

# The Montague Reporter

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THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

MARCH 7, 2024

## Leverett Officially Hits 250, And the Partying Has Begun



Residents, town staff, and officials who turned out Tuesday to celebrate Leverett's new commemorative postmark gathered for a photo op outside the post office.

By **GEORGE BRACE**

Leverett continued celebrating its 250th anniversary with a lively, well-attended event at the town post office on March 5, the date of the town's incorporation in 1774.

Organized by Maureen Ippolito and the 250th celebration committee and dedicated to longtime resident Edith "Edie" Oleson Field, Tuesday's event was marked by the debut of a special commemorative postmark and displays which included a historic post office box, postcards, and other postal artifacts.

About 30 local residents and officials crowded into the small post office for the morning event.

State senator Jo Comerford was on hand with brief comments, and selectboard chair Tom Hankinson spoke about growing up in Leverett over 60 years ago. Leverett historical commission chair Susan Mareneck provided some interesting post office history.

Comeford said she "loved" the community of Leverett and praised the town for "showing how it's done" in its care for people and the natural world and in honoring its heritage.

Hankinson shared memories of his early years in Leverett in the mid-1960s, from his parents' settling into a "boarded up, 100-acre former dairy farm with no bathrooms – or even running water" to his three-mile bike rides to school, often stopping to "check out the frog and turtle population in Leverett Pond," or to return books to the Field Library.

In those days, he noted, the post office in Leverett Center was actually "Muriel Bourne's Post Office and General Store," which sold candy as well as taking care of the mail. Hankinson said there were likely still nickels buried on the premises which he had accidentally dropped into air ducts

see **LEVERETT** page A7

## Franklin County High in Primary Voters Showing No Preference

By **MIKE JACKSON**

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – In March 2020, five of the 2,306 voters in Montague's Democratic Party presidential primary, or 0.2%, cast ballots indicating that they held "No Preference." On Tuesday, though overall participation at the polls had dropped to 1,105, the No Preference count was at 157, or 14.2%.

The incidence by precinct ranged from 8.1% in Precinct 3 to 27.9% in Precinct 5.

This gesture may reflect a minor regional trend. Sorting the state's 351 towns and cities by percentages of Democratic ballots cast for "No Preference" this week, 10 of the top 22 were in Franklin County, with Wendell, Greenfield, Colrain, Charlemont, Montague, Shutesbury, Leverett, Conway, Ashfield, and Warwick all showing at 13% or more.

Four of the others were also towns west of the Quabbin, and the remaining eight are a set of contiguous cities in greater Boston.

The Democratic primary was won in all 26 of the county's towns by incumbent US president Joe Biden.

No corresponding increase in lack of preference was seen on the Republican ballots. Nine Franklin County towns – Ashfield, Wendell, Sunderland, Monroe, Shutesbury, Warwick, Deerfield, Leverett, and Buckland – were among the 68 statewide whose Republican voters favored Nikki Haley over Donald Trump. Haley announced her withdrawal from the race on Wednesday.

## Special Town Meeting to Decide On Airport, Cemeteries, Police

By **JEFF SINGLETON**

**MONTAGUE** – Next Thursday, March 14 at 6:30 p.m., Montague will hold a special town meeting at the Turners Falls High School auditorium. All 14 articles have been endorsed by both the selectboard and the finance committee, though the latter did not vote on an article removing the police department from the state civil service as it is not a "money article."

The most controversial item on the agenda may prove to be **Article**

**9**, which would transfer \$152,261 to cover most of a shortfall in the town-owned airport's current budget, which was originally approved last spring. The shortfall was caused in part by unanticipated expenses, the largest of which is reported to be a "heating source" that failed to pass inspection, costing \$17,500.

The most important cause, however, was the failure of the airport to realize over \$152,000 in revenue from leasing land to a company building a solar array, which did not see **STM** page A5

## State Commission Seeks Input On Energy Infrastructure Siting



Jonathan Thompson, senior ecologist at Harvard Forest, spoke Tuesday night in Petersham about a recent report he contributed to on the prospects for future solar development in Massachusetts and strategies to balance it with habitat protection.

By **SARAH ROBERTSON**

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – "How should Massachusetts balance the need to accelerate deployment of clean energy, ensure communities have input into the siting and permitting process, and ensure the benefits of the clean energy transition are shared equitably?"

The state Commission on Energy Infrastructure Siting and Permitting is asking the public for input as to how Massachusetts can best implement its ambitious energy development goals. From now until next Friday, anyone can submit answers to this question – and 43 others – through an online survey.

The commission, established by Governor Maura Healey in September, is helping the state review key policies that will guide the next several decades of energy infrastructure development. Made up of agency

heads, municipal leaders, and representatives of utilities and environmental groups, it held two virtual listening sessions this week, and is expected to submit recommendations to Healey by the end of the month.

"The charge that the governor had for the commission was, number one, figure out how to accelerate siting and permitting of clean energy so that we can reach those goals," said Michelle Manion, who represents Mass Audubon. "And number two, make sure that communities have a say."

Finding sites for a substantial number of renewable energy generation and storage facilities will be essential to meeting the state's goal of net-zero carbon emission by 2050, as will the electrification of cars, indoor heating systems, and other aspects of our lives. But state agencies and local communities are

see **ENERGY** page A7

**MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD**

## Mosquitoes Reprieved, Pending State Reform

By **JEFF SINGLETON**

The Montague selectboard has agreed to support a recommendation by the local board of health that the town not join the Pioneer Valley Mosquito Control District (PVMC) at this time, pending the outcome of proposed legislation which could significantly change state mosquito control policy. Twenty-four towns in the region are in the control district, which offers testing and surveillance services at a low cost, but Montague has hesitated to join based on the fear that membership in the district might make the town vulnerable to aerial insecticide spraying.

At Monday's meeting Montague

public health director Ryan Paxton reported on a public information session held by the health board the previous week. He said that John Briggs, the director of the PVMC, attended the meeting and responded to questions.

Briggs has told this newspaper that the district does not favor, or have the capacity to implement, aerial spraying.

Paxton told the selectboard that all those who spoke at the meeting had "expressed some level of opposition to the application of mosquito pesticides," and also were concerned that joining the control district "could result in the town

see **MONTAGUE** page A6

## High School Sports: Winter Season Over After Final Turners Team Falls in Tournaments

By **MATT ROBINSON**

**TURNERS FALLS** – It was a huge week in basketball.

On Saturday LeBron James scored his 4,000th point, and the very next day, Caitlin Clark surpassed Pistol Pete Maravich's all-time NCAA scoring record. I don't believe either record will be broken anytime soon, and we were around to witness it.

Closer to home, the Franklin Tech girls fended off the young Pioneer Christian Eagles, and then traveled to Westport, where the Wildcats ended their magical season.

*FCTS 58 – Pioneer Christian 47  
Westport 50 – FCTS 31*

On Friday, March 1, the Tech Girls Basketball Eagles hosted the Eagles of Pioneer Christian in the statewide MIAA Division V Round of 32. The visiting fans filled an entire section, and they were enthusiastically loud. Many of their students wore shirts adorned with spiritual phrases.

The team themselves were young – very young. They had one junior on the team and the rest

see **SPORTS** page A4



Franklin Tech senior Kyra Goodell keeps the ball in bounds during last Friday's MIAA Round of 32 home playoff game against the Pioneer Christian Eagles.

### All-In-One, Like Shampoo and Conditioner, Only It's A Newspaper

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# The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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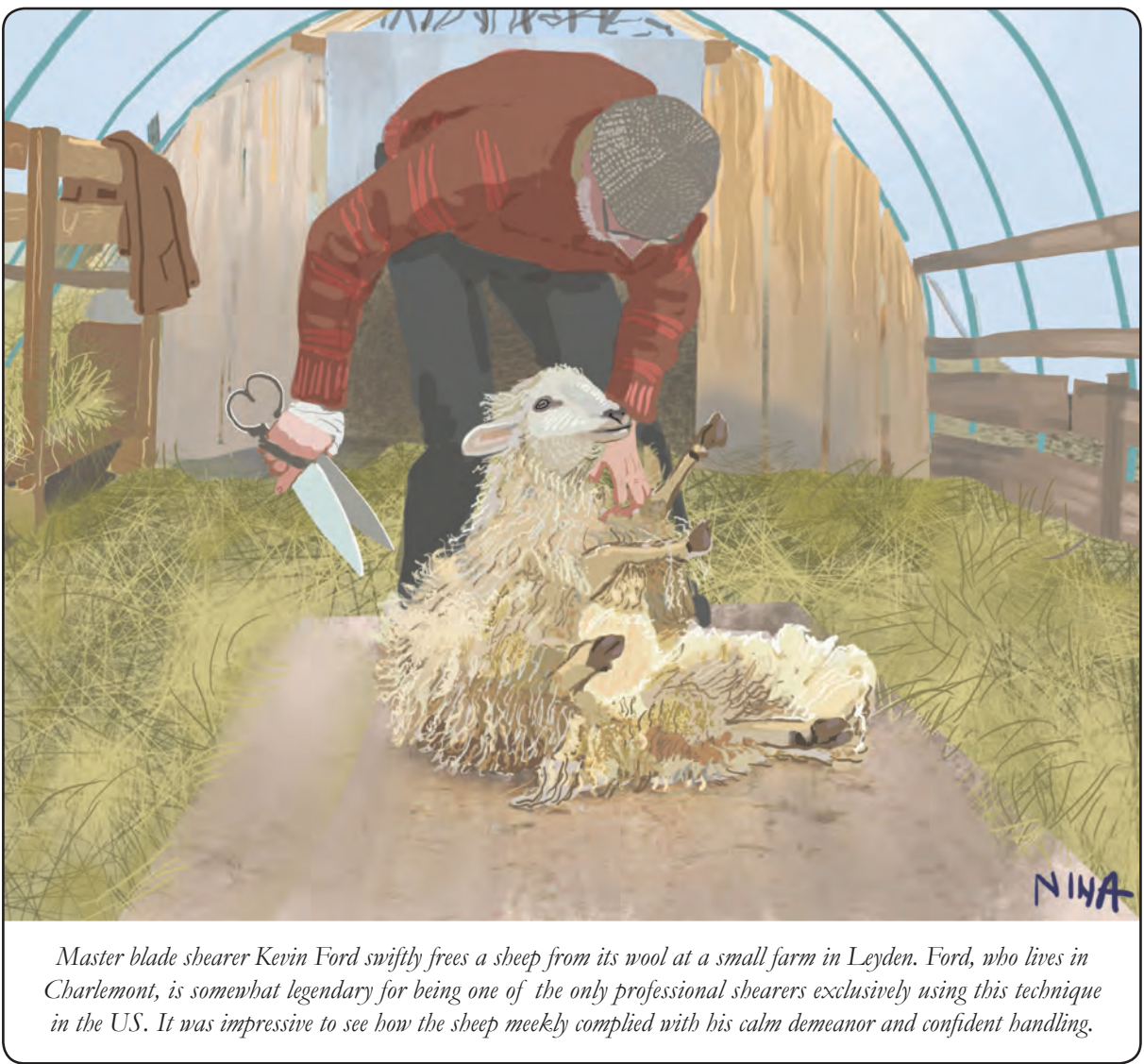
## A Sixty-Day Window

From February 22 to April 22, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is seeking comment on FirstLight Power's applications to renew its licenses for the Turners Falls dam, canal, and hydro plants and the Northfield Mountain pumped-storage station.

We hope our readers informed on these subjects will weigh in – their *full* impacts need to be taken into consideration before new 30-

to 50-year licenses are granted. The Connecticut River Conservancy has provided a guide for how to submit comments at [www.criver.org/our-work/hydropower](http://www.criver.org/our-work/hydropower).

It's easy to feel cynical that many agencies signed away their right to disagree in exchange for limited concessions, or that the company *might* be running the clock in hopes of a Republican-appointed FERC, but you should still comment.



Master blade shearer Kevin Ford swiftly frees a sheep from its wool at a small farm in Leyden. Ford, who lives in Charlemont, is somewhat legendary for being one of the only professional shearers exclusively using this technique in the U.S. It was impressive to see how the sheep meekly complied with his calm demeanor and confident handling.

### GUEST EDITORIAL

By CHRIS JOSEPH

**GREENFIELD** – Newell is a multinational corporation that owns, among other things, the Sharpie brand, the Rubbermaid brand, and Yankee Candle brand.

A local paper announced recently that 350 jobs would be leaving the area as Newell consolidates businesses and seeks efficiencies in operations.

This story is so far from unique that it wouldn't be worth noting, except that I think I have a bit of a unique perspective on the subject by having worked six years at Yankee Candle, by having helped design the facility they are closing, by having been both loved and mistreated egregiously by the company, and by having an audacious plan to get just a tiny bit of retribution or remuneration.

Around the year 1997, I was 18 years old with a wife and baby son. I was working at a local vegetarian food factory doing manual labor, packaging and light warehousing. I saw an advertisement in the *Greenfield Recorder* for warehouse workers at Yankee Candle with a starting pay over \$12 per hour. When I got that job I thought I was the luckiest person on earth. In 1997, this would be enough for rent and food and a car if I busted my butt. Prior to this my only daily transportation was a mountain bike.

I started out on Christian Lane in Whately, loading boxes onto belts and into order-picking bays, and transitioned to driving a forklift shortly thereafter.

I learned to drive a forklift by visiting an offsite warehouse with another young employee where Mike Kittredge stored some of his car collection, right along with excess candle merchandise. My first pallet move was over the hood of a black Porsche 911 Turbo.

I met some of the most amazing people at Yankee, and am still very close friends with a guy who now lives in Sacramento.

When I started working there, Mike K. was still the owner – he hadn't yet sold it to the first of many subsequent owners.

Things were good in the Mike K. years. There was free pizza for lunch every Wednesday. While the pizza came on Wednesdays, there were always leftovers on Thursdays, and often still on Fridays. This meant that

my total lunch costs for the week usually worked out to about 80 cents, I would eat a pouch of Ramen noodles with microwaved water on Monday and Tuesday, and pizza for the remainder.

Around 1999, Yankee began to build a new office headquarters and a new distribution center – both now closed or scheduled to close. The new D.C. would use the latest warehouse management software, so trainers were needed to teach the staff how to use these tools.

Managers and Supervisors in the company selected some of their most capable floor workers to become Trainers. I made that list. After a successful transition, the company made my role permanent and I became a Warehouse Management Systems Specialist, which was a *salary*! No longer hourly, I'd have security to raise a family, with a second baby on the way.

At the same time, things were changing for Yankee – Mike K. sold the whole shebang to a private-equity firm. The salary, I found out, was the lowest legal salary that could be offered without having to pay overtime and other hourly benefits. The minute I became a salaried employee, my relationship with the company changed. I was told to work all shifts, ensuring training was consistent throughout. I was told to stay as late as necessary to get certain jobs done.

Our first inventory after the switch to the new WMS system was a huge debacle, and I was told "you do not go home until this is done," I was on site 20 hours one day, and across three days was in the facility 50-plus hours. I was so sleep-deprived that I found myself one morning in the women's bathroom, wondering what the machines on the wall were for, and why they weren't there yesterday.

I saved up vacation time, sick time, and whatever else I could so that I could be with my wife when my second son was born. I had three weeks accrued. The day he was born – five weeks premature, moved to Bay-state's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit – I got a call from work. *There is a problem, you need to come in.*

I told them I have time, I have a sick baby, a distraught wife. They said *be here or you no longer have a job.*

I worked 12-hour days at Yankee, and from there went daily to Springfield to spend

the night with the baby, stopping at the company gym to shower.

I was tasked once with finding out why our shipping costs were wrong with a certain carrier. I worked with another leader, a very smart woman, and we figured out the issue was double-billing in the software we were using. We alerted the company, which in turn got a rebate check from that carrier for over \$750,000.

I was thanked with a \$100 YCC gift card. I owe a tremendous debt to this company. Yankee put me on an airplane for the first time in my life – I went to visit distribution centers in Salt Lake City, Utah, and call centers in North Carolina. They paid me well. They taught me a ton. People were kind most of the time.

In or around 2002, the changes that private equity had put into place were making life at Yankee pretty bad. Pizza was still free, but only once a month. The pool tables were removed from the breakroom, and the summer picnics no longer had vacation prizes, lobster, and steak on the grill.

Those were the superficial niceties that disappeared, but the real trouble was when the company decided to institute productivity quotas.

If you've never worked in a factory or manufacturing facility, a quota is a set amount of work the average worker should be able to complete in a given workday. This seems reasonable enough, but as anyone who works for Amazon or C&S will tell you, management slowly turns the dial... higher and higher until the average worker fails and only the strongest, hardest working survive... until they also burn out and get replaced.

Workers are not people under a quota system; they are tools that can be replaced when they fail.

A forklift operator I'd worked with for many years at Yankee approached me at my cubicle one day, I now having a luxurious office job. He told me that while they were setting the quotas, it would be helpful if the workers knew the metrics being used, so that they knew where they had to perform best and where they were being judged less harshly.

Inside that request was a moral quandary. Is my responsibility to the mega-corp that paid me, or to my co-worker who simply wanted

to make each work day a bit more survivable?

I chose to help him. I told him the internal metrics that would be used.

Someone overheard us – again, it was cubicles, not some clandestine meeting at Wolfie's – and ratted us out. I was pulled into HR, where I first lied, then knew I was caught. I called a high school friend who ran the "packaged applications" (IT) department of Ringling Brothers Circus, and he got me a job in DC. That was how I left Yankee.

I reached out to some friends still there years later, and was told in no uncertain terms that there was in fact a "DO NOT HIRE" list and I was on it. I'm kind of proud of that fact now, but at the time being barred from employment with the biggest name in the county was a challenge.

So, to wrap this all up... Newell just announced they are closing this Distribution Center. Last year they closed that new corporate office building.

In related news, Mike Kittredge's son Mick has recently listed his father's house in Leverett on the market for \$23,000,000. It has a bowling alley, movie theater, lazy river, classic car garage, tennis courts...

Mike worked hard to earn those things. He was smart. He was kind. He was savvy. Mike deserved this, all of it.

I don't know Mick, I've met him three or four times... shared lunch with him and a friend twice... argued with him about the stupid Dunkin' in Bernardston. He might be as great as his Dad, I don't know.

But he didn't start a business in his mom's basement. He didn't bust his ass to become a billionaire with a 270-foot yacht. He was just lucky enough to be born.

I think the best way to honor Mike Kittredge's true legacy would be to open that mansion as a public park and use some of his riches to pay to keep it clean, open, and free. Mike was a rockstar, both figuratively and literally. (The house has a full stage!)

At the very least, and I mean really the very least... Open a weekend invitation to former Yankee Candle employees to visit the house, or the yacht. Let them drive one of the cars, drink one of the \$500 wines. Why not?

Chris Joseph lives in Greenfield.

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Daylight Saving Time begins the second Sunday in March, so remember to **set your clocks ahead one hour this Sunday**, March 10!

The Lyman Conservatory at Smith College in Northampton is having their annual **Spring Bulb Show**, now through March 17. Catch a whiff of spring scents and enjoy this colorful display of over 9,000 flowering bulbs along with a student-commissioned art installation.

The plant house will be open for extended hours for the show, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. There's no admission charge, but donations are always appreciated.

Thirteen **Franklin County Technical School** sophomores in Cosmetology are collaborating with **Shutesbury Elementary School** students around the middle grade novel *Frizzy* by Gabriel Ortega.

The students will be visiting Shutesbury Elementary this Friday evening to style hair, do nail art, apply hair tinsel, and do face painting for students who have read and

studied the book, which describes how Marlene, a young Dominican girl, comes to accept and celebrate her curly hair.

Take **free drawing lessons** with Caroline Wampole at the Montague Center library's Drop In and Draw Series. Designed for adults and teens ages 12 and up, the series starts this Friday, March 8 from 11 a.m. to noon with "Drawing With Eyes Closed: Meditation Spirals, Memory Maps, and More."

Materials are provided for these three sessions on March 8, 15, and 22 and all levels of ability are welcome. Wampole is an artist with 35 years of teaching experience.

The **GCC Community Chorus** will hold its first concert of the spring semester this Friday, March 8 from 12:15 to 12:45 p.m. at the Sloan Theater at Greenfield Community College. The theme is "Of Seasons and Singing."

The program is a preview of a longer performance scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on April 12 at Saints James and Andrew Church in Greenfield. Margery Heins is the director, and Meg Reilly is the accompanist. Both concerts are free, with

donations welcome.

Anyone interested in singing with the choir can find information at the concerts, or contact Heins at [heins@gcc.mass.edu](mailto:heins@gcc.mass.edu).

This Friday Looky Here presents another film in its **Art Commune movie series**. *Spaceship Earth* tells the story of the Synergians, an extremely prolific group of artists who got together in 1969 and are still active today.

"This industrious hippie theater group created Biosphere 2, a massive dome structure built to be an artificial, materially closed ecological system that a team of the Synergians were to live in as an experiment to prepare for life in outer space," reads the account.

Doors open at 5:45, and the film is scheduled to roll at 7:15 p.m. at Looky Here, 28 Chapman Street in Greenfield. There's a \$10 suggested donation; tickets can be reserved at [lookyheregreenfield.com](http://lookyheregreenfield.com).

Artist Deborah Bazer is leading a **workshop for kids on making Magical Dish Gardens** this Saturday, March 9 at 10 a.m. in the yurt at Northfield Mountain.

"Create a dish garden with tiny stone walkways, magic pools and enchanted forests inhabited by tiny people and animals, all made of natural materials. We'll also plant seeds as part of a miniature garden to welcome in the spring!" reads the description.

For kids from four to ten years old. Registration is required at [bookeo.com/northfield](http://bookeo.com/northfield).

Join the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association for a **reception for New Roots in River Banks** at the Discovery Center in Turners Falls this Saturday, March 9 at 1 p.m.

This exhibit celebrates Polish and other Eastern European immigration stories told through the experiences of two families, the Skibicki/Skibiski family in farming, and the Sojka family in factories. Photos and artifacts chronicle their journey from Poland and Ukraine and their lives here.

This event is for all ages, and there will also be hands-on activities with Polish craft and culture specialist Susan Urban. The snow date is March 16.

This Sunday, March 10, the Greenfield Garden Cinema celebrates 95 years in business with a **free showing of the Marx Brothers movie The Cocoanuts** (1929) with Oscar Shaw and May Eaton at 10 a.m. The film will be followed by a lecture by movie theater historian Jonathon Boschen, who will recount the history of the cinema.

The year-long "Food, Farms, and Factories" program series continues this Sunday, March 10 at 2 p.m. at the Discovery Center in Turners Falls with a **Factory Talk about the Griswold Cotton Mill** and the community of Turners Falls.

The Griswold Mill was at the northern end of the Patch, and operated under various ownership from 1884 to 1950. The building became a Rockdale Department Store afterwards, then it was a Railroad Salvage Store ("Open Sundays!") until 1994.

A slo-mo death spiral ensued under several owners until it suffered a major fire in 2016. The EPA knocked it down in 2017 and

cleaned up the site. The presentation this Sunday is free and geared towards teens and adults.

Locals Tessa White-Diemand and Cathy Stanton of Wendell will be two of the storytellers at the **CISA Field Notes** event this weekend. *Field Notes* will take place at the Academy of Music in Northampton this Sunday, March 10 at 2 p.m. Enjoy live storytelling on the theme of food and agriculture; there is sliding-scale admission.

The Friends of the New Salem Public Library will host **Reading Aloud for Grownups** next Tuesday, March 12, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the library, 23 South Main Street. This annual series ends the season with short stories read "with expression and delight" by Dee Waterman and Frederick Edwards. Come to the library or watch on Zoom. More at [nsfriendsoflibrary.weebly.com/events.html](http://nsfriendsoflibrary.weebly.com/events.html).

The Montague Center Library is **celebrating Pi Day** (March 14) a day early, on Wednesday, March 13 at 4 p.m. Folks are encouraged to bring a sweet or savory pie to the library, or to just come and enjoy a slice while learning about the fabulous number, 3.1415926535897932384626433832.... *ad infinitum*.

There's a **roast pork supper** at the Montague Congregational Church next Saturday, March 16 at 5:30 p.m. For \$15 you can get roast pork, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, quick breads, and apple crisp. Takeout is available for \$17 at 5:45 p.m. Reserve your meal either way by calling (413) 367-2652.

Erving Library celebrates Judicial Outreach Month on Tuesday, March 19 at 5 p.m. with a **visit from Judge Laurie MacLeod**. MacLeod has held associate justice assignments with the Palmer, Northampton, Holyoke, and Orange district courts, and has taught criminal justice at GCC. Learn about the challenging tasks of the judicial branch during her presentation. There will be time to ask questions as well.

LifePath received a \$125,000 grant from the National Council on Aging to establish a **Benefits Enrollment Center** to assist eligible low-income older adults and disabled adults in accessing benefits. Benefits include the Medicare Part D Low-Income Subsidy, Medicare Savings Programs, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Energy Assistance Program.

LifePath aims to enroll 400 people in some of these programs each over the next 19 months, in partnership with the SHINE program, which provides Medicare counseling to over 3,600 older people each year. Find out more at [lifepathma.org](http://lifepathma.org).

When you do your taxes this year, consider donating to the **Massachusetts Animal Fund Voucher Program** by making a gift on Line 33F. The fund provides free spay/neuter/vaccination resources for cats and dogs in need and provides free training to animal control officers. Find more information at [massanimalfund.com](http://massanimalfund.com).

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

# UNNAM EABLE BOOKS EVENTS

**THE MAROONS**  
BOOK LAUNCH  
JEFF DITEMAN  
SHANTA LEE  
SAT. MARCH 9TH • 3pm

SATURDAY STORYTIME  
**NIGHT SONG**  
MK SMITH DEPRES  
SAT. MARCH 16TH • 10:30am

**EARTH TONGUES**  
CARLO COSTA • DAN PECK  
JOE MOFFETT  
**MILK OF MUSTARD SEED**  
STELLA SILBERT  
KATARINA MAZUR  
NAT BALDWIN  
**PARSA FERDOWSI**  
SAT. MARCH 16TH • 7pm

**MOVIE NIGHT**  
ABBAS Kiarostami  
MARIE MENKEN  
SAMUEL BECKETT  
FRI. MAR 29TH • 7pm

66 AVENUE A • TURNERS FALLS

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OP ED

'Self-Sufficient' Airport Not Adding Up

By MICHAEL NAUGHTON

**MILLERS FALLS** – For years, the Turners Falls Airport was overseen by the Airport Commission and a part-time Airport Manager. From FY'12 to FY'21 its annual budget rose from \$36,427 to \$55,694, supported by airport revenues and taxation amounts that went from \$6,164 to \$16,825 (for FY'17) before dropping to \$1,405.

During that time, there were increasing calls from the selectboard and town meeting for the airport to become self-supporting.

Bryan Camden was appointed Airport Manager in 2017. On February 25, 2021 he brought Montague's town meeting a proposal. Pioneer Aviation was a private business adjacent to the airport that operated a flight school and provided fuel and aircraft maintenance services. The recent unexpected deaths of its owners had put the continued existence of those businesses in jeopardy.

Camden maintained that those services were necessary for the airport, and he proposed that the town purchase Pioneer Aviation and take over its operations. Doing this, he said, would ensure the survival of the airport and make it self-supporting, as the expected revenues would be more than enough to cover costs. He estimated that there would likely be a surplus of around \$30,000 a year. He described the facilities as needing only routine maintenance.

The proposal was in three articles: borrowing \$1,450,000 to buy the business, with 95% reimbursement expected from federal and state grants; borrowing \$68,000 to upgrade the fueling station, from town funds but with the possibility of state assistance; and appropriating \$39,800 to increase the airport's FY'21 budget to cover the addition-

al costs of taking this on.

These additional costs included making the airport manager a full-time position, and adding a part-time employee. Camden said the airport expected to repay the \$39,800 to the town out of its revenues in the fall of 2021.

This was Montague's first remote town meeting, and technical glitches, along with what may have been some members' impatience with extended discussion, left at least one member feeling that he hadn't had an opportunity to get his questions answered. Nevertheless, all three articles passed, and at the May 22, 2021 Annual Town Meeting there were no questions about the airport's proposed FY'22 budget of \$206,164, funded entirely by airport user fees.

At the next Special Town Meeting, on October 16, 2021, members were asked to appropriate \$12,000 from Airport Retained Earnings as a "first installment" on the promised repayment of the \$39,800. Members were told they could expect to see another installment the following spring, and another in the fall.

By March, however, things had changed. At the March 3, 2022 Special Town Meeting there was no article for a second installment, and instead the airport asked to use all of its retained earnings (\$17,377) plus \$3,000 from another account, largely to cover more than \$20,000 worth of repairs and renovations to the airport's rental house.

This article passed by majority vote. Camden assured members that the neglect that had necessitated the extensive work on the house would not continue under his management.

At the May 2, 2022 Annual Town Meeting, Camden said that revenues were "on track" and predicted that they would be "within 6%" by the end of the fiscal year. The FY'23 budget of \$316,015, again

funded entirely from airport revenues, added a step increase for the Airport Manager and promoted the Operations Manager to a 30-hour-per-week benefited position.

FY'22 revenues were within 6% – there was a \$9,807 shortfall. Nonetheless, on July 13, 2022 the airport asked the finance committee for two reserve fund transfers: \$9,900 to cover that shortfall, and \$7,500 to increase the airport fuel revolving fund. These requests were approved unanimously.

At the May 6, 2023 Annual Town Meeting, the airport's FY'24 budget of \$426,965 included a raise for the Airport Manager and an increase for the Operations Manager from 30 to 40 hours per week. The finance committee's report made no mention of the reserve fund transfers the previous July.

When asked whether the airport was operating with no contribution from the town, Camden replied: "The FY'24 budget is based on no revenue from external sources – the revenue is generated from the airport itself." To the follow-up, "so what you brought in last year is paying everything off for this year?," he replied: "As of right now, our revenues and expenditures are very close. They're going to be within 10%."

Camden did not mention that just two days earlier, the airport had made a reserve fund transfer request for \$20,000 to cover increased expenses. At the finance committee meeting on May 10 one member was concerned that "additional town funds were being requested... after earlier public assurances that the airport was fully self-funded." After discussion, though, the transfer was approved unanimously.

In July, the airport asked for a \$47,000 "Chapter 44 Section 33B" transfer, citing a shortfall of \$47,044.05 – or 14% – in its

FY'23 revenues. The selectboard minutes show no questions. The finance committee minutes record one member suggesting a "bait and switch." Both approved the request unanimously.

In a nutshell, in 2021 town meeting approved purchasing Pioneer Aviation, upgrading the fuel facility, and increasing the airport's FY'21 budget after being assured that the \$39,800 requested would be repaid and the airport would not ask for any more funds from the town; indeed, it expected to generate \$30,000 a year. So far, the airport has repaid \$12,000 of that while receiving an additional \$84,400 from tax revenue. There were retained earnings at the start of FY'22, but they were gone by March 2022, and there have been none since.

At next week's Special Town Meeting the airport will be asking for \$152,261 to cover a revenue shortfall in the FY'24 budget, and \$152,315 for the town's share of a \$3 million grant to replace "failed" pavement and other items on the Pioneer Aviation property.

We were told that buying Pioneer Aviation would allow the airport to support itself with one full-time and one part-time employee. What we have now is an airport with two full-time employees that doesn't support itself.

We may have no choice but to keep funding the airport with tax dollars, but I think we deserve a credible and complete explanation of why so many people got things so wrong. I also think that we need credible assurances that it won't happen again, and an open and thorough discussion of whether changes can be made at the airport that will reduce the level of town contribution.

Michael Naughton is a town meeting member from Precinct 2.

SPORTS from page A1

were underclass girls.

The game started fast. From tipoff, both teams ran after each other. When any player went to shoot, there were hands and arms contesting the shot. But Tech's shots landed, and at the end of the first, it was 18-4. With zero seconds on the clock, Tech launched a Hail Mary, the buzzer sounded, and the three-pointer was good.

With the score already 21-4, coach Joe Gamache sent in his reserves. They increased the lead to 26-4 before Christian landed their first Three. This was a harbinger of things to come – Franklin cruised ahead for the rest of the half, and going into the break, the Home Eagles were up by 21 points, 34-13.

As the second half began, Tech piled on six quick points before Christian hit their next three-pointer to make it 40-16. And that's when the visiting fans began chanting.

Pioneer Christian is not used to losing – before Friday, they were 19-1, and they weren't about to give up now. But the third quarter ended with Franklin up by 24 points, 44-20.

In the final quarter, Christian finally began landing bombs. As the crowds grew louder, a Pioneer fan could be heard stating, "I

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DAVID HOITT PHOTO

Pioneer Valley Regional School junior Brayden Thayer drives hard against Fenway High's Caesar Glover in the MIAA Division V Round of 32 matchup last Friday in Northfield. Thayer reached 1,000 career points just before the half, and the game was paused for a recognition of his achievement. The Pioneer Panthers tamed the Fenway High Panthers 65-37 and advanced to the Round of 16, beating Athol 42-32. Next up, Pioneer will host the Division V quarterfinal contest.

think it's funny that we're playing against a school called Tech!"

The visitors were down by only 14 with five minutes to play, but

after another two minutes Tech was back up by 20. Christian mounted one last rally at the end of the game, but Gamache refused to send in

his starters, letting the reserves weather the storm. After all, they're the future starters, and they were getting valuable experience playing against a great team.

Tech held on to take the exhausting game, 58-47.

Hannah Gilbert led the team with 20 points, followed by Kyra Goodell (13), Lea Chapman (10 points and 12 rebounds), Kaitlin Trudeau (7), Haleigh Benoit (5 points and 8 rebounds), and Laken Woodard (3).


The win propelled Franklin Tech into the Sweet Sixteen. On Wednesday, the Eagles and their supporters flocked to the South Coast to challenge the fifth-seeded, 20-1 Westport Wildcats.

It would be the last time these ladies would take to the court this season as we heard before press time that the Cats had defeated Tech, 50-31.

This was a wonderful, successful season for Joe Gamache and his student athletes. They won the Franklin South Championship with a perfect conference record of 10-0, won the Small Vocational School state championship for the third consecutive year, advanced in the Western Mass tourney, and made it all the way into the MIAA D-V Sweet Sixteen.



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Montague Community Television News

Multiple Types of Farmer Filmed

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

**TURNERS FALLS** – Kit Carpenter of the Gill historical commission hosted a conversation with two old-time farmers for the series *Tales of Farming in Gill*, which took place on February 24. MCTV has footage from the event available on our Vimeo page, as well as some excerpts from *Lovejoy’s Nuclear War* (1975), which was recently shown at the Shea Theater during the 50th anniversary celebration of Montague Farm member Sam Lovejoy’s anti-nuclear direct action.

There are indeed some new meetings for our viewers to enjoy. The GMRSD school committee meeting from February 27, the Montague finance committee meeting from February 28, and the Montague selectboard meeting from March 4 are all ready for your review!

And don’t forget, dear residents and readers, that all community members are welcome and encouraged to submit their videos to be aired on Channel 9, as well as featured on the MCTV Vimeo page. That means you! 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 check-out, 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 [infomontaguetv@gmail.com](mailto:infomontaguetv@gmail.com) for a link to the Zoom.

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materialize. According to the information packet for town meeting members, the electric company Eversource required the prospective leaseholder to fund improvements in the electrical system which serves the airport industrial park, which could cost over \$16 million.

The loss, or delay, of this revenue has had a major impact on the airport. This year’s operating budget of \$284,915 – not including benefits and debt service, which are approved as separate line items – represented an increase of 34.5% over last year, driven by a hike in the airport manager’s salary, hiring a part-time employee full time, and a number of equipment purchases. These changes, justified as creating a more stable airport, were approved by the selectboard, finance committee, and eventually town meeting last year.

This year the selectboard and fin com have approved **Article 9**, which appears on the March 14 warrant along with associated motions funding the expense. (The fin com is an arm of town meeting whose members are appointed by the meeting moderator to make recommendations on any articles that may impact the town budget.)

The motions would plug the airport’s operational gap with money from two townwide reserve funds: \$24,251 from the “sale of real estate” account, which is designated to be used for debt service on real estate, and \$128,000 from free cash, the town’s unspent balance from previous years as certified by the state Department of Revenue.

The two boards are also discussing a similar budget gap in the upcoming fiscal year, FY’25, which must be addressed by the annual meeting in May. At the fin com’s February 21 joint meeting with the selectboard, member Dorinda Bell-Upp asked airport manager Bryan Camden about his plan to reduce the budget gap by FY’26.

Camden told her the airport has had “significant discussions” with Eversource, and that the utility has “definitely acknowledged the fact that this is holding back a big product revenue in the area, so I think we’ve had some forward progress.”

He went on to say that in the next year and a half he will be “focused on bumping up additional revenue sources.... That’s the million-dollar puzzle I’m going to be trying to solve over the next 18 months.”

A related money article, **Article 10**, would use \$152,315 from the town’s capital stabilization fund to renovate pavement, utility con-

nections, parking lots, and loading docks on the former Pioneer Aviation property, purchased a few years ago by the town. The meeting materials say the pavement, in particular, has been reported by the Federal Aviation Administration to be in a “failed” condition.

The project would be divided into three phases, and 95% of its \$3,046,300 total cost would be paid by federal and state grants. The appropriation covers the 5% the town would be responsible for. The fin com vote on this article was 3–1, with member Chris Menegoni supporting a different funding source. Any appropriation from stabilization requires a 2/3 vote at town meeting.

Camden reminded the *Reporter* that grant agreements for airport improvement projects contain language that require the town either to keep the airport open and functional for a set time period, generally ten years, or to reimburse the grant in full.

Floodplains and Culverts

Another item which may generate discussion is **Article 11**, \$125,000 for a “Wastewater Asset Vulnerability Inventory.” The project, required under the town’s current federal wastewater permit, would inventory the assets of the town’s Clean Water Facility (CWF) and the sewers, or “collection system,” that feed into it. A key goal is to determine, in an era of climate change, whether any of the town’s wastewater assets are in a 50- or 100-year floodplain.

Articles like this have occasionally generated debate at town meeting over funding sources. Although \$50,000 would come from the CWF’s retained earnings, which is similar to free cash but is comprised of sewer user fees, the remaining \$75,000 would come from capital stabilization, which is primarily bankrolled by taxation. Residents who treat their waste with septic tanks sometimes question why their property taxes are funding sewers.

Capital stabilization would also fund construction and equipment in two other articles. These include \$90,000 for a skid steer (**Article 12**), a small but versatile piece of equipment that would allow the public works department to mow and cut brush on inclines, mill pavement, and assist in snow removal and backfilling ditches; and \$222,880 to replace a culvert on Ferry Road that passes over a tributary of the Sawmill River near Montague Center (**Article 13**).

The latter project, much of which

would be implemented by the public works department, addresses one of 22 culverts in Montague identified as being in “critical condition” by a recent assessment.

Other money articles approved by the fin com include increasing the hourly pay for part-time police officers, bringing them in line with full-timers (**Article 3**); providing compensation for an employee in the treasurer’s office who had temporarily performed work above their pay grade (**Article 5**), funding a longevity payment to a library employee (**Article 6**), and buying back vacation time for two unanticipated retirements this fiscal year (**Articles 7 and 8**).

Cryptkeeper Summoned

One article that does not directly appropriate funds, but will have implications for future budgets, is a proposal by the cemetery commission to create a new “sexton” position to oversee burials at the Highland and Old South Cemeteries.

The position, funded by a charge of \$100 per burial, would involve not only coordinating burials but selling plots, monitoring conditions at the cemetery, and fielding questions from families about the status of their plots. These activities have previously been the responsibility of volunteer members of the commission.

The commission estimates that an average of 11 burials take place each year, and plans to add \$2,000 to its proposed FY’25 operating budget to fund the new position. It estimates that there are sufficient funds in the current year’s budget to make a hire.

Breaking Up Is Hard to Do

One of the more interesting and unusual articles (**Article 4**) – the only one not voted on by the fin com – would revoke an article passed in 1932 to enroll the police department in the state civil service system.

In 2022, town meeting voted to petition the state for special legislation to allow Montague to leave the civil service, assuming that this was the usual method of doing so. However the, legislature has failed to act on that request.

Town counsel then researched the issue and found that in 1932 town meeting had voted to join the system without petitioning the legislature. The law firm, KP Law, PC, argued that a “local option statute” such as this can be revoked in the same way that it was accepted, in this case simply by another vote by town meeting.

The 2022 motion to leave the

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civil service was a result of a request by the police department, which explained that although the system has historically “helped protect officers from nepotism and provided a transparent way of hiring and promotion,” it had become extremely difficult to fully staff the department under that system. The statement went on to say that Athol, Orange, Greenfield, and Northampton had all recently left the system.

The motion, which had the support of the police union as does the current article, passed unanimously. Town administrator Steve Ellis said this week that he was unsure why the legislature has failed to act in a timely manner on Montague’s 2022 request, but speculated that it may be because state officials are concerned that the large number of towns recently petitioning to leave the system could destabilize it.

The only municipalities listed on the governor’s website as be-

longing to civil service are Montague and Greenfield. However, a source at the Greenfield police department told the *Reporter* this week that the city department is not, in fact, in the civil service.

The final article on the warrant responds to a ruling by the state attorney general that funds received by a municipality under a recent nationwide opioid settlement may be placed in a “special revenue fund,” and can be appropriated without the approval of town meeting.

This article would create such a fund and transfer into it all the money from the town’s opioid settlement stabilization fund, which currently contains \$15,158.26. Town officials have determined that the selectboard, in collaboration with the public health department, may appropriate money from the special fund for uses consistent with the terms of the settlement.

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# LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here's the way it was on March 6, 2014: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

## FRTA: Increase Responsiveness

The selectboards of Gill, Erving, Wendell and Leverett joined Montague in calling for the Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA) management to involve them and their residents in any planning process regarding fixed-route changes, and to be more responsive to the public.

All five towns signed letters supporting expanded public transportation for those without cars and for residents with cars who

want less dependence on fossil fuels. "It's difficult to be a Green Community when everyone is riding in their private car," said Gill board member Randy Crochier.

## Montague City: Decrease Speed

Bike lanes, center islands, improved crosswalks, and narrower through lanes for vehicles are coming to a thousand-foot stretch of Montague City Road in 2015, all designed to slow the pace of car and truck travel and improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians along a section of the Canalside bike trail between Depot Street and Masonic Avenue near the Farren Care Center.

# 20 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on March 4, 2004: News from the Montague Reporter's archive.

## Commercial Homesteading

At the Montague selectboard meeting, Frank Abbondanzio reviewed a list of 52 town-owned properties, most of very low value but some with income potential.

He proposed the buildings at 62 Second Street, the former Rod Shop factory, and the former Cree-Mee on Avenue A, all of which have come into the town's ownership through tax takings, be put out to bid shortly under what he called a "commercial homesteading program."

In theory, as Abbondanzio explained, these buildings would be sold for \$1 to the bidders who

come forward with proposals to create the most investment, and produce the most jobs, from reuse of the properties.

## Animal Control Inherits 'Rolling Wreck'

Gill has a new police cruiser. The 2004 Ford Explorer was purchased and equipped for \$27,000, paid for out of a \$45,000 grant. Chief David Hastings said this is the fourth cruiser in a row the town has purchased with community policing funds "without going to the taxpayers."

The department was able to retire its old 1982 four-wheel-drive van, which Hastings called "a rolling wreck." It was turned over to Eddie Ambo, Jr. to use in his work as animal control officer in Gill.

# 150 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on March 4, 1874: News from the Turners Falls Reporter's archive.

## Local Matters

We have had about 73 inches of snow this winter. "Who'd a thought it?"

Mr. A. H. Baker will continue to do trucking on his own account.

A number of wild ducks have been killed in the vicinity of the Falls lately.

Petitions are again in circulation in favor of and against the new bridge.

Little Belle Paine, (Freeman's daughter,) slipped and fell on Sunday, spraining her ankle pretty badly.

Wm J Malley is quite reconciled to the setting off of Turners Falls from the rest of the town. Some of us think that it is already too "darned" far off on election days.

Gilman & Kimball have got their steam mill at work in good shape and are doing a good business.

Rev. Mr. Frost, our Superintendent of Schools, brings "only thirty-five years' experience" as a

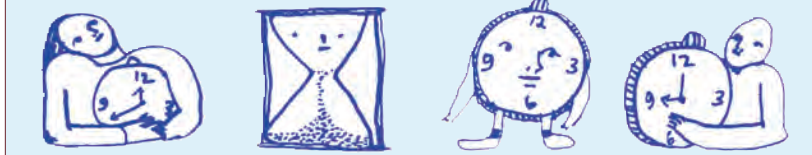
teacher and committee man to his position.

The Town having voted the sum of \$210 for the Dog fund to Turners Falls if its people shall raise \$500 for a public library before March meeting next, we do hope the matter will not be lost sight of.

Town Meeting on Monday was the largest ever held in Montague. In the election of Town Officers, Mr. R.N. Oakman received the handsome compliment of 200 votes, to 31 for Mr. Bardwell. Mr. J.F. Bartlett of Turners Falls has no reason to be ashamed of the compliment of 97 votes on the second and third ballots.

The Town voted to raise the following sums for the current year: State and County taxes, \$4,000; Turners Falls School House, \$14,000; Schooling, \$6,000; Interest, \$3,000; Support of Poor, \$1,000; Building and repairing highways, \$5,000; Contingencies, \$2,000. Total: \$35,000.

Mr. Oakman is of the opinion that the Town Farm is a failure as a speculation. He believes in a better farm and better farming or an almshouse. Which shall it be?



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ENERGY from page A1

increasingly finding their environmental priorities – and policies – at odds with one another.

“In the 25 years that I’ve been doing it, it has never been harder... to build in Massachusetts,” Rebecca Tepper, State Secretary for the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, said in December at a hearing about gas and electric utility prices. “We do need to make sure that the existing and new infrastructure that we have is utilized to its full potential, and that the grid is optimized to build only what is necessary.”

Tepper said that municipal leaders and utility companies need to play a role in “turning the narrative around” so that communities see energy infrastructure projects as beneficial.

“We need to have more of a collective view of the future,” she argued. “If we’re going town by town and fighting every single energy infrastructure project, there’s no way we’ll meet our clean energy goals – we just can’t be fighting about storage here and fighting about solar over here, it just won’t happen.... We have to get some stuff built.”

Doing It Smart

One problem, well known to many in western Massachusetts, is that large solar arrays are being built on forests, farmland, and critical habitat.

In the last decade, 60% of the ground-mounted solar arrays built in Massachusetts replaced previously forested land, and over 5,000 acres of “natural and working lands” were lost to such developments, according to an October report by Mass Audubon and Harvard University.

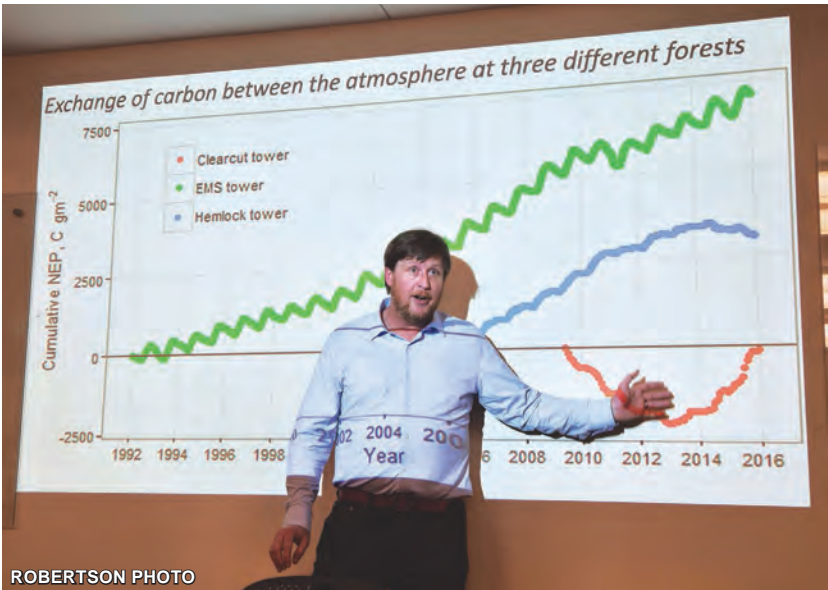
The report, titled *Growing Solar, Protecting Forests*, suggests that at the current rate the state is set to lose approximately 39,000 acres of forest, 9,400 acres of prime farmland, and 22,800 acres of high-biodiversity habitats. Between now and 2050, the researchers warn, western Massachusetts could lose 9,000 more acres of forest, and the southeastern section of the state could lose another 9,000 acres of delicate pine barren habitat.

“We need solar. It isn’t being anti-solar – let’s just do it smart,” Harvard Forest research director and senior ecologist Jonathan Thompson told the *Reporter*. “Let’s think hard about the incentives. We can incentivize putting them on developed open space.”

Thompson co-authored the *Growing Solar* report with Manion, who is vice president of policy and advocacy at Mass Audubon, and nine other researchers. On Tuesday night they shared their findings with the public inside the Fisher Museum at the Harvard Forest in Petersham.

The report analyzes trends in land use and solar energy development statewide, and recommends how to better plan for future energy generation, transmission, and storage. One key finding is that Massachusetts can meet its solar energy development goals by building on existing rooftops and parking lots.

About 4.2 gigawatts (GW) of solar energy production is online in Massachusetts, and the state’s *Clean Energy and Climate Plan* calls for 27 GW of capacity to meet its goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. According to the report, all publicly and privately owned rooftops and parking lots in the state have the potential to pro-



Harvard Forest ecologist Jonathan Thompson shared data at Tuesday’s event on the amount of atmospheric carbon sequestered by different types of forest, including estimates of the impact of land being clear-cut of trees.

duce about 30 GW of solar energy. The challenge is making these sites more economically advantageous than forests or farmland.

Changing state incentives under the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) program to favor rooftops, parking lots, and already-disturbed land could reverse the pattern of farm and habitat loss, the report suggests. State representative Aaron Saunders, who brought his 6-year-old daughter to Tuesday’s presentation, has filed a bill that aims to do just that.

“I find the biggest political challenge for the western part of the state is this assumption that everyone here is a NIMBY,” Saunders told the *Reporter*. “We’re having this conversation in Petersham – I wish it happened in Brookline. It’s not an ‘either/or,’ it’s a ‘both-and.’ It also has to happen in our centers of economic activity, where most of the energy use is.”

Massachusetts is already making progress on solar siting, Manion told attendees. In 2020, according to the report, more than half of all ground-mounted solar arrays in the United States built on landfills were located in our state. Manion said she hopes plans to revise the SMART program this year will “rebalance” efforts such as these.

“We’ve done some things really, really well,” she said. “If we can get this right – if we can figure out

how to really resolve this so that communities feel like they have a voice in the resources that are getting built, that they’re balanced in terms of our goals for nature and biodiversity, and that we can do this quickly – a lot of folks will pay attention to our approach.”

Doubling Distribution

The researchers also discussed the need for more power lines and electrical substations. “We need to basically double the size of the current transmission and distribution system,” Manion said. “Doubling is a pretty big deal.”

Manion and Thompson said they were surprised to learn that in certain areas, development is not being driven by the relative value of the land, but by constraints, and therefore costs, of connecting new facilities to the grid. Smaller, distributed solar energy systems, as well as “behind-the-meter” generation and storage systems at private homes, could help get around some of these roadblocks.

“We really need to do as much as we can close to where the load is, and where the people are, because we spend an enormous amount of money on transmission and distribution infrastructure,” Manion explained. “It is a complete paradigm shift, to go from these big central generation stations to all of these tiny generation modules all over the state.”

LEVERETT from page A1

while buying candy there.

Mareneck spoke about Leverett’s history more broadly, and read from a collection of historical facts and anecdotes titled *Leverett in Days Gone By* culled from local newspapers and town records by Wayne A. Howard. She related that the first post office was opened in East Leverett in 1818, before being transferred to Leverett Center in 1842.

In 1863, she said, Abraham Lincoln himself appointed Bradford Field as the Leverett postmaster, a position he held for 50 years. Mareneck also informed the crowd that by the early 1900s there were a total of five post offices in the town.

“We also sustain a genuine whist club, a dancing club, and a dramatic club,” Howard’s pamphlet records, as of 1897. “Don’t call us out of date or a whit behind our neighbors.”

In 1901, “the question of the need for a night policeman was raised” after a sleigh and blanket were stolen from a shed. Mareneck said didn’t have a record of the decision, but if one wasn’t hired then, the question would likely have come up again in April of 1920 when one night at 1:20 a.m. “yeggmen” – burglars who rob safes – blew one open at the North Leverett post office, absconding with less than \$200 but causing the building to burn to the ground.

Leverett’s history of political activism was also referenced in a call for a gathering to be held in front of the post office on October 30, 1915 for people to speak on the subject of



Left to right: selectboard member Patricia Duffy, historical commission chair Susan Mareneck, postal clerk Elias Kammouni, acting postmaster Sarah Biron, and 250th celebration committee member Ann Watson.

women’s suffrage. The announcement began “Those who belive [sic] in women’s suffering [sic] had their inning here some months ago. Now the other side will be heard...,” and concluded with “It looked at one time as if Leverett would vote for suffrage, but the tide has turned and the town will surley [sic] vote against it.”

After the presentation, many attendees hung around to chat, look at the exhibits, and avail themselves of a collection of roughly 50 historic rubber postmark stamps. That night at sun-

set, a lighting of the town’s official “birthday cake” was held on the community field, with an open house at the library.

The 250th anniversary committee will be conducting additional events throughout the year. A calendar and more information can be found at [www.leverett.ma.us/g/96/250th-Celebration](http://www.leverett.ma.us/g/96/250th-Celebration).

The official “birthday party” takes place this Saturday, March 9 at the town hall at 1 p.m. with live music, games, another history presentation, and cake.

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# Anderson Upsets Cat Spirit In Ice-Off Contest

By DAVID JAMES

**LAKE PLEASANT** – Plessy – the hump-backed Pleistocene monster trapped in the depths of this community’s namesake inland body of water in the aftermath of glacial retreat of the last Ice Age in North America some 11,000 years ago – did not have to hold her breath lengthily during the 47th annual Ice-Off-the-Lake contest, an event conducted since 1977 in the youngest (1874) and smallest (197 people, according to ZipCode Census Reporter) of Montague’s five villages.

The contest began on February 22, and then – in the blink-of-a-slow-moving-eyelid – ended 10 days later March 2, the third-earliest date of ice departure in event annals.

The winner this year was John Anderson of Still Waters cottage on Denton Street in the West Village of Lake Pleasant, also known as the Highlands.

Anderson is now a twin-winner, having also won in 2020.

In Greco-Roman mythology, Boreas was the Greek god of winter snow and ice and cruel north wind and Aquillo, his Latin counterpart, was depicted in ancient art sometimes as an older ravaged gnarly dude and sometimes as a circus strongman with icicles in his hair and beard.

According to village lore, in the contest’s early years people could pick the date they wanted, the wrinkle being that only one person could have that date no matter how many other people wanted it.

This first-come, first-choiced system led to near-fisticuffs as proverbial schoolyard behavior broke out like measles when bully brawn faced bullied scrawn. As a result, the rules were changed by 1980 and have been since maintained as follows:

- Each ticket sold bears a date between the earliest recorded melting of lake ice, February 22, 2012, and its latest disappearance of ice, April 19, 1978.
- Participants fork over a mere thick-or-thin one-dollar bill, or quarters four, etc.
- Blind draw – under strict supervision – of an identical-sized slip of dated paper from an old plastic pretzel jar.
- Hope that drawn date is a win-

ner, if he or she is secular, or pray for ditto if he or she is a Spiritualist member of The National Spiritual Alliance on Montague Avenue in the heart of “downtown” Lake Pleasant.

As warm or rainy days and less-cold nights grow more plentiful and ice begins receding farther, faster, from lakeside shores, contest judges gather daily at the official judging time of 5 p.m. at the official judging place, the Raisin Rosen picket midway across the 220-foot Bridge of Names, the wooden walkway joining east and west sections of the village.

Judges first scan the surface of the lake with naked eyes, searching for even the smallest of a shard of icy flotsam, or icy jetsam. Then – to be absolutely fair and absolutely honest and absolutely thorough – they sweep the lake’s surface with high-powered bird binoculars and render a mutual thumbs up (the end), or thumbs down (carry on), verdict.

The judges this year were this writer, the one and lonely PMR (Postmaster Relief/Replacement) employee of the Lake Pleasant Post Office, and Jackie Stein, the treasurer of the Lake Pleasant Village Association.

This year, after completing unaided eyeballing of the surface of the lake by both judges, March 1 seemed likely to be the winning date – this is, until Judge Jackie put binoculars to her eyeglassed-eyes and spotted a skim-ice circle, no bigger than the plastic lid of a 32-ounce container of non-fat Greek yogurt, lingering amidst lakeside bushes with overhanging offshore branches.

Next, this writer confirmed Judge Jackie’s unearthed discovery, so to speak, and the contest continued to live for at least one more day of proverbial light and life.

Had neither judge witnessed the slim-ice patch – because it simply seemed as though it were not there – the Spirit of Henry James, a disembodied Siamese cat and a perennial ticket-holder, would have made history as the first non-human, non-living contest winner.

Perhaps – as occurred for the Boston Red Sox in 2004 with the lifting of the Curse of the Bambino – next year’s contest just might tell a different tale for the same-ol’, same-ol’ long-dead cat.

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TELEVISION

Netflix’s *Avatar: The Last Airbender* Struggles to Bend Its Source Material



*Aang, the last airbender, and companions Sokka and Katara on their travels.*

By NATAN COHEN

**TURNERS FALLS** – The release of Netflix’s live-action remake of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is a fascinating moment in popular culture. Nickelodeon’s original *Avatar* series is a cultural touchstone in America and many other places around the world. Millions of children, including many of the actors in this series, grew up watching episodes of *Avatar* over and over again. Countless more of us who were adults during the 2005-2008 run of the original cartoon fell in love with its epic fantasy storytelling, astonishing artwork, and surprisingly mature themes.

What other fantasy franchise manages to reflect on the horror of war, the impact of trauma, the messiness of spiritual life, and the importance of doing what is right in the face of oppression – even when the risks are high – while also staying as grounded, light-hearted, and laugh-out-loud funny as *Avatar*?

Netflix has a lot on the line with this release. The reception to the streaming service’s growing library of live-action remakes has ranged from extremely poor (*Death Note*, 2021), to the warm, welcoming acclaim of 2023’s *One Piece*. However, these previous remakes were based on anime properties that, despite growing popularity, are still relatively obscure to Western audiences. In contrast, when the original cartoon *Avatar* was re-released on Netflix in 2020, the then 15-year-old show reportedly became the most watched children’s series on the streaming platform.

Thus, the potential audience for this live-action remake who have not already watched the original cartoon is such a relatively fringe demographic that posts with titles like “I got my mom who never watches cartoons to watch the live action series and here’s what she thinks” have become a kind of carnivalesque novelty among fans on social media.

So, how does the *Avatar* remake hold up? In short: *Ehhhhh*, it’s

complicated.

First, a recap, in case you care enough to read this article but don’t already know the story. There is a world made up of four cultures: the unambiguously named Water Tribe, Air Nomads, Earth Kingdom, and Fire Nation. Some members of each culture have the ability to “bend” their associated element through a kind of magical martial art.

Aang (Gordon Cormier) is the last airbender, frozen in ice for 100 years while the Fire Nation genocided his people and waged war against the rest of the planet. Aang is also the Avatar, a reincarnated being who is an especially powerful bender and the only person in the world who can bend all four elements.

Aang is joined by two Southern Water Tribe siblings, the supportive water-bender Katara (Kiawentiio) and the sarcastic warrior/engineer Sokka (Ian Ousley), on a journey to train in the other three elements while surviving being hunted down by the Fire Nation.

Along the way they are chased by the brooding disgraced Fire Nation prince Zuko (Dallas Liu), seeking to restore his honor, and Zuko’s uncle Iroh (Paul Sun-Hyung Lee), a retired general who only wants whatever is best for his nephew – well, that and jasmine tea. These two are later joined by the scheming, slimy, and deliciously scenery-chewing Commander Zhao (Ken Leung), who drives the first season’s story toward its climax.

The original series is known for its gorgeous, fantastical, art and world, developed by co-creators Bryan Konietzko and Michael Dante DiMartino, and inspired heavily by Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Alaskan Native cultures. As *Avatar*’s first ever live-action adaptation\* the remake has big shoes to fill visually. With a hefty \$15 million per episode budget and a sometimes slavish commitment to recreating the visual style and flair of the original cartoon, the series mostly succeeds on this front.

see **AVATAR** page B2

*Time, Once Again, to Boil*

By DONNA PETERSEN

**MONTAGUE CENTER** – *Sugar time!* Sweet dreams are made of this – who am I to disagree?

It’s Sinzibukwud time. It rolls around about this time every year. *Sinzibukwud* is the Algonquin word for maple syrup, and apparently also the name of the sugar maple tree itself, as the sap and the tree are so linked.

Call the tree sugar maple, rock maple, hard maple, or *Acer saccharum*; it is the source of the sap that produces the sweet nectar of the goddesses. Pour it on waffles or pancakes, bake with it or sweeten your coffee with it and *yum!*

I drove down the road a few minutes on Leap Day, February 29, parked my car at the top of a slight incline, and walked down to the sugar house at 11 West Chestnut Hill Road. I opened the door. I knew Gary Billings was in there, but with the steam coming off the sap boiling in the big evaporator, I could see almost nothing. Then I heard a voice and footsteps approaching through the dense fog.

The wind outside shifted and the steam parted and I saw Gary Billings, a fifth-generation maple syrup producer on the old Ripley Farm land. Gary is retired now from his previous career; he was a Montague police officer for 25 years and then



*The steam was rising from Gary Billings’s West Chestnut Hill sugar house last week.*

the Leverett police chief. Like those before him, he often did the sugaring at night after work.

We talked a little while he and his brother-in-law Jim Sinclair – “he’s the fireman today” – tended to the boiling sap, which requires constant attention. I commented that this was one big evaporator, and Gary said “Yes it is!” I estimated it was 12 feet long or so.

Jim fed the wood into the fire while Gary checked and tended the sap-to-syrup progress in that big

metal pan.

A little background here about the Ripley/Billings farm: The Ripley family bought the land in 1885 and worked it the way folks did then: they farmed, they logged, they kept critters, and in the off-season of late winter and early spring, they tapped trees and made maple syrup. (A nice film about this type of farming is *Root Hog or Die*, made locally in 1973.)

Gary grew up on the second see **BOIL** page B5

NOTES FROM THE HEARTFELT CAFE

by Trouble Mandeson



*A hot bubbling pot of chili warms the kitchen and fills the entire house with the savory scent of meat, beans, chilis, and seasonings.*

**GREENFIELD** – This month I thought I’d write about chili, a perfect choice for these cold winter months.

Chili is a distinctly American dish, originating in Texas towns bordering Mexico in the late 1800s. Cattle drivers in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century couldn’t afford to eat the valuable beef they were herding across Texas and beans were added to chili as another source of protein. Some trail cooks even planted peppers, oregano, and onions along the trails for use on future trips.

A group of women in the late 1800s to early 1900s, calling themselves the “Chili Queens” of San Antonio, sold their chili in market plazas. They called it *chili con carne* for the combination of beef and chilis.

Around the same time, after sampling chili at the Chicago Exposition,

Midwesterners developed a unique chili recipe they called “Cincinnati Chili” or “Skyline Chili” with cinnamon, cloves, allspice, and even chocolate. Chili parlors appeared, and the recipe is still enjoyed today, served over spaghetti or hot dogs with mountains of cheese.

Canned chili appeared in the early 1920s after Lyman T. Davis of Corsicana, Texas sold a bowl of chili from the back of a wagon for five cents. He later sold it in brick form as Lyman’s Famous Home Made Chili, and eventually began canning it in the back of his market. The commercialization of chili ultimately led to the downfall of chili parlors, and the advent of packaged chili spices brought chili cooking into the family home.

One of the first recorded chili cook-offs was in 1965 at the State see **HEARTFELT** page B4

\* Sorry, what’s that about a 2010 live-action film? I have no idea what you’re talking about. That never happened.



# Pet of the Week



## ‘LEO’

Leo is still a puppy at five months, and is a real funny guy! He loves to romp and play, and has all the floppy, goofy puppy antics you’d expect at his age. He’s going to grow up to be a big dog, and he’ll need help learning how to navigate life politely. Right now he jumps to say hi, pulls on leash, and has a lot of energy.

Leo likes to play with other dogs, but gets upset when he sees them on leash or behind a fence, and will bark at them. We are not recommending

he go home to an apartment since he’ll be frustrated seeing dogs on leash consistently. A fenced yard is recommended. Leo is still working on his house training as well. He is crate trained! With the right home willing to put in the training, he can grow up to be a lovely dog.

If you’re ready to adopt, you can come in during open adoption hours Tuesdays through Saturdays, 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call (413) 781-4000 or visit [www.dakinhumane.org](http://www.dakinhumane.org).

### AVATAR from page B2

The sets, costuming, landscape art, creature design, and casting decisions stunningly bring to life the best of the cartoon’s aesthetic. This achievement, and many others, rests on the long overdue and much-needed decision to hire all Asian and Indigenous talent to be in front of the camera as well as a slew of crew and consultants behind the scenes hailing from the cultures being represented.

Unfortunately, like all aspects of the series, the visual production is haunted by bizarre unforced errors that can take the viewer out of the scene, such as a dreadfully bad wig that threatens utter distraction from *Prey* star Amber Midthunder’s fine performance as the Northern Water Tribe’s Princess Yue.

The remake’s element-bending CGI creates an uncanny-valley effect in its attempt to imitate the cartoon’s smooth and immensely satisfying action style, which for its part holds up great nearly 20 years later. While some of the fighting in the Netflix show is thrilling and evocative – especially the fire-bending – many scenes struggle to convey the weight and power of the cartoon’s bending techniques. Despite the exponentially higher cost of the animation, some things just work better in 2D.

Tragically, the protagonists’ animal companions Appa and Momo, who in the original cartoon participate as full-fledged members of the group with personalities, desires, and goals, are relegated to less than 10 seconds of screen time in most episodes, perhaps due to the cost of the animation, or perhaps due to writing and pacing issues, which we will get into next.

What the adaptation achieves in majesty, it ends up losing in the pacing and impact of its storytelling. There is a significant amount of clunky exposition that didn’t exist in the original show, which did an excellent job of teaching viewers about its world through its characters’ experiences. This is especially true in the drag of a first episode, with certain major plot points repeated *ad nauseam*. Line deliveries are rushed and frequently marble-mouthed. The classic scars and vulnerabilities of the heroic trio – Sokka’s sexism, Katara’s temper,



Zuko and Iroh face off against Earth Kingdom soldiers.

Aang’s childish escapism – which they grow through as a part of their stories in the cartoon are almost completely absent, with little being offered to replace them.

Many scenes of goofy fun are cut, from penguin sledding and giant koi riding to Aang shouting “Relax Sokka. Where we’re going, you won’t need any pants!” – one of my favorite lines from the original cartoon and one which, I swear, makes oodles of sense in context.

Meme-able moments from the first and even second season of the cartoon are mashed together, sometimes to great effect, and other times in a hasty and confusing way where their meaning is not given room to breathe. The genocide of the air-benders and murderous cruelty of the Fire Nation, which are merely implied in the children’s cartoon, are depicted on screen here, seemingly more for a “wow” factor than for any contribution they make to the story.

Perhaps worst of all, we are repeatedly *told* things we are supposed to believe and care about concerning our protagonists rather than getting to witness their qualities and personalities through their decisions and mishaps. At least some of these choices were seemingly intentional trade-offs, and the adaptation succeeds the most where it brings a new focus on the anti-heroes Zuko and Iroh. Without venturing into spoilers, almost all of the fresh material for these two, and their frenemy Zhao, does well to support the themes of the series, and even drew out a tear or two from this enjoyer of the original. It doesn’t hurt that the three deliver some of the best acting performances of the season.

It’s hard to evaluate what the overall impact of this series might be. Many fans of the original longed

for a faithful adaptation that they didn’t get, but may be left at least with a few satisfying crumbs. There are new viewers wanting a fun epic fantasy adventure, and some will find one here, even if it doesn’t meet the high bar set by the source material. Netflix wants to make as much money as possible on people subscribing for the series, which they seem confident in given that the second and third seasons were just greenlit. And from what I can see on my feeds, Asian and Indigenous people hungry for representation in pop culture are eating well at the first major blockbuster series to exclusively feature people who look like them.

*Avatar*’s live-action remake will be in the tumultuous process of defining its legacy over the coming weeks and months. There is a mountain of valid criticisms of the current age of remakes and cinematic universes, and many apply to this show. At the same time, the creators of the original series are hard at work producing new animated content that will extend its canon, with a new series and film expected in 2025.

My own final analysis is torn. The fan in me grinned often and rather enjoyed it. The media critic felt aghast at all the bafflingly weird and bland writing and directing decisions. Plenty of interesting opinions, one way or the other, are bouncing around the internet discourse. And that’s okay – a piece of art or a slice of culture doesn’t have to be just one thing or another.

As Iroh said (in the cartoon): “It is important to draw wisdom from many different places. If you take it from only one place, it becomes rigid and stale. Understanding others... will help you become whole.”



## Senior Center Activities MARCH 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, please contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

### LEVERETT

Chair Yoga classes are held on Wednesdays at 10 a.m., hybrid, at the town hall and on Zoom. Foot care clinic is held monthly. For more information, contact the Leverett COA at (413) 548-1022 x 2, or [coa@leverett.ma.us](mailto:coa@leverett.ma.us).

### ERVING

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

### Monday 3/11

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

### Tuesday 3/12

9 a.m. Good For U Workout  
10 a.m. Line Dancing  
11 a.m. Social Stringers

### Wednesday 3/13

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

### Thursday 3/14

9 a.m. Barre Fusion  
10 a.m. Pilates Flow  
12 p.m. Irish Lunch  
**Friday 3/15**  
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 is available Tuesday through Thursday. For more information please call 863-9357.

### Monday 3/11

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

### Tuesday 3/12

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

### Wednesday 3/13

Foot Clinic by Appointment  
10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo  
4:15 p.m. Mat Yoga

### Thursday 3/14

9:30 a.m. Psanky Class  
1 p.m. Pitch

### Friday 3/15

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
12 p.m. Pizza Party

### THEATER PREVIEW

## Human Agenda Behind Run of *Gorgons*

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – Sometimes I have written about things like the theater, plays, and concerts. Hawks and Reed Performing Arts Center in Greenfield is one of my favorite places for that. The place will be hosting a couple of showings of a play in March.

The play, *Gorgons*, is by a theater company called Human Agenda. It starts this Friday, March 8 and will go until March 17.

I learned quite a few details from Kevin Van Develde about Human Agenda Theater and the *Gorgons*. “2022 is when we started,” said Van Develde, the theater’s director as well as a sound designer, and one of the founders of the company. “The theater has grown since 2022. We are a collaborative company.”

Another founder, Amanda Bowman, is an actress in *Gorgons*, which was written by a playwright

named Megan Tripaldi. “I found the play on the New Play Exchange, which is where you can find shows that people have written,” Van Develde tells me, as to how it came to be at the theater. “Megan was quite pleased her play had been picked – both of us were!”

A previous show put on by Human Agenda, also at Hawks and Reed, was called *Mirror and Liminal Dimensions*. “We wrote that ourselves,” Van Develde said. “We got a lot of feedback, and people are excited that we have done interesting, fun, and weird theater.... It was two versions of that show – a smaller version, and a more developed version.”

While the play written by them was around an hour and 50 minutes long, *Gorgons* is an hour and forty minutes long. “It’s about Medusa’s sisters, after she has been killed,” he told me.

According to Van Develde, Hu-

man Agenda Theater’s popularity has been good. “We call the theater this because we wanted to make art that was by people, and not AI,” he said. “It’s an acronym for ‘HAT,’ because the people involved in this theater wear lots of hats.”

As to why they are returning to the Greenfield venue: “We love to perform here, we love the town of Greenfield, Develde told me. “It’s a great venue – Hawks and Reed are really great partners in our art.” Develde says the group plans on continually using the New Play Exchange to find plays, so we might end up seeing another one at Hawks and Reed right out of Greek mythology.

*Gorgons is showing at 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, March 8, 9, 15, and 16, and at 2 p.m. Sundays, March 10 and 17. Tickets are \$15 to \$30, sliding scale, available at the door or at [hawksandreed.com](http://hawksandreed.com).*

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By MIKE JACKSON

**TURNERS FALLS** – We’ve reached the third and final installment of the 10 reviews, ordered chronologically by release date, of the 10 records I bought in a \$10 mystery bag at the Music Connection.

Last week we heard from the Cars, Fleetwood Mac, and John & Yoko; this week’s batch are all notables from the “We Are The World” session. Content warning: This trilogy ends on a bit of a dark note.

**Daryl Hall, John Oates, *Private Eyes*.** 1981.

We’re going to set aside the whole “blue-eyed soul” business and approach Hall & Oates, here on their tenth LP together, as a pure pop machine, taking whack after whack at hits and sometimes whacking them dead center. And there are two hits here: the lead single/album opener/title track, a tightly-wound if formulaic little number, and then Side A’s monster centerpiece, “I Can’t Go For That (No Can Do).”

Those two hold up. The others sound like someone at the studio forgot to flip the switch marked *Good*.

The record nevertheless went platinum. This may have been because the dial marked *Eighties* was sufficiently cranked. Drummer Jerry Marotta, who’d also been working on Peter Gabriel’s breakthrough solo albums, pulled synth player Larry Fast over from Gabriel’s camp for this project. (And it should be noted that during this era Hall and Oates’s respective girlfriends, sisters Sara and Janna Allen, stepped forward to help them write almost all their hits.)

H&O made headlines this year when an ongoing legal conflict over their back catalog boiled over to restraining-order level. Light a candle for them. Forty-two years on, the contributor left looking the best is the Roland CR-78 drum machine.

*Editor’s score:* C+ / *Adjusted:* B-

**Lionel Richie, *Lionel Richie*.** 1982.

I get why people like it, and if my seventh-grade dances had ended with “Truly” instead of Boyz II Men’s “End of the Road” – a weird selection, now that I think about it – I’d surely have a special place in my heart for Mr. Richie and his first be-sweatered solo adventure. Sadly, for me this is the sound of choosing the right bottle of multivitamins at CVS.

With the benefit of hindsight we can spin through the earlier Commodores records and hear Richie’s ambitions *vis-à-vis* maudlin balladry diverging from the band as the Seventies wore on, sloughing away their funk like so much unwanted skin: “This Is Your Life,” “Sweet Love,” “Just to Be Close to You,” and then the actually terrific “Easy.” By “Three Times a Lady,” this die seems to have been cast.

And in a better world, the band would have blackmailed him into

staying, but instead we get this, 33 credited musicians without even beginning to count the orchestral players, guys from the Eagles lurking around the studio, and a lot of it just sounds wimpy, sulky, and thin anyway. One of the better tracks, “My Love,” is a blatant rehash of “Easy.”

On the plus side, Richie hadn’t yet reached his steel-drums-and-fake-patois era, he’s a genuine talent and seems like a sympathetic person, and I actually think “You Are” is a jam, even if I might sigh and wonder how the Commodores’ version might have sounded. History is what hurts, though, and it seems like maybe there was some bad stuff happening circa 1982?

*Editor’s score:* C+ / *Adjusted:* B

**Billy Joel, *An Innocent Man*.** 1983.

Kicking myself for running these reviews chronologically instead of, say, alphabetically, and flinching before I squish the toes of yet another adoring fan base.

I like maybe three of Billy Joel’s songs. This was his ninth record.

I found a video online where Joel, looking back later, explains it: “I got divorced,” he begins. “I started dating these different women... I was a single guy, who was a rock star.” These circumstances made him recall the music he had been listening to as an early teenager, causing him to record a set of frantic homages.

Somewhere, even as you read this, a 33-year-old is hitting an early midlife crisis and remembering **hor**nily fondly the greatest hits of 2004: “Yeah” by Usher, featuring Lil Jon and Ludacris; Outkast’s “The Way You Move”; Hoobastank’s “The Reason.” If the American press and music industry catered to people born in 1991 this person might be paid millions to ape those works, his nostalgic exercise hailed as a culturally significant act in and of itself.

We can see how stupid that is when it’s not about the B----rs, who were asked “Where were you in ’62?” on the movie posters for 1973’s *American Graffiti*, started down a 19-years-earlier *Happy Days* timeline in 1974 and matched that interval with *Grease*’s release in 1978, and by 1983 had slithered so far into their own generational bellybutton that only their toes remained visible.

Since Billy Joel was aping great music, this record sounds fine on one level – but if you want to hear doo-wop *please* go check out some doo-wop, and if you’re curious about Sam Cooke I can assure you the right starting point is not “Careless Talk.”

The one bright spot in my mind is “Uptown Girl,” a brilliantly designed staircase of hooks and early turnarounds, apparently an homage to Frankie Valli (i.e. Joel’s Hoobastank (i.e. his only stated inspiration who was not Black)) but really just pop, and just good enough to save *An Innocent Man* from a failing grade.

*Editor’s score:* D / *Adjusted:* C+

#### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

### The Follower; Night Train; Gunfingers; Pinging On G; Ghost Call At Farren; Literal Dumpster Fire On Fourth

**Monday, 2/26**

1:05 p.m. Officers on Fourth Street attempting to locate a male party with a warrant. A 42-year-old Turners Falls man was arrested on a default warrant.

4:44 p.m. 911 caller states there is a car behind him that wants him to pull over because he is driving too slow. He doesn’t feel comfortable pulling over because he believes the driver of the car has been following him trying to “kill or beat” him. Caller states there are five other cars behind him that have honked because he’s going so slow, but he’s not comfortable pulling over with the driver behind him. During the call, caller stated that the car pulled off onto another road and he no longer needs assistance. Cannot say what road the car pulled off onto. Caller hung up.

5:23 p.m. Officer conducting a vehicle stop on Federal Street. Standing by waiting for operator to get a ride. Operator fell asleep at the wheel, almost causing a collision with the officer’s cruiser. Citation issued.

5:25 p.m. Caller from Third Street wants on record that a female is now screaming threats and profanities as people are walking in and out of the building. Caller has this on video and would like it added to a report. Officer advised caller to call us when this is happening and advised him of his court options.

7:57 p.m. Caller from G Street states people are rummaging through the second-floor apartment where the fire was; caller doesn’t want them there. Area checked; officer advises no one in the building at this time.

**Tuesday, 2/27**  
2:33 a.m. Caller from Highland School Apartments states he was awoken by a loud scraping noise and something that sounded like a crash. Caller unsure where this occurred. Officer advises he checked area; nothing showing at this time. No vehicle debris or skid marks observed. Upon initial arrival, a train was seen leaving the area.

8:48 a.m. Caller from Nouria states that a female just threatened employees and a child, then stole some merchandise. Summons issued for shoplifting by asportation, disorderly conduct, and larceny under \$1,200.

9:16 a.m. 911 caller reporting gas odor from back of Turners Falls High School building. Transferred to Shelburne Control.

9:46 a.m. Animal control officer requested to Burn-

ham Street to assist with a cat that is in distress.

11:13 a.m. Caller from Connecticut River Liquor and Wine would like it on record that a female came into the store, pointed at her and made a “gun” with her fingers, then walked away.

1:30 p.m. Cumberland Farms employee reports that a well-known female customer just came in and stole some merchandise. They would like to have her verbally trespassed from the store. Officers looking for involved female at her residence. She is home but refusing to speak to officers. Investigated.

3:32 p.m. Caller states that her Apple Watch and an expensive ring were stolen by someone known to her, and that the watch was then sold to a male party whose house burned down. Watch is pinging on G Street, and she’s wondering if an officer can help her retrieve the watch from the property. Officer spoke to female and advised her of options.

4:56 p.m. 911 caller reporting that a dog was locked in a car with the windows up for over two hours on Third Street. No owners around. Vehicle gone upon officer’s arrival.

5:11 p.m. Caller states that while his son was walking the dog he heard banging and yelling coming from Railroad Salvage area. Officer spoke to a juvenile who was down by the water. Didn’t hear anything like what the caller reported at this time.

6:44 p.m. Report of tree down blocking Old Stage Road. TFFD advises tree removed from roadway.

**Wednesday, 2/28**

4:21 a.m. E-911 caller from Nouria heard telling someone to go away; overheard a female party demanding money, no answer, phone disconnected. E-911 caller advises a female entered the store and tried to move behind the counter. Caller advises she tried to push the female away; however, the female grabbed her and she observed the female take multiple vape products, and possibly candy. Caller advises female was roughly 40, wearing a dark coat, and was last seen standing outside. Officer advises he is with a witness who is writing a statement at the involved location. Officer also collected written statement from caller. Belongings left by involved female, including ID, recovered. Officer on a follow-up at location. Summons issued for assault and battery, shoplifting by asportation, disorderly conduct, and threatening to commit a crime.

5:16 a.m. Special response team at station for briefing. SRT executing warrant at this time. Stop team secured scene; rest of team checking residence. Everyone clear from scene. Summons issued.

5:42 a.m. Caller states that people have been living in their van in the Fourth Street parking lot and one of the individuals who resides in the van is currently outside of the vehicle, hitting the window. Caller unsure why individual is doing this. Area checked; all quiet upon arrival.

7:52 a.m. Car arrived at target site on Main Road in Gill. Multiple people detained at this time. Three arrests made.

3:14 p.m. Two 911 calls received; beeping heard on other end, then calls hung up. Location that phone number is registered to is torn down. It is the old Farren building.

8:22 p.m. Caller from Third Street states that the downstairs neighbor closed his door too loudly.

**Thursday, 2/29**

1:29 a.m. First of 11 calls reporting trees and wires down around town. Affected locations included South Prospect Street, G Street, Turnpike Road, Park Villa Drive, Montague City Road, Meadow Road, Old Greenfield Road, Main Street, Sunset Drive, M Street, Industrial Boulevard, and Chestnut Hill Loop.

9:08 a.m. Caller from Oakman Street would like on record that last night, along with many other nights recently, her neighbor played music at 3 a.m. so loudly that she cannot sleep. She has asked them to stop, but they continue to do it. Involved male advised of complaint.

10:11 p.m. Caller from Third Street states that her upstairs neighbors are being very loud and stomping/banging on the floor. It woke her kids up, and she’s unable to sleep. Officer advises all quiet and no lights on upon arrival.

**Friday, 3/1**

2:25 a.m. Caller from Powertown Apartments states that there is a woman in the hallway making a lot of noise and rambling on about something. All quiet upon arrival. Area checked; unable to locate.

4:15 p.m. Party into station requesting to speak to an officer regarding an assault that occurred at Turners Falls High School today. Officer advises caller of options and told her to follow up with the school resource officer.

**Saturday, 3/2**

1:45 a.m. Caller from East Main Street states that her son is currently yelling and punching the walls inside her house. She has

attempted to separate herself from him, but he keeps entering her room. Officer advises that upon speaking with the caller, she stated that the situation was resolved prior to officers’ arrival. Both parties going to bed for the night.

7:31 a.m. Multiple callers reporting that a dumpster is on fire in a parking lot behind a Fourth Street address. Shelburne Control notified. FD advises dumpster and some debris next to it are on fire. PD shutting down west end of Fourth Street for now.

11:40 a.m. A 39-year-old Turners Falls woman was arrested on a straight warrant.

11:43 a.m. Caller states that a man is “working” on a car in the Fourth Street alleyway and being very loud about it. Units advised.

4:04 p.m. Caller from Third Street would like to speak to an officer regarding ongoing issues with his neighbor.

6:02 p.m. 911 caller from O Street reporting an oil fire that won’t go out that is under her deck. Call transferred to Shelburne Control.

7:57 p.m. Caller states that there is a white vehicle in the Third Street parking lot whose alarm has been going on and off for hours. Officer advises alarm not going off at this time, but flashers are on. No phone number in house for registered owner.

**Sunday, 3/3**

10:02 a.m. A 40-year-old Montague Center man was arrested on two straight warrants.


5:36 p.m. Officer cleared a bag from Montague City Road at Solar Avenue. New pillow in gray bag. Will leave with dispatch.

7:12 p.m. Report of silver sedan and darker four-door sedan parked facing each other on Twelfth Street with no lights on. Caller states silver sedan drove away. Registration of other vehicle found to be revoked for insurance. Officer removing plates. Tow requested. Vehicle owner called and aware her vehicle was towed. States she thought she reinstated her insurance; she will contact them and see if she actually did or not.

8:47 p.m. Caller states that a blue sedan tried running her off the road while driving into the Patch. Referred to an officer.

8:50 p.m. Report of vehicle vs. deer at Route 63 and Highland Street. Vehicle no longer on scene; deer still alive but unable to move. Officer advises deer is deceased. Message left for DPW to remove deer from side of roadway. Too big to be moved at this time.

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CALL FOR ART

What’s On Your Plate?

**TURNERS FALLS** – How is what we eat related to our personal history, and to the climate emergency? What should be on our plate as we think about our planet’s future? If we love the place where we live, what are we willing to do for it, and for each other?

*What’s On Your Plate?* asks artists to investigate the entanglement of food, time, commitment, and ecology. Using “plates” as a jumping-off point, follow the question in any direction. Explore plates themselves as raw material, or as a prompt for thinking about humorous or celebratory statements, pointed social commentary, the emotional, financial, and familial fodder of our lives, or a stage where we perform the joy of eating.

All interpretations are welcome for submission to this community art exhibit. Curated by Exploded View, a multi-disciplinary arts group, the exhibit will take place in May and June at the Great Falls Discovery Center in Turners Falls.

The deadline for submission is Friday, April 26 at 11:59 p.m. All artists living within 60 miles of Montague are eligible. Up to three (3) submissions will be considered from each artist.

Wall art only for submission,

please, and it must be wired for display; no sawtooth hangers.

Here is a link to the submission form: [www.tinyurl.com/EVPlates](http://www.tinyurl.com/EVPlates). If you are submitting from a Gmail account, you can upload images of your submissions in the form; if not, please fill out the form and email images directly to [explodedviewma@gmail.com](mailto:explodedviewma@gmail.com).

Drop-off will be Saturday, May 4, from 10 a.m. to noon, with pickup from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, June 30. Neither Exploded View nor the venue will handle sales – buyers will have to contact artists directly to purchase the work, and 100% of the sale price will go to the artists.

An opening reception will be held from 2 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, May 5, and a closing reception Saturday, June 29 from 2 to 4 p.m. These events will include creative performances by Exploded View.

A variety of related programming focusing on the Discovery Center’s year-long theme of “food, farms, and factories” is also planned during the two months of the exhibit, including “How to Make a Meadow,” “What’s Made in Present-Day Montague,” a downtown foraging walk, and an edible plants presentation.

By JON DOBOSZ

**UNITY PARK** - Hello and happy (almost) spring everyone! We hope you are doing well, and that you’re enjoying the end of winter. We’re about to embark on one of the busiest times of year for us here at MPRD, which certainly puts a spring in our step and wakes us up from a long winter slumber.

First off, we would like to announce that we will be holding our Annual Peter Cottontail’s EGG-stravaganza on Saturday, March 30 at Unity Park! The horn will sound promptly at 1 p.m., when the children will be set loose to gather over 5,000 candy-filled eggs strewn throughout the park.

Peter will be on hand to watch the kids enjoy themselves, but be sure to bring your own basket and bags for the eggs. The egg hunt is geared for children ages 4 to 12 due to the small candy. We would also like to thank our friends at Greenfield Savings Bank for co-sponsoring this great community event.

Registration for Tee Ball and Rookie Baseball has also begun. Tee Ball (ages 4 to 6) and Rookie Baseball (7 to 9) begin April 20 and go until June 1. These pro-

grams are often the first introduction to sports for kids, and it’s a lot of fun for the parents to watch their little ones run around the bases and learn the basics of the game.

Parent coaches are needed, so if you’re interested, give us a ring.



Not being “just for kids,” we also offer an Adult Co-ed Softball League that goes from May through August. The league, sanctioned by the American Softball Association, holds games Monday and Thursday evenings at Unity Park.

Those interested in putting a team together or getting on the individual player list should contact us soon! We’ll be hosting a pre-season captains’ meeting in the next few weeks, with plans of getting onto the ballfield by mid-May.

We would also like to announce that registration for Summer Camp will be starting for Montague residents on Monday, March 25. (Non-residents may register starting Tuesday, April 16.)

Summer Camp serves children ages 5 to 12 and will be held from June 24 to August 16. We have theme weeks, field trips, special events, and more! We operate Mondays through Fridays, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and also offer pre- and post-camp extended care. Our camp is licensed through the MA Department of Public Health, and for more information we recommend visiting [www.montagueparksrec.com](http://www.montagueparksrec.com).

That’s about it from here. If you wish to stay on top of our programs and services, be sure to log on to [montagueparksrec.com](http://montagueparksrec.com) or view our Facebook page. You can also pick up copies of our spring brochure at the Unity Park Fieldhouse, the Montague Libraries, and at Montague town hall.

If you have immediate questions, please be sure to call us at (413) 863-3216. We’ll talk to you next month...

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

HEARTFELT from page A1

Fair of Texas. Hosted by the Chili Appreciation Society International, it was grounded in the contest’s chairman Joe E. Cooper’s 1952 book, *With or Without Beans: An Informal Biography of Chili*, considered the definitive word on chili.

In October 1967 in Terlingua, Texas yet another purportedly international contest was held. It was the World Championship Chili Cook-off, which ended in a draw between two men. In 1970 that hosting body renamed itself the International Chili Society; that year was also the first contest with a woman participating. Also at that time, the Texas state legislature declared chili as the “official dish of Texas,” a drive led by chili manufacturers.

The Southwest offers many chilis, such as New Mexico’s *chili verde*, made with pork shoulder and a green chili sauce of tomatillos, jalapenos, and lime, and *carne adovada*, a Mexican-style dish with pork shoulder cooked in a thick chili marinade, often served in tacos. There’s Frito pie, chili served over a pile of Fritos topped with sour cream and cheese. Dumping chili



Mise en place, or “putting in place,” dictates that all ingredients are prepped and measured before cooking. Pictured here is everything needed to make Chef Moskowitz’s vegan eggplant-lentil chili.

onto a split bag of Fritos makes it a “walking taco.”

The Midwest still loves its chili, as evidenced by Springfield chilli in Illinois – the extra “l” is intentional – with bacon and ground turkey cooked in beer. “Detroit-style” chili is Greek-inspired, with orega-

no and paprika and served as a gravy over fries, and Michigan also serves Coney dogs which are, weirdly, Coney Island hot dogs covered in chili, raw onions, and yellow mustard. And if you ever see macaroni in chili, it should be considered Indiana-style.

Louisiana’s version is basically any type of chili with a ton of Cajun seasoning and Louisiana hot sauce. It’s often served with cornbread to cool down a scorched throat. And Rocky Mountain chili from Colorado uses game meats such as elk, deer, and antelope.

Today, chili cooking is a free-for-all. Whether using beef or chicken, eggplant or butternut squash, it’s a dish where anything goes. Add-ins like cocoa powder, coffee, bacon, fish sauce, honey, marsala, liquid smoke, vinegar, and tomato paste enhance the pot with rich, savory flavors. It’s a great dish to make for a crowd with plenty for leftovers.

My wife related to me a couple of her family’s favorite recipes us-

VEGAN EGGPLANT LENTIL CHILI

- 2 Tbsp. olive oil, divided
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 2 jalapenos
- 3 garlic cloves
- 2 lb. eggplant
- 3 Tbsp. chili powder
- 2 Tbsp. cumin
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/8 tsp. ground cloves
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1 cup green lentils
- 4 cups vegetable broth (or water)
- one 15-oz. Can diced tomatoes
- 2 cups cooked kidney beans
- 2 tsp. maple syrup
- chopped scallions or cilantro (optional)

Cut the eggplant into half-inch cubes. If you want, slice and salt it first to draw out its bitterness; rinse before using. Dice the onion, seed and mince the jalapenos, and mince the garlic.

Preheat a four-quart pot over medium-high heat. Sauté the

onions and jalapeno in one tablespoon of oil, with a big pinch of salt, until translucent, for 5 to 7 minutes.

Add the garlic and sauté for another minute. Add the eggplant and remaining tablespoon of oil. Cook for about 5 minutes, covered, stirring occasionally, until eggplant has released moisture and softened.

Mix in the chili powder, cumin, oregano, cinnamon, cocoa, cloves, and salt. Cook for 2 minutes or so.

Wash and dry the lentils. Add them with the remaining vegetable broth and diced tomatoes. Cover the pot and bring the mixture to a boil, keeping a close eye on it. Once it’s boiling, lower the heat to a simmer and cook for about 40 minutes, until the lentils are tender and the eggplant is soft.

Mix in the beans and syrup, and heat the beans through. Salt to taste. Let the chili sit for 10 minutes or so for maximum flavor. Top it with scallions or cilantro if desired.

Chili

1/2 lb. pinto beans	2 1/2 lbs. ground beef chuck
5 cups canned tomatoes	1 lb. ground lean pork
1 lb. chopped green pepper	1-3 cups chili powder
1 1/2 tbsp. salad oil	2 tbsp. salt
1 1/2 lbs. chopped onions	1 1/2 teas. pepper
2 cloves of crushed garlic	1 1/2 tsp. cumin seed
1/2 cup chopped parsley	1 1/2 tsp. monosodium glutamate.
1/2 cup butter	

Wash beans, soak overnight in water, simmer, covered, in same water till tender. Add tomatoes simmer 5 minutes. Sauté green pepper in salad oil 5 min. add onion, cook till tender, stirring often. Add garlic, parsley. Melt butter and sauté meat 15 min. add meat to onion mixture, stir in chili powder cook 10 min. Add this to beans and add spices. Simmer, covered for 1 hour. Cook uncovered for 30 min. Skim fat from top.

The author’s father was a Sunday cook, typically simmering a day-long pot of spaghetti sauce or chili. Note the “1-3 cups chili powder” on his recipe card, which is likely a typo! Reduce to tablespoons. The MSG is optional.

ing chili. One is Western spaghetti, made by adding spaghetti noodles to leftover chili, covering it with lots of shredded cheese, and baking until hot and melty. The other is “Old Cleo,” made from a mixture of ground beef, tomato sauce, chopped tomatoes, kidney beans, and corn, then seasoned with chili powder, dried mustard, salt, and pepper.

Some tips for cooking chili – it’s recommended to use a pot with a thick, heavy bottom, large enough to hold all of the ingredients comfortably. Stainless steel or enamel pots are a good choice.

Here’s one of the best vegan

chilis I’ve ever had, created by Chef Isa Chandra Moskowitz, an American vegan restaurateur. Those who claim to dislike eggplant will finish off a bowl and ask for seconds without even realizing what they ate. It melts down and mingles with the softened lentils and spicy seasonings. *Bon appétit.*

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



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Buckets collect sap from a stately maple.

## BOIL from page B1

floor of the existing farmhouse, while his grandparents lived on the first floor. At age 10 he began to help his grandfather Rob Ripley, a well-regarded local legend who died in 1993 at age 92, with the sugaring.

His grandfather's brother, Lucian, lived on the other house on the property. After Lucian died and Rob stopped sugaring with horses, some land was sold to a renegade branch of the Liberation News Service. That newspaper was short-lived at the farm, and the group morphed into the Montague Farm commune — or, as Gary calls it, "the Peace Farm."

Rob Ripley helped the commune with their attempts at farming — commune member Sam Lovejoy also provided some expertise when he wasn't knocking down nuke weather towers — and the "hippies" helped Rob with sugaring for a number of years.

Their property was eventually sold to the Zen Peacemakers in 2005 — another short-lived residence in their expansive new building — and is now the Montague Retreat; the original farmhouse on it was torn down a few years ago. (Ripley Farm historic dates are courtesy of Richie Davis's books *Inner Landscapes* and *Good Will and Ice Cream*.)

As of this writing, you can buy a "vintage Robert M. Ripley maple syrup 1 gallon tin can" on EBay for \$42.00 from a Vermont estate, if you are so inclined...

So, Gary is carrying on a family tradition of sugaring the 55 acres of field and wood. I asked how many taps are they working, and he estimated "about 2,500." They are all over — into North Leverett and around Highland Avenue in Montague, which runs into Ripley Road.

One can see the buckets hugging neighbors' trees all up West Chestnut Hill Road. One large tree in Denise Pinardi's backyard is known to be have tapped at least since 1907, when Rob Ripley was 7 years old. (Thanks to Denise for providing the photos with this article!)

The sap is brought to the sugar house after the buckets are emptied into large containers, gravity-piped in, and then fed into the evaporator while the slab wood is burning. As it is heated, the cold sap has a "continuous natural movement, and gets the whole tank boiling," Gary said. "The secret is to get the sap on the fire fast, get it boiling fast, and finish it fast."

I watched as Gary added a little pat of butter to the boil to keep the foam bubbles down, and then as the sap reached the correct sugar percentage point and was declared syrup. He then filled a number of buckets out of the evaporator's load and ran the syrup through a power filter to strain out impurities.

Gary gave me a small taste of the warm product. Oh yeah, *good stuff!* This is early syrup, the light amber kind. Gary said he expects the color will change in a week, and the result will eventually be the more robust dark amber syrup.

I asked him if this is a good year, and he said it is too early to tell. Generally, a wet summer means a good sap year.

I also asked Gary what size producer he considers himself.

"Well, we're a pretty good-sized operation for the Leverett/Greenfield area," he told me, "big-

ger than most. We get around 300 gallons a year. We sell out every year... almost always by the first of January." Gary credits the autumnal spike in syrup sales to Eggo waffles; parents pop a couple into the toaster for their kids' breakfast before school, and in New England, those thousands of waffles need real maple syrup.

I asked if he has seen any changes in sugaring in his time.

"Yes," he replied strongly. "Climate change is a big, big factor. It used to be we started tapping around Washington's birthday when kids were out of school allowing for a young labor force to help." He told me the whole season has backed up in the last 20 or 25 years. They have to get the taps in by early February. The season used to finish in early April, but now it ends in March so the season is shorter.

Nights below freezing and days around 40 degrees or so allow the sap to flow, but Gary said the days now often shoot up to 50 or higher.

"The trees are not in good health," he added, shaking his head. "Road salt and soil compression" — many of the trees are along roads — "and diseases are damaging or killing trees. Many of the younger trees seem to die when they reach a certain diameter, and road crews that used to leave roadside maple saplings now cut them down. The forests are changing."

It's sad to hear from someone on the front lines talk about the threats to a practice that has been going on in New England way before it became "New England." The cost of a



DENISE PINARDI PHOTOS

Gary Billings is a fifth-generation maple syrup producer on Chestnut Hill.

new evaporator can run to \$50,000, and large professional sugarers have introduced expensive modern equipment to their repertoire too expensive for smaller producers. "The Canadians aren't helping either," Gary said. "The industry is subsidized up there." Less expen-

sive syrup from north of the border is shipped all over.

"It's not a dying industry, but it will never reach the levels it used to," he said. "My sons may still sugar, but I'm not sure if my grandkids ever will." Gary has four sons living locally — "they have real jobs" — and a daughter in California.

So, any funny or weird stories from all your time sugaring? Gary shook his head. "No. Certainly good memories, from when I was a kid." I was hoping for some scary or weird wildlife tales, animal or human, but no. But Gary offers: "I get a peaceful feeling out of it, even when you are always on the run, especially at night and the early morning. It feels like all is well with the world."

Not a bad way to feel about your work.

Want to buy some of the syrup? Gary expects he will have the self-serve syrup set up at 11 West Chestnut Hill Road, just up from North Leverett Road, by the time you read this. And it should soon be on the shelves at Food City in Turners Falls, Rau's Towing in Montague Center, and at Foster's and Greenfield's Market in Greenfield. Enjoy!



## A HAVEN FOR MORE THAN JUST SYRUP

*If you do come up to West Chestnut Hill, watch out for the ducks and chickens; they have right of way on the road.*

*Gary's wife Janis Doyle started "Duck World" rescue during COVID lockdown. ("It kept her sane," Gary's brother-in-law Jim Sinclair piped up.)*

*A neighbor brought Janis the lone surviving duck of a coyote attack, and she nursed it back to health. Soon word got out that there was a duck whisperer at the farm and ducks in need of a forever home began showing up. She nursed them back to health if needed, and provided them a home.*

*Now there are ducks and chickens and a few other avian types in the yard, and the field, and in the road. It's fun to watch them enjoying themselves. Janis also gives educational programs in the area. There are a couple of goats in the barn as well; they're not Gary's favorite critters, though!*

## Have a question for the editor?



Email it to us at [podcast@montaguereporter.org](mailto:podcast@montaguereporter.org) and listen for our "Ask the Editor" segment to hear the answer!

## The Montague Reporter Podcast

## EXHIBITS

**Rendezvous, Turners Falls:** *Rivers of Franklin County*, geology-inspired, map-based art by Joe Kopera, through April 15.

**LOOT, Turners Falls:** *Auto Partitas*, twelve little trios of mixed-media works inspired by automotive parts, by Nina Rossi. Through April.

**Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls:** *New Roots in River Banks*, an exhibit on Polish and other Eastern European immigration stories and their contributions in the Connecticut River Valley. Through April 28. Reception this Saturday, March 9, from 1 to 3 p.m.

**Montague Center Library:** *Robert Callery*, paintings and mixed media.

**Sawmill River Arts, Montague:** *Sara Casilio*, paintings on Duralar, through April.

**LAVA Center, Greenfield:** *My Inner Joy*, mixed-media artworks by Nese Uysal,

through March.

**Artspace, Greenfield:** *Teen Art Show*, young artists from high schools across Franklin County showing two- and three-dimensional work, through March 15.

**Looky Here, Greenfield:** *Between You and Me*, portraits by Maria Sparrow, through March 29. Closing reception March 29.

**Gallery A3, Amherst:** *Pairings*, works by Martha Braun and Rochelle Shicoff, through March. Opening reception this Thursday, March 7, from 5 to 8 p.m.

**Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:** *Dare to Dream*, group show by member artists, through March.

**Salmon Falls Gallery, Shelburne:** *Lou Wallach: Photographs*, black-and-white images of the natural world, through April 28.

**Arts Bank, Shelburne Falls:** *Volcanix II*, Christin Couture's woodcuts on Pellon fabric of the Popocatepetl volcano. By chance or appointment: [redtinebluefire@gmail.com](mailto:redtinebluefire@gmail.com).

**A.P.E. Gallery, Northampton:** *Physiotas-magorical: The Implicit Body*, group exhibit exploring corporeal secrets at the intersection of the clinical and the imaginary. March 7 through 30, with an opening reception this Friday, March 8 from 5 to 8 p.m.

**Tabor Art Gallery, Mount Holyoke College:** *Geo-Spec: Cultural Introspection Wealth*. Raishad J. Glover works with mediums such as lenticular printing, graphite powder, beeswax, dura-trans/backlit film, analog and digital photography, and LED lights. Through March 20, with a reception this Thursday, March 7 from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

**Eagle Hill Cultural Center, Hardwick:** *Ohio's Appalachia: Faces & Families, 1972-1974*, photographs by Vern McClish comprising "an ode to a forgotten people." Through March.

**D'Amour Museum, Springfield:** *A Gathering: Works from Contemporary Black American Ceramic Artists*, through March 24.

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CONCEPTS

# Is It Ethical to Prescribe Placebos?

By CATHERINE DODDS, MD

**TURNERS FALLS** – In an iconic scene in *The Matrix*, released 25 years ago, a character named Morpheus offers the main character Neo two pills. “You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland...”

What is implied is that one pill contains an active treatment that will have a noticeable effect, while the other has no active components – it is a *placebo*. But what if the words themselves set up the expectations of which effects each pill will have? What if neither has any active ingredients, and any effect is the product of Neo’s mind?

A *placebo* is a medical treatment – a pill, a procedure, an injection, or otherwise – designed to seem identical to an actual treatment, but not to have any effects on the condition being treated, based on what the placebo contains or how it’s administered. Examples include a pill containing glucose (sugar), or a sham surgery where the pre-operative preparations are the same but no surgery is actually performed.

Use of placebos has been part of the history of medicine for centuries, though the ethics of giving a patient a placebo instead of an active treatment has been debated through the years, and these days is generally frowned upon. That said, a majority of doctors report that they have at least occasionally prescribed something – often a vitamin supplement or similar harmless substance – even though they believed it to be only a placebo for the patient.

A placebo can be viewed as a doctor deliberately misleading their patient and treating without the patient’s informed consent – but how important is that if the placebo effectively treats the patient’s concerns? Placebos have measurable effects on a variety of symptoms, and many people (from 20% to 60%, in various studies) are susceptible to experiencing a *placebo effect*.

Placebos are generally safe, and can be given at a wide range of doses for long periods with no major risks or side effects. However, if a placebo is given simply because a patient demands a particular treatment that is inappropriate for their situation – for instance, giving an injection of vitamin B12 before doing further testing for the patient’s complaint of fatigue, or giving it despite normal testing – the placebo may delay or prevent the correct diagnosis and treatment. This is a definite downside.

In cases where no proven effective treatment yet exists, or where the standard treatment is not an option due to individual factors such as allergies or medical history, the risks versus benefits of offering a placebo treatment to increase pa-

tient comfort and quality of life must be carefully considered.

By the early 20th century, researchers had confirmed a correlation between giving a supposedly inactive placebo treatment and participants having a positive response, sometimes even a full recovery or cure. In modern medicine placebos are widely used in research studies, to compare the therapeutic response and side effects of medication against the placebo, a presumably inactive treatment. Studying an active treatment against no treatment at all produces less accurate results than comparing with a placebo. A medication is generally only approved by the Food and Drug Administration if it is both more effective than and at least as safe as a placebo.

The term *placebo* comes from Latin, meaning “I will please.” For centuries it was typical for a doctor to give their patient a placebo to fulfill an expectation to “do something,” or sometimes simply to please or comfort the patient.

Indeed, I sometimes comment to patients about having a “therapeutic doctor visit,” where they feel better just by being in the office talking to me about their concerns. Multiple research trials show that having interactions with a supportive healthcare provider as part of the study can affect patient outcomes – that is to say, participation in a trial may itself be a type of placebo treatment.

The placebo effect is a psychological experience that happens in the patient’s brain when they receive a placebo treatment along with verbal suggestions or other cues that they will have a clinical benefit. The patient’s belief that it will do something is what causes the placebo to have an effect on them.

*Anocebo* (Latin for “I will harm”), by contrast, is a treatment that has negative side effects solely based on the patient’s expectations for the treatment. Thus, a *nocebo effect* is a negative response to a treatment that is caused by the person taking it, not inherent to the treatment itself.

For example, if a patient believes that a particular treatment will cause pain, they are more likely to experience pain after taking that treatment than they would be if they had no preconceived notions about pain as a potential side effect. Common symptoms that can appear with a *nocebo effect* are pain, nausea, gas/bloating, dry mouth, drowsiness, nervousness, sexual dysfunction, headache, and dizziness. These symptoms vary in intensity and disappear without any residual symptoms when the *nocebo* is discontinued.

As a population example, the rates of reported adverse effects of statins go up and down relative to the intensity of negative statin-related media coverage – what we hear and believe becomes reality in the case of both placebo and *nocebo effect*.

The placebo (or *nocebo*) effect will differ depending on the patient’s perception of the treatment. A placebo labeled as a familiar chemical – dopamine, for instance – will be more effective than one without a label, or one with a label that has an unfamiliar chemical name. A sham injection causes a stronger response than a placebo tablet. Two placebo tablets cause more response than one, larger-sized pills produce larger responses, and capsules produce more of an effect than tablets.

If the patient believes a treatment to be more expensive, its placebo effect will also be greater.

Placebo and *nocebo* effects are not straight input-output responses generated by one part of the brain, or one chemical signal in the body. When an individual believes they are taking active treatment, and furthermore believes that this treatment will work for them, studies show that their brain releases increased amounts of neurotransmitters that boost mood and well-being.

PET studies of brain glucose metabolism and functional MRI studies of brain activity have indicated that the opioid, dopamine, oxytocin, vasopressin, and cannabinoid systems in the brain may all contribute to the placebo effect. These are systems involved in perception of pain, addiction, and feelings of reward, motivation, liking, and wanting.

The placebo effect seems to involve both expectation – having a response because we believe and expect that we will – and classical conditioning – having a response to a placebo such as changes in heart rate, blood pressure, or breathing pattern because we previously experienced this physiologic response to the active medication that we believe the placebo to be.

How the placebo effect works also depends at least in part on the underlying condition being treated. Health conditions that rely on self-reporting of symptoms for measurement of treatment effect are most strongly influenced by placebos: mood and anxiety disorders, chronic/persistent pain syndromes, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), cough, erectile dysfunction, Parkinson’s disease, and multiple sclerosis.

However, harnessing the power of the placebo effect as part of the treatment plan for patients with these conditions remains an ethical gray area. Should Neo choose the blue pill or the red pill? Should doctors prescribe placebos to certain patients or in certain situations? Should research studies aim to minimize or utilize the placebo effect?

Hopefully this brief introduction has shed some light on this mysterious mind-over-matter phenomenon, but as with many areas within the art and science of medicine, there are still plenty of unanswered questions about the placebo effect.

MEDICINE

# Ozempic: A Primer

By CATHERINE DODDS, MD

**TURNERS FALLS** – If you do an internet search for “Ozempic” these days, in addition to seeing information about weight loss and diabetes, you’ll likely find references to the Golden Globes opening monologue, medication shortages, exorbitant costs, dangerous side effects, and even lawsuits.

So what is Ozempic, and why is it such big news?

Ozempic is a brand name for semaglutide, a prescription medication produced by the pharmaceutical company Novo Nordisk. It was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in December 2017 for the treatment of type 2 diabetes.

Ozempic is one of a family of medications called glucagon-like peptide 1 (GLP-1) receptor agonists. It is given by injection into the skin once weekly, done by patients at home. These medicines act similarly to the hormone GLP-1, which your small intestine produces after you eat to decrease your hunger, signal you to feel full, slow the emptying of your stomach, and instruct your pancreas to make insulin to lower blood sugar levels. Ultimately, these effects lead to decreased calorie intake and, over time, weight loss.

The first of the GLP-1 agonists, exenatide – brand name Byetta – was approved in 2005, the year before I started medical school. So these medications are new, but not that new.

As a primary care physician, I first became aware of Ozempic within a few weeks of its FDA approval. The marketing was relentless. It was touted as the great new medication that would help with both diabetes and weight, despite the fact that it does not have an FDA indication for use in obesity or weight management. To this day, taking Ozempic for weight loss is “off-label use,” which insurance companies have been using more and more as a reason to reject coverage for Ozempic for people who do not have a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes.

However, that distinction is splitting hairs. Wegovy, another brand-name version of the same medication (semaglutide), is also made by Novo Nordisk, but formulated in slightly higher dosing. And Wegovy is FDA approved for weight loss in patients with obesity, without diabetes. It was mainly because Wegovy was in limited supply and very expensive that Ozempic began to be substituted in its place for weight loss. They are both the same medication, semaglutide, after all.

Evidence is strong that semaglutide promotes weight loss – around 15% of total body weight loss in the initial clinical trials on Ozempic, and 5% to 20% overall total body weight loss in the studies available to date. And in a world of ever-increasing obesity, sedentary lifestyles, and constant availability of high-calorie foods, a

medication that helps with weight loss is bound to be a bestseller.

It was not a surprise to those of us on the front lines of healthcare that Ozempic itself started to be in short supply in the middle of 2023, due to increased demand by patients using it solely for weight loss, not diabetes. For several months last year, it was nearly impossible to get certain doses of Ozempic, and some compounding pharmacies controversially started selling compounded semaglutide, even though the medication is still under patent and therefore not available as a generic medication.

Per *GoodRx.com*, the current retail price for a month’s supply of Ozempic in the US is around \$900 to \$1,000. That cost is more than double the average price in Canada or Europe. (In those countries, Ozempic costs about \$200 to \$300 per month.)

The excessive costs have led many insurers to start limiting coverage for Ozempic, as well as other GLP-1 agonists, which are similarly pricey. These medications are not cures or short-term treatment courses. They must be taken chronically – essentially indefinitely – for their effects, and most patients will regain any weight that was lost once they stop taking the GLP-1 agonist medication.

Since last summer there have been anecdotal reports of mental health issues related to Ozempic, including suicidal thoughts. On January 11 the FDA reported that based on their investigation, Ozempic does not increase risk of suicidality, but anecdotes can be powerful and Ozempic’s rapid rise in popularity is cause for concern due to a lack of long-term data.

There are also anecdotal reports of Ozempic reducing cravings for alcohol, smoking, opioid pain medicines, and compulsive gambling. Clinical trials to look into these effects are ongoing, but so far these effects are just chatter.

Beyond these anecdotes, what does the medical evidence show? Ozempic is effective at lowering blood sugar levels in people with diabetes, and causes moderate weight loss in most people who take it, but only if they continue taking it. The most commonly reported side effects are nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea or constipation. Though rare, possible harms include pancreatitis, retinal damage, and thyroid cancer.

So is Ozempic worth the hype? Or has its moment already passed?

For patients with both diabetes and obesity who have made sustained efforts at diet and exercise and tried at least one other diabetes medication without a good response, Ozempic may be a reasonable long-term choice. For everyone else, most often it’s not worth the costs and risks. That said, always discuss with your healthcare provider before starting or stopping any prescription medication, and to develop a treatment plan tailored to your individual needs.

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THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Nova Arts, Keene: *Hurray for the Riff Raff, NNAMDI*. \$ 7 p.m.

Palladium, Worcester: *GWAR, Cancer Bats, X-Cops*. \$ 7 p.m.

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Frog-tones Frogget, Lick The Puss, The Stupor, Cowperson, it's mandy, 413DJMAFIA*. \$ 7 p.m.

Nova Arts, Keene: *Roger Clark Miller, Hiroya Tsukamoto*. \$ 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Play, Gorgons*, \$ 7 p.m. *Rabbit's Foot, John Ferrera*, \$ 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: *Open mic* with featured performer *Dave Der-sham*. \$ 6:30 p.m.

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

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Pedrito Martínez*. \$ 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *The*

*Big Takeover, The Mary Jane Jones*. \$ 7 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Outro, Gold Dust, Bring It To Bear*. \$ 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed: *Play, Gorgons*, \$ 7 p.m.; *RJD2*, \$ 7:30 p.m.

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

Nova Arts, Keene: *Oneida, Creative Writing*. \$ 7 p.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

Hawks & Reed: *Play, Gorgons*, \$ 2 p.m.

90 King Street, Northampton: *Accessory, Lucy, Prawn, Dee-jay Jae*. \$ 8 p.m.

MONDAY, MARCH 11

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *Advance Base, Young Moon, bobbie*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Bowker Auditorium, UMass Amherst: *Fanoos Ensemble*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

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

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Bookends, Florence: *Ides of March Cover Show* with *Orange & Amber, Wishbone Zoe, Norma Dream*, more. \$ 6 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Play, Gorgons*, \$ 7 p.m.; *Jimmy Just Quit*, \$ 8:30 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Viqueen, Jeopardy, Outlourdes, Woundlicker*. \$ 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Adam Ezra Group, The Mallett Brothers Band*. \$ 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Lost Film, Small Pond, bobbie*. \$ 8 p.m.

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Anthrophagous, I Destroyer, Ritual Clearing, Compress*. \$ 7 p.m.

Tori Town, Holyoke: *Dowsing Rod, Grazer, Sleep Destroyer, Sapien Joyride*. 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Adam Ezra Group, The Mallett Brothers Band*. \$ 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Lost Film, Small Pond, bobbie*. \$ 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Mud Season* feat. *The Dave Bulley Band, Woody & The Rebel Alliance, SpaceBar, more*. \$ 12 p.m.

Mount Toby Friends Meeting-house, Leverett: *Tim Grimm, Nate Borofsky*. \$ 7 p.m.

Wendell Meetinghouse, Wen-

dell: *Jaam Ak Salaam* feat. *Thio-ko Afia Diagne, Mountakha Lat-if, and Abdou Sarr*. Free. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Play, Gorgons*. \$ 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Burly Girlies, Kalliope Jones, Rusty Mullet, Street Trash, Film & Gender*. \$ 7 p.m.

Bombyx Center for Arts & Equi-ty, Florence: *Haley Heynder-ickx, Tim Baker*. \$ 7 p.m.

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Olde Bard, dollflower, PMS, Hard-Car*. \$ 8 p.m.

90 King Street, Northampton: *Valley Gals, Wet Bastards, Ian St. George, Owen Manure*. \$ 8 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Molly Hatchet*. \$ 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *DJ Autoplay*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

Hawks & Reed: *Play, Gorgons*, \$ 2 p.m

Belltower Records, North Ad-ams: *Tom Carter, Paul LaBrec-que, Bulle*. \$ 4 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Red Baraat*. \$ 7 p.m.

Nova Arts, Keene: *Horse Lords, Ka Baird, Know Your Program*. \$ 7 p.m.

looking forward...

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

10 Forward, Greenfield: *Scot-tia, Nitu, Biproduct, Bitcrushr, Space Camp, Joi Avery, Mad-el*. Benefit for Defend the For-est Bail Fund. \$ 7 p.m.

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Rubblebucket*. \$ 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Qwanqwa, Habbina Habbina*. \$ 7 p.m.

FRIDAY, APRIL 26

Nova Arts, Keene: *Michael Hurley, Stella Kola*. \$ 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 27

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *Arnold Dreyblatt*. \$ 8 p.m.

THURSDAY, MAY 16

City Space, Easthampton: *Nate Wooley's Columbia Ice-field* with *Susan Alcorn, Ava Mendoza, and Ryan Sawyer*. \$ 7:30 p.m.

FRI-MON, MAY 24-27

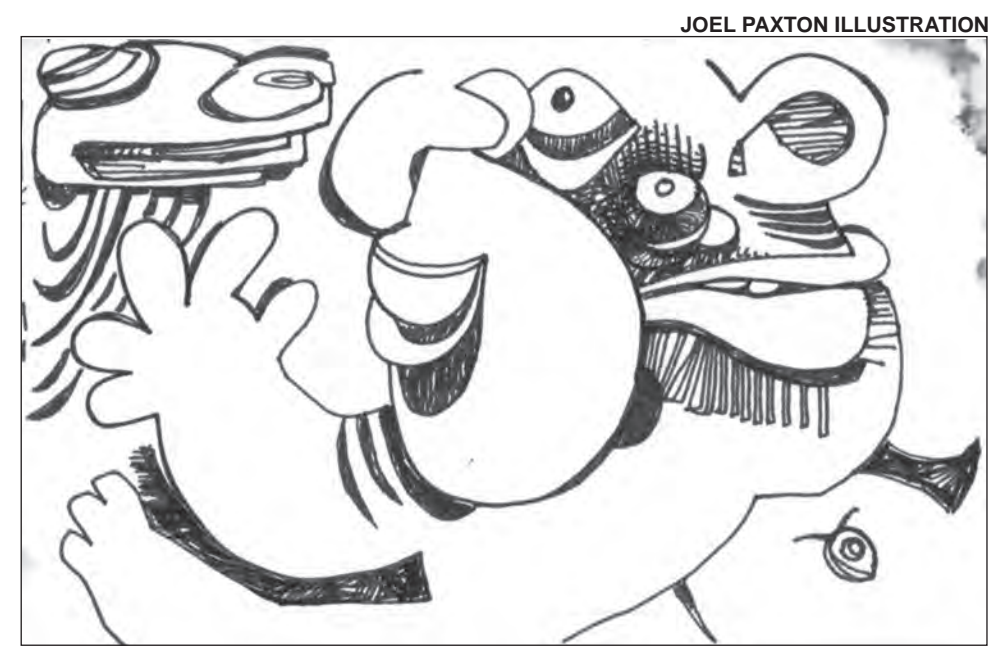
Camp Keewanee, Green-field: *Strangecreek Campout* feat. *Rubblebucket, Max Creek, Too Many Zooz, Start Making Sense, Badfish, Bel-la's Bartok*, more. See [www.strangecreekcampout.com](http://www.strangecreekcampout.com).



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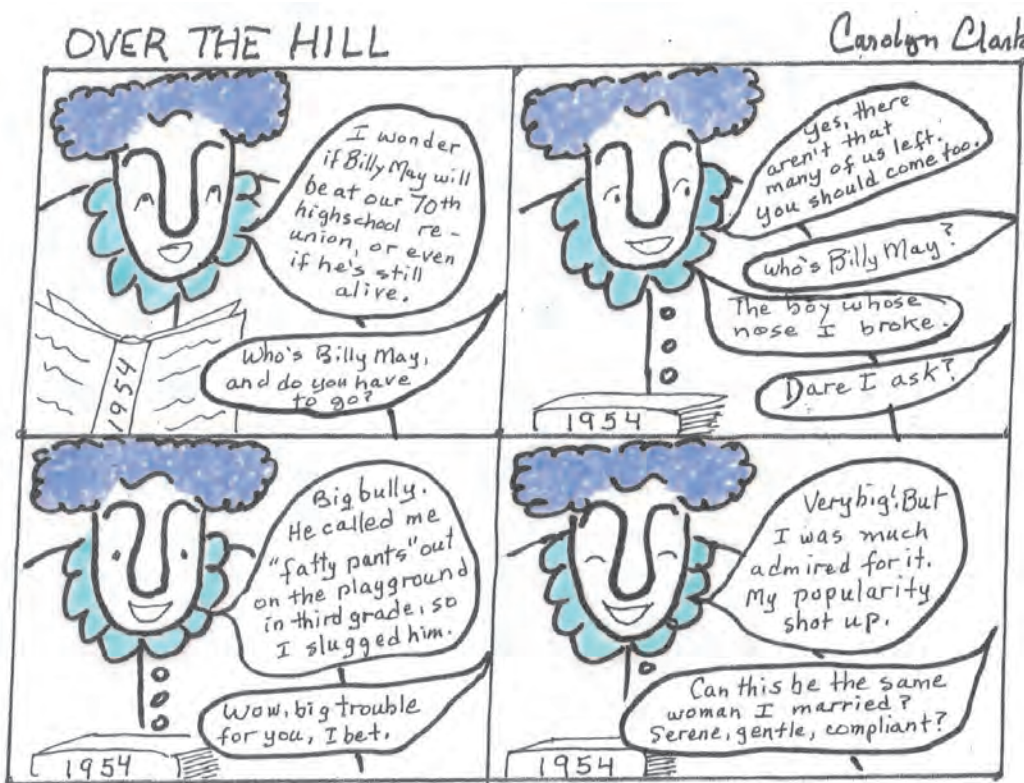
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CONNECTIONS

From Mindanao to the Brick House: Liyang Reports Back!

By MIKE JACKSON

**TURNERS FALLS** – Last October, members of the Liyang Network – a organization that supports movements of indigenous people, peasants, and agricultural workers in the Philippines from abroad – visited the country to connect with their counterparts and learn more about the situation directly. This “immersion trip” brought three volunteers from Northern California to Luzon – the most populated island in the archipelago, home to its capital Manila – as well as Mindanao, the largest and most rural island, and the focus of much of Liyang’s organizing.

Those volunteers – Gilbert, a social worker by day, Malaya, an organizer and artist, and Frankie, a graphic designer, prison activist, and I am told amateur powerlifter – are now coming to visit their colleagues in Liyang Western Mass, giving a series of discussions at the Five Colleges plus one **next Wednesday, March 13 at 7 p.m. at the Brick House in Turners Falls.**

I’ll be making the next edition of this paper then, so I offered instead to help get the word out. I met and corresponded with a member of Liyang Western Mass, who asked not to be named but was generous in educating me about what’s going on in the Philippines, a country that like many Americans I know very little about, even though our own govern-

ment took it over as a colony and has stayed very involved after granting nominal independence.

What follows is a *very* abridged excerpt of our exchange! Check out @liyangwesternmass on Instagram to learn more...

**MR:** *Liyang supports “Lumad communities, peasants, and agri-workers” – what are the differences between these categories?*

**LWM:** There are 18 distinct ethnolinguistic Indigenous tribes in Mindanao. In the 1990s, organizations of these Indigenous peoples engaged in struggle to defend their ancestral lands, united on the term *Lumad* as an umbrella term for the non-Islamic Indigenous peoples of Mindanao. They chose this word to signify their unified and shared struggle. There are also the Moro communities in Mindanao, who practice Islam and have their own long history of struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism.

A large portion of the peasant communities in Mindanao are actually re-settled Christianized peoples from other regions of the Philippines. These communities were relocated under American colonial policy, as a divide-and-conquer tactic to exert US imperialist control over Mindanao. They were offered land in Mindanao as an incentive to relocate, putting them in direct conflict with the Indigenous peoples of that

land. They often lost that land not long after, in favor of big landlords and foreign companies who were expanding their holdings, and became landless peasants themselves.

Today, Lumad and peasant organizations share a common struggle against land grabbing by multinational corporations, which threaten their livelihoods in favor of expanding mining, plantation agriculture, logging, and increasingly tourism.

**MR:** *I imagine some of our readers might find the term “peasant” anachronistic or confusing...*

**LWM:** “Peasant” is the term used by landless farmers in the Philippines to describe their socioeconomic status. Although the term may sound outdated to us, millions of people around the world continue to live lives that can be characterized as “peasant farmers.” In the Philippines, peasants make up between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population.

The closest parallel in United States history would be the sharecropping economy in the American South following the emancipation of enslaved people.... In the Philippines, the majority of farmers do not own their own land, and are forced to lease it from big landlords who control the majority of the agrarian economy and charge high amounts of rent (up to 70% of crop yield/income in some areas). Because of



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*During their “immersion trip” to the Philippines in October, Liyang Network Northern California members met with members of an agrifolk union in the Compostela Valley in Davao de Oro province.*

this, peasant farmers in the Philippines become shackled to endless cycles of heavy debt, suffer some of the highest food insecurity in the country, and lack access to basic services like health and education.

**MR:** *Are there other connections with things in the US that people here might be interested to learn about?*

**LWM:** The methods of colonization that the US government employed in the Philippines between 1898 and 1946 were built from the lessons they learnt in the genocide of Indigenous nations in what is now the United States. The imperialist impetus for westward expansion that drove the US settler-colonial project across the continent merely expanded across the ocean to the Philippines after it reached the Pacific coast and was greedy for more land to colonize.

There are also parallels between the issues in Mexico/Latin America as a whole and those of the Philippines, both colonized by the Spanish. Spanish policies to expand feudalism through the *hacienda* system were carried out in both regions, leading to similar economic and social structures that persist to this day.

**MR:** *Are there qualitative differences – for indigenous people, or for the land – between different foreign centers of power and their interests in Mindanao?*

**LWM:** Our community partners in Mindanao and throughout the Philippines assert that the Filipino people will never see the root causes of their exploitation resolved without true sovereignty, freedom from foreign economic, political, and military domination, and a gen-

uinely democratic government that represents the needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the Filipino people. They do not see any real qualitative difference between the interests of different foreign centers of power in the Philippines, nor do they see qualitative positive differences between the succeeding modern-day pseudo-democratic administrations from the Cory Aquino administration to today’s Ferdinand Marcos Jr. administration.

**MR:** *Can you tell us a little bit about when and how Liyang started?*

**LWM:** In June 2019, Sabokahan Unity of Lumad Women held their General Assembly in Davao, where founding chairperson emeritus Bai Bibyaon Ligkayan Bigkay gave the keynote address from within sanctuary in Manila. After two days of lively discussions and updating from women representing various parts of Southern Mindanao, one of the resolutions was a call to action to further amplify their struggle to the international community.

A handful of observers who attended heard this call to action. They had advocated for Lumad, land and environmental defenders in different ways and capacities in the past, but that weekend they decided to form a global advocacy network based in Mindanao, that advocates for and alongside these Lumad land defenders. They chose the name *Liyang*, meaning “woven basket” in the Manobo indigenous language, to symbolize both the origin of our network in highlighting and supporting the struggle of Lumad women, and to point to our network’s role in weaving connections between struggles worldwide.



*Left: Visiting a communal farm on the SUMIFRU banana plantation in the Compostela Valley. Right: Liyang members report back from their October trip in a public presentation in Oakland.*

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