

# The Montague Reporter

YEAR 22 – NO.5

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

DECEMBER 21, 2023

GILL SELECTBOARD

## Gill Board Spares Dog That Bit At Least Three

By KATE SAVAGE

The bulk of Monday's Gill selectboard meeting was devoted to a dangerous dog hearing regarding a blue heeler mix named Max, owned by Travis Johnson. Regional animal control officer Kyle Dragon called for the hearing after receiving three separate reports over the past 16 months of Max attacking someone inside Johnson's house.

The first two incidents, dating to 2022 and last summer, occurred when the sister and aunt of Johnson's wife were bitten, and a school nurse filed a third report on behalf of a 14-year-old child last month. The incident reports showed photos of dark bruises and open wounds, for which one victim received emergency room treatment.

Travis Johnson said he has since separated from his wife, and she and her children have moved out of the house.

Selectboard chair Randy Crochier disclosed that through his work as a regional health agent he has occasionally had dealings with Johnson, who works for a company that installs equipment. "I don't think it comes into play for this, but I need to make that on the record," he said.

Selectboard member Charles Garbiel likewise disclosed that he buys cordwood annually from Johnson. "Travis lives half a mile from

see GILL page A3

## Millionaires' Cash Divvied Up For Local Road Budgets

By JEFF SINGLETON

FRANKLIN COUNTY – The state Department of Transportation (MassDOT) announced last week that it has allocated \$100 million raised under a new 4% tax on income over \$1 million, the result of last year's "Fair Share" referendum, to cities and towns in the Commonwealth for highway and bridge aid.

Senator Jo Comerford, who represents 25 municipalities in the Hampshire, Franklin, and Worcester district, circulated a list breaking down the allocations in her district, which totalled just over \$4.7 million.

Statewide, half the money was divided according to the traditional Chapter 90 highway aid formula, and the other half purely according to the road mileage in each municipality. In Comerford's district this meant \$2 million under the traditional formula, plus \$2.7 million by road mileage.

The incorporation of road miles into the state's Fair Share disbursement reflects a complaint frequently made by western Massachusetts's state legislators. "Rural towns in my district have never received a fair slice of an already insufficient Chapter 90 pie," Comerford wrote. "Not only has Chapter 90 funding

see ROADS page A4

THE BIG PICTURE

## Comprehensively Planning: The First Year

By MIKE JACKSON

MONTAGUE – Maureen Pollock lived in downtown Turners when she worked for the city of Greenfield, moved to Northampton after she got a job with Amherst, and tells me she is kicking herself for not buying a house in Franklin County when they were affordable. Since January, she has been commuting back north as the Montague town planner.

I'd been meaning to catch up with Maureen all year, and this week we finally found a time to sit down for an interview. The wall clock in the town hall annex was frozen, and perhaps because of that we ended up talking for quite some time. This transcript has therefore been significantly abridged, and then edited for clarity and continuity. I hope our readers will enjoy it!

**MR:** So this is your one-year review! We kind of decided not do a one-month interview – seeing how many projects you were immediately thrown into, it seemed like it would probably take a little time.

**MP:** I appreciate that. It's definitely taken me a little while to get a handle on all the projects. I used to live here, so I know a lot of people – I know places and buildings and streets, I don't need directions – but I don't really know what people want, or don't want.

see PLANNER page A6



Montague town planner Maureen Pollock.

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

## 'Dangerous' Dog Spared; June Date Set For Ramsey Promotion

By JEFF SINGLETON

At its Monday night meeting the Montague selectboard declared a dog "dangerous," according to the criteria in state law, but agreed to spare its life.

The dog, a pit bull named Tyson, had attacked a woman walking her Chihuahua on K Street in Turners Falls, killing the smaller dog and severely biting the owner. The board decided, however, that Tyson's owner, who had left the pit in the care of her mother on K Street, had a reasonable plan to socialize the animal and could be expected to implement the restrictions it imposed.

The dog hearing, which lasted over an hour, was the first item on a busy agenda which included setting a date for a winter special town meeting; developing a plan for Walter Ramsey to become the next town administrator, and his replacement as assistant town administrator; endorsing the addition of a laborer at the public works department to assist work on the sewer collection system; and accepting

see MONTAGUE page A7

## A Contentious Hike Along a Beloved Gutter

By SARAH ROBERTSON

LEVERETT – Discussions as to whether the town should officially close the road along Rattlesnake Gutter, or reopen it to traffic, continued on Wednesday when about a dozen people assembled on the southern end of the scenic glacially-carved chasm.

The Leverett selectboard had invited a representative from the state Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to assess whether reopening the road is feasible, and if state aid is available to do so. Town officials, members of the nonprofit Rattlesnake Gutter Trust, and other concerned citizens walked together up the dirt road with MassDOT state aid administrator Christopher Bouchard.

"The road isn't in that bad a shape," said Bouchard. "The two sections that were washed out are definitely a concern, but... With a little work and a normal maintenance routine on the road, it could



Left to right: Isaiiah Robison, town administrator Marjorie McGinnis, selectboard chair Tom Hankinson, and MassDOT administrator Christopher Bouchard were among a group inspecting Rattlesnake Gutter Road on Wednesday.

be done."

A severe storm closed a nearly mile-long section of Rattlesnake Gutter Road to vehicle traffic in 2001. Since then, it has turned into a popular route for hiking, skiing, and horseback riding. The road

runs through the town-owned Rattlesnake Gutter Conservation Area; adjacent conserved parcels are owned by the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust (RGT) and W.D. Cows.

The runoff from this week's see GUTTER page A8

ERVING SELECTBOARD

## Officials Give A Begrudging Green Light to Senior Housing

By KEITH WATERS

The main topic of conversation at the Erving selectboard's meeting on Monday was the recent proposal for new senior housing on Care Drive.

The town's senior housing committee, which has been working for six years on the issue, finally announced a proposal last month from Rural Development, Inc. (RDI) to build housing on town-owned land near the senior center and library.

The plan RDI is proposing is two buildings, one comprising 18 units of senior housing and the other 8 units of workforce housing. The total cost is estimated at \$15.7 million. The town would only have to pay a small portion of that, with the rest coming from state and federal grants.

"I'm concerned that it doesn't seem to be the proposal [I] was expecting," said Debra Smith, a member of the finance and capital planning committees. "Eighteen units feels like not a lot... I didn't see that they were going to be residency-restricted to Erving residents... My fear being that they would fill up incredibly quickly, potentially

see ERVING page A3



DAVID HOITT PHOTO

Turners Falls senior Deven Sloan drives into the paint against Hampshire Regional defender Ben Pierce during the Thunder's 54-31 win over the visiting Raiders on Tuesday.

## High School Sports: Floods, and a Sprain

By MATT ROBINSON

TURNERS FALLS – This week the rains and winds came calling. The storm system that battered Florida and caused record tides throughout the Southeast slammed into New England on Sunday and Monday, bringing five inches of rain, causing widespread outages and flash floods, and forcing several schools to postpone after-school activities.

Back in the day, we would've received 50 inches of snow right before the Christmas break.

Within days most area towns were drying out, with the exception of Greenfield which was still dealing with three different rivers flooding. Although most of Monday's games were postponed, Franklin Tech and Turners Falls High still managed to squeeze in several games this week.

The Tech girls basketball team saw their unbeaten streak screech to a halt, and experienced a key injury

see SPORTS page A5

Last Issue Of The Year! No Paper Next Week! Back January 4! Merry Merry!

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# The Montague Reporter

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 August 2002

## Chapter 22: Merry Christmas

"Is that the way they heave in the marchant service?" he roared. "Spring, thou sheep-head; spring, and break thy backbone! Why don't ye spring, I say, all of ye- spring! Quohog! spring, thou chap with the red whiskers; spring there, Scotch-cap; spring, thou green pants. Spring, I say, all of ye, and spring your eyes out!" And so saying, he moved along the windlass, here and there using his leg very freely, while imperturbable Bildad kept leading off with his psalmody. Thinks I, Captain Peleg must have been drinking something to-day.

At last the anchor was up, the sails were set, and off we glided. It was a short, cold Christmas; and as the short northern day merged into night, we found ourselves almost broad upon the wintry ocean, whose freezing spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor. The long rows of teeth on the bulwarks glistened in the moonlight; and like the white ivory tusks of some huge elephant, vast curving icicles de-

pendent from the bows. Lank Bildad, as pilot, headed the first watch, and ever and anon, as the old craft deep dived into the green seas, and sent the shivering frost all over her, and the winds howled, and the cordage rang, his steady notes were heard, -

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood, Stand dressed in living green. So to the Jews old Canaan stood, While Jordan rolled between."

Never did those sweet words sound more sweetly to me than then. They were full of hope and fruition. Spite of this frigid winter night in the boisterous Atlantic, spite of my wet feet and wetter jacket, there was yet, it then seemed to me, many a pleasant haven in store; and meads and glades so eternally vernal, that the grass shot up by the spring, untrodden, unwilted, remains at midsummer.

**Herman Melville,**  
*Moby-Dick*



Cindy Bayer, owner of Rustic Romance, says her store has been exceptionally busy selling vintage and handmade items since she opened three years ago in downtown Millers Falls. She has moved five trailer loads of holiday decorations so far this year. Rustic Romance is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays, and on Monday holidays.

## Letter to the Editors

### Correction: Recovery Support Centers

In your November 30 issue, Mo Schweiger wrote a beautiful article, *Exhibit: Breaking the Stigma of Recovery* [Page B1]. The article depicted the amazing work of the RECOVER Project and community allies, such as ArtSpace.

It was noticed and brought to my attention that an error was cited. The article states, "The Project, one of 10 recovery support centers funded by the state Bureau of Substance Abuse Services..."

The RECOVER Project is one of *thirty* (30) support centers funded by BSAS across Massachusetts, with nine more currently being established across the state.

On further discussion we feel that the work is important enough to warrant a correction. BSAS and supporting agencies across the state have been working tirelessly to fund, establish, and normalize Peer Recovery Support Centers in as many places as possible. The RECOVER Project was the first center to bring the peer participatory model to Massachusetts, and we were the


first such center to be funded by BSAS in 2003.

The RECOVER Project, along with the other centers established since, have provided data proving the effectiveness of our model in empowering and supporting individuals who navigate substance use recovery, paving the way for the establishment of these other centers. The widespread establishment of Peer Recovery Support Centers and the support we receive from BSAS in this regard is at the heart of our fight against the stigma of recovery.

I hope this information will be useful in future reporting, and might even warrant a correction to the recent article.

Thank you for your time and attention.

**Claire McGale**  
*Peer Leadership Development Coordinator,*  
**The RECOVER Project**  
 Greenfield

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# FACES AND PLACES



Ed Gregory sent in this photo, which he took last Thursday in Montague City. "This is looking north from the back porch (second floor) of the house on the Farren lot," he writes. "Photo-center would be the location of the hospital buildings. The main, or east, entrance is photo-right and out of frame. The white garage near the equipment, along with the gazebo, "smoking shed," and pavilion, will remain. The south entrance is shown photo-left. The recreation area field will be retained." Last Friday was scheduled to be the final day for the "grooming," Ed tells us, and the final grading and seeding is due to take place in the spring.

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Savor this week's paper, because there is **no paper next Thursday, December 28!** Our next edition will be published on January 4. Have a happy holiday, and happy New Year!

There are several local events to mark the solstice on Thursday, December 21.

From 3 to 4:30 p.m., you can take a **Winter Solstice Walk** along the Canalside Rail Trail in Turners Falls to celebrate the change in season. The walk is about three miles long, on a level, paved surface, and is geared for adults and children ages 8 and up.

Meet at the front entrance of the Discovery Center. Be prepared for cold weather, dress in layers, wear sturdy shoes, and bring water. Inclement weather or icy trail conditions will cancel the walk.

And at 6 p.m. at the Wendell Meetinghouse, Gwyn Peterdi will lead a **Winter Solstice Circle Dance**. "Circle Dance is a participatory dance form based on ancient roots and practiced around the world. The emphasis is on enjoying movement; integrating bodies and minds; increasing balance, strength and flexibility; and exploring gratitude for the simple things in life," reads the description.

All are welcome; partners are not necessary. Those with small children are encouraged to arrive 15 minutes early. Donations are appreciated at this event, but not required. Contact Gwyn at [worldcircledance@gmail.com](mailto:worldcircledance@gmail.com) with questions, and find out more about the Meetinghouse at [wendellmeetinghouse.org](http://wendellmeetinghouse.org).

There's also a **Winter Solstice Spiritualist Gallery Gathering** from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Thompson Temple in Lake Pleasant.

"This special evening will feature an array of talented mediums who will tune into the spirit world and bring messages of hope and healing from your loved ones in spirit," reads the notice from The National Spiritualist Association. "So, come along and let the warmth of our community embrace you as we honor the turning of the seasons and welcome the return of the light." Tickets are available at [tinyurl.com/TNSAsolstice](http://tinyurl.com/TNSAsolstice).

The **Deja Brew in Wendell** is opening this Friday, December 22 from 7 p.m. to midnight for a pre-holiday get together and fire circle with s'mores. The owners say they hope to continue opening once a month throughout the winter to give folks a place to gather and spend time with friends and neighbors, "so come on down! All are welcome!"

**GILL** from page A1

me, which in Gill means we're neighbors," he added.

When asked his opinion about the events, Johnson answered, "I believe that something provoked the dog every time."

"I don't think that's what's happening," selectboard member Greg Snedeker countered. He pointed out that something could "trigger" Max's violent reaction without anyone intentionally "provoking" him.

Though no one attended the hearing to testify against Max, three people sent emails asking the board to take the matter seriously and consider strong measures against Johnson and the dog. They alleged that Max had attacked others, even leaving a scar on a child's face. One wrote that Johnson had repeatedly proven he was not capable of taking responsibility for his dogs, instead blaming the victims.

Two of the three wrote that they were afraid of Johnson as well as his dog.

"I really want to emphasize that you take this very seriously," Snedeker told Johnson. "People have been bitten in your house, and they're not happy with this. And they're also saying that you were somewhat defiant - like you're going to do what you want to do, with your dog, in your house."

Johnson said he had scheduled six sessions with a local in-home dog trainer to help fix the situation. "I've done nothing but try to take this seriously for 18 months," he said.

The board voted, 3 to 0, to return to the issue in two months,

once the trainer could provide some input. In the meantime, they legally declared Max to be a "nuisance dog" and ordered Johnson to post signage warning about him at all entrances to the house and the outdoor kennel, isolate or muzzle him when visitors are in the house, and follow all recommendations of the trainer.

"I absolutely hate dog hearings," Crochier confessed at the hearing's end. "With a passion. They're the worst thing we do as a board."

**Other Business**

For four years, the Six Town Regionalization Planning Board (STRPB) has been studying the feasibility of merging the Gill-Montague and Pioneer Valley regional school districts. As a show of support and appreciation for the STRPB's work, the Gill selectboard moved to preemptively adopt whatever recommendations the board makes in January.

"Whatever they come up with - short of if they recommend not to do anything - it's not the end," said Crochier. "It still has to go to six towns for a vote."

Snedeker serves as the STRPB's vice chair, secretary, and treasurer, while Deb Loomer and Bill Tomb also represent the town.

The board renewed eight car dealer licenses, four liquor licenses, and one food concession trailer license for the year ahead.

The selectboard gave an enthusiastic approval of Chris Polatin joining the conservation commission as an associate member through June 2025.

During school vacation week, the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls has activities for youngsters age four and older at its **Mammal Adaptations Investigation Station**. During open hours children may learn about local mammals, and the unique adaptations that enable them to survive in their winter habitats. Explore through touchable artifacts such as pelts, replica skulls, and replica tracks, habitat diorama scavenger hunts, and a Bingo game. Free.

The Northfield Senior Center will begin a **monthly Dementia Café series** next Wednesday, December 27, to "provide socialization and support for adults and their caregivers who are dealing with memory-related issues," according to the Village Neighbors newsletter.

The café series continues on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. A light lunch is included, and the first café will provide live music. Call the Senior Center at (413) 498-2901 x. 114 about joining this group.

The last **Puppetry Percolator** at the LAVA Center is next Thursday, December 28 from 5 to 8 p.m. The Percolator is an informal exploration of the worldwide art of puppetry. You may drop in that night to play with different puppet forms and workshop simple puppets and performance.

The event is appropriate for teens and adults and facilitated by Jovonna Van Pelt, former director of Puppet Showplace Theater. This last session's theme is marionettes.

A **First Day Hike** along the Canalside Rail Trail will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. on New Year's Day, Monday January 1. Meet at the main entrance of the Discovery Center for an approximately three-mile stroll along the canal.

Sign-ups are open now for "Unproductive Behaviors," a **writing workshop series for queer folks** at Looky Here in Greenfield. The

sessions, on Mondays from 5 to 7 p.m., start on January 8 and run for six weeks, during which writers will compose short fragments in a shared document using the "100s" method. Two full scholarships are available for queer writers of color. Find out more at [lookyheregreenfield.com](http://lookyheregreenfield.com).

**Interested in genealogy?** The New Salem Public Library is hosting monthly Beginning Genealogy workshops starting on January 11 at 4 p.m. They say it's best to attend all four sessions, but not required.

The workshops are led by Philip Johnson who, with 30 years of experience behind him, will inform attendees about recommended software and sites for research, both free and paid. Participants are encouraged to bring a laptop or tablets. Space is limited; register at (978) 544-6334 or [n\\_salem@cwmar.org](mailto:n_salem@cwmar.org).

If you'd like to test your nerves by getting up in front of an audience and unrolling a personal story, **CISA is looking for storytellers** for their "Field Notes" event on March 10 at the Academy of Music in Northampton. They provide individual coaching and supportive group workshops, and stipends and childcare are available.

Contact [jacob@buylocalfood.org](mailto:jacob@buylocalfood.org) to get started - he can answer questions and talk you through pitching a story. Pitch your story on the theme of "In the Weeds" by January 12 to be considered for the show.

Fans of the Deja Brew in Wendell can return for a **New Year's Eve event** on Sunday, December 31, with classic rock music by the Shadow Twisters from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. There will be drinks, snacks, and a bonfire, with donations taken for the Kids on the Bridge Charity in Siem Reap, Cambodia *in lieu* of a cover charge.

The organization brings food, clothing, music and more to impoverished children in that country.

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

**ERVING** from page A1

without Erving residents being able to live there."

Smith added that she was "a little surprised to see... workforce housing included as well."

Dan Hammock of the finance committee echoed that sentiment. "I'm not certain that's what people in Erving want," he said, "senior housing here, for people from all over the place."

Town planner Mariah Kurtz explained that as the project would be grant-funded, it could not be legally restricted to Erving residents. She added that with some legal hoop-jumping it might be possible to write in some sort of local preference.

Charles Zilinsky of the finance committee also noted the construction price. "\$600,000 per unit seems a lot," he said.

In the end, however, it was agreed to move forward with RDI's proposal. Everyone agreed that it would be good to build some additional senior housing in the town, and that as it had taken a significant amount of work to get this far, the proposal should be given to the townspeople.

If RDI is given the go-ahead on

the project by the town and subsequently wins the available grants, town meeting would then have a final vote on providing the land for the project.

**Other Business**

On the topic of town meetings, town administrator Bryan Smith recommended that the town should schedule one in January. The length of a contract recently offered for school transportation exceeds the length which can be approved without a town meeting vote, and the contract would need to be signed by February 4.

A special town meeting will likely be held January 24 or 31.

The selectboard took a first reading of a new proposed policy regarding flags, banners, and signs. The policy states that the only flags that would be legally permissible on town-owned properties are the flag of the United States of America, the Massachusetts state flag, the Erving town flag, official flags of the US military, and the POW/MIA flag.

It would also strictly prohibit any banners or signs on any town property that are not for town business or for town-sponsored events.

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## AT LARGE

## Northfield's Sewer Crisis

By CHIP AINSWORTH

**NORTHFIELD** – The town's 350th anniversary is over, but the days of emptying chamber pots into the streets may yet return. According to figures extrapolated from engineering studies, four years from now the annual sewer bill will have jumped from \$905 per ratepayer to \$2,222.

"I didn't come up with those numbers," said sewer commissioner Karen Boudreau. "These are engineering numbers, and I'm putting the information out there that people need to know."

The engineering report and cost-analysis studies were submitted by Dave Prickett Consulting of Longmeadow and Tighe & Bond of Westfield.

Prickett's report from 2019 estimated it would cost between \$22 and \$25 million to get the sewer system up to code, numbers that Boudreau said "have scared people to the moon and back."

Rates have already risen 28% in five years, and in January the treasurer's office will mail \$59 surcharges to correct a longstanding clerical error. "We needed to balance the books, and we agreed a one-shot adjustment was the best way to accomplish it," said Boudreau.

The high cost of flushing has been the result of a sewer commission, selectboard, and town administrator who were asleep on the can.

"The six-year span of missteps, miscommunications, broken software, loss of skilled staff, casual processes, clerical errors, pandemic, and magic math cannot be undone," said Boudreau. "We could have slowly, incrementally increased rates instead of what we are forced to do now. We could have written to the DEP. We could have negotiated if and when we received a consent order. We could have been near the front of the grant money line..."

As the saying goes: If ifs and buts were candied nuts, we'd all have a helluva Christmas.

**Disproportionate Burdens**

The town is putting the burden of playing catch-up on seniors, single-dweller homeowners, and landlords. Northfield has 283 accounts that serve approximately 850 people, two-thirds of whom are over age 50.

A senior who lives alone, or a single parent with a school-aged child, pay the same rate as a family of ten; homeowners with an adjoining apartment pay double. The bill for the nine apartments in the Beehive on Main Street will be \$8,145. Luckily for the landlord, the apartments are state-subsidized.

Grant money is the only viable way for Northfield to fix its sewer problem, but grantwriter Mallory

Sullivan submitted her resignation to the selectboard this week. Sullivan was hired by the state to manage funding for rural development. She had been making \$70,000 a year during her brief 14-month tenure.

"She was poached," said Boudreau. "It was a shock. She's a hard worker, she was easy to get along with and she produced."

Who will step in to replace her?

"Tighe & Bond does grantwriting, but at a cost," said Boudreau.

The town of Littleton recently completed a \$20.25 million water treatment project, designed by Tighe & Bond, that came in \$4 million under budget. It was financed by a 20% forgiveness state grant and by the Mass. Clean Water Trust, but the town's ratepayers will ultimately foot the bill.

Littleton is a wealthy Boston suburb of about 10,000 residents. Northfield's population is slightly under 3,000, roughly one-third of whom live on the west side of the Connecticut River and have septic systems.

The third who do have town sewer hookups include homeowners, business people, and workers in public buildings such as the post office, elementary school, and town hall.

**Through a Trapdoor**

At town meeting in May, \$385,689 was allocated to operate the sewer system. The bulk of the money is for Isaac Golding to operate and maintain the plant; Boudreau and her commission colleague Tom Walker both make \$660, which is laughable considering the amount of work they do.

Golding came aboard in 2020 and re-opened communication lines with the state Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). Boudreau and Walker joined the commission a year later. "I can't begin to count the emergencies that Isaac and Tommy Walker respond to, on nights and weekends, and never complain," said Boudreau.

Slowly they've climbed out of the trapdoor sprung by their predecessors. "Nobody pays attention until they have to pay attention," said Boudreau. "The DEP came after us because we didn't do what we were asked to do."

The succession of failed MassDEP inspections began in 2016 and resulted in a notice of non-compliance. When those were ignored, said Boudreau, the town was issued a consent order. "Think of it as a speeding ticket or court order – it means a state regulatory agency is breathing down your neck," she said. "If it's ignored the feds get involved, and in extreme cases it can go up to the Department of Justice."

As the shots over the bow became louder, nerves began to fray

in town hall. "When I came on board it was a hate-based relationship between the commission and the selectboard," said Boudreau. "It's much better now. It has to be. We're starting to work out of a tough situation, but decades of neglect can't be fixed in one, two or even five years."

**Statewide Problems**

Northfield's flushing problem isn't unique. Blue-green algae blooms are ubiquitous on Cape Cod. Salem is paying \$13.5 million to replace two aging pipes before 500,000 gallons of sewage is diverted into the harbor each day.

In Holyoke, the US Office of Public Affairs ordered the city to stop dumping raw sewage into the Connecticut River. The cost to comply is \$27 million.

"That's correct. We're not in this alone," said Boudreau. "But Northfield made itself a priority by not responding to the DEP's emails."

**Sending Out an SOS**

Two months ago Boudreau wrote a sewer newsletter that was viewed over 500 times on NextDoor. It explained the basics: more than nine miles of old clay and composite pipe are six feet under and need fixing.

"It's a communication channel," said Boudreau. "The goals are to teach and inform at regular intervals. We need everyone to learn with us."

Help might soon come from Pioneer Valley Regional School where administrators are ready to begin a 100-hour internship program called Innovation Career Pathways.

"We have an agreement with Northeast Paving, and are looking at expanding to the Northfield DPW and Sewer Plant," said PVRS dean of students Scott Freniere. "Students would compile sewage reports, attend sewer commission meetings, and help maintain and improve the town's municipal sewer system. It's an opportunity for those interested in pursuing a future in the field of Water Reclamation."

At town hall, Golding, Boudreau, and Walker have joined forces with town assessor Beth Walker, treasurer/collector Michele Turner, assistant treasurer Erin Degnan, and town clerk Amanda Lynch. "Their expertise and collaboration have allowed us to quickly dissect and analyze our information like never before," said Boudreau.

"We're here, but we need help. We've felt frustrated, nervous and scared, but we've just kept going forward."

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

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**ROADS** from page A1

not kept pace with inflation or the escalating costs of materials and labor, but the formula relies too heavily on population. In my district, we have the road miles but not the population."

It has been a complicated road from the 2022 referendum, which approved the "millionaires' tax" by a 52% to 48% margin, to the highway aid distribution. The ballot question specified that the revenue from the tax should fund education and transportation, but left much room within those broad categories. Governor Maura Healey and others have warned that the tax's revenue relies heavily on volatile capital gains income, and may not be stable from year to year.

The governor proposed an initial spending plan in February 2023, which had to proceed through the normal legislative process with bills in the state House and Senate, a conference committee, and then her signature. A final compromise was reached in August, with spending on programs capped at \$1 billion and any revenue over that amount put into an "innovation and capital fund" and a reserve fund to offset future shortfalls.

The bill allocated the available \$1 billion in the first year to five broad categories and 24 line items, including \$100 million for "roads and bridges supplemental aid," specifying that half should be distributed according to road miles.

The list of allocations in Comerford's district illustrates the difference between the two formulas. Amherst, where her office is located, received \$207,738 of the money split using the Chapter 90 formula, plus \$175,648 under the formula that emphasizes road length. The more rural town of Montague, meanwhile, was allocated \$120,874 under the traditional formula, and \$171,577 under the latter.

This meant Montague's total Fair Share allocation of over \$291,000 for roads and bridges – which it is receiving in addition to \$483,496.47 in actual Chapter 90 aid this year – was significantly higher than the initial estimate town administrator Steve Ellis provided to the selectboard in September.

As of this week, some local officials were not entirely clear whether Fair Share money disbursed in FY'24 needs to be spent during this fiscal year.

Gill-Montague school district business manager Joanne Blier said

she had not received any guidance from the state on the expenditure of Fair Share money. Though the bill allocates \$69 million into supporting free school meals, Gill-Montague was already eligible for free meals through a federal program based on local income; Blier said she did not know if the district would now receive an additional benefit.

In September, the *Reporter* speculated that \$100 million allocated to the state School Building Assistance Authority might "increase the district's chances" of receiving funds to build a new elementary school in Turners Falls, but the MSBA did not accept the district's initial application last week.

According to Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) executive director Tina Cote, MassDOT has advised regional transit authorities that their Fair Share money must be spent by June 30, 2024, or be returned. As a result FRTA – which is expecting to see nearly double its state aid this year thanks to Fair Share revenue – had planned to launch a "pilot program" extending all existing daily fixed routes to Saturdays and Sundays.

However, Cote told the *Reporter*, the management company that operates the system has reported difficulty in hiring qualified drivers for those days, so FRTA may offer a more limited level of weekend service under the pilot. *[Disclosure: This reporter serves the town of Montague on the FRTA advisory board.]*

And Katelyn Billings, a spokesperson for Comerford's office, told the *Reporter* that the Fair Share dividends are "not dissimilar from every other dollar allocated in the budget in that cities and towns must spend this funding by the end of FY24."

However, Montague public works superintendent Tom Bergeron expressed uncertainty over the timeline for spending the new highway money. Bergeron noted that recent "pothole" special winter assistance funds from the state are required to be spent by the end of the fiscal year. A communication he received recently from MassDOT, however, suggested that the Fair Share allocation for roads and bridges would be added to the municipality's Chapter 90 money, which funds projects over multiple years, and may carry over from year to year.

"Maybe we'll get another letter about that," Bergeron said.

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**SPORTS** from page A1

which led to their second loss. The Tech boys, meanwhile, are still looking for their first victory, though the Turners boys recorded their first win of the season. And the hybrid swim teams, made up of athletes from both schools, saw their own unbeaten streaks ended with split decisions against Holyoke and Renaissance.

**Girls' Basketball**

Renaissance 54 – FCTS 35  
FCTS 57 – Mohawk 23  
Frontier 64 – FCTS 24

The Franklin Tech girls lost to the Renaissance School of Springfield last Wednesday, 54-35, derailing Tech's unbeaten streak.

Kyra Goodell (9 points, two steals), Hannah Gilbert (7 points, three assists), and Lea Chapman (5 points, 16 rebounds, and two steals) led the team, with Kaitlin Trudeau, Haleigh Benoit, Trinity Doane, and Cordelia Guerin (3 points each) and Laken Woodard (2 points) all contributing as well.

Brayleigh Burgh (8), Gilbert (6), Benoit (4), Samantha Duncan (2), and Kaelyn McLean (two blocks) also made noise for the Eagles.

On Monday Tech's game was cancelled due to the weather, and on Tuesday, the Lady Birds traveled to South Deerfield to take on the Red Hawks.

This game started out pretty scary. Early in the first quarter, Chapman rolled her ankle and had to leave the game, leaving Franklin with no center. The Hawks took control in the second quarter, limiting Tech's offense to just two points, and poured it on in the second half, putting up 40 points to Tech's 14.

With their inside player on the bench, Gilbert had to step up. Although she had difficulty hitting field goals, she sank two 3-pointers to give her nine points. Trudeau (6), Burgh (5), and Goodell and Chapman (2 each) also scored points for the Eagles.

This Friday, the Athol Bears visit Tech.

Gabe Mota (4), Dylon Cullen and Alex Knapp (3 each), and Josiah Little (2) scored for the Birds.

On Tuesday, the Boys in Blue finally broke their losing streak, defeating the Hampshire Red Raiders 54-31. There was some hope in the stands as the JV game went into overtime. Turners ultimately lost that match, but for the varsity crowd entering the gym, it seemed that perhaps the school might just notch their first victory. The Thunder jumped out to a sizable lead early, then maintained a 20-point lead throughout the game on their way to what was in fact their first victory of the season.

This Thursday it's the Eagles' turn to travel to Athol and battle the Bears, while Turners hosts Mount Greylock.

**Swimming**

Holyoke 91 – TFHS 78  
TFHS 57 – Holyoke 47  
TFHS 121 – Renaissance 15  
Renaissance 82 – TFHS 52

This week the Turners Falls swim teams split two contests with Holyoke and Renaissance. The boys outswam Holyoke, but then lost against Renaissance. The girls, meanwhile, dropped their meet against Holyoke but sprang back and swamped Renaissance by more than 100 points.

In the girls' meet against Holyoke last Friday, Blue Thunder won three races for 15 points, with another 63 off second- and third-place finishes. Sophia McComb scored two wins, finishing the 100-yard freestyle in 1:04.40 and the 100-yard backstroke in 1:13.78. Madi Liimatainen won the 50-yard freestyle sprint in 28.47 for Power-town's third win of the afternoon.

The Turners boys only won two races that night, but used their second- and third-place finishes to accumulate enough points to defeat the Knights. Liam Bliss won the 100-yard freestyle in 59.34 seconds, and the team of Matthew Sibley, Cody McDonough, Connor Glennon, and Bliss took the 200-yard relay in 2:39.19.

On Tuesday the teams waded to Springfield, where they again split the meets. The Girls in Blue Trunks completely dominated, while the boys were outscored by 30.

Sylvie DiBartolomeo won two individual races, the 200-yard freestyle (2:36.15) and 100-yard butterfly (1:21.20). Liimatainen finished first in both the 50-yard free (28.52) and 500-yard free (1:14.86).

Ainslee Flynn won the 200-yard IM (3:10.76), Avery Heathwaite took the 100-yard freestyle (1:07.36), and Ava Fortin tapped the wall in 1:31.33 to win the 100-yard breaststroke.

McComb, Ava Fortin, Tristan Bliss, and Liimatainen won the 200-yard relay in 2:18.97, while DiBartolomeo, Alice Fortin, Liimatainen, and Tristan Bliss took the 200-yard freestyle relay in 4:41.03.

In the boys' lanes, Sibley, McDonough, Liam Bliss, and Tyler Galenski took the 200-yard medley Relay in 2:25.46. Bliss also took first place in the 50-yard freestyle (25.70) and the 100-yard breast stroke, while Galenski took the gold in the 100-yard freestyle (1:10.80).

The swim teams have one more meet this year, traveling down to Agawam to face the Brownies this Thursday. On January 2 they host their first home meet, against the Lions of Ludlow.

**Boys' Basketball**

Athol 63 – TFHS 45  
Smith Academy 62 – FCTS 31  
TFHS 54 – Hampshire 31

Last Thursday the Turners boys' basketball team busied east and lost a game to the Athol Red Bears, 63 to 45. Jackson Cogswell led Blue with 12 points, followed by Branden Truesdell (11), Joey Mosca (9), Cameron Burnett (6), Dylon Richardson (3), Deven Sloan (2), and Alex Quezada (2).

On Monday, while many schools were postponing after-school activities, Smith Academy played on. The results weren't good for the Franklin Tech Eagles. Tech was held to just two points in the opening frame and was unable to make up any ground, dropping the match 62-31.

Robert Belval (8), Cam Candelaria (6), Anthony Gallo (5),



DAVID HOIT PHOTO

Turners Falls senior Branden Truesdell goes up to the hoop against Hampshire Regional defender Vynce Carr during Tuesday's home win.

The Lady Birds got back to their winning ways on Friday the 15th, when they defeated the Mohawk Warriors up in Shelburne Falls. Tech's defense kept the Warriors off balance, making 34 steals, blocking several shots, and dominating in rebounds. This aggressive style held Mohawk to just four points in the first quarter and six in the second, while the Tech offense scored 38 points in the first half alone.

The third period was no better for the Warriors. Although Franklin only put up nine points in the quarter, they held the Warriors to just three. In the final quarter, both teams scored 10 points to make the final 57-23.

Chapman scored 18 points, grabbed 11 rebounds, and made six steals, and Trudeau scored 10 points and made seven steals. Goodell (9),

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## PLANNER from page A1

When I started in January it was really good timing, because the town is updating its comprehensive plan, which is like its blueprint for the next 15 years. Doing robust engagement, hearing from the community what they envision the next 15 years in terms of a variety of topics: housing, town facilities, transportation needs like buses or adding new sidewalks or bike lanes, economic development, arts and culture, open space, land use.

**MR:** *Comprehensive, meaning all these parts actually have to fit together?*

**MP:** Yeah. So in February we held a public forum at the high school, we had maybe 80 people in attendance and it was really great to hear from residents. We even got into breakout groups of the different villages, and it was cool to hear everyone's thoughts about their particular neighborhood or village – what are the current conditions there, and what do they envision or would like to see happen there.

**MR:** *Did anything surprise you?*

**MP:** Well, in Montague City, which was the village I was sitting with, folks would love a welcome sign from over the bridge. That makes sense. The folks who attended said that there used to be a post office and I think even a hair salon and other shops, and they would like to see more activity, a sense of village center there. I thought that was interesting to hear.

**MR:** *You said it's a 15-year plan. When was the last time one was done?*

**MP:** It was last updated in the '90s. They're actually supposed to be updated every 10 years.

When I worked in Greenfield they had just updated their comprehensive plan – it got into what the town's goals and objectives were, and it even had specific recommendations. This was great for me, because I was like, "All right, this is the blueprint – there's a grant coming out, let me refer to these specific recommendations that the town endorsed and approved."

It gives the planner the direction of what sort of policies and programs to create or expand upon. It can help with knowing what kind of grants to pursue, and it can help in support of land use decisions. It's more important than most people realize.

**MR:** *Have we gone in the direction decided on in the last comprehensive plan?*

**MP:** That's a good question. Yes, on a lot of topics, we are going in the direction of that comprehensive plan from the '90s. It is on the Planning website.



Direct links to Parts 1 and 2 of Montague's 1999 Comprehensive Plan.

And I truly want to use this as a blueprint moving forward, because from a practical perspective, I don't have the desire to reinvent the wheel. If I can refer to a document – "This is what everyone wants, we went through this planning process that was over two years," it will help me do my job more efficiently. "They gave me the direction, here we go!"

**MR:** *It seems like there's been a massive shift toward grants as a model for funding from the state and federal levels. That's a lot of work – is that churn a big part of what everyone at town hall is doing at any point in time?*

**MP:** Yeah, we're very grant-driven. Which is great. We have really passionate staff that want to help the community meet its needs, so whenever there's a grant opportunity we have a lot of enthusiasm to pursue it. It feels good to work with people that genuinely care, but it all takes so much time, and there's very limited staffing here, and a limited budget. There's 15 people that work in town hall. But we are pumping out projects, and we hope that goes a long way for the needs of this community.

The digital equity plan is funded through the state. We're working with FRCOG to get an assessment from the community of what



JACKSON PHOTO

Pollock in her natural habitat, on the top floor of town hall.

digital needs are important to pursue, in terms of future grant programming.

The three pillars of digital equity are internet access – do all folks have access to internet, if so how fast is it, and do folks have access to devices such as a laptop or computer or a mobile phone? Second, is it affordable? And then the third pillar talks about "digital literacy," especially with elders: do folks know how to use a computer? We live in an age where a lot of services are only offered on the internet.

**MR:** *Helping people sign up for COVID vaccines was the first time I saw the senior center really step in on a big scale.*

**MP:** I learned this term I'd never heard before, a "digital navigator." A navigator navigates a user through a website, or figuring out those sorts of things. It's a real need – here in town hall, sometimes we're navigating folks: how do you fill out an application? The senior center helps residents get online to attend medical appointments, or get a prescription filled, those sorts of things. The town wants to make sure we are hearing the needs of those most at risk... I just learned that you can go to the library and take out the internet [hotspots devices]! It's such a great program.

**MR:** *I hear it's very popular. Is there ever any talk about just making all of downtown Turners one big wireless hotspot?*

**MP:** Funny that that you say that – a grant just rolled out last Monday for communities to provide free WiFi, outside or inside. I hope to apply... It's due in 30 days. I've asked everyone I've spoken with since finding out about this grant: As you go about your day, notice where there could be improvements to the internet connection. The town's interested in making sure that folks that have limited income have opportunities to get internet for free or at a reduced rate. A lot of communities are exploring that, so it would be great if we could as well.

**MR:** *I've been at a bunch of public input sessions over the years in town, and I wonder two things. First, how do you get a representative group to show up? And second, how does the staff go about synthesizing their input and reflecting back in a plan, or in priorities?*

**MP:** Yeah, those are really good questions. In terms of the comprehensive plan, we're really grateful to get additional grant money for providing "enhanced community engagement" for priority populations: low-income residents, older adults, and residents whose primary spoken language is not English. So we've been holding focus groups with those communities; we had a focus group at the senior center just recently where we heard from older adults from around the town of Montague.

And the town is working with FRCOG staff, they're assisting these efforts and they're going to be reaching out to the Brick House to have a focus group that I believe would be geared towards youth and families, and to Montague Catholic Social Ministries to have a focus group with immigrant populations....

And then there's another project we've started called "MVP 2.0." Back in 2018 the town created a municipal vulnerability preparedness plan, "MVP plan" for short, assessing what we need for building a climate

change-resilient community. This is a grant from the state that creates this plan for towns.

So that 2018 plan actually is definitely useful. "These bridges need to be replaced, these culverts need to be enlarged – they're too small, and they can't handle the amount of rain coming through," stuff like that. And it even gets into improving emergency communication. But it doesn't get into equity, and it really only accounts for infrastructure needs for the municipality. It doesn't get into residents' needs, and how the sort of stressors caused by climate change are impacting folks most at risk.

**MR:** *Which is what, mostly housing?*

**MP:** Well, it can be a variety of topics. So this year we got a grant to look at the 2018 plan and hear from residents in priority populations. We just had a kickoff meeting with a core group, 11 residents and some town staff members on it. We're going to go through trainings for the first couple of months, and take a look at the 2018 plan, and then provide outreach to hear from residents about their needs.

In terms of climate change and equity, if we take food for example: immigrant farmworkers work in the summer. Hopefully there isn't a drought, or a lot of rain like we saw this year – if they can't work, are they getting paid?

And then, keeping with food, with the droughts and rain affecting crops, it's affecting the price of food. How do we have increased access to food, and food security? Is there interest in more community gardens, or outreach about assistance programs? We do have a mobile market for food, which has locations in the summer at different libraries in town.

We'll talk about the variety of different topics including food systems, and then also housing. There's a real lack of accessible housing in Franklin County – is there housing for people with mobility limitations? What's the connection between that home and the bus stop? Are there transportation options for someone with mobility impairments, and do they know about programs such as the on-demand bus service?

**MR:** *New England is seen as one of the safer long-term places to live – we'll have more water, but people have been saying for years that it's going to be a residential pressure: more and more people are going to be moving here. Is that something that's within the scope of "municipal vulnerability planning"?*

**MP:** We are already receiving a lot of migrants in terms of climate change. Since I've started working here I've met probably at least a dozen folks who moved here from California, from the wildfires, or from down South or Colorado where there's larger droughts. This is beginning to happen. And there's a lot of folks moving here from the Boston area – who wouldn't want to live in western Mass?

And as we both know there's a very limited housing stock, both for renters and for homeowners, and rent and mortgages are not going down. And I think there is a need for more housing for all income levels. We want to be welcoming to everyone, no matter who they are, where they're from, or what their background is – and we want to make sure that families who have lived here for generations have a place to stay. Providing more affordable housing options can help ensure that.

**MR:** *When the Northern Tier rail project was getting input for what should be in the study, I talked with FRCOG about asking them to include the impact of high-speed rail from Boston to Greenfield on housing around here, particularly the rental market. They basically said that's not done – "induced housing demand" is siloed off; transportation planners don't feel they should be asked what the impact on housing is. That feels like a Catch-22.*

**MP:** I'm not familiar with the protocols of induced market studies, but I do know that as part of the Farren land-use study, I wanted to learn more about what is feasible. A nice person had emailed me saying "let's build condos, and they'll each be \$150,000." Sign me up, I'll buy one of those! Unfortunately, I don't know if that's realistic in the United States, because of the cost of labor and materials. I wish it was.

And so as we look at what is possible at the former Farren center, I thought it would be helpful to do a residential and commercial market study, so that is being conducted right now. It could be helpful for both the town and any potential developer out there.

It's really great to have Mass Housing Partnership be the the funding source – they have helped to guide both VHB Consultants and the town in making sure we do get community input and think about how this site relates to the surrounding environment. We don't want to jump to any conclusions – there has been an expressed need for enhancing the village center there, so this project wants to explore what a re-envisioned village center could look like.

We should get the report sometime in January, and I want to present the findings and recommendations to both the planning board and the selectboard, to hear their thoughts and to guide the town on the next steps.

**MR:** *Has there been any pushback on having housing at all on the Farren lot?*

**MP:** There has been, yes, a bit. Some folks feel like there isn't a need for housing in general, or "why there"? But I've overwhelmingly received comments that there is a need for all kinds of housing: senior housing, housing for families, housing for all ages and abilities and income levels. And a lot of people would love community spaces, maybe a park or community gardens, or a memorial garden to folks who were involved with the Farren Center.

**MR:** *You really got thrown in headfirst on the project up on the Hill...*

**MP:** Is there a question? [Laughs.]

**MR:** *A major takeaway from that conversation was that there are apparently very few developable lots for industry right now in Montague – can you talk about the town's prospects for industrial development?*

**MP:** I went through a GIS mapping exercise, looking at all parcels throughout the town regardless of what the zoning would allow. I looked at wetlands, slope, topography, frontage, infrastructure such as water and sewer, and whether there is protection that would limit or prohibit development. There really are limited parcels available for new construction – there are some small lots, three acres or less.

I think this is something the town wishes to explore in the future. Montague has historically been built on manufacturing, and is interested in opportunities to bring in new businesses. Perhaps that particular location didn't make sense – we heard loud and clear that residents in that neighborhood are not interested.

**MR:** *Even with a small staff, it seems that town hall staff has expanded somewhat. How's it been to work here so far?*

**MP:** It's great! I love working with Walter and Steve. It's been so great to have Walter be my go-to person with all the institutional knowledge – although he's the assistant town administrator, he'll still always be a planner. I respect all the work he's done over the last 12 years, and I'm excited for him to become the town administrator when Steve leaves in June.

**MR:** *Anything else you want to say?*

**MP:** If anyone has any questions or comments, they can call me. My door's always open.



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**MONTAGUE** from page A1

the retirement of a longtime police officer, who will become a reserve officer.

The dog hearing was chaired by town counsel Greg Corbo, and began with brief reports by Montague police sergeant John Dempsey and Judie Garceau, the regional animal control officer. They reported interviewing both the victim and Tyson's owner about the attack, which took place on the afternoon of November 16 after Tyson escaped from an enclosure behind his house.

Denise Bouchard, who lives at L and Seventh streets, then took the stand, reporting that she was walking her dog down K Street with a friend, as they have nearly every day for 23 years. She said she did not see Tyson coming, but her friend walking ahead turned and screamed "pick him up," referring to her Chihuahua. The smaller dog was dangling by the leash when Tyson attacked, knocking Bouchard down and then biting her and her dog. A teenager came out of the house to pull Tyson off the victims.

"I'm not mad at my neighbors," Bouchard said. "They paid restitution. They brought me beautiful flowers and a sympathy card." But she said she wanted her neighborhood, with its many small dogs and children, to be safe. "Tyson is a powerful, powerful animal who needs socialization and training," she said.

Bouchard's friend, Bonnie Sokoloski, confirmed her story and expressed similar sentiments. "There was blood everywhere," she said. "I thought he got her neck.... They are nice people, they came and paid restitution, but the dog is obviously a danger. There were kids getting off the bus when it happened."

The next witness was Brianna Snyder, Tyson's owner, who currently lives in Greenfield in an apartment where dogs are not allowed. Snyder said that she had gotten updated shots for the dog, was "in the process of training him," and planned to "send him to a boarding camp to be properly socialized.... for most of February."

"I don't have that much to say except that I'm sorry, especially to them," Snyder said, pointing to Bouchard and Sokoloski.

After several more witnesses, the board members deliberated on whether to declare the dog "dangerous," according to the criteria set under Chapter 140 Section 157 in Massachusetts state law. They quickly did, but then voted to require that Tyson not be allowed out of the K Street house unless leashed, muzzled, and in the company of an adult "capable of restraining the dog."

Snyder is also required to purchase insurance or make "reasonable efforts" to do so, provide the animal control officer with "microchip information," and have the dog neutered.

Corbo said that if Tyson moves with Snyder to another town, the order will follow the dog, and enforcing it would be the responsibility of the new town.

**Personnel Board**

The board formally voted to appoint assistant town administrator (ATA) Walter Ramsey to the position of town administrator, and to authorize chair Rich Kuklewicz to meet with Ramsey and current town administrator Steve Ellis to

discuss a contract.

Ramsey then reviewed a transition plan for hiring a new ATA. He said the goal was for the town to appoint the person June 17, with Ramsey assuming the town administrator position June 23.

**The board was shown a map of the Turners Falls sewer system. The town has over 1,200 manholes, over 210,000 linear feet of gravity sewers, 1,600 catch basins, and 200 culverts.**

Under the plan, a revised job description for the ATA would be available in early February, a hiring committee would be appointed "on or about" February 26, and the committee would advertise the job in March and hold interviews in April. The "official hiring" would then take place in May.

Police chief Chris Williams announced that Sergeant Dempsey would be retiring, but would be rehired as a reserve officer. The selectboard, in their role as the personnel board, voted to accept Dempsey's retirement effective December 30 "with regret."

Williams then requested that reserve officers be paid an hourly wage, according to the same scale as full-time officers, which would mean Dempsey would make \$32.35 an hour given his 27 prior years of service. Williams said he could adjust his budget for the current fiscal year by taking the money from the overtime line item. The board approved the new pay scale, although this may need to go to the finance committee during the process of building next year's budget.

The board appointed Ryne Hager to the cable advisory committee.

**Collecting Collectionists**

Also on the personnel board agenda Monday was a proposal to add a "collection system laborer" position to the department of public works (DPW)'s FY'25 budget, to assist the new collection system chief operator, Kyle Bessette. The collection system is the town's sewer and stormwater system, which primarily feeds into the treatment plant in Montague City but can overflow at two points into the Connecticut River during heavy rain.

**The selectboard took a formal vote to urge the Six Town Regional Planning Board to move forward with drafting a new regional school district agreement to present to its member towns.**

The budget proposal came with a detailed slideshow describing the system and plans to improve it. The presentation was made by Bessette, DPW superintendent Tom Bergeron, and Rebekah Novak, a consultant from RCAP Solutions, a private non-profit assisting the town in mapping the sewers.

Novak began with a slide of a manhole cover on Turnpike Road

dated 1925. "It's the oldest one we've found," she said.

Bessette reviewed the central goals of the proposal to add a new laborer, including "safety for the staff," in that it would allow two employees to implement potentially dangerous sewer inspections. Novak then reviewed specific goals of the collections system staff, including proactive maintenance, increasing capacity, and avoiding costs.

The selectboard was shown a map of the Turners Falls sewer system, covered with dozens of green dots representing manholes. Novak said the town has over 1,200 manholes, over 210,000 linear feet of "gravity" sewers – which waste moves through by gravity alone – 1,600 catch basins, and 200 culverts.

Bergeron presented an estimate of the potential cost for an additional laborer, which totaled \$77,600 per year including a wage on the union scale, benefits, and retirement. He said he hoped to integrate the position into his FY'25 budget so it could be funded at the May annual town meeting.

The board took no votes on the proposed position. Kuklewicz recommended that Bergeron stress the potential reduction in overtime costs by allowing more work Mondays through Thursdays and reducing the amount of work on Fridays, which requires overtime pay.

**Other Business**

A winter special town meeting was placed on the town calendar for March 14 by the selectboard, but member Matt Lord said he would like to see its agenda include the question of rezoning land behind the DPW garage on Turners Falls Road to allow manufacturing. This proposal, approved this year by the planning board, was taken off the fall town meeting agenda to create time for more discussion.

Ramsey said he would review the status of the rezoning proposal with the planning board, ahead of a February 8 deadline for proposed articles for the meeting.

The board voted to approve a long list of license applications for the upcoming calendar year. A request by the Rendezvous bar and restaurant to stay open until 2 a.m. on Sunday, December 31 – New Year's Eve – was approved, by a motion that would allow any other restaurant with an all-alcohol license to stay open until 2 a.m. as long as it applies to the town administrative assistant by noon on December 28.

The selectboard took a formal vote to urge the Six Town Regional Planning Board, which has been considering the consolidation of the Gill-Montague and Pioneer Valley regional school districts, to move forward with drafting a regional agreement to present to its member towns.

Ramsey announced that the state School Building Authority had not accepted the Gill-Montague district's "statement of interest" for funding to build a new elementary school at the lower grades, effectively consolidating the Hillcrest and Sheffield schools. Ramsey said the district intends to apply again next year, and that "sometimes it takes several attempts, or more, to get into that program."

The next selectboard meeting will be held Monday, January 8, unless it becomes necessary to call a meeting on January 2, a Tuesday.

**LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK**

*Here's the way it was on December 19, 2013: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.*

**A Wet Basement in Gill**

At its December 16 meeting, the Gill selectboard realized no one seemed sure how to effectively address the longstanding issue of groundwater, or runoff from Center Road, entering the basement of town hall, where town records are stored and the board of health and assessors have their offices.

Town administrative assistant Ray Purington noted that the problem worsens in spring, and after heavy rains.

**A Slippery Slope In Turners Falls**

Kids who look out at the new fallen snow this week in Turners

may have to wait until next year to use the traditional sledding hill at Unity Park. Where generations of Turners youth – and their parents – have coasted down the slope from the top of Third Street toward the playing fields, now an orange plastic fence has been erected to prevent access, with signs saying "Hill is Closed for Sledding."

Parks director Jon Dobosz explained that the temporary fence surrounding the ballfields is to protect the newly loamed and reseeded playing fields from damage.

**Erving: You've Got Mail!**

At its December 16 meeting, the Erving selectboard approved a contract with Crocker Communications for hosted email at the town hall. Crocker will support 75 mail boxes for \$4,455 annually and \$948 in setup costs.

**20 YEARS AGO**

*Here's the way it was on December 18, 2003: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.*

**The Strathmore Saga**

If Jerry Jones has his way, the former Strathmore paper mill will take a bold leap back to the future, again becoming an incubator for small industries and a home for artists.

In 1994, when International Paper shut down its machines at the Strathmore mill, Indeck Energy Systems, owners of the neighboring cogeneration plant, took a 15-year lease on the building. They turned their plant manager, Fran Zabek, Jr., loose on the local art world with an irresistible offer of heated com-

mercial space for \$2 a square foot.

By 1996, over two dozen manufacturers, musicians, and artists were at work in the Strathmore Arts and Industry complex. It seemed the long-awaited renaissance of Turners Falls was right around the corner.

The number of tenants swelled to 35 before Indeck announced it would mothball its coal-fired generator at the end of the year, cutting off the source of steam heat that had made the arrangement possible. After failed attempts to put together a deal, all tenants were forced to move out by the end of 2000.

Jones, who runs a fleet of 30 tractor trailer trucks and sells paper to China and India, now hopes to revive the incubator concept.

**150 YEARS AGO**

*Here's the way it was on December 17, 1873: News from the Turners Falls Reporter's archive.*

**Local Matters**

A wooden wedding celebration looms up.

It is worthy of note that many of the founders of Turners Falls are moulders of public sentiments.

There was a show at Schuler Hall, Tuesday night. A pretty sick affair.

Hurry up and buy the lecture tickets for the Baptist Church course, so that the first lecture can be announced.

The Baptist folks have a Christmas tree on Wednesday evening, 24<sup>th</sup>.

John Jameson, so well known for his fine work at the Keith and other mills, has opened a shop of his own on K street, near Seventh. As he is what is known as a machine blacksmith, he will be pleased to receive orders for the nicer little jobs usually done in a shop like his.

A ninety-nine cent store is a new feature in the business of the place. It is in Sauter's Block. Don't fail to call and see what 99 cents cash will buy. Jewelry, silver ware, glass ware, brackets, dolls, toys, fancy and staple goods, and a great variety of articles suitable for holiday presents.

P. MacArthur on Sunday killed a real live snake near the river above the ferry. It is a common thing for some folks to see snakes this time of the year, but something unusual to capture them. He also caught a live grasshopper. Some people do see these things occasionally.

At a meeting of the citizens in the parlors of the Farren House, committees were chosen to prepare for the second annual ball and supper of the Founders of Turners Falls, which takes place on Wednesday evening, Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>. This will be the leading ball of the season. Parties are expected in numbers from adjoining towns, and from a distance. The tickets have been placed at the low price of \$3.



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**GUTTER** from page A1

rainstorm did not carve deep channels across the road, as happened this summer. After July's severe weather it took the highway department a week to restore the road to passable condition, superintendent Matthew Boucher told the group as they paused to rest at the top of the road's steepest section.

"The highway department took over four years ago, and inherited something that hadn't necessarily been taken care of in five years or so, so I've been slowly trying to catch up on it," Boucher explained. "Cost-wise, a lot of it is not super expensive. The washouts are the expensive part."

The summer flooding prompted discussions at town hall about the road's future. Rattlesnake Gutter was never taken off the books as a town road, and Leverett receives Chapter 90 funding for its full length.

Members of the RGT suggested that if the road were officially discontinued, they would be able to pursue grant funding to maintain it as a public trail.

"I want to see it be what it has been for the last 22 years," said Eva Gibavic, a member of the Trust who lives on the road's southern section and followed the hikers in a golf cart. "I also want to see it repaired so it doesn't fall in."

Others have argued that it is time to fully repair the road and reopen it to vehicles. Leverett emergency management director Sean Connor sent a letter to the selectboard saying that reopening the road would save first responders traveling from the public safety complex to Moore's Corner 2.2 miles, or five minutes of response time.

"This may not seem like much to some but it could mean the difference of life or death, partial or complete loss of property, and to a victim five minutes is a lifetime based on the situation," Connor wrote. "Choosing recreation over the concern for residents of Leverett and Wendell should not be the precedent that is set."

In a joint letter, Leverett fire chief Brian Cook and police chief Scott Minckler also expressed their support for reopening the road, citing public safety, convenience, and accessibility.

"The strategic significance of Rattlesnake Gutter Road cannot be overstated, especially in emergency situations where time is of the essence," the chiefs wrote.

On December 5, the selectboard voted unanimously to petition the Franklin Regional Council of Governments to officially discontinue the road.

According to chair Tom Hankinson, the board had invited MassDOT to inspect the road, voted in the meantime, and decided to still hold Wednesday's tour in order to gather more information.

Bouchard said he doubted whether FRCOG's participation was needed to approve the discontinuation, explaining that the decision was up to the municipality. Massachusetts law governing road closures references "county commissioners," but Franklin County's government was abolished, along with seven others in the state, in the late 1990s.

During Wednesday's tour, fire chief Cook told the Reporter he felt more information is needed before a final decision about the closure is made. He pointed to the steep cliffs along the Gutter, which have become popular with climbers.

"Some kind of access for emergency response is critical," he said. "You never know what kind of equipment you might need to bring, whether it's a technical rescue and you need to rappel down the cliff to get someone who is stuck."

"I think it's a very pretty road to drive on, and it would be better to have it more accessible to everybody, especially the elderly," said Jim Field, Leverett's former emergency management director. During the walk,



Left to right: Leverett police sergeant Steven Gould, selectboard chair Tom Hankinson, Silas Ball, MassDOT administrator Christopher Bouchard, Isaiah Robison, and Steve Weiss inspect the road's erosion.

said he used to drive a tractor-trailer truck over the road when it was open.

"The selectboard ordered me not to drive my truck on this road anymore, because I scared someone somewhere," Field said.

"It's people like you that make us have to close roads like this," Hankinson joked.

Isaiah Robison, the former chair of the town conservation commission, told the Reporter that he would like to see the road reopened, and that he felt the selectboard made its decision without adequate public input.

"If the road was officially closed at the end of an open, transparent, fact-filled process, so be it," Robison said. "That's where my personal agitation is – the process has the appearance of being favorable to one group with a certain perspective on the asset. It's a public asset."

Robison currently serves on the town's comprehensive plan steering group with Boucher and resident Silas Ball, who also joined Wednesday's walk. Robison and Ball said they felt pending decisions about other public assets were given a more deliberative process.

The questions of what to do with the town-owned Field Family Museum, which might be sold to the Leverett Historical Society or moved next to the town library, led the selectboard to appoint an *ad hoc* committee last year to study the pros and cons of various options. A recent offer of a donation of land for a town forest has also prompted a study process involving advocates and opponents of the idea.

"When you have these things that are all assets to the town, and one gets treated one way and one gets treated another way – it's eroding my trust for our leadership," Robison said.

Ball, who serves on the Field Building committee, pointed out that the town paid \$30,000

for an engineering study of that building. He also recalled a 1996 flood that left Cave Hill and North Leverett roads impassable. "But we didn't lose the Gutter," he said.

Steve Weiss of the RGT, who said he would prefer to see the road discontinued, asked the MassDOT administrator how much it might cost to reopen, and whether it could qualify for state aid.

An engineering study to assess the washouts would cost around \$5,000, according to Bouchard. The project would then be eligible to apply for a "highly competitive" Small Town Road Improvements to Enhance Public Safety grant, known as STRAP, which covers road repair projects of up to \$1 million.

Bouchard said the grant has funded projects similar to Rattlesnake Gutter, which have cost around \$250,000.

If the road were to be reopened, Bouchard recommended either adding more pull-offs for cars to safely pass each other, or allowing only one-way traffic so as not to let climbing cars "chew up" the steep dirt road.

"I've taken care of gravel roads that are very similar to this," he added. "We didn't perform winter maintenance on them, and they had steeper grades. So yes, it can be done, for not a lot of money."

"A decision has been made by the selectboard," Hankinson told the group. "I didn't hear anything today that has changed my mind."

As the sun went down, everyone headed back down the hill to the road's southern gate. According to state law, a public hearing would be needed – whether it is held by FRCOG or by the town is unclear – before the road can officially be decommissioned.



Robison stops to give a roadside stream a second look.

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FERD WULKAN PHOTO

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DECEMBER 21, 2023

Above: Santa delivers the Reporter to Montague Center. Thanks to Ferd Wulkan!

# IDEAS Very Last-Minute Gifts

By CLAIRE HOPLEY

**LEVERETT** – Books loom large in my mental life at this time of year. Right now they’re my number one choice for last-minute shopping because they’re ideal gifts. Easy to wrap. Widely available. And in season, because publishers bring out their best for Christmas.

When Christmas passes, books won’t go with it. They will still be on my mind as I look for cozy corners to lose myself in with whichever book comes in my stocking. If you are looking for a last-minute gift or maybe just a post-holiday treat for yourself, books can be the answer. There’s even time to order online – just about.

To order what? Here are some fact and fiction possibilities.

The first two books are novels with local links. Daniel Mason’s wonderful *North Woods* (New York: Random House, 2023) is set in the forests of northwestern Massachusetts. It begins with young Puritan lovers fleeing to the western Massachusetts woods where they build a cabin. Later, Major Osgood, wounded at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, abandons the army to create the perfect apple and to care for his motherless twins Mary and Alice. Under his auspices the cabin becomes an odd yellow house that his spinster daughters eventually inherit.

*North Woods* tells the tales of these people and the

many others who eventually live in the house. They include a runaway slave en route to Canada, a 19th-century industrialist hoping to create a hunters’ lodge, and a schizophrenic who loves the forest. Eventually the house decays, then lives again in 21st-century form.

This is a book of American history told in many stories: a masterpiece of traditional narrative, and a true delight for readers who love the worlds conjured in great fiction. (For a more in-depth look, see Donna Petersen’s review on this page. – Eds.)

Amanda Flower’s *I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died* (Berkley Prime Crime, 2023) is set in 1850s Amherst, where Edward Dickinson presides over the town’s foremost family. His son Austin has just married Susan Gilbert, who aspires to be its premier hostess, and his daughter Emily is an amateur sleuth. (She also writes poetry.)

Ralph Waldo Emerson visits with his secretary Luther Howard – a nascent piece of work who’s both a plagiarist and fortune hunter. When he is killed, the police arrest an Italian peddler who has publicly quarreled with him. Emily believes the police are wrong, and she and her maid Willa – the narrator of this story – devote themselves to finding the real culprit.

Dickinson scholars will probably hate this book, so don’t buy it for one of them. But it could definitely be

see **GIFTS** page B8



## BOOK REVIEW

### Daniel Mason, *North Woods* (Random House, 2023)

By DONNA PETERSEN

**MONTAGUE** – Run, don’t walk to your nearest local bookstore to buy *North Woods* by 2021 Pulitzer Prize finalist Daniel Mason. Yeah, it’s that good, and local as well.

The book starts as a pair of young lovers flee their Puritan colony near Springfield, Massachusetts. Running and hiding from pursuers for seven days, they beat their way through forest, bog, brush, valley, and hillside until they came to a burned area.

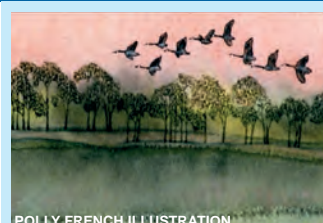
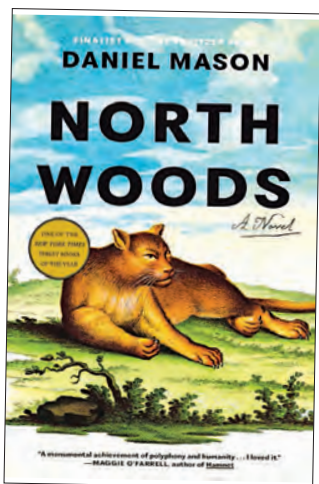
The young man, who seduced the willing young woman from her home, finds a flat rock in a stream, carries it to a clearing, and says “Here.” And here is where the story begins.

The novel tells the story of the 400 years that follow. It is a tale of the land and its forests, meadows, and fields, the animals that live in the landscape, and the yellow house that is built, grows,

is abandoned, and reclaimed. The people that live upon the land and in the house shape the land as it shapes them.

A stunning telling of so many stories: the original young settlers, their marriage vows in the hollow of an oak, and their small house; a woman and her child kidnapped (from Deerfield, maybe?) by righteously vengeful Native people, but left at that house, where that now-old young Puritan bride, who married a “praying Indian” after her husband died, lives. Then, the Nightmaid’s mushroom: murder most justified.

The house is abandoned, then reclaimed by a soldier returning from the French and Indian war because he found the perfect apple growing there, courtesy of one of the murderees. His “pomomania” and his twin daughters build an orchard, name the apples “Osgood’s Wonder,” and grow the



POLLY FRENCH ILLUSTRATION

## WEST ALONG THE RIVER

### KEEPING AN OLD CHRISTMAS OF THE MIND

By DAVID BRULE

**THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE** – For some of us, there is one time of the year when we can put aside worry, forget for a moment this world of strife, forget the vision of jack-booted generals and spineless politicians, and instead, remember the meaning of this season marking the time when we are told the Prince of Peace was born.

So we give ourselves permission to drift back, to gather up visions from the past, back to our childhood again, even for a day or two. In my case I take a full week.

Christmas will not pass me by without me setting aside the time to remember, to be mindful of what we were and still could be.

Sometimes I look into my crystal snowglobe and find the vision of early school days in December. Grade school or high school, but I particularly remember when I sat in old Bill Connelly’s English class where he was trying his best to introduce us reluctantly budding scholars to literature. That’d be me daydreaming, looking out through the tall 1900s-era classroom windows that opened out onto Crocker Avenue, tall maple trees bare, and possibly snowflakes filtering down.

A few days before Christmas vacation, Bill had us reading passages from Washington Irving’s sketchbook, published in 1876, describing the author’s adventures as a Yankee traveler spending Christmas in Old England.

The passages stuck with me, and to this day, to bring back an Old Christmas reminiscence, I call upon the spirit of Mr. Connelly, and I read all that again. Ritual has its place in this season.

I like to conjure up the noisy Christmas Eve parties at the Brule grandparents’ house. (Grandmother Mimi always spelled our name as *Brulé*, in the true French fashion.) That big old beehive of a house on the corner of Second

and L Streets in Turners is gone now, replaced by a cozy Habitat for Humanity cottage. But back then, in their first-floor apartment with vast rooms filled with uncles and aunts and cousins of our extended French-Canadian family, we all gathered to feast on pork pie *tourtières*, *p’tites galettes* fried on the stove top, and impossibly florescent-colored two layer cakes, too sweet for even a ten-year-old to enjoy.

Those were gregarious parties, with those aunts and uncles known for their loud laughter and joking, happy to find themselves together again, nothing quiet or restrained about us back then.

Just before some of us headed out for Midnight Mass at Ste. Anne’s French Church, Gramp Joe would set up his clacking old projector and run some of his Christmas movies. We could accompany the scratchy film and sing all the Christmas carols, following the bouncing ball over the lyrics subtitled on the screen as the images of a solemn choir sang draped in their choral frocks.

Then there was the Christmas vacation sledding down the steep hills and dunes of the sandbank at the corner of Crocker Avenue and High Street, between High and Park Streets. We spent hours zooming down head-first or feet-first on American Flyers. The whole Hill Gang was there, with nothing better to do than shout and sled on those December days.

More often than not we managed to get ourselves invited to Doc Higgins’ house on High Street, where the gracious Mrs. Higgins provided us with cookies and hot chocolate.

Other years on Christmas Eve found us in this house where I now live. This is the home of my maternal grandparents, Abe and Hannah Smith. There were aunts and uncles as numerous as on the French side of the family. This being the see **WEST ALONG** page B2



A postcard sent to the author’s great-uncle around 1913.



# Pet of the Week



CARMODY COLLAGE

## ‘MERIDA’

Merida, a one-year-old calico, boasts a spirited personality that sparks with a touch of feistiness upon first encounters. Yet beneath this initial vigor lies a heart eager for affection and attention. Merida transforms like the changing hues of her coat, melting into a puddle of contentment at the mere prospect of pets and attention.

Change is hard for this cat. She will be very nervous when you first bring her home. You will need to set up a room with a litter box, food, and water. It will take days for this cat to

become comfortable and confident in the new home. This cat will be going home with a behavior plan that will need to be followed in order for everyone to transition successfully.

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).

# Your Holiday Recycling Guide!

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

By AMY DONOVAN

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – During the holiday season, according to the EPA, the average American family disposes of 25% more trash than they usually do. Think about your household: could some of this trash be reduced, reused, recycled, or composted?

When families reduce their holiday trash, they can save money on “Pay As You Throw” town trash stickers or bags, reduce carbon and methane emissions, and protect our environment.

These items are on the “yes” list for household recycling: wrapping paper, gift bags, tissue paper, and paper greeting cards and envelopes that do not contain metallic inks, glitter, or foil, such as foil-lined envelopes. Tape and labels are okay. Remove batteries from singing cards before recycling the cards.

Other recyclable paper items include catalogs, calendars, paper shopping bags, corrugated cardboard, and paperboard. (Here’s a tip: when opening or wrapping gifts, keep a paper bag handy to collect paper recyclables.)

These items are on the “no” list for household recycling: ribbons, bows, tinsel, glossy photo cards, holiday light strings, Christmas tree netting, bubble wrap, paper envelopes lined with bubble wrap, packing peanuts, Styrofoam in any form, plastic shipping envelopes, and the molded plastic used to package toys, electronics, etc. Holiday light strings, power cords, and Christmas tree netting are not acceptable in municipal recycling programs, because these “tangles” get wrapped around the sorting

equipment at recycling facilities.

Recyclables from Franklin County towns are processed at the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility (MRF). For recycling guides, including a colorful yes/ no holiday recycling guide, visit [springfieldmrf.org](http://springfieldmrf.org) and click on “What’s Recyclable.”

**More Advanced Recycling**

Holiday light strings and power cords are accepted for recycling at scrap metal dealers and in the scrap metal dumpsters at town transfer stations. In addition, mail-in programs are available at [holidayleds.com](http://holidayleds.com) and [christmas-light-source.com](http://christmas-light-source.com).

“Pack and ship” stores, such as UPS in Greenfield, accept clean, dry packing materials such as bubble wrap, packing peanuts, and inflatable “air pillow” packaging for reuse.

Plastic bag recycling programs at grocery and retail stores accept bubble wrap, plastic shipping envelopes (no paper), “air pillows,” and other bags or films marked #2 or #4. A list of acceptable items is at [nextrex.com/view/educate#materials1](http://nextrex.com/view/educate#materials1).

Certain batteries – rechargeable, button, and lithium – are accepted for special recycling at transfer stations. Place them in a bag or container and hand it to an attendant.

When the holidays are over, check with your town about Christmas tree recycling. Your tree may be recycled as mulch this spring.

**Creative Reuse**

In addition to recycling, consider wrapping your gifts in reused materials. Gifts can be creatively wrapped in reused wrapping paper, old calendar pages, sheet music, maps or map book pages, paper bags, old posters, wallpaper scraps, fabric, scarves, newspaper, comics, kids’ artwork – or the *Montague Reporter* special wrapping paper edition!

Gifts can be wrapped in cloth bags, reusable decorative tins, reusable shopping bags, or baskets. Or make the wrapping part of the gift: for example, a kitchen towel or oven mitt to hold kitchen utensils or gadgets, or a book wrapped in a scarf.

Wrapped gifts can be tied up with twine and adorned with pine or holly branches, pine cones, shells, or buttons. Last year’s holiday cards can be cut up to reuse as gift cards.

For a fun activity with kids, the online tutorial from Tori Avey at [toriavey.com/homemadehanukkah-wrapping-paper](http://toriavey.com/homemadehanukkah-wrapping-paper) shows how to make beautiful Hanukkah gift wrap with

homemade potato stamps. Grab some reused paper bags, a couple of potatoes, and some acrylic paint or stamp pads. Cut the bag along the side and bottom to make one big sheet. Cut the potatoes in half and have adults carve shapes into the flat potato surfaces – or use cookie cutters to press shapes into half-inch potato slices. When you are all done, you can cut the painted parts off the potatoes and compost the rest!

One of the most important steps for reusing materials is unwrapping gifts carefully and saving gift wrap, gift boxes, ribbons, bows, and gift bags for reuse next year.

**Compost**

Another way to reduce holiday trash is to compost food and paper waste generated from holiday meals. Food scraps might seem small, but they add up: studies by the Department of Environmental Protection show that 22% of the residential trash in Massachusetts is food waste.

Municipal compost programs accept all types of solid food waste including meat, bones, and cheese, plus paper waste such as napkins and paper towels. Unacceptable items include liquids, foil, metal, glass, and plastic. These programs accept compostable material free of charge, though an access permit or entrance fee may be required.

These transfer stations have compost programs: Bernardston, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Deerfield, Greenfield (open to non-residents for a \$5 fee), Leverett, Montague, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Shelburne, Warwick, Wendell, and Whately.

The Solid Waste District sells discounted “Earth Machine” home compost bins and compost pails to District residents. Pricing is \$25 or \$65 depending on the resident’s town. It is not recommended to put meat, bones, or dairy in home bins. For details and pricing, contact the District or see [franklincountywastedistrict.org/Composting](http://franklincountywastedistrict.org/Composting).

For more information, contact the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District at (413) 772-2438 or [info@franklincountywastedistrict.org](mailto:info@franklincountywastedistrict.org), or visit [franklincountywastedistrict.org](http://franklincountywastedistrict.org). MA Relay for the hearing impaired: 711 or 1(800)439-2370, TTY/TDD.

*Amy Donovan is a program director at the FCSWM.*

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

## Environmental Scholarships

**SOMERVILLE** – The Henry David Thoreau Foundation awards collegiate scholarships of up to \$26,000 to eight to 10 students graduating from public or private high schools each year in Massachusetts. These select high school seniors may enroll in any college and university in the world while they major or minor in an environmentally-related field.

Henry David Thoreau Scholars are encouraged to enroll in internships or study abroad to broaden their awareness and understanding of environmental issues. Upon completing their undergraduate de-

grees they became members of the Henry David Thoreau Society.

The Foundation further assists scholarship winners by identifying environmentally-related internships, offering internship stipends, and providing networking opportunities. A sign of success of the Henry David Thoreau Foundation’s mission to foster environmental leadership is the support past scholarship winners provide to present winners.

To learn more about the Henry David Thoreau Scholarships, please visit [thoreauscholar.org](http://thoreauscholar.org). Students have until February 1, 2024, to apply.

## Senior Center Activities DECEMBER 25 TO JANUARY 5

**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 Mondays through Fridays from 8:30 am to 3 p.m. Daily snacks and coffee. Fitness room and pool table open.

**Monday 12/25**

Closed  
**Tuesday 12/26**  
9 a.m. Good For U Workout  
10 a.m. Line Dancing  
11 a.m. Social Stringers

**Wednesday 12/27**

9 a.m. Strength & Conditioning  
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics  
11:30 a.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo

**Thursday 12/28**

9 a.m. Barre Fusion  
10 a.m. Pilates Flow

**Friday 12/29**

9 a.m. Quilting & Open Sew

**Monday 1/1**

9 a.m. Interval  
10 a.m. Seated Dance  
12 p.m. Pitch Group  
**Tuesday 1/2**  
9 a.m. Good For U Workout  
10 a.m. Line Dancing

11 a.m. Social Stringers

**Wednesday 1/3**

9 a.m. Strength & Conditioning  
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics  
11:30 a.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo

**Thursday 1/4**

9 a.m. Barre Fusion  
10 a.m. Pilates Flow

**Friday 1/5**

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.

Lunch available Tuesday through Thursday. For more information please call 863-9357.

**Monday 12/25**

Closed

**Tuesday 12/26**

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
9:30 a.m. Tuesday Knitters  
10 a.m. Zumba Lite  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

**Wednesday 12/27**

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

**Thursday 12/28**

1 p.m. Pitch

**Friday 12/29**

10:15 a.m. Aerobics

11 a.m. Chair Exercise

2 p.m. Chair Dance

**Monday 1/1**

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
10:15 a.m. Outdoor Chair Yoga (weather permitting)

11 a.m. Chair Exercise

1 p.m. Kitchen Club

**Tuesday 1/2**

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
9:30 a.m. Tuesday Knitters  
10 a.m. Zumba Lite

**Wednesday 1/3**

9 a.m. VA Agent  
9:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo

4:15 p.m. Mat Yoga

**Thursday 1/4**

9 a.m. Senior Help (by appointment)

10:30 a.m. Brown Bag

1 p.m. Pitch

**Friday 1/5**

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).

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**BOOK REVIEW** from page B1

to their own devices. But always there is a feeling of the presence of the past, and maybe more.

The trees and plants, wildlife, and landscape are really the main characters, it seems. It is almost an ecological lesson unveiling the interconnectedness of all. We read and watch as chestnut blight decimates the millions of trees that generations of people depended on for food. As the stories move closer to our time, alien pests and invasive species change the landscape further. Emerald ash borer, woolly adelgid killing hemlocks, knotweed, and more invade.

Near the end of the book, a young researcher comes to the area to study spring ephemerals, those flowers who briefly bloom in spring. Her tale will be the last we witness, but the land goes on, as does its story, beyond our time as climate change shapes an altered landscape.

A murder most foul, love, hate – the house grows, falls apart, and is renewed. New residents bring their stories and impact the land. And perhaps ghosts? The author leads us gently to think about what impact we make on the land and it on us, and whether we leave part of ourselves there.

The tales are each rich and each could be its own book. Such wonderfully told stories! Reviewers have been heaping praise on the book. Some compare it to Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2019, and to *The Cloud Atlas* by

David Mitchell from 2004.

I'll quote a few. From NPR: "gorgeous," the *New York Times*: "eccentric and exhilarating," and the *Guardian*: "travels to the limits of what the novel can do." It has been named a Best Book of the Year by *Time*, the *Boston Globe*, NPR, the *Library Journal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. And my sister loved it! A childhood friend I have not seen since about 1965 sent me a copy. Thank you BFF Mary Yoon!

One fun thing to do is ponder whether the author had a specific area in mind when he wrote the book. Although a professor of psychiatry at Stanford in California, he has obviously spent time in our local woods and seems familiar with the landscape, thanking local friends. It kind of feels Ashfieldish. A hill town with an Apple Valley section; the town that grows near the yellow house is Oakfield.

I've always wondered about the cellar holes near where I live, and think of those who built all those stone walls as they cleared the land. And I think of the indigenous people who harvested chestnuts here, perhaps from my four own acres on Chestnut Hill before the blight hit. The past is always present in some way, affecting us subtly or boldly.

I hope you go to your local bookstore – World Eye and others need your patronage – and buy or order this book for yourself or your favorite reader. You, and they, will be thankful!



**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG**

**Mating Disturbed; Dam Failure Drill; Big Crash On Tracks; Trash Truck Smashes Scooterist; Burglary on Griswold**

**Monday, 12/11**

11:06 a.m. Caller reports a female allows her dogs to run off leash down by the canal on Migratory Way. She states this is a wildlife sanctuary and the dogs are disturbing the waterfowl, which are mating.

**Tuesday, 12/12**

7:28 a.m. Caller states he heard a shotgun go off either by Cumberland Farms or the fish lab, he isn't sure which. Area checked; checked with detail officer on duty; negative findings. There is an area for hunting, and it is hunting season. Spoke with caller on Migratory Way; caller advises the noise he heard came from a patch of woods between the bike path and Montague City Road. Unable to locate.

10:49 a.m. Caller states that there is a deer carcass over the embankment, pushed off into the woods, on the side of Cemetery Road. MPD officer and Environmental Police advised.

4:40 p.m. Dam failure drill call from Northfield Mountain.

5:22 p.m. Caller states that there are two teenagers in an older-style Honda smoking with a pipe in the Walgreens parking lot. Referred to an officer.

5:30 p.m. 911 caller from East Main Street states that she was cooking something and the smoke detector went off; now she can't get it to shut off. No smoke or flames. Transferred to Shelburne Control.

**Wednesday, 12/13**

3:07 a.m. Caller states that she went to Nouria and when she was leaving, there was a male videotaping her and a female taking pictures with a flash. Caller states male was wearing a hood and a bandana covering his face. Advised caller they are probably First Amendment auditors; have heard from surrounding towns that they are in the area. Caller understood they have a right to record in public; felt better and didn't want anything further to happen at this time.

3:19 a.m. 911 caller from Third Street states that people are outside the store taking pictures of him and customers; they were asked to leave and shown the "No Soliciting" signs, but refuse to move on. Officer arriving in area. It appears parties are on the public walkway. Officer spoke with caller and put his mind at ease.

9:43 a.m. 911 caller from East Main Street requesting officers to mediate a situation with her neighbor, who she says is threatening her verbally. Advised of options.

11:17 a.m. Assisting Gill PD with a juvenile.

12:44 p.m. 911 caller states she was driving down Turnpike Road and saw a dog on the side, so she

stopped. Small black-and-white dog with orange collar and one eye; no tags. Caller stated she would not bring the dog to the shelter, then hung up and called MSP looking for assistance. MPD officer is on scene. Dog has a tag. Officer will return it to owner.

2:45 p.m. School resource officer advising vehicle operator on Reservoir Road of complaints by local businesses about vehicles driving through their parking lots as shortcuts.

3:08 p.m. 911 caller states that there is a lot of smoke in the Industrial Boulevard area and it smells like burning wood. Shelburne Control advised.

8:02 p.m. Caller from Lake Pleasant Road states that 20 minutes ago someone was walking outside with a flashlight and pointing it into her backyard. Person is gone now. Caller called back to report that she found out it was her boyfriend's brother and he was walking his dog.

**Thursday, 12/14**

12:37 a.m. Caller from Keith Apartments states her neighbor is yelling and banging on the walls. All quiet upon officer's arrival. Officer waited for a while; nothing heard.

7:54 a.m. Caller states that she was hit by another vehicle while pulling out of her driveway on Turnpike Road. Report taken.

8:21 a.m. Food City employee reporting a shoplifting incident that they have on video. Summons issued.

8:37 a.m. 42-year-old male party with active straight warrant located in Peskeompskut Park and arrested.

10:56 a.m. Multiple 911 callers reporting a garbage truck hit a person riding a motor scooter on Fifth Street. No injuries reported. Report taken.

3:13 p.m. 911 caller states that a vehicle is rolled over and on a tree in the brush off Old Northfield Road. Vehicle has its lights on, but no one appears to be around. Registered owner contacted; states his son told him about the vehicle and that he was swerving to hit a deer. His son told him he and his friend are OK, not injured, and walking to his friend's house. Registered owner on his way from Northampton. Rau's requested for tow. Officer advises that the operator has a laceration on his left hand but is refusing medical assistance. Operator is also refusing to provide information on the passenger. Officer sent over an Immediate Threat. Summons issued.

5:32 p.m. Caller states that Publishers Clearing House has been calling him stating that he has won money. They asked him to purchase a money card, and he's afraid it's a scam. Call-

er did not give them any personal information.

5:37 p.m. Caller from East Mineral Road states that a female just came to his house with another male who was "acting sketchy." Female was asking to buy a piece of the barn. Parties left in a blue Toyota Corolla. Caller would just like incident on file at this time.

**Friday, 12/15**

4:40 a.m. Caller from Griswold Street advises she woke up to unknown individuals in her house; she thought it was her kids at first when she was awoken, as she wears glasses. Caller indicated that the individuals fled upon her waking up and moving around. Caller states she located an open window, where an A/C was in, and states the A/C was out of the window; she is thinking that's how access was gained. Caller advises she has kids who are currently sleeping and safe at this time. Caller stated her kids' tablet(s), Playstation, and Xbox were among items stolen. Caller advises parties took off in what appeared to be a black Toyota headed towards Scotty's without its lights on. Officers advised. Officer advises he spoke with RP about incident. Report taken.

On-duty detective will be advised of call nature.

5:47 a.m. Caller reports he struck a deer and has vehicle damage. Caller advises he is in the area of the Hunting Hills farm stand. Deer is deceased. Officer advises passerby on scene to take deer.

**Saturday, 12/16**

12:24 a.m. Caller states there is a dog outside a K Street location that has been barking for the past 15 minutes. Caller concerned for dog's welfare; advises she has knocked several times at the owner's house, as she sees lights on, but no one has come to the door. Officer advises he was able to get someone to the door. Dog back inside building.

1:11 a.m. Caller advises he is at Millers Pub and when he went to his vehicle, he noticed damage on the passenger side. Caller states whoever struck his vehicle is no longer on scene. Officer spoke to caller and bar manager; bar manager advises she will be able to get footage from camera on December 19 or 20.

10:27 a.m. 911 caller from Federal Street states that a dog came onto his property and attacked his chickens. Now the dog owner is in his driveway, and they are arguing. Parties advised of options. Officer requesting animal control officer follow up with involved dog and owner.

10:54 a.m. Employee reporting recent shoplifting incident at Food City. Investigated.

2:11 p.m. Multiple callers reporting a fight outside of Nouria. Fight was over when officers arrived. Parties advised of options, but neither wanted to pursue anything further.

2:58 p.m. Caller from Avenue A states that a woman from another apartment is taking pictures of her from inside her apartment through a window. Officers advised.

4:01 p.m. Report of hit and run accident at Unity Park. Report taken.

9:54 p.m. 911 caller states that she was selling something on Facebook Marketplace; a man showed up and was sketchy, and it made her uncomfortable. She believes he is still in the area, possibly in her yard. Caller feels unsafe and would like officers to check the house/yard. Advised of options.

10:20 p.m. 911 caller reporting multi-car accident about 1,000 feet north of his house on Turners Falls Road. Unsure about injuries or fluids, but can hear multiple people yelling for help. Officers advised; Control requested for EMS. All lines down, over tracks. Eversource contacted. Car over embankment. Roads will need to be blocked from Swamp Road onwards. Officer advises there is a train car that is lit up at this time. Train company advised. Lines moved off tracks. Water company contacted for truck that was on the main. Roseledge requested to pull out truck over embankment with entangled wires. DPW and Water Department contacted per Eversource, who requests all water and sewer locations in the area be marked. Officer advises vehicle removed. Train yard advised that they can continue train traffic at their discretion.

**Sunday, 12/17**

12:14 a.m. Caller states she was at the Five Eyed Fox earlier with her friend and that a party had a baby in the location; they believe a baby should not be in the area. Caller declined seeing police; advised they just want to get away from the area; concerned about child in bar location. Officer advised. Second call reporting same issue; nothing further had changed; caller denies wanting to speak/meet with an officer and states her biggest concern is there is a kid at the bar.

3:35 a.m. Caller states a male is refusing to give her property back to her and claimed he was going to destroy her car by crashing it into a mudhole. Caller advises male also wrestled her purse out of her hands; however, he didn't harm her. Caller currently outside neighbor's house awaiting PD. Officer providing courtesy transport to female, who was advised of options and services.

**TV GUIDANCE**

***The Santa Clauses, Season 2 (Disney+)***



By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – I said in my review of the premiere of this show last December that it could end up being a very nice closing act for this story. Well, to my great surprise, it was not meant to be that. The show ended up doing so well that Disney Plus gave it a second season, which premiered on November 8.

To briefly remind you about this series, some time has passed for Scott Calvin (Tim Allen), the man who accidentally became Santa Claus in the *Santa Clause* movies. He still has the same wife, played by Elizabeth Mitchell, but now he also has two teenaged kids with her.

Santa has to look for a successor in order to retire, and this kind of opens the door for us to see Santas other than the one Scott Calvin replaced. I can tell you some of where that leads, which I have learned from Season 2 previews: a Mad Santa (played by Eric Stonestreet of *Modern Family*) becomes a threat to Scott and his family. He thinks Santa's throne has been taken by a fraud, and he wants it back. When I looked up some more info on the show, I also found out someone called Tech Santa will be a part of it.

In the first episode of the season, we are treated to a glimpse of

how unpopular the Mad Santa was when he was in play. They came after that guy. A trademark item of the story ends up appearing to people all over, and in many places. Readers who have seen at least the first film might have a pretty good guess as to what this is.

As it turns out, Scott's two kids are not exactly ordinary teenagers. That was brought up last season, when it was proven that they are indeed the kind of kids Santa might have to his name. The previews tell us we will see more about that this season – Scott will work on making the whole deal of being Santa literally a family business, which should get interesting, because the kids aren't great at doing stuff that Santa does. The son having a girlfriend might make things rather interesting, too – like I said, these aren't ordinary teenagers. Let's just say that he shows her around the North Pole.

Also, the story still has talking reindeer in it.

As I described, the door gets opened for other Santas to show up. Unfortunately, the elves really should have warned Scott about the Mad Santa. He's not going to be too happy with his elves which are the same ones Scott has. Stonestreet looks like he's going to be great in this role in Season 2!

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# MONTAGUE REPORTER ON THE ROAD

SUBMITTED PHOTO



Turners Falls residents Richard Ruth and Jennifer Bennett carried our September 21 issue to the Temple of Athena, just down the hill from the Temple of the Oracle of Delphi on the slopes of Greece's Mount Parnassus. Going somewhere this winter? Take us with you! Send your photos to [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org).

## WEST ALONG from page B1

Irish side, there were cookies and cakes too, but with more whiskey and cigarette smoke associated with those memories.

We were glad to be together, of course, but the mood was oftentimes more somber, given the strife of recent and continued hard times in the family. But in those days in the village there was also the custom of holding open house, and many of the neighbors, friends of grandfather from the Tool Shop factory, even the clergy, popped in for a glass of Christmas cheer and a smoke.

But the hint of lingering melancholy evaporated on the following day when we all gathered back here for Christmas Day dinner. At its height, this family had swelled to more than 30 people, so we had to tuck into the turkey and fixings in shifts, the uncles and aunts who had to work, even on Christmas Day, got to sit at the kitchen table and be served first.

We children, now numbering around a baker's dozen, sat in the living room at card tables, eating now and then whenever we could pull ourselves away from our new toys.

Other Christmases involved homecomings, especially when our own boy came home from University studies in Paris. On one memorable night of a howling snowstorm, I picked him up at Logan, the last flight out of New York where he had to change planes.

The city was quickly shutting down as we found ourselves driving home on Route 2. The two of us sitting in the Jeep heading west were often the only ones out in the storm. I sang the praises of the four-wheel drive that kept us somehow safe in the accumulating and sometimes unplowed snow. We were driving into a storm that was destined to dump more than two feet of the white stuff on the landscape and keep us snowed in for two days. Too bad it doesn't snow like that anymore.

But the fun began when we opened the front door and stepped into the parlor. In those days we were living with a pack of Siberian huskies, five of them, born when our son was just turning 16. For them, he was a part of the pack. When they realized he had finally come home after four months away, all mayhem broke loose. Coming forth from all corners of the house, the happy dogs piled onto him, leaping and barking.

They eventually overwhelmed him and pushed him onto the floor where all disintegrated into a furry pile of overjoyed snow dogs, all tongues, husky smiles, and wagging tails.

They then treated us to a wolf song howl, filling the house with their wild chorus, inviting us to join in, to welcome their brother home.

All this is to say that it's all right to escape into memories a bit at this time of the year, to remember old friends and family, even those who are no longer with us. Sometimes it's all right to leave behind for a bit this world that's going to hell in a handbasket, to carve out a respite and sanctuary for a while, to do what I do.

Sometimes you can find comfort in the natural world, in the woods along the river, or just on your own street. Give yourself permission to spend time in the presence of family and good friends. You'll see that sometimes things don't go from bad to worse.

I've found that at this time of the year, as the days grow darker, finding sanctuary in Christmas remembrance is an annual practice that works for me, and, keeping this in mind, I hope that it may happen for you.



## Have a question for the editor?

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## #66: Mozzaleum

Interview by J. BURKETT and TROY CURRY

**TURNERS FALLS** – Mozzaleum are a unique and cool Valley band, and so worth checking out. They are a synth-based trio obsessed with horror movies! Their music is hard to describe, but freaks of early industrial, "gore Metal," and druggy USA slasher vibes à la *Sleepaway Camp*, take note. This might be *thee* newest atmospheric/cosmic horror band... and it's happening right now, in our backyard!

Mozzaleum have a record out now on Feeding Tube, and it's really great, so check it out. They like to add fun and memorable theatrics to their live shows, so they are definitely worth seeing live too. They play places like 10 Forward, Mystery Train, and other more unusual venues pretty often. Their shows are always different, but expect spooky and scary dimensions. Keep your eyes open, they might play a haunted house on your block soon!

Luckily they are out of the asylum now – watch out everyone! – so they could finally be interviewed...

**MMM:** Hi guys! What are the origins of Mozzaleum – what was the original vision for the band?

**M:** Our original idea was to provide background music for cocktail hours on cruise ships and yacht clubs, but our friendship emerged from our love of horror movies and Halloween (not the movie, the holiday of course). We do love Michael Myers, though, and especially love John Carpenter soundtracks.

When we first escaped from the asylum, back in 2016, we needed to put our demented energy out into the world to help keep us sane and grounded. Music was the thing that helped the best, and the spookier the better.

**MMM:** How did the name come to be – did you start with "Mausoleum"? Maybe another band sent you death threats?

**M:** The name came about from our love of food. We knew there were other bands with that name, but we thought we'd play with the

spelling, as we were aiming for a kind of Italian soundtrack theme back then.

As Emeril Lagasse would say, "BAM!" Thus Mozzaleum was boiled and sautéed.

**MMM:** Has western Mass played a part in your development? Has it influenced your sound and visions?

**M:** Western Mass has encouraged us with its underground grassroots music scene. It's helpful living in a supportive community of non-professional musicians.

We mainly just play for ourselves, mostly jamming in our dungeon. Hopefully what we find entertaining is fun for the audience.

**MMM:** Was the show on the Amherst Common your first show? Remember that Mystra Ooze fest when you were all dressed like doctors, and Erica climbed on your patient and started eating their entrails? Who came up with that idea?

**M:** The Common show was Erica's idea. We wanted to focus on a theater aspect versus playing music live. We prerecorded our set, then added our creepy dialogue. That gave us freedom to perform and play around, plus with help from friends... I mean bodies (ha!) to slice with our scalpels and power tools.

We like to mix things up, we never do anything twice.

**MMM:** How many shows have you played now?

**M:** We have played 14 shows throughout the Pioneer Valley. We are working on a show right now that is top secret!

**MMM:** You said you guys bond over creepy movies. What are some favorites?

**M:** Movies we love... *The Brood*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Beyond*, *Gates of Hell*, Bobby (the actor), *Dr. Butcher M.D.*, *The Wizard of Oz*.

**MMM:** Thanks for your time! We look forward to your next spooky show...

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Montague Community Television News

# A Library's Future

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

**TURNERS FALLS** – The future of the Carnegie Library was discussed in a public forum on December 13, and if you missed it, the meeting is available to watch on the MCTV Vimeo page. There you will also find the Montague finance committee meeting, the Montague selectboard meeting and dog hearing from December 18, the Gill selectboard meeting and dog hearing from the same day, and the latest GMRSD school committee meeting.

And, as promised, more holiday content is also uploaded. You can catch both Santa and Mr. Drag's recent visits to Turners Falls. (One of them is threatening to not come back next year – I wonder which one!) If you are reading this article,

know that you are welcome and invited to submit your 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.

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 [infomontaguenv@gmail.com](mailto:infomontaguenv@gmail.com) for a Zoom link.

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## A Year of Big (and Good) Changes in Tech

By RYNE HAGER

**TURNERS FALLS** – There is a sort of cycle that happens with many tech companies. Technologist Cory Doctorow has a very colorful term for it that I love – “enshittification” – but it's also known as “platform decay,” and it describes the path most technology platforms take over time: a sort of documented and repeated death spiral meant to pump value in turns from everyone involved in the system.

I've been thinking about this a lot as I remember some of the biggest tech news of the last year. That's because something genuinely magical has been occurring across the world: Regulatory agencies in the United States, European Union, and elsewhere have all been taking legitimate steps to try to encourage honest-to-god market competition, fighting the patently false attempts most big tech companies have enjoyed for the last few decades. It might be just what we need to break the cycle of platform decay, and the benefits to consumers could be incalculable.

The biggest news of the last few weeks, at least when it comes to tech, is the victory of Epic Games over Google in a recent lawsuit, in which the former claimed that the latter's market dominance when it comes to in-app billing is anti-competitive.

If you wanted to distribute a mobile app compatible with Android, the world's biggest mobile platform, you basically had to distribute it through the Google Play Store. And Google has had strict rules about how those apps can bill customers, all of which required giving Google a cut of the sales, ranging from around 15% to 30% depending on various factors.

Apple, of course, has the same rules, but with an extra bummer: while Android-using customers have the freedom of bypassing this whole system by installing applications from any source they want, including competing stores, Apple only allows its customers to get apps from the Apple App Store.

While it's a little confusing to me that Apple got a pass in its lawsuit against Epic while Google, with its far more permissive model, was found liable, I had anticipated that

neither of these lawsuits would go anywhere. But as I think back on the year, this was just the most recent in a long line of unanticipated but consumer-friendly moves, like the EU forcing Apple to adopt the USB Type-C standard on the most recent iPhone, the failure of Adobe's \$20 billion acquisition of Figma, and the EU's “AI Act,” mandating additional transparency and responsibility in how AI is developed and used.

As someone who was sadly used to the government's rubber-stamping every competition-destroying acquisition or subsidy, this newfound regulatory interest in technology has been a joy.

This brings me back to the platform decay described by Doctorow, which has been picking up in recent years, in no small part due to rising interest rates. That's because so-called “monetization,” or figuring out how your product can make money, has traditionally been a secondary consideration in the development of a new technology or product, if you can believe it.

When interest rates were low, investors were happy to see smaller returns over longer schedules and took bigger risks on the projects they gave money to, happily throwing good money after bad in the hopes that even a business that continued to burn cash might someday edge out its competitors, secure a *de facto* monopoly, and eventually turn a profit once it could raise prices or reach the right scale of efficiency. But rising rates forced a more conservative approach and a demand for faster, better returns, and the question of how to make money from a product or platform became immediately critical. This has driven many of these companies to do things like sell more customer data, reduce service quality, raise prices, increase ads, limit third-party integrations, and cut features.

At the end of the day, that's how businesses work: they are systems meant to make money. Just as life can't propagate if it isn't self-sustaining, neither can the economic model, which includes these businesses, produce the quality of living that we enjoy without profit.

But platform decay is a serious issue when decades of consolidation

and rising barriers to market entry serve as real proof that market competition is, at best, difficult to maintain. And there have recently been several significant examples of platform decay causing customer and market harm: the Unity game engine's monetization strategy, Twitter banning users for linking to competing social media platforms, the death of Reddit's third-party applications, and smart home companies like Chamberlain stripping out features customers paid for.

Competitors can't just swoop into the space overnight to capitalize on these mistakes, because of the sheer complexity of many of these technologies. As a great example, there are indications that OpenAI's Chat GPT product is so far ahead of its competitors that some are using the output of that system to try to train their own. It's an imprecise metaphor, but it's sort of like just showing Google's results and your own logo when you've claimed to make your own search engine. (Fun fact: that's basically how DuckDuckGo works, using Bing's results.)

There's a balancing act when it comes to regulating businesses, and for decades, technology has moved too quickly for effective regulation. Remember, the internet was a “series of tubes” according to one member of Congress in 2006, and the 2018 congressional hearings following the Cambridge Analytica scandal were filled with countless embarrassing moments like a senator asking for iPhone tech support from Google's CEO and a basic failure to understand how advertising works as a business model.

I can sympathize: these subjects are hard to understand, and that makes them hard to regulate. But the recent flurry of rulings and legislation gives me some hope that those in a position to regulate are finally learning how technology works, as many of the decisions that have come down will be good for customers and good for competition.

Competition might have the knock-on effect of driving even faster change in the market, but that could be a good thing, too – the status quo favors incumbents, after all, and it's their fault we're in this cycle of decay. (Well, them and the regulatory-capture politics that has pushed regulators to make decisions that favor big companies, but I digress.)

I don't usually do this sort of op-ed type piece, but the schedule this month didn't favor a last-minute holiday gift gadget recommendation that would more typically fit this column. Rest assured, I'll probably have a less incendiary topic next time. No promises, though.

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

## EXHIBITS

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

**Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls:** *Junior Duck Stamps*. See the top entries for the 2023 Junior Duck Stamp competition. This statewide contest, for students from kindergarten to high school, highlights the importance of preserving wetland habitat. Make your own stamp at the investigation station in the Great Hall. Through January 16.

**LOOT, Turners Falls:** *Paintings and Prints* by Amy Chilton, colorful geometric paintings and fine art prints, through February.

**Artspace, Greenfield:** *CREATE: Creativity in Recovery Expressed Artistically Through Our Experience*. Art and writing by the Recover Project's Peer Mentor Group. Through December 23.

**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.

**Looky Here, Greenfield:** *Quilt Show*, textile works by Emily Carris and Rae Heller. Opening reception next Friday, December 29, from 5 to 8 p.m.; closing reception Friday, January 26.

**Erving Library, Erving:** *Patterns and Reflections*, photographs by Phyllis Stone. Through December 28.

**Northfield Mount Hermon Rhodes Arts Center, Gill:** *Bor-*

*rowed Light*, sculptures, prints, ceramics, and photographs by Anna Hepler. January 7 to 18.

**Gallery A3, Amherst:** *Small Wonders*, small-scale works by members of the gallery, through December 30.

**A.P.E. Gallery, Northampton:** *Microworks 23*. Extra-small works by over 120 artists who have shown at the gallery over the past 40-plus years. Through December 22.

**Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:** *Peace, Joy, and Art*, group show by member artists, 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.

**PULP Gallery, Holyoke:** *North-east Deconstructed*, 18 artists showcase their journal pages, through January 7.

**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. *A Gathering: Works from Contemporary Black American Ceramic Artists*, through March 24.

**Springfield Science Museum, Springfield:** *Ways of My Ancestors: We Are Nipmuc. We Are the Freshwater People*. New installation celebrating the diverse culture of the Nipmuc, featuring photography by Scott Strong Hawk Foster and Andre StrongBearHeart Gaines, Jr. Through February 25.

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# Aquí se habla español

Esta es la página mensual en español del *Montague Reporter*. Aquí podrá encontrar cuestiones acerca de la comunidad hispana en el área, eventos de interés, curiosidades, y noticias mundiales en español. Si quiere participar o compartir alguna sugerencia, envíenos un correo electrónico a [spanish@montaguereporter.org](mailto:spanish@montaguereporter.org).



## ¿Cómo se celebran estas fiestas en el mundo hispano?

Por VICTORIA MAÍLLO DE AGUILERA

**GREENFIELD** – Las tradiciones de origen católico son las predominantes en el mundo hispánico, aunque en cada país existen peculiaridades debido a las culturas prehispánicas que existían antes de la llegada de los españoles.

Una de las costumbres extendidas en muchos lugares del mundo hispánico es la de decorar las casas con una Corona de Adviento. Su origen se remonta a la Edad Media. Se colocan coronas hechas con ramas de pino u otros materiales, aunque siempre de color verde y con cuatro velas.

Se enciende una vela cada domingo previo al día de Navidad. Las cuatro velas representan la luz que va a llegar durante la Nochebuena. Las velas son de color morado y rosa. El día de navidad se enciende una vela blanca en el medio que representa que la luz ha llegado. Esta tradición está muy extendida en los hogares católicos de Latinoamérica, aunque no tanto en España.

Otra costumbre común en el mundo hispánico son los *villancicos*. Son canciones populares llamadas así porque primero las empezaron a cantar los habitantes de las villas. Una de las más conocidas es “El tamborilero,” “El burrito sabanero,” o “Los peces en el río.”

Y no podemos olvidarnos de los nacimientos, pesebres o belenes. Ya sean de figuritas hechas de arcilla, madera u otros materiales, o bien los belenes vivientes en los que son personas de carne y hueso los que representan a los personajes como María, José, los pastores, los Reyes Magos, etc. Se cree que estos belenes vivientes tienen su origen en las *Pastorellas* de la Edad Media.

Las comidas típicas de estas fiestas varían mucho de un país a otro o incluso entre las diversas regiones, aunque hay algo que es común en estas fechas y es el chocolate caliente. El chocolate tiene su origen en los mayas y aztecas que lo ofrecían a los dioses y era degustado solamente por sus máximos mandatarios. Los monjes españoles le añadieron azúcar porque el original les parecía muy amargo y ahora dependiendo del lugar se le añade canela, cardamomo o nata montada.

Por último, debo mencionar una tradición que se celebra en muchos países hispánicos y es el equivalente al 1 de abril en Estados Unidos. El 28 de diciembre se celebra el día de los Santos Inocentes, que nació como un evento católico y ahora es simplemente el día dedicado a hacernos bromas los unos a los otros. Incluso los periódicos y las televisiones emiten noticias falsas para sacar una sonrisa a sus lectores.

A continuación les enumero al-



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*Tió Nadal, una costumbre de Cataluña.*

gunas de las tradiciones más peculiares dentro del mundo hispánico:

**Aragón y Cataluña:** El “tío de Nadal” o el “tronco de Nadal” es una tradición que se celebra en Cataluña, la región al nordeste de la península ibérica y su región vecina, Aragón. Se cree que es una tradición pre-cristiana con orígenes en las zonas rurales que celebraban el solsticio de invierno. En sus orígenes simplemente se quemaba el tronco y luego se esparcían las cenizas en los campos. Era el símbolo de los antepasados que volvían a la tierra para que esta fuera más fértil.

Actualmente en Cataluña y Aragón los padres adornan un tronco y lo tapan con una manta. En la parte que se ve del tronco se pinta una cara y a veces visten el tronco con una *barretina*, el sombrero del traje regional catalán y aragonés. Los niños le dan de comer cada día para engordarlo y en Nochebuena golpean el tronco con un palo para que este defeque regalos. Por esta razón se llama a esta acción de pegar al tronco se llama “cagatió,” debido al vulgarismo “cagar” que significa defecar.

La tradición del tronco de Nadal tiene mucha relación con otras tradiciones como el árbol de Navidad, o el *yule log* del Reino Unido.

Fuera de España pocos conocen otra tradición catalana: *el caganer*. Es una figura que se pone en el nacimiento o belén que representa a un joven vestido con el atuendo típico de un campesino catalán, incluida la *barretina*, y con los pantalones bajados en actitud de defecar.

No hay nacimiento catalán que no tenga esta figura escondida y los niños siempre tratan de encontrarla en el belén. Se ha hecho tan popular que se han creado figuritas basadas en el *Caganer* con los rasgos de Messi, Rafa Nadal, Trump, o la Reina de Inglaterra.

**Colombia:** Las festividades empiezan en Colombia con el Día de las Velitas que se celebra el 7 de diciembre y después continúan con la Novena de Aguinaldos que tiene lugar entre el 16 y el 24 de diciembre. Es similar a las posadas de México, pero con este nombre.

Se recrea la búsqueda de alojamiento de María y José. Tiene su origen en la época colonial, en la que la religión católica era el centro de las festividades. Las canciones que se cantan tienen un trasfondo feminista porque fueron escritas para abogar por la educación de las niñas cuando esto era algo impensable.

La combinación clásica de comidas típicas colombianas durante esta época son *la natilla* y *buñuelos colombianos*. La primera es un postre cremoso, similar al flan que lleva leche, harina de maíz, leche condensada y nata. Los segundos son bolitas hechas con masa frita. Llevan harina de maíz y queso rallado.

**México:** Las Posadas son las fiestas que se originaron en México, pero se celebran también en Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua y Costa Rica. El origen es prehispánico, más concretamente azteca.

Los aztecas durante este tiempo del año, del 6 al 26 de diciembre, celebraban las ofrendas al dios de la guerra, Huitzilopochtli. La llegada de los españoles hizo que esta costumbre se convirtiera en las que se celebraban en la religión cristiana.

Ahora las festividades empiezan el 16 de diciembre y terminan en Nochebuena. Se llaman Posadas porque quieren evocar a María y José tratando de encontrar una posada para pasar la noche. Las familias más tradicionales rezan cada día juntas, aunque en realidad ahora es una tradición festiva y pagana.

Las personas se reúnen cada

noche en la casa de un familiar o un vecino que prepara comida especial de Navidad, se cantan villancicos, se bebe y se baila. No puede faltar cada noche la típica *piñata* llena de regalos pequeños, dinero y dulces para los pequeños de la casa.

En Nochebuena se adornan las casas con *flores de Pascua*, el nacimiento con las figuritas representando el belén y se come pozole, ensalada de manzana, tamales y es típico beber el ponche de frutas, con y sin alcohol.

**Honduras:** En este país existe una de las más curiosas tradiciones, se llama el “Robo del Niño” y es esencialmente eso. Una persona roba y esconde la figura del niño que está en el pesebre municipal y deja una carta diciendo en qué día va a ser devuelto a la cuna. Ese día se celebra una fiesta en honor del niño que ha aparecido.

**Guatemala:** En el país centroamericano se celebran también las Posadas, aunque terminan el 23 de diciembre. La particularidad es que en Guatemala se celebran *procesiones* en estos días con estatuas de José y María que van de casa en casa por el vecindario visitando los altares adornados para la ocasión. Los dueños de la casa reciben a los que llevan las andas y cantan las canciones navideñas acompañados de instrumentos musicales como la marimba, tambores, flautas, botellas de cristal y conchas de tortugas.

Luego se bebe chocolate caliente, o ponche de frutas y se comen tamales y tostadas.

**Venezuela:** “La Patinata” es una celebración típica de Venezuela, que se hace en las avenidas y calles que se cierran para la ocasión desde el 6 de diciembre hasta el día de Navidad. Adultos, jóvenes y niños

llevan sus patines, o bicicletas y hay grupos de música amenizando el ambiente. Es una ocasión especial para que los niños disfruten de los regalos recibidos.

Tuvo su origen en las Posadas pero se ha convertido en este evento tan peculiar que se hace solamente en Venezuela. Actualmente y por motivos de seguridad, las patinatas se hacen en urbanizaciones o recintos cerrados.

**España:** No hay 22 de diciembre en España sin los cánticos de los niños de San Ildefonso que cada año llevan la suerte a algunos de los que han comprado la famosa “lotería de Navidad.”

El primer sorteo se celebró en 1812, curiosamente el año de la primera constitución española. Se llamó en aquel entonces Lotería Moderna, y se lleva celebrando desde entonces. La lotería nació como una idea del gobierno para conseguir fondos destinados a la Guerra de la independencia contra las tropas de Napoleón. Los números de los décimos en papel y los bombos con las bolas de los números y los premios no empezó hasta 1913.

La tradición de cantar los premios es más antigua, ya que la trajo el rey Carlos III en 1771 desde Nápoles, su lugar de origen.

**Puerto Rico:** “Las Parrandas” son la tradición de estos días en el país caribeño. Se conocen también como asaltos navideños. No es una tradición religiosa, sino secular. Grupos de amigos o familias se organizan y van a casa de otros amigos o familiares con música en vivo o con aparatos de música. Los instrumentos suelen ser los autóctonos de la isla como maracas, el cuarto, y el güiro. Las canciones no siempre son religiosas, se canta desde folklore popular hasta el rap más moderno.

Se organizan así fiestas espontáneas donde se come pernil, pasteles y se bebe *coquito*. El coquito es una bebida cuyos ingredientes principales son la leche de coco, el ron, la vainilla y otras especias al gusto.

Las parrandas se empiezan a celebrar antes de la navidad y continúan hasta después de la fiesta de los Reyes Magos.

Las Parrandas se celebran también en algunos municipios de *Cuba*.

**San José de Costa Rica:** En la capital de Costa Rica se celebra el “avenidazo.” Esta tradición es relativamente moderna ya que se empezó a celebrar en 1970. Consiste en cerrar al tráfico la principal avenida de San José y recorrerla paseando y mirando los escaparates de las tiendas iluminados y decorados para las fiestas. Ahora hay música en vivo, actividades para los niños y puestos de comida ambulante.

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# 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, DECEMBER 21**

Academy of Music, Northampton: *Sweetback Sisters' Country Christmas Sing-Along Spectacular*. \$ 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Witch, Native Sun*. \$ 8 p.m.

Hawks & Reed: *Jabbawaukee, Dead tribute*. \$ 8:30 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The Valley Moonstompers Society, Bill Carbone*. \$ 8:30 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *The Happy Valley Gas Juggers*. No cover. 9 p.m.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22**

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Mosquinha, Owen Manure, La Boca Del Lobo, Evander Curbelo*. \$ 8 p.m.

Shutesbury Athletic Club: *Wildcat O'Halloran*. No cover. 8 p.m.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: Screening, *Gremlins* (1984), with *Synthesizer Santa* before the movie. \$ 8 p.m.

The O's Music Bar, Sunderland: *Gloons, Brujo*. \$ 9 p.m.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23**

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

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Princess Kikou, Allouette Bateau*. \$ 8 p.m.

Hawks & Reed: *Seth Glier's Holiday Sing-A-Long*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Parlor Room, Northampton: *The Nields Holiday Show*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Dr. Strangelove & the Rockettes, The Maladaptive, Padded Waltz, Mike Martin*. \$ 8:30 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27**

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Wes Brown & Friends*. No cover. 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29**

10 Forward, Greenfield: *2-Step Night, Live Country Karaoke*. \$ 7 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Shokazoba New World Funkestra, Kae Sharp*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Progression Brewing, Northampton: *Lich King, Problem With Dragons, PWRUP*. \$ 8 p.m.

Parlor Room, Northampton: *Melissa Ferrick*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Shutesbury Athletic Club: *Fortified Blues Band*. No cover. 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30**

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Pre-New Year's Eve Dance Party with Video DJ Ryan Short*. No cover. 7 p.m.

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

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Ice Rasta, DialogTalk, feardotcom, Aoife, Jess xo*. \$ 8 p.m.

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

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Space Camp, Mal Devisa,*

*DJ Tallgirl, Kashmere Champagne, Leora Citrine*. \$ 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**

First Night, Northampton (22 venues): *Soul Magnets, Pangears, Taproots, Lexi Weege & JJ Slater, Mal Devisa, Padded Waltz, The Fawns, Mary Lambert, Aisha Burns, Spouse, ReBelle, The Greys, Thistle, Ian St. George Band, Film & Gender, Gaslight Tinkers, The Nields, Masala Jazz, Ciarra Fragale, Lonesome Brothers, Vimana, bobbie, The Leafies You Gave Me, Carrie Ferguson, Wildcat O'Halloran, Expandable Brass Band, Original Cowards, Ray Mason, Rocking Puppies, Father Hotep, Loculus & Magick Lantern, Appalachian Still, Hedgewitch, Pamela Means, and MANY more*. See [firstlightnorthampton.org](http://firstlightnorthampton.org). \$ Starts at 1 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Kids' New Year's Eve*, free, 7 p.m., *New Year's Eve*, 9 p.m.

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

10 Forward, Greenfield: *New Year's Eve Party with VNRBL, Bux Wild, DJ Hello*. \$ 9 p.m.

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

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

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 5**

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Black Pyramid, The Worst, Craetor*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 6**

ToriTown, Holyoke: *Bochek, Bedside Manor, Magick Lantern, Perennial*. \$ 6:30 p.m.

Next Stage Arts, Putney, Vermont: *DiTrani Brothers, Jason Scaggs*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Hutghi's at the Nook, Westfield: *Fred Cracklin, Videodrome, Gloons*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 7**

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Barbicide, Solgyres, O-Rama,*

*Rednave, True Jackie*. \$ 3 p.m.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10**

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Falltown String Band*. No cover. 8 p.m.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 11**

The Drake, Amherst: *Lonnie Holley, Mourning [A] Blkstar*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 12**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Young Shakespeare Players present The Tempest*. Free. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Roger Clark Miller*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Abby Volta, LOEN, Sonum Unum*. \$ 9:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 13**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Young Shakespeare Players present The Tempest*. Free. 1 and 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Warm to Close, Tysk Tysk Task, Necralant, Amulette*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 14**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Young Shakespeare Players present The Tempest*. Free. 1 p.m.

Hawks & Reed: *ZydeGroove, Planet Zydeco*. \$ 1 p.m.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 19**

Next Stage Arts, Putney, Vermont: *Lonnie Holley, Mourning [A] Blkstar*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 20**

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Opel, Rev. Dan and the Dirty Catechism*. \$ 8 p.m.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 26**

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *PWRUP, Mega Infinity, Skappository, Double Star, Green St. Fiends*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 27**

Nova Arts, Keene: *All Feels, Chodus, Sunset Electric*. \$ 7 p.m.

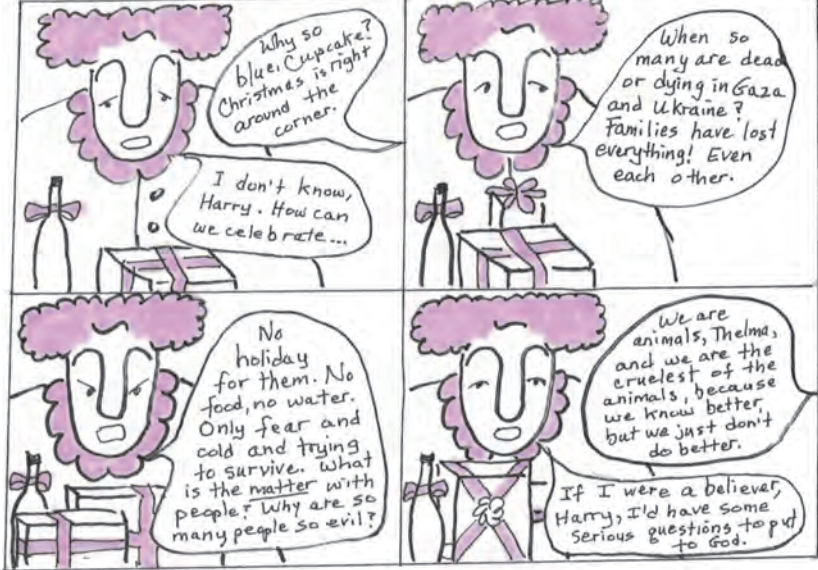
Stone Church, Brattleboro: *The Suitcase Junket, Cloudbelly*. \$ 8 p.m.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 6**

The Drake, Amherst: *Jon Spencer*. \$ 8 p.m.

OVER THE HILL

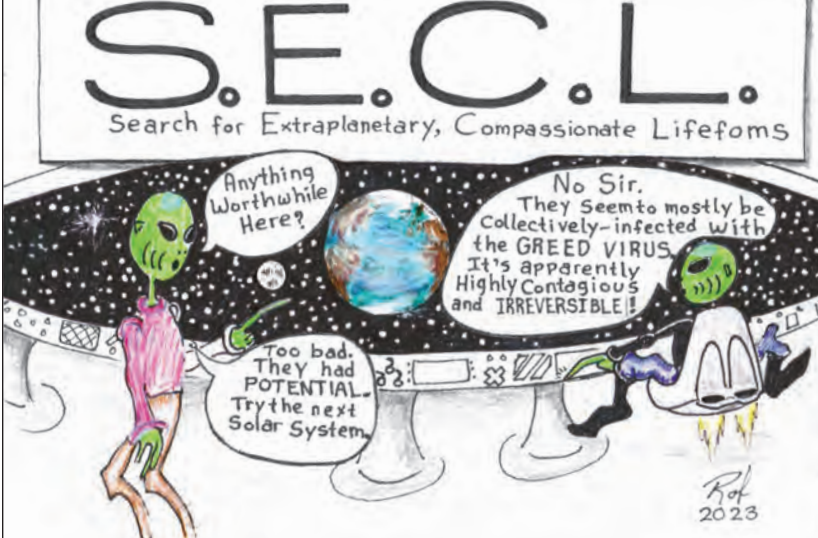
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**looking forward...**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16**  
The Drake, Amherst: *Ted Leo*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24**  
Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *An Evening With the Cowboy Junkies*. \$ 8 p.m.

**SAT-SUN, JUNE 15-16**  
The Cheshire Fairgrounds, Swanzey, NH: *Northlands Music & Arts Festival* feat. *Goose, Greensky Bluegrass, moe., Dopapod, Sierra Hull*, and more TBA. See [northlandslives.com](http://northlandslives.com).

**FRI-SUN, JUNE 21-23**  
Franklin County Fairgrounds, Greenfield: *Green River Festival* feat. *Cake, Fleet Foxes, Gregory Alan Isakov, Mdou Moctar, Joy Oladokun, Dakhabrakha*, and more. See [greenriverfestival.com](http://greenriverfestival.com).

**FRI-SUN, JUNE 28-30**  
MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Solid Sound Festival* feat. *Wilco, Jason Isbell, Nick Lowe, Iris Dement, Dry Cleaning, Ratboys, Mary Halvorson, Wednesday, Soul Glo, Horse Lords*, and more. See [solid-soundfestival.com](http://solid-soundfestival.com).

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GIFTS from page B1

a winner for someone who likes historical detective fiction.

Another book about a revered literary figure is Anna Funder's *Wifedom: Mrs. Orwell's Invisible Life* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2023). This is a biography with occasional fictional passages to fill in where information is missing, as is often the case.

Anyone who has read a biography of George Orwell will know that he married a woman called Eileen O'Shaughnessy, but won't have learned much about her. She's a shadowy figure who appears briefly in biographies when she married in 1936 and again in 1945, when she died, aged 39, during gynecological surgery. The most illuminating insight on her hitherto came from Orwell's friend the novelist Anthony Powell, who said he thought she had a lot to put up with.

How right he was! She abandoned her M.A. studies in London to move to a chilly country cottage because Orwell thought he could write there. When he went to fight in the Spanish Civil War she followed, took care of him when he was wounded, and worked for the Independent Labour Party. When they were being hunted down, she got them out of the country.

She was with him in Marrakech while he recuperated from tuberculosis, and heeded his plea that he needed to sleep with a Moroccan woman so he could compare the experience to that of sleeping with Burmese women when he had worked in Burma. This was only one of Orwell's sexual sorties.

Author Anna Funder sees his behavior and his biographers' neglect of Eileen as the work of patriarchy, presenting Eileen as the talented, stoical wife who improved her husband's life and work at great personal cost. It's a book for anyone who is interested in literary history – or feminist history. Readers will learn much about Orwell – not all good.

Do you have a cook on your Christmas list? Cooks love cookbooks and the one to go for this year is *Start Here: Instructions for Becoming a Better Cook* (Alfred A Knopf, 2023). It's Sohla El-Waylly's first book, and she starts big – 578 pages, with lots of information, lots of detail, gob-smacking pictures, and interestingly luscious recipes.

Her aim, she says, is "a one-step culinary school in a book (without years of inescapable debt)." Each chapter explores an essential topic, and they are all thorough, giving useful tips while explaining the



essential science of foods and what happens when you cook them. This is a book for any cook – the experienced aficionado as well as the beginner – and the perfect gift for anyone who wants greater control in the kitchen.

Plus it has lots and lots of recipes. Some are basic: alternate ways of scrambling eggs or making meringue, for example. But many are mouth-wateringly different. Baked White Beans with Dates or Seared Scallops with Pepperoni, Sungolds and Corn are recipes to send readers straight to the stove. For desserts there's White Chocolate Macadamia Mousse, Twice-Baked Caramelized Cashew Baklava, and the Bitter Mocha Honeycomb Over Buttery Sky Flakes – an oozy chocolate temptation if ever there was one.

For all the seriousness of her topic, El-Waylly writes in a spritely, often amusing, and always accessible style.

Like cooking, gardening can be a hobby as well as a domestic necessity. And also as in cooking, success often depends on understanding the science that underpins it. Typically, gardeners appreciate the botany of flowers and vegetables. But compost? What's going on there?



It turns out that compost heaps and bins are not just useful dumps for lawn clippings and vegetable peelings, but veritable laboratories. In *Compost Science for Gardeners: Simple Methods for Nutrient Rich Soil* (New Society Publishers,

2023) Robert Pavlis says that the secret to great flowers and more vegetables is not fantastic seeds or starter plants, nor even whether you plant them in the sun or the shade and give them the water they need. The answer is the soil. "Get the soil right and you can grow anything that is hardy in your location,"

he writes. And the secret of getting the soil right is compost. The gardener on your Christmas present list knows this, of course, but quite likely doesn't know all the dark secrets of this revered product and what it likes to make it perfect for the plot that is being gardened.

The author, a Canadian gardener responsible for six acres of botanical gardens featuring 3,000 plants, has a lot to say on compost: 200 detailed pages. There just has to be something for every gardener in his book.

The great thing about these books is that they are not alone. There's thousands and thousands of them out there. Truly, something for everyone.



# AN EDITORIAL

## (150 Years Ago This Week)

**TURNERS FALLS** – The greatest fun we know of is running a country newspaper. It's something that any fellow can do, if he has only a mind to it. But that is where a good deal of the fun comes in – they haven't all got the *mind* to try.

On a city daily the poor quill slave has nothing to do but follow a beaten track, with every duty chalked on a diagram on his desk, following his duty as faithfully, with about the same results, in a measure, as the horse on a well-elevated treat mill. Of course the horse makes it lively for the machinery, but remains in the same spot at night as on that which he stood in the morning.

These daily paper scribblers are looked upon with dread, and the rural people who think they can run a country paper well enough, would not even dare confess that they had ability enough to sweep out a well regulated city daily office.

We speak thus from years of observation, and a vast experience. Many and many a time have we been reminded that ours is a very good little paper for a country village. Exactly. But they do not think of the fact that one half of the dailies of the country, do not command the talent which shines through the REPORTER. A half dozen of the writers on this paper have been writing for the *Press*, for a living, from ten to thirty years, and having passed through all shades of newspaper life, why they are now scribbling for pleasure and for notoriety for a little country newspa-

per is "something which no fellow can find out."

But it is not exactly what we are driving at. Most people who imagine that the man who edits a country paper is a kind of a one-horse concern, find fault if he is not more than a whole team – a huge livery stable.

In a country printing office, as elsewhere, the boy is more likely than not to "slip up" at any moment, get sick when he has the most to do, and all his chores have to be shouldered by the iron man who was got up expressly for a country editor.

Next a type setter gets sick. Then that situation has got to be filled, by the same "Old Infallibility" that took up the devils' own work where the boy left off.

Then the pressman goes the way of the rest – he's human, too, – but the whole machinery has got to be kept up to time as usual.

When the poor cuss of an editor gets about enough on his hands to keep him employed seventeen hours out of the twenty-four, about fifty people come marching into the office, Indian file, and want to get what it would take three weeks to print, turned out in good shape in half-an-hour's time, and when they are assured that such a thing would be impossible, they seem to be perfectly disgusted with nature for not endowing the fellow who presides over a country newspaper with the powers of a Hercules or an Atlas.

*The Turners Falls Reporter,*  
Wednesday, December 17, 1873



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