

The Montague Reporter

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

DECEMBER 7, 2023

State Strikes Down Solar Zoning Bylaw In Shutesbury

By SARAH ROBERTSON

SHUTESBURY – Local bylaws that are overly restrictive of solar energy development are at odds with Massachusetts’s goal of reducing carbon emissions, and are therefore unlawful, according to state attorney general Andrea Campbell’s office. The towns of Wendell, Shutesbury, and Pelham have all received negative rulings this year from the state’s highest legal office over attempts to limit the location and size of solar energy projects.

These bylaws are the products of several years of revision as the small towns try to keep pace with the rapid development of solar infrastructure while addressing concerns about deforestation and public safety.

“We’re forcing communities to fight to defend their own bylaws,” state representative Aaron Saunders told the *Reporter*. “We risk providing a roadmap to developers to steamroll small communities, and there’s nothing that these small towns can reasonably do, oftentimes, to meaningfully participate in the proceedings.”

The AG’s rulings struck down bans on stand-alone battery storage systems in Wendell and Shutesbury on the grounds that they “facilitate see **SOLAR** page A4

GILL SELECTBOARD

Gill Discusses Future of Police Amid Advice to ‘Grow or Die’

By KATE SAVAGE

The main focus of Monday’s Gill selectboard meeting was the long-term future of the town’s police force.

“Everybody’s going to have to grow or die,” said Mike Edwards, from the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management. “It’s unfortunate, but that’s the reality.”

The Collins Center is a state agency based out of the University of Massachusetts Boston, with a mission to “help governments work better.” Edwards came to the meeting to discuss grants to study the feasibility of police regionalization, in which multiple towns join their budgets together to sustain one police force.

Over the past few years, Leverett and Wendell reached an agreement about sharing police services, as did Bernardston and Leyden. Gill currently only has two full-time officers – both of whom may be nearing retirement – and about three part-time officers. Edwards cited increased training, more administrative work, and difficulty recruiting new officers as reasons small towns are struggling

see **GILL** page A5

THE WISHING SEASON



Sadie the dog looks longingly either at Santa’s mailbox in Turners Falls, or past it at squirrels. Saint Nick is scheduled to meet his followers at 6:30 p.m. this Friday at Spinner Park during the “It’s a Wonderful Night” downtown event.

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Internal Candidate Tapped for Top Town Job

By JEFF SINGLETON

The Montague selectboard indicated on Monday night that it plans to elevate assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey to the position of town administrator. If Ramsey is appointed by a formal vote in the coming weeks, without a search process, he will replace current town administrator Steve Ellis who will be vacating the position at the end of June.

Ellis said that he had spoken with town counsel and was told Montague was not legally required to fill the position with a formal search.

Ramsey was hired as Montague’s interim town planner in 2011 while he was still a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts Master of Regional Planning program, and became the permanent planner six months later. In October 2022 he became assistant town administrator (ATA), a new position created by a town meeting vote that May.

Ramsey owns a home in Turners



Montague assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey has been offered a promotion.

Falls and his children attend the local public schools, he told the *Reporter*.

The discussion took place under an agenda item titled “Town Administrator Succession and Transition Plan.” Selectboard chair Rich Kulewicz thanked Ellis for giving the

board time to consider a succession plan, and said he was about to present his “thoughts” on such a plan.

“I can jump in,” Ramsey said, “and take the opportunity to publicly acknowledge that I am interested, see **MONTAGUE** page A6

High School Sports Week: Warming Up!



DAVID HOITT PHOTOS

Left: Franklin Tech’s Cordelia Guerin heads to the hoop as Kaitlin Trudeau sets a pick to hinder Greenfield defender Taylor Bergeron. The Eagles hosted the Green Wave on Monday for an early-season scrimmage in Turners Falls.

Right: Lea Chapman goes up for jumper, flanked by Greenfield’s Carly Blanchard and Amber Bergeron.



Candle Baron Estate Could Become Home To Hundreds

By JEFF SINGLETON

LEVERETT – The property at 6 Amherst Road in Leverett, on the town’s border with Amherst, was once the location of a commune called Ant Rockies, one of several in the neighborhood that survived into the 1980s. The residents paid \$700 per year for rent and lived in an “unsafe house,” according to a 2015 article in this newspaper, with “no electricity, water from a hand-pumped well, and candles for light.”

The property is now part of an 83-acre estate combining 20 adjoining parcels created by former Yankee Candle owner Michael Kittredge II, who first purchased a lot on Juggler Meadow Road in 1984. The estate includes a performance stage, an indoor tennis court, two barns housing antique cars, a spa and sauna building, and a nine-hole golf course, among other amenities. After the elder Kittredge’s death in 2019 the properties – 17 in Leverett and three in Amherst – passed to his son Michael “Mick” Kittredge III.

The estate is the largest property taxpayer in Leverett, and has annually challenged the town’s assessment, which appears to be \$14.3 million, before the state appellate tax board. Last year 60 acres of the property were put on the market for \$23 million, as well as the former Ant Rocky’s parcel, a “guest house,” for another \$3.99 million.

The properties have not sold, and last month a development manager working for the Kittredge see **ESTATE** page A8

LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

Residents Hazy On Orientation Toward Making More Housing

By GEORGE BRACE

At Leverett’s selectboard meeting Tuesday night, the town’s comprehensive planning committee provided late-breaking news of a proposal to build “hundreds” of housing units on the Kittredge estate at Juggler Meadow and Amherst roads. The board also voted to submit an application to discontinue Rattlesnake Gutter Road as a county road, and took action on an unresolved dog complaint.

Comprehensive planning committee (CPC) member Tim Shores, scheduled to give an update on progress toward creating a comprehensive plan for development in Leverett, was asked to report on the proposal to build hundreds of housing units on the Kittredge estate (see article, Page A1).

Shores said a developer had reached out to planning board member Tom Ewing in mid-November with the idea, but that a planning board meeting on Monday was the first public discussion of the matter. Shores said the CPC had “no facts” to work with at the present time, but

see **LEVERETT** page A7

Which Neighbor Will You Buy A Montague Reporter Gift Subscription For This Year?

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The Montague Reporter

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August 2002

Great Work, Sarah!

State Testing Finds High PFAS Levels in Leverett

By SARAH ROBERTSON
LEVERETT – A number of private wells in Leverett are contaminated with potentially dangerous levels of toxic man-made chemicals, according to test results collected by the state Department of Environmental Protection

Emerging PFAS Concerns Complicate Regional Sludge-Composting Efforts

By SARAH ROBERTSON
FRANKLIN COUNTY – Efforts to compost sludge from wastewater treatment plants are being complicated by the discovery of PFAS in the sludge. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is currently testing for PFAS in sludge from several plants in the region. The DEP is also testing for PFAS in the water used to irrigate crops with sludge. The DEP is currently testing for PFAS in the water used to irrigate crops with sludge. The DEP is currently testing for PFAS in the water used to irrigate crops with sludge.

Towns Debate Plan to Address Pollutants at Shared School

By SARAH ROBERTSON
NEW SALEM – A camera attack on the well at Swift River School after this month found a crack in the well's casing, and some Wendell and New Salem officials believe it suggests surface contamination, likely from groundwater, could be a source of PFAS chemicals in



Physical education teacher Sadie Graham teaches sixth graders line dancing in the Leverett Elementary School gym.

Letters to the Editors

Twenty-Five Miles for Palestine

As a member of the local Jewish community, and as someone who works with children here in Great Falls, I carry a deep concern for the well-being of children and all civilians in Gaza, and have been heartbroken to learn that over 6,000 children have been killed in the ongoing military bombardment by Israel following the tragic Hamas-led attack on October 7. I believe that every life is sacred, and that Israel's US-funded military response does not serve the interests of Israeli Jews or Palestinians, and will not lead to lasting security or freedom in the region. The children in Gaza who survive the current bombing, displacement, and inhumane living conditions will be left with unfathomable loss, trauma, and ongoing oppression in the context of Israeli occupation and apartheid. Furthermore, Israel's escalated military bombardment has sparked a rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia worldwide. History shows us that only collective action, global solidarity, and diplomacy can secure human rights for all. For these reasons, I invite others to join me in marching 25 miles for Palestine – the length of Gaza – this Sunday, December 10 from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., beginning at Rep. McGovern's office in Northampton and culminating outside Senator Warren and Markey's offices in Springfield. Folks may choose to attend a single teach-in at a set stopping point, sign up to march for a specific segment, or take action steps with us virtually. I invite you to join me in whatever way you can, alongside a broad coalition including Jewish Voice for Peace, to embody grief, hope, and love together, to march in solidarity with displaced Palestinians, and to take steps towards a world that holds space for our shared humanity and freedom. Another world is possible. Please join us in calling for a permanent ceasefire now! If you are interested in participating, you can find out more and register at linktr.ee/25milesforpalestine, or follow us on Instagram @25milesforpalestine. See you in the streets!

Kaia Jackson
Turners Falls

Keller: 'New Leaf' is Not Green

A zoning bylaw of the town of Wendell prohibited "Stand Alone Battery Energy Storage Facilities." The town bylaw has been rejected by a Massachusetts Attorney General ruling. State authorities are grappling with how to replace fossil emissions with what they consider to be clean peak standards, and to safely provide alternative energy sources. (According to Mass General Law Ch. 40A S. 3: "reasonably necessary for the public convenience or welfare," and according to M.G.L Ch.164: "with minimum impact on the environment at the lowest possible cost.") The state thereby is accepting responsibility for reducing dependence upon carbon-producing production in seeking what they deem to be green or renewable producers of energy. The "New Leaf" Stand Alone Battery Storage Project has been proposed for mid-town. It is neither green nor renewable. Activity to stop the facility, and others of the same ilk, is based upon diverse issues. One major fact is that the lithium-ion batteries only receive electrical charge directly from an existing powerline grid, which transmits energy sources produced elsewhere. As documented in the New Leaf proposal, that grid is seasonally provided with 45% to 60% gas and 30% to 40% nuclear – clearly not alternative nor green. Borrego/ECP are project developers, with corporate offspring "New Leaf" established as an independent company for "Renewable Energy." Battery storage may more likely be considered green by some if it exists in conjunction with solar, or producers of energy like hydro or wind. Batteries that consume directly off the grid are not renewable. Stand Alone Battery projects are environmentally unacceptable, here or elsewhere. Instead, there are solar installations on acreage in proximity to power lines which could be retrofitted to accommodate battery storage. At that point there remain the troubling issues of batteries themselves, with a life of 20 years after which there is much trash, toxicity, flammability, and overly-challenging infrastructure accommodations. If the state of Massachusetts directs us towards solar battery systems, there are unused paved areas that yearn for updated function. Clear cutting oxygen-producing environments and paving those acres is not an option. Economic assessments must include all environmental costs, which includes what is safe, healthy, and progressive.

Nina Keller
Wendell

Thank You to Santa...

Despite a very busy schedule, Santa was able to stop at Greenfield Savings Bank on Saturday, December 2, much to the delight of young and old. Sincere thanks to the Jolly Old Elf and hopefully he might be able to fill some wishes.

Hope to see you next year, Santa! Thank you from GSB, 282 Avenue A in downtown Turners Falls.

Linda Ackerman
Assistant Vice President,
Greenfield Savings Bank

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PHONE: (413) 863-8666
EMAIL:
editor@montaguereporter.org
features@montaguereporter.org
ads@montaguereporter.org
bills@montaguereporter.org
circulation@montaguereporter.org
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LOCAL BRIEFS

Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Montague's **winter parking ban** is in effect from December 1 to April 1. Outside of downtown Turners Falls and the Patch, parking isn't allowed on public roads or streets between 1 and 5 a.m.

Special rules apply to the Patch and downtown Turners – everything from Bob's Auto Body on Avenue A, L Street, Park Street, and Hillside Avenue north to the canal and river. Overnight street parking is allowed there, except during declared winter emergencies. See www.tinyurl.com/monty-park for more information.

The *Montague Reporter* will be selling our special **Wrapping Paper Edition at two holiday events** this weekend.

There's a holiday popup shop at the Brick House (24 Third Street, Turners Falls) this Friday from 4 to 8 p.m. as part of the downtown "It's a Wonderful Night in Turners Falls" events, continuing on Saturday afternoon. We will also be at the Wendell Holiday Craft Fair in the old Wendell town hall on Friday evening from 4 to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Stop by and say Hi, and pick up some of these cool papers to wrap your holiday gifts with!

Sadie's Bikes in Turners Falls will hold its eighth **Gumball Machine Takeover** this Friday during "It's a Wonderful Night," postponed by sickness from last week. The featured artist is Fay Strongin, and the event runs from 5 to 8 p.m. with seltzer and refreshments.

The shop has some other non-bike offerings like cigar box amplifiers, electrical insulator nightlights, and handmade art. Owner Nik Perry says, "Next year we will be rolling out new models of a lot of our crowd favorites as well as some less expensive, refurbished, adult bikes. We're here all winter and have open hours Wednesday through Saturday." Find Sadie's at 83 Canal Street.

Nik also has a gumball machine at the Upper Bend cafe at 112 Avenue A, and next Thursday, December 14 from 4 to 7 p.m. that ma-

chine will be taken over by Greenfield Community College student artists. "Bring your quarters and load up on student-made stocking stuffers," the cafe writes. "Everyone's a winner..."

This Friday, December 8 from 12:15 to 12:45 p.m., the **GCC Community Chorus** will present an informal Holiday Concert in the college's main lobby, with carols, traditional music, and pieces by William Byrd and G. F. Handel. The audience will be invited to join in on several numbers, and light refreshments will be available. Admission is free.

Anyone interested in singing next semester is invited to attend or to contact director Margery Heins at heins@gcc.mass.edu. Second-semester rehearsals begin in early February.

The LAVA Center has organized a **Poetry Crawl** around Greenfield this Friday, December 8. Start at 6 p.m. at 10 Forward with Soanell Esguerra and Wren Hannah; make it over to the LAVA Center by 7 p.m. for words by Nina Gross and Orice Jenkins, then head over to Looky Here by 8 p.m. for Sadie Dupuis, Catherine Besner, and Sarah Wisby.

The Leverett Village Co-op's Third Annual **Holiday Baskets Silent Auction** is open for bidding now through December 20. This year's themes include Bird Watching; Gardening; Happy Dog; Body Care; Hidden Hill Goat's Milk Delights; Marvelous Mushrooms; Eat, Drink, Have Fun – Go Co-op, Stash Sisters Quilting; Seasonal Succulents; and a basket filled with original works by local artists from Leverett Crafts & Arts.

Bid as often as you like, through 7 p.m. on the 20th; winners will be contacted on the 21st to arrange pickup. All items were donated by generous supporters, and sales benefit the Co-op. Call (413) 367-9794 for more information.

This Saturday, December 9 at the Leverett Library author Christian McEwen reads from her book, *In Praise of Listening*, at 1 p.m.

McEwen explores the idea of listening as an extended metaphor for openness and receptivity.

The United Church of Bernardston's monthly **Second Saturday Roast Beef Supper** is up and running again, with the next one taking place this Saturday, December 9, with seatings at 5 and 6:15 p.m. "A delicious roast beef meal, complete with freshly mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetable and rolls, and freshly baked pie for dessert for only \$15," reads the description.

Call (413) 648-9306 to reserve seating or order take-out meals.

Greenfield Community College will host a workshop for older adults who want to gain a better understanding of the social media platforms people are using. "**Social Media for Seniors**" will be presented by GCC students Olivia Dow and Jessica Lenihan next Wednesday, December 13, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Registration is required at tinyurl.com/elder-media.

Next Wednesday, December 13 from noon to 4 p.m. join Zeke Jakob of Conservación Panamá to learn **how to use a map and compass** to stay safe in the woods. The event begins at the main entrance to the Great Falls Discovery Center. Dress for the weather. The rain date is Saturday, December 16. For ages 6 and up, sponsored by Montague Public Libraries.

There's an **in-person job fair** next Wednesday, December 13 from 2 to 4 p.m. at the MassHire Franklin Hampshire Career Center in Greenfield, where you can meet with employers from many different industries.

The Ja'Duke Theater has put out a call for first responders, nurses, young professionals, and anyone else who wants to be part of a performance **fundraiser for the New England Learning Center for Women in Transition**. "We aim to honor those who embody resilience and show support for survivors and victims of emotional, physical, and sexual violence," they write.

"Resilience Rising: A Fundraiser for NELCWIT" will be held on February 9 and 10 at the Ja'Duke theater in the industrial park in Turners Falls. Rehearsals begin January 7 and run for five Sundays. Interested persons should contact jaduketheater@gmail.com.

Enjoy hot chocolate and meet your neighbors at a **Hot Chocolate Social** at the Millers Falls branch library from 3 to 4 p.m. next Thursday, December 14.

A **Música Franklin Community Concert** will be held at Sheffield Elementary School in Turners Falls next Thursday, December 14 from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. This is a student performance and family-friendly concert featuring jazz vocalist Leala Cyr, complemented by trumpet. Cyr has performed around the world as a member of Esperanza Spalding's "Radio Music and Chamber Music Societies." This concert is free and open to the public.

The Artspace community arts center in Greenfield will hold a **Winter Stamping Activity** next Saturday, December 16 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. This is an all-ages winter craft with which you can make cards, a wintry scene, or what-have-you. Drop in and be creative, for a suggested donation of \$10.

Families are also invited to come **make Gingerbread Houses** from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, December 16. This Montague Public Libraries program will be held in the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls. Children of all ages and their caregivers are invited to make easy gingerbread houses with empty milk cartons, graham crackers, and assorted candies all provided for free.

Santa will take a ride through Montague starting at 2 p.m. Saturday, December 16 from the Montague Center fire station. The route will proceed to Rutters Park in Lake Pleasant, Carroll's Market in Millers Falls, Montague City, land at Unity Park in Turners Falls around 3 p.m., and head back to the Mon-

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tagne Center common. Find more details on the Montague Parks & Recreation Facebook page.

Sage Green Botanicals at 109 Avenue A announces their third annual Yule Bazaar next Sunday, December 17 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. They will have botanical- and herbal-inspired vendors, a tea and elixir bar, and live music from James Bird.

Send your local briefs to editor@montaguereporter.org.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

The Future of the Carnegie Library

TURNERS FALLS – The Montague Public Libraries are in the application phase of a project to either expand the Carnegie Library in Turners Falls or construct a new building farther up Avenue A. If awarded state funding next fall, this project will proceed to the planning and design phase.

Opportunities for the future of the Carnegie will be discussed at two community forums next week. The first will be held via Zoom, from 6 to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, and the second will be held in person at the Great Falls Discovery Center

from 6 to 8 p.m. on Wednesday, December 13. All are invited to attend.

During the first hour, the current conditions at the library will be reviewed and the state's application process and construction timeline explained. The library director and trustees will present the community feedback gathered so far, answer questions, and listen to input.

Register for the Zoom forum at montaguepubliclibraries.org.

At the in-person event, the presentation will be followed by a reception where participants can chat with the director and trustees.

MONTAGUE REPORTER



ON THE ROAD

Wendell reader Su Hoyle was not caught on the Isle of Skye, off Scotland's northwest coast, Montague Reporterless. Here she is with our September 21 edition. "I left this copy for housekeeping staff to enjoy," she writes.

Going somewhere? Take us with you! Send your photos to editor@montaguereporter.org.

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\$12,000 grant opportunity

Looking for artists to create a sculpture with natural materials on the library lawn for Summer 2024.

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erving-ma.gov/bids

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SOLAR from page A1

the collection of solar energy."

On Monday the office ruled against a Pelham bylaw that would have required any battery to only be used to store energy from the sun. Attempts by Wendell and Pelham to ban the application of herbicides and pesticides around solar arrays in their zoning bylaws were also deemed inconsistent with state law.

A bylaw amendment passed by a Shutesbury special town meeting in January was nullified last month – in part due to a technicality, but also because it would have left too little land available for solar development.

Tracer Lane Justification

In each of these rulings, the AG's office referenced the recent Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court case *Tracer Lane II Realty, LLC v. City of Waltham*, in which the city was ordered to allow a solar developer to construct an access road through a residential neighborhood.

"It's very disturbing, on a big picture level, with regard to how the state is treating zoning powers and municipal home rule powers," said environmental attorney Margaret Sheehan, who works on behalf of the southeastern Massachusetts activist group Save the Pine Barrens. The group filed an amicus brief in the 2022 case, co-signed by the planning boards of Wendell, Pelham, and Shutesbury among other interested parties.

The *Tracer Lane* ruling set a precedent for what may be considered a reasonable restriction on solar energy under MGL Chapter 40A Section 3, known as the Dover Amendment. The law, which originally protected farms, schools, and churches from overly restrictive zoning, was updated in 1985 – one year before Ronald Reagan took Jimmy Carter's solar panels off the White House – to state that municipalities may not restrict solar development "except where necessary to protect the public health, safety or welfare."

Multiple bills introduced in the state legislature this session aim to change the Dover Amendment as it relates to solar energy. One introduced by Saunders would update the law to allow towns to regulate solar facilities for the purposes of preserving forests, farms, or wetlands, instead of only public health.

"The Dover Amendment was never intended to protect large, ground-mounted solar from zoning regulations," Sheehan told the *Reporter*. "But the court never addressed that in the decision, so the attorney general's office is taking an overly expansive view of the Dover Amendment for solar, and in our view, misinterpreting it and misapplying it."

Margaret Hurley, assistant AG for the office's Municipal Law Unit, authored the November 16 ruling against Shutesbury's amendment. Hurley cited precedents from 1950 and 1985 to justify the special consideration given to solar developers.

"[T]he Legislature determined that certain land uses are so important to the public good that the Legislature has found it necessary 'to take away' some measure of municipalities' 'power to limit the use of land' within their borders," Hurley wrote. "[I]t determined that 'neighborhood hostility' or contrary local 'preferences' should not dictate whether solar energy systems and related structures are

constructed in sufficient quantity to meet the public need."

The public need, in this case, is the need to reach the state's net-zero carbon emission goals by 2050. According to Massachusetts' 2050 *Decarbonization Roadmap*, "substantial deployment of ground-mounted solar is needed under any circumstance," because not enough viable rooftop space exists to meet the state's solar energy goals.

This justification, Saunders told the *Reporter* this week, is "flawed and outdated." He cited a study released in July by the state Department of Energy Resources, *Technical Potential of Solar*, which concluded that Massachusetts can meet its goal of developing 27 to 34 gigawatts of new solar energy by 2050 by building on rooftops, parking lots, and developed land.

"We do not need to rely on clear-cutting of forests in order to meet our solar needs," Saunders said. "The state should remove the financial incentive for solar installations on forested land."

In the last decade, about 60% of the ground-mounted solar arrays built in Massachusetts were on previously forested land. These projects received public subsidies through the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program.

Shutesbury Struggles

Last winter, Shutesbury voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the town zoning bylaws that would have increased restrictions on the size, location, and permit requirements for large-scale solar arrays, dividing the town into nine districts and mandating that no more than one large array be located in each district. However, the planning board failed to post the new solar zoning map along with the meeting warrant, as required, so the AG's office deemed the new amendment impermissible last month. Hurley called the omission "misleading."

"[O]ur decision in no way implies any agreement or disagreement with the policy views that may have led to the passage of the bylaw," Hurley wrote. "Any future bylaw must contain record evidence that each of the regulations is necessary to protect the public health, safety or welfare in the Town." She urged town officials to consult with a lawyer prior to any future attempts to regulate solar installations.

"As we presumed, the Attorney General decisions agree with our attorney's, that the Pelham and Shutesbury solar bylaws violate MGL in many ways," Cinda Jones, president of the forestry company W.D. Cows, told the *Reporter*.

The town's amendment was passed largely in response to plans proposed by the solar developer PureSky Energy to build five large-scale arrays on nearly 200 acres of forested land owned by W.D. Cows. The two companies are suing the town over what they consider to be overly restrictive zoning bylaws, in a case separate from the AG's ruling.

Activist groups such as Smart Solar Shutesbury have been advocating against the projects, arguing that clear-cutting forests for solar energy releases sequestered carbon and threatens water quality and wildlife habitat in the region.

"The state does not have any kind of regulation that says, 'Okay, you can't cut down forests, you can't build on wetlands, et cetera,

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Legal Aid Fundraiser

GREENFIELD – Community Legal Aid (CLA) is kicking off its annual Franklin County Access to Justice Campaign, which seeks to bring help to residents in the county facing a variety of civil legal problems.

Over the last year CLA's staff of attorneys and paralegals helped more than 400 elderly and low-income clients in Franklin County, impacting an estimated 1,000 residents trying to avoid homelessness, seeking safety from violence, and fighting for life's necessities. Through its Central West Justice Center subsidiary it also helps refugees seeking humanitarian-based immigration relief.

For more than a decade, the legal community of Franklin County has banded together through the Franklin County Access to Justice Campaign to raise funds and awareness to support CLA. Last year, the campaign raised over \$6,000. This year the goal is to raise \$10,000.

"Every day we see families in poverty on the brink of losing their homes, victims of violence seeking

protection orders, and parents fighting for custody of their children, all without a lawyer," said Hon. Beth Crawford (Ret.), co-chair of this year's host committee. "Most of CLA's clients have household incomes that fall below 125% of the federal poverty level, and truly do not have the means to hire a lawyer to protect their rights and advocate for them. By supporting CLA's work, our legal community is upholding the principle that 'justice for all' applies to everyone, not just those who can afford it."

The host committee will hold a fundraising luncheon at 1 p.m. next Wednesday, December 13, at Hope & Olive restaurant in Greenfield. Guests will hear how CLA is working to address poverty issues in Franklin County.

If you would like to attend, RSVP to donorrelations@cla-ma.org or go to p2p.onecause.com/franklin/event/lunch/. Anyone who wishes to support the work of Community Legal Aid can find more information or make a donation at www.communitylegal.org.

for solar," Sheehan said. "They target towns that aren't as sophisticated, and have less expensive land, and all-volunteer boards without ample resources."

Sheehan said the AG's office has issued 21 decisions on solar and battery storage in 2023.

At their meeting on Tuesday, Shutesbury selectboard members discussed how the town might legally accept donations to help cover its legal fees. Then they entered executive session to discuss strategies in response to the attorney general's ruling, and in the ongoing lawsuit.

"PureSky Energy still intends to move forward with these solar projects in Shutesbury once a viable pathway is determined," PureSky director Andrew Chabot told the *Reporter*. "[N]one of them are possible to pursue under Shutesbury's 2023 bylaws or the previous ones that are now back in effect."

Chabot said PureSky held 10 outreach meetings in 2021 to review the project details and solicit public feedback, and W.D. Cows set aside 5,500 acres of forest land in advance of these projects.

"We have been and remain committed to working with Shutesbury to build these projects in a way that benefits the community to the greatest extent possible while simultaneously minimizing environmental impact," Chabot told the *Reporter*.

"The climate crisis is not going to fix itself," Jones said, pointing to language in the *Tracer Lane* decision that says the state can only meet its goals by deploying large-scale ground-mounted solar arrays.

"Each one of us has to do everything in our power to help," she added. "Saying 'NO, not in my back yard, not in my town,' isn't help. Every second we don't take active steps to replace fossil fuels with renewables is in fact harming the planet."

Battery Banks

The Shutesbury ruling included a footnote that banning energy storage systems is also "impermissible without record evidence of a legitimate public health, safety, or welfare

concern to justify the prohibition." The decision may affect neighboring Wendell, where solar developer New Leaf Energy is petitioning the Department of Public Utilities to override all local bylaws to site a 105-megawatt battery project.

"We note that the development of energy storage systems is critical to the promotion of solar and other clean energy uses," Hurley wrote in the November ruling.

Opponents of the Wendell Depot Road project have pointed to the risks associated with fires at storage facilities. Battery fires cannot be extinguished with water as readily as typical fires, and the truck-sized batteries would be equipped with chemical fire suppression systems.

Jake Wark, a spokesperson with the state Department of Fire Services, told the *Reporter* that batteries containing lithium are "a rising concern in the fire service." "They pack so much power into a small container, and when they're abused they can explode in flames and toxic, flammable gases," he explained.

"There is an obligation to make sure there is an adequate response available if something goes wrong," Rep. Saunders said of the Wendell project. "It's not for lack of skill or commitment by our volunteer firefighters – this is just a matter of response time."

Saunders argued that it is "incumbent upon us" to protect the aquifer identified under the facility's proposed site on Wendell Depot Road, and suggested that utility-scale storage is better suited to communities with full-time fire departments, police departments, hazardous materials crews, and emergency evacuation plans.

"These communities are struggling to maintain adequate funding for education, public safety, and very basic municipal services," he said. "Trying to then add on a couple hundred dollars for expert legal advice in filing is oftentimes a completely untenable situation.... It's not happening in larger communities that can afford to fight back, and I don't believe that is a mistake or by accident."


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GILL from page A1

to keep their police forces running. Following widespread protests against police brutality, the state of Massachusetts passed "police reform" laws which require more training for officers. Part-time officers, who had lighter training requirements before, must now undergo full academy training. Edwards said the laws also demand more administrative work from chiefs, which would only increase once the state releases its department-level certification requirements for police forces.

"I think larger departments are going to be the ones that are left standing at the end of the day," said Edwards. "The momentum is there. I honestly think what you're waiting on is retirements and scandals, for the most part. You're waiting on that opportunity to come."

Edwards recommended that Gill begin by researching the full cost of its current police department and learning what residents expect and want from the police. Then it could start "dating" other towns to see who might be interested in joining forces.

"I'll warn you in advance," said Edwards, "very rarely is it going to save you a lot of money." He stated that regionalization was instead about "maintaining or sustaining a level of service."

"I think we're in good shape," said selectboard chair Randy Crochier, who expressed belief that the town would have a lot to offer in any agreement. "Our budgets are reasonably high for the police department," he said, and the town has three cruisers, the oldest one from 2019.

The board agreed to work with the Collins Center to apply for grants for a feasibility study, exploring the likely consequences of several options, including the town contract-

ing with an established regionalized force, hosting a new regional force, continuing its current one-town department, or ending its police force and relying on state police instead.

The board agreed that part of the process would be at least two public meetings to receive guidance from residents. "Ultimately the board can enter into any agreement they want with any town to do the service," said Edwards, "but it's still got to be funded. And that's town meeting's lever on this whole thing."

Funding the Fire Department

"The three-year brush truck project is almost coming to a close," promised deputy fire chief William Kimball. After a long wait, Gill's new firefighting truck is expected to arrive by February.

To pay for it, the town will take around \$77,600 from the funds given to the town by Northfield Mount Hermon School (NMH). The "NMH gift fund," as town administrator Ray Purington called it, is made up of voluntary payments the private school makes each year to fund emergency services in the town. Purington estimates that around \$22,000 will remain in the account after this purchase.

The final \$6,000 needed for the truck will come from American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds left over from a new town hall copy-machine purchase.

The board also approved spending \$2,875 from the fire department budget to buy a 2,100-gallon drop tank for the fire engine. "It's like a mobile fire hydrant," said Kimball, "because we don't have fire hydrants in most of the town."

Finally, the selectboard also considered renovation requests for the fire department office space. They approved spending \$1,100 from the

building maintenance fund to renovate deteriorating particle-board countertops in the radio room, but decided to wait on funding a \$7,000 renovation job to complete flooring on the second story of the office. The department would like to practice drills and store equipment there, but it currently features a wide hole with exposed insulation.

"I'd feel a lot better if this was April or May and more of the year and its surprises were behind us," said Purington. The board agreed to return to the issue in the future.

Other Business

The board voted to adopt an official flag policy, allowing only official federal, state, and town flags to fly on town-owned flagpoles. The change makes it so town officials don't have to consider each flag request sent to them, and comes after the Pro Life Legal Defense Fund sent a request to many towns in Massachusetts to fly its anti-abortion rights flag.

Selectboard members said goodbye to Tom Hodak, who has resigned from the cable advisory committee. They also authorized a state law exemption to allow Tim Batchelder to hold multiple appointed positions, as both an administrative clerk and PEG access videographer.

The board signed a letter of support for Comcast's application to the Broadband Infrastructure Gap Networks Grant Program, which will allow the company to offer broadband to the last several dozen households in Gill that still have no broadband internet access.

The board voted to once again close a portion of Pisgah Mountain and River roads to vehicle traffic from December 5 to April 1 due to icy driving conditions.



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FACES & PLACES

PHOTO COURTESY OF RIVERCULTURE

Team sports: Local and state officials gathered at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls on Tuesday to announce \$8.3 million in grants through the state's One Stop For Growth platform, a conduit for economic development grants from a variety of agencies.

Montague was awarded \$500,000 from the Rural and Small Town Development Fund for a project aimed at reducing its sewer overflows into the Connecticut River, and \$132,700 from the Site Readiness Fund for demolition design of the former Strathmore Mill complex.

A partial list of luminaries present includes, from right to left in the front row: state representative Natalie Blais and senator Jo Comerford; Massachusetts director of rural affairs Anne Gobi and secretary for economic development Yvonne Hao; MassDevelopment deputy director Theresa Park; undersecretary of economic foundations Ashley Stolba; and assistant secretary for communities and programs Juan Vega.

Behind them may be spotted Montague town administrator Steve Ellis, assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey, town planner Maureen Pollock, selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz, and selectboard member Chris Boutwell.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Holiday Craft Fair Expands To Two Days

WENDELL – The annual Wendell Holiday Craft Fair, hosted by the Friends of the Wendell Free Library, will be held on the Wendell Common this Friday, December 8 from 4 to 8 p.m. and Saturday, December 9 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The first hour of each day is for masked shoppers only.

Vendors will be set up in both the Town Hall and Senior Center. Join us for live music, Diemand Farm food, and raffles, as well as a wide variety of offerings from local artists and craftspeople.

Included are: wooden bowls, cutting boards, and utensils; pottery; jewelry; fabric art, clothing, woolen knits, and quilted items; visual art; hand-made stationery; soaps and candles; wildlife photography; and more.

Sugarbush Farm will be there with local maple syrup, and members of the citizens group No Assaultin' Battery United will be on hand to answer questions with handouts and a petition to protect the health and safety of Wendell.

There will also be new Wendell Flag merchandise, including red aprons, blue long-sleeve t-shirts, and black deluxe tote bags, with all proceeds benefiting the Friends of the Wendell Library.

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LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here's the way it was on December 5, 2013: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

2-Way Bridge: Honk 4 Joy

When word got out that the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge was open both ways after four years of one-way traffic, news spread fast. Soon the Avenue was busy with joyriders honking their horns, turning around, and crossing over again.

Wagon Wheel owner Carol Ann Zaccara said that when the project started in 2010, "lunch business went down 30% immediately." On Saturday grateful business owners and relieved residents, with balloons, noisemakers, and tuba music, made the trek across the bridge to the Wagon Wheel, which offered free ice cream at the finish line.

Gill: Hopes for Sewage Answers Go Up in Smoke

The mystery of how unbilled water is becoming billed sewage – the main culprit behind rising sewer rates in the small Riverside sewer system – deepened when a day-long smoke test turned up no answers. Administrative assistant Ray Purington reported that the sewer line is in good shape. So how is excess water finding its way into the sewer pipes and across Barton Cove to Montague, which charges the district for its treatment?

Further testing may have to wait until spring rains raise the level of groundwater, so that flows can be inspected to see which pipes, if any, are demonstrating telltale signs of sewer inflow and infiltration.

20 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on December 4, 2003: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

Stolen Trash Sticker Money

On December 1, Montague town administrator Frank Abbondanzio confirmed that a second candidate has rejected the town's offer for the top slot at the DPW. The position has been vacant since former superintendent Edward Parks-Mleccko, Jr. resigned in January, after allegations that he had stolen money from the town's trash sticker receipts. He later pled guilty to larceny of public funds over \$250.

Investigators determined that out of 12 vendors, the total loss of funds was estimated at \$25,000 to \$40,000. This followed the guilty

plea of former highway volunteer Ron Kelley, who admitted stealing \$40,000 in trash sticker receipts in 2001, when carrying department money and receipts to town hall.

To Mark or Not to Mark

A heated discussion took place at the Erving selectboard's meeting on Monday. Member Linda Downs-Bembury said she has received citizen complaints regarding the lack of magnetic placards to identify the unmarked police cruiser, after the previous ones went missing. She and board member Bert Dubay said they feel the car should be marked, but some residents and the police argued that an unmarked cruiser gives more flexibility in their work.

150 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on December 3, 1873: News from the Turners Falls Reporter's archive.

Local Matters

Horses cross the river now.

It has been one continual snow storm for two weeks, with an occasional five-minute stop for refreshments, as it were.

Diphtheria is the scourge that threatens the village now.

Seth J. Stone drove a pair of horses from Brattleboro to this place in one hour and forty minutes on Friday.

Gillman, Quimby & Kimball's steam door, sash and blind factory on L street is now running full blast.

The paper for the *Daily Graphic*, *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly*, is made at the Montague Paper Mill.

E.B. Nims, of Crown Point N.Y., has started the wheel right business in the shop over J.P. Morgan's blacksmith shop.

F. Baker will, next week, open a ninety cent store in connection with his boot and shoe business in

Sauter's Block, Second street.

Braddock & Webster have a good stock of Acme skates. They are the best skate made, requiring neither strap nor screw, and can put on or taken off in a second.

Joseph Neeman, while driving around the corner of Fourth street, Monday, got tipped out by the slewing of the sleigh, and the horse scampered around the streets in a lively manner, till caught by some men on Fourth street. No damage.

Luke Thornton and Earnest Watt, two boys belonging to Riverside, went through the ice on Thanksgiving day, and came near going to their long home. Had not Mr. Cornelius Field been at hand to render timely assistance, nothing would have prevented them from ceasing to drift down the stream of time and commence drifting down the Connecticut River.

A peculiar disease has killed off a lot of hogs belonging to Mr. Holden. Eddie, the hostler, says that if it had attacked a big grunter of the human persuasion that he knows of, there would have been less cause for regret.



Clockwise, from left: assistant town administrator Walter Ramsey; selectboard members Matt Lord, Rich Kuklewicz, and Chris Boutwell; and town administrator Steve Ellis, who has announced his retirement from the position in June.

MONTAGUE from page A1

and committed to, succeeding Steve Ellis as town administrator. I can say with confidence that I am prepared to fill the post."

Kuklewicz said he had seen "tremendous growth" in Ramsey since he became town planner and applauded his "professionalism" as ATA, and told him that he has heard "nothing but compliments from the staff that you work with." "For me, Rich Kuklewicz," Kuklewicz continued, "I see what we need to do is talk about finding a new assistant town administrator."

The other selectboard members, Matt Lord and Chris Boutwell, expressed similar sentiments. Lord said he currently serves on the board of a non-profit agency looking for a director. "Boy, do I wish we had an internal candidate who was qualified to do that," he said.

Boutwell said he did not have anything to add to these comments, but noted that he had been the deciding vote in hiring Ramsey as town planner 13 years ago. "I was the new kid on the block," he said. "I think it was my first board meeting."

Ellis said he was pleased with the board's decision, which he said would lead to an "orderly, efficient and productive" transition. He also noted that with potential upcoming retirements, "we're going to lose a tremendous amount of our institutional history."

Kuklewicz said he would like to see some "overlap" between Ellis and Ramsey, where the current ATA performs some of the functions of the administrator before Ellis leaves. He also recommended that the selectboard take a vote on appointing Ramsey "in the next few weeks," and soon "look into putting a search committee together to look for an ATA."

The Reporter asked Ellis if any legal requirements or town policies guide when the town must opt for a full search process. "We do not have set policies related to hiring, but we have a set of practices," he responded. "Generally, when there is a vacancy at the head of a department, we set up a hiring committee to conduct a search process." But in certain circumstances when an internal candidate is qualified for the job, he explained, there may not be a formal search.

Ellis pointed to the recent promotion of the assistant town clerk to the town clerk's position, in which a committee was created to review the candidate's credentials, but not to conduct a search. Ellis also pointed out that Ramsey had gone through an application and interview process before he was hired as the ATA last year.

Library Growth

Library director Caitlin Kelley presented an update on the town's process of applying to the state public library construction program for either renovating the Carnegie Library or building a new library in downtown Turners Falls.

She presented a timeline for the process, describing recent public input meetings and focus groups, as well as two upcoming forums: on Tuesday, December 12 on Zoom, and on Wednesday, December 13 at the Great Falls Discovery Center.

In the spring, town meeting will be asked to approve \$150,000 for the planning and design of the project, and the town must submit the application for funding by May 31. The town would receive news of the state's decision next fall.

Kelley was asked if, despite the local public debate over the relative merits of renovating the Carnegie or building a new library, the state would refuse to pay for a Carnegie renovation in any case. She said that was a possibility.

Lord asked if the \$150,000 town meeting appropriation would be wasted if the state does not support a project in Turners. Kelley said the money would not be spent if the application is rejected.

The board did not take a vote on the application or the town meeting appropriation, but there was a "consensus of the board," in Kuklewicz's words, that Kelley was on the right track with the process.

Kelley also announced that she was applying for two other grants, one from the American Library Association to help libraries in "small and rural communities" serve people with disabilities and the other from the state Board of Library Commissioners to address "the social isolation and increased screen time experienced by tweens and teens."

Snow Business

Public works superintendent Tom Bergeron and police chief Chris Williams came before the board to discuss the annual winter parking ban, which prohibits on-street parking between 1 and 5 a.m. from December 1 to April 1.

Last year the ban was lifted for downtown Turners Falls and the Patch neighborhood, except during declared snow emergencies, and that policy remains in effect this year. During a snow emergency, on-street parking is not allowed downtown or in the Patch from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m., and residents are directed to park in public lots. These lots must be vacated when the emergency ends.

Flashing blue lights on Avenue A announce the snow emergency, as does a CodeRED telephone

warning for those who sign up.

Other Business

The selectboard spent a good part of the meeting discussing portions of the upcoming FY'25 budget that the board itself has "either direct management responsibility [over], or are contributors [to]," in Ellis's words. These included budgets for the selectboard office, which includes four staff members (\$338,159); town counsel (\$85,000); information technology (\$92,252); the farmers market (\$5,200); the Colle building (\$52,250); town meeting (\$3,180); veterans' services (\$77,897); "inter-governmental" expenses (\$118,323); and liability insurance (\$120,600).

Some of the largest increases were in the IT budget, with a new contract with Suzer IT for support services, and town counsel, with an increased estimate for labor negotiations. All money for expenditures at the town-owned Colle building comes from a reserve fund holding the rent payments from the Center for Responsive School, the town's tenant in the building, and the veterans' services account is reimbursed by the state.

Clean Water Facility superintendent Chelsey Little requested a \$25,000 change order in the project to replace the old generator at the waste plant. Little said this was needed because the original plan called for an "integrated switch," combining different elements in one unit, which would take 80 weeks for delivery, while a switch separating them into three cabinets would take only 40 weeks to arrive.

Despite the reservations of Kuklewicz, who said he had seen cheaper used switches online that could be ordered quickly, the board approved the change.

At Ramsey's request, the board approved a \$190,930.53 contract with Alliance Clean Energy, Inc. to build a solar array on the roof of the town hall annex.

Ramsey also updated the board on the town's annual Green Communities report to the state. He said that the town had met key benchmarks for energy reduction and building codes, but that the state had imposed a new reporting system that is not consistent with data collection methods in previous years, so an accurate comparison was hard to make.


At Ellis's request the board signed a \$50,000 agreement with the engineering firm Wright-Pierce to develop a plan for the sewer system and treatment plant that is required under Montague's new state and federal wastewater permit.

The next selectboard meeting is scheduled for December 11.



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NOTES FROM THE GILL-MONTAGUE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Schools Bracing for Slow Growth

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – November was marked, as it always is, by the joyful descent of the Gill-Montague school committee into the annual budget process. The committee met on November 14 and 28 via Zoom.

Though the district settled a contract this fall with “Unit A” of the staff union, i.e. teachers, the committee is still negotiating with “Unit C,” paraprofessionals, administrative assistants, and information technology staff. Public comment time at the beginning of both meetings featured short speeches by union supporters.

“They provide essential services and complex educational plans, with fidelity, in substantially separate and mainstream classrooms across our district,” said teacher Joseph Katz. “They are supporting students, on and off their case load, to create more inclusive schools.” Katz urged the removal of steps under \$15 per hour from the Unit C schedule. “This will incentivize keeping more of our skilled colleagues within our district,” he said.

Jayne Finn, a former district employee now working as an education advocate, said she had been looking at job postings for area schools. “It disturbs me to find out that Gill-Montague has 15 positions on the board that directly affect kiddos who are on IEPs,” she said. “Mohawk has 10, Greenfield has seven, Pioneer has two, Franklin Tech has zero... I even looked at Frontier and they have three.”

Finn said she did not think this could be blamed on the paraprofessionals themselves, the pupil services director, or the school committee. “I know people who have worked [at Gill-Montague] for 10, 15, and 20 years, and may have two jobs, and still have to take advantage of food stamp benefits, fuel assistance, and housing assistance,” she said. “Talk to the people who hold the purse strings, and let them know you’re watching.”

Tabitha Martinelli, a Unit C member and part-time paraprofessional at the high school, said she takes home \$1,234 per month and spends \$800 of it on rent. “I qualify for SNAP; I’ve got an application in for fuel assistance,” Martinelli said. “For Gill-Montague, that is a problem: I’m relying on taxpayer-funded charities, basically, to supplement my income. I shouldn’t have to do that.”

“It seems unacceptable that our employees give so much to our schools, and so much to our students, and still do not make a living wage,” said Hillcrest and Sheffield elementary school librarian Ramona La-Tronica. “There are at least six open Unit C positions in our elementary schools alone – without them the

backbone of our schools is weakening.”

Business manager Joanne Blier gave a preliminary look at the FY’25 budget based on projections of revenues and expenses. In a regional school district this process is tightly choreographed: the schools must have an early sense of the costs they plan to assess to towns, but a major category of revenue, Chapter 70 state aid, always remains a wild card until late in the game.

Next year the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding (ESSER), federal pandemic aid for schools, will have ended. Blier said Gill-Montague has banked up cash in special accounts – the school choice and special education revolving funds and the excess & deficiency account – to cushion the loss.

Trying to predict Chapter 70 aid, Blier explained, involves guessing at everything from enrollment trends to inflation. As of November 28, she was predicting a low (2%) increase in what the district towns can afford to contribute, and a large (9%) increase in state aid.

“More of our students are choosing to stay in our schools,” she reported. “We have less students going to the charter schools, and we have less students choosing out.” Despite this positive trend, Blier’s early guess at next year’s all-funds budget was \$27.90 million – a 1.3% increase over the current year’s budget of \$27.53.

“When we’re looking at our expenses and our costs – and our contracts – those are all things that take more than 1.5% of their little piece of the pie,” Blier concluded, “but they all add up, so we’re going to keep working on this.” A working session with the Montague finance committee was scheduled for December 6.

The committee approved changing the district policy which had required that the committee hold a special meeting directly after Montague and Gill town elections each year to reorganize itself. The revised policy has the committee reorganize “at its first regular meeting” after the elections. “It became challenging, because the two towns in the region often have their elections now on a different day,” chair Jane Oakes explained.

The committee approved a list of capital requests recommended by administrators, most notably \$75,000 to \$100,000 to revamp the parking lot and sidewalks at Hillcrest Elementary, owned by the town of Montague.

By a vote of 8 to 0, the committee agreed to try to hold its December 12 meeting in person at Turners Falls High School. “Yes, and if necessary I’ll wear a mask,” said Gill representative Bill Tomb. It would be the committee’s second in-person meeting since March 2020.

Tip of the week ...

Christmas Tree Safety:

Keep your tree away from heat sources and water it daily. Never leave a lit tree unattended and properly dispose of it before it dries out.



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Montague Community Television News

Perfect to Put On

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

TURNERS FALLS – Unnameable Books is bringing not only incredible titles to our small town, but upstanding programming as well! Their recent Poetry Marathon is available to view on the MCTV Vimeo page, though we recommend you attend their next event in person if you can.

Events that are for screen view only, such as our Zoom-recorded board meetings, are perfect to put on when you don’t know what to watch. This week we have new “episodes” from the Gill select-board and the Montague select-board. Or, catch the new GMRSD school committee meeting, which was released on November 28.

All community members are wel-

come to submit their videos to be aired on Channel 9, and featured on the MCTV Vimeo page. If you have any ideas for films, MCTV is always available to assist in local video production as well. Cameras, tripods, and lighting equipment are available for checkout, and filming and editing assistance can be provided.

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

Contact us at (413) 863-9200 or infomontaguetelevision@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook, or find us on Instagram @montaguecommunitytv. Find videos and more on our website, montaguetelevision.org.

LEVERETT from page A1

that the developer is expected to provide more information at a planning board meeting next Wednesday.

Ewing, who was also present Tuesday night, commented that such a project had the potential to “be great for the community or terrible for the community,” and that residents would need to work together to figure out how to make the town a better place to live if it moves forward.

Selectboard chair Tom Hankinson commented that water and sewer service would need to come from Amherst, which would require the two towns to cooperate. He said that he, Ewing, and town administrator Marjorie McGinnis had already met with Amherst officials to begin discussions, but there was a “long time to go” before making any decisions.

Planning Survey

Shores then reported on the CPC’s work on the comprehensive plan. According to the town website the plan will provide “evidence-based and community-driven goals and guidelines to inform Leverett policy-making for years to come” and “establish goals and guidance for evidence-based, community-driven development options that aim to broaden our tax base and create shared prosperity.”

Shores said the CPC’s most recent survey of residents had received 275 responses, and the most popular elements they identified as contributing to the quality of life in Leverett were preservation and use of nature and forests (90%), clean water (85%), passive recreation such as trails and picnic areas (78%), and the town’s rural character and way of life (76%).

Responding to a question about what would improve the quality of life, 69% of residents

said better cell phone and Wi-Fi service, 66% said town-owned solar power and resilient community energy infrastructure, and 55% said better-quality or affordable housing.

Shores noted “a bit of a disconnect” among respondents in ranking goals by level of importance, with 58% saying affordable housing should be a priority, but only 30% and 26% saying increased and improved housing stock, respectively, were important goals.

The current survey is available on the town website and open until December 15, with more outreach to follow. Shores said the comprehensive plan is expected to be completed in June, and would need to be approved by a planning board vote.

Gutter Reopening Rejected

The board unanimously voted to petition the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) to discontinue a portion of Rattlesnake Gutter Road as a county road. The move is intended to pave the way for the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust (RGT) to pursue grant funding to repair significant erosion damage, which the RGT was advised would only be available if it officially becomes “a public recreational trail.”

Former RGT trustee Stephen Weiss noted that the portion of the road they are seeking to discontinue has already been closed to traffic for over 20 years, and is “the most heavily-traveled, year round, recreational venue in Leverett,” serving hikers, bicyclists, horse-back riders, cross-country skiers, and others.

Weiss argued that an alternative proposal to repair the road and reopen it to vehicular traffic would compromise “the most remarkable natural feature of our town,” curtailing or eliminating recreational use of the Gutter, and that he did not believe most people sup-

ported the idea.

Resident Silas Ball said that the town should have “all the information on the table” before “even considering a decision of this magnitude.” Adding to reasons to explore the idea of reopening the road Ball presented at previous meetings, Ball referred to a letter from Leverett’s fire and police chiefs saying that reopening the road “is crucial for the efficient and timely access” to northeastern Leverett, Shutesbury, and Wendell.

If Cave Hill Road also collapses due to erosion, Ball argued, there would be no quick route to North Leverett. He added that although everyone in the room was “pretty sure of this” or “pretty sure of that,” the select-board had a responsibility to get more information before deciding on the matter.

Hankinson replied that he felt he had “sufficient information, based on my understanding of Rattlesnake Gutter Road... and the last 20 years of history,” and that the road would have “far greater value to the town” if it were closed and becomes a trail than if it were reopened. He also said he thought “the town will never spend the money to return it to a usable road.”

Selectboard members Patricia Duffy and Melissa Colbert expressed similar reasoning to explain their votes in favor of the petition.

Town administrator Marjorie McGinnis noted that FRCOG would still be required to hold hearings on the discontinuance, at which residents would have further opportunity to comment.

Fresh Wires

National Grid director Joseph Carroll gave a presentation on the company’s “Central to Western Massachusetts Energy Improvement Project,” which will involve replacing 16 to 17

miles of power lines and towers in Leverett.

Carroll said that the overall project entails replacing roughly 68 miles of lines running through 16 communities, originally constructed in the early 1900s. He called the change a “proactive step” towards establishing reliable infrastructure for a clean-energy future; while Leverett’s lines currently handle 69 kilovolts (KV) of electric potential, the new lines would be built to handle 115 KV.

Carroll estimated the project would be in a permitting phase until 2027, with construction expected between 2027 and 2033. He pointed out that the new construction would increase tax revenue to the town.

The company is providing more information at www.E5F6project.com.

Other Business

The board unanimously voted to rescind a revised dog order addressing a barking complaint, reinstating the original order due to a lack of compliance with the conditions of the revised order.

Resident Jimmy Grogan presented a detailed log of his neighbors’ dogs’ barking since the board’s original May 12 order – which had included the possibility of muzzling the dogs – and an overview of his years-long efforts to reach a resolution.

In voting to reinstate the original order, Melissa Colbert noted that it had already been upheld by a court when it was appealed by the dog’s owner.

Hankinson suggested that the parties should also pursue a mediation effort. Grogan said he would participate.

The board unanimously voted to include a line in the FY’25 budget funding the townwide mailing of a paper version of the town newsletter.



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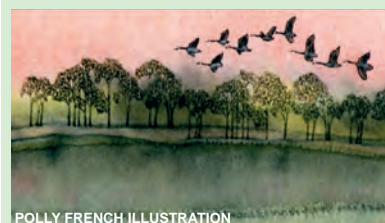


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DECEMBER 7, 2023

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WEST ALONG THE RIVER
EARLY DECEMBER
SKETCHBOOK

By DAVID BRULE

THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE – I always approach December cautiously, trying to ease into the season without the calendar and its precious days speeding by leaving me wondering where the month went.

I'm a Christmas Eve-born baby boomer, and for me December has always held a certain kind of magic. Maybe even more than most, I live in the snowglobe bubble of early wintertime, holly, swirling snow, calm and peace. I like to keep that bubble from popping for as long as I can, so I learned long ago how to unplug Christmas. Unplug from the commercial madness and compulsive buying, fretting about finding the perfect gift.

I often turn back to, of all things, snowscapes of the French Impressionists. They tried, like I do in this sketchbook, to capture fleeting moments of outdoor occurrences and scenes playing with natural light, ephemeral as they are. I find myself standing before the next 31 days as before a blank canvas, paints, or in my case ink, almost congealed with the cold. Felt pen clenched in mittened right hand, I stand there or sit there ready to paint what I see.

For the time being what I see is a most un-December-like landscape, mostly drab brown, with an occasional cardinal perching in the bare branches of the old lilac. Here I would add a dash of a brilliant scarlet *accent aigu* to the otherwise sere viewscape.

Birds are few, as most everyone has observed and complained about to me. Lots of natural foodstuffs out here so most birds don't see the need to stop by the bird feeders. A family of titmice, hatched and raised in the neighborhood, have been here daily all summer and now into the winter. Do they count?

I'm glad to have them.

The white-throated sparrow clan and junco cousins have arrived for the winter, but in small numbers so far. With the portent of an open winter, they may not need a handout for a while yet. Woodpeckers have found the suet post, nuthatches with their tin-horn nasal calls scoot in and out of the seed hoppers, and a welcome tree sparrow down from the northern *taiga* has appeared, but has remained somewhat scarce.

I feel lucky enough to live mostly outdoors, and I can escape the indoor worries about mounting bills, while others may well be submerged under the onslaught of commercial seasonal urgings, imperatives to buy and buy more, or even the warnings about the threatening rising tide of fascism in our internal politics.

My sense of December, like for some souls who like to reflect on memories of the days when the world seemed more simple and more kind, provides some sort of solace. Just stepping out of doors and taking a deep breath of cold air can help restore some balance in my day.

Back then in the '50s, in the idealized collection of my winter memories, my sister Sue and I often embarked on an ambitious Christmas bird count. With ruler and pencil we drew up our own census lists with our usual winter birds written in, plus a few hoped-for rare individuals like a snow bunting or a white gyrfalcon. We penciled in the names on the appropriate lines, making boxes where we could place checkmarks and write our observations.

On a cold day in December during the designated count dates, we would head out the door of our little house above the Narrows on the Connecticut, and slip and see **WEST ALONG** page B3



Claude Monet, Snow at Argenteuil (1875).

An Old Holiday Tradition Reaches American Shores

By CLAIRE HOPLEY

LEVERETT – When I was a child growing up in England, Christmas crackers were as vital for Christmas as the Christmas tree. There were big ones that appeared at Christmas meals, and little ones that were tied to the tree. At down moments over the holiday we could beg for a little six-inch one, but the big ones – around twelve inches – were reserved for dinner on Christmas Day and other Christmas festivities.

Later, living in Massachusetts, it was inconceivable that my children would grow up without them, and equally that adults should sit down to Christmas dinner without a Christmas cracker waiting at their place. I got visiting relatives to bring them, and hunted them down wherever they could be found.

But while the eye-candy designs tempt most Americans who encounter them, many don't know what to do with them. Surely not break them apart! But yes, that's the idea. And now that local big-box and department stores sell



Various cracker designs, left to right: a Christmas elf, red and silver snowflakes, gold and a Christmas tree, a green butterfly, an Irish leprechaun.

Christmas crackers, everyone can enjoy them. Here's how.

You put a cracker at every place setting, usually on the side plate or napkin. When everyone is assembled for the meal, each person picks up the cracker. You can hold one end in your right hand, then

cross your arms over your body so its left end points to your neighbor on the left, who grabs hold. Everyone around the table is linked by the crackers.

Keeping your thumbs tight on the joints in the crackers – an important see **TRADITIONS** page B8

NOTES FROM THE HEARTFELT CAFE

by Trouble Mandeson

GREENFIELD – “Beans, beans, the magical fruit, the more you eat, the more you toot. The more you toot, the better you feel, so eat your beans with every meal!”

Did you know that beans are legumes, but not all legumes are beans? The word *legume* is often used as an umbrella term, but in fact beans are the edible seeds of different plants while legumes come from plants that bear their fruit inside a pod. For clarity in this column, I'll use legume to describe both, unless otherwise specified.

Legumes are good substitutes for red meat and an important plant-based protein for vegans and vegetarians, soybeans in particular as they are a complete protein. Nutritious and versatile, low in fat and cholesterol, they are loaded with antioxidants that help prevent cell damage and fight aging and disease. Their high-fiber content can cause bloating in our guts as our bodies work to digest them, hence the

“toot” from this “magical fruit.”

As a food crop they have a low impact on the environment, are drought-resistant, and use far less water than what's needed to raise beef. When legumes are used as a dry grain, such as livestock forage and silage, they're called a *pulse*.

Fossilized evidence has been found on the banks of the Euphrates River in modern day Syria showing lentils were a dietary staple about 60,000 years ago. The ancient Egyptians favored them – think falafels and hummus, which we still enjoy today – while early Greeks initially saw them as poor man's food. Rome's Pliny the Elder extolled the virtues of the fava bean, and the gourmet writer Apicius included them in the world's first cookbook, *De Re Culinaris*.

During the Middle Ages, Charlemagne ordered the dense and nutritious chickpea to be planted across war-ravaged European lands, see **HEARTFELT** page B4



MANDESON PHOTO

Chili with beans is thought to originate from cattle drivers in the Southwest. With chili cookoffs popularized in the 1950s and '60s, the first world championship was held in 1967 in Terlingua, Texas. From traditional red chili, a.k.a. Texas chili, to chili verde (green) there are passionate debates among aficionados as to the right way to make chili.

Pet of the Week



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Angus is a handsome pup who loves to play, go for walks, enjoys car rides, and is super smart! He is fully house-trained, walks nicely on leash with his harness, and loves to have play dates with other dogs.

Angus does guard his food from other animals, so he needs to be the only pet living in his home. He loves older kids, but is uncomfortable with young children, so if you have children, they should be at least 10 years old.

If you're looking for a solo dog

who is a smart, energetic companion who is already fully house trained and knows manners, then look no further than Angus!

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

Want your pet featured? Email a photo and information about them to jae@montaguereporter.org.

MONTV / MUSIK / MOUNTAIN



SUBMITTED PHOTO

LXV: Andrea Pensado

Interview by J. BURKETT and TROY CURRY

TURNERS FALLS – We were very fortunate to be able to interview Andrea Pensado this week. Andrea is a programmer and performer who lives in Salem, Mass.

Here is some background info from her website: “She has been using digital media and live interactive musical systems since 1995. She studied in Argentina and Poland. At first, she composed mainly for acoustic instruments.... Today, the abrasive digital noise of her improvisations is far away from her earlier pieces. Harsh dense layers of sounds, often interwoven with her voice, combine hybrid synthesis techniques to create a highly personal sound language, which reflects an intuitive, emotional and paradoxically also logical approach to music making.”

Andrea’s music is very hard to describe, so we won’t even try – but her performances are life-changing!

tronics and programming. To my surprise I became a performer and do the music that I do now.

MMM: How would you describe your music? It seems like a combination of many genres.

AP: If I have to be honest, I don’t know how to describe my music. I am very intuitive and I just put together sounds that I like. I never think of genres or anything related to where my music “belongs”... I love music deeply and I enjoy the most diverse music genres or styles, so I guess I am influenced by that.

Of course, I am very interested and curious about how new sonic material is created, and I guess that curiosity is one of the main propellers. When I go to a show, I love it when I have no idea how someone makes their music.

MMM: Would you like to talk about western Mass arts and music?

AP: I am a big, big fan of the western Mass scene. One of the things that I admire the most is the raw, genuine need to make music and art, which is felt instantly in each show. No pretentiousness, no snobbism – it’s art for art’s sake. I find it very inspiring and nurturing. It gives me energy to keep going.

There is also a certain “irreverence” that I love, which I think is quite connected to the way many people relate to the arts in this country. I think it’s fascinating, refreshing, and much needed!

MMM: Is there something shamanic, healing, about making your art?

AP: Making music is definitely very healing for me. To be in the mere presence of sound has a calming and, paradoxically, also invigorating effect. I think music/sound

is so powerful because it can reach very deep corners of our psyche. Personally, I find that the most mysterious and interesting part of humans lies in the non-verbal realm.

But I must say that it’s still surprising to me that all that somehow translates into the performances. When I play I never think of “feelings,” “healing,” or anything of the sort. I just think of what it sounds like.... The whole thing is very strange!

MMM: Would you like to talk about your vocal work, and the work with the extension of your ventriloquist’s puppet?

AP: I use the voice constantly in my music, but it’s the thing I never really “practice.” It’s totally improvised. I don’t know where it comes from. I work on the electronics, create the sounds, etc. The voice just “makes it alive.” I love languages, sound poetry, etc., so, I guess it’s normal because the voice is so present in my music.

The idea of using “Andreitá” – the doll – matured very gradually. There was a program for kids on Argentinean TV in which a man used a ventriloquist doll (*Chapman and Chirolita*). It fascinated me as a girl, and I always wanted to do something with that. I finally bought one and created the piece.

I love doing it, and I have lots of fun when I rehearse it. The doll allows me to touch scary corners of myself while having fun. Of course, I can never plan it... The fact that many people find it scary is another funny mystery to me. But I think it’s very related to American movies, etc. Who knows?

MMM: Anything else you would like to add, or advice to younger music folks?

AP: I’ve managed to continue making music all my life, and that makes me very happy. There are more productive periods and periods when I do less, but making music has always been a constant companion. I feel very grateful about this fact. Life can be tough sometimes, and to have that faithful companion is a relief, something I can rely on.

There’s a quote by e.e. cummings that I read somewhere, I don’t remember it exactly but the idea is that life seems like a “conspiracy” to make us stop making art, but we have to continue. I like it a lot.

I think it’s also very important to do it without caring about the “results.” Sometimes it’s more satisfying, sometimes less. I think it doesn’t really matter – the fact of making it is more than enough, and a true privilege I am grateful for all the time.

Senior Center Activities DECEMBER 11 THROUGH 15

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.

Nurse and blood pressure clinic is the first Tuesday of each month, Second Tuesday is Toe Nail Clip. Veterans’ Services are the first Wednesday of each month. First Thursday is Brown Bag pick-up.

Monday 12/11

9 a.m. Interval Workout
10 a.m. Seated Dance
12 p.m. Pitch Card Group

Tuesday 12/12

8:30 a.m. Nail Clip
9 a.m. Good For U Workout
10 a.m. Line Dancing
11 a.m. Social Stringers

Wednesday 12/13

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

Thursday 12/14

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

Friday 12/15

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 12/11

10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
12 p.m. Pot Luck Lunch

Tuesday 12/12

9 a.m. Chair Yoga
9:30 a.m. Tuesday Knitters
10 a.m. Zumba Lite
12:30 p.m. Tech Help Drop In
3 p.m. Tai Chi

Wednesday 12/13

Foot Clinic by Appointment
4:15 p.m. Mat Yoga

Thursday 12/14

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

Friday 12/15

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.

MMM: Do you want to talk about your earliest music experiences?

AP: I started playing piano as a little girl in the most conventional way. I love playing piano still today, and I am actually a piano teacher, which I enjoy doing a lot. One of my brothers is totally into music, and he was the one buying records at home when we were teenagers. So, I was more or less aware of popular music, and also enjoyed it.

When I went to college, I was introduced to what was then called contemporary music: the 20th century *avant-garde*. I fell in love with it immediately. Eventually, I became a composer. I composed conventionally for around 10-plus years, and then I guess I got bored, and very gradually started experimenting more and more with elec-

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WEST ALONG from page B1 slide down the steep hill to the Red Rocks and the nearby marsh. We were ready to chalk up all kinds of winter rarities, accidentals, and more familiar constant neighborhood birds.

The anticipation of finding something new played a major role, like anticipating opening Christmas presents, with a similar kind of slight letdown once the wrapping is torn away and the gift is, well, sort of what you “always wanted.”

Our Christmas count results were always something like that: we usually managed to count a dozen blue jays, about the same number of cheery chickadees, maybe a merganser in the still ice-free channel of the Narrows, a furtive song sparrow darting among the cattails of the marsh. In December those tall cattail plumes were puffed open and scattering floating wisps into the cold wind.

We got home, chilled then warmed by hot cocoa and our sense of winter adventures as we tallied up our day’s count.

Nowadays Sue participates in the Cornell Bird Count, tallying up birds at the feeders and sending the results electronically to the lab a hundred miles away. No need to move from the comfy chair and the warmth of the woodstove!

Other Decembers over my lifetime found me hitchhiking in Spain, through Madrid and Seville, spending nights in a youth hostel in Tangier, later in our snug Paris home reveling in our son’s first Christmas. Those kinds of memories pop up in my snowglobe, but only in this winter month.

But for the last fifty years, I’ve been holding December in the old homestead in Erving. That’s when I began keeping track of

what’s going on in the outdoors and the woodlands along the west-flowing river.

December 6 of this year will find the faint light peering over the landscape at 7 a.m. A few bird shadows will move in the branches outside the kitchen window. That very same west-flowing river hurries past, skirting the rivershore boundary of bright red winterberry bushes, the swift-flowing current steaming in the frosted air.

Where will the day go? What is just around the corner? I’ll just catch hold of my coffee cup, hang on, and wait to see what will happen.

What I’m trying to tell you is that you have to catch December like you would catch a wave in August on the shallow shore of Plum Island. That would be in high summer, not its seasonal opposite, perched as we are on the beginning of the longest dark nights of the year, but the metaphor works – the rolling wave of Christmas comes in quicker than you think, then flattens and recedes.

For a December-born like me, I need to savor this month. We don’t know how many more we’ll see the way things are going.

With my head and heart dwelling back in the 19th and 20th centuries, those December images linger. Some are stored in the rooms of this homestead, now entering its 152nd year of family living, dying, and celebrating Christmas within these humble old walls.

I guess that’s why one more winter finds me in this old kitchen or, depending on the weather, in the south-facing woodshed just beyond the kitchen door. Coffee cup in hand, pen at the ready, I’m waiting for my muse to join me on this cold frosty morning – or for the earliest birds to arrive in the yard, whichever comes first.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Officer Advises That He Located Sheep; Drone Canceled; Burnt Spite Napkin; Previous Medical Issue; ‘Hey Siri’

Monday, 11/27

1:40 p.m. Animal control officer was notified about an injured skunk walking around near the parking lot off the bike path near First Street. ACO located and relocated skunk.

6:30 p.m. 911 caller from Eleventh Street reporting a fire inside of a barrel outside of a house whose residents are not home. Caller says the fire is too big for her to put out on her own. Call transferred to Shelburne Control.

7:02 p.m. 911 caller states that there is a herd of sheep in the roadway near Hunting Hills Farm. Officer checked area; no sheep.

8:14 p.m. Caller states that some items were lost out of the back of a truck on the General Pierce Bridge. They are trying to clean it up, but many things have gone missing. Officer advises most items were recovered and caller just wants incident on record. Caller called back to make sure the in-house number was correct so if anyone turns in any items or if they are seen on Marketplace, they can be retrieved. Items include orange coveralls, an orange vest, two camo bib overalls, a Carhartt hooded sweatshirt and jacket, a pair of gloves, and a hat.

9:13 p.m. 911 caller stated that there are sheep in the roadway on Federal Street near South Street. Officer advises that he located the sheep. Owner has been notified; she is coming out to gather them.

Tuesday, 11/28
11:31 a.m. Walk-in reporting minor accident in the back parking lot. Report taken.

2:23 p.m. Walk-in would like to speak to an officer about a piece of equipment she believes was stolen.

5:39 p.m. Two-vehicle accident on Avenue A near the Gun Rack. No injuries reported. Rau’s contacted for a tow.

6 p.m. FD took a report of an injured deer in the road on Federal Street. Deer is deceased and is off the road.

8:46 p.m. Walk-in party reports that a Camaro pulling out of a driveway struck him while he was riding his bike on Montague City Road last night.

Wednesday, 11/29
10:40 a.m. Caller states that people are riding dirt bikes over the pedestrian bridge on the bike path. Nothing located on Greenfield Road side. Caller believes they headed down the tracks towards Lake Pleasant. Lake Pleasant checked with negative results. Caller will call if they return.

2:17 p.m. 911 caller states that two hunters are lost in the woods near Route 47 and Federal Street. Caller unsure of exact location; is not familiar with the area. Fire dispatched. Officer requesting Environmental Police be contacted. EPO advises he will head to the area in about 30 minutes.

Greenfield PD en route with drone. Officer checking Chestnut Hill Loop area where the hunters went into the woods to see if they came out. Second officer checking Ripley Road area to see if anyone came out of the woods there. MCFD standing by with third officer awaiting the drone from Greenfield. Officer located parties in the wildlife area. Drone and EPO canceled. Parties are uninjured; no need for any further services. All parties reunited.

Thursday, 11/30
11:44 a.m. Caller states there was a burnt napkin in her mailbox today and she feels like maybe her ex-boyfriend did it to be spiteful. Wants on record at this time.

1:27 p.m. Caller states she hears a minibike or a dirt bike in the Old Greenfield Road area and she was told yesterday by officers to call if she heard it again. Operator described as wearing a white helmet. Checked Lake Pleasant; area search negative. Officer advises he spoke to the caller

again; she states it seems like an older gentleman on an unregistered bike who is being irresponsible and probably lives in the area.

2 p.m. Caller called in stating that right after the officer cleared, the dirt bike appeared, flipped her off, and headed towards Lake Pleasant. Officer advised.

11:22 p.m. Caller states he went under a low bridge and it tore his trailer apart. Caller states he is on Montague City Road crossing the Connecticut River into Greenfield. States the bridge was an old railroad bridge. Believes it is Cheap-side in Greenfield. Info given to GPD. General Pierce bridge is clear; GPD is out with a tractor-trailer unit on their side.

11:43 p.m. Caller from Powertown Apartments states that a female in the apartment below his is yelling and screaming; unknown whether anyone else is in the apartment with her, or if she is intoxicated again. Officer advised female was on the phone having an argument with her boyfriend. She states she will keep it down for the night. Caller called back at 12:05 a.m. stating that whatever the officers did didn’t work; female is now pounding on the walls. Officer on scene again; no sounds heard after five minutes standing in hallway. All quiet at this time. Caller advised of findings.

Friday, 12/1
12:39 a.m. 911 caller reports the fire alarm is sounding in the hallway of an Avenue A building. No sign of fire or smell of smoke. Caller states nobody else seems to be awake in the building. Call transferred to Shelburne Control.

1:09 a.m. Caller from Avenue A states that the female from a previous call is yelling again. Female advised of complaint. Officer does advise that when she communicates, it is loud due to a previous medical issue.

10:36 a.m. 911 caller states that she is setting up her new phone and it told her to call 911 to finish setting up. Officer advised.

11:46 a.m. Caller from East Mineral Road states that a deer was shot on his land and they are dragging the deer back to their truck. Second caller states hunters walking on his land, which is marked private property. Caller asked them not to and was ignored. States they are driving a red pickup truck with a red cap on the back. EPO notified. Officer out with caller looking at where deer was shot on his land. Information given to EPO.

12:54 p.m. Property manager of an Avenue A building states that this morning they did an eviction with the sheriff’s office; tenant was not home at the time; belongings were placed into a storage unit in Holyoke. Party has since returned and broken into the apartment after the locks were changed; she is refusing to leave. 911 caller stating disturbance has been brought into the hallway, screaming and disrupting the building at this time. Copy of eviction paperwork requested and received. Property manager dropped off USB of security footage. Left in officer’s box.

3:57 p.m. Multiple 911 calls reporting a female pedestrian struck by a vehicle in front of Freedom Credit Union on Avenue A. Officers and Shelburne Control advised.

8:19 p.m. Caller from Third Street states that he was attempting to park and hit another vehicle. Officer advises the caller left a note on the windshield of the involved vehicle. If the owner calls, she can be advised that there will be a report on file.

Saturday, 12/2
12:58 p.m. 911 caller states his girlfriend won’t give him his stuff from her car. Parties separated after verbal disagreement.

5:52 p.m. Caller states that he just got a message from his employee at 253 Pharmacy that a customer just tried to make a purchase using a counterfeit bill. Caller states the employee has the bill and information on the customer. Investigated.

6:13 p.m. Caller states that he just hit a deer at Hatchery and Turners Falls Roads; unsure about damage to truck; believes deer is still on scene. Caller called back and stated that there was no damage to his truck and the deer took off. Cancel response.

6:18 p.m. 911 caller stated that he was showing his family how Siri will call 911 if you ask.

7:01 p.m. 911 caller states that he was involved in a two-vehicle accident on Turners Falls Road; no injuries; no fluids. Officer advises both vehicles are driveable.

7:17 p.m. Caller from G Street states the fire alarm is sounding and there is some smoke coming from an apartment. Call given to control; they also received a call from the alarm company. Officer advises no fire, just burnt food.

Sunday, 12/3
7:42 a.m. 911 caller from Morris Avenue states that all four tires of a vehicle at her house were slashed overnight. Report taken.

EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Coffeehouse Benefits Meetinghouse; Event Celebrates New Local Memoir

WENDELL – In support of the Friends of the Wendell Meetinghouse mission to preserve and restore the Wendell Meetinghouse as a center for spiritual, cultural, and community programs, the Wendell Full Moon Coffeehouse designated the Friends as the beneficiary for the second concert of the Coffeehouse’s fall season. The Green Sisters will perform at the Wendell Town Hall this **Saturday, December 9 at 7 p.m.**, with proceeds going to support Meetinghouse operations and restoration work.

Hailing from a small farm in rural Massachusetts, the four Green Sisters were raised with music accompanying their chores. Their sound spans a wide range of bluegrass, barbershop, blues, country, and lots of original songs which fit right into the mix. Playing regularly in New England for several years, they have garnered a following for their tight harmonies, high-energy tunes, and lively and engaging stage presence.

“Whether you’ve heard them before and are delighted for the reprise, or you’re about to freshly discover their amazing music and energy, this is an evening not to miss,” says

Friends of the Wendell Meetinghouse board member Debbie Lynangale. “Two great things in one evening – a wonderful show, and support for your local Meetinghouse!”

Full Moon Coffeehouse concerts feature an open mic, the popular Desert-O-Rama, and hot beverages in an affordable, family-friendly venue. A donation of \$6 to \$20 is suggested.

With significant community support, the Friends of the Wendell Meetinghouse completed its most recent phase of renovations on the building this spring, rebuilding it from the ancient posts and beams to modern acoustic sound panels. Floors, walls, ceiling, wiring, insulation, windows, doors, stone steps, and ADA entryway were updated and refinished. Since the spring the Meetinghouse has hosted over 40 events. More information is available at wendellmeetinghouse.org.

For more information on the Coffeehouse event, contact Court Dorsey at (413) 325-7587 or courtdorsey@gmail.com.

On **Sunday, December 10 from 3 to 6 p.m.**, Wendell author Kai Carol Jud will celebrate the release of her newly published book, *Life of Kai*, “a memoir of awakening,” at the Wendell Meetinghouse.



Jud is a psychotherapist, retreat leader, tarot reader whose embodied spiritual path and study of shamanism have taken her through the ecstasies and challenges of life and death. In 1988 she founded the Institute of

Process Therapy, a year-long training for therapists and healers in the techniques of process work. She brings decades of experience in Core Energetics, Gestalt, and shamanic journeying to her private practice.

She will be reading excerpts from her memoir, published by Hadley’s of Athol, followed by a question-and-answer period. There will be music, food, and drinks. Books will be available to buy, and a raffle drawing will be held for an autographed book and a tarot reading. This is a free event.

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HEARTFELT from page B1

a move the Italian medievalist and historian Umberto Eco believes likely saved many from malnutrition and death.

Second only to the importance of cereal, grasses, and grains in terms of the human diet, legumes have been a part of every major civilization in history with crops of barley and lentils, rice and soybeans, and corn and beans.

By the 16th century legumes traveled by ship to Europe: black-eyed peas came from Africa as a food source on slave ships as well as a new species of bean, *Phaseolus*, from the New World. Dubbed “kidney beans” by the British, these were popular due to the ease of growing and storing them. The species name evolved into *faculia* for the Greeks, *fagioli* for the Italians, and *flageolet* for the French.

During WWII beans were included in C-rations, and the “navy bean” was so named as a staple for sailors. Postwar food relief efforts greatly increased their consumption as a cheap protein, and today legumes are consumed at the rate of 21 grams per person per day (about 0.74 oz.), as compared to 112 grams of meat (about 4 oz.) per person per day. India and Brazil consume the most legumes, North Korea the least.

Since we live near Beantown, I feel obligated to share the origins of Boston baked beans. With the 18th century slave trade importing rum made from the distillation of fermented molasses, sailors and merchants coined the nickname after the distinctive local style of baking beans with molasses and salt pork or bacon added, and served with sweet brown bread.

As a kid chewing on Boston Baked Bean candies, made from peanuts inside a hard-baked coating shaped to look like the real thing, I might have imagined the sweet and savory smell of molasses and bacon wafting over Boston Harbor as this



MANDESON PHOTO

Lentils are quick and easy to cook and can be added to soups, stews, and salads for a protein punch.

regional delicacy baked slowly in ovens throughout the city.

Here in the Pioneer Valley we grow different varieties of legumes and beans at local farms and in our gardens. One of my favorite summer activities is picking fresh snow peas and green, yellow, and purple string beans on the farm where my CSA share originates. Taking these just-picked vegetables and gently steaming them or, more likely, eating them raw on the way home, is how food should taste.

I have to mention heirloom beans too, which offer unique flavors and textures not often found in the more common beans available. They're harder to grow and have a lower yield than other beans, but are well worth the effort. As the name suggests, these bean varieties have been passed down by small-scale farmers for generations, unlike what we know as commodity beans, the commercial varieties we see in stores.

There's also a floral side to the legume family in the form of the dangling wisteria with its showy blue-violet blooms, and the gorgeous purple, red, and yellow lupins we see in our own summer gardens. In tree form they appear as the honey locust and the black locust.

Whether you're whipping up a batch of refried beans, simmering a pot of chili or hearty lentil soup, sprouting *adzuki* beans for salads, or canning dilly beans, you're adding lots of protein, fiber, carbohydrates, and vitamins to your diet from among the over 400 types of beans and 16,000 legumes that exist in the world.

Trouble Mandeson lives in Greenfield with her wifey and their newly adopted cat Peeps. She volunteers for local nonprofits to cook and feed those in the community, and loves to write, copyedit, and create art.



FROM A TEEN'S POINT OF VIEW
Competitive Speedcubing

By FINTAN ANDREW JONES

MONTAGUE – If you read my previous column about the Rubik's Cube you might know what speedcubing is, but if you don't, it is when you try to solve a Rubik's Cube as fast as possible. People who consider this their hobby, like me, are called “speedcubers.”

Once you feel you are ready you can sign up to be in a competition. There are podiums and prizes, but the majority of people there are doing it because they want to meet other people like them and improve on their own time. I have been to a couple of competitions, and would like to share what it is like competing in them.

Registering for one of these competitions is very easy: you just go onto the World Cube Association (WCA) website, sign up, and pay a small participant fee. Competitions are happening all over the world, though sometimes there may not be a competition very close to you. The two I have been to were in Amherst and Northampton. Luckily enough, we live in a relatively densely-populated area which means there will be more demand for speedcubing competitions. There are usually multiple “events” at each competition, but I will talk about that later.

When you arrive at the competition, you first sign in and then get ready to solve. The venues they choose are usually big, and have plenty of room for spectators to sit. At the competition, an “event” is a type of cube or twisty puzzle you are solving. Not everybody there is solving the traditional 3x3 Rubik's Cube. There are other events, like 2x2, 4x4, 5x5, and even a pyramid.

Anyway, there are multiple groups per event, and it will be announced when it is your time to solve. You walk up with your solved cube, and place it in a corresponding cup that has your name on it. While you are waiting to get called out to the timer, you can talk with other cubers and warm up.

To clear confusion, once the scramblers have scrambled your cube and your name gets called, a

“runner” brings it from the scrambling station to your table in the same cup, and you get ready. You are sitting at a table with a special “SpeedStacks timer” and a judge. The judge will ask if you are ready and let you begin your inspection time. This is when you get to look at the cube and plan your first couple moves.

Once you are ready, the judge lifts the cover and you start the timer. The time starts in a very special way, because you must have both your hands on the timer for it to trigger. You quickly solve the cube, and your time gets recorded onto a piece of paper.

The layout is you do five “solves” per event, and those five solves are averaged – excluding your fastest and slowest times – to get your “Ao5” (average of 5). This is what gets placed and ranked on the leaderboard, and the fastest solvers move onto the next round for each event.

With all of this happening, things can get a little hectic and noisy. Delegates are like the rulers or bosses of everything that happens in a competition – they are there to catch cheating, make sure everyone is safe, and to make sure that competitors are comfortable. I can get stressed under loud noises, so I wear noise-canceling headphones when solving to block out extra noise. This is very common, and lots of people do it.

If you do well in a round, you have a chance to move on to the next round. I made it to Round 2 of 2x2 and then stopped there. I did well in 3x3 and set a couple of personal bests (PBs).

I have a competition coming up in January, and another one in February. There I will be competing in Clock and Pyraminx. Clock is a fascinating and very unique puzzle where you have to align all of the 18 clocks to 12 o'clock. Pyraminx is the pyramid-shaped puzzle that I mentioned earlier.

Thank you for reading! Next time I will be writing about the Inuit. They are indigenous people who live in the northernmost parts of Canada and eastern Siberia.

BASIC HUMMUS

- ½ cup tahini
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- one 15.5-oz. can of chickpeas
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tsp. salt
- pinch of cayenne
- 3 Tbsp. lemon juice

Drain and rinse the chickpeas, and mince the garlic. Mix all ingredients in a blender until smooth.

This quick-and-easy hummus recipe can be modified in many ways. Try substituting or adding steamed beets or roasted root veggies, use a different bean, add in a handful of green olives or roasted peppers, or adjust the amounts of garlic or lemon juice to your taste.

Then, drizzle with olive oil and fresh parsley and serve with pita bread or crackers.

Hummus will keep for several days sealed in the refrigerator.



Hummus is a great addition to any meal, party platter, or charcuterie board. The ingredients may vary with the addition of different types of beans and various additives to change the flavor profile of the dish.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL POLICE LOG

October & November: Injured Hawk; Dropped Phone; Distraught Moose; Double Foot Pursuit; Young Goats

Monday, 10/2
3:40 p.m. Suspicious activity, Main Road. Four parties standing around waiting for a tow truck.
5:57 p.m. Injured hawk reported and located, Main Road. ACO contacted.
5:58 p.m. Two backpacks stolen from an unlocked van parked at the Barton Cove picnic area.

Tuesday, 10/3
3:05 p.m. Caller reporting a tractor trailer violating marked lanes and dangerously braking, French King Highway.

Friday, 10/6
10:04 a.m. Single-car accident versus sign, Route 10 and Lamplighter Way. No personal injuries.
12:45 p.m. 911 call for unwanted party, Mountain Road Estates Street.
2:02 p.m. Disabled vehicle causing problems, Turners Falls-Gill Bridge.
7:03 p.m. Suspicious person reported, West Gill and South Cross roads.

Saturday, 10/7
12:25 p.m. Large spill, possibly oil, at the Barton Cove Recreation Area.
3:27 p.m. Vehicle stuck in the mud, Memorial Grove Road.

Sunday, 10/8
7:12 p.m. Caller advises she struck a deer, Main Road. No injuries, no fluids, no smoke, no fire.

Monday, 10/9
12:40 p.m. Report of a sporty Honda pickup with Vermont plates passing in the breakdown lane, French King Highway.

Tuesday, 10/10
12:43 p.m. Two dogs reported running loose north of the elementary school, Boyle Road.

Wednesday, 10/11
7:58 a.m. Accident, French King Highway. No injuries.
11:22 a.m. Westbound maroon SUV reported passing multiple vehicles on double yellow lines, French King Highway. Erving and Gill units advised.
6:13 p.m. Caller advises a black dog with white markings is loose near the natural cemetery, Main Road.

Friday, 10/13
1:13 p.m. 911 hang up, Riverview Drive. On callback advised it was accidental.

Saturday, 10/14
9:06 a.m. Officer requested to assist Erving PD, West High Street.
6:09 p.m. Assisted citizen at the station.

Sunday, 10/15
11:37 a.m. Served paperwork, South Cross Road.

Tuesday, 10/17
8:50 a.m. Disabled vehicle reported, Riverview Drive.

Wednesday, 10/18
2:38 p.m. Assisted Erving PD, West Main Street. Three-car accident involving a tractor-trailer unit. They are pulling a male subject out of a vehicle. No injuries.
5:08 p.m. Minor collision,

Main Road. Customer backing out of store brushed against parked vehicle in lot. No injuries.

Thursday, 10/19
8:11 a.m. Phone line pulled from library. Coiled up and out of the road.
9:58 p.m. Officer requested for suspicious activity in garage, Center Road.

Saturday, 10/21
1:10 a.m. iPhone crash notification, Dole Road. Subject stated he dropped his phone and does not need police, fire, or EMS.
11:53 a.m. 911 call, West Gill Road. Landline with static on the line.
3:07 p.m. 911 call from a landline, Mount Hermon Road. Buzzing in the background before disconnecting. On callback, line continuously busy.

Sunday, 10/22
6:58 p.m. Assisted Northfield PD, Main and Maple Streets. Motor vehicle accident, no injuries.

Monday, 10/23
1:55 p.m. Meals on Wheels requesting an officer for a welfare check.
2:20 p.m. Caller advises a drone is flying in the area of Myrtle Street.
4:15 p.m. Served paperwork on Dole Road.

Tuesday, 10/24
1:29 p.m. Loud vehicle reported every evening around 9 p.m., Franklin Road. No description.
3:55 p.m. Assisted Bernardston PD with disturbance, South Street.
4:56 p.m. Caller reporting a tall, thin woman in an orange vest and gray sweatpants staggering a lot and heading toward the dam, Walnut Street. Contact made with subject.

Wednesday, 10/25
3:28 p.m. Investigated small burn, Green Hill Road. All units clear.
6:12 p.m. Caller reporting a lost chocolate Labrador, Green Hill Road.
7:01 p.m. Served paperwork on Dole Road.
7:26 p.m. Caller reports a bin of recyclables and trash fell out of her car and scattered on the French King Highway. She is looking for assistance to slow traffic so she can pick it up.

Friday, 10/27
11:24 a.m. Assisted Montague PD. Report of a male party jumping from Canal Street bridge.
4:28 p.m. Assisted Erving PD, Prospect Street and Papermill Road. Caller reporting a two-car accident.

Saturday, 10/28
10:46 a.m. Assisted Bernardston PD, Bald Mountain Road. Caller states a moose is distraught, possibly injured.

Sunday, 10/29
9:30 a.m. Assisted Montague PD with double foot pursuit, Avenue A.
12:50 p.m. Caller advises she is locked in a gated area, Barton Cove Road.

2:15 p.m. Investigation, Main Road.

Monday, 10/30
1:02 p.m. Main Road caller states someone came in saying they were out of gas, removed the plates off their van, and took off.
1:56 p.m. Caller reports someone parked a red SUV with a "For Sale" sign on her property, Main Road.

Tuesday, 10/31
8:08 a.m. Caller advised a red dump truck dropped a trailer in front of his house and took off.
9:09 p.m. Riverview Drive caller noticed a screen window up on her porch. She is concerned about entering her home.

Wednesday, 11/1
6:47 p.m. Car alarm sounding repeatedly, French King Highway. Made contact with homeowner.

Friday, 11/3
10:29 a.m. MassDEP advises of potentially significant release of #2 fuel oil in Putney, Vermont yesterday which has impacted the Connecticut River.
3:03 p.m. Sick/injured kitten recovered, Main and River roads. Transporting to emergency veterinary hospital.
6:22 p.m. Assisted Northfield PD with suspicious person, Northfield Road.

Saturday, 11/4
11:23 a.m. Assisted Erving PD with disturbance, French King Highway.

Sunday, 11/5
4:20 p.m. Caller advises she was rear-ended. No personal injuries, fluids, or airbag deployment.

Tuesday, 11/7
1:32 p.m. Caller advises a newer black Suburban was entirely pulled off the northbound side of Main and Boyle roads with doors open on the side, but not facing the road. Advises the vehicle had extremely dark tinted windows, and no one is near the vehicle.
2:54 p.m. Assisted Northfield PD with structure fire.
7:24 p.m. Vehicle swerved into oncoming traffic, Main Road.

Thursday, 11/9
11:12 a.m. Two young goats reported in roadway, Main Road.

Friday, 11/10
2:16 a.m. 911 call, French King Highway. Caller at the Gill Mill was afraid that they were going to run out of gas and the Mill wasn't open.
1:20 p.m. Caller believes she has found an injured heron. Bird flew away on its own. All is well.

Saturday, 11/11
11:37 a.m. Assisted Sunderland PD with arrest, Boyle Road.

Monday, 11/13
9:48 a.m. Camper fire, no smoke currently showing, Main Road.

Tuesday, 11/14
5:27 p.m. Caller advises there is a baggie with a

white substance in it in the parking lot, Main Road.

Thursday, 11/16
9:41 a.m. Served warrant on Walnut Street.
3:25 p.m. Caller discovered a vehicle in her front yard with extensive damage and airbag deployment.

Saturday, 11/18
7:30 a.m. Assisted Northfield PD with accident, Bennett Brook and Mount Hermon Station roads. Vehicle went through the stop sign and struck a pole. Wires are down.
2:09 p.m. Vehicle lockout, NMH lower soccer field.

Sunday, 11/19
1:52 p.m. Main Road caller advises a dump truck is parked in her front yard and she is unsure who it belongs to.
4:15 p.m. Assisted Northfield PD, South Mountain Road.

Monday, 11/20
10 a.m. Missing person reported, Main Road.
12:47 p.m. Assisted citizen with property left behind, Mountain Road Estates Street.
3:09 p.m. Caller advises she was behind a box truck traveling westbound on Route 2. Vehicle was swerving and eventually went off the road just west of the French King Bridge.

Tuesday, 11/21
12:33 a.m. Mountain Road caller reports hearing the sound of smashing metal from across the street.
9:02 a.m. Caller states he came home from work to find a deer in his front yard on South Cross Road with a severely broken leg. No vehicle in area.

Wednesday, 11/22
9:56 a.m. Animal complaint, West Gill Road.
7:47 p.m. Container of dry-wall supplies lying in the travel lane near the Spirit Shop on Main Road. Removed from roadway.

Saturday, 11/25
8:49 a.m. Assisted another agency, Barney Hale Road.
10:50 a.m. Assisted Greenfield PD with arrest, Barney Hale Road.

Monday, 11/27
4:44 p.m. Caller advises he struck a deer on Main Road. Same is injured on the side of the road.

Tuesday, 11/28
2:48 p.m. Loose dog, Center Road.
7:17 p.m. Tree down blocking the eastbound lane, French King Highway.

Wednesday, 11/29
5:39 a.m. Caller from Chappell Drive asked for an officer to listen to very threatening voicemails.
9:25 a.m. Chimney fire, South Cross Road.

Thursday, 11/30
1:03 p.m. Assisted with probation visit, Main Road.
7:30 p.m. Assisted Massachusetts SP search for subject who fled from a crash scene, Route 91 northbound.

REVUE REVIEW

A Drag for the Holidays

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI



Mr. Drag (Joe Dulude), left, with Pink (Myka Plunkett).

GREENFIELD – I've seen a couple of holiday shows at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls featuring Karl and Mr. Drag. I found them to my liking, and decided to see if my lucky streak with that would continue.

This year's show, on December 1 and 2, was called *A Drag for the Holidays*, and the theme seems to be like their version of a family gathering that takes an interesting turn. A nice large crowd showed up at the theater to see the performance, so it looks like Karl and Mr. Drag haven't lost any popularity since the other times I have seen them.

In the opening act, Mr. Drag was singing a song in a suit that he was obviously wearing for the holidays. It turned into a dance number with other people dressed as martinis, which I think had to do with the song he was singing. It wasn't a bad way to start the show. It started to resemble a family gathering during the holidays, but it did have a unique turn to it. Mr. Drag commented about the change, and indicated it wasn't how things are normally.

The show did seem like they were having a holiday party. I liked the joke about a new slogan idea for Turners Falls: "What happens here stays here, because no one knows we're here."

There were a couple more music numbers, which the audience really

enjoyed. One number was a Christmas song, "What Christmas Means to Me." I enjoyed that being part of the show. Another number resembled something I once saw in a car ad. It was funny. Sometimes I don't get the humor in the Mr. Drag and Karl shows, but I got some of what was there this time rather decently.

The audience's continued enthusiastic applause to the show backed up my thought that those shows hadn't lost any popularity. There was an interactive part of the show where the audience was asked questions by Mr. Drag. I found the show to be all right.

My favorite moment of the show was when Mr. Drag told his own take on the Nativity story to the audience. I really enjoyed it.

EXHIBITS

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

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Junior Duck Stamps*. See the top youth entries for the 2023 Junior Duck Stamp competition. This statewide contest, for students from kindergarten to high school, highlights the importance of preserving wetland habitats and the delights of wildlife. Make your own duck 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: *C.R.E.A.T.E.: 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.

Leverett Crafts & Arts Center, Leverett: *Holiday Store and Open Studios*. Work by Mudpie Potters and resident artists, plus a few "local friends." First two weekends in December.

Northfield Mount Hermon Rhodes Arts Center, Gill: *Borrowed Light*, sculptures, prints, ceramics, and photographs by Anna Hepler. Through December 14; reopens after break, January 7 to 18.

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

ember 30. Opening reception this Thursday, December 7 at 5 p.m.

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. Reception this Friday, December 8, from 5 to 8 p.m.

Art in the Hall, Shelburne Falls: *The Antique Future*, Christin Couture's long, narrow, surreal landscape paintings in battered vintage frames, through December. By appointment at redtide-bluefire@gmail.com.

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 Strong-BearHeart Gaines, Jr. Through February 25.

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BRAINS

Psychoactive Substances Structurally Similar To Serotonin Soothe Sadness

By **SPENCER SHORKEY**

MILLERS FALLS – Serotonin has a really important function as a *neurotransmitter*, that is, as a propagator of signals in the brain. Low serotonin levels are one of many chemical imbalances observed in patients of depression. Serotonin and a number of well-known psychoactive substances are all known to bind to a receptor on brain cells which mediates their effects.

Other psychoactive substances structurally similar to serotonin include lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), a synthetic compound; dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a natural plant compound used in indigenous Amazonian shamanic practices; and psilocybin, a naturally occurring compound found in “magic mushrooms.” These are shown in the accompanying illustration binding with the serotonin receptor.

Psychedelic substances have been increasingly investigated by clinical trials in recent years, showing promise in alleviating symptoms of depression, anxiety, trauma, and addiction. Many therapeutically relevant psychedelic compounds work by mimicking the serotonin, sticking to the serotonin receptors in the brain.

A significant clinical trial testing single-dose psilocybin treatment for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) in 104 adults reported positive Phase 2 results this August. Participants were randomized to receive a 25-mg dose of synthetic psilocybin or a 100-mg dose of niacin as a placebo, each with psychological support.

The results showed that psilocybin treatment led to a significant reduction in the patients’ “Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale” (MADRS) scores, indicating a rapid and sustained antidepressant effect. Trial participants receiving psilocybin had sustained depressive symptom response in 42% of cases, compared to 11% in the control group. Psilocybin was also associated with improved psychosocial functioning and was generally well-tolerated, with most adverse events being mild or moderate and limited to the acute dosing period.

The study adds to the growing evidence that psilocybin – when administered with psychological support – is a promising treatment for MDD. These trial results were published this August, the same month that the Massachusetts campaign, Massachusetts for Mental Health Options, started its petition for a psychedelics legalization ballot initiative. This campaign, backed by the political action committee New Approach, aimed to get 100,000 signatures in support of the ballot question in our state.

New Approach says it has collected 100,000 signatures from Massachusetts voters, putting the initiative on track to become a referendum on the ballot next fall. According to spokesman Jared Moffat, the high volume of new signatures collected in a short time is indicative of the initiative’s popularity.

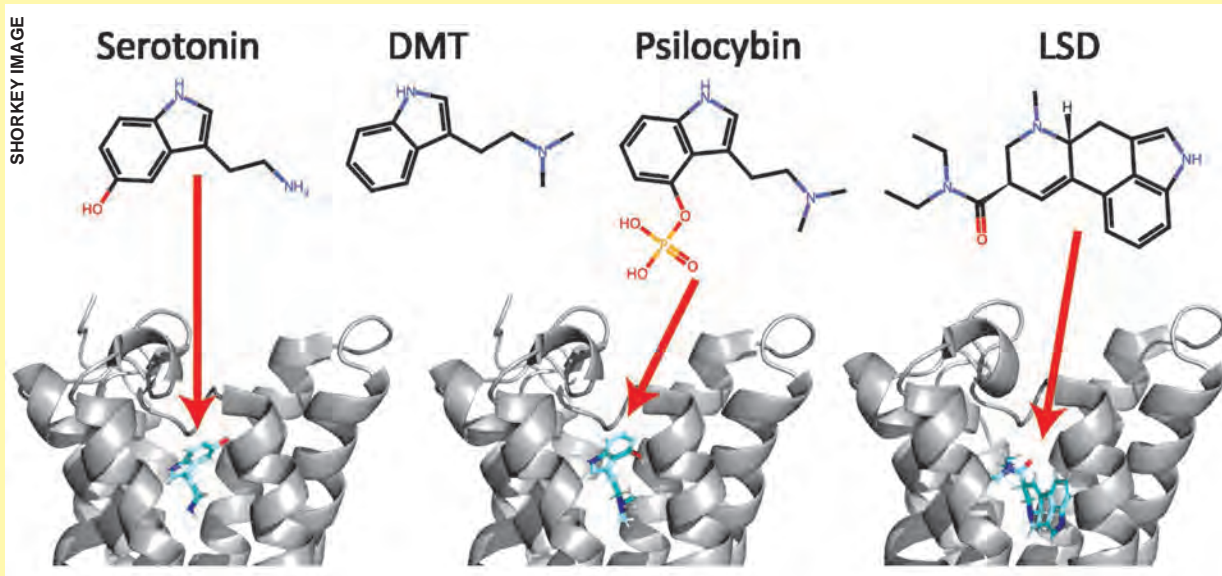
The initiative, known as the Natural Psychedelic Substances Act, aims to create a regulatory framework for lawful and supervised access to psychedelics at licensed facilities. It would legalize the possession and gifting of psychedelics such as psilocybin and ayahuasca for adults 21 and older, and would allow for their home cultivation.

The act would also establish a “Natural Psychedelic Substances Commission” to oversee implementation of the law and licensing of facilitators and service centers. Additional provisions include a 15% excise tax on psychedelics purchased at these licensed facilities, with localities having the option to impose an additional 2% tax.

From a medical standpoint, recent research has shown promising potential for psilocybin in treating certain mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Clinical trials suggest that psilocybin, often in conjunction with therapy, can produce significant and rapid improvements in these conditions.

The move towards legalization or decriminalization of psilocybin reflects a shift in how society views psychoactive substances, and represents a significant step forward in the treatment of certain mental health conditions and in drug policy reform in general.

Look out for psilocybin on the ballot in 2024!



Several molecules with shapes similar to serotonin all bind to the serotonin receptor, and exert psychoactive effects. (For more information about molecular structures and how they are represented, see the author’s article at frankscience.substack.com/p/the-art-of-protein-structure.)

BLOOD

Cholesterol Gene Therapy Shows Promise in Phase I

By **SPENCER SHORKEY**

MILLERS FALLS – Over the past year we’ve put out a few articles to prepare the knowledge base of readers for results in Phase 1 of a very significant clinical trial, VERVE-101. This gene therapy was developed by the companies Verve Therapeutics and Eli Lilly, and is effectively a gene-level inactivation of the PCSK9 protein:

- The target of the gene therapy, PCSK9, and the intended cholesterol-lowering effects were discussed in February by Olivia Macrorie, and can be found at www.frankscience.substack.com/p/the-new-cholesterol-medications.

- The makeup of the gene therapy, a lipid nanoparticle (LNP) carrying ribonucleic acids (RNA), was described in October by this reporter and can be found at www.frankscience.substack.com/p/sneaky-greaseballs-deliver-an-rna.

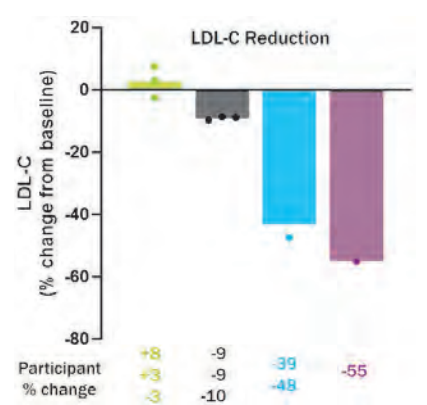
- The action of gene-editing enzymes which permanently change DNA, including CRISPR/Cas9 and base editors, was covered last month by yours truly and can be found at www.frankscience.substack.com/p/the-long-road-from-dna-structure.

So let’s discuss this breakthrough medicine. The inactivation of PCSK9, which stands for “pro-protein convertase subtilisin/kexin type 9,” is expected to result in lowered blood cholesterol levels in patients. PCSK9 has been previously targeted for lowering cholesterol in humans by antibodies, such as Praluent from Regeneron, and by silencing RNA – such as inclisiran by Alnylam and Novartis.

In their preclinical work, Verve showed its gene therapy worked well in non-human primates, successfully editing 70% of liver cells, and durably lowering low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) levels by more than 50%. Their studies also showed that no gametes (i.e. sperm or eggs) were edited, alleviating concerns that the gene therapy could possibly impact a patient’s offspring. The rates of incorrect or off-target edits in their mouse and monkey studies were also exceedingly low.

The new results, presented on November 12 at the American Heart Association Scientific Sessions 2023, looked promising.

The Phase 1 trial was cautiously small, involving nine people in New Zealand with familial hypercholesterolemia. The results were



Reductions in blood LDL-C of 39%, 48% and 55% were observed in the two higher-dose cohorts following VERVE-101 administration.

presented for a range of dosages; 0.1, 0.3, 0.45, and 0.6 mg of LNP per kilogram of patient mass (mg/kg), with three, three, two, and one patients respectively.

Although the patients who received the lowest dosages (0.1 and 0.3 mg/kg) had relatively little change in blood cholesterol, the two treated receiving 0.45 mg/kg saw LDL-C reductions of 39% and 48%, and the patient receiving 0.6 mg/kg saw a 55% decrease. These preliminary results appear to be at least as good as Praluent and inclisiran, which had previously been shown to reduce LDL-C around 48% in familial hypercholesterolemia patients.

As for side effects, in the two lower-dose cohorts there were no adverse events observed. However, in the two-higher dose cohorts, mild or moderate infusion reactions occurred transiently. Two patients experienced serious cardiovascular events; however, in their press release Verve commented that these events occurred in the context of patients with already severe cardiovascular disease.

Moving forward, Verve is continuing to enroll more patients in the 0.45 and 0.6 mg/kg dosages to complete “dose escalation phase” of the current trial, and plans to enroll an expansion cohort in 2024.

A Phase 2 trial for VERVE-101 is planned for 2025. While Phase 1 trials are geared toward establishing a new drug’s safety and dose range in a small number of patients, Phase 2 is more to gauge the efficacy of the drug, and includes more patients.

In the final stage, Phase 3, a much larger and sufficiently diverse patient population would be tested, providing the necessary data for the regulatory agencies to make a final approval decision.

IMAGE COURTESY OF VERVE THERAPEUTICS

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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Menschorama's Chanukah Spectacular* feat. *Ciezig Ziegler, Danielle Deluty, Bella Levavi, Eric Dreiblatt*. Comedy. \$.8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Horse Jumper of Love, Strange Mangers, Sapien Joyride*. \$.8 p.m.

Red Cross, Northampton: *Craow, Amobriax, Waves Over Heaven, Death Spiral*. \$.8 p.m.

The Buoyant Heart, Brattleboro: *Henry Birdsey, Caldon Glover, ARKM Foam, Orobeltarb Ramblers, Bug*. \$.8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Rage Honey, Magick Lantern, Silvie's Okay*. \$.8 p.m.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

Leverett Village Co-Op: *Little House Blues*. No cover. 6 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Danny and Heath, Sean Magoo*. No cover. 7 p.m.

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

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

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: *Lui Collins and Anand Nayak*. \$.7:30 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Eleanore Levine Band, Sasha K.A. Trio, Niagara Moon*. \$.7:30 p.m.

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

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

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

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

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: Open mic, and *Paul Kaplan*. \$.6:30 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: The Performance Project presents *Mother Tongue*. \$.7 p.m.

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

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Kivimäe, Black Axe, Draíodóir, Cinderghast*. Benefit for Gaza Strip mutual aid. \$. Bake sale, tarot readings, readings at 4 p.m. speakers at 6 p.m., music at 7:30 p.m.

Wendell Full Moon Coffeehouse: *The Green Sisters*. Benefit for the Meetinghouse. \$.7:30 p.m.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *Jake Blount*. \$.7:30 p.m.

Everything Must Go, Northampton: *Film & Gender, Letters of Marque, KO Queen, Target Scammers*. \$.7:30 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Donna the Buffalo*. \$.8 p.m.

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

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Welcome Yule*. \$.2 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Mephiskapheles, The Prozacs, Threat Level Burgundy, Green Street Fiends*. \$.8 p.m.

Everything Must Go, Northampton: *Dead Gowns, h. pruz, bobbie, Sleep Destroyer*. \$.8 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

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

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

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

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *TapRoots, Mal Maiz*. \$.8 p.m.

Everything Must Go, Northampton: *Prawn, Van Vreeland, Ruby Lou*. \$.8 p.m.

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Red Herings, Gluebag, Silver Dagger, Flavour*. \$.8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *HardCar, Ezzy P, Mesmir*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Mad'Atter*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Mt. Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Eveline MacDougall with Fiery Hope*. \$.7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Jeopardy, PWRUP, Slob Drop, Bent*. \$.7:30 p.m.

Next Stage Arts, Putney, VT: *Livingston Taylor, Karla Bonoff*. \$.7:30 p.m.

Red Cross, Northampton: *Rong, Nite Office, Blood Blood Blood, Ian St. George Band*. \$.8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Kimaya Diggs & Friends Holiday Show*. \$.8 p.m.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *Sophia Subbayya Vastek, John Davis*. \$.8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Olivia Nied*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

The Clark, Williamstown: *Aaron Dilloway, Liz Durette*. \$.5 p.m.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Editrix, Space Camp, Valley Gals, Sensor Ghost*. \$.7 p.m.

looking forward...

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 Niels, 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 Hopte, Loculus & Magick Lantern, Appalachian Still, Hedgewitch, Pamela Means, and MANY more.* See firstlightnorthampton.org. \$. Starts at 1 p.m.

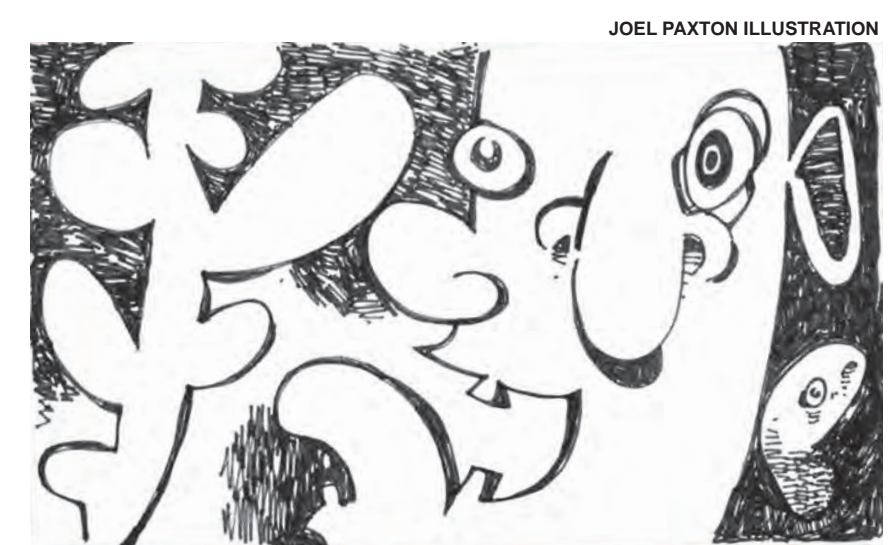
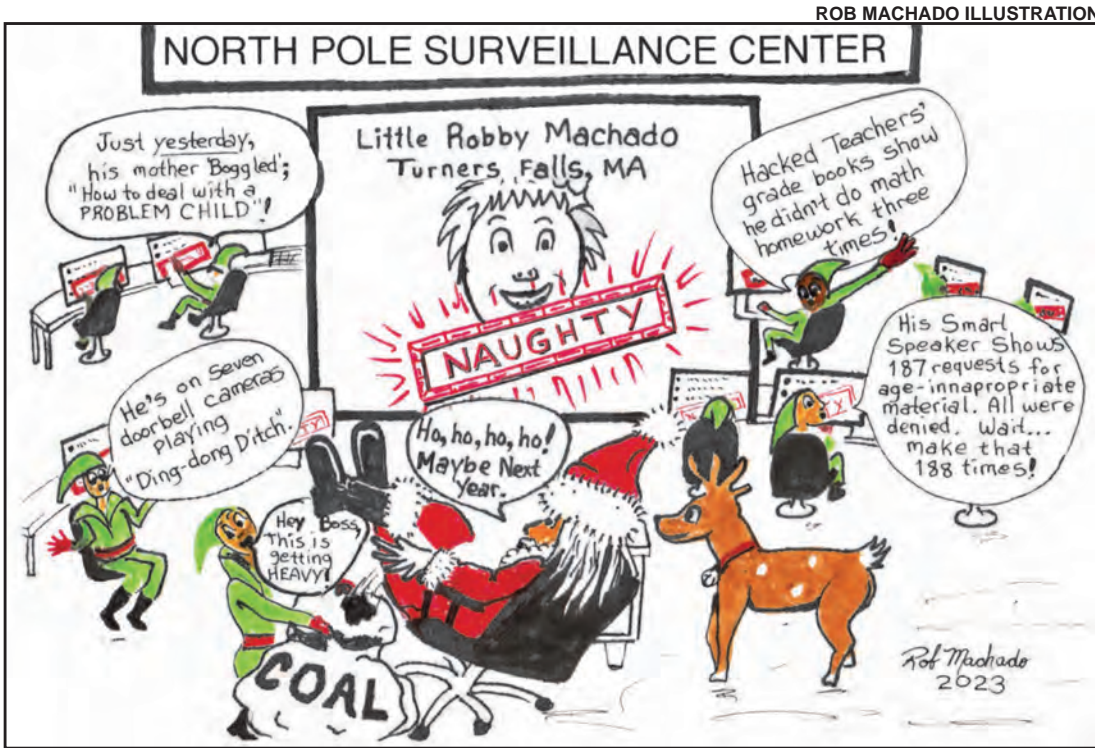
Race Street Live, Holyoke: *Enter the Haggis*. \$.8:30 p.m.

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

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

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

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



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TRADITIONS from page B1 point – everyone pulls sharply when given the signal. The crackers have a pop-gun type snap inside, which breaks with a satisfying *pop* and the fillings spill out.

If the arm-crossing business sounds a bit complicated, the other equally canonical way to go is to have a partner and to crack your two crackers with each other, one in each hand, so they both pop at the same time.

As for the fillings, there are three per cracker: a rolled-up paper crown, a riddle or joke known as the “motto” on a slip of paper, and some little novelty – a tape measure, a mini-pack of cards, a little game. Bottle openers and bracelets are not unknown. Once I got a plastic scoop that now lives in my sugar bin.

Often the fillings fly around the room as the crackers are pulled so you have to find them, because the next steps are donning the paper crowns and reading the mottoes. An American relative complained that cracker jokes are the stupidest he’d ever heard. True. They are meant to be that way. Good jokes are not in the spirit of the thing.

The result of all this is everyone in England starts their Christmas dinner groaning over bad jokes, laughing at the bits and bobs that came as cracker gifts, and wearing an unflattering paper crown. They are in a jolly frame of mind, however, and that makes all the difference.

So what’s the origin of this mini-mayhem? Today’s crackers go back to the 1840s, a period when Christmas festivities were changing in England, moving from adult-centered games with lots of feasting and drinking to the child-centered Christmas we know today, with gifts and outings for children. For example, Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s husband, brought German customs such as Christmas trees to entertain his children, and they quickly caught on throughout the country.

Christmas crackers were, how-



A place setting complete with a cracker.



Hold tight at the joint, then both pull together.

ever, an entirely English invention, created by Tom Smith, a London confectioner. Inspired by the luxuriously-wrapped *bonbons* he had seen in Paris, he marketed his candies wrapped in fancy paper with a twist at each side. He dreamed up crackers as a way of selling the candies, modeling the three-part cracker shape on the candy wrapping. He also included a tiny love message similar to Valentine’s messages with the candy inside. Quite soon sweethearts were sharing his Christmas crackers, hoping that the motto would foretell some happy outcome.

This was such a success that rival crackers soon appeared. In response, Tom and later his son Walter added the snap – apparently inspired by the *snap* of logs burning in the fireplace – and the hat. They also switched out the candy for a trinket. The beloved Christmas crackers of today had arrived.

But while the mid-19th century invented Christmas crackers, its pleasures are all rooted in the medieval English Christmas, and beyond that to the Roman Saturnalia. The core element of both festivities was the Christmas King, or the Bean King or the Lord of Misrule – a servant or other ordinary person who took precedence over everyday rulers such as bosses and lords. Chosen by lot he was King for the day, and he and his Queen wore fake crowns and robes and were supported by a

court similarly dressed.

By the 17th century these customs had morphed into the game of “characters.” Each person picked a paper from a hat on which was written what they should play: perhaps the King or Queen, or perhaps a cheeky page boy or a fat cook. Until fairly recently the paper hats in crackers reflected this, because they were not all crowns. There could be Napoleonic bicorn hats, maid-servant’s caps, and chef’s toques. But crowns were definitely the prize, and today, everyone’s a winner.

The mottoes with their foolish jokes also date back to the medieval Lords of Misrule who presided over Christmas, using their short-term authority to command japes and antics, forfeits and jokes. The mottoes are the jokes and, significantly, they are not for private reading. The point is to read them aloud to inevitable groans – but laughter, too.

Together, the hats and the jokes set the festive mood, helped along by the little gifts. They too hark back to old Christmases when adults gave each other gifts on Boxing Day, which falls on December 26 and was a day for worldly festivities, because Christmas Day was traditionally kept as a religious holiday.

New Year’s Day was another day for gifts – and for crackers, too. In England they often help fuel the fun on New Year’s Eve, and show up again at New Year’s Day dinners.

Indeed, though absolutely vital on the Christmas table, they are welcome any time in the season, not least at children’s parties.

If you are new to buying crackers, the first thing to do when you have located a stash at one of the big-box stores is to check out the designs. Some feature pretty green-

ery, sparkly snowflakes, or other Christmas motifs, while others parade as Santa and his elves or the figures from *The Nutcracker* or even cartoon characters.

When you have picked a design, check the back of the box, which usually describes the trinkets inside. You can sometimes buy gorgeously fancy crackers that have better goodies, but typically these are pretty expensive, and since it’s quite likely you’ll need two or three boxes so that you have at least one cracker per guest, the cost can be mouthwatering.

Having chosen eye-catching crackers, you can be sure that they’ll provoke the fun and laughter of Christmas, bringing echoes of its rambunctious past. Soon, I hope, crackers will become as much a part of Christmas in America as they are in Britain – and in Australia and Canada, too.



A cracker and its contents: a paper crown, a motto, and a roll of sticky tape.

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