

The Montague Reporter

Year 23 – No. 3

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editor@montaguereporter.org

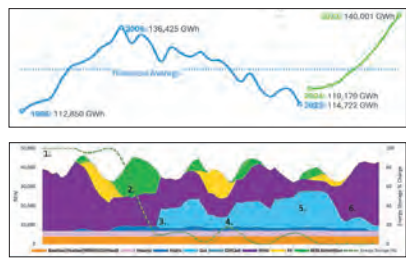
THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

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Grid Operator Questions Whether Renewable Power Can Cover Winter Peaks

By SARAH ROBERTSON

FRANKLIN COUNTY – Two public meetings on Tuesday highlighted the difficulty of ending New England’s dependence on fossil fuels, and disagreement over how to develop and regulate the renewable



Two charts from ISO-NE’s new study. Top: Electricity usage in New England from 1995 to 2023 (blue), and projected over the next decade (green). Bottom: A projected scenario showing that natural gas (blue) may be required to meet needs during a 2050 three-day cold snap.

energy buildout that would be necessary to meet that goal.

Decarbonizing the regional energy grid will involve “significant cost and unresolved reliability concerns,” according to a recent report by ISO New England, the not-for-profit agency that manages the grid. Electrifying our vehicles and home heating systems is expected to drastically increase demand on the grid in the coming years, while a growing reliance on the sun and wind will make the supply of energy more unpredictable.

“Most paths to a low-carbon grid involve high variability in demand and supply,” Patrick Boughan, an engineer and author of the report, said during an online presentation on Tuesday. “When we’re talking about variability, we’re talking about both year-to-year changes, see **PEAKS** page A5

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Review Finds Massive Water Bill Mostly Legit

By JEFF SINGLETON

The mystery of the astronomical water bill issued by the Turners Falls water department to the Montague Clean Water Facility (CWF) has been solved, CWF superintendent Chelsey Little told the selectboard at its meeting Monday night. Little said the water department had agreed to lower the bill by about \$18,000 after a “third-party inspection” evaluated the plant’s water usage.

The board also approved a lengthy “comprehensive plan” for the town presented by planner Maureen Pollock, expressed skepticism about a personnel upgrade at the

CWF, and allocated the town’s remaining American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which need to be under contract for specific projects by December 31.

The discussion of the water bill began with Little saying she and town administrator Walter Ramsey had met with Turners Falls water department superintendent Jeff Hildreth, and learned the original bill was based on an estimate of 20,861,000 gallons of usage from April through September. A new meter was installed in August, and when the water department read it 40 days later, it indicated that about 115,000 gallons per day had been used.

see **MONTAGUE** page A7

CHECKING IN

Downtown Shopkeepers Taking December In Stride



David Bunting (left) bought a stuffed slug, a stuffed Boss Elf, and a stuffed Frosty the Snowman from Casey Williams at LOOT: Found + Made.

By MIKE JACKSON

TURNERS FALLS – This Friday the 13th is the designated night for downtown’s annual Christmas-slash-holiday festivity, with Santa Claus set to occupy Spinner Park at 6:30 p.m. and a number of shops staying open until 8.

“It’s A Wonderful Night,” promoted for over a decade by the town’s RiverCulture program as a means of gathering revelers and carolers downtown – and putting them in proximity to retailers hoping for a seasonal bump – seems to have mellowed with age, but a full slate of events is posted.

One can assemble a winter birdfeeder at the Discovery Center, check in on open houses at the Brick House and Hired Hand Signs on Third Street, and catch the traditional Welcome Yule pageant at the Shea. Live music is booked at Dreamhouse, the Rendezvous, and Pioneer Valley Brewery.

The 1946 classic *It’s A Wonderful Night* will not be playing on a big screen this year, but it will be available on a loop at Great Falls Harvest, along with roasted actual chestnuts, free of charge.

How crucial is the retail sector to the neighborhood, and how crucial are December receipts to holding it all together? The *Montague Reporter* braved puddles on a dark and dismal Wednesday afternoon to take stock of the holiday shopping climate. We found today’s cohort of shopkeepers a fairly stoic bunch overall, offering a wide range of goods and open to commerce, but not banking too anxiously on a holiday gift-buying boom.

“December is the worst month of business for me,” Gary Konvelski told us at **Gary’s Coins & Antiques**. “People don’t buy antiques for Christmas.... Most of my business is in fine jewelry and coins, see **STRIDE** page A6

Health Board Effectively Bans Nicotine Pouch Products from Local Stores

By JEFF SINGLETON

MONTAGUE – On Wednesday night, the Montague board of health unanimously endorsed a revision of its tobacco regulations to effectively ban nicotine pouches, the fastest-growing product in the tobacco market. The town’s new regulations say that the product, pouches containing nicotine that are placed between the gum and lip, may only be sold in “adult only” tobacco outlets.

There are no such outlets in Montague, and the board has previously indicated it will not approve any.

Unlike an initial hearing on October 30, which saw extensive debate between supporters and opponents of the pouch ban, Wednesday’s hearing was sparsely attended, and there was virtually no “public input.”

Only Peter Brennan, director of the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association, spoke against the ban, repeating many of the arguments he made in October. Brennan argued that existing regulations prohibit sales of pouches to minors, the product is used to help people quit smoking, and a ban would only drive potential users into the “illicit market.”

“There is really no logical reason to restrict these products,” he said.

None of the proponents of the ban who testified at the October hearing – including Massachusetts Association of Health Boards executive see **NICOTINE** page A3

IRVING SELECTBOARD

More Taxes Collected Than Officials Expected

By KEITH WATERS

The Erving selectboard held joint meetings with the board of assessors and then the finance committee at their get-together on the evening of Monday, December 9.

The selectboard and the assessors had a long, and at times slightly heated, conversation about what and how much money should go into the assessors’ overlay fund. The actual taxes received by the town this year were higher than expected.

As principal assessor Jacqueline Boyden recalled, the assessors had initially requested that \$200,000 be put into their overlay fund, and this was negotiated down to \$90,000 or \$100,000, with an understanding that if there was excess levy capacity, the contribution to the overlay fund would be increased.

The overlay fund is an account used to mitigate costs that might arise when tax receipts are lower than anticipated, but also for abatements, exemptions, and costs that arise when the town loses an appeal of an assessment, such as from a large corporate resident.

One such large appeal is apparently nearing its conclusion now, and the overlay fund is high in case the town has to cover a large payback. Boyden seemed to think there is a good chance the town will lose. Given this fear and the unexpected windfall, the board of assessors put \$260,000 into the fund this year.

see **IRVING** page A4

WENDELL SELECTBOARD

Removal of Pond Dam, Snow, Mice Discussed

By JOSH HEINEMANN

Snow started falling during the Wendell selectboard’s December 4 meeting, and Wendell had not yet found a person to clear the walks around town buildings. The town supplies a snowblower and shovels, and offers \$17.75 per hour with a five-hour minimum per storm, but no one had come forward.

Selectboard member Gillian Budine said she would clear some in the morning. On Thursday morning, December 5, she followed through on this promise.

Town coordinator Glenn Johnson-Mussad reported that the library custodian position was also empty. The position allows two to five hours per week and Eric Shufelt, Wendell’s general custodian, has said he can spare some hours of his allowed hours if that makes the position more attractive.

Pete Diemand has been Wendell’s interim plumbing inspector, and will stay interim until January 31. The selectboard appointed him as full plumbing inspector starting February 1 through the end of the fiscal year on June 30, when appointments are renewed.

When asked, Diemand said of his inspection work, “It’s been slow.” He needs eight hours of training yearly to maintain his plumbing license, and to maintain an inspector’s license.

The board appointed Tom Siefert as board of health see **WENDELL** page A6

DONUT TORCH PASSED

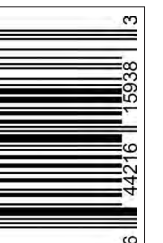


JOE R. PARZYCH PHOTO

Sereyvrith Mon, who also goes by David, is the new owner of Adams Donuts at 348 Federal Street in Greenfield, a community staple since the 1950s. The shop is open 6 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays and 7 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Sundays. For more information, see www.adamsdonuts.com. Thanks to local photojournalist Joe R. Parzych for this photo!

It’s Only An Index Title

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The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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Founded by
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August 2002

Exciting Times

New Jersey mayors and members of Congress are calling on the federal government to intervene in, or at least explain, ongoing incursions over the course of several weeks by large commercial- or military-grade drones over the state's airspace. Similar unauthorized objects have been flying over a number of US Air Force bases in the United Kingdom. So far the feds say they believe it is neither a foreign adversary nor the Pentagon.

The war in the Middle East is spiralling out of control, with the Ba'ath Party completely collapsing this week in Syria after 60 years of rule. Leaders of the rebel coalition say they wish to see a secular, multi-confessional democracy built in the country, despite

their own ties to religious particularist movements. Foreign powers including Israel are pushing into the vacuum, and it is completely unclear what alliances or balance of power might emerge in the region over the coming months.

Back in the US, a young man from a privileged background who suffered from debilitating pain stands accused of assassinating the CEO of one of the nation's largest health insurance companies. Mainstream media seem to not know how to handle the larger connected story of very widespread sympathy for the killing. No polling agency has broached the subject head-on.

How many more chips will fall before we even reach Inauguration Day?

Light Doc Hits Shea

Charles Light's documentary about the Montague Farm and Packer Corners communes, *Far Out: Life On & After the Commune*, makes its Montague premiere next Friday, December 20 at 7:30 p.m. at the Shea Theater. Light will be joined by Verandah Porche and Sam Lovejoy for a panel discussion after the film.

We reviewed *Far Out* and interviewed Mr. Light this summer in advance of its world premiere in Brattleboro. Since then the film has been well-received regionally, and won Best New England Feature at the Newburyport Film Festival.

As we wrote in August, the documentary is well-recommended

"as a resource for understanding the local commune scene in its particularity, which is in turn a skeleton key for understanding shifts in the region's class and political composition in the decades since." We stand by this assessment and encourage readers who missed the Brattleboro and Greenfield screenings to check it out next week.

Many other stories and histories have intertwined to make these towns the curious places they are today, and *Far Out* is by no means a final word, but it is a fantastic example of the kind of frank accounting of our recent past we hope to see more of in the coming years.



Beatrice the cat makes sure mice aren't eating the birdseed and kibble at the Aubuchon Hardware store in Turners Falls. All Aubuchons are encouraged to adopt cats from local shelters! Some folks come to the store just to visit with Beatrice, according to the staff.

Letters to the Editors

A Heartfelt Thank You

At a moment in our national history when the very idea of a Department of Education is being put into question, I want to take a moment to reflect on my experience visiting our Sheffield Elementary School this December. There was an invitation to caregivers to attend the All School Sing program which is put on once every other month by music teacher Ms. King, under principal Ms. Heathwaite.

With Ms. King's guidance the children completely led the program, offering the introduction and conclusion. It was a surprising pleasure to see our kids all practicing good manners, confidence, and self-discipline amidst the excitement of such an occasion.

I watched as some of the students who had come in acting a little too cool for school – my third- and fifth-graders among them – suddenly melt with excitement at hearing the first few bars of the tune they were

about to sing. To my delight the program opened with Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land," and, it being December, that was followed by the Dreidel Song, a Kwanzaa Song, and "Deck the Halls."

Perhaps it was my parental pride giving way to sentimentalism, but as I looked across the auditorium at the children singing songs celebrating equality, opportunity, and the plurality of our American heritages, my eyes welled up with tears.

Let this modest letter stand as a heartfelt thank you to the staff and teachers at our schools who work every day to instill these values in our children. Your dedication and hard work mean so much more than any one politician.

Shannon Ramsey
Turners Falls



Get It While It Lasts!

Our 2024 Special Wrapping Paper Edition is flying off the shelves! Get yours now. Along with our annual Writers's Fund appeal, this is an important year-end fundraiser for our tiny, non-profit community newspaper.

Seven designs were chosen from over three dozen submissions; this year's winning artists are Linda Aubry, Daphne Board, Roxanne Boyd, Vu Nguyen, Sophia Elizabeth McKusick, Soren Mason Temple, and Jeanne Weintraub. Weintraub is a second-time winner, and McKusick won in the Youth category. The cover features a selection of Nina Rossi's weekly portraits of local people from Page A2 of the Reporter.

Support was provided by anonymous donors and Greenfield Savings Bank.

The Wrapping Paper Edition sells for \$5

per copy, or five copies for \$20. In Turners Falls it's for sale at Food City, Unnameable Books, the Stash House, and the Avenue A Market. In Greenfield, look for copies at Federal Street Books, the LAVA Center, and Green Fields Market. Other locations include the Wendell Country Store, the Leverett Village Coop, the Montague Village Store, and Uppingil Farm Store in Gill.

Volunteers will also be selling wrapping paper and black Montague Reporter t-shirts at the Wendell Holiday Craft Fair this Friday and Saturday, December 13 and 14.

The wrapping paper and t-shirts are also for sale at www.montaguereporter.org. As postage rates are high and the mail is slow, we recommend local readers contact us to arrange pickup. Thank you!

Doubly Fascinated

Thanks to Spencer Shorkey for his article in last week's MR on the Congressional House Oversight Committee on UAPs (UFOs). It was a fascinating use of AI to create readable summaries of complex proceedings, on a topic that I – and many of us, I suspect – find fascinating as well.

I thought the AI did a creditable job at the end, especially, in summarizing the likely motivations for governmental agencies to withhold such vital information so long and so thoroughly, continuing to do so to this day.

Karun Das
Montague Center

Published weekly on Thursdays.

Every other week in July and August. No paper the fourth week of November, or the final week of December.

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Now that winter weather is here, the **delivery of your Montague Reporter can be a bit challenging** for our carriers. Let this be a reminder to keep your mailbox shoveled out if you are on a rural route, and clear a path to your door for in-town delivery!

If the driver can't get close to your box, they will toss it underneath it, and likewise, if the walker can't get to your stoop, they will have to toss it as close as they can.

Tips are very much appreciated at this time of year – and any other time when the spirit moves you – to reward our hardworking delivery team!

The **Great Falls Farmers Market** is hosting its first ever Winter Market this Saturday, December 14, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Great Falls Harvest, 109 Avenue A in Turners Falls. Vendors include summer favorites like Dan's Veggies and Craft Knot Art, and new friends like Just Roots.

Shop at the market and enjoy Louis Arnold playing holiday favorites on the guitar. SNAP and HIP are accepted.

The **Northfield Mountain Recreation Center** offers free children's programs one Saturday a month from 10 a.m. until noon. This Saturday, December 14, children ages 4 to 10 and their caregivers can listen to stories about light while making colorful solstice lanterns to welcome back the sun.

These programs take place both inside a yurt and outside, so participants must dress for the weather. Reservations for the Welcoming Back the Light workshop are required at bookey.com/northfield.

Eveline MacDougal is sharing her fabulous collection of art calendars with people who come to her free "Upcycled!" **envelope-making and holiday gift bag workshop** this Saturday, December 14 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Artspace in Greenfield.

Fold your own from MacDougal's offerings while picking up the

skills to upcycle your miscellaneous printed paper into cool, one-of-a-kind envelopes.

"**Millers Falls Magic**" is the name of a special holiday shopping event this Saturday, December 14, throughout the village.

Enjoy a wreath-making workshop in the library from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Materials will be provided, and \$10 donations are encouraged, but not required.

The Pub General Pop Up store features art and craft by locals, and giftable food items. Meet Santa at the Chaos Corner indoor playground, with your regular admission of \$10.50 per adult and child.

Element Brewing also hosts an arts-and-crafts popup with live music and libations, from 1 to 6 that afternoon. And Eldritch Goods will be open with an eclectic array of used items, vintage media and ephemera, and marbles to replace the ones you have undoubtedly lost.

The event was pulled together by the Millers Falls Community Improvement Association, the Millers Falls branch library, and RiverCulture.

Great Falls Books Through Bars will hold a volunteer day this Saturday, December 14, from 1 to 5 p.m. at 104 Fourth Street in Turners Falls. Help them read and respond to letter requests from incarcerated folks and pack up books to mail to them.

Feel free to drop in for a little bit or the whole time, and check out the other projects that are happening in the space: a library, free store, and community pantry. Masks are required.

The **Wendell Craft Fair** will be held at the Wendell Meetinghouse this Friday from 4 to 8 p.m. and Saturday, December 14 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There will be live music, raffles, refreshments, plus locally-made crafts: wooden bowls and utensils, jewelry, pottery, soaps, knitted goods, art and photography, candles and clothing, and Wendell flag aprons and totes.

You can pick up one of our *Montague Reporter* t-shirts and the 2024

Special Wrapping Paper Edition there as well.

The first hour of each day will be for masked shoppers only, with masks available at the door. The event is hosted by the Friends of the Wendell Library, and there will also be baked goods and cider for sale in the Library on Friday night to benefit the Friends.

Come back to Wendell at 7 p.m. Saturday for the **Full Moon Coffeehouse** featuring StompBoxTrio. Held in the Wendell Town Hall, the concert will be raising funds for ongoing renovations at the Meetinghouse.

StompBoxTrio – Evelyn Harris on vocals and percussion, John Caban on dobro, vocals, and stompbox, and Paul Kochanski on upright and electric bass, vocals, and foot percussion – does their own spin on American roots, blues, rock, and soul music. There's an open mic before the show, and plenty of goodies for sale at the Dessert-O-Rama table. Sliding scale admission from \$6 to \$20 gets you in.

The United Church of Bernardston's next **Second Saturday Roast Beef Supper** is this Saturday, December 14, with seatings at 5 and 6:15 p.m. A roast beef meal, complete with freshly mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetable and rolls, and freshly baked dessert can be had for only \$15. Call (413) 648-9306 to reserve your preferred seating time, or to reserve take-out meals.

Students and staff in the Franklin County Technical School Culinary program will host a **holiday banquet luncheon** next Wednesday, December 18 at the school's Apprentice Restaurant. Seating is at 11:30 a.m. Reservations are necessary, and can be made by calling (413) 863-9561 x. 182.

The set price of \$16.95 gets you oven-braised pot roast, mashed potatoes, winter squash, green beans, dinner roll with butter, and apple crumb cake. Franklin County Technical School is located at 82 Industrial Boulevard, Turners Falls.

Next Wednesday, December 18 from 5 to 7 p.m. the Montague Center Library offers a drop-in workshop to **make folded paper luminaries**. The event is recommended for adults and children ages 8 and above.

NICOTINE from page A1

director Cheryl Sbarra, who assisted the department in revising the regulations – attended, either at the town hall meeting room or via Zoom. Nor did the owners of any of the four Montague outlets that currently sell nicotine pouch products.

The leading brands of nicotine pouches, Zyn and On!, are owned by tobacco giants Philip Morris International and Altria, respectively. The industry has seen the sales of other products, including cigarettes, decline in recent years.

The approved revisions, based on a template produced by Sbarra's organization, include many technical changes designed to make the town's regulations consistent with state law and to reflect inflation in the price of tobacco products.

The board was asked whether Montague town counsel had reviewed the new regulations, since they effectively ban a product which, like cigarettes, is legal for sale to adults.

Public health director Ryan Paxton said the document was vetted by Sbarra's organization, "which has multiple attorneys on staff," and is similar to language implemented in other communities, but had not been reviewed by town counsel.

After the hearing officially closed, health board

All are welcome to attend the 40th Anniversary **Solstice Storytelling Celebration** at the First Congregational Church in Ashfield at 7 p.m. on Saturday, December 21. This year's performers include Sonny Crawford, Christy Grecsek, Yosl Kurland and Peggy Davis with Aaron Bousel, Sarah Pirtle, John Porcino, ReBekka Tippens, Tim Van Egmond, Rochelle Wildfong, and special guest storyteller Joyce White Deer-Vincent.

The suggested donation is between \$12 and \$20 for adults and \$5 to \$10 for children. Donations will be divided amongst the Food Bank of Western Mass, Partners in Health, and the Center for Biological Diversity. Attendees are invited to bring a non-perishable food item for the Franklin County Survival Center.

Folks are also asked to bring a treat to share at a buffet during intermission. Pine Hill Orchard will provide cider, and there will be tea. Those who prefer to watch by Zoom can email solstice@Ganeydn.com for the link. The snow date is Sunday, December 22 at 3 p.m.

The Montague Center library has just announced that, thanks to a grant from the New Salem Academy, **Bilingual Music & Movement with Tom & Laurie** will resume in 2025. The first session is on Thursday, January 2 at 10 a.m. at the Montague Center branch, and runs through March.

Parents and caregivers with young children will enjoy the songs and accompanying movements sung in both English and Spanish.

From now until February 23, the **Flynt Center for Early New England Life** in Old Deerfield offers free admission on weekends, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. They have quite a few outstanding exhibits, including a fine scrimshaw collection, colonial textiles, and a furniture exhibit that does a great job explaining the joinery and carpentry skills involved in making the examples on view.

There are some intriguing portraits upstairs by Erastus Field, born in 1805 in Leverett, and others, plus an immense number of artifacts in glass cases to browse through.

Send your local briefs to editor@montagureporter.org.

member Michael Nelson, who said he had been on the board for 20 years, said that the last time the regulations were revised, "doom and gloom was cast upon us that the world was going to collapse... and that the entire economy of Montague was going to crumble, because we had enhanced our tobacco regulations."

Nelson went on to say that the current regulation, "except the one [part] that is most exciting, is just about... cleaning it up into a more modern draft regulation, so I personally think the regulation is spot on."

"I agree," said board member Rachel Stoler. "I happen to be in favor of the proposed regulation," said chair Melanie Zamojski. "We are still fining people for selling [tobacco products] to minors... There is no evidence that this is a product that successfully assists somebody in quitting smoking altogether. There are other methods that have science behind them, and this is not one of them."

After this brief hearing and discussion, the board voted to approve the new regulations "with an effective date of March 1, 2025."

After the vote, Nelson said he appreciated "the input from the community."

"We had a lot of great input from both sides of the argument," he said, "and it's always really great to have those conversations."

Memorial Hall Theater
POTHOLE PICTURES
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Montague Community Television News Shows & Meetings

By **HANNAH BROOKMAN**

TURNERS FALLS – Egg-tooth came "Home for the Holidays" to the Shea Theater. Cuddle up with your mug of whatever, and watch our beloved local holiday special on your favorite cable channel, MCTV.

And don't switch that dial! The Montague selectboard is up next, followed by the GMRSD school committee, the Montague planning board, and the Gill selectboard.

All MCTV videos are aired on Channel 9, as well as featured on the MCTV Vimeo page. If there is a meeting, event, performance, or happening in the Montague area that you think MCTV should capture, let us know! And if you also have an idea for a show, MCTV is always available to assist in local productions as well. Just reach out!

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

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ERVING from page A1

According to Boyden, this caused the residential tax rate to go up about 9 cents per thousand dollars in valuation. For reference, the residential rate had been \$8.00 per \$1,000 in FY'23. Assessors board chair Daniel Hammock added that this was a difference of about \$5 for most residences.

With the \$260,000 contribution, the overlay fund now sits at about \$2.3 million.

Selectboard member Scott Bastarache accused the assessors of not acting transparently in adding the excess taxes to the overlay fund. He said Boyden had mentioned a conversation in which this agreement was made, but that he did not recall such a conversation.

As Boyden was explaining what happened as she understood it, Bastarache interrupted her to say, “I’m fully aware of the process.” She continued her explanation, and he interrupted her again.

The difference in understanding related to what happens when actual tax receipts exceed the 2.5% allowable annual increase. Boyden explained that if the assessors do not deposit the excess in the only place they can – the overlay fund – the revenue cannot be added anywhere later.

Boyden and Hammock said that the assessors were not trying to hide anything, and that this has been the practice in the town for many years. They suggested scheduling a meeting each year between the assessors and selectboard around August, when the tax receipts are at or near completion, to decide what to do in such a situation.

As Hammock explained, once the outstanding appeal is settled, if the town does not need to pay the money out, then it can decide what to do with it. He said he hoped the town would decide to put it into general stabilization and capital planning, where he said the town has much more expenditure than income forecast.

Selectboard member James Loynd tried to clarify his understanding of the issue. He echoed Bastarache’s concern about the excess receipts going into the overlay fund, and suggested it would be more financially sound to save each family in town \$5 than to add \$75,000 – the total additional levy from both residential and commercial properties – to the town’s coffers for emergency preparedness.

Hammock countered that as he saw it, leveraging \$5 per household to put an additional \$75,000 in emergency preparedness was more sound.

Bastarache, selectboard chair Jacob Smith, and town administrator Bryan Smith agreed that having a meeting when the year’s receipts were ready in August would be a good idea.

Splitting the Burden

The discussion of the excess funds preceded a tax classification hearing. The board of assessors recommended keeping the “minimum residential factor” (MRF), which determines the relative split between the residential and commercial property tax burden in the coming year, at 65%.

The selectboard approved this recommenda-

tion, which is estimated to increase the residential tax rate from \$9.22 to \$9.31 per \$1,000 in valuation.

The selectboard also approved another recommendation from the assessors for a small commercial exemption, which according to Boyden will save about 10 local small businesses about \$2,900 each. That concluded the joint meeting with the assessors.

Other Business

The joint meeting with the finance committee was largely about FY'26 adjustments in base wages for non-union and non-contracted town personnel. The idea was floated to put in at least an approximate placeholder to signify that wages will need to go up.

Bastarache said he felt the two most important numbers are the lowest entry-level wage, which affects whether the town is able to fill positions, and the highest step, which affects whether long-term personnel will stay with the town or leave for more money elsewhere.

Bastarache said that as he saw it, a 2% or 2.25% increase across the board would be a reasonable placeholder.

The selectboard and fin com agreed to use 2%, and look for federal data on cost-of-living increases in the northeast region to inform future discussion.

The next selectboard meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 16. 

OP ED

Pols to Biden: Pardon Steven Donziger!

Dear President Biden,

We write regarding the perilous legal situation of Steven Donziger. Mr. Donziger is a human rights lawyer who was imprisoned or under house arrest, for almost three years, from a criminal contempt charge related to his work on behalf of Indigenous and farming communities in Ecuador who are pursuing environmental justice against Chevron.

The troubling legal irregularities that occurred in his case have garnered significant international attention. They have also been criticized as unconstitutional or illegal by three federal judges, 68 Nobel laureates, and five high-level jurists from the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the United Nations.

President Biden, your administration has prioritized promoting the rule of law, standing up for those who are victims of injustice, and working to defend our democracy. In light of the highly suspect charges against Mr. Donziger and their alarming connection to his work as an environmental lawyer, we ask that you exercise your power of executive clemency to issue a full and unconditional pardon for Mr. Donziger.

From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, Texaco (purchased by Chevron in 2000) deliberately dumped billions of gallons of poisonous oil waste into Indigenous ancestral lands in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Much of that waste is still visible today and continues to cause grievous harm to thousands of Indigenous peoples and farming communities.

In 2003, Mr. Donziger led a legal team in Ecuador on behalf of affected communities of the Amazon basin in a lawsuit against

Chevron for remediation of harms caused by decades of dumping deadly, carcinogenic waste in this environmentally fragile region. The lawsuit resulted in a \$9.5 billion judgment against Chevron that was unanimously affirmed by the Supreme Court of Ecuador in 2013.

Separately, in 2015, Canada’s Supreme Court rejected Chevron’s claims and ruled unanimously that the affected communities had the right to enforce their judgment against Chevron in that country.

Nevertheless, Chevron has yet to pay.

In addition to refusing to comply, Chevron counterattacked by filing a lawsuit against Mr. Donziger under the RICO Act. The contempt charges against Mr. Donziger arose from his appeal of an unprecedented order, sought by Chevron after the trial, requiring him to surrender his computer and confidential case files to the company while in the middle of civil litigation – an order that, according to Mr. Donziger’s legal team, violates attorney-client privilege and had never before been issued by any court in this country.

Although the U.S. attorney declined to prosecute this unprecedented contempt charge, the District Court in New York nevertheless made the alarming and unusual decision to appoint a private corporate law firm to step into the role of the U.S. government in order to prosecute Mr. Donziger. It later came to light that the law firm that prosecuted Mr. Donziger had recently represented Chevron as a client.

Unbelievably, although the highly suspect charge was a low-level misdemeanor, the private prosecu-

tors insisted that Mr. Donziger be placed in pre-trial confinement in his Manhattan apartment, where he lives with his wife and son. Because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons, Mr. Donziger was forced to remain in confinement for 26 months as the trial was scheduled – *more than four times longer than the maximum sentence allowed on the underlying misdemeanor charges.*

He ultimately was denied a jury of his peers and convicted by a judge who herself had been appointed by the charging judge.

Mr. Donziger is the only lawyer in U.S. history to be subject to any period of detention on a misdemeanor or contempt of court charge. We believe that the legal case against Mr. Donziger, *as well as the excessively harsh nature of the punishment against him*, are directly tied to his prior work against Chevron. We do not make this accusation lightly or without evidentiary support.

In September 2021, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention appointed by the UN Human Rights Council concluded that Mr. Donziger’s extended pre-trial detention was arbitrary under international human rights standards and therefore unlawful. The Working Group identified several violations of norms relating to the right to a fair trial and the impartiality of the legal system.

Based on its findings, the Working Group called on Mr. Donziger to be released immediately and for the US government to conduct a full and independent investigation into the unprecedented circumstances of the case.

Even more than two years after

his release, Mr. Donziger still cannot practice law, as his license was stripped – at the urging of Chevron and without a fact hearing. In addition, a coalition of 68 Nobel Prize Laureates, Amnesty International USA, and other human rights organizations, as well as distinguished members of the European Parliament, issued statements calling for Mr. Donziger’s release and questioning his treatment by the US courts.

Perhaps most importantly to Mr. Donziger, the Indigenous and farming communities in the Amazon for whom he advocated have steadfastly stood by him over the years.

Notwithstanding the personal hardship that this unprecedented legal process has imposed on Mr. Donziger and his family, we are deeply concerned about the chilling effect this case will have on all advocates working on behalf of other frontline communities, victims of human rights violations, and those seeking environmental justice. Those who try to help vulnerable communities will feel as though tactics of intimidation – at the hands of powerful corporate interests, and, most troublingly, the US courts – can succeed in stifling robust legal representation when it is most needed.

This is a dangerous signal to send. Pardoning Mr. Donziger would instead send a powerful message to the world that billion-dollar corporations cannot act with impunity against lawyers and their clients who defend the public interest.

We respectfully ask that you use your authority to pardon Mr. Donziger. We thank you in advance for your thoughtful and expedited consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

James P. McGovern, *Member of Congress*
Jamie Raskin, *Member of Congress*
Sheldon Whitehouse, *United States Senator*
Rashida Tlaib, *Member of Congress*
Bernard Sanders, *United States Senator*
Summer L. Lee, *Member of Congress*
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, *Member of Congress*
Cori Bush, *Member of Congress*
Jared Huffman, *Member of Congress*
Jesús G. “Chuy” García, *Member of Congress*

Greg Casar, *Member of Congress*
Pramila Jayapal, *Member of Congress*
Raúl M. Grijalva, *Member of Congress*
Ted W. Lieu, *Member of Congress*
Barbara Lee, *Member of Congress*
Mark Pocan, *Member of Congress*
Steve Cohen, *Member of Congress*
Jan Schakowsky, *Member of Congress*
Maxwell Alejandro Frost, *Member of Congress*
Ilhan Omar, *Member of Congress*
Nanette Diaz Barragán, *Member of Congress*
Seth Magaziner, *Member of Congress*

Nydia M. Velázquez, *Member of Congress*
Mike Thompson, *Member of Congress*
Lloyd Doggett, *Member of Congress*
Veronica Escobar, *Member of Congress*
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Mark DeSaulnier, *Member of Congress*
Daniel T. Kildee, *Member of Congress*
Ayanna Pressley, *Member of Congress*
Teresa Leger Fernández, *Member of Congress*
Juan Vargas, *Member of Congress*
Donald S. Beyer Jr., *Member of Congress*
Terri A. Sewell, *Member of Congress*

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natural changes, but also climate-adjusted weather changes.”

Meeting the anticipated demand for electricity will require quadrupling New England’s current 29,700-megawatt (MW) generation capacity, according to ISO New England (ISO-NE), and better incentivizing companies to build renewable energy systems that may not otherwise be profitable.

According to the quasi-governmental agency, building more long-term energy storage systems will be crucial to achieving “net zero” carbon emissions by 2050, as vast reserves of quickly dispatchable energy will be necessary to avoid blackouts at peak-usage times of the year.

“Today’s electrical grid experiences only modest variations in peak annual demand from year to year, allowing for efficient planning for a limited range of possible outcomes,” ISO-NE’s report states. “In the future, however, electric heating will shift annual system peak demand from summer to winter.”

By mid-century, the highest peaks of wintertime demand could vary by as much as 50% from year to year, ISO-NE found. By then, solar photovoltaics are expected to become the least cost-effective method of reducing carbon emissions, and long-duration, “100-hour” storage methods the most cost-effective.

“To avoid fossil-fuel burning generation entirely, the future system will require vast quantities of seasonal storage, or a firm supply of zero-carbon fuel,” the report says. The agency suggested synthetic natural gas, hydrogen, biodiesel, and small modular nuclear reactors as potential alternatives to bridge the gap.

Soaking It Up

Too much electricity could also be bad for business. By 2040, milder weather in the spring and fall in combination with large amounts of wind and solar power will likely lead to days when energy supply exceeds demand, according to the report, which may require strategic shut-offs so as not to overwhelm the grid.

Nuclear power generators currently supply about 20% of New England’s power and cannot be turned off, so demand must remain at or above that threshold.

Some of the solar, wind, and battery storage systems built in 2045 might only contribute to the grid for about 10% of the year, according to the ISO-NE report.

“There’s going to be a loser somewhere among those intermittent resources as we go further and further towards decarbonization,” said Ben Wilson, co-author of the report. “It’s kind of a matter of how do we pay [for] all these renewable energy resources, when there isn’t enough load to go around to soak up all their energy?”

The study suggests correcting the market by offering energy developers long-term power purchase agreements to build solar, wind and storage, even if those projects would not be profitable on the open market. These contracts could include built-in “adders” that pay utilities for maintaining idle generation capacity in order to ensure the grid remains reliable at peak times, or just to offset diminishing profits.

“They need these long-term agreements in order to cover their initial investments,” Wilson explained. “This is an interesting

flexibility challenge that we’re going to have to address within the next 10 years.”

Constructive Approval

On November 21, Governor Maura Healey signed a major energy policy bill, “An act promoting a clean energy grid, advancing equity and protecting ratepayers,” into law. It is intended to reform and streamline the permitting process for energy facilities and incentivizes companies to speed up development of renewables, but some western Massachusetts residents say they are worried the state is usurping local decision-making power.

The changes will take effect March 1, 2026, and many of the specific regulatory details are still being worked out by legislators.

On Tuesday evening, hours after ISO-NE researchers presented their big-picture findings to the public, local activists from No Assault and Batteries and Smart Solar Western Mass coincidentally hosted another virtual gathering to discuss how future energy grid changes might play out at the local level.

“We need clean energy. We’re in a climate crisis,” Shutesbury planning board member Michael DeChiara told the roughly 65 online attendees. “All that is real. But it is a matter of how you do it, and my sense is that state leadership feels like they tackled this issue, they solved it, and we should all just be happy.”

Under the new law, municipalities will have one year to review and decide on any application for a new energy facility, and must issue a single “consolidated” permit, signed and agreed on by all local boards.

If a town fails to rule on an application in time, the project will be considered “constructively approved,” as long as it meets a set of state standards which have yet to be finalized by the Department of Energy Resources (DOER).

“The constructive approval deadlines, I think, are too firm and too short,” DeChiara said. “The idea of a consolidated permit [is] untested, so it could easily require more time.”

The bill states that municipalities will maintain permitting authority over “small” clean energy generation facilities (under 25 MW) and storage projects (under 100 megawatt-hours). Any projects over these thresholds will go through a separate permitting process before the state Energy Facilities Siting Board (EFSB).

“Critical decisions about our common future are being made at the state level,” said the Wendell-based biologist and activist Bill Stubblefield. “This is not acceptable, and there is a pressing need for far more inclusive and genuinely democratic decision-making processes as the planetary polycrisis deepens and grows more urgent.”

Stubblefield took issue with the state commission appointed by the governor that recommended policies that formed the core of the energy bill. “As is so often the case, the commission was packed with industry insiders, government officials, and business-friendly environmental groups,” he said. “Towns in western Massachusetts were not represented. There were no public hearings.”

Commission members included Nathan L’Etoile, a Northfield farmer representing the American Farmland Trust – who is seeking to develop large-scale solar arrays on his family farmland – and Rusty Pol-

grove, an environmental justice organizer with the Springfield-based organization Arise for Social Justice. Other members represented solar, real estate, labor, utilities, and conservation groups.

DeChiara encouraged attendees to urge their legislators to help preserve local control over energy infrastructure siting, and to make the next iteration of the state’s Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target (SMART) solar incentives program as protective of forests, water, and farmland as possible.

“There’s still a lot of open questions,” DeChiara said. “We’ve got 15 months between now and March 1, where nothing has changed and we’re still in the quagmire of vulnerability. And then it’s really a question, going forward, of what the quality of those regulations will be.”

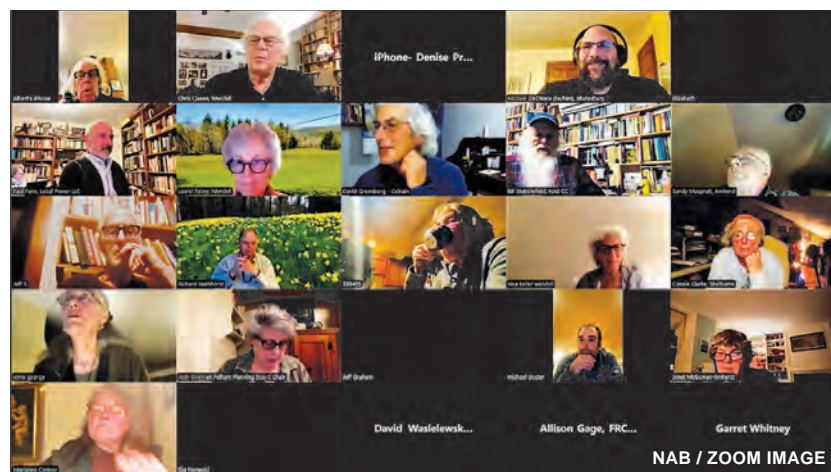
Persistent Gas

The study ISO-NE presented on Tuesday, “Economic Planning for the Clean Energy Transition,” is the latest in a years-long series analyzing the future of New England’s energy supply.

“[D]esigning the power system of the future requires balancing reliability, economic efficiency, and carbon-neutrality,” the report concluded. “Given current technology and market structures, no single existing scalable resource type is highly reliable, inexpensive and carbon-neutral, and future planning will require tradeoffs among these three factors.”

ISO stands for “Independent System Operator,” an entity established after the federal Energy Policy Act of 1992, which initiated the deregulation and the diversification of wholesale electricity markets. ISO-NE manages distribution and wholesale markets for Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island, and is one of the quasi-public, not-for-profit corporations that manage the continent’s 10 regional power grids.

The authors of the ISO-NE report are not optimistic that New England can achieve complete independence from fossil fuels. Their models still anticipate a potential need to use natural gas to recharge batteries during winter demand peaks.



Tuesday’s forum hosted by No Assault & Batteries drew about 65 participants.

“We found that eliminating carbon emissions through only complete electrification of the heating and transportation sectors – and only using wind, solar and short-duration storage – is possible,” Wilson said, “but it might be very, very expensive, and there still might be some reliability concerns.”

“Having a variety of different resources with different characteristics reduces the cost of the build-out,” said Boughan.

Attendees of the online presentation were unable to see or interact with each other, but in response to multiple questions, a facilitator re-

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mindful listeners that the institution does not itself regulate the energy industry, nor does it plan or finance infrastructure projects.

Decentral Power

At the No Assault and Batteries meeting, attendees discussed the state attorney general’s recent decisions not to certify a bylaw passed in Wendell regulating standalone battery energy storage systems, and to strike down a similar attempt in Shutesbury.

The stated basis for both bylaws was that large-scale batteries contain flammable, toxic chemicals that can threaten residents’ health and safety, and that forested lands should not be cleared for these kinds of projects. They were rejected on the grounds that they were in effect

“Microgrids are distributed energy resources, behind the meter in buildings, which connect things like electric vehicles to solar arrays, and appliance automation systems, and fuel cells, so they can operate as integrated systems,” Fenn said.

“They open up a whole new space for on-site decarbonization, which is very critical,” he continued. “It is neglected by the regulators, and is in general blocked by utilities because they don’t like them. Utilities like to require [that] all systems are connected to the grid, and are essentially used by the utility.”

Leverett planning board member Richard Nathorst said that his town recently completed a study to consider building a microgrid connecting the police station, fire station, elementary school, and library.

“The plan is to develop a three-phase backbone feeder with solar and battery storage,” Nathorst explained in the online meeting’s written comment section. “The utility is only single phase, and refuses to supply three-phase power.”

A member of the Sirius intentional community in Shutesbury shared that Sirius was considering building a microgrid, but that the complexities of working with the utility company dissuaded them. The community has instead decided to build a completely off-grid system, she said.

Fenn outlined some policy recommendations that he said could make smaller-scale energy distribution more viable on a municipal level. These included eliminating the requirement for rooftop solar owners to acquire an “export permit” from the utility to send power to the grid, and giving local communities control of the revenue generated by the “energy efficiency charge” on users’ electricity bills.

“It’s a lot of money – it’s not a small purse that is being administered now by the utilities,” Fenn said. “It would really put the ball back in the hands of communities, to really control their energy futures.”



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WENDELL from page A1

clerk, pending the board of health's approval. Siefert said he has been shadowing the current clerk, but said her interest is fading.

Dam Removal

Selectboard chair Laurie DiDonato said she and conservation commission agent Mary Thomas went to look at the Bowens Pond dam, and wanted to learn what other board members thought about its potential removal. She said the town could become part owner of the dam, following on the model at the MacAvoy Pond dam, of which Wendell is part owner.

The Bowens Pond dam might have held water back during the 2023 storms, mitigating the damage to Wendell Depot Road. The pond provides the town's most central dry hydrant, but fire chief Joe Cuneo said he will not fight dam removal as too expensive.

Budine said partial ownership might increase the town's expense and liability.

No notice of intent for dam removal has been filed. Any option may be regulated by the state Office of Dam Safety. Board members agreed to put the pond on the next agenda.

Criminal Checks

Library trustees Karenn Idoine and Ruth

Mazurka came with questions about criminal offender record information (CORI) checks for library workers and volunteers. Four surrounding towns require them for library volunteers and workers, and they said it seemed reasonable to them for Wendell to do the same. There is also a sex offender registry information (SORI) check.

The library needs an account to request a CORI report from the state, and Idoine asked if the town has one. If not, the library may use the Massachusetts library system account.

Town treasurer Carolyn Manley said Wendell does not have an account set up for CORI checks, and that a CORI check is not part of the town personnel policy.

Manley said checks might also be appropriate for people working or volunteering with the Council on Aging and other departments whose workers might have contact with vulnerable people. She said she would contact town departments to see which ones might want to run CORI checks, and would look into the town setting up an account.

DiDonato said she would reach out to the fire department and the Council on Aging about their interest. CORI reports need someone trained to be interpreted properly.

Report Printing

Johnson-Mussad said he had sent the town's 2023 annual report to Collective Copies in Amherst, and was waiting for their estimate. That estimate might have to include some graphic design. He said he expects the per-copy price will be higher, but the number of copies lower, than in prior years.

The 2024 report is also in the works. Johnson-Mussad said the expense line for town reports is high this fiscal year because not one but three, and possibly four, reports will be printed. He wrote to the finance committee pointing out that no report was printed for several years, and this year will make up for that.

Johnson-Mussad said he was happy to say he expected the new photocopier to arrive Friday, December 6.

Critical Habitat

The state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) sent Wendell a notice, for reading at a public meeting, that DCR may acquire a 118-acre property along Old Farley Road. The land has been under Chapter 61 protection, has a parking area next to the road, and would stay open for public use. Half the property is identified in the state BioMap as forested "critical natural landscape."

No answer was received from Zero Tolerance about the mouse problem in the town office building. Johnson-Mussad said he called a second company, Minute Man, and was waiting for an estimate.

Other Business

Johnson-Mussad and Dan Leahy were scheduled to meet with Erving town administrator Bryan Smith to discuss how the towns will use a feasibility grant, which the state awarded, for a multi-use trail from Farley to Wendell Depot.

The board signed a renewal of a Class III auto salvage license for Mormon Hollow Auto, allowing the business to continue selling used cars and salvage parts, and postponed renewing the liquor licenses for Deja Brew and the Wendell Country Store because paperwork was not ready.

Board members chose to send a policy for one-day liquor licenses to town counsel to make sure the language is in line with state requirements. The policy states that beverages must be bought from a licensed distributor, and not an ordinary package store. Drinks must be consumed on the premises, not on public property, and all state regulations must be followed.

**STRIDE** from page A1

stuff like that, so February's actually my best month."

Konvelski pointed potential shoppers toward a case of sterling jewelry, and said he was unlikely to stay open late on Friday. "I'm open 9 to 5, Wednesdays to Saturdays," he said with a friendly shrug.

Next door, **LOOT found + made** was geared up for prime time, and mildly bustling even on a weekday. Casey Williams, working the register, told the *Reporter* that owners John McNamara and Erin MacLean "try to have something for everybody, at every price point," and their efforts were evident.

Along with the boutique's "trend and true" holiday fare – ornaments, cards, tchotchkes, garlands and candles, found objects and local handicrafts – Williams highlighted a new line of fancy flasks, as well as a "huge rock collection" McNamara recently acquired from a jeweler.

Another door down at **Unnameable Books**, Adam Tobin said business was "going pretty well." "Books sell better in December than they do in all the other months of the year," he said. "They make a nice gift."

Tobin said Unnameable "focuses on the literary and the artistic, and the smaller presses, and things that you might not know about unless you come and browse," but added that any book can be special-ordered; orders entered by Sunday will hopefully arrive before Christmas.

Tobin said he was finding Turners "a terrific, lively little town," and that he will be open until at least 8 p.m. Friday, as he is every Friday. He also recommended gift certificates. "In some ways it's a better gift than a book," he said, "because a book can come with a little pressure to read it."

Eric Magnuson, across the Avenue at **Breakdown Records**, said he would also stay open this Friday.

"Black Friday weekend was good – I had a 'buy one, get one free' sale on everything except equipment, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday," Magnuson said. "Downtown has been much slower since then."

Breakdown offers gift certificates in any amount. "I've got some good Christmas vinyl," he added. "I don't know how many people are looking for a reel-to-reel player, but I have that. If anyone needs a turntable..."

Waterway Arts, an art store with studios on the corner of Avenue A and Third Street, has stocked up on holiday gifts. "We've been stocking art supplies geared towards beginners, even kids," owner and resident artist Kiah Tinkham reported. "We have fun marker sets and pens and paper, little gift-type things that could be under \$50 and under \$20."

Tinkham said Waterway is running a promotion all weekend: member artists have laden a tree with ornaments, and everyone who buys one will be entered into a drawing for a stocking filled with "art supplies and a few special, secret things."

The shop, she said, now features work by over 40 local artists and craftspeople – and offers gift certificates. "We were also just donated a printmaking press," she added, "so the focus of workshops and programming that we'll be offering after the new year will be based around printmaking processes."

Avenue A Market will extend its hours "at least until 7" this Friday, according to general manager Sky Loth. "We don't have anything in particular planned for sale events," she said, "but we have lots of little things for stocking-stuffers or holiday spreads, cheese boards, and gift baskets for people who love food."

Loth said the market mostly sells food, beer, and wine from local and further-afield producers, but also "body products and kitchen goods, which make great gifts" – and, of course, gift certificates.

"Not as much as other shops," owner Norm Emond, Jr. said when asked whether December was a big time at **The Gun Rack**. "What we sell is a little different – licenses only, and so on."

Still, Emond said, sales "do pick up naturally" around this time of year. "Gift certificates, boxes of ammo, that kind of thing," he said.

"We don't typically get a big uptick in sales for the holiday season," Nik Perry says of **Sadie's Bikes**, a block off the Avenue on Canal Street. "People don't really have bikes on their radar after early October."

Indeed, the *Reporter* reached Perry by phone after discovering Sadie's was already closed before 6 p.m. – winter hours, he explained, run November through March.

"I rely on my spring rush over my

holiday rush for revenue," he added.

For the stocking-stuffer-shopper, Perry said Sadie's has "the best variety in accessories you're going to find in a bike shop: bike hats, sunglasses, valve caps we made ourselves, bells, tassels, spokie-dokes..." Fifty cents, he added, gets a handmade object from the shop's cosmic gumball machines, currently stocked by artists Sam Mulligan and Amy Chilton.

"We've actually sold a handful of bikes in the last couple weeks," Perry said, but added: "It's hard to sell a bike as a present, because the rider doesn't get to test-ride it and pick out the color and stuff like that. But we have a really good return policy – people can grab one to put under the tree, and if it doesn't make sense they can come exchange it."

Looking toward the spring, Perry said he was "planning on a leaner year," reasoning that "everybody plays it more safe than they would otherwise" after a new president is elected, "and this one is uncharacteristically chaotic."

"We have some baked-in resiliency, because we've already experienced lots of scarcity in this industry – I've built my company around it," he said. "I'm constantly looking to reuse or find materials that are in the world already, instead of buying stuff manufactured brand new.... If the tariffs make things cost-prohibitive to other folks, I think we'll be able to temper that with getting a lot of parts secondhand, or deadstock."

And will Sadie's stay open late on Friday? "No," Perry said, "I'll actually be enjoying the festivities."

Over at **The Music Connection** the 1975 *Merry Christmas From Sesame Street* LP was displayed at the register, but the staff was listening to Louis Armstrong. Owner John Benedict said that while the store boasts a deep Christmas bin, they only put it on "occasionally – we find that people get a little burnt out from other places they've been shopping."

Benedict said he plans to stay open late Friday, but was more enthused that the shop, in its second holiday season in Turners, was starting to attract more attention overall.

"It's not the mad rush for Christmas anymore," he said of long-term industry trends. "They spread Christmas out over like four months now.... Last year I did pretty well in January, because I had the gift cards coming back in, and people also had a week



John Benedict and Mark Schwaber say the Music Connection is getting noticed.

off between Christmas and New Year's and noticed we were here."

The Music Connection sells used music in most formats, as well as fresh vinyl – including your Sabrina Carpenters and Billie Eilishes and Chappell Roans, Benedict said, "if your kids are looking for things that are popular" – and speakers and stereo equipment. In terms of stocking-stuffers, there are band stickers and record-cleaning kits and dollar-bin cassettes, but like shopkeepers up and down the Ave, Benedict and staffer Mark Schwaber nodded at gift certificates as the sensible choice for discerning recipients.

Further down the Avenue at **Swanson's Fabrics** and the **Stash House** – a textile shop becoming a clubhouse becoming a pedagogical social movement – owner Kathryn Swanson says the holiday sales bump "starts a bit early, because we cater to a lot of makers who are making their gifts." She reported that the Stash House has about 90 members and is pushing to meet a goal of 100 by the end of the month, at which point all in-house classes and workshops will become free to members.

The store will be closed Friday night for a staff birthday party, but Swanson says she is hoping the holiday commerce "picks up even a little bit more" before it is through. New shelving acquired from LOOT, she said, allows the store to better display gifts, such as small, inexpensive cross-stitch and needlepoint kits.

And there are gift certificates. "We love that as, like, the best gift that you can give," Swanson told the *Reporter*. "It brings new people into

our store – it's really a great spot to find community and friendship."

And finally, at the Ave's furthest reaches, **Replay** sells and repairs musical instruments and gear. Allan Cadran emerged from the back room holding a drill, and looked surprised at the line of questioning.

"I never advertise a special sale for the season," he said. "January is actually better than December – people are coming in and spending what they got.... I have reusable gift cards, but I haven't really had any inquiries about them, now that you mention it. I actually did sell one back in May, but the person they said it was going to be for never came in."

Cadran said Replay's customers range from long-term gigging musicians – "the lifers" – to "beginners of every age," and he lit up describing the latter. "A trumpet left today for a 13-year-old kid," he said. "And a guy came in with a flute, wanting to know if it was okay to give to his nine-year-old kid. And then the beginner who bought the acoustic guitar the other day, she's in her 60s..."

Business bounced back after a year or two of the pandemic, he said, and hasn't changed much since. "Guitars, acoustic guitars, and effects pedals have always been the better sellers, and I've been sinking more money into them," he added.

A dazzling array of gear fills Cadran's showrooms, including a shelf full of very handsome accordions.

"I've got 100-and-something guitars and about half that number in amplifiers, and I don't want any of 'em," he says with a grin. "Feel free to come in!"



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THE SPIRIT SHOPPE

MONTAGUE from page A1

That number was then multiplied by the 182-day billing period, creating a bill of nearly \$106,000. Before the meter was installed, the bills had been around \$15,000.

Little said the water department agreed to bring in a “third party” to “verify the meter,” which they did on December 3. The next day, the water commission voted to reduce the daily usage estimate to 96,000 gallons, amending the six-month bill to \$88,312.

“The old meter was extremely inaccurate,” Little said. “That was telling us that we were using 16,000 gallons per day. They think that it was probably not a good meter since Day One.” The older meter may have been in use since the early 1980s, she said.

Selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz said he was surprised the water department had been missing this much water.

Little said the plan now is to pressure-test the system, which is used for chlorination, to check for leaks, and add a second meter at the chlorine discharge point. The chlorination system will be shut off until the spring in any case. She also suggested that the plant could “recycle” its own effluent, reducing the use of town water.

Ramsey gave two options for paying the current bill, developed by town accountant Angelica Desroches. These were “deficit spending, on paper, out of elsewhere in the [CWF] budget,” which he said would not require action by town meeting, or taking a town meeting vote to fund it out of CWF retained earnings or reserves, which he said would “signal to town meeting members that there’s an increase in this budget.”

Selectboard member Matt Lord apologized to Hildreth and “other folks at the water department” for critical comments he had made during a previous discussion, when he “treated this bill as ridiculous.” He asked what the water budget would look like in next year’s CWF budget.

Little said she had increased the line from \$15,000 to \$30,000, because “we have a lot of control over what we can do to change it,” pointing to the use of recycled plant water.

Lord said he was “totally indifferent” to the way the town decides to pay the current bill, and the other board members appeared to agree, but did not take a vote.

Plan Comprehensive

The board heard a lengthy presentation by Maureen Pollock on the town’s new comprehensive plan, which includes general goals and long lists of specific policies. The process of updating the plan, which has been in the works since February 2022, appears to be winding down, with a potential vote at a special town meeting in February.

Pollock described the five general categories in the plan, which were land use, zoning and open

space; housing; transportation; community facilities and services; and “economic development and cultural and historic resources.”

Each category included numerous recommendations, some of which Pollock emphasized, such as development of affordable housing on the former Farren Hospital property in Montague City.

Pollock was asked whether approval of the plan will lock the town into every recommendation, some of which had never been discussed in public meetings. “This is a high-level plan,” Pollock responded, noting that the planning board saw grant opportunities for the town in maintaining an updated plan. “There will be checks and balances, as there always have been.”

“It’s less about the recommendations than it is about the goals... because we can’t anticipate what the issues are going to be 10 years from now,” said Ramsey. “You’re not specifically endorsing every little recommendation.” The board unanimously voted to endorse the plan.

Personnel Considered

The selectboard, wearing its “personnel board” hats, extended the contract of police chief Chris Williams through the end of the fiscal year in June. The contract, which had expired last week, contained four new amendments negotiated with the chief, and will need to be renegotiated before it expires. “We’ll be chatting with him in the spring, or whatever,” said Kuklewicz.

The board appointed a new full-time dispatcher at the police department, a part-time library assistant, three substitute library assistants, and temporary members of the tree advisory and energy committees.

At the CWF, Little proposed a small increase in her FY’26 budget to upgrade the administrative assistant to an office manager, with increased responsibilities and a higher pay grade. She said the new responsibilities included taking over sewer billing from the town treasurer, assisting in procurement and contracts with vendors; supervising other staff; assisting her with the budget; and assisting in compliance with state and federal permits.

The model for the new position, Little said, was the office manager at the Department of Public Works. The qualifications would be upgraded to a relevant associate’s degree and five to seven years of “related experience,” or “any equivalent” of that combination.

In response to a question from selectboard member Chris Boutwell, Little estimated the upgrade would increase the CWF budget by \$6,700. The current year’s budget is \$3,119,324, with \$359,499 funded from townwide taxation and \$2,759,825 from sewer user fees.

Kuklewicz called the step increase for the position a “pretty big change,” and questioned the proposal to have the department process sewer bills instead of the treasurer’s office. “I was unaware

there was any challenge with that,” he said. “I thought that was kind of what they do.”

“It is actually quite burdensome for that department to handle the residential sewer,” Little replied.

“I’m not sure I can say I support it, this evening,” said Kuklewicz. “I’m not in your department every day, so we count on you, but I’m not seeing it quite yet.”

After brief comments by Lord and Boutwell, Kuklewicz said the board would “take it under advisement” and discuss the idea further. The board did not vote to pass the proposal on to the finance committee, as it had with other proposed personnel changes.

Diffusing Cash

The board voted to award a contract to SSI Aeration, Inc. for bubble diffusers at the CWF, which would aerate wastewater moving from primary to secondary treatment. Little told the *Reporter* that the \$58,000 contract, funded by a grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection, is only for the diffusers, which will be installed by CWF staff.

The board approved a \$1,400 change order with General Contracting Solutions, Inc. for work refinishing the staircase to the basement at the Carnegie Library, and a \$3,000 contract amendment with Power Options, Inc., which is working on a “decarbonization roadmap” for town buildings, given planned upgrades to the heating system at the Gill-Montague senior center.

At the request of assistant town planner Chris Nolan-Zeller, the board signed memoranda of understanding with the town cultural council for \$5,289 in grant matches, and \$75,000 to the Gill-Montague regional school district for an after-school program at Sheffield Elementary School. Both will be funded by ARPA money.

The board agreed to allocate the final \$1,590.49 in unspent ARPA funds to the Eleventh Street bridge renovation project.

Other Business

Ramsey discussed the town’s progress toward creating an FY’26 budget. He said the department budgets, which were due that day, had been “coming in,” and that he and Desroches were working to “bring those together and get a big picture.”

He said he was not ready to discuss it with the board that night, but planned to meet with the finance committee on Wednesday to review this “first compilation.”

Ramsey also discussed a plan to revisit building permit and fee schedules, some of which have not been updated since 2016. He recommended a review of the fees, which in some cases are below those in neighboring municipalities, but said “there’s no rush to do this,” and suggested it take place “sometime in January.”

The next scheduled board meeting will be held Monday, December 16.



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

Here’s the way it was on December 11, 2014: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

restriction would keep properties permanently affordable.

No Tobacco Sales to Under-21

Montague’s board of health is hosting an open hearing on a proposed regulation that would increase the legal age for all tobacco purchases, townwide, from 18 to 21, aligning the age with alcohol sales.

Gina McNeely, the town’s director of public health, said 90% of people will not start smoking at all if they haven’t started by age 20. Considering how addictive tobacco is, limiting use before age 20 can have a significant effect on lifetime use.

Over 40 Massachusetts towns have adopted the new regulation; most of them are east of Route 495, although Hatfield recently approved it, without much local debate.

Housing Aid Coming to Leverett

Coming after years of struggling to find projects to expand affordable housing in town with funds from the Community Preservation Act, Leverett selectboard member Julie Shively said on Tuesday that a lottery for assisting mortgage down payments for home buyers will soon begin.

Shively explained the program would work with low to moderate income homebuyers, using funds set aside through the town’s affordable housing trust, to provide mortgage subsidies for up to four projects a year. The intent, she said, is to set aside 50% of mortgage assistance for people who now live or work in town. A deed

20 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on December 9, 2004: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Library Forum Opts For Depot Road Site

With the town of Wendell seeking a new, expanded location for its offices, one of the sites the library building committee has been investigating for the possible relocation of the library was the present office building itself.

At a December 4 forum architect Gail Sullivan made it clear that renovations to bring that historic building up to code would carry a high price tag, but when the meeting split into two groups, both preferred the Depot Road site to the lot east of the common on Morse Village Road where the office building committee has landed.

Choosing a Chief

Three candidates for Montague chief of police appeared before the seven-member selection committee on Tuesday.

They were Sgt. Chris Williams, with 12 years on the force, who scored highest on the civil service exam; Sgt. Gary Billings, 28 years on the force, acting chief for the last three, who scored lowest on the civil service exam of the three; and detective Ray Zukowski, with 29 years on the force, who scored below Williams and above Billings.

140 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on December 10, 1884: News from the Turners Falls Reporter’s archive.

of a dozen sat down to a coon supper at the latter’s house.

Miss Annie Howard received a beautiful bouquet, for the most graceful and pretty skating at the recent race at the rink. F.L. Temple and Miss Howard are ready to race any couple in town against time.

A ghost, wearing a plug hat and long overcoat, has been haunting Second street every night at midnight, scaring the superstitious out of their wits. A little cold lead would settle the spook’s hash.

Contractor R. B. Campbell has been busily at work for the Turners Falls Paper Co., removing the brick wall that separates the finishing room from the machine room, in their mill, for convenience in handling the big rolls of paper.

The iron work has been placed upon one span of the new Connecticut River bridge at East Deerfield. Some six weeks more will be required to complete the structure, which it is estimated will cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000. It will be the finest bridge of the kind in the State.

Turners Falls and Vicinity

Last month of leap year. The springs and wells are all full enough now to last all winter. The tramp nuisance is on the increase in adjoining towns.

The Horse Traders convention will soon meet to start a bone yard. S. Bahman got drunk and Justice Dana fined him \$1.00 and cost.

Subject of Rev. Mr. Parson’s sermon on Sunday, Dec 14th, “How to Reach the Young.”

All sons of veterans of this and adjoining towns are requested to meet at Fred Colle’s drug store, on Thursday evening.

Notwithstanding the local drouth, the Connecticut river has been higher this fall than for many years, at this season.

W. B. Clark and Geo. Little went coon hunting in Colerain the other night, and got two big coons. Saturday evening, a party



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OBITUARY

Parker Ramspott

5/21/1960 – 10/16/2024

Parker Ramspott, age 64, of Leverett, passed away on October 16 at home surrounded by family and friends. He was born May 21, 1960 and is survived by his wife Ann Tweedy, daughter Helen Ramspott, brother Paul and sisters Lende and Thia, many nieces and nephews, and a community of friends.

Parker was known by many as the owner of Laughing Dog Bicycles in Amherst. The original shop, Bicycle World Too, opened in the 1980s after Parker graduated from UMass Amherst. His mechanical know-how, work ethic, genuine delight in educating customers about the workings of bicycles, and care for the community were hallmarks of the shop. It was a third space for many and a place for discussing history, current events, music, books, and more. Parker opened the space for live music for touring musicians free of charge. Laughing Dog Bicycles continues under new ownership by the former manager of the shop.

He is remembered as a loving father and husband, a caring friend, a mentor, and an excellent guitar player. The effects of his loss are felt by many, as his social nature and ability to make connections drew many people into his life.

Parker had an incredible skill at repairing all things mechanical, but he was also a gifted builder and maker. He built a beautiful post-and-beam addition to replace the fragile 18th-century kitchen in the home he shared with his family in North Leverett. Visitors with a keen eye will notice repurposed flooring from the original structure as wainscoting and stainless steel handlebar end caps as cupboard door handles.

Parker grew up in Rehoboth, Massachusetts, the youngest of four children. His father Richard owned a tool and die business that operated in a building on the home property, modeling the life of a small business owner for Parker.

A strong sense of ethics and stubborn intellect were facets of his character along with his caring,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

protective, and forgiving nature. He was not shy about sharing his opinions, and his outspoken nature was matched in measure by his authentic personality and desire to help and to listen.

A service in his memory will be held Saturday, May 24 at 2:30 p.m. at Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse in Leverett. Donations in his memory can be made to the Monkeywrench Fund at the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts to support nonprofits that were important to Parker.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Brick House Open House

TURNERS FALLS – Are you interested in being more involved in your community? This is a great time to find out more about the Brick House! Join us this Friday, December 13, from 5 to 7 p.m. for our Open House.

The Brick House has a 30-year history of providing a place in Turners Falls for creativity and learning, growth and leadership, and strengthening community connection. Our group of staff and volunteers is between 10 and 15 folks, and each of us is using our skills and experience to make our community a robust, welcoming, and dynamic place to

live and connect.

We are seeking more people who might want to help us as we build our Board of Directors, add capacity to our basic needs and food pantry program, and pay some needed attention to maintaining our historic building, among other opportunities. There are many ways to get involved.

Come drop by, have some food and hear more about what we're up to. We hope to see you there!

The Brick House is located at 24 Third Street in downtown Turners Falls. For more information, visit www.brickhousecommunity.org.

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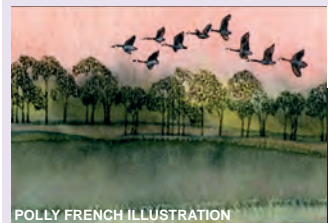
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 features@montaguereporter.org OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER DECEMBER 12, 2024



WEST ALONG THE RIVER

DOWN DECEMBER DAYS

The two best things in this world are
 Hot coffee and winter sunrises...

Baron Wormser

By DAVID BRULE

ERVINGSIDE – December 4. You'll have to put up with me. Being one of those children born in December, this eve of the first true snow sends me spinning into a reverie and state of excitement as though I were still 10 years old.

Only I'm not. But for some of us, childhood can spring up again each year with the mere mention of snow!

Inspired by that prospect, I head to my bookshelves of poetry, plunging my hands into my anthologies and finding a treasure trove of winter writings.

*One must have a mind of winter
 To regard the frost and the boughs
 Of the pine-trees crusted with
 snow...*

*To behold nothing that is not there
 and the nothing that is.*

Wallace Stevens

I have to admit that summer after summer, sitting out under the old apple tree and reading my collections of poetry with a strong cup of coffee, I always skip over the snow poems, not being in the winter mood during an August season of sunshine, gin and tonics, chill white wine, and luxuriant summer greenery.

But ah! When the sun deserts us, staying low on the horizon all day long, and when the summer fair-weather bird friends have long left for the south, this Capricorn boy turns to the cold, sere landscape, the graceful evergreen hemlocks, and the downed leaves of maple. I dream of snow and its

promised arrival overnight.

So if you are not in the mood for hearing about the white stuff from the heavens, then you'd better stop right here! I'm one of those who can't wait to pivot towards the crisp brass of winter.

I always take on winter firmly with two hands, eyes wide open and ears cocked like the fox, all senses alert and ready.

There's always something going on out here, something to see, something to note.

December 5. When the snow finally falls, overnight and into this morning, I find myself out walking along the rushing river, breathing deep the smell of the cold, letting in the familiar sense of snow.

Robins may start up from the holly-red winterberry bushes that border the shore. Siskins may hang from the drooping alder branches and seed cones, like in past days of deep December. Small winter birds, the siskins and goldfinches, trim the trees like so many faded and lively Christmas tree ornaments.

Red-tail hawk suns in the hemlock boughs, high up and a half-mile away on Mineral Mountain. He faces the east in swirling snow squalls, and then in sudden clear brightness of blue sky. From time to time then does the sun reach his lofty perch. His breast, the color of cream, catches the occasional rays, a far-away point of light against the dark pine-green cliffs.

An impertinent winter wren scolds and ducks into the berry-filled multiflora brambles that line the shore and guard the path into the trees. She keeps the cruel thorns between the wee mite of her wren's self and my probing eyes.

The path leads to a cleared place
 see WEST ALONG page B8

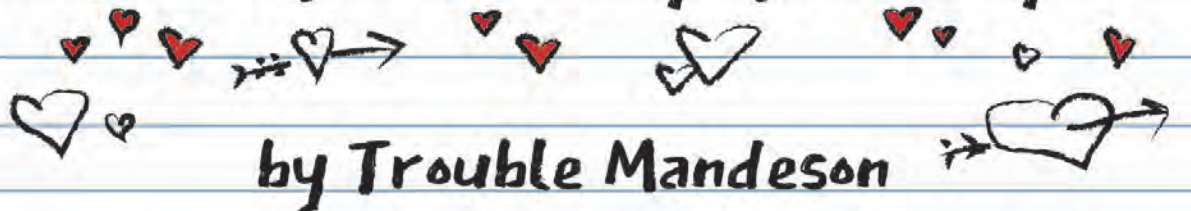


LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES ILLUSTRATION

Red-tailed hawk (Buteo jamaicensis), shown here with a friend.

Above: Rob Machado shared this photo from his morning commute last Thursday morning to the Greenfield industrial park.

NOTES FROM THE HEARTFELT CAFE



by Trouble Mandeson

GREENFIELD – This column, dear reader, will take a look at tarts, tartlets, tortes, and tartines, since we're in the holiday season when desserts and side dishes reign supreme. These types of dishes each consist of some type of pastry topped with fruit, but may also feature vegetables, meat, and herbs.

The various types each have their own distinct characteristics, ranging from their origins and structural composition to their flavors and textures.

Tarts – and their miniature version, tartlets – can be traced back to the ancient Egyptians and Romans, who served desserts made from honey and fruit. In Egypt, nuts, honey, and meat were served in an oval formed from ground barley, wheat, or oats.

Greece refined the dish by creating a flakier crust, which we know as *phyllo* (or *filo*) dough, and the Romans were the first to not only bake pies with a bottom and top crust, but to publish the pie recipes,



MANDESON PHOTO

The author's spin-off of spanakopita, or Greek spinach pie: Flaky and crispy phyllo dough encases layers of vegetables. Sautéed kale, spinach, swiss chard, leeks, dill, eggs, black pepper, and feta cheese are packed atop a layer of steamed beets with cheddar cheese.

the first of which featured rye-crust-ed goat cheese and honey.

These baked delicacies were a favorite in medieval European courts, which used sumptuous ingredients and exotic flavors. With the development of pastry crusts and the combination of crispy crusts

with sweet or savory toppings, these dishes spread across Europe. Each country created their own local version: sweet tarts in England and France; savory in Germany.

In Germany, plum and apple are popular, as are caramelized onion
 see HEARTFELT page B6



Passing through the Gateway to the West, St. Louis.

SOUTH DEERFIELD – After half a lifetime of traveling, I still thrill when I visit a new state. I felt great after ticking the Missouri box off with a late-October visit to the Show Me state.

Like any visitor to this important gateway to the West, our first stop was the famous 630-foot-tall Gateway Arch National Park. You enter a tiny elevator crammed with eight people to ride to the top where a magnificent view awaits. Underneath the vast green surrounding the base of the arch is a giant new museum that tells the history of exploration that brought Lewis and Clark through here and opened up the exploration of the US. The museum does a fantastic job with videos, huge dioramas, and room after room of artifacts that tell how the West was settled starting in St. Louis.

Big On Wine

Missouri is famous for many things, among them wine. The United States's first American Viticultural Area was located in 1980 in the Ozarks of Missouri. Much of the wine grape rootstock sent to France during the terrible 1870s grape phylloxera blight came



HARTSHORNE PHOTO

The Gateway Arch in St. Louis, you ride up inside on a tram to reach the 630-foot tall top view.

from Missouri. The state has its wine bragging rights.

One of the best locations for a winery is on a high hilltop in the small town of Augusta, Missouri. The view up there is stunning. In all directions we could see vines, distant brown fields, hills, and in the distance,

see TRAVELS page B4

Pet of the Week



CARMODY COLLAGE

'MANWICH'

Meet Manwich, a *debonnaire* 16-month-old domestic longhair with personality plus, not to mention, he's strikingly handsome!.

Manwich certainly isn't the shy type. He came to Dakin as a stray, and according to his finder, he followed her about, did the infamous kitty roly-poly on the ground, and put his paws into her lap for pets! He just loved cuddling by her side.

Manwich is a mellow guy who is affectionate and fearless, and acts more like a dog. Perhaps he's got some canine DNA in his gene pool! Looking for a dashing fellow with

a lot of love to give? Manwich is your man! The \$299 cat adoption fee includes neutering; rabies and distemper vaccines; a FeLV/FIV test; a microchip implanted and registered to you; treatment of fleas, ticks, and ear mites; a veterinary exam; and a health certificate at Dakin. Most pets also receive additional medical care while awaiting adoption.

Come to the Dakin Humane Society in Springfield during our open adoption hours, Tuesdays through Saturdays from 12:30 to 3 p.m., call us at (413) 781-4000, or visit www.dakinhumane.org.

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The Problem With AI Now: You're the Product.

By RYNE HAGER

TURNERS FALLS – AI has been the biggest driver of economic gains in recent months out of any industry. Some call it a bubble, and it might be – I don't know. That seems like the sort of thing one can only really determine with certainty in hindsight, after it pops.

One issue that's driving some of this talk is the fact that some analysts think we're approaching an AI scaling "wall." The old ways of solving problems and making AI faster by simply throwing more power at bigger models just aren't working as well, and each improvement costs more for less ultimate benefit. Diminishing returns are starting to kick in for large-language models, by many observations.

It's far too early to claim this is the end of AI's improvements, though I personally think we're still *incredibly* far away from the science fiction-like artificial general intelligence that many involved in these products perpetually claim is just a few months away. But it does mean new avenues of improvement will likely require a more creative approach.

Chip-designing companies lithographing silicon into inconceivably tiny electrical machines will have to devise new architectures and methods for approaching the kinds of work that AI does in novel ways, and we may see hardware specialization reach new levels in order to maintain investor spending, keep returns growing, and keep those retirement account graphs perpetually rising up and to the right – growth at all costs, as is tradition.

If you can't make the systems arbitrarily bigger and faster forever, the second way to improve them is to make them work *better* at the scale they're already at. That's hard work, creative work, difficult engineering, and the sort of thing you can't plan out years in advance to keep investors happy. Break-

throughs happen at their own pace as a result of research, not marketing calendars, as the sudden rise of AI and large language models itself so aptly illustrates.

And one of the things some engineers believe will help them improve the accuracy and reliability of existing models is... *more data*.

It's surprising to think of, given how huge the internet is and how much information exists in the world, but the AI companies are facing what some have called a "data crisis." Part of that is because early models were trained without any regard for copyright, using vast swaths of the internet, crawling all the news sites, all the technical forums, and piles of pirated books. One such data set was colloquially known as "the pile."

That was good data, but slurping it up like that is illegal. (Don't worry, no one will be seriously punished for it – these aren't record companies going after teenagers, after all; these are big-deal American economic interests!)

Another part of the issue is that you can't use just *any* data to train a model. Truth is frequently absolute, despite politicians' protestations, and a model that's fed misinformation is more likely to spit out falsehoods. Just read the average YouTube comments section or Twitter thread and ask yourself, "Will a system trained on *this* output good quality answers?"

To that end, the search is on for more and better high-quality data that is known to be correct.

This data is hard to find at scale – experts and their expertise have value, and aren't often available for free. Much of the good English-language data out there belongs to publishers, and it lives in books, newspapers, or news sites. That's why you see big announcements every so often about those kinds of companies licensing out their data to AI companies.

That data is vetted by know-

ledgeable humans through elaborate systems of multiple editing processes – much like this very paper – to be accurate and authoritative. It's very good data, but it will cost you to access.

The second-best kind of data is what the AI systems *themselves* can gather from the people interacting with them, and this is a critically important detail. If you review the privacy policy and licensing agreements for basically every AI system out there, from meeting note-takers to chatbots to video-creation tools, almost all of them record every aspect of their prompts or the data that they process for future training.

So when you're talking with ChatGPT about unreleased products, upcoming company plans, or your family issues, all that data is being logged and stored for later analysis. If it's useful data, those secrets may end up as part of a data set to train a future system – or, at least, they're another source of private data for future misuse by marketing firms or too-broad subpoenas.

And worst of all, a future AI system trained on that data may repeat those secrets to others.

The incredibly urgent need for a federal, opt-in, private right of action, consent-based data privacy law is the subject of another piece. (Or, really, the subject of *every* piece I write, in one way or another.)

In the meantime, I hope you think about two things, reader: lots of AI experts think the pace of AI improvement is slowing, and the companies making these AI products have their eyes set on *you* as a source of data to help speed things up again.

I hope we all recognize our value before the relationship becomes too one-sided.

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

Senior Center Activities DECEMBER 16 THROUGH 20

ERVING

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

Monday 12/16

9 a.m. Good For U
10 a.m. Seated Fitness
1 p.m. Yoga

Tuesday 12/17

6:15 a.m. Bus leaves for Newport Mansions Bus Trip
9 a.m. Stretch & Balance
10 a.m. Line Dancing
11 a.m. Social Stringer

Wednesday 12/18

9 a.m. Interval Training
10:15 a.m. Chair Aerobics
11:30 a.m. Bingo

Thursday 12/19

9 a.m. Barre Fusion
10 a.m. Pilates Flow
12 p.m. Senior Tech Help

Friday 12/20

9 a.m. to 3 p.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. For more information, please call 863-9357.

Monday 12/16

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

Tuesday 12/17

9 a.m. Chair Yoga
11 a.m. Money Matters
12:30 p.m. Drop-In Tech Help
3 p.m. Tai Chi

Wednesday 12/18

9 a.m. Veterans' Agent
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
11:45 a.m. Friends of the

Senior Center Meeting

12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo
1 p.m. Mobile Food Bank

Thursday 12/19

10 a.m. Montague Villages Board of Directors Meeting
1 p.m. Pitch

Friday 12/20

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

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. Contact (413) 548-1022 x2 or coa@leverett.ma.us.

WENDELL

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. For Senior Health Rides, contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

How to Reduce Trash This Holiday Season

FRANKLIN COUNTY – During the holiday season, the average American family disposes of 25% more trash than they usually do, according to the EPA. Much of this waste can be reduced, reused, recycled or composted. When residents reduce their holiday trash, they can save money on “Pay As You Throw” town trash stickers or bags, reduce carbon and methane emissions, and protect our environment.

Recycling Yes/No

The following paper items are on the “yes” list for household recycling: wrapping paper (including the *Montague Reporter’s* Wrapping Paper Edition), gift bags, tissue paper, and paper greeting cards and envelopes. However, it is important not to recycle these paper items if they contain metallic inks, glitter, or foil – for example, foil-lined envelopes. Tape and labels are okay. Remove batteries from singing greeting cards before recycling the card.

Other recyclable paper items include catalogs, paper calendars, paper shopping bags, and cardboard, both corrugated and paperboard.

Here’s a holiday tip: when opening gifts, use a paper bag to collect paper recyclables!

These items are on the “no” list for household recycling: ribbons, bows, tinsel, glossy photo cards, holiday light strings, Christmas tree netting, bubble wrap, paper envelopes lined with bubble wrap, packing peanuts, Styrofoam in any form, plastic shipping envelopes, batteries, and the molded plastic used to package toys, electronics, etc.

Some of these unacceptable items, called “tangles,” cause problems at recycling facilities because they get tangled in the sorting equipment: holiday light strings, power cords, and Christmas tree netting.

Recyclables from Franklin County towns are processed at the Springfield Materials Recycling Facility (MRF). See their website for printable recycling guides, including a colorful “yes/no” holiday recycling guide, at springfieldmrf.org.

Options for Other Materials

Many of these unacceptable items can be recycled elsewhere:

- Holiday light strings and power cords are accepted at scrap metal dealers and in the scrap metal dumpsters at town transfer stations. A mail-in recycling program is available at holidayleds.com.

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

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

- Gold Circuit E-Cycling in Agawam accepts various types of Styrofoam from the public for a fee: call (413) 328-3187 or see goldcircuit.io or recycleyourfoam.com.

- Certain batteries (rechargeable, button, and lithium) are accepted

for special recycling at transfer stations. Place them in plastic bags and hand to the attendant. Staples stores accept a wide range of batteries for free recycling.

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

Creative Reuse

In addition to recycling, consider wrapping your gifts in reused materials. Gifts can be creatively wrapped in reused gift wrap, old calendar pages, maps or map book pages, paper bags, sheet music, old posters, wallpaper scraps, fabric, scarves, newspaper, comics, or kids’ artwork.

Gifts can be wrapped inside cloth bags, reusable decorative tins, reusable shopping bags, or baskets. Or, make the wrapping part of the gift; for example, a kitchen towel or oven mitt to hold kitchen utensils or gadgets, or a book wrapped in a scarf. Wrapped gifts can be tied up with twine and adorned with natural items such as pinecones, pine or holly branches, shells, or buttons. Last year’s holiday cards can be cut up to reuse as beautiful gift cards.

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

Compost

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

Local transfer stations have compost programs that accept all types of solid food waste, including meat, bones, and cheese, plus paper waste such as paper napkins, paper towels, and more. Unacceptable items include liquids, foil, metal, glass, and plastic. These programs accept separated food waste free of charge, though transfer stations may require annual permits.

The following transfer stations in Franklin County have compost programs: Bernardston, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Deerfield, Greenfield, Leverett, Montague, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Shelburne, Warwick, Wendell, and Whately. Greenfield’s is open to non-residents for a \$5 host fee.

Gill residents have access to a special food waste drop-off program; contact town hall to learn more.

Composting at home is another way to reduce trash, and it provides the additional benefit of improved garden soil. Franklin County Solid Waste District sells discounted “Earth Machine” home compost bins and compost pails to District residents. Pricing is \$25 or \$65 depending on the resident’s town.

It is not recommended to put meat, bones, dairy in home compost bins. For more details and pricing, contact the solid waste district or see franklincountywastedistrict.org/Composting.

For more information, contact Franklin County Solid Waste Management District at (413) 772-2438 or info@franklincountywastedistrict.org; or visit franklincountywastedistrict.org;

MA Relay for the hearing impaired: 711 or 1-800-439-2370 (TTY/TDD).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Controversial Towing; Ice and Slush; Toy Causes Oven Fire; Police Blown Off By Comcast; Fireball Joyride; Baby Hawk

Monday, 12/2

1:03 p.m. Detail officer located a motorcycle in the woods near the railroad bridge off Federal Street. Shelburne Control asking New Salem PD to contact us about the motorcycle. New Salem PD going to motorcycle owner’s home to notify him about the bike being found.

6:48 p.m. Report of party dressed all in black walking up Unity Street by Scotty’s, pretty much in the street, almost got hit by a couple of vehicles. Officer checked area; unable to locate.

Tuesday, 12/3

12:09 p.m. Representative from Our Lady of Czestochowa states that someone is living in a white tent in the woods by their rectory. The tent is on the church property. Tent located; appears abandoned. Caller will be advised of options.

2:22 p.m. Shelburne Control advising of a two-car accident on Turners Falls Road in Montague Center, called in by off-duty Montague Center firefighter. They are starting an ambulance. MPD officer advises both vehicles need a tow. Report taken.

5:24 p.m. Caller states that there is a white SUV in the Davis Street area which has been there for a while. Caller reports that when they went to make sure the driver was OK, a beer can fell out of the vehicle, and the driver is slurring his words and not acting right. Caller would like driver checked on. Party removed to hospital.

6:07 p.m. 911 caller states that their vehicle broke down; they have been waiting for AAA for over an hour, but they feel they are in a dangerous spot on Federal Street. Operator attempting to call AAA again. Officer states vehicle is in a bad spot; he will stand by with lights on for now. Tow truck on scene. Courtesy transport provided.

7:30 p.m. Caller from Warner Street states that their daughter was in the backyard and someone is walking in their woods with a flashlight. Officer checked property; no sign of anyone in the area.

Wednesday, 12/4

5:42 a.m. 911 caller states a party struck a deer on Turnpike Road. No injuries reported other than to deer; no smoke, fire, or fluids from vehicle. Second

caller reporting vehicle accident involving deer. Officer advises registered owner will leave vehicle in front of MPD and will contact AAA for a tow.

9:11 a.m. Email sent to Chief Williams about graffiti on the town pump house building on Main Street. Officer responding. 11:02 a.m. Party emailed chief of police stating that there are multiple abandoned vehicles parked on the Sixth Street extension, a public way. Tow company has agreed to remove five vehicles at some point today.

3:05 p.m. Officer out with tow company on J Street. Male party showed up and is highly agitated with the situation that is going on. Officer remaining on scene while cars are towed away. All five vehicles removed. Some debris left on driveway from vehicles sitting for so long.

6:03 p.m. Caller looking to speak to an officer regarding stolen packages. Officer advised. Party advised of options.

Thursday, 12/5

1:37 a.m. 911 caller reports that she is currently stuck on Sunderland Road due to weather conditions. Caller advises she saw a vehicle strike a guardrail; vehicle operator is currently trying to get free. Caller states that vehicle has front-end damage, and is now leaving the scene after putting debris from the crash into their car. Officer advises caller was assisted in getting unstuck, along with another vehicle that was having trouble in the area.

4:45 a.m. DPW called and advised a crew stated that there was a tree on wires on Taylor Hill Road. No report of sparks or fire. Officer checked involved location. At this time, some heavy snow is causing branches to be weighed down onto primary or secondary wires; not an immediate hazard at this time.

8:12 a.m. Caller from Millers Falls Road states that a wire detached from the pole to her house and now the wire is across her front door. Unsure what kind of wire it is. TFFD toned out by Shelburne Control.

9:17 a.m. Motorist reporting a large tree branch fell into the road at Montague and L streets and may be a hazard. Branch removed.

9:34 a.m. Officer reporting vehicle off road near the state forest on Wendell Road. No injuries. Vehicle pulled out; operator drove vehicle to a mechanic’s garage.

11:43 a.m. Report of vehicle into guardrail with damage on Sunderland Road. Tow requested. Report taken.

1:22 p.m. 911 caller from Depot Street states that her friend’s two dogs are trying to attack or kill each other. Officer advises dogs are separated and secured, but one of them is injured. 4:59 p.m. Burglar alarm in fish passage building at Silvio O. Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center. Alarm company contacted keyholder, who is responding. Officer advises there is a door open. Keyholder on scene, will do a walk-through with officers.

6:22 p.m. 911 caller from Fifth Street states her oven is on fire. Son left a toy in the oven and she didn’t know. Transferred to Shelburne Control. Fire extinguished.

6:40 p.m. Caller reporting a downed wire across the roadway on Broadway. Comcast wire. Called Comcast; representative states she will put in a ticket, but all crews are at home and probably will not respond until morning. Advised her that the wire is down across the road. Representative states “yes.” Unable to provide reference number when asked. Officer updated about call nature.

Attempted to call Comcast again to speak to someone else; was hung up on five times. Called and spoke with previous rep again; states she’s attempting to reach her supervisor, but as of now, the crew will be at the scene between 8 and 10 tomorrow morning. She was advised an emergency detail would need to be ordered for this. Comcast supervisor called stating he is unable to get a crew out tonight. Detail officer on scene. Comcast was updated that a detail officer would be on scene at \$90 per hour until a crew arrives. Officer advises he contacted Comcast, spoke with a male party named “Joe,” and got a job number; they should be calling back shortly due to the issue of the cable being a road hazard. Officer advises someone from company will be on scene in 40 minutes. Officer advises Comcast on scene. Officer clear of detail at this time; technician on scene.

Friday, 12/6

1:29 a.m. State police advise that they towed a vehicle belonging to a male party who resides in Montague. Inside the vehicle were open containers of Fireball nips and a High Noon. MSP requesting and provided phone number of vehicle owner. Involved male called stating he received a call from MSP about his vehicle, which was abandoned and has damage to the tires and front end. Vehicle owner advises he left his keys inside his vehicle tonight, and states it

was taken between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m. Officer spoke to involved male, who reports his vehicle was stolen and has a camera in front of his house that showed individuals enter the vehicle and leave. Officer responding to house for a stolen vehicle report. MSP advised and updated. Officer reviewed video, which showed three suspects. Vehicle was recovered by MSP before it was reported stolen by the owner. Vehicle has not been entered into NCIC as stolen/cleared at this time.

10:58 a.m. Animal complaint on Meadow Road. Picked up baby hawk.

10:58 a.m. Checking on two dogs reported loose on Eleventh Street. Will talk to owner. Leaving note with leash law violation. Animal control officer advises he spoke to owner; will attempt to make contact tomorrow.

11:15 a.m. Caller from East Camp Road requesting a call back from a specific officer regarding trespassing on her property; states he’s familiar with the situation and she doesn’t need to go into detail. Officer spoke to caller. 8:10 p.m. Report of loud motor running in area of Stevens and Burnett Streets. Officer reports aerial lift in backyard; they will be done with the work soon.

Saturday, 12/7

12:10 a.m. Caller from Park Street states they had a vehicle broken into sometime between 6 p.m. and now. Caller states it doesn’t look like anything was taken, but the vehicle was entered and gone through. Report taken.

1:33 p.m. Walk-in reporting that she was just threatened in Subway along with her daughter and granddaughter. Advised of options.

9:45 p.m. 911 caller from Fifth Street reporting suspicious activity in the hallway outside her apartment. Officer advises no one located in area, nothing appeared to be disturbed; advised caller to keep her door locked and call if anything else happens.

Sunday, 12/8

6:33 a.m. Caller would like to speak to an officer about how someone has parked in front of her garage on Eleventh Street. Note left on vehicle telling owner not to park there next time.

5:09 p.m. 911 caller reports that a vehicle backed into her vehicle at Carroll’s Market, then left the scene without giving her name. Greenfield PD attempting to locate owner of vehicle. Vehicle owner called to speak with officer. Report taken.

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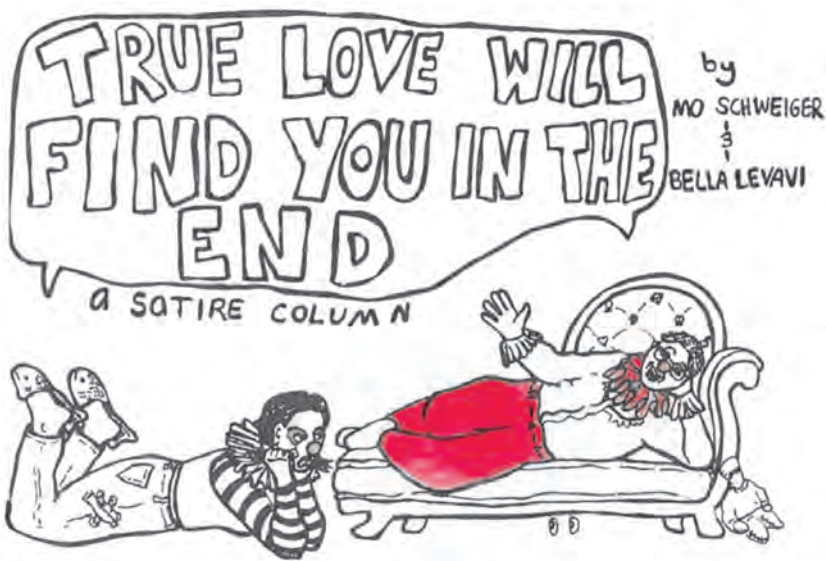
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By MANDY MOODBALLS

TURNERS FALLS – All I can say is that it started like every other first date I’ve ever been on. Both of us live walking distance from Unity Park, so it felt like a low-commitment option with the potential for fun. Canalside Rail Trail, abandoned factory, Brick Beach, etc. etc., rinse, repeat. Don’t forget the obligatory kiss on the scariest, most low-to-the-

water section of the bridge for good luck! Everybody does it.

For me, this was a perfectly planned date – I just hoped my new boyfriend could measure up and make the long, blistering walk home worth it.

Going past Brick Beach, we hung a left at the first open window we saw, as I described the screenplay that I plan to write about negotiating for a higher salary with my boss

The Perfect Date, from A to Z

and several dead fish (that I’ve already received a \$700 grant for from Northampton Open Media!).

He said that it sounded a little derivative, and told me about the film that he is making – a coming-of-age flick set on a desert island (currently unfunded). I squawked at him that that sounded like a load of shit, and at that exact moment we were hit with what felt like a gunshot, but was really the beam of a flashlight.

“Just who do you think you are, shitting in this building – we’re the EPA! Karl and Janice of the EPA, to be specific, and we can’t let one more molecule of poop touch this historic, antiquated, and pooped-up building!”

“Look lady, we didn’t come to poop in here, I was just saying that this guy’s movie idea sounds like a crock of nonsense. My date here wrote a movie about a sad young boy learning the ways of the world from a similarly sad old man, but here’s

the twist – they live on a desert island. Nonsense, right?”

“Okay, so you’re right – that sounds like the pits. Please, though, for the love of God and if you know what’s good for you, leave this factory and never return!”

Quickly, we scampered out of Dodge and ran to the banks of the Connecticut River, so fast that we slid into its frigid current. Reaching for something to hold onto so that we did not get swept away in the river’s infamous rapids, I grabbed hold of the heaviest object I could find: a brick. Slipping into the current, I had just one second to look at what I had grabbed and realize what it said: *PRAY*.

To God I yelled, “Help, save me from this terrible date and his horrible movie idea!”

Unfortunately, this wasn’t my preferred way to cold plunge; fortunately, Hashem pulled through once again, and the river belched us out

onto its banks like Jonah and the whale. Vanity got the best of me as we walked, dripping, back toward the Rail Trail and I realized that, despite his terrible movie idea, my date was very cute.

We kissed at the scariest, most low-to-the-water section of the bridge for good luck. Xylophones played in my head and heart to the tune of Bruno’s Mars’ 2010 hit “Marry You.”

“You looked really beautiful when you came out of the water,” my beau said to me, “kind of like you might if you had washed up on the shore of a desert island, and then decided that you wanted to spray-paint Poet’s Seat Tower together.”

“Zayn, let’s go on a second date – inside, though: it’s winter,” I replied.

True Love Will Find You
In The End (TLWIFYITE),

Mandy Moodballs

TRAVEL from page B1

the Missouri River.

For wine lovers interested in expanding their palate, a sign at Montelle suggested “If you like Chardonnay, try Chardonnay, or for Cabernet, try the Norton.” These unfamiliar grapes make up the majority of the best Missouri wines. It is interesting and fun to sample a whole new bunch of grapes like Chambourcin and Vignoles, as we did during our visit here and to another Augusta winery, Noboleis Vineyards, which also has the same sweeping views that make vineyards in Missouri favorite places for leisurely lunches and wine tasting.

I’d say the wine is pretty, pretty good.

But alcohol makes its name in many other forms here. It seemed like everywhere, whether an ice cream shop, hotel, or museum, there was usually a bar or a local brewer or distiller offering their wares. One of the aspects of the city that brings in so many beer and booze makers is the water. Because Anheuser Busch is headquartered here, the city filters the water, and has some of the best water of any city in the US!

Many of the brewers learned their chops at “AB,” as it is known, which casts a giant shadow over the city. Most locals will never forgive the Busch family for selling out to the Belgian giant InBev several years ago and moving the headquarters out of St. Louis.

Our first stop on the St. Louis distillery scene was to StilL 630, where an extensive library of sample whiskey batches grace the walls. It’s where the distillery keeps the records of the many batches it produces. The small distillery is located in a former Hardee’s fast food restaurant and makes not only bourbon whiskey but gin, rum, and a host of experimental spirits.

StilL 360 has won more awards than any other distillery in Missouri, which means something in a state where so many people make booze – there will be 58 makers in the state in 2024.

Hometown Hero

Every city needs that local guy who made good somewhere else, then returns to help improve his hometown. In St. Louis that man is Jim McKelvie, and the money came from starting the payments company called Square. So far McKelvie has spent upwards of \$30 million in the Delmar Maker District, and he keeps asking neighbors about buying their buildings to complete his vision for this compact neighborhood.

We visited a glass-blowing workshop there called Third Degree Glass Factory, a vast building where experts demonstrate their craft and anyone can learn how to blow glass from them. The glass shop has brought many more to this neighborhood, along with the other businesses that Jim helped fund, including The Fountain on Delmar, Steve’s Hot Dogs, and Florentin – an “Israeli-inspired” restaurant with a menu of falafel, shakshuka and smoothies.

A new upscale Mexican restaurant is set to open on Delmar very soon, right next to another vodka-making distillery called Alpha, owned by Derek Langeneckert. Would we try the wares at 10:45 a.m.? You bet!

The most important food in St. Louis is the fried or toasted ravioli, which is available with dozens of varieties of fillings. The dessert cited as the city’s own is goo-

ey butter cakes, little white bursts of sugary goodness also ubiquitous in the city.

Dining in St. Louis was full of great tastes, but none of the restaurants compared with Justin and Amelia’s backyard. That’s where this dynamic young couple hosts guests in their Elsworth Supper Club. On any seasonable weekend night, the two prepare a lavish feast and serve it in the cozy, candlelit setting of their one-car garage with appetizers outside in their yard. It was an intimate and delicious experience in the Webster Grove neighborhood, complete with wine pairing and lots of interesting bites like a kohlrabi miso *brûlée* and wagyu short rib.

Finders Keepers

We visited a diverse cross-section of museums in the city. One of the largest exhibits at the Missouri History Museum was about the 1904 World’s Fair, when dozens of massive buildings were constructed in just months out of lightweight wood, designed to look like stone. A controversial exhibit at the fair featured live babies in cribs people could gawk at, and live captured Africans who had to live in cages as living museum exhibits.

Things were sure different in 1904.

The City Museum stood out as a place where kids can delight in climbing huge covered tunnels and jumping on the world’s largest pencil. The four-story, 600,000-square-foot museum is so big that they’ve been able to preserve and exhibit massive façades of stone that once graced local businesses in St. Louis. Nearly all of the museum is constructed of these reconstructed pieces of buildings and interiors from over the ages. Worth a visit for anyone – and yes, there’s a bar with cocktails here, too.

One of the city’s best attractions is the 1,300-acre Forest Park, an urban park par excellence. It has forests, a giant outdoor concert arena, lakes, four large museums, and the city zoo. It’s a place locals enjoy all year and all times of day.

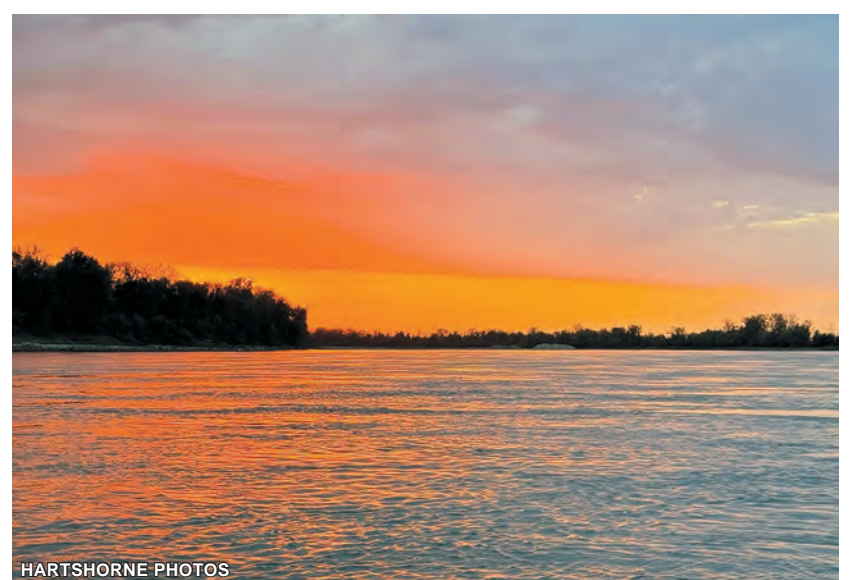
On the last night of our October visit to St. Louis, we met up with a group of people who had packed all the gear we needed for a fireside dinner on an island in the Missouri River.

We boarded ten-foot-long canoes with an outfit called Big Muddy Adventures and began a leisurely downstream paddle about seven miles from where we put in. Alongside the river were corn and hay fields with cormorants and ducks swooping down. Later on, a long blue barge for dredging the river slowly cruised by.

After a somewhat vigorous paddle, we landed the boats at a wide, flat shoreline that used to be filled with water, but was all open for our exploration – and pilfering – due to low rainfall.

After hearing that there were many arrowheads, pieces of petrified wood, and other valuable stones, we set out. It only took ten minutes before a woman in our group plucked a very distinctive arrowhead and a few other keepers.

Max Hartshorne, from South Deerfield, is the editor of the *GoNOMAD.com* travel website and the host of the *GoNOMAD Travel Podcast*, with weekly short form episodes, every week: feeds.captivate.fm/gonomad-travel-podcast.



HARTSHORNE PHOTOS

Top: At the Elsworth Supper Club, a local couple prepares an elaborate dinner that’s served in their candlelit one-car garage in the Grove neighborhood.

Middle: If something gets torn down in St. Louis, it often ends up in the City Museum, like these tremendously heavy bank vault doors.

Bottom: The Missouri River, where Lewis and Clark paddled on their search for the West.


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It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.
- William Carlos Williams

edited by Janel Nockleby
Readers are invited to send poems to
the *Montague Reporter* by email at:
poetry@montaguereporter.org
(Please note we are no longer
accepting mailed submissions.)

Our December Poetry Page

Treasures of the Earth

For Genie Zeiger

How you love words, their shine, their clusters,
their liquid touch, their cayenne pepper bite,
their surprising nectar, a mango easy to cut into,
messy to eat. How you polished them, never hasty,
never overdone, taking your time, pulling the fried
eggs of your poems up, plumping them into toast
just at the right moment, and if the yolk remained
runny you knew how to wipe its too bright yellow away,
to edit its brazen insides if it was showing too much.
But wasn't that what you wanted, the caviar, the tiny
eggs of too much, that cracker thin edge where revealing
became a shawl you could wear, and how you wrote it,
the salt and pepper of words you used, fed you, kept you warm,
that edge, the copper edge of an old dime sharp against
your tongue, where even eating a fried egg sandwich
could be divine when you said who you ate it with,
how you gave the other half to the one you loved.
I give the other half of this sandwich to you.

May the fingers of the nurses who wash you be the words
you loved to polish, to sort through like sea glass and shells.
May the sounds of the nurses' clothes or any machines
be the rustle of the monarch butterflies you let emerge
on the sticks from their cocoon in your very neatly kept living room,
their wings as they stretched open and flew; it had a sound
whisper thin but you caught it, loud as an ocean wave crashing
so you could write it down and feed it to us.
May the windows in your room have the blinds pulled wide
so you can see the pearl blue of the open sky
that holds its umbrella open above us at all times,
never closing, its arms never getting tired.
May the sheets that warm your body be light and soft,
may the hands of your husband holding your hand
be the sonnet he may have wished he could write
when writing was your first love, your morning voice.

- Laura Rodley
Shelburne Falls

Poem for Patricia

At night in the library
Her dark hair
About her
Books in loose shambles
Warm air
Daunting half smile
Rising
Through floor grates
Nictating, buzzing
Fluorescent oracle
On again
Dust motes drift
Off
In a corridor of moths
She foretold a future
Long overdue

In the reading room
Murmurous snores
From the furnace
Dry rot
Wood smell
Cracked leather bindings
She felt
Most at home
Among books

Rank
In dim, airless stacks
Telltale romances
Odd flannery,
Criminal elements
Welty kincaid
Fitful gleaming
Zora Neale Hurston
Around some corner
One eye always open
Wing chair gliding
On loose brick sidewalk
Mysteries

Her attempt to expand
The Montague board
Succeeded

On the front porch
Watching children describe
Figure eights
In midair
Above a skatepark
She prophesied
Back and forth
Chris serving
Dining room volleys
Of poetic solons

Outside, at the Book Mill
One time in the fall
Chris at the table
She laughed
You're a cholo
A term of affection

I look for her still
Down back alleys
Beneath the arched bridge
Up there on the hill
On Spring Street
I look for her
Still

- David Detmold
Great Falls

Home Is

For Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

1.
Home is where the sickness settles.
The drone state of mind.
Home is where we are free
to dominate dust and dog hair.
Where my storied Scottish ancestors
turn out to be British soldiers
separating hand from land.

2.
Home is where I avoid looking
at my old face in the mirror.
More and more shaggy
like the mythic fisherman
laying lines in the dark.
Home is where the sweet timeless totality
of tides
fade and fade.

3.
Home is where Cossacks
don frilly lace underwear
then salute the barge
carrying a one-hundred-year-old tree
to an oligarch's mystical false Eden.
Movies make everything possible.
Even the truth.

4.
Home is where you find
a 50-year-old bottle of Rioja
in a neighborhood wine shop
and drink it with a buddy
that same night
high above the bay
wearing a thick Icelandic sweater
and beanie from Scotland
pulled down over your ears.
Home is where you listen
to Janko Nilovic's Xenos Cosmos
while an array of satellites
arrange themselves
over the water.

5.
Home is where you know the system
is rigged and the backup plans
are oversubscribed.
Home is where your internal and
external demons agree
to never call a ceasefire.

6.
Home is the next place
and the next and the one after
and home is where you die
when you want to live.

7.
The easy chair,
the reading lamp,
the fake fireplace,
the door,
the path,
the brutal apartment building
that wasn't there
yesterday.

- Thoreau Lovell
Berkeley, CA

Contributors' Notes

Pushcart Prize winner Laura Rodley's latest book is *Ribbons and Moths Poems for Children*, 2024 International Book Award Nonfiction Winner. She taught writing at the Gill-Montague Senior Center for 14 years, editing and publishing seven books of Montague, Gill, and other local seniors' memoirs, culminating with *As You Write It Lucky 7*.

Thoreau Lovell is a novelist, poet, editor and publisher living in Berkeley. His latest book is the novel *Marco Polo Mother and Son*.

David Detmold is a *cholo* living in Great Falls for the past 38 years. He is the founding editor of the *Montague Reporter*.

This month the *Montague Reporter* brings you more poems in honor of or inspired by Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno and/or Patricia Pruitt. Thank you all for your submissions. Keep them coming!



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HEARTFELT from page B1

tarts, which are made by cooking onions down until they are tender and sweet, mixing them with egg, cream, buttermilk, herbs, and bacon, pouring them into a pie crust, and baking.

We all know that the French take great pride in the visual appeal of their food. Even the simplest pastry is a work of art, and the presentation further elevates it. Desserts are arranged on beautiful plates with smaller portions so as not to overwhelm and to encourage small bites. Tarts and the like are decorated with garnishes of whipped cream, powdered sugar, a sprig of mint, or colorful edible flowers, and paired with tea, coffee, or alcohol to complete the culinary experience.



MANDESON PHOTOS

Above: A somewhat sloppy, but still delicious apple Tatin. (It's typical to lay out the apples in a pleasing pattern, but that's what you get when #thesloppycook is in the house.) The butter-and-sugar-caramelized apples on a flaky crust are divine when served with whipped cream.

Now, what makes a tart different than a pie? Tart dough is thicker and crumblier and used only for a bottom crust while pie crust is thinner and smoother and used as both bottom and top crust. Another difference is that pies are often served from the dish in which they were baked, while tarts are removed from

their baking dish and served on their own.

Tortes are either multilayered or have one dense layer. The Los Angeles Times once quoted English chef Dione Lucas, the first woman to graduate from Le Cordon Bleu, as saying, "Tarts are usually containers, while tortes are absolute containment."

Basically, a tart resembles a pie with fillings contained within a crust, while tortes are more like layered freestanding cakes filled with fruit and cream.

Tartines are open-faced sandwiches topped with ingredients such as butter and flavored spreads, cheeses, fruits, cured meats, vegetables, and herbs. They're great for a mid-morning or midday snack. The word tartine simply means "bread with something on it."

The tartine's history is not really known, but it possibly evolved from the Danish open-faced sandwich, Smørrebrød or butter bread, eaten during the European Middle Ages. Today, tartines are staples in cafés and bistros around the globe.

And then there is the classic tarte Tatin, a French dessert created in the late 19th century. The history of this dish comes from the sisters Tatin who ran the Hotel Tatin. One sister was making an apple pie and, distracted by her busy day, accidentally overcooked the apples in butter and sugar until they were caramelized. Attempting to rescue the dish, she threw the pie crust on top and put it in the oven. When it came out, she put a plate on top of the crust and flipped the dish. The upside-down tarte Tatin was born, and became her signature dish.

I've experimented with making tarte Tatin using apples, tomatoes with caramelized onions, and recently, purple cabbage, which was well-received and completely disappeared from the potluck it was made for. It was topped with dollops of goat cheese, fresh chopped dill, and chopped pecans which complemented the sweet, tender cabbage atop its crispy crust.

The best part of this recipe is the moment when you put a plate over your upside-down pie or tart and flip it quickly to reveal a gorgeous pattern or labyrinth of caramelized ingredients. It's very impressive for a shared meal.

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



PURPLE CABBAGE TARTE TATIN



Cabbage Tatin uses purple cabbage that softens and melts as it bakes. Drizzled with olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and maple syrup, it's baked under a pie crust or puff pastry. Once cooked and flipped over it presents a beautiful labyrinth of color and texture.

- 1 pie crust or puff pastry, cut into a circle
- 1 small head of purple cabbage
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. maple syrup
- salt
- fresh-ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup softened goat cheese
- 1/4 cup chopped pecans
- 1 handful of fresh dill, chopped

wide circles and set aside.

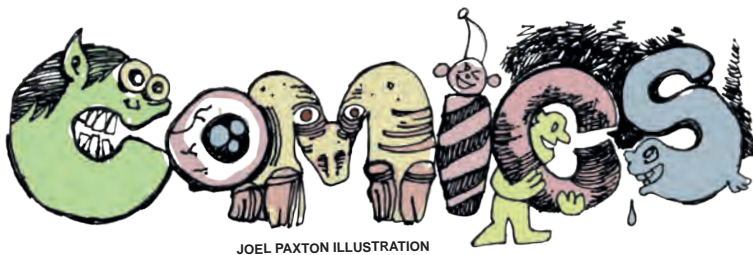
On a parchment-covered baking sheet drizzle the oil, vinegar, and syrup in a layered circle matching the approximate circumference of your crust. Lay out the cabbage slices as close as possible to each other, and to the edges of where your crust will lie. Salt and pepper the cabbage. You can fill spaces with the leftover cut pieces of cabbage, just make sure to keep it all level.

Lay the crust over the cabbage and bake for 30 minutes at 350°. Remove from the oven, put a plate on top of the crust, and quickly and evenly flip the baking sheet.

Remove the parchment paper, add cheese, nuts and dill, and serve hot or cold.

If you're using frozen crust like I do, pull it out of the freezer, remove it from the package, and allow it to thaw as you prep your ingredients or make your own crust.

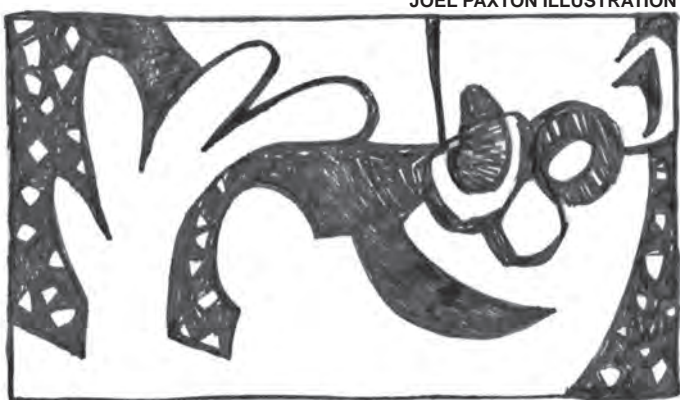
Remove the tougher outer leaves from the cabbage and cut out the thick white bottom core. Slice cabbage into quarter-inch-



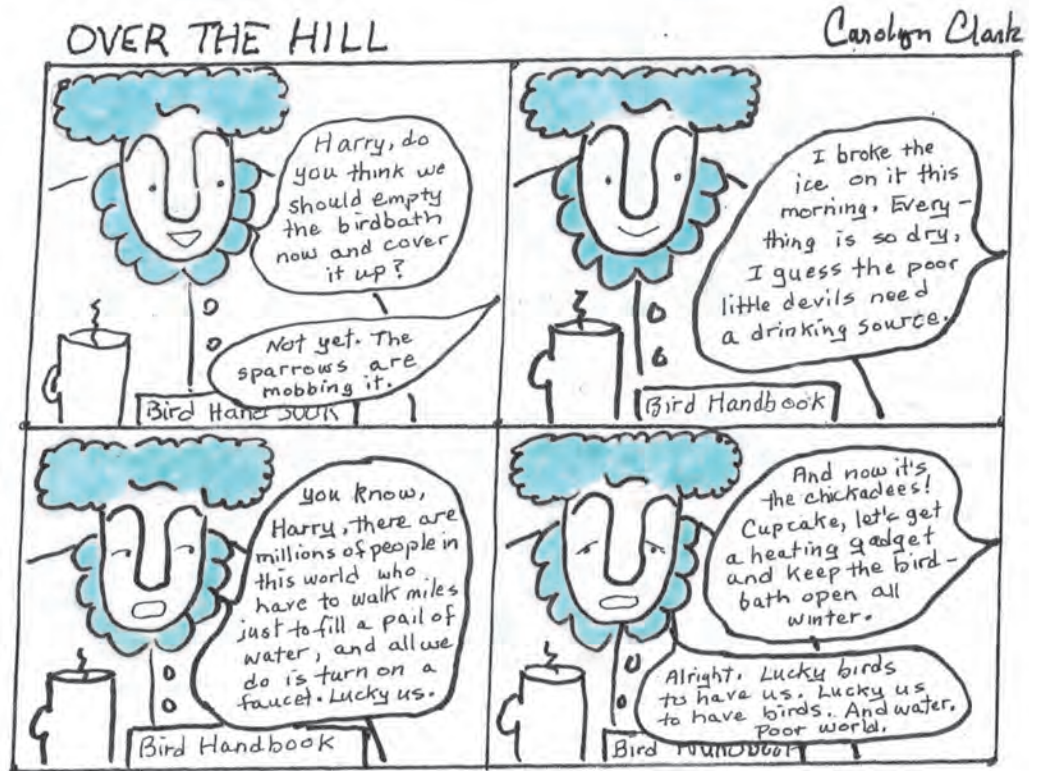
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looking forward...

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Son Little, Tonina*. \$. 7 p.m.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *The Greys, Hot Dirt*. \$. 7 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: *About This, It Was Not Yet Written* with Myk Freedman. \$. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Michah Thomas Trio*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13

Common Hall, Montague Center: *Montague Square Dance* feat. Grace Clement. \$. 6:30 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Carol Devine & The Mighty Fine*. \$. 7 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Anxious, Restraining Order, Burning Lord, Dimension*. \$. 7 p.m.

Abandoned Building Brewery, Easthampton: *Meat for Tea* presents *Fred Cracklin*, films, more. \$. 7 p.m.

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

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

Shutesbury Athletic Club, Shutesbury: *The Berkshires*. No cover. 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *TapRoots, Mal Maiz*. \$. 8 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Ashley Rhodes*. \$. 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14

Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *Dan Strauss Trio*. Free. 5 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The Agonizers, Marianne Toilet & The Runs, Typhoid Rosie, The New Limits, The Prozacs, The Downstrokes, Futon Lasagna, Sapien Joyride*. \$. 6 p.m.

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: Open Mic feat. *Matthew Thornton*. No cover. 6:30 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Steve and Bob's Santa Slammer Christmas Bash* with Steve Ellis & Bob Wyngowski. No cover. 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Jeopardy, Slobdrop, Maidenhead, Woundlicker*. \$. 7 p.m.

Bookends, Florence: *Glasss, Rhubarb Duo, Porcelain, 3rd Party*. \$. 7 p.m.

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

Full Moon Coffeehouse, Wendell: *Stompbox Trio*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Guiding Star Grange, Greenfield: *Contra dance with Noah Van-Norstrand, Max Newman, Stuart Kenney, and Matt Kenney, Will Mentor* calling. \$. 8 p.m.

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

People's Pint, Greenfield: *Looky Here's Third Annual Gala*. \$. 9 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15

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

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Laraaji, sound bath*. \$. 7 p.m.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Open Mic with *Jim McRae*. \$. 8:30 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Howling Giant, Black Pyramid, Modern Ego*. \$. 7 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

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

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19

Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *Silverback Swing*. No cover. 6 p.m.

Zen Frog Cafe, Florence: *George Lanides Trio*. No cover. 6:30 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *The Voo Holiday Spectacular* feat. *Corki & Ken, Falltown String Band, Drew Paton, Fern Bork & Bruce Kahn, Marvin Shedd, Jerri Higgins*, many more. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Parlor Room, Northampton: *Kirk Knuffke/Joe McPhee/Michael Bisio Trio*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Stephen Kellogg, Moonrise Cartel*. \$. 8 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *A Band Called E, Roger C. Miller*. \$. 8 p.m.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *The Sweetback Sisters Country Christmas Sing-Along Spectacular*. \$. 6 p.m.

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Sue, A Home Beneath, Glasss, unbrokenapologies, An Hero*. \$. 6 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Peter 'B-Side' Beebe*. \$. 7 p.m.

Progression Brewing Company, Northampton: *The Fawns*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Hutghi's at the Nook, Westfield: *PWRUP, Bent, Jeopardy, Slobdrop*. \$. 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: Screening, *Far Out: Life On & After the Commune*, with Q&A. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Shutesbury Athletic Club, Shutesbury: *Paper City Music Show*. No cover. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Slant of Light, Outro, Ex-Temper*. \$. 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *Pre-Emption Road*. No cover. 6 p.m.

Palladium, Worcester: *Shadows Fall, Unearth, E-Town Con-*

crete, Jasta, more. \$. 6:30 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Ugly Sweater Party*. Free. 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Jatoba, Hot Day at the Zoo*. \$. 7 p.m.

Cold Spring Hollow, Belchertown: *Big Destiny, Cowperson, bobbie, Barbie.AI, ZBS.fm, Impure Luck*. \$. 7 p.m.

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

Belltower Records, North Adams: *A Band Called E, Sky Furrows, J. Burkett*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Quiet Riot*. \$. 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *A Band of Brothers*, Allmans tribute. \$. 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The Mary Jane Jones*. \$. 8 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Public Serpents, RBNX, Threat Level Burgundy, Ragz to Stitchez*. \$. 1 p.m.

Abandon Dream, Turners Falls: *Peter Stampfel, Stella Kola, Cycles Inside, Tony Pasquarosa, Joshua Burkett*. \$. 3 p.m.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: Screening, *Soundtrack to a Coup D'Etat* (2024). \$. 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Jeff Belanger's The Fright Before Christmas*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27

Deja Brew, Wendell: *The Mo'Joes*. \$. 7 p.m.

Hawks & Reed, Greenfield: *Low, Bag Lady, Mothra, Unagi*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Shutesbury Athletic Club, Shutesbury: *AKA Music*. No cover. 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Graviton, Asystole, Writing In The Skies*. \$. 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Club d'Elf*. \$. 8 p.m.

Academy of Music, Northampton: Screening/premiere, *Rusty Nail New Year's Eve '84 with NRBO & The Whole Wheat Horns*. \$. 8 p.m.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29

Iron Horse, Northampton: *David Wax Museum*. \$. 7 p.m.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 30

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Enter The Haggis*. \$. 8 p.m.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31

Guiding Star Grange, Greenfield: *New Year's Eve Contra Dance*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Grateful Dub, Roots of Creation*. \$. 8 p.m.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Enter The Haggis*. \$. 8 p.m.

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

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Half Shaved Jazz*. \$. 8 p.m.

EXHIBITS

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Wax, Water and String*, paintings in encaustic, watercolor, and embroidery by Pam Allan, through January.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *A First-Class Machine Shop*, local history exhibit with images, text, maps, and artifacts, and Junior Duck Stamps, top youth entries for the state-wide 2024 Junior Duck Stamp competition, through January 16. *Deep Roots: A History of Agriculture in the Connecticut River* is on display in the hallway.

Montague Center Library: Susan Dorais, collages combining natural and architectural elements to create fantastical sights, through January 3.

Sawmill River Arts, Montague Center: Guest exhibit featuring Andrew Vlock and Chinatsu Nagamune, ceramic and textile artists from Leverett, through January.

Leverett Crafts & Arts, Leverett: Annual Crafts & Arts Holiday Sale, artists and craftspeople from the LCA and surrounding community, and open studios. This Saturday, December 14, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Leverett Library, Leverett: *Wondrous Wildlife*, illustrations by Jeanne Weintraub of birds in their habitats shown with their food sources, and prints of nocturnal wildlife in relation to plants, fungi, and food sources. Through December 17.

Rhodes Art Center, Northfield Mount Hermon, Gill: *Counter-vail*, words and ceramic work by Anne Thiam. Through January 24. Email jrouke@nmhschool.org to arrange a visit.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Finding a Path*, hooked rugs by Phyllis Lawrence. Through December.

Geissler Gallery, Stoneleigh Burnham School, Greenfield: *Tourist*, photographs by Anja Schütz, through December 15.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: *World on Fire*, art and installation by self-taught Greenfield artist JJ White, and Community Art Exhibit, both through December.

Gallery A3, Amherst: *Small Wonders*, works smaller than 10" by 10" by member artists. Through December.

Science & Engineering Library, UMass Amherst: *Our Common Ground*, UMass worker artist exhibition about caring for the Earth and each other, through December 19.

Oxbow Gallery, Easthampton: *Scenes from Here and There*, paintings by Karen Evans, mostly of locations in and around Turners Falls, where she lives. Through January 5.

Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls: *Peace and Joy*, holiday arts and craft exhibit by member artists, through January.

Salmon Falls Gallery, Shelburne: *Lisa Beskin: Photography*, photos of ice, and *Anita Hunt: (Re)Imaginations*, collages made from hand-printed papers, through December.

D'Amour Museum, Springfield: *Look Again: Portraits of Daring Women*, woodcut and collage prints by Leverett artist Julie Lapping Rivera celebrating the achievements of women who defied the status quo, through February.

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WEST ALONG from page B1
 deep in the woods of my island where I come upon my summer's chair, now covered in a new coat of snow. This is the secret spot where I welcomed the rising freshets of spring and then the dry summer. The philosopher's chair now sits empty, looking out alone towards the sullen river.

No longer does the green heron *quawk* from the dead branch above the river as in the summertime. The woods and river are silent. Maybe if I'm lucky a cardinal will flash his red streak across the snow-filled sky, but it's unlikely. For all I know he's up in the yard, feasting on sunflower seeds free for the taking from the feeder.

Beaver sign, neat rows of nibbled twigs, line the shore of my winter beach in the southwest reach of my riverine republic. Out here the sun always lasts longer in the July afternoons, even when the homestead is lost in the shadow tossed by lofty summer oaks.

But now in winter, the sun reaches the frozen pebbly shore unimpeded all day long, and the setting sun will create warm pinks and salmon-colored clouds before dipping below the pitch pines of the Plains.

But sunset, and that kind of sky, are a day's length away. For the time being I've still got the whole snow-filled December day ahead of

me, with a list of daily chores to do. I'll leave the winter beach and thread my way along the red dogwood osier of my island's shore. Here at the bend, easily spotted on a map and even from space, the river makes a 90-degree turn, abandoning its ancient bed and flowing due north toward the French King confluence, where it whispers its name one last time before losing itself in the great Connecticut.

This evening I'll pick up where I left off this perambulating to follow the river in its northward flow, heading into the Old Pasture. This pasture was a field farmed by great-grandfather Judah in the 1880s. The field is now gone to woodlands, the way I like it.

The Great Flood of 1938 swept away the pasture, orchards, weeping willows, and woodpile, and left rubble and an unfarmable floodplain in its place. Oak, maple, birch, and poplar now stretch out over the lower eight acres, home to wood thrush and the pileated family, redstarts and wood pewee.

December 10. Time has a way of slipping away. I didn't get back to continuing my woodland survey until this evening. The Old Pasture grows dark by 4 p.m., shadows lengthen, and I visit the trees, my familiar friends made over the last

50 years of my living here.

There's the great wolf tree, a grandfather oak, that towers over all the others in this spot. Its closest neighbor is an elderly birch, rising up just outside the range of the great oak's branches. It has managed to grow tall, and only slightly bent, leaning away from the outward-branching arms of the old oak.

Lesser trees, the maples, have sent out their offspring here and there, leggy slender beanpoles reaching for the sky. I harvest these saplings during the winter, taking only the number I need to supplement the firewood for the cookstove. These small-bore trees, oftentimes more than 20 feet in height, once harvested and dried for a year or two, serve as kindling for the split oak from the woodpile.

Down these December days there is Christmas at the end, and the Eve that marks the turning of another year on my personal advent calendar.

In the twilight, I long to see the flakes filtering down, but I'll have to be patient. It's early in the season. The first snowfall has come and gone, but there may well soon be a blessing of snow again, brightening these woods and reconnecting me with memories of childhood, family, and Christmases past.

In my dream, I am the first to arrive back at the old home... I push inside, turn on the lamps, light a fire in the woodstove... On Christmas Eve, I prepare a warm place for my mother and father, sister; Grandparents, cousins, all my relatives, none dead, none missing, none angry With one another, All coming through the woods.

(Adapted from "Housewarming," by Thomas R. Smith.) **MB**



Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*).

EVENT REVIEW

A Happy Home for the Holigays at the Shea

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

TURNERS FALLS – On December 6 and 7, Eggtooth Productions put on an annual holiday show at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls involving their recurring characters, Karl and Mr. Drag. This was another of their shows that is set up like a family gathering. It was asked "What would Mr. Drag's *Christmas Carol* look like?"

The show indeed started out like a family gathering Mr. Drag and his family were having. A cast member narrated throughout the show. But before this version of *A Christmas Carol* got started, a question-and-answer event was held with the audience. I got one of my questions answered myself.

This whole thing was led by Karl before the show really began.

It then started with the party scene, with Mr. Drag being uninterested in having a Christmas party. Others were there, including Karl, with decorations stuck to him while he was decorating a tree.

Marley's ghost showed up as a character in a blue dress wearing red heels and chains. It was not a bad version of Marley's ghost. I liked what they did with

a character dressed as the Spirit of Christmas present better. She almost looked like the classic versions of that ghost I have seen in a movie version or two of *A Christmas Carol*. It was cool-looking.

I found some of the humor to be better than the last show I saw by this theater group. Part of the show involved a character with a crush on Freddy Krueger, and Freddy being in the scene with her. It was very funny.

Another scene that was very funny was when Karl danced to the song "Maniac" from *Flashdance*. The audience loved it. I liked a scene where Mr. Drag and Karl were just on stage singing "Let It Snow" as well. The whole storytelling of *A Christmas Carol* was well done, and stayed true to the story. Some of the musical numbers were great. The show ended with the cast doing Mariah Carey's "All I Want For Christmas," with a number of them dancing to it with some of the audience.

I was actually happier with this year's Eggtooth holiday show than I was with last year's. I believe the level of applause from the audience matched up with that sentiment. This show was a great take on *A Christmas Carol* that fit the style of these characters and what they do in their shows.

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