road in Putney, Next Stage is host to the Wild Goose players in *Claire in the Chair in the Cimitero*, a new play written by Sean Hurley and directed by David Stearns. Find out if death is the ultimate punchline in this comedy taking place in this "Ronald-Dahl/Edward-Gorey-esque world." In the midst of life, they say, "there is death. Or maybe it's the other way around?"

*Claire...* continues through the 17th, 18th, and 19th.

Mary Kay Mattiace  
Montague City

# 'Colonial' Framing Not Accurate

I subscribe to this wonderful newspaper and would like to respond to Casey Wait's column [*Your Sick Friend*, November 9, Page B2].

I agree with much of what Wait says, especially not just stopping with a ceasefire but also working on a long-term solution that will support co-existence of both Israelis and Palestinians, with freedom and equality. I have worked towards this over many years, both in the Middle East and here.

I disagree with their characterization: "Like the United States, Israel is a settler-colonial nation. Settler colonialism is the full-scale replacement of an indigenous population with settlers." I am no fan of many of the settlers on the West Bank, though there are a number who have developed strong connections and relationships with their Palestinian counterparts, forming a grassroots effort at co-existence. Regardless, taking a Western paradigm that seems to describe the colonialism practiced by white Europeans in the US, South America, South Africa, and other countries and

applying it to the Middle East just adds to the confusion. Who, pray, is the indigenous population here?

I've had the good fortune of being directed by the managing editor of this newspaper to census and DNA data indicating that the genomes of both Jewish and Levant Arabic-speaking groups are linked to Canaanites, or other Bronze Age Levant inhabitants even older than Canaanites. This doesn't lend itself to the usual understanding of colonialism where white Europeans traveled to distant continents to colonize lands and cultures vastly different from their own.

Is the writer aware of the fact that many Israeli Jews are of Middle-East and North African origin themselves, having lived in Arab countries in North Africa and the Middle East for centuries before being kicked out and becoming refugees? Are they the colonizers Wait is talking about? Even many of the European Jews who settled in Israel can trace their origins over many centuries back to the old Israel of

Jesus's time, before their ancestors were exiled by the Romans.

I'm not sure that ancient ancestry is the best measuring stick for whether a particular nation is "native" or "indigenous" to an area or not, but the basic point is this: We can agree that Israelis and Palestinians should live together in a way that sustains and nourishes all their lives, be it a two-state solution, one-state, etc., without resorting to abstract labels that may be relevant to us here rather than to the Middle East.

In connection with this, I was moved reading about President Barack Obama's talk with many members of his old staff a week or so ago, when he urged his audience to study and learn more about the history and sociology of the Middle East, and the many threads and nuances that come together there. If you don't do that, he warned, you get into "sloganeering."

His word, not mine.

Eve Marko  
Montague

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Reminder: There will be **no paper next week on Thursday, November 23**. Staff and volunteers at the paper will take a break on the holiday, and we hope all of you have safe and happy gatherings with friends and family as well.

We will, however, be getting out our **Special Wrapping Paper Edition** next week, featuring pages full of designs by local artists, and putting them out in local stores. If you are a shop owner and interested in stocking a few, contact [garth@montaguereporter.org](mailto:garth@montaguereporter.org).

Copies of the edition will be available for \$5 each, or five for \$20. Besides the local shops they will also be available online at our website, and in our office at 177 Avenue A in Turners Falls!

A tremendous community effort is under way to find a **white Pyrenees dog named Boris** that went missing in Colrain on November 6. More than 50 people have been out searching, and as of press time nearly 800 had joined a Facebook group. A drone has been hired, and trail cams are being checked.

Check the "Bring Boris Home" group on Facebook to learn more, or to find out how to help.

The **Millers Falls Community Improvement Association** meets at 4:30 p.m. today, Thursday, November 16, at Element Brewery in Millers Falls to discuss the priorities for the village. "We'll be revisiting the plans made pre-COVID and assessing how best to move forward,"

reads their notice. "Please join us!"

The next **free food distribution** by the People's Pantry at 104 Fourth Street in Turners Falls is this Friday, November 17 from 4 to 6 p.m.

**Get your flu and COVID vaccine** at a clinic at the Turners Falls High School this Friday, November 17 from 4 to 7 p.m. Some walk-in doses will be available, but registration is recommended; go to [frog.org/covid](http://frog.org/covid) to find the link.

The Montague Libraries have a **new museum pass** to the Holyoke Children's Museum. Other available passes include the Clark Institute, Eric Carle Museum, Historic Deerfield, MASS MoCA, and the Pioneer Valley Symphony. You may reserve a pass by calling the library at (413) 863-3214 and picking it up before the library closes. Passes are not able to be placed on hold in the catalog.

The Greenfield community arts space Looky Here is accepting **donations for their second annual fundraising auction** from now until December 1. They are accepting art and craft items, but you may also donate tickets, books, gift cards, and other things. If you would like to contribute, send an email to [lookyheregreenfield@gmail.com](mailto:lookyheregreenfield@gmail.com) including a .jpg image of each item along with a written description and estimated monetary value.

All items must be delivered to Looky Here by December 1; online bidding will start on December 6.

Contributors will receive entry tickets to the **Looky Here Mas-**

**querade Gala**, at 7 p.m. Saturday, December 16 at the Pushkin Gallery in Greenfield. The fundraiser finishes with a live auction at 9:30, and all winners will be announced at 10 p.m.

The gala also promises music, drinks, raffles, costumed partygoers, and "a special something for the best masquerade look of the evening." Performers include a Flaming Dragons of Middle Earth tribute band, Shea Mowat, and the Loculus dance collective. Tickets are \$20 at the door or \$15 in advance at [lookyheregreenfield.com](http://lookyheregreenfield.com).

The LAVA Center in Greenfield announces **auditions for Climate Change Theatre Action**: "All Good Things Must Begin," a worldwide festival of short plays about the climate crisis. They are looking for a wide diversity of actors to perform staged readings, and they especially encourage BIPOC actors and activists to join them. An honorarium is offered, and you don't need to memorize the part.

Auditions will be held November 19 and 21. Sign up for a spot at [tinyurl.com/climate-act](http://tinyurl.com/climate-act). The performances will be on December 2 and 9 at 7 p.m. Email [info@thelavacenter.org](mailto:info@thelavacenter.org) for more information.

**RiverCulture is seeking craft vendors** for a holiday popup in Turners Falls at the Brick House Community Resource Center on Friday evening, December 8 from 4 to 8 p.m. - during the "It's a Wonderful Night in Turners Falls" holiday event - and from 12 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, December 9.

Participation is free, and all handmade crafts are eligible to apply: fabric arts, jewelry, photography, housewares, candles, pottery, you name it. The deadline is this Monday, November 20. Email [riverculture@montague-ma.gov](mailto:riverculture@montague-ma.gov) with photos, descriptions, and space requirements.

"It's a Wonderful Night" will feature restaurant specials, unique gift-buying opportunities, a performance of *Welcome Yule* at the Shea Theater, and a visit at Spinner Park from Santa Claus.

Enjoy fresh fruit and pastry with Linda Ackerman and Seth Goldstein of Greenfield Savings Bank during the next **Money Matters presentation** next Tuesday, November 21 at 11 a.m. at the Gill-Montague Senior Center in Turners Falls.

Goldstein is the bank's information security officer. Learn how to keep yourself safe from scams, identity theft, and fraud. The event is free and open to the public.

Jeanne Weintraub-Mason, a.k.a. MsGreenJeanne, is holding a "Green Friday" **holiday open studio** at 2 North Street, Montague Center, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, November 24. Her unique designs have eco-nature themes of pollinators and flowers, nocturnal animals, fungi, and iconic plants and animals of the Connecticut River Valley, printed on jigsaw puzzles, tea towels, calendars, and more. Additional special hours are available by appointment, (413) 768-0979.

"Go Green" on Black Friday, November 24, by connecting with nature and local history instead of joining the shopping blitz. Meet at 1 p.m. at the main entrance to the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls for a leisurely **walk along the Canalside Rail Trail**.

The walk is about three miles long, on a level-paved surface, and makes for an easy stroll for adults and children ages eight and up. Be prepared for cold weather, wear sturdy shoes, and bring water. Inclement weather or icy trail conditions will cancel the walk.

The LAVA Center will host a **Saturday holiday salon series** that will kick off on November 25, "Shop Local Saturday," and continue on December 2, 9 and 16. There will be local craft vendors, live music, storytime with Mrs. Claus, and other surprises. Details and updates can be found online at [thelavacenter.org](http://thelavacenter.org).

Send your local briefs to [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org).

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**DISTRICT** from page A1

The board is now in the process of evaluating the financial side of the equation. According to Greg Snedeker, a member of the Gill selectboard who is vice-chair of the planning board, if the STRPB concludes that a combined district would be financially viable it will hire a consultant to develop a district agreement, then send it to all six towns for review and approval.

The evening's slide presentation, presented by Mark Abrahams and his son Matthew, gave a projection of the combined district's total budget and revenues using data from the current fiscal year, and showed different scenarios for splitting the local costs up among the towns. Six scenarios were offered for a five-town district - excluding Warwick, which has recently left the Pioneer district in order to stop the closure of its elementary school - and then the same six methods were used to split costs among a six-member district.

This produced a total of 12 assessment methodologies. Four were variations of the "statutory" model, a standard approach recommended by the state. Under this approach, assessment begins by taking each town's "required local contribution" - a number calculated by the state, based on property values and income - and adjusts it upward based on the town's share of student enrollment.

Four of the "alternative" scenarios used the towns' required contributions as the only variable, and the final four used enrollment alone.

In addition to this, the Abrahams Group calculated the impact of the new district adopting either the Gill-Montague or Pioneer

employee healthcare benefits, further complicating the 12 scenarios.

In the end the calculations seemed to produce great complexity, with diverse winners and losers among the towns depending on which assessment method was chosen.

For example, under one scenario which used a version of the statutory method for a six-town district, Montague's annual assessment would decline by 2.7% and Gill's by 2.2%, but Leyden's would increase by 11.1% and Bernardston's by 8.1%.

On the other hand, scenarios using certain "alternative" methods saw big increases in the Gill and Leyden assessments - and significant declines in Montague's and Bernardston's.

The diversity of these outcomes - and their potential negative impact on developing a public consensus on consolidation - were a major topic during the discussion that followed the presentation. Montague town administrator Steve Ellis suggested that the large number of options seemed to create too many potential losers, and asked whether this approach would lead to "good governance."

Montague selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz and finance committee member Fred Bowman both recommended that any votes on a proposed district agreement, which would include an assessment method, be held on the same day, similar to the way the Franklin County Technical School district was created.

Several attendees questioned the report's projections for Chapter 70 state aid, since Pioneer is currently in "hold harmless" status, receiving only minimum annual increases

in aid until its enrollment increases significantly. Abrahams said the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education had agreed that the new district would not be in hold-harmless status, but that it declined to make projections of total future funding.

The conversation ranged well beyond the findings of the report, and did not proceed according to the agenda proposed by Genovese, which would have invited the various town boards to address questions and comments on the research in alphabetical order.

"How is this proposal different from what we have now?" said one official, who did not identify her town of origin. Snedeker, stressing the significant enrollment increases that would be attained by combining the middle and high schools, said he had personally taught at schools with declining enrollment and called it "heartbreaking."

"There's a small group of high-achieving students, and everyone's grabbing at them," he said.

Leyden finance committee chair Ginger Robinson called the STRPB's work a "thankless job." She said she would like to see "more pay for teachers, better education for students, and lower costs to the towns," but did not see how this could be accomplished without "closing schools."

Snedeker said that the STRPB was not charged with considering "closing schools."

David Young, the Warwick town coordinator, expressed concern about the lack of union involvement in the study process, but said he supported the goal of expanding

course offerings with a consolidated district. "We got divorced, and now may be getting back together," he said, referring to Warwick's decision to leave Pioneer.

In response to several questions about "next steps," Genovese and Snedeker suggested that the STRPB will decide whether to endorse the financial report, and if they do, will then hire a consultant to draft a proposed regional agreement. Snedeker said the consulting service would need to be subject to a bidding process, but that funds to cover the cost have already been made available by the state Department of Revenue.

Under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 71, Sections 14 and 15, which specify the process for creating a regional planning board, the STRPB would be responsible for submitting a proposed regional agreement to the town selectboards. Each selectboard would then submit the proposal to town meeting.

Both Genovese and Snedeker told the Reporter the next day that they thought the meeting went well, even though the agenda did not proceed as planned. Snedeker said he thought the STRPB will have served its function even if in the end the member towns decide not to regionalize.

"I like to go with the flow when chairing a meeting," Genovese, who also chairs both the Warwick school committee and the Warwick selectboard and previously served as the superintendent of the Mohawk Trail regional school district, told the Reporter. "I think I understand the culture of small towns and their school districts."

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## AT LARGE

## Sewer, Water Issues Stymie Moody Center

By CHIP AINSWORTH

**NORTHFIELD** – On a recent cold, damp day in East Northfield, a battered blue pickup truck parked at the edge of Pierson Road next to the old athletic fields that've gone to seed. The driver, an older gent with a mop of disheveled gray hair, rolled down the passenger side window and asked, "What happened?"

Told the reason for the neglect, he peered at the ugly weed-ridden landscape where NMH students had once played soccer and muttered, "That's terrible."

Today the land is owned by the D.L. Moody Center, a religious non-profit from Overland Park, Kansas, which in 2017 was gifted one-quarter of NMH's holdings by the National Christian Foundation. The NCF got it from Hobby Lobby president Steve Green, who had purchased the campus for \$100,000 in 2009.

Hobby Lobby had hoped to give it to a Great Books school or Protestant college, but money problems caused both the C.S. Lewis Foundation and Grand Canyon University to back out. Enter a Catholic institution, the California-based Thomas Aquinas College, which has prospered since it opened its doors to faith-based instruction.

Meanwhile the D.L. Moody Center – not to be confused with the Moody Center in Texas, or the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago – was incorporated to preserve the legacy of Dwight L. Moody, the renowned evangelist of the late 1800s, but corporate officers James Spencer and Emmitt Mitchell appear to be as much about making money as preserving a Moody legacy.

In 2019 the planning board gave it a special permit to build a multiple-cabin "glampground" called Idyllwood off of Pierson Road. After angry Pierson Road residents lost \$17,000 in court trying to stop it, the D.L. Moody Center resumed laying the groundwork for Idyllwood's grand opening. In September planning board chair Steve Seredynski announced that an unspecified number of pre-built cabins would arrive at Idyllwood on November 1.

## OVERHAUL from page A1

group of senators who argued during debate on the bill that the state can become more competitive by increasing affordability and equity, rather than by incentivizing wealthy people and businesses to stay. "Our conversation... was more focused on the folks who want to stay here, work here, and raise families here, but can't afford it," she told the Reporter. "That's what 'competitive' looks like."

## Places to Live

At an October 4 press conference announcing the bill's passage, Senate president Karen Spilka made it clear that its enhanced tax credits to housing developers are meant to keep working people in the state.

"This will create thousands, if not tens of thousands, of housing units across our state to help people stay here – stay in Massachusetts, live, raise a family, work, and give employees to our employers who need them so desperately," Spilka said. "For the businesses in our state that invest in our economy and our people, this relief is going to make it easier to spur new growth, build up their workforce, and be more competitive on a national basis."

Nearly 110,000 people left the state between 2020 and 2022, and adults between the ages of 25 and 35 are leaving faster than any other de-

Their arrival – if they had arrived – would've been premature, because the dwellings couldn't be occupied without an approved septic plan and water source. A raised septic system was approved last spring after it met Title 5 guidelines, but getting water down from Grandin Reservoir would cost \$700,000.

Spencer and Mitchell went to the well, so to speak, but the permit application was unanimously denied by the board of health, which is composed of chair David Balk and members Ruth Potee, Alison Wahlstrom, Kathryn Boudreau, and Kathryn Bridges.

Private wells pose little problem, but commercial wells "are a whole different can of worms in terms of regulations," said Boudreau, including a 400-foot buffer zone, state oversight, and monthly testing.

"Right now it's on hold," said Northfield building inspector Jim Hawkins. "The holdup is sewer and water. They're deciding both issues, and until they can figure that out they can't build."

As for the whereabouts of those prefab cabins, Hawkins said, "I told the architect not to bring them. I don't know what they did with them, and I don't care."

The Pioneer Valley Regional School Committee recently voted to return nearly three-quarters of a million dollars to Northfield, Bernardston, and Leyden, pay off a \$198,000 state note, and invest \$615,000 in school needs.

The windfall adds up to \$379,779 for Northfield, \$297,961 for Bernardston, and \$62,474 for Leyden.

Director of finance and operations Jordan Burns said two factors made it possible. "The first is that over time the district has developed substantial fund balances," he said, "and the second is that revenues for the current year are significantly higher than projected."

"It's a moment to celebrate," said PVRs superintendent Patricia Kinsella.

Hoping to jumpstart more ideas, the Northfield selectboard appointed three new members to the Emergency Services Facility Commit-

mographic.

"We're losing these up-and-coming young people who want to stay here, but can't afford to," Comerford told the Reporter. "This is an expensive state."

"I talk to too many young people who talk about postponing major life events because of cost and, due to a lack of a strong federal government, states are often pitted against each other to compete for workers," said state representative Lindsay Sabadosa. "People right out of college, particularly those with a lot of debt, are often choosing cheaper locations."

Low-income housing tax credits, such as those being used to renovate the former Wilson's Department store in Greenfield and an elementary school in Athol into apartments, will be expanded by the bill. It also raises the statewide cap on the Housing Development Incentive Program from \$10 million to \$57 million for one year, then to \$30 million annually. The program subsidizes new market-rate apartments in 26 "gateway cities."

While renters wait for tens of thousands of rental units to be built, they might see modest savings in the meantime: the law increases the rental deduction cap from \$3,000 to \$4,000, saving the average tenant about \$50 per year according to the advocacy organization Progressive Mass.

Seniors may receive more significant sav-



AINSWORTH PHOTO

*After years of wrangling for permits and state and local government approval, Cha's Convenience Store is on schedule to open its gas station next spring on Route 10 in Winchester, New Hampshire, near the the Massachusetts border.*

tee. Barry Bordner, Victoria "Tori" Luksha, and David McCarthy have joined a lineup that includes fire chief Floyd "Skip" Dunnell, police chief Jon Hall, selectboard representative Heath Cummings, EMT boss Mark Fortier, and residents Bernard Porada and Steve Seredynski.

Bordner is a longtime Northfield resident and businessman, Luksha has worked for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and McCarthy is a skilled tradesman and member of the Northfield Finance Committee.

One idea was to keep the EMT building separate from the fire department and police station, because fewer regs mean more savings.

**History Lesson:** John DeVillars is the co-founder of Blue Wave Solar, the Boston outfit that wants to put thousands of solar panels on 72 acres of farmland along Pine Meadow Road. DeVillars was the state's environmental secretary in 1989 when he was pulled over for driving his Ram Charger 102 mph on I-91.

"I think he was shocked I wrote him up after he gave me his business card," said Trooper Billy O'Connell – Northfield's own.

**Northfield Notes:** The owner of Cha's Convenience Store says he hopes to be pumping gas by the end of May. The store is located less than a mile over the New Hampshire

border on Route 63, and is a popular destination for beer and cigarette hounds.... Thomas Aquinas College is negotiating with the D. L. Moody Center to buy the land next to Moody Street that would connect the southern portion of the former NMH campus to the northern portion.... More than a few town workers have been happy to see town administrator Andrea Llamas getting her chain rattled in a public setting. "That's how she acts behind closed doors," one employee told me. "In public she's the mild-mannered bureaucrat.".... As part of her \$70,000 annual salary, development director Mallory Sullivan is publishing a Town Hall newsletter that, along with senior center updates and scam warnings from the police, reminded senior citizens and disabled veterans to contact the assessors' office to see if they're eligible for a property tax exemption.... Sullivan has procured a \$490K grant to replace the old culvert on Highland Avenue near the golf course, which in turn will enable highway boss Tom Walker to build a new sidewalk on the avenue.... Richie Davis will be at the Dickinson Library on Thursday, November 30 at 6 p.m. to read from his latest book, *Flights of Fancy, Souls of Grace*.

*Chip Ainsworth writes sports for the Recorder, and news and opinion for the Recorder. He lives in Northfield.*

ings, with the doubling of the Senior Circuit Breaker tax credit from \$1,200 to \$2,400. The change will cost the state about \$67 million annually, and provide a refundable credit to seniors who own or rent property.

"Versions of this legislation have been around for years," state representative Natalie Blais told the Reporter. "We were not able to get this senior circuit breaker through previously."

## Breaking New Ground

The bill also closed what Comerford called a "loophole" which would have allowed married couples to file taxes separately with the state, but jointly with the federal government, in order to avoid hitting the millionaires' tax threshold.

Another change was made to a state law known as Chapter 62F, a 1986 ballot initiative that triggers tax rebates if state tax revenue exceeds a certain threshold. The rebates would now be distributed evenly among all taxpayers, regardless of how much they originally paid.

The policy change that progressive legislators and activists have fought the longest for is probably the increase to the state's earned income tax credit. Under the new law, the state will increase its contribution to the federal program that refunds taxes to low-income households with children.

see OVERHAUL next page


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**MONTAGUE** from page A1

Ramsey said the problem was common in urban areas, and that he hoped the findings would not be a “dealbreaker,” but added that Habitat for Humanity was requesting to delay the closing of the sale, scheduled for the end of December, until June 30 as it would like to acquire the property in a “clean state.”

Habitat executive director Megan McDonough, who attended the virtual meeting, said she supported the extension but indicated her organization might need additional time beyond June. She also flagged concerns about a clause in the purchase-and-sale agreement that granted Habitat the right to pull out of the deal if the organization found hazardous materials, pointing out that in this case the contamination was found by the town of Montague, not Habitat. She said that this clause was identified as a potential problem by “the lawyers,” but that “we’re working collaboratively, and I think we are going to find a solution.”

Ramsey said the town was also “in conversations” with the state agency MassDevelopment, which offers grants for hazardous materials cleanup at Brownfields sites.

The board voted to extend the closing date on the property until July 1, 2024.

**Wastewater Permit Renewed**

Clean Water Facility (CWF) superintendent Chelsey Little came to discuss a range of topics with the selectboard, wearing their “sewer commissioner” hats.

The first topic was the town’s new National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit, which will allow the facility to discharge treated effluent into the Connecticut River from 2024 through 2028. The permit also regulates the town sewers or “collection system,” which is primarily overseen by the public works department, and the combined sewer overflows (CSO), which periodically release a combination of waste and stormwater into the river.

Little held up the new permit, a hefty document, and told the board that she has “been trying to find some time to look through it,” but noted she had already reviewed previous drafts with the selectboard.

Under the new permit the treatment plant will have “quite a bit more testing requirements,” including to identify PFAS chemicals and to create “climate change resiliency” by tracking high-water events. She also mentioned that the deadline for a required “local limits study” recently funded by town meeting, which will measure the treatment plant’s capacity, had been extended.

Little was asked if the volume of monitoring and reporting requirements was typical of towns Montague’s size. “We’re a small town, but we have big-city permitting requirements because of our industrial pre-treatment and our CSO,” she responded. She suggested scheduling a sewer commission “retreat” in February to discuss ongoing upgrades to the CWF and the town’s future sewer rates.

She then presented her monthly review of data on treated waste sent to the river. All measures met the permit criteria with the exception of high *E.coli* readings on one day, which Little said was the result of “emergency maintenance” at the facility.

Little also reported that the CWF received a 100% on a test related to the removal of toxins from the effluent, which requires only 50% to pass. “I’m not sure what all the paperwork means, but where there’s a ‘Pass/Fail’ in there, it says ‘Pass,’” said selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz.

**Authorizing the Authorities**

Executive assistant Wendy Bogusz informed the board that she had received notice from the Massachusetts Cultural Council that the state comptroller had clarified its policy on who may sign grant contracts, known as the “Authorized Representative of the Contracted Officer designation.”

The clarification said there need to be separate signatures from the board member or members approving a given contract and a person who affirms that the board member or members are authorized to sign it. Montague also apparently did not have a clear policy as to how to determine the “primary contact” tasked with overseeing a given grant contract.

Without taking a formal vote, the selectboard appeared favorable to expanding the number of its own members authorized to sign contracts, designating Bogusz as the one who would affirm that they are authorized to sign contracts, and designating the staff member most directly responsible for overseeing any given grant as its “primary contact.”

**Other Business**

At Ramsey’s request the board allocated \$35,000 in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to pay for the design of improvements to the “swale” that captures stormwater runoff from the capped burn dump on Sandy Lane. The solar company Kearsarge Energy, which capped the dump and constructed a solar array on it, will pay for the upgrade construction.

Ramsey said there was a total of \$346,000 remaining in the town’s ARPA funds, of which \$227,000 had been allocated for “contingency.” The runoff redesign would count as a “contingency” expense.

Bogusz told the board that the state Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission had returned a liquor license application for the restaurant El Nopalito on Turners Falls Road. “It was mainly clerical issues that needed to be fixed, and adding a document,” she explained. The board approved the changes.

The board appointed Pete Lapachinski as an alternate member of the zoning board of appeals, and approved \$91,517 to H.M. Nunes and Sons for work on the long-running Avenue A Streetscape Project.

Town administrator Steve Ellis reviewed a recent report by con-



MIKE JACKSON PHOTO

A US Department of Transportation employee, contracting with the Environmental Protection Agency, gathered samples on August 1 for a Phase II environmental assessment of the First Street lot slated for new Habitat for Humanity housing. A separate drilling crew helped make six borings for soil samples, as well as two monitoring wells. As it turned out, the soil contained low levels of six toxic chemicals.

sultants to the six-town regional planning board (STRPB) considering the consolidation of the Pioneer Valley and Gill-Montague regional school districts and combining their middle and high schools. The report was discussed the following night at the Gill town hall, with quorums of the Montague selectboard and finance committee in attendance (see article, Page A1).

Ellis reviewed his FY’25 “budget message” to town departments, which called for them to submit “level-services” budgets and asked that any proposed personnel increases be communicated to him in ad-

vance. Draft departmental budgets should be in hand by December 11.

He also reviewed four memorandums of agreement with the United Electrical Workers union (UE), which represents most employees at the DPW. He said he expected the documents to be signed by the end of the week. He then reviewed his priorities for the months prior to his retirement at the end of June. He emphasized a study evaluating town staff compensation, and the creation of a human resources policy manual.

The next selectboard meeting will be held on Monday, November 20.



**OVERHAUL** from previous page

The maximum refund from the state will increase by about \$700 annually; combined with the federal credit, the benefit for a family with three children could be nearly \$10,000.

Community Action Pioneer Valley has been part of a coalition pushing for graduated state income taxes for over 30 years, executive director Claire Higgins told the Reporter, an effort that finally broke ground with the Fair Share Amendment.

“The challenges in Massachusetts are primarily around housing affordability and childcare, so you move somewhere where it’s cheaper,” she said. “I would love to see a much more progressive tax piece here – and maybe we’ll fight for that down the road.”

Comerford said the earned income tax credit increase was a major reason she compromised on other aspects of the package. “There’s a lot of good, intuitive things in the bill,” she said. “I would also like to go further on the child and dependent tax credit.”

The child and dependent credit, described by Healey as the “most generous” in the country, was the largest single piece of the bill, representing \$307 million in cuts. It is expected to provide around 565,000 families with a \$440 annual tax credit per dependent, who can include children under 12 years old, seniors, and people with disabilities.

“I’m sure they can use it and welcome it, but we’re talking about a \$440 tax credit like it’s somehow revolutionary for people when that’s not making a dent,” said Jonathan Cohn, policy director for Progressive Mass. “This state could be doing so much more by

pooling money and investing in infrastructure to support parents rather than just giving people a check.”

**The Other Half**

At the press conference, Healey did not mention that the bill also made dramatic cuts to the short-term capital gains tax and the inherited estate tax. About one-third of the cuts, representing about \$347 million in annual revenue according to MassBudget, will favor wealthy families and businesses.

“Massachusetts had previously been a national outlier, with only two other states taxing short-term capital gains at a higher rate than long-term capital gains,” Karissa Hand, a spokesperson for Healey’s office, told the Reporter.

Taxes on short-term gains – income from the sale of stocks, bonds, real estate, art, and other assets held for under a year – will be reduced from 12% to 8.5%, costing the state about \$50 million per year according to the nonprofit MassBudget. While the Senate’s version of the bill did not include this reduction, both the Governor’s and House’s proposals did. (Blais noted that this cut will not affect the state budget immediately, because capital gains taxes go into the state’s stabilization fund.)

The bill also raised the minimum threshold at which the estate tax kicks in on inheritances from \$1 million to \$2 million.

“They’re throwing money at people,” said Cohn. “Many people in this state will die in debt, and the idea of putting that much focus on cutting the taxes on multi-million dollar estates is crazy.”

Cohn said he was disappointed in the Healey administration’s “misleading” characterization of the cuts as a way to address affordability. “The cost of living is at a crisis point for so many people,” he said. “The tax bill does not meaningfully address that.”

Comerford said she agreed with the \$2 million threshold as a compromise – the Healey administration had proposed \$3 million.

Last month state officials held a separate press conference at the headquarters of State Street Corporation, an international financial services company, to celebrate changes to the state’s corporate tax policies. The bill changed how businesses will calculate taxes owed to the state, eliminating property and payroll taxes and counting only sales.

“We’re grateful to the Governor and Lieutenant Governor for putting forth this package, and to the Legislature for passing it,” said Economic Development Secretary Yvonne Hao. “This is a big win for our state’s competitiveness.”

**Win, Lose, or Draw**

“The frustration I hear from my progressive constituents is, what is the value of having a Democratic governor and an overwhelmingly Democratic legislature if we’re passing Republican policies?” state senator Jamie Eldridge of Acton told the Reporter.

Eldridge, one of only two legislators to vote against the bill, pointed out that Governor Charlie Baker had also proposed cutting the capital gains tax while he was in office, but the House and Senate rejected his proposal.

After the passage of the Fair Share Amend-

ment, he said, businesses began aggressively lobbying for changes in this direction. “A lot of large corporations, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and in my opinion the *Boston Globe*, are pushing hard on the idea that we passed the millionaires’ tax and now we need to provide some relief for the wealthy,” Eldridge continued. “The idea of competition is a very neoliberal frame, because what does ‘competitive’ mean? ... The idea that Massachusetts would somehow be this low-tax, low-cost state is just unrealistic.”

The legislators the Reporter spoke with who voted for the bill said that they had to make compromises with Healey’s proposals, but that the updates to the tax policy were positive overall, and that tax cuts are not the best way to make living in Massachusetts more affordable. “It felt like the bill as a whole really supported working and low income individuals and families,” said Blais. “For me, a Yes vote for this bill felt like the right thing to do. ... The things that constituents had been in contact with me about far outweighed any negatives.”

“I think there are some meaningful things here, and I think that tax policy is not the only way to address affordability,” Higgins said. “There are other levers for government to work through.”

“How are we becoming a more welcoming state, and how are we improving the quality of life for residents? I don’t see cutting taxes as the way to get there,” Eldridge argued. “When you talk to most employers, they’re focused on workforce training, housing needs – it’s not the taxes that are driving people away.”



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## LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here's the way it was on November 14, 2013: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

### New Head for RiverCulture

Suzanne LoManto, a Holyoke artist with experience in arts coordination and administration, will be the new Turners Falls RiverCulture coordinator, pending approval by the Montague selectboard.

Montague town planner Walter Ramsey said he was thrilled at the choice. "She'll be a good fit for the town," he said. "She's an artist, and we felt it was important

to choose an artist."

### Honoring Veterans in a Chill Wind

As usual, it was cold on Veterans' Day. The wind whipped the flags into a mild frenzy as the Turners Falls Junior Band played patriotic songs. The small crowd on Avenue A pulled up collars against a biting wind. Guest speaker Commander Michael Walsh exhorted the crowd not to take freedom for granted, and warned that both Russia and China remained threats to the United States.

## 20 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on November 13, 2003: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

### Hallmark Proposes Student Housing

Reluctantly, the Montague selectboard agreed Monday to forward a request to rezone 16 acres of industrial land on Millers Falls Road to the zoning board of appeals. The Hallmark School of Photography seeks to acquire this parcel from the Turners Falls Fire District to build student housing.

Town administrator Frank Abbondanzio cautioned against "any kind of policy which would shift away from supporting the rehabilitation of housing in Millers Falls and Turners Falls." He said the influx of Hallmark students "has helped to keep the housing up" in those villages.

### Dusty Health Concerns

Two teachers from the Turners Falls High School/Great Falls Middle School complex are "on

extended medical leave," according to superintendent Sue Gee, on complaints of upper respiratory problems which the teachers say are the result of breathing in dust from ongoing construction there.

### Cell Tower Hearing Continued

The Wendell zoning board of appeals seeks administrative support in reviewing a permit request from AT&T to install cell phone transmitters on the already existing tower on Locke Hill Road. Many residents attended an October 23 hearing with concerns.

### Brownfields Grant Sought

A hearing will be held next week on Montague's grant to the federal EPA Brownfields program to clean up the property on the corner of Third and Canal streets in Turners Falls. First a garage, then a scrap warehouse, the building needs a new roof and the walls are falling down. Known contaminants include PCBs, lead, chromium, and petroleum hydrocarbons.

## 150 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on November 12, 1873: News from the Turners Falls Reporter's archive.

### Local Matters

Heavy frosts are the order of the night.

Will Hosner is happy again. He's got a yellow dog.

Michael Daley got a hand smashed by the falling of a sliding door at the Montague Mill yesterday.

Chas. B. Stoughton & Co. find advertising in the Reporter so profitable that they have "doubled the dose." Scrutinize our columns.

Wm. Weissenborn has established a new milk route in our village. His milk is home manufactured and warranted pure.

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"Reporter Block" is the title given by Mr. Clapp to his splen-

did new building on Avenue A, near the depot. As a compliment to our journal we are grateful.

Henry O. Jones and Elbridge A. Sugland, of Northampton, for robbing John G. Fritz of Turners Falls, were on Thursday held for trial in December, under \$500 bonds each, by Justice Peck, of Northampton.

Braddock & Webster have our thanks for some beautiful specimens of pocket cutlery. They are so much better than the ordinary pen knife which a fellow is apt to see loafing around, like a yellow dog, without an owner, that the temptation to be the foster-parent of every waif of a knife that comes within arm's length is not so great with us as it used to be.

If people who attend services over the river on Sunday would make a point to get at the ferry all together, it would save Mr. Smith the labor of pulling the big boat over and back a half dozen times. It is too much to impose on Commodore's good nature.

## SPORTS from page A1

tie it at 17. The Hopes went on a mini-run to take a 20-18 lead, but Powertown fought back, scoring seven points while limiting Hope to only one and taking the first game 25-21.

The second game was just as competitive, but with the score 19-16, Turners finished strong to take the second contest 25-19. And in the third battle of the night Blue Thunder took an early lead and coasted to a final 25-21 victory.

Taylor Greene ended with four digs, 22 assists, and an ace. Janelle Massey made eight kills, three digs, and four aces, Madi Liimatainen scored 10 kills, two blocks, six digs, and two aces, and Tatiana Carr Williams made two kills and a block.

The victory propelled Turners into the D-5 semifinals. On Tuesday evening they drove with their entourage to North High School in Worcester in a bid to unseat the second-seeded Purple Canal(wo) men of Bourne. It was a hard-fought contest.

The court was jumping, before and after the national anthem, as students from the two schools attempted to out-chant each other. The Turners crowd was dressed in blue while Bourne's supporters waved purple dish towels adorned with their team picture.

In the opening match Purple jumped out to an early lead using sharp serves and soft tips. It seemed that they knew exactly where to send the ball, frequently hitting it just out of reach. Blue never gave up, but their mistakes began to mount. By the end of the first contest they had surrendered several points due to faults, allowing Bourne to win the opener 25-16.

In the second dustup, Bourne shot out to an early 10-point lead, showcasing their accurate aim, hitting the very corner of the boundary line or tapping the ball at players' toes. By midgame Turners had adjusted, but it was too little too late, and Bourne maintained the wide lead throughout the contest to take the second game 25-14.

In the third and final battle of the night – and of the season – Blue appeared to be playing back on their heels, committing some mental mistakes while Bourne built up another early 10-point lead. But Turners never gives up. They regained their composure and again fought point for point with Purple. They were unable to make up the ground, though, and Bourne took the final game 25-14.

High school sports can be fraught with emotions for the students who participate. The elation that comes with wins is frequently replaced by devastation when their team loses. Unfortunately, unless a playoff team wins the state championship, their season will always end with a loss.

And for Turners Falls and the amazing group of student athletes on the volleyball team, they have exceeded expectations. Not only did they win the conference championship, they also clinched the Western Massachusetts Class D title, finished 19-3, and made it into the state Division V semifinals.

### Football

FCTS 16 – Cape Cod Regional 12

Although last Friday's kickoff was earlier than usual, it was still blustery and cold when the Cape Cod Regional Maroon Crusaders



The Thunder celebrate their Division 5 state quarterfinal win against the Hopedale Blue Raiders at Turners Falls High School last Thursday. The Thunder swept the Blue Raiders in three sets for the win.

rode into town for the Massachusetts Small Voc football playoffs.

Franklin Tech came into the game as the team to beat. They were ranked first in the state while the Cods came in at number eight. The Eagles were also itching to redeem themselves after a lopsided loss in the MIAA.

Before kickoff there were two tables near the ticket booth. One had assorted Eagles merch for purchase, while the other had piles of Franklin Tech football t-shirts free for the taking. This wouldn't be only thing Tech gave away on Friday. They gave up two unanswered touchdowns, and went into the second half trailing the Crusaders 12-0.

**High school sports can be fraught with emotions for the students who participate. The elation that comes with wins is frequently replaced with devastation when their team loses.**

It didn't start out that way. The Birds crashed down the field on their first possession and set up camp inside Maroon's 5-yard line. But the Crusaders defense shut the door, and took over on their own 3.

Tech's defense almost forced a safety, but the Cape Codders survived, marching methodically up and down the field while chewing up the clock. With 56 seconds remaining in the first stanza, the Crusaders scored the afternoon's first TD. The hike on the extra point went over the QB's head, though, and Tech took back possession trailing 6-3ip.

Franklin was unable to make first down, and the Crusaders got the ball back on their own 40. They then orchestrated a long, drawn-out drive which ended with a touchdown right before the first half ended. The 2-PAT was denied, and Tech found themselves down 12 with half the game to play.

In the third quarter both squads banged helmets and pads, but neither could score. With only one quarter to play, Franklin Tech was on the verge of elimination. But they had something to prove to their fans, and to themselves.

With time running low, the Eagles waged a coordinated attack that culminated in a Gabriel Tomasi-to-Ethan Smarr TD completion. Smarr then scored the 2-PAT on another Tomasi throw to narrow the gap to 12-8.

Tech kicked the ball away, and it was now up to their defense to get it back and win a chance to steal the victory. The Cods cracked ahead for three plays, only gaining eight yards. They went for it on fourth down, but a bad snap shut down the drive, and Franklin took over trailing by four points – with precious little time on the clock.

The Birds' offense answered the call, and with 2:12 left in regulation, the Eagles wrestled back the lead, 14-12, on a Tomasi keeper. Tucker Hicks increased the lead to four points when he caught a Tomasi pass for the 2-pointer.

It still wasn't over. Leading by just four points with more than two minutes on the clock, Tech could ill afford to give Cape Cod back the ball. The ensuing kickoff was a knuckleballer, but Tech recovered the ball, allowing their offense to run out the clock and advancing into the next round of playoffs.

Under center, Tomasi completed 11 passes for 133 yards, threw both 2-pointers, carried the ball 10 times for 60 yards, and scored a touchdown. Smarr made six catches for 77 yards and scored a 2-pointer and a touchdown.

William Ainsworth and Cam Candelaria each had two receptions for 20 yards, Hunter Donahue corralled a one-handed catch for 16, and Hicks scored the other 2-pointer. Josiah Little gained 33 yards and he ran a kickoff back 36, Jet Bastarache made two carries for 18, and Shaun Turner returned another kickoff for seven.

Defensively, Landen Hardy led the team with 16 tackles, while Tyler Yetter and Collin Eddy both recovered fumbles.

The Football Eagles get back in the saddle this Saturday afternoon against the Tri-County Cougars from Franklin, Mass. And, win or lose, they have a Thanksgiving morning rendezvous with the Smith Vocational Vikings.



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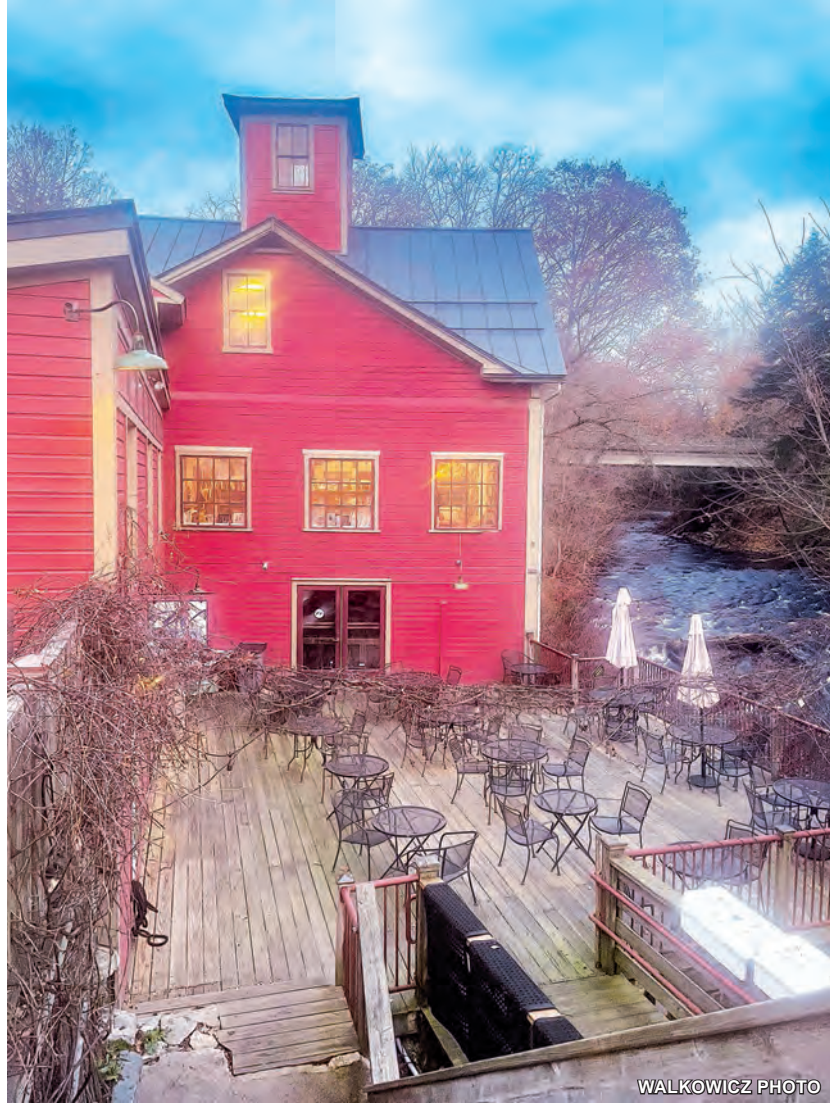
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**WATERSHED** from page A1

Fitzgerald and Stetson decided to close the Watershed to allow him to pursue these new opportunities. “One of the promises we made to each other, when we opened the

restaurant a couple years ago, was that neither one of us had the desire to do it alone,” he said.

Fitzgerald said that the Watershed was not affected more than any other restaurant in the area



The space on the lower level of the Montague Bookmill complex has been home to the Blue Heron, the Night Kitchen, the Alvah Stone, and the Watershed.

by the pandemic. “I’d be missing something if I thought that it wasn’t a factor,” he said, “but that has nothing to do with the reason for closing.”

Even after the decision to close, Fitzgerald remains optimistic. “With any kind of new endeavor there are always some hurdles and trials and tribulations,” he reflected, “but if you do it for the right reasons and stay connected to why you want to do it, and why you show up for work every day – I don’t care if it’s restaurant work, police work, or anything – it makes that dream a lot easier to go after and stick to.”

Fitzgerald advises others interested in starting a restaurant in the area to take the first step, just as he and Stetson did. “Melissa always had a dream of owning a restaurant,” he said. “We decided that when that opportunity presented itself we would try to take advantage of it. The best advice I have for anyone who wants to do it is to give it a shot.... We had a wonderful time and we hope that we did right by the community. The short time we were there, it was always our goal.”

The experiences the couple had with the community, Fitzgerald explained, outweighed any day-to-day difficulty of operating the Watershed. “The space is fantastic – the area is screaming for a restaurant,” he added. “It’s kind of bittersweet that we couldn’t keep it going, but we met some wonderful people. A lot of our customers are now our friends.”



**MONTAGUE COMMUNITY TELEVISION NEWS**

# Future of Farren Lot Discussed

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

**TURNERS FALLS** – The “Re-Envisioning the Farren Property” public meeting, held last Wednesday, November 8 at the Great Falls Discovery Center, is up on our Vimeo channel in two parts.

The fourth annual FAB Passion Fashion Week and the seventh Migrations Festival at the Discovery Center have also been captured by MCTV videographers. We have uploaded videos from the Episcopal Church of Saints James and Andrew Green Team, with their presentation

*Only Human: Living in a Changing World with Jill Stoddard*, as well as a Shea Theater production of the New England Repertory Orchestra.

This week’s new meeting videos are from the Montague selectboard and the Gill-Montague regional school committee.

And remember, residents and readers, all community members are welcome to submit their videos to be aired on Channel 9, and featured on the MCTV Vimeo page. If you have any ideas for films, MCTV is always available to assist in local video production as well. Cameras, tripods,

and lighting equipment are available for checkout, and filming and editing assistance can be provided.

And if you’re looking for more ways to get involved, consider joining the MCTV Board. If you would like to stop in for a meeting, even just to check the vibe, email [infomontaguetyv@gmail.com](mailto:infomontaguetyv@gmail.com) for a link to the Zoom.

Contact us at (413) 863-9200 or [infomontaguetyv@gmail.com](mailto:infomontaguetyv@gmail.com), follow us on Facebook, or find us on Instagram [@montaguecommunitytv](https://www.instagram.com/montaguecommunitytv). Find videos and more on our website, [montaguetyv.org](http://montaguetyv.org).

**RABBITS** from page A1

looked back at the numbers from when we first opened, before the pandemic, and we were gang-busters,” McGuigan says. “And the reality is, you need to make money –

I can’t live in the Fantasyland of ‘I have a store! And the things I give to the community are enough!’ Trading for vegetables is not going to make you money.”

With landlords supportive of



Simpler times: Alex McGuigan at the shop’s grand re-opening in February 2020.

her vision, McGuigan’s rent started low, growing slowly according to an agreed schedule. The COVID-19 shutdown was followed that first summer by a serious leak of contaminated water in the building, which damaged a collection she had spent decades amassing, and the ramp-up was postponed. In just the last few months, she tells me, it has reached its target, and sales have simply not grown to match it.

McGuigan has operated the store with temps and interns, juggling it in her own life with the often hectic responsibilities of parenthood; despite the slow foot traffic, the situation has kept her too busy to build out a planned online retail component of the business.

Even worse, she says, the shop’s steady losses have meant her husband John has had to serve as the family breadwinner. The couple met working in the vintage industry and share a love of fashion, but over the last few years, McGuigan laments, “he’s kind of had to climb to try to

make up for whatever they hell I’m doing. Our roles all of a sudden became very traditional – it’s not fair to have to rely so much on one income. It feels like a vanity project.”

Now, she says, her plan is to drop the storefront (I am pretty sure she says the “chains of overhead” while we are on the record) and re-focus Buckingham Rabbits on two things: getting the online shop up and running, and offering her services locally by appointment.

In Boston, McGuigan had worked her way up in the industry into a coveted position as a personal shopper at Barneys, and she speaks proudly of her skill set.

“It was so beyond my reality, and I loved it,” she reminisces. “I got to work with some of the most influential people, in realms that I really would never have had access to.... But then it got old. And then I realized that some people were spending my entire salary in one shopping trip.”

At its heart, Buckingham Rab-

bbits is McGuigan’s attempt to make that experience accessible to everyday, non-celebrity customers.

“Everyone has a thing that they inherently can do,” she says, with the giddy, dreamy edge of someone whose business is not closing. “I happen to be able to dress someone as they walk in. I know exactly what size they’re going to be, what they’re going to be comfortable in, and whether or not they want to be approached.... How many times we have had people try on things in the store that feel affirming of their identity for the first time? Over and over again. All the time.”

McGuigan sighs.

“That was the point – the point is the community,” she tells me. “But unfortunately, the community is not easily monetized.”

Buckingham Rabbits will remain open through the end of December, and perhaps for a couple more weeks. “In that time,” McGuigan adds, on the record, “I’m open to all ideas.”

## CORRECTION!

An unlucky combination of errors behind the scenes resulted in the unnecessary insertion of an incorrect fact – a reference to “Osage actor Lily Gladstone” – into our review of the film *Killers of the Flower Moon* (November 9, Page B5).

“Gladstone is indigenous, and learned to speak Osage for the film, but she’s Siksikaitsitapi and NiMiiPuu,” a sharp-eyed reader alerted us while carriers were still delivering papers.

Reviewer Rebecca Tippens was understandably taken aback when an editor forwarded this to her. “I had the correct info in my original review,” she objected. (Her original submission, too long to print in full, had detailed Gladstone’s Blackfoot heritage and her process of studying with the film’s Osage consultants.) “[I] am very confused as to how that got in the article.”

It took us a while to untangle just what had happened. The short version is that the error was an artifact of proofreader training, but the fault of seasoned staff. We apologize to our readers, to Lily Gladstone and her kin, and especially to Rebecca Tippens for this unusually big mistake. **Entirely our fault!**

## Coming up at the Shea



#gettotheshea

- Thu. 11/16: GCC Music Department fall concert. FREE and open to the public.
- Fri. 11/17: Shea Presents Toubab Krewe, with special guests Woody & The Rebel Alliance
- Sat. 11/18: Connecticut River Defenders present A People’s Hearing: The Right to Nature. FREE.
- Fri. 11/24: Signature Sounds Presents Willi Carlisle Peculiar Tour finale + live taping
- Sat. 11/25: Shea Presents the Music of The Stone Coyotes and the Art of Doug Tibbles \*\* with special guest emcee Steve Sanderson, musical director JJ O’Connell, and performances by dozens of celebrated Valley musicians! \*\*
- Fri. 12/1 + Sat 12/2: Eggtooth Productions presents A Drag for the Holidays! Featuring Mr. Drag and the Drag Sisters, plus special guests.
- Fri. 12/8 + Sat 12/9: Welcome Yule: A Midwinter Celebration
- Fri. 12/15: Shea Presents TapRoots Winter Ball, featuring live music by TapRoots and Mal Maiz plus craft vendors and artists
- Sat. 12/30: Shea Presents Wolfman Jack with special guest Jatoba

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## NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

# Insurer Requires Work at IP Mill, But Will Voters Want to Pay?

By KATIE NOLAN

At the Erving selectboard meeting on Monday, voters' rejection last month of a tax levy limit override influenced discussions about the former International Paper Mill property and the former Maple Avenue landfill.

In a November 7 email Erving's insurance broker, the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association, informed the town that the new insurance carrier for the former IP Mill had inspected the property and provided three mandatory recommendations, with compliance required within 30 days.

The recommendations were that the property be checked once a week to ensure unauthorized individuals are not entering it; that all broken windows be boarded up; and that a portion of collapsing roof decking on the upper floor of Building 5 be stabilized.

Town administrator Bryan Smith told the board that the town does regular checks on the property, and has boarded up windows except some on upper floors. "I already communicated that their timeline is completely unrealistic," he said, "impossible to meet.... The idea of asking you or the voters to reinforce and reconstruct a roof that you intend to tear down does not sound viable. That would not be approved."

Selectboard chair Jacob Smith agreed, saying that after the override was soundly defeated at the October 18 special town meeting and the October 23 election, "it doesn't give any of us the confidence that they're going to want to spend \$3.8 million to demo something on a debt exclusion, either. I don't think we should put any more

money into this site, and another option is to auction it."

With an auction, he said, "Potentially, it's on the tax rolls, it's not our liability."

Selectboard member James Loynd agreed. "I don't see the posture of the town changing anytime soon on the cost of demo," he said.

Town planner Mariah Kurtz commented that a debt exclusion vote was "slightly different from an override vote. It's a one-time cost."

Jacob Smith and selectboard member Scott Bastarache observed that the debt exclusion would be spread out over three to five years, but would not permanently increase the tax rate, as a successful levy limit override would have done.

Bastarache recommended moving forward with a debt exclusion to pay for the IP demolition, possibly at a spring special town meeting, while at the same time investigating auctioning the property, and trying to satisfy some of the insurance carrier's requests.

All of the board members felt that trespassers would not be able to enter the building through the upper-floor windows, and that covering up these windows was not worth the expense.

"If it's only pigeons entering the third floor," Loynd commented, "we'd be blocking them from exiting."

The board decided to meet with the finance and capital planning committees on November 27 to consider what to do about the property's future, and its collapsing roof.

#### Landfill Monitoring

The board scrutinized a \$25,300 proposal from engineering firm Tighe & Bond for annual monitor-

ing of environmental conditions at the town's former Maple Avenue landfill, as required by the state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP).

In previous years, according to Jacob Smith, the annual cost was in the range of \$13,000 to \$14,000.

Tighe & Bond's proposal noted that MassDEP has added a new requirement for monitoring PFAS in groundwater and in three residential water supply wells. The cost listed for lab analysis for all chemicals in groundwater samples was \$12,300.

Bastarache said he wanted more detail about the costs. He highlighted a \$1,000 estimate for replacing a soil gas sampling point "installed approximately four feet below ground level using hand tools for installation," per the proposal.

"That's a lot of money to dig a hole," he said. "I'm beyond the time where I'll just look at this and say 'the engineer says it's going to cost us \$22,000, so it's going to cost us \$22,000, check, move on.' Uh-uh. I want to know how."

Loynd concurred about "the level of scrutiny that we are going to need to look at everything [with] in the coming years."

Bastarache asked, even if there were not large increases over previous years, "Was it too high last year? And we just said 'sure,' and we let it go, we signed off on it — 'services we need, do it every year' — and moved on?"

Water and wastewater superintendent Peter Sanders agreed to ask Tighe & Bond for greater detail justifying the cost estimates.

#### Keyup Brook Bridge

Kurtz announced that the state Department of Transportation

(MassDOT) had awarded Erving a Small Bridge Grant for the design of a new bridge on Swamp Road over Keyup Brook.

According to the award letter MassDOT intends to assign a designer for the replacement bridge and pay for the design directly, rather than providing funding for the town to hire its own designer. However, Erving has already signed a contract with Weston & Sampson for the entire project, including designing, engineering, and developing bidding documents.

Kurtz said she did not have the MassDOT-approved designer list, and she did not know whether Weston & Sampson was on it.

"This bridge is going to be challenging, funding-wise, so every bit helps. And, maybe we get construction money," Jacob Smith commented. He added that Weston & Sampson is already working on the Church Street Bridge project, which for him is a higher priority. "If we're trying to do two bridge projects at the same time," he asked, "do we want to not

have them doing both, just from a focus-and-priority standpoint?"

"Given the difficulties we've had already trying to get Church to move along," said Bastarache, "adding another bridge — even if they were to be put on the list, and MassDOT said 'we'll work with them' — I'm not sure we'll get the results that we want in a timely manner."

Both Jacob Smith and Bastarache suggested that the two projects could be completed by different engineering firms. "It's worth having a conversation with them," Loynd agreed.

Providing the Swamp Road project to a firm other than Weston & Sampson would need to be "by mutual agreement, not a battle of wills," said Bastarache.

"We're looking for a way to build a bridge about the bridges," Loynd quipped.

After the meeting Kurtz informed the Reporter that Jacob Smith planned to contact Weston & Sampson to discuss the MassDOT grant and the two projects.

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FEATURES@MONTAGUEREPORTER.ORG OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER NOVEMBER 16, 2023

Above: Rainwater drips off birdberries after the first snow, earlier this month, outside the Lady Killigrew in Montague Center.

RECIPES

# The Cranberry: Tart, Colorful, and Rugged

By CLAIRE HOPLEY

**LEVERETT** – Is anything more crimson than cranberries? The scarlet of strawberries and even the downy-red of raspberries pale in comparison, while the nocturnal redness of Bing cherries, though full of passion, cannot match the cranberry’s carmine brilliance.

Cranberries simply are, hands down, the deepest of the red berries.

They are also by far the sturdiest. They grow in bogs, undeterred by water because each berry floats on its own tiny pocket of air. At harvest, growers take advantage of this by flooding the bogs and then stripping the cranberries from their stalks. The berries bob off into the water, where they are easily scooped and delivered to the processing plants. They don’t ripen until September, which sets them up to be in the stores in time for all the end-of-year holidays.

That air pocket gives cranberries bounce. They used to be sorted by tipping them down stairs. Sound berries bounced safely to the bottom; damaged berries didn’t, and were discarded. Until 2010 sorting methods still used this principle, but now optical sorters equipped with cameras sort the berries based on size and color. Cranberries that get top grades go into the bags that we buy in the supermarkets; the rest are turned into juice.

Another sturdy feature of cranberries is that they produce their own preservative in the form of benzoic acid. Native Americans understood its powers and mixed crushed cranberries with dried meat and animal fat to make *pemmican*, a useful food for winter. They also used cranberry juice to help heal wounds, and tied halved

cranberries cut-side down on corns to remove them.

It was from Native Americans that Massachusetts’ first colonists learned about the cranberry’s therapeutic potential. A 17th-century English visitor, John Josselyn, noted that cranberries “are excellent against the scurvy,” and subsequent generations of sailors took barrels of them on board to prevent the disease. The credit is due to the cranberry’s hoard of Vitamin C. They also have manganese and phytochemicals that have an array of other nutritional benefits.

That slew of good-for-you nutrients, their amazing ruggedness, and that gorgeous color make cranberries worth stockpiling. Typically, supermarket bags of fresh cranberries disappear by the year’s end, sometimes sooner. Luckily cranberries freeze really well, emerging from the freezer as good as when they went in.

In these pre-Thanksgiving days, most cranberry thoughts focus on the cranberry sauce to go with the turkey. The tradition goes back to early colonial times. “The Indians and English use them much,” Josselyn noted, “boiling them with sugar for sauce to eat with their meat; and it is a delicate sauce, especially with roasted mutton.”

This reminds us that the tartness of cranberries complements rich savory foods: mutton for Josselyn and his English compatriots, turkey in American tradition. They are also good with chicken, pork, sausages, and cheese. Cranberry-studded Wensleydale cheese is an English favorite available locally during the holiday season. Boursin and brie are other good cheese partners.

Josselyn had a further note on see **RECIPES** page B5



To work well in pies, the acid in cranberries calls for sweeter or richer partners.

# Local Strongman Heads to Nationals

By GRANGER SMITH-MASSA

**MILLERS FALLS** – With competitors carrying heavily loaded sandbags, deadlifting massive weights, and throwing heavy stones, hearing about strongman competitions can bring to mind a singular kind of person. One might imagine people like Arnold Schwarzenegger, who lent his name to what is considered the heaviest strongman competition in the world, the Arnold Strongman Classic.

Russell Johnson, competing in the 50-years-old range, is a stockier and shorter man by comparison, and is incredibly cordial. Living in Millers Falls and training at the Greenfield YMCA, his strongman story so far has been short but impressive. Johnson’s determination and skill in the sport have earned him a place at the Iron Podium Nationals next June.

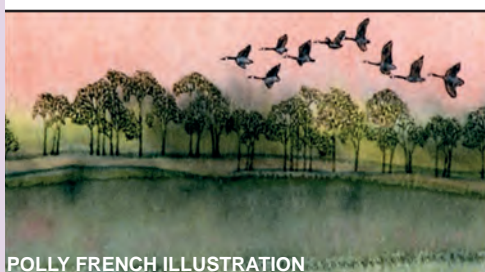
So what is this sport that has become a large part of his life?

Modern strongman competitions stem from a long history of humans trying to prove their Herculean strength, much like any athletic sport. Highland

see **STRONGMAN** page B8



Russell Johnson lifts a “log,” a piece of equipment particular to strongman training, at the Greenfield YMCA.



POLLY FRENCH ILLUSTRATION

## WEST ALONG THE RIVER MY NOVEMBER GUEST

By DAVID BRULE

**THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE** – What good can anyone say about November? Like the ancient two-faced god Janus, this month is neither autumn nor winter. Full of contradiction and hypocrisy, it looks in two directions, holding forth late-year warmth in the daytime and bone-chilling cold at night.

Occasional warming days can coax us out of doors, along with errant insects drifting around the woodpile, and the busybody Carolina wren who breaks into a long spring-like song.

November, in spite of all, can also be bright and brilliant as the early morning today. All is covered in this morning’s deep frost. We could call it a killing frost, but it isn’t the first this year; most summer vegetation is already frost-grilled and blackened.

Some beauty persists: the frosted edging on the burnt orange leaves of the oak across the way will soften and melt in the very first rays slanting in from the east.

November can also be dark and unforgiving, foreboding even, as darkness falls earlier and earlier, rushing past the last Equinox headlong into December.

*My November guest, when she’s here with me  
Thinks those dark days of autumn rain  
Are beautiful as days can be;  
She loves the bare, the withered tree  
She walks the sodden pasture lane...*

The yard is but shriveled stalks, the morning glory vines hang limp, dogwood leaves carpet the fern bed. The milkweed stands withered. Once this milkweed was a nursery for the lissome August monarchs,

who by now are perhaps far away in the south winging to a sanctuary on paper-thin wings. May they find safe haven somewhere beyond the reach of human interference.

From my morning writing desk perched high up in the north bedroom, I watch the sun’s rays inch down the bare maple trunks, first reaching and warming the treetops where jays puff their breasts to the welcome warmth.

From my window, I can see the heights of Mineral Mountain beyond my river and woods. Some call it simply a hill, but we’ve always called it a mountain.

“No minerals, and not much of a mountain,” so say many old-timers around here.

Of course, there are not many old-timers left who have ever taken the time to consider this remnant of the Jurassic, pushed up along the see **WEST ALONG** page B4

# Pet of the Week



## “LUNA”

Luna is a beautiful pup with soulful eyes and a gentle, sweet demeanor. She was not well socialized, and she is very fearful in new situations, with new people, and in new environments. She is super gentle and sweet, and will run and hide when frightened.

Her foster mom says she loves to cuddle on the couch, but sudden noises make her flee.

We would strongly recommend she go home with another friendly, relaxed dog, as she may feel safer with a canine companion. If you're

happy to bring home a dog who may take a few weeks to warm up, but will be a loving, adoring companion once she does, then consider giving Luna a safe space to land.

Animals at Dakin are currently available only in Springfield. Contact adoption staff at [springfield@dakinhumane.org](mailto:springfield@dakinhumane.org) and include your name and phone number. For more information, call (413) 781-4000 or visit [www.dakinhumane.org](http://www.dakinhumane.org).

Want your pet featured? Email a photo and information about them to [jae@montaguereporter.org](mailto:jae@montaguereporter.org).

By LEE WICKS

**MONTAGUE** – The holiday decorations are already out in some places, and it won't be long before Christmas carols provide the background for daily activities. My dentist seems fond of the Chipmunks singing carols in their squeaky, annoying voices. I get it. He's being inclusive and sticking to secular songs, but still. It might be okay for a couple of weeks, but each year the season seems to start earlier. Most Christmas decorations are up by Thanksgiving, and both holidays can be fraught with sadness, particularly among elders.

Maybe you treasure childhood memories from long ago and miss the people who once celebrated with you. Maybe dear friends have passed on. Perhaps the magic was never a part of your life.

I could go on and on, but the message is clear: November and December are not a time of peace, joy, and family gatherings for everyone. Instead, people can feel depressed and lonely, or downright ornery about commercialization and excess spending.

Roberta Potter, director of the Gill Montague Council on Aging, is sensitive to and well aware of these issues, and the senior center in Turners Falls and other centers around us are poised to help people navigate the season. She was happy to tell me about Matt Aversa, an outreach worker who is dividing his time between Northfield,



Matt Aversa, outreach worker at several area senior centers.

Greenfield, Bernardston, Gill, and Turners Falls senior centers.

"I'm delighted to have Matt available to help with needs that pop up at this time of the year," Roberta says, "especially fuel assistance and food insecurity."

This part-time position, funded by a \$25,000 Service Incentive Grant from the Massachusetts Councils on Aging and state Executive Office of Elder Affairs, allows Aversa to use his skills and connect with his community. With a background in clinical social work, Aversa is able and eager to help with some of the details facing seniors, especially in winter-time. He says, "My priorities are, first and foremost, assisting folks with applications for fuel assistance and other programs and services they can access."

He is at the Gill-Montague senior center on Thursdays, and people wanting to meet with him individually should call the center and make an appointment.

Aversa says he immediately noticed that many more women than men came to the senior centers. He talked to people, and found that many men felt there wasn't anything for them to do. Some of the women said their husbands just stayed home all day. He has also started a men's group that meets once a month.

The next men's group meeting is in Turners Falls at 10 a.m. on Thursday, November 30. Men who want to join in can just show up. The men who attend these group meetings, which are open to all, will suggest speakers and programming of interest to them.

Aversa is also starting a group to help people deal with the holidays. "I think that the greatest challenge facing folks in general are the expectations," he says. "Culture makes us believe that the holidays are filled with joy. We are bombarded with ads and decorations and people can feel that if they aren't in the 'holiday spirit,' there's something wrong with them. It can also be demanding when folks feel the need to be happy so that they don't disappoint others."

His best advice is, "Be understanding! Meet people where they're at, and keep expectations

reasonable."

That advice reminded me of Christmas visits to see my mother when she became too old to travel. Arranging pet care over the holidays wasn't easy, especially when we had a dog with challenges. Traffic to New York was awful. Finding a parking space in Brooklyn was a challenge. Then after hugs and greeting, we'd chat for a while and my mom would fall asleep. Yes, I was disappointed. I could have used someone to caution me about expectations.

Now I am one of the elders. My family celebrates the Solstice, and it's a wonderful day, but after gifts and great food, board games and candle lighting, I often feel like taking a nap, just like my mom, and that makes me miss her.

Both gratitude and loss pervade the season.

"As a senior myself," Aversa says, "I think that the biggest stereotype is that 'getting old' is something to be sad about. There are definitely losses – physical ability, loss of friendships – but there are also pluses. There is wisdom and experience gained. Unfortunately, we live in a culture that values youth, and seniors need to understand that they have much to offer."

Seniors do have a lot to offer. The people in Montague forming Montague Villages are all seniors, and the people I've met while writing this column are inspiring. The Tai Chi class I mentioned last month was welcoming, and provided just the right amount of challenge. But most of all, the welcoming faces promised new friendships in an entirely supportive atmosphere.

Lists of activities are boring to read, but for anyone who is lonely and feeling a little lost at this time of year, browsing the local Council on Aging websites is worth doing. There's something for everyone, every day. There are holiday parties and dinners near, but not on, the actual holidays. You'll find people to talk to and classes, activities, cookies, and coffee.

Our senior centers provide a lifeline during the holidays, and they will still be there during the cold dark days ahead.

## Senior Center Activities NOVEMBER 20 TO DECEMBER 1

### WENDELL

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. For Senior Health Rides, contact Jonathan von Ranson at (978) 544-3758.

### ERVING

Open 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Open for cards, coffee, and snacks daily.

Fitness room open daily. For more information, please call (413) 423-3649.

### Monday 11/20

9 a.m. Interval  
10:15 a.m. Stretch & Infusion

### Tuesday 11/21

9 a.m. Good For U  
10 a.m. Line Dancing

### Wednesday 11/22

9 a.m. Cardio Low Impact  
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics  
11:30 a.m. Bingo

### Thursday 11/23

9 a.m. Core & Balance  
10 a.m. Barre Fusion

### Friday 11/24

9 a.m. Quilting & Open Sew

### Monday 11/27

9 a.m. Interval  
10:15 a.m. Stretch & Infusion

### Tuesday 11/28

9 a.m. Good For U  
10 a.m. Line Dancing

### Wednesday 11/29

9 a.m. Cardio Low Impact  
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics  
11:30 a.m. Bingo

### Thursday 11/30

9 a.m. Core & Balance  
10 a.m. Barre Fusion

### Friday 12/1

9 a.m. Quilting & Open Sew

### GILL and MONTAGUE

The Gill Montague Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls, is open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

COVID test kits are available. You can pick a kit up any time during open hours. COA meetings are the first Tuesday of the month at 12:45 p.m., September through June. Lunch available Tuesday through Thursday. Coffee and tea available all the time. For more information please call 863-9357.

### Monday 11/20

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
1 p.m. Kitchen Club

### Tuesday 11/21

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
10 a.m. Zumba Lite  
11 a.m. Money Matters  
1 p.m. Pie and Ice Cream Social  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

### Wednesday 11/22

9:15 a.m. Aerobics

11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo  
4:15 p.m. Mat Yoga

### Thursday 11/23

Closed on Thanksgiving Day

### Friday 11/24

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
2 p.m. Chair Dance

### Monday 11/27

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

### Tuesday 11/28

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
10 a.m. Zumba Lite  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

### Wednesday 11/29

9:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo  
4:15 p.m. Mat Yoga

### Thursday 11/30

1 p.m. Pitch  
1 p.m. Five Crowns

### Friday 12/1

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
2 p.m. Chair Dance

### LEVERETT

Chair Yoga classes are held on Wednesdays at 10 a.m., hybrid, at the town hall and on Zoom. Foot care clinic is held monthly.

For more information, contact the Leverett COA at (413) 548-1022 x 2, or [coa@leverett.ma.us](mailto:coa@leverett.ma.us).

PLACE YOUR BUSINESS CARD HERE (12 WEEK MINIMUM) CALL 863-8666!

# OUT OF THE PARK NOVEMBER 2023

By JON DOBOSZ

**UNITY PARK** – Hello everyone! I think it's safe to say that we're all gearing up for the winter months. Some of you may not be too crazy about needing to brave the snow and colder weather, but it's vitally important to get outside, breathe in the crisp air, and get some exercise. Embracing the cooler months with a positive attitude will manifest in a healthier you.



Speaking of healthy activities, we're in the throes of planning our annual **Sawmill River 10K Run** scheduled for New Year's Day! The event will be held Monday, January 1 in Montague Center, and we typically host around 150 runners as it is one of the more popular races in the county. The sleepy back roads of this beautifully picturesque village are a major draw for many runners.

If you are a runner, or know of one, what better way to start the year! Pre-registration is available online at [RunReg.com/sawmill-river-10k-run](http://RunReg.com/sawmill-river-10k-run), or you can download a registration form on our webpage at [montague-parksrec.com](http://montague-parksrec.com). The Sawmill Run is digitally timed, and we serve refreshments at the end of the race.

Another great way to stay active during the winter months is to take advantage of our **Open Swim Program**. Open Swim is held at

the Turners Falls High School pool and will be starting up in January. It will be held on Tuesday and Friday evenings starting January 5, through March 15. Family Swim is held from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m., with Adult Lap Swim from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. For additional information and admission rates, please visit our website or simply give us a call.

We will also be offering an **American Red Cross Babysitting Course** on Monday, February 5 and Tuesday, February 6 for youth ages 11 to 15. The course is a two-night class, so attendance at both is mandatory to receive an official course certificate. This is a fun and interactive class that we provide every year, and it teaches students first aid and safety skills, as well as other helpful tips on how to prevent and respond to emergencies. The course fees are \$40 for Montague residents and \$45 for non-residents.

Also, looking ahead to spring, we have set Sunday, June 2 as the date for our next **Montague Soapbox Races** event. Now is the time to register and start building your cart. Racers will need to log on to [montaguesoapboxraces.com](http://montaguesoapboxraces.com) to register. This is a major community event that benefits the Montague Parks and Rec Department's scholarship program for youth.

That's about it from here. If you wish to get additional information on any of our programs and services, check out our webpage [montagueparksrec.com](http://montagueparksrec.com) and like us on Facebook. All of us here at MPRD wish you a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday and remember: Don't Hibernate... Recreate!

*Jon Dobosz, CPRP, is parks and recreation director for the town of Montague.*

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

### Unsure What to Do With Chicken; Weed Farm Smelly; Man in Camo Flings Mud; Reported Gunshots Not Located

**Monday, 11/6**

8:34 a.m. Assisting animal control officer on N Street. ACO has cargo.

10:44 a.m. Caller concerned about two people at Peskeompskut Park; states she saw a female being pushed against the bandshell by a male. Unsure if physical or sexual. Officer advises parties were just talking.

2:43 p.m. Caller states that there are three loose chickens against the back fence in St. Mary's Cemetery. The birds do not seem to be bothering anyone at this time. Referred to an officer.

5:37 p.m. 911 caller states that a male and female party were yelling while using the ATM at Greenfield Savings Bank, then the parties took off towards the back parking lot. Second caller stated that two parties were yelling at each other at Food City, something about him taking her phone, and then one of them took off behind the building. Officer checked area; nothing showing.

**Tuesday, 11/7**

8:06 p.m. Assisting Greenfield PD with a stop on Montague City Road. GPD advises they attempted to stop the vehicle on their side of the bridge, but it did not stop until they were over the bridge.

**Wednesday, 11/8**

12:45 p.m. Property manager states that someone broke into an Avenue A apartment whose locks

they had changed. They have video of the event that they would like an officer to see. Officer spoke with caller, who advised they just wanted the incident on record at this time. Property manager has evicted a tenant and changed the locks on Friday 11/3. On Friday and Saturday, squatters broke the lock and reentered their apartment. They have since left. Property manager fixed the damaged door.

2:36 p.m. 911 caller from Wentworth Congregate Housing states that a female is pounding on his door trying to get in. She may have a weapon (knife); unconfirmed. Involved female detained, then given courtesy transport to Greenfield.

4:34 p.m. Caller from Laurel Lane states that a large chicken has been hanging out in her yard for the past few days and has been roosting in her garage. She checked with the neighbors, and it does not belong to any of them. She is unsure what to do with the chicken. Information passed along to ACO.

8:46 p.m. Caller from Montague Avenue reports that people are working on a truck and keep revving the engine. Caller states it is on for 10 minutes, then off for 20 minutes. Caller states it is right near Rutter's Park.

Caller called back stating that they just left the area on a motorcycle at a high rate of speed. Officer

advises he sat in the area for a while; did not see or hear anything.

**Thursday, 11/9**

10:28 a.m. A 25-year-old Greenfield woman with an active warrant was located on J Street and taken into custody.

11:19 p.m. ACO advising that he picked up a skunk in a trap from an Old Sunderland Road address.

1:41 p.m. ACO advising he is off on Fourth Street; will advise what he finds. ACO advises he picked up a stray goose and returned it to Unity Park.

2:50 p.m. School resource officer advising of a strong odor of marijuana on Industrial Loop Boulevard coming from a nearby grow facility.

4:41 p.m. 911 caller reporting two-vehicle accident at Avenue A and Seventh Street. No injuries at this time. Caller does have a five-month-old in the vehicle. Investigated.

4:57 p.m. Caller from Federal Street states his tire was slashed recently and wanted it on record.

9:04 p.m. Caller from Watershed Restaurant reporting a theft of petty cash; believes it may have happened yesterday; still checking video footage. Caller advised to bring in all the footage and information when she has it all together.

11:05 p.m. Caller states that there is a male party in the alley between Fourth and Fifth Streets who stands next to his vehicle at times and has been told to leave the area; however, the party is still there and making the caller uncomfortable. Area search negative.

**Friday, 11/10**

9:21 a.m. Officer conducting a motor vehicle stop near Seventh and J Streets after seeing a passenger who has two active warrants. A 32-year-old Greenfield man was arrested on two default warrants.

10:16 a.m. 911 caller concerned about a box truck operating at a high rate of speed on Federal Street, heading south. Box truck says "National" on the side. Shelburne Control notified; they will let Leverett PD know.

12:26 p.m. 911 caller from Unity Park states that a man dressed in camouflage threw mud on the back of his camper and walked off. Officer made contact with all parties and advised of options.

1:49 p.m. Caller from Thirteenth Street states that there is a car with New York plates parked in front of her house, and she does not know who it could be. Investigated. Car belongs to a nurse who has a patient nearby.

**Sunday, 11/12**

8:45 a.m. A 43-year-old Turners Falls man was arrested on two straight warrants.

9:31 a.m. Caller from X Street states he just heard 20 to 25 gunshots about two minutes ago. Officer advises he doesn't see anything occurring in the area or on the street. Search negative for findings at this time.

10:55 a.m. Caller states that there is an abandoned car at the intersection of Newton and Franklin streets that she thinks was involved in an accident last night. Not her vehicle; she woke up this morning and saw it outside her window. Unsure of make/model. States you can't miss it; its entire side is banged up. Officer advised. Car is registered and insured and legally parked.

11:28 a.m. Caller from Bridge Street states his downstairs neighbor is banging on the ceiling and harassing him. No answer at door. Officer advised caller of options.

2:11 p.m. 911 caller states there is a construction zone on the side of Route 63 and there is a piece of metal sticking up on the side of the road that could cause a hazard if someone hit it. Item is not in the road.

2:45 p.m. 911 caller reporting hole in bridge on Route 63; states there was a cone in it, but it seems to have fallen out, so he stuck it back in and put a rock on top of it. Would like area checked just in case it is not safe. Officer checked cone and determined it to be secure at this time.

5:09 p.m. 911 caller reporting small brush fire under power lines near North Taylor Hill and Meadow Roads. Caller transferred to Shelburne Control. PD responding. Eversource notified by dispatch; priority 1. Eversource on scene with MCFD. PD clear.

9:05 p.m. 911 caller states that his girlfriend just hit him with her truck and then sped off. Officer went to involved female's address; no one home; no vehicle there. Also checked Union Street area in Montague per caller's suggestion. Vehicle not in area. Summons issued.

**Monday, 11/13**

1:38 a.m. Caller states that the people at the Rendezvous are discriminating against him and treating him badly. Caller unsure why they are being the way they are. Not as reported; employees of establishment state he had an argument with someone earlier. They have been trying to move him along. Caller has now left.

## MOVIE REVIEW

# A Million Miles Away (2023)

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – I recently spotted a movie called *A Million Miles Away* on Amazon Prime. It's a true-life story about the ultimate wish fulfillment, following José Hernández as he attempts to become an astronaut.

After persevering quite a lot, José gets his dream. But this guy starts out in a family of migrant workers, working in the fields, which makes it kind of tricky to have a decent education. One of his teachers even points this out to his family. This is a moment they show us in the film, along with how life is for him and his family.

But in time, José does have a college degree to his name. He works as a lab engineer at some place, and he shows them he is good at it. We next see him meeting his wife while he is trying to buy a car with his brother. They end up having a couple of kids.

José's strategy consists of



*Astronaut José Hernández, played in the film by Michael Peña.*

learning skills, like being a pilot and a scuba diver, as he continues to be rejected by NASA. The guy really did learn to scuba dive and fly a plane as part of his many attempts to be an astronaut. By the time he officially has a college degree, a scuba certification, and a pilot's license, that seems to be what finally makes it work.

This guy, who has applied to NASA over 12 times over

the years, finds out on his birthday that he is going to be an astronaut. Talk about a very nice birthday present to get!

Another thing that ultimately happens with José is a trip into space including going to the International Space Station. Today that is probably the biggest and coolest way someone being an astronaut can go into space! Jose got to live that journey for 13 days.

To me, applying to NASA

12 times feels like one hell of an amount of perseverance that this guy had. I don't know if I could give that amount of it to something I want. But he did, which is very impressive. The closest I have ever come to hitting that kind of a roadblock was with Algebra in high school. I needed tutoring with it at one point.

I found José Hernández's story to be more impressive than the story of British race car driver Jann Mardenborough, which was featured in another movie I reviewed this year, *Gran Turismo* (2023). I am not saying Jann didn't have the skills to be a race car driver – his skills ended up being shown to people, like José's were.

But José also put in the hard work to acquire more of the skills that might help him out. His hard work and perseverance alone won him the prize that he was after. That makes becoming an astronaut a very rewarding experience for José, in my eyes.

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## WEST ALONG from page B1

ancient Eastern Border Fault. It looms over those of us in this hamlet below known as the Flat. We live in the shadow of this sudden, abrupt heaping-up of cliffside and hardscrabble hemlock, a dwelling place for owls and bobcats, just beyond reach but within sight.

November means no birds, and no flowers, save perhaps for the modest yellow-blooming witch hazel. Our summer residents are long gone, and few northern winter birds have yet moved in.

... She's glad the birds have gone away  
She's glad her simple worsted gray  
Is silver now with clinging mist ...

At least the brilliant jays animate the drabness of the forlorn yard. They peck at the ice in the winter saucer I place out for them each morning.

One of my first morning chores is to clear that ice from their saucer. Often I can hold up a perfectly shaped circle of ice and look through the fragile frosted window glass to see some other rippling world. Water and food provided for my winter kin, I step back as they swoop in for first choice of the breakfast seed.

All of us here dutifully bring in our feeders each evening to be sure not to lure in hungry bears. They haven't made their appearance yet, and what with hunting season underway, bears may be pushed around in the woods by people out there with guns, ready to shoot something.

But let a cloud drift over the pale sun and the November shroud pushes us back to the realization of the coming three months of the glacier's return.

Not yesterday I learned to know  
The love of bare November days  
Before the coming of the snow ...

Within weeks, however, the holiday season will lift the mood and bring more brightness and light.

Soon the family circles will draw close for the Thanksgiving observances. We will then turn from the



A postcard saved by the author's grandparents.

somber gray of November to the bright reds and greens of the holly. Soon the season of lights will bring colors to the inside parlor, and candles will chase the gloom from frosted windows.

The sweeping hemlocks in the yard will be bright with the lights of December – and, given the current state of the world, a little bit of seasonal joy can't come soon enough.

Poem excerpted from  
"My November Guest" by Robert Frost.



## Wait Before Buying: The AI Gold Rush Will Breed Gifts.

By RYNE HAGER

**TURNERS FALLS** – I've talked about the "new" obsession with AI before here, and how these large language models everyone is getting hyped about, like ChatGPT, are essentially just your phone's decade-old autocomplete system with way more resources behind it. Now these services are starting to turn into consumer-facing products, like Humane's new Ai Pin.

Announced just last week, the \$700 Ai Pin – which requires an extra \$24 a month for cellular service – is sort of a cross between a Star Trek "combadge" and Google Glass: you wear it on your chest and tap it when you have questions or need to perform certain actions, and it ostensibly answers or performs them. A built-in camera handles visual cues, so you can ask it for details about things in front of you or snap a photo without pulling out your phone, and it even has a built-in projector to display information.

And, between the limitations of large language models and Humane's own marketing materials, it's probably garbage.

I'm not just rushing out a cynical opinion for its own sake. Humane's promotional videos show off exactly the sorts of issues these large language models have when it comes to the simple action of providing correct information, with the Ai Pin's ChatGPT-powered voice eagerly dishing out numerous factual errors on both eclipses and nutritional content. And that's the thing about large language models: they are confidently wrong all the time, *by design*.

Let's return to that autocomplete comparison, because it isn't a metaphor – these systems operate on the same principles. When you type part of a word on your phone, a statistical model takes a look at what has been entered and tries to determine what is most likely to appear next. There is no semantic or intellectual understanding happening inside that glass-and-metal sandwich when you type the first few characters of "ambiguous"; it just sees "ambig-" feeds this into a kind of statistically-structured model based on trained word lists and example sentences, and knows that the most likely characters to follow are "-uous."

This basic concept is how all generative language models work, taking the input you provide and determining what is most likely to follow. That's it. And there are two very profound issues with that.

One, the data these models are trained on come from wholesale content-scraping on the internet at venues like Reddit, personal blogs, and countless sources of news. It doesn't take a whole lot of experience on the internet to understand that all those places can have incorrect information.

Second, the lack of any understanding means that, even if all the data it's trained on is perfectly accurate, all these models are looking for is what is statistically likely to

follow input. These systems are "stochastic parrots," to use a phrase coined by noted AI researcher Emily M. Bender, which can generate content that is semantically sensible but without any actual understanding of content – sort of like a toddler screaming out words they learned in a grammatically correct order but possibly devoid of meaning.

Software engineers today are grappling with this issue, trying to find new systems they can add on top of these large language models to fight the problem, but there's no easy way to fix it right now. That isn't stopping companies like Humane from trying to sell products based on these existing, objectively flawed models, though. And that's the problem.

This isn't simply an early-adoption problem, where you might be buying a TV with an untested display technology or a phone that uses bleeding-edge connectivity only supported in a handful of areas. Products built on top of systems like ChatGPT are flawed in this way by design and can only really be trusted with the additional and complex understanding that they *will* steer you wrong regularly, presenting nonsensical information alongside proven facts with equal fervor.

It takes a highly critical and educated customer to understand these limitations, and the products do not come with the required knowledge, which is a significant impediment to using them correctly. Worse, they're being marketed disingenuously as seemingly magical devices devoid of these many problems. The customers buying them will likely not be aware of the limitations, and our regulatory bodies are historically slow to move, even with the obvious near-fraud that happens with each of these new boom-and-bust cycles of technology – just look at what happened with cryptocurrencies. If history is any indicator, we probably won't see any regulations until the clear and preventable harms have had a widespread negative impact on numerous victims.

Until that time, I'd urge you to consider any new "AI" products with a wary eye, especially when it comes to those built on top of large language models like ChatGPT, Google Bard, Meta's LLaMA, and other upcoming systems, but don't discount use of the term wholesale. Machine-learning systems in other capacities, like those used for image processing, object recognition, assistive devices, and other accessibility use cases, can be highly useful tools.

AI isn't just one thing, and sadly, right now that makes it easier for the grifters to sell garbage alongside the gold. So one piece of advice: Wait a few years before buying any "AI" goods like Humane's pin.

For more questions about consumer technology, how gadgets work, or which doodad to buy if you need X, Y, and Z, shoot me an email at [deviceadvice@montagureporter.org](mailto:deviceadvice@montagureporter.org).

## EXHIBIT

## Moonlight Magic Glows in New Library Exhibit

By Montague Center Library staff.

**MONTAGUE CENTER** – Jeanne Weintraub-Mason is an environmentally-themed designer and creative entrepreneur. She takes inspiration from gardening and nature enthusiasts, our vibrant local farming community, environmental activists, local indigenous people, and scientists. A science geek and storyteller at heart, she gets excited about communicating ecological relationships and concepts related to sustainability.

Weintraub-Mason recently pivoted to a career as a graphic artist after accepting a voluntary retirement offer at Amherst College. She holds a degree in Landscape Architecture from Rutgers University, where she became entranced with the wondrous world of plants and trees. While dreaming up designs she researches everything from dinosaur ecology to the host plants of moths and butterflies to the food sources of opossums.

Her series of luminous illustrations, *Moonlight Magic*, highlights the mystery and magic of nocturnal wildlife in the Northeast. At night, these other beings are very busy going about their lives, foraging for food in woods and fields around us and doing their best not to be seen. Our woodlands are alive with life forms all partnering together in an intricate dance.

Each print tells a story about the intertwined relationships among these animals, fungi, and plants. A bobcat peers from under a canopy of hemlock trees, which host hemlock varnish mushrooms



One of Weintraub-Mason's digital illustrations depicts a bobcat at night.

and give cover to partially-hidden snowshoe hares. The magnificent luna moth appears alongside caterpillars foraging on birch leaves, a specific food source. A jumping red fox, surrounded by fireflies, hunts meadow voles.

This exhibit invites us to honor our kinship with the reclusive beings who share our New England home, and consider our own intertwined relationships with plants, fungi, and animals.

Weintraub-Mason begins creating most of her illustrations with digital brushes and pens on her iPad. To achieve the luminosity that is a hallmark of much of

her work, she creates gradations through separate layers in a program called Procreate. She turns to Adobe Illustrator to generate geometric shapes, and uses Photoshop to develop "repeats" for fabric and wrapping paper.

*Moonlight Magic* will be on display at the Montague Center library beginning this Monday, November 20, with an opening reception from 5 to 7 p.m.

The library is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 2 to 7 p.m. and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. To inquire about showing your art at the library contact Kate at [kmartineau@cwmar.org](mailto:kmartineau@cwmar.org).

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# CRANBERRY STREUSEL TART



HOPLEY PHOTOS

8 Tbsp. (1 stick) cold unsalted butter  
 ¾ cup all-purpose flour  
 ¼ tsp. baking powder  
 ½ tsp. powdered cinnamon  
 1 cup light brown sugar  
 1 unbaked 9-inch pie shell, homemade or store-bought  
 3 cups (1 bag) fresh cranberries  
 ½ cup white sugar  
 2 tsp. confectioners' sugar

Turn the oven on to 400 degrees. Make the streusel topping first. Cut the butter into 1-inch cubes and place it in a mixing bowl with the flour, baking powder, cinnamon, and light brown sugar. Mix it by rubbing through your fingers or using a pas-

try blender until it forms large clumps. Pinch one or two. If you pinch into solid butter, keep mixing. Set it aside.

Put the cranberries in the pie shell, and sprinkle them with the white sugar. Scatter the streusel mixture on top. Bake in the center of the lower rack of the oven, reducing the temperature to 375 after 15 minutes.

Continue baking until the top is golden brown and the fruit bubbles a little around the edges – about 25 to 35 minutes.

Serve at room temperature after first dusting it with sifted confectioners' sugar. Ice cream or whipped cream are good accompaniments.

## RECIPES from page B1

cranberries in 17th-century Massachusetts: "Some make tarts with them as with gooseberries." Gooseberries are sour, so it's easy to see why the colonists thought cranberries were a good substitute – and lots more colorful than the old country's grey-green gooseberries.

To be good in pies the acid in cranberries needs the balance of

sweeter or richer partners. Traditional ones include apples and raisins. But the cranberry-streusel pie in the recipe at left gets its richness from a brown-sugar-and-butter-crumbs topping. It's great for the holidays because that vivid crimson gleam is the very essence of festivity: iconic at Thanksgiving and the perfect color for Christmas.

Strings of cranberries inter-

persed with popcorn are a traditional Christmas decoration and still one of the prettiest. Cranberries are worth remembering for Valentine's, too. The redness of cranberry juice is just what's needed to make a blushing cocktail, and the cranberry desserts of Thanksgiving and Christmas can reappear in loving heart-shaped forms.



# CRANBERRY CHUTNEY

¾ cup golden raisins  
 1 bag (12 ounces) cranberries  
 ¾ cup white sugar  
 1 large onion, chopped  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 ¾ tsp. cinnamon  
 ¾ tsp. allspice  
 1 or 2 Tbsp. vinegar (optional)

Put the raisins in a small dish, cover them with water, and let them soak for 15 to 20 minutes.

Put the cranberries in a plastic bag and pound them with something heavy, such as a can of food, just enough to break them – don't turn them to mush. Add half the sugar, toss, then set aside.

Put the onion into a saucepan, add water just to cover, and simmer for 7 or 8 minutes or until soft. Add the sugared cranberries. Strain the raisins and add them too. Cover and cook, stirring often until the cranberries have softened – about 8 minutes.

Stir in the salt, cinnamon, allspice, and remaining sugar. Cook for 3 minutes longer. Taste. Stir in the vinegar if you want extra tartness; also more salt, sugar, or spices if you like.

Cool and pack in a jar. This keeps well for two months. This easy chutney is a good relish with turkey, ham, cold cuts, and cheese.



Try topping a cracker with Boursin or other soft cheese and garnishing with half a teaspoon of cranberry chutney, plus a leaf of mint or parsley.

## EXHIBITS

**Rendezvous, Turners Falls:** Lisa Beskin, underwater photography. Through December.

**Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls:** *Migrations Exhibit and Day of the Dead Altar.* Colorful depictions of village life, Mayan culture, and the history of Lake Atitlan in Guatemala. Through November.

**Montague Center Library:** Jamie Fuller, mixed media, through November 17. Followed by *Moonlight Magic* by Jeanne Weintraub-Mason, luminous illustrations of nocturnal animals; opening reception this Monday, November 20 from 5 to 7 p.m.

**Rhodes Art Center, Northfield Mount Hermon, Gill:** *Torrents*, sculpture and drawings by NMH alum and Hampshire professor emeritus Bill Brayton of Conway. Through November 17.

**LOOT, Turners Falls:** *Paintings and Prints* by Amy Chilton. Colorful geometric paintings and fine

art prints. Through February.

**Artspace, Greenfield:** *C.R.E.A.T.E.: Creativity in Recovery Expressed Artistically Through Our Experience.* Artwork and writing by the Recover Project's Peer Mentor Group. Through December 23. Opening reception with live music this Friday, November 17, from 5 to 8 p.m.

**Looky Here, Greenfield:** *Breakfast Kingdom*, new multimedia work by Wishbone Zoë (Zosia Kochanski). Through November 24.

**LAVA Center, Greenfield:** *Fourth Annual Community Art Show*, through December. *Climate Crisis Photography Exhibit*, photos taken in the Connecticut River Valley and the hill towns, through December.

**Leverett Crafts & Arts Center, Leverett:** *Oh Beautiful Glass*, annual group show curated by Sally Prash of works by glass artists that range from realism to surrealism to abstraction, along with paintings by Susan Mulholland. Through November 27.

**Gallery A3, Amherst:** *Expres-*

*sions from Nature: Past and Present*, landscape paintings by Janet Winston. Through December 2.

**Art in the Hall, Shelburne Falls:** *The Antique Future*, Christin Couture's long, narrow, surreal landscape paintings in battered vintage frames. Through December. By appointment at [redtidebluefire@gmail.com](mailto:redtidebluefire@gmail.com).

**Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:** *MEOW*, a humorous collection of sculpture, stuffies, comics, and wall art with a feline theme by Nina Rossi, through November 20. *Peace, Joy, and Art* group show by member artists, November 22 through January.

**Salmon Falls Gallery, Shelburne Falls:** *On the Land*, paintings by Charles Malzenski, and *Bright Suspensions*, window hangings and mobiles by George Reynolds. Through December.

**D'Amour Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield:** *As They Saw It: Women Artists Then and Now*, over 60 works by women artists spanning three centuries. Through January 14.

## MR Wrapping Paper Edition Artist Profile #7

By REPORTER STAFF

This summer we invited people to submit design proposals for a special Wrapping Paper Edition, to be printed in November. This fundraiser for the *Montague Reporter* will feature full-color designs printed on double pages of newsprint, meant to wrap presents in. Seven of these pages will feature the work of local artists chosen from dozens of entries we received.

We are so excited to bring these wonderful designs to life in this special edition, which will go to press in the third week of November!

**Anne Thalheimer** won with her design of black-and-white cat faces, which people can color in.

We asked each artist to answer the same three questions:

**MR:** *What would you want your wrapping paper to say, and feel like, for the person it is being gifted to?*

**AT:** I hope that my wrapping paper makes them smile. It's designed so that the giver or the recipient can add in their own personal (purr-sonal?) touch by coloring in the cats, adding word balloons so they can MEOW, or otherwise make their feelings known, or whatever else their imagination brings.

I want my wrapping paper to be fun for everyone involved: a little bit of cat appreciation, and a little bit of whimsy all at the same time with a chance for peo-

ple of all ages to put their own spin on the design.

**MR:** *What gifts would you want to receive wrapped in your paper?*

**AT:** Catnip! But really, I'm a huge fan of the USPS, so anything to do with getting and sending mail is a major plus for me. Stamps, fancy pens and writing paper and notecards, art supplies and postcard sets, all that stuff – always a win in my book.

**MR:** *What other gifts have newspapers given you over the years?*

**AT:** I have such great memories of reading the "funny pages" on Sundays with my family as a kid, but it carried over to my adult life as well: as someone who loves the thingness of an object, the tactile feel of something, I really enjoy being able to read the paper, fold down pages and move between sections, while I'm having coffee on a weekend. That's a gift.



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# The Children's Page

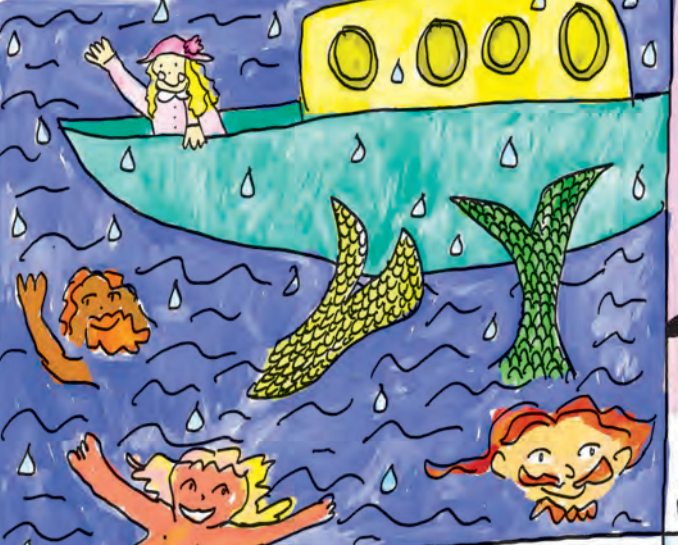
YONERDOD ILLUSTRATION

THE LOVELIGHTS AND THE RAINY DAY GENIE (PART 2)  
WORDS BY BEVERLY KETCH PICTURES BY HANNAH BROOKMAN



THE FUNNY LITTLE PROCESSION WENT TOWARD THE RIVER, STOMPING IN PUDDLES, SPINNING UMBRELLAS AND SAYING HELLO TO EVERY FROG AND DUCK ALONG THE WAY. BY THE TIME THEY PASSED THROUGH THE FOREST AND ARRIVED BY THE RIVERBANK THEY WERE SOAKED TO THE SKIN IN SPITE OF THEIR RAIN GEAR. IN FACT, DOT'S POCKETS WERE FILLING WITH WATER. FLORA AND FAUNA WERE SHIVERING AND THEY FLUTTERED THEIR WET WINGS AND HELD ON TO THE EDGE OF HER POCKETS TO STAY DRY.

THEY ALL LOOKED OUT AT THE RUSHING RIVER, WONDERING WHAT TO DO. JUST THEN, ELDA'S LITTLE HOUSEBOAT FLOATED AROUND THE RIVERBEND. MERMAIDS POPPED THEIR HEADS OUT OF THE WATER AND WAVED, AND A MERMAN LEAPT UP ON HER DECK AND CALLED OUT FOR THEM TO JUMP IN. THEY ALL LIKED THE INVITATION, BUT NONE OF THE WET, CHILLY GROUP FELT INCLINED TO SWIM.

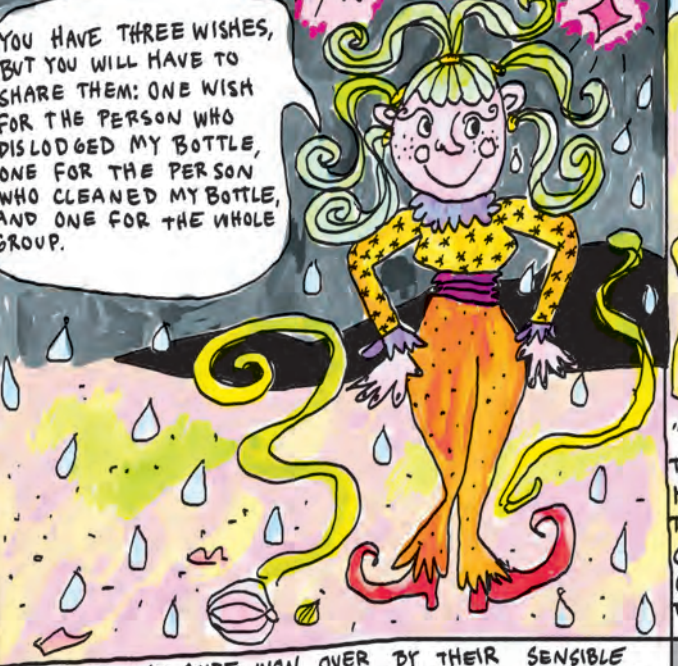


JUST THEN, CHELLA SLIPPED ON THE MUDDY BANK AND WENT FACE-FIRST INTO THE MOSS AND SAND! AS SHE SAT UP WOEFULLY, VIOLA SAW THAT HER FALL HAD DISLODGED A SMALL GOLDEN BOTTLE.



THE OTHERS TENDED TO CHELLA MAKING SURE SHE WAS ALL RIGHT, VIOLA RUBBED THE EARTH AND SAND FROM THE LITTLE BOTTLE, UNCOVERING THE JEWELLED ONION-SHAPED CAP, AND FINALLY WRAPPING IT IN THE HEM OF HER DRESS AND RUBBING IT CLEAN.

THE CAP FLEW OFF AND CLOUDS OF PURPLE SMOKE CAME OUT IN PLUMES. THERE BEFORE THEM APPEARED A GENIE! SHE WAS SMILING AND KINDLY DRESSED IN SPARKLING CLOTHES AND BOWED TO THEM ALL WITH A WINK, APPARENTLY AS SURPRISED AS THEY WERE TO FIND HERSELF IN THEIR MOTLEY LITTLE CREW IN THE POURING RAIN.



YOU HAVE THREE WISHES, BUT YOU WILL HAVE TO SHARE THEM: ONE WISH FOR THE PERSON WHO DISLODGED MY BOTTLE, ONE FOR THE PERSON WHO CLEANED MY BOTTLE, AND ONE FOR THE WHOLE GROUP.



"I WISH IT WERE A BEAUTIFUL DAY!" EXCLAIMED THE BEDRAGGLED, MUDDY, AND WET CHELLA. NO SOONER HAD SHE SAID IT THAN THE SKY WAS BRILLIANT BLUE, THE AIR WAS WARM AND BREEZY, AND THE WHOLE COMPANY STARED IN AMAZEMENT AT THE BEAUTIFUL GENIE, BASKING IN THE BALMY WEATHER. BUT THEY WERE STILL IN THEIR RAINCOATS!



I WISH WE HAD OUR PICNICS AND SWIMSUITS!  
AND SO IT WAS, IN THE WINK OF AN EYE, WHAT A HAPPY DAY IT WAS! MR. HARBINGER'S WADERS DISAPPEARED AND FOUND HIMSELF IN STRIPED SHORTS AND A SUN HAT. FLORA AND FAUNA WERE SUDDENLY PERCHED ON A MOSSY BRANCH WITH A TINY FAIRY BASKET FULL OF TREATS. AND ALL OF THE LOVELIGHTS AND MERFOLK WERE GATHERED AROUND COMFORTABLE PICNIC BLANKETS AND SANDWICHES, DRINKS, PIE AND CAKE, AND EVERYTHING THEIR HEARTS COULD HAVE DESIRED.

THE GENIE WAS QUITE WON OVER BY THEIR SENSIBLE AND MODEST WISHES, AND SHE JOINED THEM AT THE PICNIC, CONJURING UP HER INSTRUMENTS AND PLAYING MUSIC FOR THEM AS THEY ATE AND SWAM AND RELAXED ALL AFTERNOON.



THERE WAS LOTS OF TALK ABOUT THE FINAL WISH, BUT AT THE END OF THEIR MARVELOUS DAY THEY ALL AGREED TO WISH FOR THE GENIE TO STAY AND LIVE IN THEIR TOWN! SHE WAS SO HAPPY THAT THEY SANG AND DANCED UNTIL THE STARS CAME OUT.

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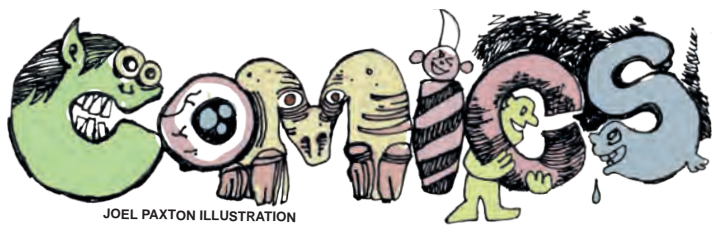
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JOEL PAXTON ILLUSTRATION

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Reporter is looking for volunteers to help us curate this listing. Interested? Contact us at [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org)!

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16**

First Methodist Church, Greenfield: *MÚsica Franklin Community Concert with Samirah Evans*. \$ 5 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Greenfield Community College Music Department Concert*. Free. 7 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Matthew Parrish Trio with Houston Person and Michelle Lordi*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17**

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Don LaCoy, Rich Stratton*. No cover. 7 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *PowerPoint Comedy Night*. \$ 7 p.m.

Palladium, Worcester: *Fishbone, GZA*. \$ 7 p.m.

Space Ballroom, Hamden, CT: *Full of Hell, END, Inter Arma, Wake*. \$ 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Galvanizer, 2 Car Garage*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Toubab Krewe, Woody & The Rebel Alliance*. \$ 8 p.m.

19 King St., Northampton: *Frogtones Frogget, Hedgewitch, Primitive Accumulation, Gentle Field and Hill*. \$ 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The Greys, Vandal Flag*. \$ 8 p.m.

MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Jason Moran & the Bandwagon*. \$ 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *North Bay Dead Alliance*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18**

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *BluGroove*. No cover. 6 p.m.

Mount Toby Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Claudia Schmidt & Sally Rogers*. \$ 7 p.m.

Nova Arts, Keene: *Marisa Anderson, Pete Bernhard*. \$ 7 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Rave in Scorpio with DJs hedone, Hello, Nitu!*. \$ 8 p.m.

Academy of Music, Northampton: *Rubblebucket, Dante Elephante*. \$ 8 p.m.

Race Street Live, Holyoke: *The Basement Cats, The Claudia Malibu, Outro*. \$ 8 p.m.

Tori Town, Holyoke: *Third Wife, Grazer, Tysk Tysk Task, Rage Honey*. \$ 8 p.m.

Dream Away Lodge, Becket: *Winterpills*. \$ 8 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *The Pharcyde*. \$ 8:30 p.m.

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19**

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Fiddle Orchestra of Western Massachusetts*. \$ 12:30 p.m.

Holyoke Media, Holyoke: *Zoh Amba / Chris Corsano duo*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21**

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Brad*

*Mehldau Trio*. \$ 7 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22**

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Jeopardy, Coma Hole, Tysk Tysk Task*. \$ 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *JARV, Coyote Reverie, Nahte Renmus*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24**

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Cajun Two-Step Night*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Willi Carlisle*. \$ 8 p.m.

Shutesbury Athletic Club: *Lonesome Brothers*. No cover. 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Bluegrass and Beyond*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25**

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Josh Ritter, Nora Brown*. \$ 6:30 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *JJQ*. No cover. 7 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Slob Drop, Chodus, imissmydead-friends, cputergirl*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *The Music of the Stone Coyotes & The Art of Doug Tibble*, memorial concert. \$ 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Roomful of Blues*. \$ 8 p.m.

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Grupo Mambique*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26**

Music Connection, Turners Falls: *King Imp*, special guest. No cover. 4 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Josh Ritter, Ali McGuirk*. \$ 6:30 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29**

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Rodney Crowell, Rob Ickes, Trey Hensley*. \$ 7 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Wes Brown with Scott Sasanecki*, guitar. No cover. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Sen Morimoto, Club Casualties*. \$ 8 p.m.

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30**

The Drake, Amherst: *Twisted Pine, Beau Sasser Trio*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1**

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Drew Paton*. No cover. 6:30 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Todd Lescarbeau and Friends*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Jones Library, Amherst: *Valley*

*Gals, Film & Gender, Billy, Robbery, Bad Card, Compress*. \$ 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Eggtooth Presents: A Drag for the Holidays*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Slob Drop, Chodus, imissmydead-friends, cputergirl*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Hanover Theater, Worcester: *Indigo Girls*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Kendra Morris*. \$ 8 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Haley Heynderickx, Max Garcia Conover, LéPonds*. \$ 8 p.m.

Daily Operation, Easthampton: *Armand Hammer, M. Sayyid*. \$ 8 p.m.

The O's, Sunderland: *Subjct 5, Popo2004, DJ Lucas*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2**

Four Star Farms, Northfield: *Rosie Porter*. No cover. 5 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Rock201*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: *John Scofield Trio*. \$ 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Eggtooth Productions Presents: A Drag for the Holidays*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *She Said*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3**

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Valley Tea Dance*. \$ 2 p.m.

Institute for the Musical Arts, Goshen: *Robin Holcomb*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6**

The Drake, Amherst: *The Bad Plus*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8**

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Tony Trischka, Tim Eriksen & Friends*. \$ 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Welcome Yule*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

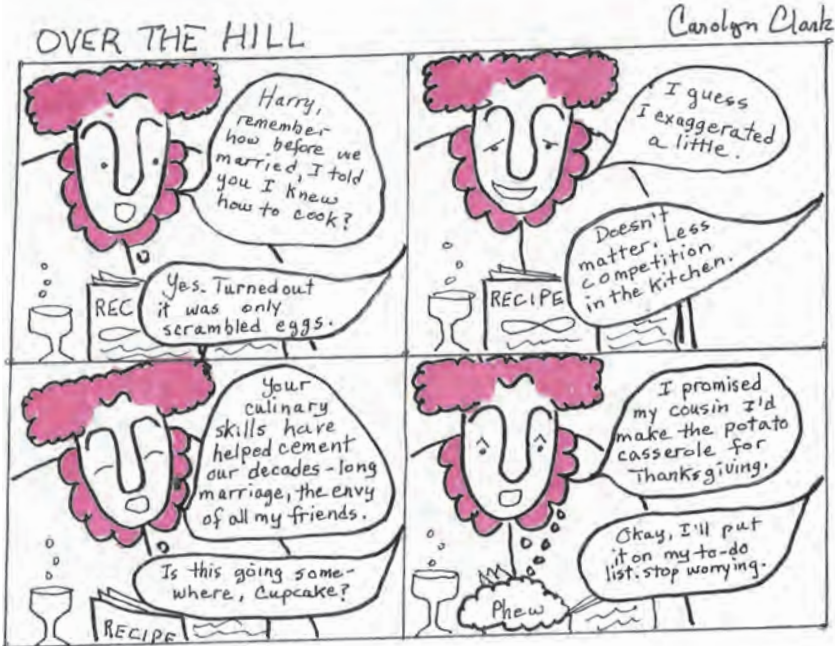
The Drake, Amherst: *Odie Leigh, King Strang*. \$ 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *The Boys from '69*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

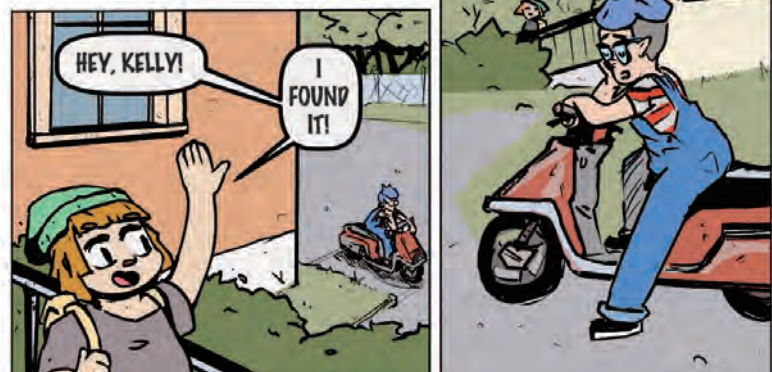
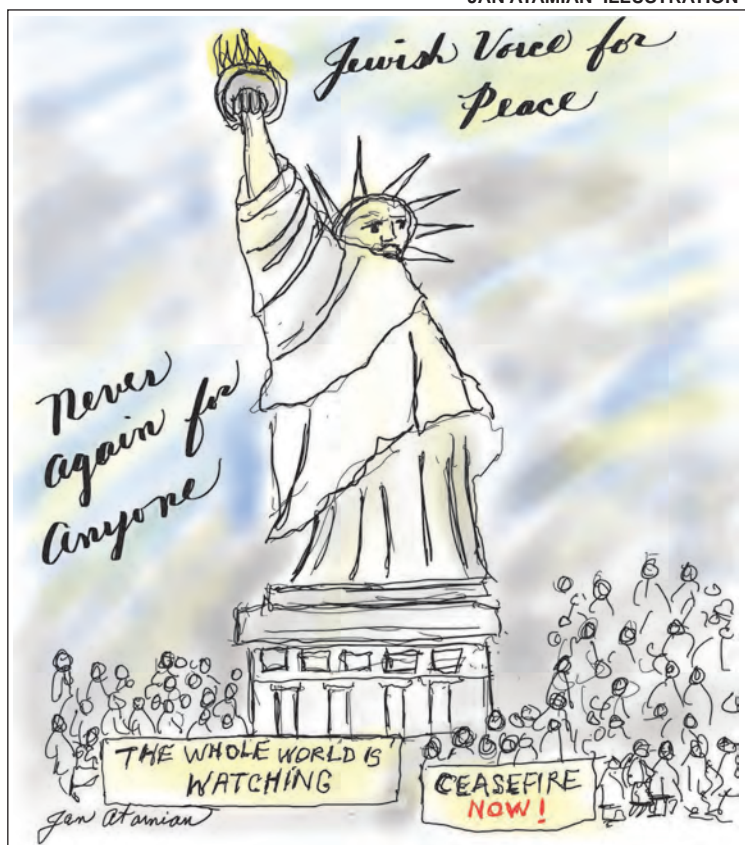
**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9**

Turners Falls High School, Turners Falls: *Montague Community Band Holiday Concert*. \$ 2 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Welcome Yule*. \$ 7:30 p.m.



JAN ATAMIAN ILLUSTRATION



BY TAY JAMES ©WARPSPEEPSKELETON

Submit your comics (and puzzles) to [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org). Original & local creations only, please!

**looking forward...**

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15**  
Parlor Room, Northampton: *Sandy Bailey, Stefan Weiner*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 18**  
Hutghi's at the Nook, Westfield: *Editrix, Sensor Ghost*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30**  
Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Wolfman Jack, Jatoba*. \$ 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *NRBQ*, *LuxDeluxe*. \$ 8 p.m.

Race Street Live, Holyoke: *Enter the Haggis*. \$ 8 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Bella's Bartok, Robber Robber*. \$ 9 p.m.

**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31**  
Race Street Live, Holyoke: *Enter the Haggis*. \$ 8:30 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *NRBQ, LuxDeluxe*. \$ 9 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Bella's Bartok, Goldsetter*. \$ 9 p.m.

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**STRONG MAN** from page B1 Games from Scotland are an example of traditional strength competitions, with a storied history. The event of caber tossing, for instance – throwing a long, heavy log as far as possible – is known to have been popular in 16th-century England, and is likely to have a history older than that.

By the 19th century in the United States, circuses around the country would claim to have the “world’s strongest man” as part of their collection of attractions. Since these titles would have been of questionable accuracy and the acts primarily set up as spectacles, there eventually developed some amount of standardized competition.

Olympic weightlifting, introduced early in the modern Olympics, was a significant step in establishing regulations. The later introduction of weight classes continued to create more strict standards.

Modern strongman competitions have roots in both the historical entertaining spectacles and these current regulated competitions, introducing such events as lifting cars or carrying propane tanks while still sticking to stan-

dards. The Iron Podium Nationals, hosted by the United States Strongman organization in Colorado next June 8, is one of a number of large competitions across the country, and it is the competition that Johnson is preparing to compete in.

**“It even impresses me,” Johnson says. “You know what I mean? This little old man... I had no idea I even had this in me!”**

Having qualified for the Iron Podium Nationals with his participation in two separate smaller competitions, Johnson is an impressive example of hard work and determination. He began weight training only five years ago, but despite his humble beginnings his progress in the sport has been quick.

Though Johnson had little athletic experience before weightlifting, he decided one day to push his weight training to see how far he could get. Eventually someone asked if he did any competing,

which inspired him to revisit a past interest in strongman competitions.

Johnson joined his first competition two years ago, and made it all the way to fifth place. Enjoying that first success, he attended a few more competitions, and between them continued to train – and discovered more about the family-oriented community built around the competitions.

With such quick progress, he has also met some of the stars of the sport, including Brian Lawson of Springfield who placed eighth in his class last year in the Arnold Classic, and a person working under the moniker “Juggernaut.”

Now able to deadlift around 525 pounds, bench press 350, and squat 450, Johnson has qualified for the Iron Podium Nationals in two separate competitions, much to his own amazement. “It even impresses me,” he says. “You know what I mean? This little old man... I had no idea I even had this in me!”

Johnson works as a school bus driver and for campus maintenance at an Amherst school for his day job. While generally quite busy, he still easily finds time to work out at the Greenfield YMCA as his lifting regimen is surprisingly sparse. Even training for only a few days a week, he has been able to improve through concentrated effort during his workouts.

“When you work out hard, you rest hard,” he says, clarifying that it’s not necessary to push limits during workouts every day, because it’s more likely to cause injury than progress. This approach is even more pronounced in the prep leading up to a competition, when he takes one week of half weights and then rests for a full week directly before the competition to make sure that his body has fully recovered.

The continued success Johnson has seen drives him to go further, and he says the strong sense of



Johnson, with a sled full of weights at the Y.

SMITH-MASSA PHOTOS



Johnson works out on a leg-strengthening machine.

community at competitions continues to draw him in. He makes a point to say that families are welcome at events, and that there’s very little swearing, if any, at competitions.

“It’s one of the few communities as well that, you know, you make a lift and you’re really happy with it,” he says, “and then the next guy is doing another lift, and he’s going heavier than you to beat you – but you cheer him on anyway, because you know what it takes to do that.”

Now that Johnson has found so much success in his training, others have come to see him as a figure to

look up to, much to his surprise.

“There [are] a lot of people now that go ‘Hey, you’re my inspiration around here,’” he says. “I’m not really used to that. I’m pretty much a humble guy.” He has taken to helping others at the YMCA with their own training, and seems to enjoy passing on what he has learned just as much as his own surprising gains.

“I feel like I’m in a really good place, and I have the right people around me right now,” Johnson says. “I’ve got a shot, I’ve got a chance, and I’m gonna do the best I can to get the greatest outcome I can get.”



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