

The Montague Reporter

Pool Pros Set Up Shop, And UPS Site, Downtown



LEVAVI PHOTO
Corey Fitzpatrick (left) and her son Alex at their new pool supply store – and UPS shipping location – on Fifth Street in Turners Falls.

By BELLA LEVAVI

TURNERS FALLS – Yes, Turners Falls residents Corey, Alex, and Walter Fitzpatrick are back in town.

The family, with a combined total of over 60 years of experience in pool and hot tub chemicals and maintenance, has opened their own store located at 29 Fifth Street, called Fitzpatrick Pools, Spas & Services.

“It is exciting, to say the least,” Alex Fitzpatrick said. “The customers have been really supportive.”

At the new store, customers can receive in-person testing and assistance with balancing their pool and spa chemicals, as well as ship UPS packages. They opened

their doors in November.

The three pool experts gained their experience from working at a similar store up the Hill called Jarvis Pools.

They explained to the *Reporter* that their service differs from other stores in the area because of the one-on-one help they provide. They test pool water right in the store, and can offer chemical advice with flexible solutions. They also sell pool parts and help customers find fixes to broken equipment.

“We can help maintain chemicals and give advice with no problem,” said Alex.

They noted that they have far more experience than competitors in the area, and shopping at their

see **PROS** page A5

High School Sports Week: Winter Means Basketball!

By MATT ROBINSON

TURNERS FALLS – The winter high school sports season tipped off this week, with the Eagle Holiday Basketball Classic held on December 12 at Franklin County Tech School. The Turners Falls swim teams splashed off a day later.

Boys’ Basketball
FCTS 50 – St. Mary 40
Ware 70 – FCTS 33
Lennox 64 – TFHS 52

In Franklin Tech’s first game of the season, the Eagles defeated the St. Mary’s Saints in the opening round of the Holiday Classic last

see **SPORTS** page A8



DAVID HOITT PHOTO
Franklin Tech’s Gabe Mota (right) drives the ball up the court against St. Mary’s defender Lucas Morganelli during the Eagle Holiday Classic semifinal game at home last Friday. The Eagles took the first round of the tournament, 50 to 40.

Leverett Selectboard Amherst Water Would Need Leverett Town Hall Approval

By GEORGE BRACE

At Tuesday’s Leverett selectboard meeting, chair Tom Hankinson reported that Amherst town officials have informed him that for Amherst to provide water and sewer services to any potential housing project on Juggler Meadow Road, Leverett’s approval would be necessary.

Hankinson said he and town administrator Marjorie McGinnis met with Amherst town manager Paul Bockelman, public works superintendent Guilford Mooring, and other officials on December 12 to discuss the towns’ relationship and elements of their responses to a proposal to build a senior housing development on the 60-acre former estate of Yankee Candle founder Michael Kittredge, which lies on the land of both towns.

The Kittredge estate’s development manager, Joshua Wallack, has publicly floated the idea of building 400 age-restricted housing units on the property, including either 48 or

see **LEVERETT** page A6

Elementary School Roof Inches Closer At Long Last

By KATE SAVAGE

GILL – “The elementary school is in dire need of having its roof replaced,” said Gill finance committee chair Claire Chang at Monday’s special town meeting. “This is our opportunity to finally replace the roof, and at the same time deal with the insulation and air-sealing problems that exist in that school.”

Though the meeting’s 30 participants voted unanimously to appropriate funds to take the next step in designing the roof replacement, the discussion raised concerns about the project’s ultimate cost.

The approved article added \$50,000 to a fund to hire a project manager and designer for a feasibility study and schematic design of the roof project, doubling what the town had already set aside for the project. The money was taken from the general stabilization account.

The step gained new urgency this fall when the town finally received a grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) after six fruitless annual applications. The MSBA agreed to reimburse Gill for 77.5% of the design and construction work, but requires the town to set aside the full cost of the schematic design.

see **GILL ROOF** page A4

Gill-Montague School Committee District Employees Declare ‘No Confidence’ in Super

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – By a vote of 166 to 9, with six members absent or abstaining, school employees represented by the Gill-Montague Education Association declared publicly that they have “no confidence” in superintendent Brian Beck. The union announced this result at the beginning of Tuesday’s regional school committee meeting, during time allotted for public comment.

“These issues are brought forward by the membership due to persistent unresolved concerns

see **GMRSD** page A5

see **GMRSD** page A5



MCTV IMAGE
Union president Heidi Schmidt (center) read the statement during public comment.

Montague Selectboard Montague Confronts Crisis Of Leaf Pile After Farm Sale

By JEFF SINGLETON

All the leaves are brown in New England, but they have been accumulating at an alarming rate in a pile at the end of Sandy Lane, an inspection of the town transfer station has determined. The state-mandated report also cited the town for not clearing a large brush pile at the rear of the station.

In his comments on the report to the town selectboard on Monday, public works superintendent Sam Urkiel revealed that the company that has been picking up and composting Montague’s leaves, Martin’s Farm, has been sold to another company that no longer wants to deal with them.

Other highlights of Monday’s

see **MONTAGUE** page A7



MAGGIE SADOWAY PHOTO
Townpeople are piling leaves, but they are not being hauled away for composting.

Public Assistance in Testing Road Salt’s Impact Sought

By BEN GAGNON

FRANKLIN COUNTY – Anyone interested in being a citizen scientist can sign up now to check chloride concentrations in the Connecticut River over the next three months as part of a new program to determine whether the de-icing of roads is having an impact on plants and fish.

A similar program in eastern Massachusetts has detected a “clear trend” of increasing chloride concentrations in the Mystic River watershed, which can create

“stress and toxic environments for freshwater organisms, from fish to dragonfly larvae to native plants,” according to the Arlington-based Mystic River Watershed Association. A pilot study in the winter of 2022 showed evidence of chloride exceeding state water quality standards for chronic and acute toxicity in Alewife Brook.

The new chloride-testing program for the Connecticut River is being launched by the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC), which is seeking volunteers in New

see **TESTING** page A6

No Paper Next Week! Happy New Year! Tip Your Carrier!

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The Montague Reporter

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David Detmold

Slinking Away

Last week we published as an op/ed an open letter from our own member of Congress, Jim McGovern, and 33 others asking President Biden to consider a pardon for Steven Donziger, the environmental lawyer who spent years under house arrest on a bizarre contempt-of-court charge brought by allies of an oil company he successfully sued on behalf of Ecuadorian Indigenous people whose land it destroyed.

By the time the newly printed edition arrived in Turners Falls we were dismayed to learn that the president had not only not done so, but had instead granted clemency to Michael Conahan, the Pennsylvania judge convicted of taking nearly \$3 million in bribes in exchange for intentionally sending thousands of children into private prisons.

Worse is coming in Washington, to be sure – the new administration is already falling face-first into beligerent conflict with any members of its own party it sees as colluding to keep the government operational for these few final weeks

– but that Conahan news is a good reminder of just how and why the Dems managed to lose it all.

So was the confirmation fight over an open National Labor Relations Board seat. If the party pushed through a nomination it could secure a pro-union majority until 2026, but... Kyrsten Sinema and Joe Manchin, in one last parting gift before they both slime off back into the private sector, tanked the deal.

With friends like these...

And then there's former Speaker Pelosi's intervention to block Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from becoming the ranking Democrat on the House Oversight committee. Across the board it's looking like their coming years as an opposition party will be defined by stuffing PAC-backed elders into any and all remaining musical chairs of power.

So what's the strategy there, exactly? If the Democrats want to claw back a modicum of power in Washington, what are they planning to do to galvanize support? Or is it just grabbing candy on the way out?

CLARIFICATION...

In our December 12 coverage of the Montague board of health's decision to limit the sale of nicotine pouches – Zyn et. al. – to 21-plus stores (*Health Board Effectively Bans Nicotine Pouch Products From Local Stores*, Page A1), we wrote that "[t]here are no such outlets in Montague, and the board has previously indicated it will not approve any."

We stand by our analysis that the move is an effective ban, but public health director Ryan Paxton reached out to clarify that the board has never actually indicated it wouldn't approve 21-plus tobacco outlets.

"While there are currently no adult-only tobacco retailers and it is also true that there cannot be any additional tobacco permits issued to new businesses," Paxton wrote, "there has been a reducing cap on the number of retail tobacco permits in Montague since at least 2015. Your article seems to imply that the Board would not approve any adult use permits, but existing tobacco retailers could elect to alter their business to be an adult only retailer if they so desired."

Mea culpa. MGL Ch. 270 S. 22 defines a "retail tobacco store" as "an establishment which is not required to possess a retail food per-

mit whose primary purpose is to sell or offer for sale to consumers, but not for resale, tobacco products and paraphernalia, in which the sale of other products is merely incidental, and in which the entry of persons under the age of 21 is prohibited at all times..."

In other words, if any of the nine stores licensed to sell tobacco – Cumby's, Food City, Family Dollar, CT River Liquors, and Nouria downtown; Crestview and Scotty's on the Hill; Carroll's in Millers; the Village Store – wish to become specialist shops, they can sell the pouches. If any of them close, the tobacco cap drops to eight.

... and CORRECTIONS

Under a photo we published on December 12 of Adams Donuts co-owner Sereyvith Mon (*Donut Torch Passed*, Page A1), we wrote that the shop is open Wednesdays through Sundays.

This was apparently outdated info cribbed from their website – we have been told Adams is sling-ing donuts week-round!

In the second illustration with our *West Along the River* column in the same edition (Page B8), we mislabeled a Louis Agassiz

Fuertes illustration of a Cooper's hawk as a red-tailed hawk.

Turns out we'd chopped a mislabeled print with two hawks onto Pages B1 and B8, and the non-ornithologists in our office assumed the smaller bird was a female red-tailed hawk, the species mentioned in the column.

We are proud to share that multiple readers caught this gaffe.

The *Montague Reporter* will always endeavor to set the record straight. Thanks for the corrections!



Ferns, frogs, snakes, garlic, and seed pods are some of the woodland imagery that Pascale Jarvis decorates textiles with. They have printed with hand-carved linoleum blocks on gently-used textiles since founding their business, Raskl., in 2021. You can find Raskl. clothing at the Sawmill River Arts gallery at the Book Mill complex in Montague Center.

Letters to

the Editors

Third Street Center Bustling

I joined the Board of Directors at the Brick House two years ago after having been involved as a volunteer for many years. I'm writing to reach out to the readers of the *Reporter* to let you know how excited I am about everything that is happening at our community center on Third Street.

Lately I've also been reflecting about how five years of living with a global pandemic has changed the social and economic fabric of our community. A lot of people have moved into town over these last years, and on a local and national stage people are talking about how important it is to know and connect with our neighbors.

The Brick House has a 30-year history as a place for this kind of community connection, and we are overjoyed to see the building filled with people once again. It is gratifying to see our programs, participants, and staff flourishing with the leadership of Tom Taaffe, the organization's first full-time executive director in at least 20 years.

Our drop-in Teen Center is bursting with activity. An average of 25 young people a day come through our doors, where we provide a safe, supportive space as well as workshops and activities that build confidence and life skills.

This year we've added a food pantry, in partnership with the Food Bank of Western Mass, to help provide essential food, clothing, and hygiene supplies.

Our Parent and Family Support program offers one-on-one assistance, workshops, and support groups to empower families to overcome challenges and thrive together.

Community members have also used the Brick House this year for theater rehearsals, dance classes, meetings, film screenings, fundraisers, and more! And stay tuned in 2025 for more all-ages music shows, which have been making a comeback in our front room.

Whether you are new to town, are a long-time resident, or have been involved with the Brick House in the past, we want to hear from you! Come feel the energy and possibility as people stop by to pick up groceries, live music reverberates in the front room, kids dance upstairs, people practice English and Spanish, families connect with one another, youth learn how to cook, and neighbors chat over coffee. These daily activities of people coming together strengthen our community as a whole.

We invite you to stop by for the weekly coffee hour on Thursdays, consider joining one of our volunteer committees, and make a financial contribution if you are able. You can learn more about all of these at www.brickhousecommunity.org. We appreciate your support in sustaining this vibrant community center, which belongs to us all.

Julia Handschuh
Turners Falls

Pumped Cats Are Back

I was just composing a letter of appreciation for the "Over the Hill" cartoons, a bright spot in every issue, but adding much I have missed an earlier cartoon, "Cool Cats on the Ave." So imagine my delight when this week's paper had both the cats – a new crew – and Thelma. By the way, Harry has appeared at least once in "Over the Hill," and daughter Ann has been mentioned.

And yes, I suggested a few years back to assemble and sell collections of "Cats," and I see someone has suggested a collection of "Over the Hill." I would buy both – for myself and as gifts. So think about it! I do have folders full of the cut-out cartoons, but they are incomplete and of course a bit messy.

I also would love more puzzles: the ones by Alex McGuigan were much appreciated. And keep up the cryptograms; I have been stumped only three times over the years.

M L Magrath
Montague

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

This is the last *Montague Reporter* before the holidays – **there will be no newspaper next Thursday**, December 26! Enjoy your holiday, and we will publish again in the new year on January 2.

The Connecticut River Conservancy is looking for volunteers to **help monitor chloride content** in waterways this winter. The chloride comes from road salt used to de-ice roads in winter and settle dust in summer, and it can harm plants and animals in the water. To participate in this community science effort, go to ctriver.org/opportunity/road-salt-monitoring.

FirstLight invites the public to celebrate the winter solstice with a **nighttime snowshoe hike** on the trails of the Northfield Mountain this Friday, December 20 at 6 p.m. There will be a stop along the path to enjoy a campfire.

Bring a headlamp, dress in layers, and be prepared to hike two miles with a 300-foot overall rise. If the trails are not open for skiing, snowshoes will not be permitted and participants will have to hoof it on Vibram soles. The program is free, and snowshoes are available to rent if needed.

If you haven't seen the documentary *Far Out: Life On & After the Commune*, it's finally coming to the Shea Theater in Turners Falls tomorrow, Friday, December 20 at 7:30 p.m. after selling out premieres in Brattleboro and Greenfield this fall.

There is amazing footage from the early years of the Montague Farm and Packers Corners communes, and the anti-nuke movement. The film was awarded Best New England Feature at the Newburyport Film Festival.

Director Charles Light and former fellow communards Verandah Porche and Sam Lovejoy will be on hand after the film on Friday for a panel discussion.

Bring your little ones to a **Breakfast with Santa** at the Elks Club in Turners Falls this Saturday, December 21 between 9 and 11 a.m. There will be holiday tunes, the big man in red, and a festive craft to make and take while you enjoy pancakes, bacon, juice, and coffee.

Meals are \$10 for those over 13 years old, \$5 for 6- to 12-year-olds, and free for those 5 and under. Proceeds go to support the Turners Falls High School Class of 2026.

Great Falls Books Through Bars is hosting a winter card-writing event to **send cards to incarcerated folks** in Massachusetts prisons this Saturday, December 21 from 1 to 4 p.m. in their shared space at 104 Fourth Street in Turners Falls.

The addresses and contact information come from the Abolitionist Mail Project (abolitionistmailproject.com), a group which connects folks who are incarcerated in our state with folks on the outside via penpalship. Cards, envelopes, and stamps will be provided.

You may also join via Zoom at linktr.ee/GFBTB.

Santa is taking a tour through the villages of Montague this Saturday, December 21, thanks to the Montague Center fire department.

He'll greet kids on the Montague Center common at 1:30 p.m.; at Rutters Park in Lake Pleasant at 2 p.m.; in downtown Millers Falls at 2:30 p.m.; at Unity Park in Turners Falls at 3 p.m.; at the Montague City parking area across from the former site of the Farren at 3:30 p.m.; and at the Turners Falls fire station at 3:45 p.m.

Make a super-easy **gingerbread house** with graham crackers and candies at the Discovery Center in Turners Falls this Saturday, December 21, between 1 and 3 p.m. The event is for kids from 3 to 16, and is sponsored by the Montague Public Libraries.

Herald the shortest day of the year with a **sunset solstice stroll** along the Canalside Rail Trail on Saturday, December 21 at 3 p.m. Dress warmly and meet at the Discovery Center, then watch the sun go down as you walk about three miles along the mostly level, paved path.

The walk is for ages 8 and up, and inclement weather will cancel the event. After the walk, all are invited to enjoy hot chocolate at the Discovery Center.

My mail has substantially increased due to my pending Medicare eligibility – pounds of notices arrive every week! Luckily, an online workshop on at 10 a.m. on December 30 promises to help figure out this barrage: **"Medicare Mysteries Uncovered"** will explain what Parts A, B, and D cover, the differences between various options, and how to enroll in them.

The workshop facilitator is Lorraine York-Edberg from the Serving the Health Insurance Needs of Everyone (SHINE) program. SHINE provides confidential and unbiased health insurance counseling for Medicare beneficiaries. Register at lifepathma.org to get the Zoom link.

The Montague parks and recreation department needs **basketball officials for youth basketball** home games on selected Saturday mornings in January and February. Knowledge of basketball rules are a must, and previous officiating experience is preferred. There is a payment per game. Contact the parks and rec office at (413) 863-3216.

Bring your kids to see the **Junior Duck Stamp exhibit** at the Discovery Center, and encourage them to enter the contest in 2025. The contest is open to students from kindergarten through grade 12, and the deadline for entries is February 15. The entries are judged in four categories at the state level,

with the "Best in Show" going on to a national competition.

Find out the details at tinyurl.com/ducks-tmp.

Community organizations and local businesses now can apply for **funds to make venues more age- and dementia-friendly**.

LifePath program director Jason Molony sent us news of one-time grants of up to \$3,000 for improvements that make places more accessible, providing training, offering workshops, conducting marketing campaigns, hosting Memory Cafés, and any other creative solutions aiming to recognize and assist people living with dementia or mobility issues.

"Updates intended to minimize confusion or discomfort for older adults and individuals with dementia," Molony writes, "such as making doors easier to open, signage easier to read, brighter lighting, seating in waiting areas, anti-slip mats or reductions to noise levels," could be successful proposals, among other ideas.

Applications are accepted through February 1. To find out more, visit lifepathma.org/about/doing-business-with-us.

More **silent movies with live music** by keyboardist Jeff Rapsis are scheduled at the Garden Cinemas in Greenfield in 2025. The first, on Monday, January 6 at 6:30 p.m. is *The Strong Man* with Harry Langdon. This 1926 comedy was Frank Capra's first film as a director.

On February 3 the movie is *Nanook of the North* (1922), on March 3 it's *The Sheik* (1921), and on April 7 it's *The Lost World* (1925).

Phil Simon, booking manager at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls, is also looking for **volunteers for upcoming shows** at the Shea who can hang posters, help bands load in and out, serve as ushers or box office staff, and more. Email him at simonsaysbooking@gmail.com for more information.

Readers in Leverett and Wendell: Are you interested in having a "Clean Out My House" **tag sale next spring**? Let Village Neighbors' public relations team know you are interested in participating by calling and leaving them a message at (413) 345-6894 x.4 or emailing pr@villagenighbors.org.

The holidays can be a hard time for a lot of people. **Want to talk to someone about it**, but not in crisis? Try a "warmline" – check out the directory at www.warmline.org.

One is the peer support line run by the local Wildflower Alliance at (888) 407-4515. "Get support, ask about resources, connect with another person who can relate or has 'been there,' or just talk," they write. "This line does not collect personal information, perform assessment, or call crisis or the police."

Wildflower's line is staffed from 7 to 9 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays and 7 to 10 p.m. Fridays through Sundays.

Free at-home **COVID-19 tests** and N95 masks are available in the front entry way of the Gill town hall.

Send your local briefs to editor@montaguereporter.org.

That's a WRAP

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Wednesdays 1/15-2/19 \$200

• QUILTING 101 (Pt 4) 3 Week
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FACES & PLACES



Far beyond gingerbread: This year local maniacs sculpted their favorite grocer, complete with wayward edible shopping carts and a landmark snow-beap made of marshmallow, and agreed to submit this photo for our readers' admiration.

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GILL ROOF from page A1

Any funds remaining after the phase will go toward construction.

Chang explained that the school was built in three different phases, in a patchwork process that resulted in “no insulation in that building to speak of right now.” She said a new roof would make the building more energy-efficient, and more comfortable for teachers and students.

“If we don’t approve the appropriations for this and the process stalls out, then the consequence is that we are excluded from applying to this MSBA program for the next 20 years or so,” fin com member Becca Mandel cautioned before the vote. “The roof doesn’t have that long left in it, so we would have to pony up to do it entirely out of pocket.”

Retired architect James Asbel suggested that the full planning phase could be more complex and costly than was being discussed. With a rueful chuckle, Asbel ultimately lent his support to the measure and agreed to volunteer for the town’s building committee to keep an eye on the project.

Amy Gordon asked if the school was certain to still exist in five or ten years. Town moderator Isaac Bingham, speaking as a parent, answered that enrollment in the Gill-Montague school district was actually growing, and selectboard

member Randy Crochier added that MSBA loans require a guarantee that the building will be a school for 20 years, or else the funds have to be paid back.

Local horseshoer Ray Steele summed up his take on the dilemma: “It’s a town building. If it needs a new roof, it needs a new roof. Either that or you get a pile of rubble.”

Pooling Drug Money

The special town meeting also voted to allow the selectboard to simplify the process of using opioid settlement funds, in accordance with new state accounting guidelines. Though the money is still earmarked for opioid use prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, it will no longer require a two-thirds vote at town meeting to be used.

Before the vote, one resident asked why town meeting should be excluded from those decisions.

“Not to minimize either the amount of money that we’re going to receive or the role of town meeting,” town administrator Ray Purington responded, “but I will point out that we’re anticipating receiving about \$12,000 over 18 years.” The room erupted in laughter.

Crochier, who is also the health district project manager at FRCOG, said the plan is to pool Gill’s settle-

ment funds with 14 other communities, giving them about \$33,000, and to apply for a matching grant from the Mosaic Opioid Recovery Partnership.

The funds would go to groups to expand 12-step recovery programs and help local mothers of children born with substance abuse disorder.

Selectboard’s 2025 Plans

Prior to town meeting, the selectboard met to deal with town property and issue licenses for the year ahead.

Purington announced that the online auction for old town trucks would be closing within hours. As of the meeting time, the highest bid for the 1986 Chevy truck was \$9,100, and the top bid for the 1987 KME pumper truck was \$2,125, though there was still a chance of a last-minute “flurry of activity.” The board authorized him to award the trucks to the highest bidders.

“I have to say I’m very impressed, since we paid nothing for that ’86 [truck],” said Crochier. “That’s a pretty good return.”

The town declared two 22-year-old rifles from the police department to be surplus, and agreed to trade them in to Jurek Brothers for three patrol rifles, at the final cost of \$3,062. The cost will be covered by a donation from the Gill Police Association.

The board renewed the town’s participation in the Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid agreement for another three years. The agreement, which covers Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, allows the town to “reach out and call on dozens of towns” in an emergency, said Purington.

Nona LaGrenade was appointed as a member of the conservation commission through June 2026, after receiving an exemption to allow her to hold multiple appointed positions. LaGrenade is also the town’s administrative clerk. Additionally, Rebekah Minor was appointed as an alternate member of the historical commission through June 2027.

The board issued a slate of license renewals for 2025. Turners Falls Schuetzen Verein, the Gill Tavern, 23 French King Highway LLC, and the Spirit Shoppe received liquor license renewals; Cielito Lindo and Toasty Buns of Keene received food concession trailer license renewals; and car dealer license renewals went to A-J Cycle Shop, Arrow Auto Sales, Atlantic Wholesale, Doug’s Auto Body, Engine Up Automotive, LSA Auto, TEK Cycle, and Town Line Auto Repair.

Gill’s final selectboard meeting of the year will be held Monday, December 30 at 5:30 p.m. at the town hall.

AT LARGE

Art Spreads to Cups; Train Sent to Scranton

By CHIP AINSWORTH

WORCESTER – The morning after the region’s first and only real snow storm – late *Recorder* columnist Irmarie Jones counted anything deeper than a cat’s paw – I drove my cousin to Worcester. He was having a medical procedure on his face, a Mohs they call it, and with three hours to kill I decided to see the City of Seven Hills. Alas, I didn’t get far.

Across the street from the doctor’s office a sign caught my eye that said “Cup Show.” Ah, yes: behold the cup, double-stacked and relegated to the back of the cupboard – it is getting its due through Christmas Eve at the Worcester Center for Crafts, the oldest nonprofit crafts center in the country.

The fragile pieces were perched like peacocks on thin rectangular pedestals in the Krikorian Gallery, a modest-sized room with white walls, soft lighting, and polished hardwood floors. I had the place to myself; there were no crass signs that said, “You break it, you own it.”

“I’ve been here almost ten years and I’ve never had a gallery visitor knock anything over,” said Lindsey MacLean, the manager of the Handcrafted Shop next door to the exhibit. “We do it every year. Ceramics curator Maliya Travers-Crumb invites half the exhibitors, and the rest are called to enter.”

Unlike mass-produced ceramic cups or, yegads, plastic cups, these were labors of love, and the \$80 to \$160 price tags didn’t reflect the time and effort involved in creating them.

Despite the lavish cost, MacLean told me she had already sold fifty-five and added, “Each is different, and yet comes from the same lump of clay.”

Some looked fit for a castle, but Asta Bubleiene’s were elegantly simple and proper for a kitchen in Concord or Weston. “My art embodies a cheerful and elegant style with a dash of nostalgia,” she wrote on her website, and indeed her white cups were decorated with flowers she had delicately drawn in soft shades of blue, green, yellow, and purple.

Each of Klairat Brown’s three cups were complemented by a woman’s seductive profile. Her jet black hair was combed down to her long eyelashes and her oversized eyes stared warily back at her admirer.

The staff’s pick was a black cup with gold trim on top and tiny pearls draped from a narrow canopy around the bottom. Its creator, Zara Davis of New York, graduated *summa cum laude* from the Rochester Institute of Technology. “I work almost exclusively with the female form,” Davis wrote on her site. “I resonate more with depictions of my own body.”

The cups were suitable for anyone with a discerning eye. Otherwise, leave on the price tags lest they wind up in the back of the cupboard.

Far-Flung Trips

Two weeks ago in this space we reported on the trials and tribulations of “Big Indian,” a statue that was removed from the Mohawk Trail and relocated to a diner on Route 66 in Oklahoma. The statue was commissioned by the late Kim Estes, and her daughter subsequently called to say it was artwork, and not meant to be historical.

A retired state trooper also contacted me to say they’d use it as a reference point, i.e., “the accident is a mile west of the Indian.”

Another attraction that’s gone is Steamtown, which was in Bellows Falls, Vermont. My only recollection of being aboard was brushing coal pellets from my hair as they floated back from the steam engine, but a blogger named Wabash2800 wrote on *trainorders.com*: “The trip was fun, going through a covered bridge, waterfalls, fall colors, and arriving in the quaint town of Chester.”

Today the Steamtown National Historic Site is in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and operated by the National Park Service. Its website says short rides cost \$6 per person from January through March, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., and tourists can visit the steam engine museum, roundhouse, and railroad.

If you prefer your train rides in a warmer climate, the Sugar Express leaves Clewiston on the southern tip of Lake Okeechobee and takes passengers through backwater communities and past orange groves and sugar cane fields. For more information, go to *sugarexpress.com*.

Or how about a trip to the top of the Empire State Building? Rides start at \$93.63 including taxes, slightly less for children and seniors. For information see *esbnyc.com*.

Maybe you’ll see one of the drones that are becoming as popular up here as manatees are down south.



Above: The Cup Show in the Krikorian Gallery at the Worcester Arts Center.
Below: Self-portrait cups by Klairat Brown.

Don’t expect any close encounters of the third kind, says UFO expert John Greenwald: “These are not aliens. An intelligent civilization won’t travel light years to check out New Jersey.”

Local Boy Makes Good

The incoming Trump administration has chosen Greenfield native Kevin Hassett to head the National Economic Council. Hassett graduated from Greenfield High School and Swarthmore College, and has a Ph.D. in economics from Penn.

Conservative podcaster and *Daily Wire* founder Ben Shapiro says: “Kevin Hassett is, by nature, a very, very, pro-markets guy. He was part of the first Trump administration, and the markets love it already. Hassett’s work is excellent.”

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

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PROS from page A1

business allows customers to buy local and help support a Turners Falls family.

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Corey Fitzpatrick explained that she taught her sons the trade by bringing them to work with her when they were children.

"They learned from the day they were born. They stepped right up as kids, just as I did," Corey said, remarking on the generations of experience within the family.

When asked about the local market for pools and hot tubs, Alex replied, "You would be shocked at how many people have pools and hot tubs in the area." He explained that customers also drive from as far as two hours away to access the expert services offered at

Fitzpatrick Pools, Spas & Services.

The "services" at the end of the business's name refers to their role as a UPS authorized shipping provider. People can ship packages out of their store, including Amazon packages which need a printed label – though they do not take QR codes. They mentioned this service can be helpful with Christmas shopping and returns. They also offer many other paper services and VHS digitizing services.

In terms of goals for the near future, they hope to start shipping their products by springtime. They also plan to expand a showroom in the former salon space on Fifth Street to feature additional products available for purchase.

They are open for their winter hours, Mondays through Fridays from noon to 5:30 p.m.

"We have the experience, we have the knowledge, and the customers know our faces," Corey said.



GMRSD from page A1

spanning several years," Gill-Montague Education Association (GMEA) president Heidi Schmidt told the committee after explaining that the union had collected "comprehensive data" from its members and outlining qualities staff felt were lacking under the categories of "communication," "management," "leadership," and a "safe work environment."

"We would like someone who is regularly available or accessible, proactively communicates with staff and families, is collaborative, and communicates effectively in team settings," the statement read.

The union also called for a superintendent who "ensures accountability throughout the hierarchy within our school district to guard against unexpected expenses, delays, and missed opportunities".

Though Schmidt also announced that a similar no-confidence vote was held about facilities director Heath Cummings, school committee chair Jane Oakes cut her off, explaining that this information should be brought instead to Beck as a matter of the "chain of command."

"Public participation isn't really a time for back-and-forth discussion," Oakes told Schmidt after she read the union's statement, "but I guess I'm just surprised, and a little disappointed, that the issue was brought to the school committee at a public meeting rather than having the school committee members officially notified through the chair before today."

"I can't say anything back?" Schmidt asked before taking a seat in the meeting room audience, where about 20 staff members sat, many wearing red GMEA t-shirts.

The vote held earlier this month represented nearly all of the 181 employees in the union's A and C bargaining units, comprising the school district's teachers, paraprofessionals, educational specialists, therapists, guidance counselors, administrative assistants, and information technology staff.

Beck declined to comment on the union's vote. An attempt to reach Cummings was unanswered as of press time.

Beck has served as superintendent of Gill-Montague schools since 2020 – the school committee's vote to hire him was taken during its first remote meeting of the COVID-19 pandemic that March. In each of his four annual evaluations since that time, the committee has officially rated his performance as "proficient."

Oakes told the *Reporter* on Wednesday that the committee had not yet made any decisions as to whether to discuss the staff's

no-confidence announcement at a future meeting, but said that as far as she was aware it did not have formal implications, either in district policy or under the union contracts.

She elaborated on her comment about the announcement coming in public: "If you get information from the staff about something like that, you have an opportunity to look into it or gather information – things that you can't do on the spur of the moment when it's brought up in public participation."

District policy BEDH, which governs the public comment time at school committee meetings, states that "[c]omments and complaints regarding school personnel (apart from the Superintendent)... are generally prohibited unless those comments and complaints concern matters within the scope of School Committee authority." It describes the comment period as "an individual's opportunity to express an opinion on issues within the School Committee's authority."

"Any place where teachers have an opportunity for dialogue, it has not been implemented," Schmidt said of the GMEA's decision to announce its no-confidence determination publicly. "There are no staff surveys. There are no climate surveys, no morale surveys. There's no administrator evaluations anymore.... This decision was not made lightly. There are systemic, ongoing issues that are negatively impacting our ability to educate the community's children."

Schmidt, a Turners Falls High School art teacher, said these limitations included a lack of "voice" for teachers in the district's professional development plan as agreed to in the spring, and the absence of a school council at the high school.

In February and March the school committee discussed the joint labor-management committees (JMLCs) required under both the Unit A and Unit C contracts, which are apparently intended to provide a forum to solve problems before they reach the level of contractual grievance. Each body consists of three union appointees and three school committee appointees.

In a public comment in March, Schmidt suggested that Beck not sit on the JMLCs, but Beck argued that he should, and after some debate the school committee agreed with him. During the March 12 discussion, Montague member Carol Jacobs said that any concerns about the superintendent himself could be brought to an executive session meeting of the school committee.

Schmidt told the *Reporter* that neither JMLC has convened during the current school year. "[GMEA]

have been available every time we've been asked," she said. "We've had several scheduled that then get canceled last-minute, by Brian.... We were supposed to have one [this Thursday], and it got canceled."

Schmidt said the idea to hold a no-confidence vote came from the rank-and-file GMEA membership, and that Beck emerged as a subject only as the union's executive board analyzed extensive written feedback collected from members about all administrators.

"This is from us," she said, "because of what we see in our schools, and not having a mechanism to call attention to issues that are going on.... I would really like it to be something that can be used as a conversation starter, and a way to make change happen. It comes from a place of care."

Other Business

After the statement was read, the school committee held its shortest meeting in recent memory, wrapping its year-end business up in roughly half an hour. Business manager Joanne Blier was not in attendance.

The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) sent a letter to the district rejecting its application for support in expanding Sheffield Elementary School, part of a long-term plan to absorb and close the neighboring Hillcrest Elementary.

MSBA gave no reason other than the number of applications, and invited Gill-Montague to apply again in 2025. Beck said he believed the agency looked favorably on similar consolidation plans.

The committee voted to accept four donations, ranging from \$30 to \$150, to the athletic program's Helping Hands Leadership Council, and agreed to table a continued discussion of the recent Massachusetts Association of School Committees annual conference.

By 5-0 votes, each with one abstention, the committee approved a memorandum of agreement modifying the Unit C union contract, and changing a pupil services administrative assistant position in that unit to a data position at the central office.

Gill-Montague schools will be closed from next Monday, December 23 through Wednesday, January 1.

The school committee's next meeting is scheduled for January 14. Citing a technological issue with broadcasting Zoom meetings over the local cable channel, Beck noted that meetings will now be held in person, "unless it's absolutely necessary for [making] quorum, or if there's an issue with weather."



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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

International Paper Demolition Could Actually Begin Soon

By KATIE NOLAN

On Monday night the Erving selectboard and capital planning committee, meeting jointly, reviewed a spreadsheet documenting 71 current and planned capital projects and attempted to determine whether each was high, medium, or low priority. Understanding which were already in progress, and which the town plans to pursue, is necessary for developing the FY’26 budget.

The list included a sewer assessment maintenance plan, streetlight repair in Erving Center, new senior housing on Care Drive.

When they came to demolition of International Paper Mill buildings, selectboard chair Jacob Smith commented “It’s in progress – it’s funded, technically, a portion,” referring to the \$700,000 grant re-

ceived from MassDevelopment.

“They have a contractor that they’re working with right now that they believe they can assign to us,” town administrator Bryan Smith replied. After the MassDevelopment contractor completes a study, the town may have authorization to proceed with the demolition. Smith said MassDevelopment will inform the town about its decision in January.

Jacob Smith grumbled that it would have been good to know this a year ago, but continued, “We’re getting there now, we’re still moving.”

After discussing each specific project on the list, the selectboard and capital planning committee decided that each member would review the projects outside of meeting time, and reconvene to discuss priorities further in January.

Bryan Smith told the board and

committee that generic estimates for modular office space for the water, wastewater, and highway departments ranged from \$130,000 to \$155,000. Firm estimates would not be available, he explained, until there were detailed specifications for the structures. Town meeting has already approved \$75,000 for the offices, and a second town meeting vote would be needed to approve additional funds.

The selectboard decided to publish an invitation to bid by December 26 for 500 feet of fencing at the wastewater treatment plant.

The board also renewed the current alcohol beverage service and retail licenses and 16 business licenses, and voted to hire Charles Garbiel II as a full-time wastewater treatment plant maintenance worker, as recommended by a screening committee.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Celebrate This New Year’s Eve In Orange!

ORANGE – December 31, 2024 marks the 29th annual Starry Starry Night, a North Quabbin and regional celebration for New Year’s Eve. The Orange Revitalization Partnership (ORP) began Starry Starry Night in 1995, and hosts the gala every year with the support of a team of local volunteers and non-profit partners.

“Celebrating New Year’s Eve is a worldwide tradition that takes on many forms,” said Starry Starry Night committee co-chair Dorothy Verheyen. “Starry Starry Night brings out that great hometown feeling as you move from one venue to another seeing folks smiling, laughing and enjoying all the different performers. If you have never been, join us – all are welcome.”

Starry Starry Night was created as a free, fun, family-friendly way for the area to celebrate New Year’s Eve. It has evolved into a much-anticipated staple of our community with travelers visiting from all over.

Performances of varying genres rotate at venues throughout town.

All evening there are beautiful ice sculptures in Memorial Park, surrounded by holiday lights, and hot cocoa by Dave’s Arcade. When the performances are over, festival-goers gather carrying handmade stars on sticks for the Parade of Stars, and after that an amazing array of fireworks ends the night with a **BANG!**

Here are this year’s performers – visit www.starrystarrynight.org for a full schedule and venues:

Adam S.Z. and the Inner Fiyah: Deep pocket bass and drums, with sounds of roots reggae and lovers rock, classic rock, R&B, and pop.

The Can Collectors: Classic rock, with steel drum, bass, and a kazoo. Audience requests welcome.

Dan Kennedy: This acclaimed solo pianist says his music “helps restore people to the peace and quiet we all deserve.”

Dennis Cormier: Elvis is back in the building! Travel back to the early days of rock ‘n’ roll and spend some time with the King.

Ed Raz: Fun, interactive close-up

magic for children and adults.

Inside/Out Dance Company: Talented dancers sure to wow you with their mesmerizing moves.

Pioneer Valley Brass: This quintet’s “brassy” twist on classical, marching band, and rock has entertained audiences for over 40 years.

Robert Rivest: An interactive comic mime show is full of humorous stories, awe-inspiring illusions, and audience participation.

Surround Sound Chapter of Harmony: This all-women chorus sings in four-part harmony, *a capella*. You’ll recognize recent musical and movie themes and holiday songs.

Talking Hands Theatre: Musical interactive puppet show for children ages 3 to 10.

Todd Goodwin: Will warm your heart, mind, and imagination with songs and stories.

The first performers go on at 6 p.m. and the fireworks end at 10:30 p.m., giving plenty of time to get home to watch the ball drop.

And... it’s all absolutely *free!*

TESTING from page A1

Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The effort is in partnership with the Izaak Walton League of America.

While chloride concentrations in rivers and streams in forested areas of New England tend to be low, studies in 2016 and 2017 showed those concentrations increasing, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). The primary source of chloride in surface water is de-icing salts used on roads and discharges from wastewater treatment facilities and septic systems.

So far, the only local sampling stations recorded by the USGS are at the Millers River in Erving and the Deerfield River in west Deerfield. The sampling in Erving dates back to 1952 when chloride levels were measured at 6.8 milligrams per liter (mg/l), a figure that rose to 62 mg/l in 2021. In west Deerfield, the only sampling was in 2019, showing close to 11 mg/l.

A limit of 860 milligrams per liter of chloride is the EPA standard for “acute exposure,” which is defined as the highest concentration to which organisms can be exposed in a 24-hour period with “zero to slight mortality.”

Volunteers will receive testing kits in the mail and will upload their results onto the Izaak Walton League’s Clean Water Hub and the CRC’s “Is It Clean?” website, which also features data on *E. coli* bacteria throughout the watershed.

“Road salt is a major water quality issue in the north-eastern US,” says CRC water quality program manager

Ryan O’Donnell. “Many people have asked over the years if we can monitor the impacts of road salt, and this is a really great way to get that started. Since it’s not limited by needing to get samples to a lab, volunteers throughout the entire watershed can easily participate and contribute to this community science effort.”

Enthusiasm has been strong for CRC’s first year of monitoring road salt inputs to the Connecticut River, with 55 area residents signing up so far. Volunteers can choose a water sampling location and will be asked to collect samples four times between this month and March. No experience is necessary, and sampling dates are flexible. Interested volunteers can sign up at ctriver.vomo.org/opportunity/road-salt-monitoring.

The Izaak Walton League of America was founded in 1922, and was commissioned by President Calvin Coolidge to conduct the first national water pollution survey in 1927. The League was at the forefront of local and national efforts to lobby for sewage treatment in the 1930s and to establish the Clean Water Act of 1972. The League operates several thriving national volunteer science programs, including Save Our Streams, Salt Watch, and Nitrate Watch, designed to monitor streams, lakes, and other waterways for pollution.

The CRC has been a steward of the Connecticut River and tributary streams since 1952, focusing on advocacy, aquatic invasive species management, dam removal, habitat restoration, migratory fish surveys, recreation, trash cleanups, and water quality monitoring. Learn more at ctriver.org.



LEVERETT from page A1

150 units on the Leverett side of the estate and a larger number in Amherst. The units would be owner-occupied, and either proposal would designate 25% as “affordable” under the state’s Chapter 40B program.

Either version would also need to have a plan for water and sewer services. Leverett does not have a municipal water system, and Leverett planning board members and others have pointed out that a connection with Amherst’s water would be key to the feasibility of any large residential project on the estate.

Hankinson reported that he was told at the December 12 meeting that Amherst has a policy of not putting “any of their equipment into an adjoining town without that town’s permission.” In the case of Leverett, this permission would need to come from the selectboard.

Discussion turned to the lack of communication between Wallack and the town, and recent reports about the proposal in the press.

Board member Patricia Duffy was critical of an op/ed in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* penned by Wallack which she said was “one-sided” and “not fact-checked.” She said Wallack was “not wrong” about Leverett needing affordable housing, as he mentioned in the piece, but said he neglected to address concerns expressed by residents, including traffic and legal issues and the limited ability of a small town to absorb such large changes.

Isaiah Robison suggested that town officials did not need to be “reactive” to media reports, and that Leverett would be better served by focusing on “calm communication,” permits, and a formal negotiating process.

Robison said he thought a project beneficial to Amherst, Leverett, and the surrounding region could be built on the property, but that reacting to news coverage didn’t help that goal. He added that he didn’t think disparaging comments from the community about Wallack and Kittredge were helpful, either.

Resident Carol Heim said she agreed in general with Robison’s comment that being reactive was not useful, but that there were exceptions. She said inaccuracies she saw in a *Boston.com* article about the project, for example, deserved a response, because state legislators in Boston “may be getting a wrong impression about what he’s trying to do here.”

She also cited several assertions made by Wallack in the press about the units’ affordability which she felt needed to be substantiated.

Hankinson asked Heim if she thought the selectboard should be responding to the news items in some way.

Heim said it seemed as if Wallack was not giving the selectboard information or negotiating with the town, but “trying to debate this in the press.” She referenced a news report that said Wallack had reduced the total number of units he intends to build, which he had not communicated with the town, and said she found it “weird” for the selectboard to have to ask him for information he had previously provided to the press.

“He should be coming to the board, not vice-versa,” Heim said, but added that she felt somebody from the town should be asking him for more details about his public assertions.

“I do, myself, want to see affordable housing on that site,” Heim said, but added that it was hard to know what might work without seeing more information. “Wallack should be presenting the town with a plan it can evaluate,” she said, noting that Leverett has still not seen “most of the information that was requested” of the developer in August.

“The meeting with Amherst was critical to Leverett for two reasons,” Hankinson told the *Reporter* after Tuesday’s meeting. “We were able to restate and reaffirm our commitment to one another to act in good faith as good neighbors, and we learned Amherst has a policy that requires a request from Leverett selectboard to install water or sewer on Leverett soil.”

Truck & Gutter

The selectboard authorized \$71,770 for the purchase of a highway department truck, as approved at a special town meeting in November. A lower bid was rejected because it didn’t meet the specifications in the solicitation.

Robison offered his opinion, as a resident, that while he did not object to the purchase, the diesel engine in the new truck was an upgrade to what the town had previously, and in the future he would like to see changes like this approved in advance and accounted for in the town’s capital plan.

Board members said they understood his point, but noted that the capital planning committee currently had no members, and the town needed the truck.

Steve Weiss and Eva Gibavic updated the selectboard on progress with the project to restore Rattlesnake Gutter Road, discontinued as a public road, as a hiking trail.

The pair said they had received the go-ahead from the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Division of Fish and Wildlife for the work they would like to do.

They also reported the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust has pledged a \$20,000 donation to be used as matching funds to pursue a \$100,000 grant from MassTrails. Several other grant applications are in the works, they said, along with plans for a community fundraising drive.

Other Business

The selectboard approved a requested increase in pay for police details from \$55 to \$62 an hour, in line with neighboring towns. Duffy noted that this increase would not cost the town anything.

Board members reviewed a list compiled by department heads of unfunded town projects. The list was requested by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments for the purposes of documentation and pursuing grant funding.

Robison suggested prioritizing current infrastructure and efficiency projects.

Board member Jed Proujansky, who was not in attendance, was appointed as the town’s voting representative to the Massachusetts Municipal Association and to the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association.

The selectboard waived the town hall use fee for a senior yoga class sponsored by the recreation committee. Duffy reported that she was looking into restarting the garden committee, and has identified one interested party so far.



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MONTAGUE from page A1

meeting included agreements to train deputies from the county sheriff’s office as “peace officers,” a proposed collaboration between the Soldiers Memorial committee and the parks and recreation department to reinvigorate the Halloween parade in Turners Falls, and a decision to hold the winter special town meeting on February 12, creating a very full plate for the selectboard in January.

Urkiel reviewed the results of the inspection of the transfer station, conducted by Jan Ameen of the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District, which provides services to 21 local towns. The inspection was generally positive, Urkiel reported, but the town needs to reduce the amounts of brush in the brush pile and leaves in the leaf pile.

The brush pile is within the transfer station and can be accessed only on Wednesdays and Saturdays when the facility is open. Residents can contribute to it at no cost, but it tends to grow quickly, and can become a fire hazard.

The leaf pile is outside the fence enclosing the transfer station, and can therefore be accessed at any time. Leaves often accumulate at the top of a hill, so the DPW must periodically push them down the hill and turn the pile. Ameen wrote that the leaves “need to be moved off site or pushed back and turned,” and that a pile of bricks and concrete also needs to be removed.

“They don’t like to see the stuff stay there for extended periods,” Urkiel told the *Reporter*, referring to both the leaves and the brush. He told the selectboard that the DPW can rent a shredder for about \$10,000 to shred the brush. In a telephone interview, he explained that the shredded brush can be mixed with the leaves to form compost, but where the composting would take place is “to be determined.”

According to Urkiel, the Greenfield company that has been composting the leaves at no cost to the town, Martin’s Farm, has been purchased by the Westfield-based 360 Recycling, which does not want to continue the current arrangement.

The board voted to accept Ameen’s report, with member Chris Boutwell abstaining because he represents Montague on the waste management district, but it did not address the need for a shredder to reduce the brush pile.

Peace Pipeline

The selectboard approved two separate memoranda of understanding (MOU) leading the town, in collaboration with Greenfield, to train deputies from the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office to serve as “peace officers” throughout the county.

Montague police chief Chris Williams originally presented one MOU between the town, the sheriff’s office, and the Montague patrolmen’s union, the New England Police Benevolent Association, whose members would be paid to conduct 12-week field trainings which will supplement the deputies’ training at the police academy.

Montague will train three deputies in succession for 12 weeks each and Greenfield will train two, and the deputies will then be available to all towns in Franklin County to serve in cases of local need. Williams said his department would pay to cover the trainings and then be

reimbursed by the sheriff’s office.

Town administrator Walter Ramsey said that an attorney for the town advised breaking the MOU into two separate agreements, one with the sheriff’s office and the other with the union, so two virtually identical MOUs were approved by the board.

Parade Pact

Parks and recreation director Jon Dobosz came before the board to suggest a partnership between his department and the Soldiers’ Memorial committee, which has been organizing the annual Rag Shag Parade down Avenue A in Turners Falls each Halloween. The parade was canceled this year due to miscommunication over permitting.

Dobosz said that his department has the “infrastructure” to organize the parade, compared to the Soldiers’ Memorial committee, which has been depleted and is now “a committee of one” according to Boutwell.

“We used to be involved about 19, 20 years ago,” Dobosz said, “but then my second daughter was born on Halloween, and that changed my plans for the event.”

Ramsey noted that the RiverCulture, the town program which sponsors events in Turners and other villages, had also expressed an interest in supporting the parade.

Selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz suggested the town consider changing the Soldiers Memorial committee from an elected to an appointed committee.

The board did not take a vote on either issue, but was generally supportive of the proposed collaboration to reinvigorate the parade.

Meetings and Meetings

The board, again without taking a formal vote, approved a special town meeting for Wednesday, February 12. Ramsey said that he was originally thinking of a date later in February, but the newly elected moderator, John Dempsey, was not available any time in February, so he requested the services of the previous moderator, Ray Godin, who was only available on the earlier date.

Kuklewicz said he already had a meeting scheduled for that night, but would “try to get to town meeting.”

Administrative assistant Wendy Bogusz said the February 12 date would require that all articles be submitted to the selectboard office by Thursday, January 2 at 9 a.m.

The newly elected moderator, John Dempsey, was not available any time in February, so Ramsey requested the services of the previous moderator, Ray Godin.

“We’d have to get into business right after the new year,” Ramsey said, noting that his office has so far collected seven articles.

These were “mostly administrative housekeeping,” he said, but he also mentioned a capital request at the Clean Water Facility, payment for the transportation of a student to Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, and a supplemental appropriation for the town airport.

The new year will no doubt be a busy time for the board, as Ramsey reported that all departmental bud-

gets for the 2026 fiscal year had been received at town hall. “I’ll be collating them and sending them to the board for you all to review, with the department narratives as well,” he said, and starting January 6, “we’re going to dig into the budget.”

Ramsey went on to say that the finance committee had already done its budget review and identified which departments it wants to meet with. “I’ll share that schedule with selectboard folks,” he warned, “in case you want to maybe come to a finance committee meeting.”

Finally, Ramsey said another meeting had been scheduled for February 5 with officials from the Gill-Montague regional school district and the town of Gill for initial discussions of the FY’26 school district budget.

Loose Licenses

A very long list of permits and licenses was approved, following a dramatic reading by board member Matt Lord. Lord said he had noticed that the same establishments seemed to occasionally go under different names, or perhaps by different spellings. Bogusz said she would review the list for consistency, and Kuklewicz offered that the contradictions may have appeared on the original applications.

“Yes,” said Lord, “most people don’t have a clue how this works.”

Kuklewicz noted that a number of liquor licenses had not been renewed, leaving the town with “more available licenses than usual.”

Boutwell asked about a recently-proposed review of the license fees, which “have been the same for quite some time.”

Kuklewicz said that Bogusz had been reviewing the fees, and “at some point in January or February we’ll have a presentation to the board for discussion.”

Other Business

Acting as personnel board, the selectboard appointed Tim Mooney and Carter Woodward as new patrol officers, provided they meet requirements for attending the police academy, and appointed Tom Wyman to serve as the alternate electrical inspector until the end of the fiscal year.

On the infrastructure front, the board awarded a contract to the National Water Main Cleaning Company for upgrading cracked manholes, most of them in Turners Falls. The \$194,850 project will be funded by a Rural/Small Town Development grant from the state.

Assistant town administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller was authorized to apply for another state grant, from the Shared Streets and Spaces program, of up to \$250,000 to build access ramps to stores on the 102-112 block of Avenue A.

The board retired into an executive session at the end of the meeting to discuss “the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property,” namely 15 Power Street, the former annex to the now-demolished Railroad Salvage building.

The town sold the annex building in 2017 to Power Street, LLC, a company owned by local developer Bob Obear, for \$1,000 in exchange for a land development agreement initially promising that the building would be redeveloped “no later than June 30, 2019.”

The next scheduled selectboard meeting will be on January 6.



LOOKING BACK:
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here’s the way it was on December 18, 2014: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Off the Grid, Legally

On November 22, Susan and Jonathan von Ranson finally received legal permission to move into their non-electric, wood-stove-heated, compost-toilet-trained, root-cellared, water-table-friendly home in Wendell.

The couple had first talked to building inspector Phil Delorey in 2007. Board of health chair Harry Williston said the non-code apartment they wanted to build in their barn would never happen with no running water, no electric wiring, no hard-wired fire alarm, and no toilet plumbing.

When the board of health voted to reject the von Ransons’ application, 230 voters, one-third of Wendell’s registered voters, signed a petition in support of the von Ransons’ application and their radical concept of trying to revive the dy-

Here Comes the Train

It’s official - Amtrak trains will begin arriving at the John W. Oliver Transit Center in Greenfield on December 29. Going south, the Vermonter’s stops will include Springfield, Hartford, New York City, Trenton, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC.

The effort to open up western Massachusetts rail transportation started years ago with the building of the transit center – it opened in May 2012 - with funds from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a project supported by Governor Deval Patrick. Plans are in place to build onto this first step by providing local commuter rail service. For now, tickets, \$61 to \$89, to NYC, will not be sold at the center, there is no long-term parking, and the waiting room may not be available on weekends.

20 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on December 16, 2004: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Farmland Protected

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, the Montague Conservation Commission, and Valley Land Fund announced the purchase of an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on 10 acres of prime farmland on Meadow Road in Mon-

tague, along the Sawmill River. Melanie Gaier and Anthony Reiber purchased the property in 2003, restored the old farm house, and rented the land to a young organic farmer. They then worked with the Commonwealth, the town, and several land trusts to permanently protect the property for agricultural use. “This points to the importance of partnerships in land conservation,” said town planner Robin Sherman.

150 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on December 16, 1874: News from the Turners Falls Reporter’s archive.

Turners Falls and Vicinity

How’s your poor cold feet? R.N. Oakman has recently lost a valuable cow by sickness.

There were two deaths from diphtheria in one family here last week.

The flag on the Farren House looks as though it had been to the wars.

Those accidental drowning paragraphs will get a rest for a few months.

A very successful blast with Dualin was made in the canal yesterday.

The passenger receipts at the Turners Falls station average about \$1000 a month.

Now ’tis the hungry hour of noon, when whistles shriek, and factory operatives scramble off to dinner.

Large numbers of pickerel were taken through the ice at Barton’s Cove last week. On Monday the catch weighed fifty pounds.



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SPORTS from page A1

Thursday. The game was fast-paced and aggressive. Because there were no established fan sections, spectators from opposing teams found themselves sitting and cheering together.

The Saints held tight until late in the contest. With the score 46-40, they were forced to intentionally foul, but Tech hit four foul shots to hold on and win it 50-40.

The next day, Friday the Thirteenth, the Ware Green Indians defeated Tech for the Holiday Classic championship. Nolyn Stafford led Tech with 8 points, followed by Gabe Mota (7), Hunter Donahue (6), Brody Hicks (4), Cole Bassett and Jaxon Silva (3 each), and Dylan Cullen (2).

On Monday, December 16, the Turners Falls boys lost to the Lenox Millionaires out in Lenox, but we were unable to track down game stats as of press time.

Girls' Basketball

FCTS 47 – McCann 33

Mount Greylock 54 – FCTS 29

FCTS 46 – Ludlow 27

In girls' basketball, the Franklin Tech Eagles are attempting to match last year's very successful

season, while Turners Falls High School does not have a varsity team for the second consecutive season.

In the girls' Holiday Classic matchup last Thursday against the Green Hornets of McCann, coach Joe Gamache instituted his full-court press and liberally substituted players throughout the contest. This game was a little slower-paced than the boys' game, but just as aggressive, as players from both teams fought for the ball on every possession.

The Hornets kept it even for the first quarter, but Tech dominated the next three to cruise to a 47-33 win.

Ten different Eagles scored: Lilianna Inman (10), Hannah Gilbert (7), Cordelia Guerin and Brayleigh Burgh (6 each), Madyson Lynde (5), Haleigh Benoit (4), Laken Woodard and Samantha Duncan (3 each), Abigail Dobias (2), and Sarah Beckwith (1).

But in the championship game Friday night, the Eagles were defeated by the Mount Greylock Mounties. Tech couldn't find the hoop in the first quarter, and went into the second down 12-3. It didn't get any easier. Grey doubled the Eagles up 20-10 in the second period to increase the lead to 32-13

at the half, then outshot them 22-16 to coast to a 54-29 victory.

Nine players scored for Tech in this game: Burgh (12), Gilbert (5), and Lindsey Taylor (3); Beckwith, Lynde, and Inman (2 each); and Guerin, Benoit, and Ariel Peters (1 each).

On Tuesday the Lady Birds got back to their winning ways, defeating the Ludlow Lions 46-27 down in Ludlow. The Eagles rode a 15-5 first quarter lead to a 19-point victory. This time Gilbert (12), Inman (10), Benoit (8), Duncan (7), Peters (4), Woodard (3), and Burgh (2) scored for Tech.

Swimming

TFHS 63 – Monson 27

TFHS 53 – Monson 39

Last Friday, both Turners Falls swim teams swept the Monson Mustangs. Because there were 37 students from four schools on the team, there was very little room at poolside.

In the boys' meet William Tyler, Tyler Galenski, Liam Bliss, and Malcolm Tyler won the 200-yard medley relay and 400-yard freestyle relay, while Connor Glennon, Nethanel Martin, Rowan Deery, and Ryker Bray won the 200-yard

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freestyle relay.

In individual events, Galenski finished first in the 200-yard freestyle and the 100-yard breaststroke, Bliss won the 200-yard individual medley and 50-yard freestyle, while Glennon (100-yard butterfly), Mario Pareja (100-yard freestyle), Malcolm Tyler (500-yard freestyle), and William Tyler (100-yard backstroke) also won events.

In the girls' lanes, Avery Heathwaite, Jess Schimmel, Lillian Walker-Hanning, and Sylvie DiBartolomeo tapped the wall first in the 200-yard freestyle relay, DiBartolomeo won the 200-yard freestyle, Walker-Hanning won the 100-yard breaststroke, and Rosie Fortin finished first in the 100-yard butterfly.

On Monday the teams traveled to Chicopee to take on the Pacers, and again they went 2-and-0.

In the boys' contest, the Turners swimmers amassed an incredible 125 points while holding Chicopee to just 7.

First-place finishers included Pareja (200-yard and 50-yard freestyle), Bliss (200-yard individual medley and 100-yard butterfly), Martin (100-yard freestyle), Malcolm Tyler (500-yard freestyle and 100-yard breaststroke), and William Tyler (100-yard backstroke). Glennon, Martin, Deery, and Bray again took the 200-yard freestyle relay, and the Tylers, Galenski, and Bliss won the 400-yard freestyle relay.

In the girls' relays, Heathwaite, Walker-Hanning, DiBartolomeo, and Alice Fortin won the 200-yard medley while Rosie Fortin, Araceli McCoy, Maddie Phillips, and Alice Fortin won the 400-yard freestyle.

Individual winners were Rosie Fortin (100-yard freestyle and backstroke), DiBartolomeo (200-yard freestyle), Alice Fortin (500-yard freestyle), Walker-Hanning (100-yard breaststroke), and Sigrid Calhoun, in diving.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Shakespeare Workshops

TURNERS FALLS – The Montague Shakespeare Festival announces *The Digital Bard: Live Shakespeare Workshops Online*, a nine-part Zoom workshop series that runs from January 3 to February 28. With sessions led by acclaimed actors, directors, and educators from Shakespeare's Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company, the series provides unparalleled access to expert guidance on performing, directing, and understanding the Bard's works.

Whether you're a seasoned theater professional, an aspiring actor, or simply a lover of Shakespeare, these workshops offer something for everyone: practical skills, actionable insights, and a unique look into how actors and directors from the Globe and the RSC approach Shakespeare – from directing to soliloquy to individual creative interpretations.

The series kicks off on Friday, January 3 from 1 to 2 p.m. with "Recasting the Script: Shifting Away from Traditional Gender Imbalance," led by Elle While, artistic director of Pentabus Theatre and associate artist of Shakespeare's Globe.

Each online workshop costs \$25. Reserve your spot at www.montagueshakespearefestival.com.

The Montague Shakespeare Festival, which will be held from March 26 to April 6 at the Shea Theater in Turners Falls, celebrates Shakespeare's works through performances, workshops, and events. This year's highlight is *Macbeth*, directed by Nia Lynn of the Royal Shakespeare Company.



DAVID HOITT PHOTO

Franklin County Tech Eagles senior captain Cordelia Guerin (center) takes a good look during the Eagle Holiday Classic semifinal game on December 12 at Franklin Tech. Eagles bested the McCann Tech Hornets in the first round, 47 to 33.

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Above: This very long freight train passed Wendell Depot Road near West Orange Road in Wendell last Thursday.

BEHIND THE MISTLETOE

By CLAIRE HOPLEY

LEVERETT – By this time of year you’ll have heard someone crooning about a kid secretly watching Mommy kissing Santa Claus underneath the mistletoe. The child thinks it would have been “a laugh” had Daddy seen this, then plans to tell him about it. You realize that he or she believes in Santa Claus, so doesn’t get that the Santa kissing Mommy is actually Daddy in costume. A joke – but the plan to snitch on Mommy is a bit unsettling.

This duality is typical of mistletoe. On the one hand, kissing under it is fun, and mistletoe is certainly a lovely motif on Christmas wrapping paper and cards. On the other hand, mistletoe is a poisonous parasite that makes its home on tree branches and takes nutrients from them. Since it isn’t rooted in the ground, long ago its appearance suggested that it was magical.

And magic can always be both good and bad.

For the Druids of early Britain, mistletoe was all good. Julius Caesar described them in the first century BCE, and the Roman historian Pliny wrote that they “hold nothing more sacred than the mistletoe and the tree on which it is growing.”



Mistletoe growing on a tree, with a holly bush seen below.

Believing that mistletoe would make any animal fertile, they celebrated it in a ritual in which a priest cut the mistletoe with a golden sickle and used it in the ceremony of sacrificing two white bulls.

Mistletoe also had heroic roles. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Aeneas uses a

golden bough of mistletoe to visit the land of the dead and speak to his father. In the Norse *Hrómundr Saga* the hero takes Mistilteinn, a fabulous sword of mistletoe wood, from the grave of its owner who had killed 420 men with it. In *Hrómundr’s* see **MISTLETOE** page B8

BOOKS The Aesthetics of Resistance? One Primary Source

By GEORGE SHAPIRO

LAKE PLEASANT – *The Thorn and the Carnation* is a novel written by Yahya Sinwar in 2004 while he was serving a life sentence in an Israeli prison for the killing of police informants in the Gaza Strip. Born in Gaza as a refugee of the events of 1948, Sinwar is better known as the architect of the October 7 military assault on Israel by soldiers of Hamas, the radical Islamic Palestinian movement and *de facto* government of Gaza.

Sinwar was killed in October of this year by Israeli soldiers while traveling in the ruins of Khan Younis, where he was born – and where the story begins.

As reported by the author, this novel is composed of real events, as experienced directly by Sinwar or related to him by those who experienced them. It aims to tell the history of Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation between the “Six-Day War” of 1967 through the first “Intifada” in 1987-93.

Some commentators compare this work to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which can be purchased on Amazon, whereas Sinwar’s book must either be purchased at a high price for “self-publisher” *lulu.com* or obtained for free from one of the many places where you may surreptitiously download books. With that in

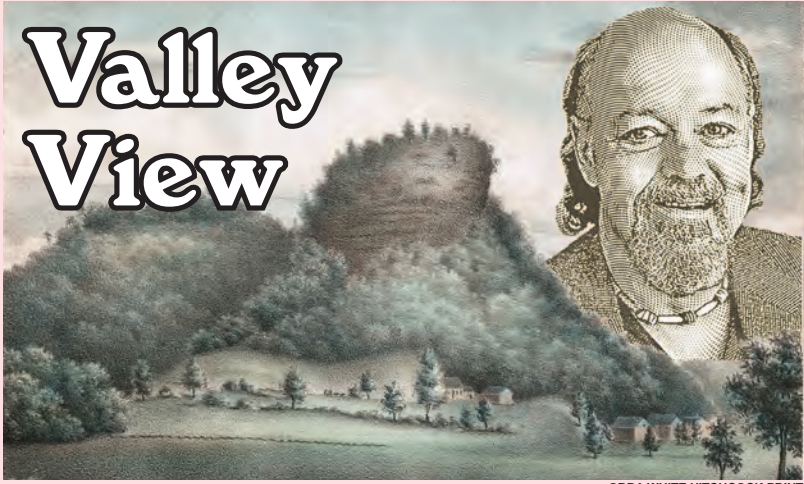
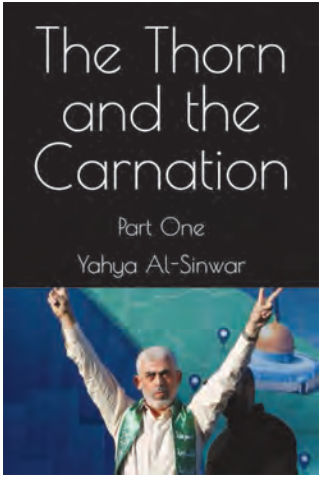
mind, someone will surely react: Why read this at all?

Sinwar’s mode is neither polemic nor diatribe but literature, and his method is analytical rather than emotional or poetic. How do wars end? One answer might be that you end a war by convincing your opponent to give up: to inflict a state of complete hopelessness. The resistance to this hopelessness after the retreat of the Arab armies in 1967 – the continuation, in other words, of that war – is the subject of his novel.

Sinwar is now a figure of history, but he wrote his history as a memoir of the aspirations and acts of ordinary people rather than of great men. While concerned with historical events, the focus of the novel is on how individuals find themselves committing acts of resistance in the face of hopelessness and the consequences they experience.

The story begins with an extended family living under a leaky roof in a house with no windows or doors in the Khan Younis refugee camp. The narrator, the youngest male child of this family, watches his father build a bomb shelter in anticipation of a war the child cannot comprehend. The men of the family are then lost to this war, the Six-Day War, leaving the narrator’s mother as the head of household, and an infirm grandfather.

see **BOOKS** page B4



A Reevaluated View

By GARY SANDERSON

GREENFIELD – OK, at long last, time to revisit and reassess, as I promised many weeks ago, the uncertain topic of New England’s prehistoric and early-historic Atlantic salmon runs.

This subject was a staple of my weekly *Greenfield Recorder* outdoor column “On the Trail” in the 1980s and ’90s, when an aggressive, ultimately unsuccessful Connecticut River Atlantic salmon-restoration program was trying to justify itself. By the dawning of our new millennium the tide had turned against the altruistic effort’s feasibility.

Although I continued to studiously track, compare, and contrast the annual spring spawning runs of shad, salmon, blueback herring, and sometimes lamprey eels up our Connecticut River basin, it was by then clear that the salmon program was fast-tracking to its demise. So, I backed off and let others run with the baton.

Finally, the feds pulled the plug on salmon restoration in 2013, by which time the paltry number of annual returns could no longer justify the expense.

Readers may recall the impetus for my most recent foray into regional salmon runs after years of back-burner neglect. Reading a 50-year-old book about New Hampshire’s frontier settlement, I noted a reference to the 18th-century diary of a Bedford, New Hampshire man named Matthew Patten, who counted among his many annual chores fishing the spring Merrimack River anadromous fish runs, including salmon.

Patten also occasionally fished for non-migratory native fish such as pickerel, perch, and hornpout, but not as aggressively, while capitalizing on occasional summer salmon found secreted in small, cold-water-tributary lairs awaiting fall spawning.

I bought a copy of the Patten diary, discovered it contained no index, and spent three days compiling a hand-written version for future reference, recording mostly

fishing data but also miscellaneous items of personal interest – like, for instance, a heavy June 30 frost today unheard of.

I soon introduced Patten’s 1754-88 diary to my scholarly friend Peter Thomas, a retired archaeologist and historian. Immediately intrigued, he one-upped me by finding an online copy and laboring to produce a useful, 75-page, annotated digital index, along with two Excel spreadsheets tracking Patten’s many fishing activities. He and fellow retired archaeologist Stuart Fiedel, both PhDs with many years of field experience, found the “new” information relevant to their current, ongoing examination of historic and prehistoric New England anadromous fish migration, particularly in the Connecticut Valley.

Though I haven’t yet carefully dissected the spreadsheets, I’m sure they’ll become useful at some point.

Thomas and I have discussed anadromous fish runs and ancient fishing practices for the approximate 10 years I’ve known him. He led an archaeological dig at Riverside/Gill in the 1980s that revealed much evidence of Native American fishing long before European colonists reached our shores. Likewise, his Hinsdale, New Hampshire dig at the Sokoki “Fort Hill,” overlooking the confluence of the Ashuelot and Connecticut rivers, revealed some fishing culture. Plus, our recent discussions have focused on the dynamics of ancient weirs still discernable in some Connecticut Valley rivers.

My own recent research hit a brief snag with too many irons in the fire, so to speak. The most impactful wrinkle was an unexpected communication glitch between me and US Fish and Wildlife Services Connecticut River Coordinator Ken Sprankle. After years of easy exchanges, he was suddenly unable to respond to my queries when his government server blocked responses to my private email address linked to an old business website.

When we finally connected by see **VALLEY VIEW** page B3

Pet of the Week



‘BLIZZARD’

Meet Blizzard, a two-year-old malamute with a heart as big as his voice! This sweet and playful boy is friendly with everyone and already knows *sit* and *paw*. Blizzard lived with children ages seven and up, making him a great addition to an active family. He’s used to spending plenty of time outdoors, and would thrive in a home with access to a yard or outdoor space. Daily exercise and mental stimulation help keep him happy and content.

Blizzard’s a quick learner, a good listener, and always ready for some fun. Like most malamutes, Blizzard loves to sing! His soulful howls are

part of his charm, but they did lead to his previous owner surrendering him after neighbors complained. He’s a bit shy when meeting new dogs but warms up fast and is eager to play. He appears house trained.

If you’re looking for a fun-loving, loyal companion who will keep you smiling, and serenaded, Blizzard is ready to meet you. Blizzard’s adoption fee is \$550.

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.

Senior Center Activities DECEMBER 23 TO JANUARY 3

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 12/23
9 a.m. Good For U
10 a.m. Seated Fitness
12 p.m. Pitch Group
1 p.m. Yoga

Tuesday 12/24
9 a.m. Stretch & Balance
10 a.m. Line Dancing
11 a.m. Social Stringer

Wednesday 12/25
Closed

Thursday 12/26
Closed

Friday 12/27
Closed

Thursday 12/26
1 p.m. Pitch

Friday 12/27
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
12 p.m. Pizza Party

Monday 12/30
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

Tuesday 12/31
9 a.m. Chair Yoga

Wednesday 1/1
Closed

Thursday 1/2
10:30 a.m. Brown Bag Lunch
1 p.m. Pitch

Friday 1/3
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

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 12/23
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

Tuesday 12/24
9 a.m. Chair Yoga
3 p.m. Tai Chi

Wednesday 12/25
Closed

LEVERETT
Chair Yoga classes are held 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. Next clinic is January 8, 2025. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments.

For Senior Health Rides, contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

Montague Community Television News Blasts From the Pasts!

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

TURNERS FALLS – Who remembers the locally-produced films *Love’s Young Dream* and *Greenfield’s Winter Carnival*, two silent films from the years 1923 and 1924? If you don’t, you might want to check out one of MCTV’s recently-updated videos, produced by the Historical Society of Greenfield, titled “Greenfield’s Forgotten Silent Movie 1924.”

Greenfield’s Winter Carnival features bull-drawn sleigh rides, barrel racing, figure skating, snow carving, fireworks, ice castles, and more – all activities and footage from the first Greenfield Winter Carnival, a century ago! And *Love’s Young Dream*, a quite funny comedy/drama, unlocked a Greenfield Historical Society investigation into the local young actors and film production company from the ’20s.

I highly recommend a watch.

And if you’re looking for more local content, check out the highly-attended GMRS school committee meeting from December 17 (*see article, Page A1*), the Montague selectboard’s latest Zoom recording, the last Montague finance committee meeting, or the Montague Community Band’s Christmas Concert.

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 infomontaguetv@gmail.com, follow us on Facebook, or find us on Instagram [@montaguecommunitytv](https://www.instagram.com/montaguecommunitytv). Find videos and more on our website, montaguetv.org.



By CASEY WAIT

TURNERS FALLS – Hello dear readers,

December 31 will mark the five-year anniversary of the first reported case to the World Health Organization of pneumonia caused by a then-unknown pathogen. This was the beginning of the still-ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Since then, according to data published by the United Nations, there have been 7,073,453 confirmed COVID-19 deaths worldwide. Because deaths due to complications from Long COVID are not generally listed as COVID deaths, the numbers could be even higher; some estimates suggest that the actual death toll could be between 19.1 and 36 million.

Half a decade with this pathogen and not only do we not have a cure for its over 200 post-viral symptoms and conditions, we have very limited treatment options as well. And while we’re seeing fewer deaths from acute infections, COVID-19 remains a leading cause of death in America, and contributes to the mortality rates of others, such as heart disease and cancer.

The government response to the pandemic has now been almost entirely dismantled, leaving Americans to fend for themselves with little reliable guidance on how to prevent illness – and little more than two free boxes of rapid antigen tests per household every few months.

local wastewater data. Without community action, we could be headed toward the kind of monumental surge we saw last winter.

The good news is it doesn’t have to be this way! In the past five years we have developed many simple and effective ways to prevent transmission. At a workshop I co-facilitated with Charlotte Murtishaw at the Finders Collective last week, we discussed what epidemiologists call the “Swiss cheese method” of COVID mitigation. Using this method means layering all the various prevention techniques at our disposal so that if any one of them fails to block viral spread, you’ve got backup to “patch” the hole.

The cheapest and most effective way to prevent COVID transmission is, sadly, the method that gets the most ridicule: wearing a well-fitting N95 or KN95 mask in public. We are lucky to have multiple places in Franklin and Hampshire counties to get masks for free: the Finders Collective in Turners Falls, Comics N’More in Easthampton, and Bookends in Florence. Please take advantage of these amazing community resources, and contribute to their supply budget if you are able.

If you find wearing a mask uncomfortable, it’s very possible you haven’t tried all the available mask styles out there. This is one of the benefits of community mask distribution projects, sometimes called “mask blocs”: they tend to have multiple styles of mask you can try out without committing to buying a whole box of masks you end up not liking.

In addition to masking, it’s important to clean the air. This means ensuring both good air circulation and air filtration when possible. If you’re hosting an event consider cracking windows, turning on fans, borrowing some air purifiers from Bookends’ lending program, and/or building a Corsi-Rosenthal box. Incorporate as many of these methods as you can – the more the better!

Testing on a regular basis, and especially before gatherings or events, is another slice of our

“Swiss cheese” arsenal. Rapid tests are the most widely available form of COVID test, but are dismally inaccurate. They have a 60% accuracy rate when you are symptomatic, but only 12% accuracy when asymptomatic – and remember, the majority of COVID transmissions are asymptomatic, and some studies suggest that mild and asymptomatic cases may be *more* likely to lead to Long COVID.

Testing multiple times can help increase accuracy. If you are asymptomatic, two tests over 48 hours is reasonably reliable. However, if you’re symptomatic, keep testing for a week, every 48 hours or so, mask around others, and isolate if you’re able to. Many of the places listed above also carry free rapid tests, so stock up!

Vaccines play an important role in controlling the damage COVID can do. While they do not prevent transmission or Long COVID, they do greatly decrease the severity of infections, and have greatly reduced the likelihood of dying of COVID. Like the flu shot, you need to get an updated COVID vaccine every time a new one comes out. This is because COVID mutates rapidly, especially in our era of uncontrolled spread, and we need new vaccines to effectively target the variants currently spreading.

We covered a lot more at the workshop, including what to do if you do test positive. If you want to brush up on your COVID knowledge, follow me on Instagram [@sickos_podcast](https://www.instagram.com/sickos_podcast) to be notified when a recording of the presentation becomes available online. I also regularly post the latest in COVID and Long COVID research, and love referring people to reliable sources of information regarding public health and health justice.

Take care, dear readers, of yourselves and others. May 2025 see a groundswell of community action to finally end this pandemic, despite the inaction of our so-called leaders. And may Palestine be free!

With love and rage,
Your Sick Friend

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VALLEY VIEW from page B1
phone and I mentioned the Patten diary, it immediately rang a bell. On the spot, Sprankle pulled from his office bookshelf a 21st-century source previously unknown to me. A glance at the index, footnotes, and bibliography revealed that, as he suspected, Patten was an important source.

The book, *Fishing in New Hampshire: A History*, was published in 2003 and authored by Granite State historian and novelist Jack Noon. The introduction alone, by celebrated American author John McPhee, immediately validated the book in my mind. Then, when I read promotional snippets of praise by reviewers on the opening pages, one of them was none other than my old North Country pal, the late John Harrigan, former editor, publisher, and outdoor columnist at Lancaster, New Hampshire’s *Coos County Democrat* newspaper.

Noon’s paperback has achieved “rare book” status in the online marketplace, inflating its cost and confirming its value as a source. Then again, the steep cost could merely reflect a tiny print run. I hunted down a reasonably-priced copy, bought it, waited for it in the mail, and couldn’t put it down once I opened it.

Noon introduces a refreshing new spin on ancient New England salmon presence – one in sharp contrast to anthropologist Catherine Carroll Carlson’s thesis that, yes, they existed, but in insignificant numbers compared to other anadromous fish. This opinion, which shook the salmon-restoration world, was based solely on the curious rarity of salmon in the archaeological record.

Of course, that begs the question as to whether the absence of salmon evidence in New England’s archaeological record proves they were irrelevant. Noon doesn’t think so, and frankly, I have evolved to agree. My opinion has changed over some 40 years, especially since striking up friendships with a handful of professional archaeologists in recent years.

Initially, because Carlson’s scientific findings supported the position I was piecemealing out weekly in my *Recorder* column – based on second- and third-hand reports from published town histories – I was quick to take her bait hook, line, and sinker. My support of her thesis was only buoyed as she sharpened her attack in various scholarly journals between 1988 and 1996.

Convinced by the start of this new millennium that the Connecticut River salmon-restoration failure was a settled issue, word of Noon’s 2003 book somehow escaped me. It apparently received no attention from the New England Outdoor

Writers’ Association. At least nothing I recall. Maybe the snub had to do with Noon’s non-member status. Had the organization’s newsletter mentioned Noon’s book, I wouldn’t have missed it.

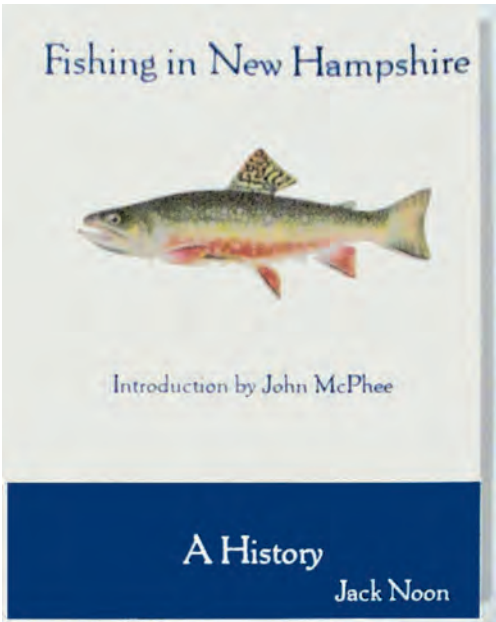
Noon does cite Carlson in his bibliography, listing only her Fall/Winter 1996 *Federal Archeology* piece, “The Insignificance of Atlantic Salmon.” By then she had published her 1992 doctoral dissertation *The Atlantic Salmon in New England History and Prehistory: Social and Environmental Implications*, and was dancing in the end zone with a thesis damaging to the struggling salmon-restoration effort.

Otherwise, Noon pays Carlson no heed, totally ignoring her hypothesis in favor of his own reasoned approach: that there were lucrative annual salmon runs on many New England rivers up and down the coast, ranging as far south as the Connecticut, Housatonic, and Hudson rivers.

The problem, according to Noon, was that unlike Native Americans whose cooperative part-of-the-whole lifeways respected conservation and sustainability, Europeans exploited and soon destroyed the resource with wasteful commercial harvests in nets and seines aimed at maximizing profits.

As these interlopers overharvested forests, created insurmountable mill dams, polluted salmon streams with gill-clogging sawdust, and fished with apparatuses that invited waste and overharvest, they also made no effort to record and quantify for posterity the 17th-century anadromous-fish runs that greeted them.

As to why only a few of the 75 Northeastern fishing sites listed in Carlson’s study produced salmon



evidence, well, that may forever remain a mystery. Perhaps it had something to do with the reverence Indians held for salmon, which were less plentiful and more valued than their anadromous companions. Maybe they disposed of salmon remains with ritualistic re-

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Tiny Guests; Repo Man; Car Door Checker; Laundry Sleepers; Alleyway Escalators; Bush Illuminator; Surprising Raccoon

Monday, 12/9
8:44 a.m. Officers attempting to serve two active warrants on Vladish Avenue. Unable to locate.
12:19 p.m. Caller from Greenfield Road would like on record that a female living in a tiny house on her property has still not left, even after receiving a notice to quit. Now her boyfriend has also moved a trailer home onto the property.
12:23 p.m. 911 caller from Laurel Lane is concerned about a blue pickup truck that is driving around and appears to be taking down plate numbers from vehicles. Vehicle is from Recovery Zone looking for a debtor.
2:21 p.m. A 37-year-old Gill woman was arrested and charged with missing number plate; attaching plates to a motor vehicle; operating with a suspended license; unregistered motor vehicle; uninsured motor vehicle; and receiving stolen property worth more than \$1,200.
5:04 p.m. Caller from Park Villa Drive states that her neighbor left early this morning and left her dog, which has been barking and alone all day. Caller unsure who to call, but feels bad that the dog has been there all day. Officer advised. Dog’s owner is on their way home.
8:42 p.m. Caller from Industrial Boulevard states there is a yellow box truck in the JaDuke parking lot that shouldn’t be there. Truck was waiting to make a delivery down the

street and was advised to wait in that parking lot.
Tuesday, 12/10
9:17 a.m. Caller from Fifth Street would like it on record that her car was left unlocked and somebody went through it overnight and took her checkbook. She is calling the bank to inform them. GPD called to say they recovered a stolen motor vehicle overnight that had been involved in car break-ins. They located the item that went missing from the caller’s vehicle.
1:47 p.m. Caller from Central Street would like it on record that someone went through her vehicle last night and stole a phone charger.
3:19 p.m. Caller from Turners Falls Road would like it on record that someone went through her vehicle last night and took a pair of white earbuds.
Wednesday, 12/11
7:25 a.m. 911 caller believes that her son, who lives with her, stole her car. He left in it without her permission about 30 minutes ago. Caller called back to say her son came back with the car and stated he was only down the street smoking a cigarette.
9 a.m. Officer contacted directly by a party from West Camp Road who stated that last week she observed a male party walking around the property, looking in the windows of her cabin. This was captured on security cameras, which also picked up the plate number of the vehicle that he

arrived and left in.
9:41 a.m. Representative of Turners Falls Fire District reporting fraud amounting to several thousand dollars. Report taken.
11:43 a.m. Manager of an Avenue A property reports that a male party who was trespassed from the property keeps showing up at night and pushing residents’ buzzers until someone lets him in, then he has been sleeping in the laundry room. Advised of options.
4:15 p.m. Multiple 911 calls reporting two-car accident at Routes 47 and 63. No injuries; no smoke, flames, or fluids. Tow requested for both vehicles.
8:08 p.m. Caller reports that there is a big puddle at the intersection of Montague City and Greenfield roads; could be a hazard if someone hits it driving too fast. Referred to an officer.
8:36 p.m. 911 caller reporting four or more people fighting in the Fourth Street alleyway; unsure if it’s physical at this time, but feels that it’s escalating. Issue between neighboring apartments. Mediated at this time.
Thursday, 12/12
6:49 a.m. 911 caller from Avenue A states that a female in a nearby apartment is going to do something bad to the caller. Caller states the involved female told her that the cops were on her payroll and then disconnected the phone. Referred to an officer, who discussed allegations with the caller.
1:34 p.m. Caller reporting that he was letting his friend borrow his truck and someone just backed into it on Avenue A. Both parties on scene. Report taken.
3:17 p.m. 911 caller reporting disturbance on Fifth Street. Verbal argument settled for now. Both parties advised of options.
9:54 p.m. Caller from J Street states that a guy has been inside some bushes behind Food City using some sort of red light for 30 minutes or so. He left for a little bit, but then came back to the bushes. Male party moved along without incident.
Friday, 12/13
12:50 a.m. Caller states that the lights are all off at the Third Street Laundry, but he doesn’t believe they should be. Unsure if anyone is in the building, but states the owner doesn’t want anybody in there. Parties moved along; doesn’t appear they were stealing anything, but looks like they were set up to sleep. Building secured.
1:07 a.m. Officer out with a vehicle with no plate on L Street. Requesting Shelburne Control contact Gill PD in the morning and ask them to attempt to make

contact with the registered owner and have her get the vehicle moved; otherwise, it will be towed before the next snowfall.
8:23 a.m. 911 caller reporting that a woman in a bright pink coat is walking in the middle of Turnpike Road. Officer advises he just went by and the woman was safely on the side of the road.
10:21 a.m. 911 caller from Grove Street reports that his car was vandalized at his home overnight. Transferred to Control.
12:23 p.m. Caller looking for number for animal control officer; states there is a loose dog at Unity Park. ACO number given.
10:46 p.m. Caller from Park Street reporting there is a silver station wagon parked in front of the fire hydrant for the last two hours. All officers tied up on an arrest call; will check the area when available.
Saturday, 12/14
6:44 a.m. 911 caller states there is a large patch of ice on Greenfield Road near the treatment plant; caller states it’s on a corner and could cause a problem. DPW foreman notified; he is heading over to check it out.
6:01 p.m. 911 caller states that while he was out walking his dog today, he was followed by a person who has previously attacked him and his grandmother. Looking to speak with officer. Advised of options.
6:30 p.m. Caller states it looks like one of the dam gates is open and it’s misting onto the roadway on the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge and freezing, causing a traffic hazard. MassDOT advised. Gill officer drove over the bridge both directions; did not observe a hazard at this time.
7:07 p.m. Caller from Second Street states a raccoon crashed through the bathroom ceiling; tenant was able to shut the door and has the raccoon trapped in the bathroom. Unknown damage to building. Officer advised. Attempting to reach ACO. Animal vacated on its own.
11:09 p.m. Caller from K Street reports that her landlord changed her locks and she cannot get back into her apartment. Officer advises none of the locks were changed; the caller’s locks were sticking, but are working fine now.
Sunday, 12/15
6:46 a.m. Multiple calls reporting railroad lights flashing near Prondecki’s in Erving. Control advised; they were already aware of the issue.
11:54 a.m. Passerby reports a coyote struck on Millers Falls Road. Officer reports animal has been dispatched. A motorist took the animal.

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BOOKS from page B1

The aspirations of the new female head of household are that her sons obtain higher education, marry, and have children, in that order. Marriages are arranged, and gender roles and expectations are strict.

Israel occupies Gaza in the aftermath of the war, and so life in the camp is punctuated by military police patrols – and sporadic violent resistance, the continuation of the war by those who remain after the Arab armies retreat. When the eldest brother returns from Egypt with a coveted engineering degree, he is immediately arrested on suspicion of subversion. The family is caught between upward mobility and the inexorable logic of military occupation.

We witness this progression as resistance brings police presence, police repression breeds resistance, and the occupation grows an institutional structure. In the beginning the borders of Gaza, originally administered by Egypt, are porous, and guns are hard to acquire. Now Israelis shop there for bargains, while men from Gaza find low-wage employment in Israel. Violence at first ebbs, but reignites with the slightest spark. At the same time Gaza begins to grow, under occupation, as wages from work in Israel allow doors and windows to be purchased and houses expanded to accommodate growing families.

What comes into view is not a persistent Palestinian nation separate and equal to Israeli oppression, but the birth of conjoined twins, strangling each other while sharing the same economic heart.

The primary forum for politics in Gaza is the family meal, as brothers and fathers debate each other, sometimes violently. Sinwar describes roughly four camps: Arab “nationalists” who follow Nasser in Egypt, the group that becomes Fatah and the PLO; communists who desire the intervention of the Soviet Union; non-aligned revolutionary Marxists; and students of Islam, emerging from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, a religious movement originally funded by Saudi Arabia.

In 1968 all of these camps advocate for violent resistance to Israeli occupation, except for the Islamic radicals. In his portrayal of this early reticence, Sinwar illustrates that rather than advocating a particular strategy or leadership, this faction instead embraced building a popular resistance movement. He then shows – but doesn’t tell – that it was the status of al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem that transformed the Palestinian cause into a holy war. The Islamic radicals and the PLO switched their quietist and revolutionary roles in the lead-up to 1993’s Oslo Accords.

The explosion of the first Intifada in 1987, 20 years after the Six-Day War, culminates the strategy of mass resistance – and coincides with the official birth of Hamas as a vanguard party, one with a different eschatology than the Palestinian Left had expected.

The American writer Ta-Nehisi Coates recently generated controversy with the publication of his travel memoir *The Message*. The last section of the book details his experiences on a 10-day tour of the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the main controversy arose from his straightforward laying out of a familiar argument that Israel is an

“apartheid” state – and his assertion that the conflict between Jews and Palestinians was, in the end, not complicated. He tied this in with his previous written advocacy for reparations, based on the property stolen throughout the history of black America.

Coates’s success as a writer and editor at *The Atlantic* magazine has been through his “New Journalism,” testifying on the basis of his identity and experiences growing up in the 1980s and ’90s as the child of black revolutionaries – Black Panthers – in the city of Baltimore. So, the controversy around his book stems not as much from its analysis as from his ability to give testimony that he, as a black American, finds the position of the Palestinians “familiar.”



In *The Message* Coates draws upon his experience growing up in the Baltimore City neighborhood of Park Heights. This reviewer also grew up in the city during the same period, in the similar neighborhood of Reservoir Hill, just on the other side of Druid Hill Park.

Sinwar’s coming-of-age narrative feels broadly familiar, to echo Coates’s comparison, and it fits into broader narrative tropes of the black American experience: The relentless police patrols. The constant drip of gun violence. The female heads of households in a patriarchal culture. The men who accept that they will eventually find themselves in prison. The family celebrations for men coming out of prison that celebrate not prison itself, but their having endured prison as men. The police sponsorship of organized crime. The pressure to “snitch,” and the hatred of and retribution against those who do.

Critics have labeled Coates’s comparison between Palestinians and black Americans as superficial, the casual relation of universal themes based on a dilettante’s travel experience. At the same time, comparisons between American segregation and South African apartheid are usually given the benefit of doubt arising from the way black Africans fit into the American racial calculus.

Meanwhile, critics of Israel have noted the longstanding practice of training American law enforcement in that country, and events antecedent to October 7, 2023 have elevated questions about the special relationship between Israel and the United States. It bears asking whether there *could* be a more fundamental basis for comparing the experiences of black Americans and Palestinian Arabs.

Some of the difficulty in this particular comparison may come from the lack of weight behind the con-

cept of “refugee” in American discourse. Sinwar describes the family at the center of his novel as being refugees from the town of “al-Faluja,” about 10 miles north of Gaza’s 1948 border. Israel is roughly the same size as New Jersey, so in those terms, going from al-Faluja to Gaza would be equivalent to moving from Princeton to Trenton. You can become a refugee without going very far from home.

Black Americans moved from South to North starting early in the 20th century to escape the violence and oppression of the failures of “Reconstruction” after the Civil War. This flight from violence conforms to the standard boundaries of a refugee story, except for the failure to cross a national border. Settling in Northern cities, they confirmed the historic enmity they bear – and it is this enmity which cemented their ultimate dispossession in the North.

About a year after the Six-Day War, in April 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. Like other Northern cities, what happened in Baltimore after King’s assassination is described as a “riot” or “rebellion,” depending upon your perspective. A peaceful protest marking King’s assassination was met with police violence, and became a week of violent resistance.

How you view this resistance is less important than how it was viewed by the American government: up to 11,000 US Army and Maryland National Guard soldiers were called in by Governor Spiro Agnew and President Johnson to occupy Baltimore, and remained there for a year after that week of violence. Even today, the police department of Baltimore City is responsible to the state, rather than city, government.

As a consequence, what had been a heterogeneous city of over a million in the early 1960s lost half of its population by 1980 – and became majority-black. If black residents were already refugees in Baltimore, the city was transformed into a refugee camp by the flight of the non-black population.

To grow up in a camp is to be outside society as a whole but subject to every social force, existing within a veil of complete indifference. This feeling persists even if, by identity or happenstance, you have the ability to leave.

Taking into account the role of “immigration” in the most recent American presidential election and looking at looming changes in the political order in Europe, it’s not hard to put the refugee, as a class, at the fulcrum of this moment’s politics. But then, the dispossession of and enmity towards black Americans has been at the center of American politics for the last 75 years.

The alignment of the Palestinian and black American stories would be a familiar idea to Coates’s Black Panther parents. Much of the leadership of the Black Panther Party fled the violent crackdown in the US in the 1970s to places like Algeria, where a party line was established as to the revolutionary status of Palestinian resistance. The other thing happening in 1968 was the intensification of the US counter-insurgency intervention in Vietnam. The Panthers saw Baltimore, Gaza, and Vietnam as manifestations of the same agenda by the United States to crush resistance to white power.

If, for the sake of argument, we

MONTAGUE CRYPTOJAM ANSWERS!!! (MARCH THROUGH NOVEMBER)

3/7/24: All artists are egotistical maniacs with inferiority complexes. – Lionel Richie
3/14/24: Many a trip continues long after movement in time and space have ceased. – John Steinbeck
3/21/24: They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself. – Andy Warhol
3/28/24: Capitalists sidetrack the women into clubs and make ladies of them. – Mary Harris “Mother” Jones
4/4/24: Hanlon’s Razor: Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity. – Kurt Vonnegut
4/11/24: You may not be able to change the world, but at least you can embarrass the guilty. – Jessica Mitford
4/18/24: A doctor can bury his mistakes but an architect can only advise his clients to plant vines. – Frank Lloyd Wright
4/25/24: Anyone who isn’t confused really doesn’t understand the situation. – Edward R. Murrow
5/2/24: You can’t be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline. – Frank Zappa
5/9/24: Only free men can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts. – Nelson Mandela
5/16/24: I postpone death by living, by suffering, by error, by risking, by giving, by losing. – Anais Nin
5/23/24: Arbitrary power is, like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken. – Abigail Adams
5/30/24: Birds born in cages think that flying is a disease – Alejandro Jodorowsky
6/6/24: What’s breaking into a bank compared with founding a bank? – Bertolt Brecht
6/13/24: Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. – T.S. Eliot
6/20/24: Only free men can negotiate: prisoners cannot enter into contracts. – Nelson Mandela (Ooops)
6/27/24: Music is the best means than he seeks. – John Muir
7/1/24: To punish the oppressors of humanity is cruelty. – W.H. Auden
7/11/24: Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city. – George Burns
9/12/24: Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. – Rosa Luxemburg
9/19/24: Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree. – Joyce Kilmer
9/26/24: Resentment and anger are bad for your blood pressure and your digestion. – Desmond Tutu
10/3/24: From even the greatest of horrors, irony is seldom absent. – H.P. Lovecraft
10/17/24: The fight is never about grapes or lettuce. It is always about people. – Cesar Chavez
10/24/24: Human beings are the only creatures who are able to behave irrationally in the name of reason. – Ashley Montagu
10/31/24: People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war, or before an election. – Otto von Bismarck
11/7/24: History never really says goodbye. History says, “see you later.” – Eduardo Galeano
11/14/24: Whatever must happen immediately. – Henry Kissinger
11/21/24: In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks. – John Muir

accept this worldview, what are we to make of President Nixon’s “War on Drugs?” Even as the FBI preferred the Panthers to SNCC, Nixon chose to reframe resistance to white power in the United States in terms of crime – and drug crime in particular, effectively choosing the drug dealer as the icon of resistance. And when, in 2013, a criminal organization was found to have subverted the Baltimore City jail from the inside, that organization called itself the “Black Guerilla Family.”

The suggestion that the Americans have learned how to police restive populations from the Israelis is reductive. A broader perspective would indicate that it reflects the incorporation of Israel *into* a broader American military order that has persisted since Vietnam, and has only grown in scope and capability.

The second volume of *The Thorn and the Carnation* transitions from family drama to a matter-of-fact action storyline, a recitation of attacks against “the Jews.” These scenes of violence call to mind “true crime” novels in their blunt descriptive language and dispassion.

Sinwar is forthright in identifying his enemy, but attributes to “the Jews” no special evil qualities other than cunning and military violence.

Palestinian violence progresses from knives to ancient rifles, from rifles to machine guns, and finally to explosions.

Sinwar sees Israeli military police as standing behind Palestinian organized crime, which he feels must be resisted. Without this resistance it’s easy to imagine a version of Gaza that resembled Baltimore even more closely.

The final scene of the novel is, perhaps, the only one in which Sinwar descends to maudlin emotion. A young man leaves his phone on while committing a “suicide” bombing against civilians, so that his mother may listen to his last moments.

In light of current events, this scene reads broadly like a foreshadowing of the current immolation of Gaza. More than any electoral shifts in the West it has been the actions of the Palestinian people, galvanized by organizations like Hamas, that have set in motion the history now unfolding. If anything, the message of Sinwar’s novel seems to be that movements aren’t made by great leaders, but by the willingness of ordinary people to take action.

George Shapiro is an occasional contributor to the Montague Reporter. He lives in Lake Pleasant.



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The Children's Page

YONDERNOD ILLUSTRATION

IN WINTER, FAIRIES ARE JUST AS BUSY AS THEY ARE IN SUMMER! THEY LOVE TO DANCE IN RINGS AROUND THE FIRE, DECORATE THEIR FAIRY HOUSES WITH EVERGREEN, AND PLAY IN THE SNOW. EVEN FREEZING RAIN IS FUN FOR FAIRIES, WHO HAVE NO FEAR OF ANY WEATHER. THIS IS BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE POWER TO WARM THEMSELVES WITH THEIR MAGIC.



AFTER A FULL MORNING PLAYING OUT IN THE COLD, FAUNA FELT CONTENT TO GAZE THROUGH THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF HER FROSTY SNOWFLAKE WINDOWS, BUT FAUNA HAD THE URGE FOR FURTHER ADVENTURES.



FLUTTERING SLOWLY ALONG THEIR PATH, FAUNA SAW A CAT, A CAT THAT, IN COMPARISON TO THEIR LITTLE BODY, WAS THE SIZE OF AN ELEPHANT. SUDDENLY, THE CAT TURNED AROUND AND SWATTED THEM OUT OF THE AIR. THEY LANDED WITH A THUMP ON THE SNOW AND BRANDISHED THEIR LITTLE THORN DAGGER FURIOUSLY.



SHE FLEW AWAY AS FAST AS SHE COULD AND STREAKED INTO FLORA'S HOUSE, SURPRISING HER AS SHE SAT, SIPPING TEA.



FLORA AND FAUNA WERE PLAYING VERY HAPPILY ON A COLD, WET, DRIZZLY DAY IN THE TOWN PLANTER WHERE THEY LIVED, WHEN THE WEATHER CHANGED INTO A PERFECT MAGICAL SNOW! THEY BEGAN TO COLLECT THE FLAKES WITH A SPECIAL METHOD KNOWN ONLY TO FAIRIES, AND FILL THEIR LITTLE WINDOWS WITH THEM.



THEY FLEW OFF OVER THE PLANTERS AND INTO A NEAR-BY NEIGHBORHOOD COVERED IN LIVELY POWDERED SUGAR SNOW. SHE SPIED FOOTPRINTS!



THE CAT GLARED, FROZEN STILL, AS SHE BLUSTERED BRAVELY. JUST AS THE CAT WAS ABOUT TO POUNCE, MR. HARBINGER SCOOPED HIM UP FROM BEHIND "THERE YOU ARE, OLD SMOKEY," HE SAID, NEVER EVEN NOTICING FAUNA.

"I THINK I'LL JUST STAY HERE AND HAVE A LITTLE TEA," SHE SAID, TRYING TO ACT NONCHALANT AS HER HEART POUNDED FURIOUSLY. FLORA LOOKED AT FAUNA. SHE KNEW VERY WELL THAT THEY HAD GOTTEN THEMSELVES INTO TROUBLE. "YES, LET'S STAY TOGETHER RIGHT HERE!"



WORDS BY BEVERLY KETCH & PICTURES BY HANNAH BROOKMAN

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FILM STUDIES

The Hallmark Channel’s Three ‘Mrs. Miracles’

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

GREENFIELD – I know of the “Mrs. Miracle” series from Debbie Macomber’s books. The title character is some kind of Christmas angel who helps people out during this time in such interesting ways. I have now seen her played by three different actors in film adaptations on the Hallmark channel.

The first time I saw this character on screen she was played by Doris Roberts, with whom I had some familiarity from the TV show *Everyone Loves Raymond* and a couple of other movies. This was the 2009 film *Mrs. Miracle*, and her official name was Mrs. Merkel, though she’s nicknamed Mrs. Miracle.

The character was a nanny for a single father, played by James Van Der Beek, and acted as a matchmaker with him and another woman played by Erin Van Karpluk. By

the end of this film, she successfully matches Van Der Beek’s character with Van Karpluk’s character.

In a sequel, 2010’s *Call Me Mrs. Miracle*, Mrs. Merkel is working at a department store, and helps the toy department be a success for the Christmas season.

This one has Jewel Staite and Eric Johnson in it. Staite plays a fashion designer who isn’t having any better luck with her job than the toy department at the store, and Johnson plays the son of the store’s owner, so his character is quite a large part of the story.

I am not sure which one of these first two movies I liked better, but by the end of the second movie, the toy department is a success, along with the fashion designer. They end up having a Christmas party because of this. Roberts acts well in both.

A *Mrs. Miracle Christmas* premiered in

2021. This time, the main character is played by Caroline Rhea. Her official name is Mrs. Merkel, and her nickname is still Mrs. Miracle.

This one also features her daughter Mercy, played by Jordyn Ashley Olson, who helps, too. She helps get a family back into living life after trying to adopt. By the end, this family is back to living life again. Throughout *A Mrs. Miracle Christmas*, there are signs that they are going to get a young girl in their home. They actually have two children to their name sometime later.

This was an all right film to see.

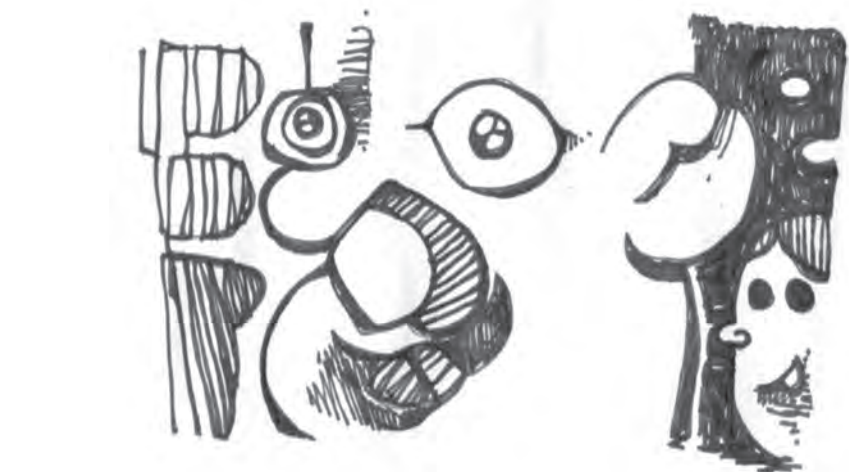
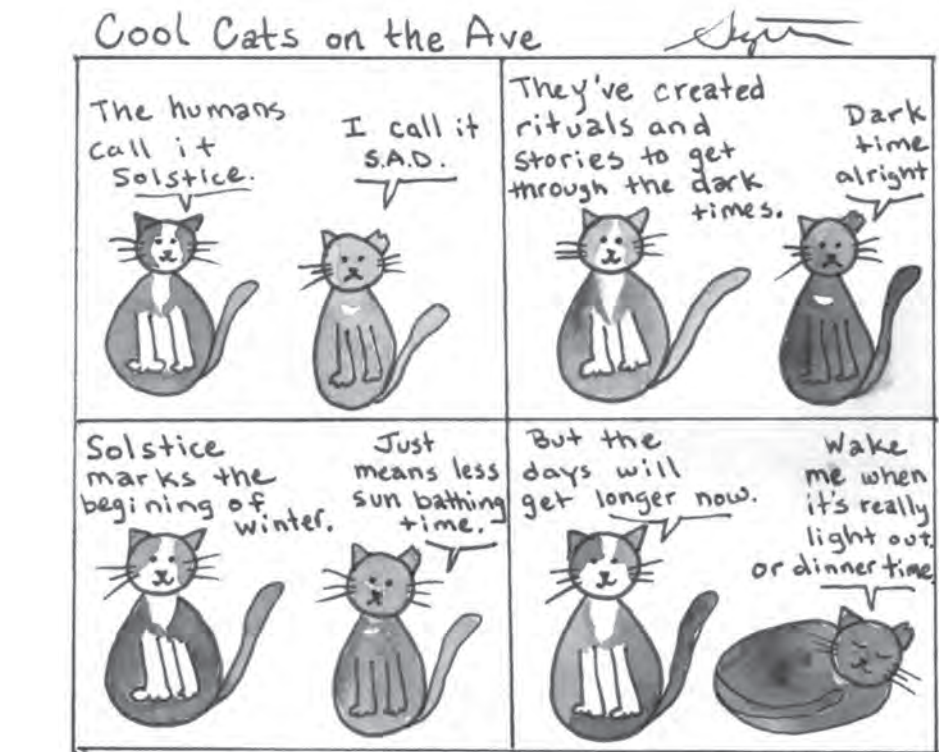
The story of *Joyful Mrs. Miracle* (2024) is about three adult siblings who return to their home at Christmas to honor their late grandmother’s wishes, trying to agree on new leadership for the family’s company. The siblings don’t get along well, and need to make a unanimous decision.



Joyful Mrs. Miracle, the latest offering in the franchise, stars Rachel Boston (third from right) as the titular character.

For the first time, the opening is a flashback to a romance that happened between one of the siblings with a teenage boy she grew up with. Rachel Boston plays Annie Merkel, an estate planner who helps the family play nicely together. That romance also gets rekindled.

I liked *Joyful Mrs. Miracle* the best. The story is a nice and fresh one to tell, and I felt Rachel Boston was a great fit to play this character.



JOEL PAXTON ILLUSTRATION

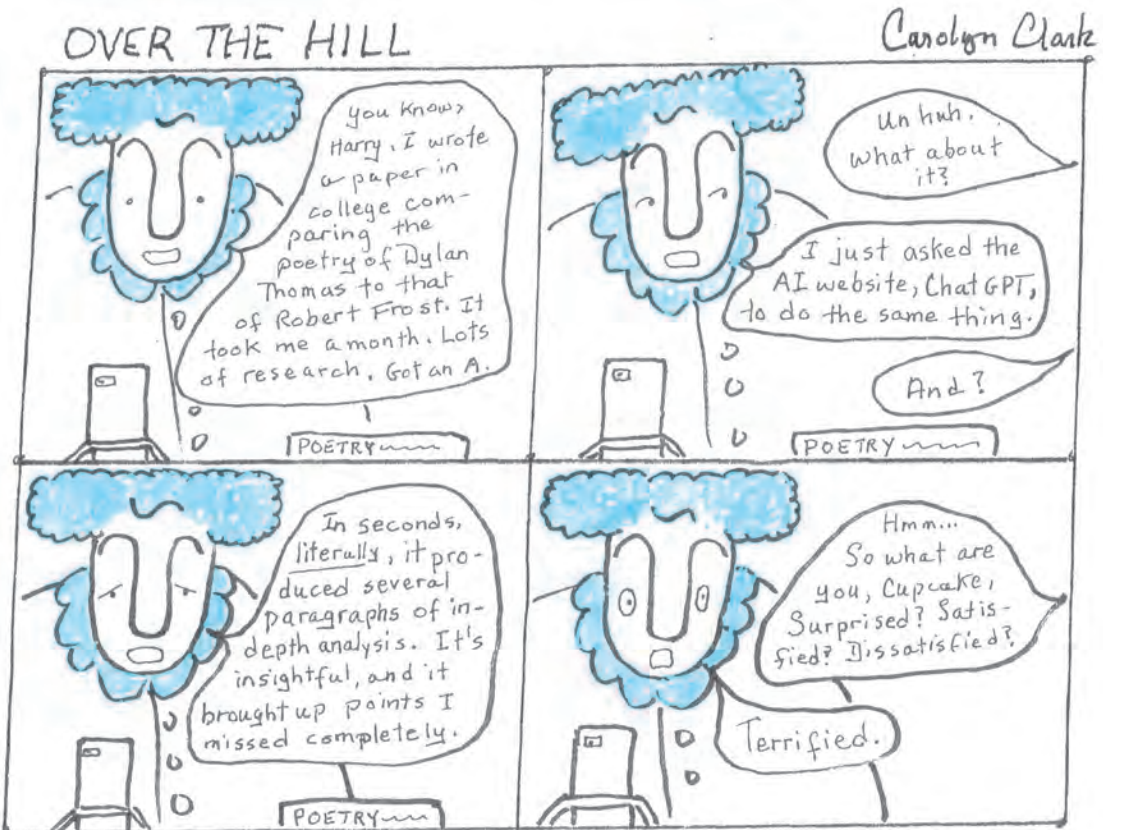
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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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, Uneath, E-Town Concrete, Jasta*, more. \$. 6:30 p.m.
Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Ugly Sweater Party, HyFy*. 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*, Allman Brothers 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: *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.
Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Lexi Weege, Zack Bartolomei Quartet*. \$. 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
Bombyx Center, Florence: *Paul Winter Consort*. \$. 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Cinemastorm* screening: *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977), dubbed in Ojibwe; Q&A with voice actor *Tomantha Sylvester*. Free. 7 p.m.

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

Academy of Music, Northampton: Screening/premiere, *Rusty Nail New Year's Eve '84 with NRBQ & 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
First Night, Northampton (22 venues): *AEIOUKes, All Feels, Ardaigh, bobbie, Cloudbelly, DANE, Expandable Brass Band, Film & Gender, Folk Implosion, Four Gong Confucius, Chris Goudreau, Tracy Grammer & Jim Henry, Hedgewitch, Henry the Juggler, Ian St. George Band, Indë, It's Mandy, Solymar, Myles Jéh, Avery Joi, Kalliope Jones, Klezamid, The Leafies You Gave Me, Zoe Lemos, Masala Jazz, Pamela Means, Laura Mustard, Jocie Nangle, Northampton Woodwind Quintet, The Raging Grannies, The Rocking Puppies, Wishbone Zoe*, more. \$. Starts at 12 p.m.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Shadow Twisters*. \$. 6 p.m.

Starry Starry Night, Orange (four venues): *The Can Collectors, Dan Kennedy, Pioneer Valley Brass, Talking Hands Theatre, Todd Goodwin*, more. \$. Starts at 6 p.m.

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*. No cover. 8 p.m.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3
Brick House, Turners Falls: *The Spatulas, Red Herring, Bent Light, Karen Schoemer, DJ Seasonal Work*. Gaza benefit \$. 7 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Next Stop Comedy*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4
Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *Moon Hollow*. No cover. 5 p.m.
Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Mosey Down*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Gaybo the Drag Clown, Blue Berimore, Anita Blunt, Huck Pew*. \$. 9:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 5
Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *Rosie Porter*. No cover. 3 p.m.

MONDAY, JANUARY 6
Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Open Mic with *Jim McRae*. \$. 8:30 p.m.

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

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9
The Drake, Amherst: *Yeison Landero, DJ Bongohead*. \$. 8 p.m.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10
Iron Horse, Northampton: *Livingston Taylor*. \$. 7 p.m.
Nova Arts, Keene: *Greg Davis, Dave Seidel, Saapoto, Temporal*. \$. 7 p.m.

Looky Here, Greenfield: *Content Clown, Ditch & Palisade, The Origin of the Whale, Z the Clown, The Little Man Who Makes the Music*. Clowning and puppetry. \$. 7:30 p.m.

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Eggy*. \$. 8 p.m.

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Skinlab, Dead By Wednesday, One Ton Tommy Gun, Infinite Cruelty, Skud*. \$. 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11
Brewery at Four Star, Northfield: *The Bandit Queen of Sorrows*. No cover. 5 p.m.

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Small Town Radio*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Livingston Taylor*. \$. 7 p.m.

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Eggy*. \$. 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Mono Means One*. \$. 8 p.m.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 12
Daily Op, Easthampton: *Elucid*. \$. 7 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15
Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Wes Brown & Friends*. No cover. 8 p.m.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16
Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Keller Williams*. \$. 7 p.m.

looking forward...

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18
Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *Gravestone*. No cover. 7 p.m.

Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Dear Ella*. \$. 7 p.m.

Bombyx Center, Florence: *Kamauu*, soundbath. \$. 7 p.m.

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

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25
Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Half Waif, Kristine Leschper*. \$. 7 p.m.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31
Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Bluegrass & Beyond*. No cover. 9:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 1
Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Jessica Lea Mayfield*. \$. 7 p.m.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *The Nields*. \$. 7 p.m.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *First Generation Ensemble* presents *Mother Tongue*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4
Bombyx Center, Florence: *Bill Frisell*. \$. 7 p.m.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6
Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Geordie Greep*. \$. 8 p.m.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11
Iron Horse, Northampton: *Yasmin Williams*. \$. 7 p.m.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15
Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Pamela Means*. \$. 7 p.m.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *The Bad Plus*. \$. 7 p.m.

Full Moon Coffeehouse, Wendell: *Do It Now!*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16
Bombyx Center, Florence: *Lucy Kaplansky, John Gorka, Patty Larkin*. \$. 7 p.m.

FRIDAY, MARCH 7
Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Suzanne Vega*. \$. 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15
Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Colleen Katau*. \$. 7 p.m.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *The Suitcase Junket, Cloudbelly*. \$. 7 p.m.

Full Moon Coffeehouse, Wendell: *Ragged Blue*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12
Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Joan Osborne*. \$. 8 p.m.

SATURDAY, APRIL 19
Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *John Sheldon*. \$. 7 p.m.

Full Moon Coffeehouse, Wendell: *Gaslight Tinkers*. \$. 7:30 p.m.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25
MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Ani DiFranco*. \$. 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 statewide 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.

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

Rhodes Art Center, Northfield Mount Hermon, Gill: *Counter-vail*, words and ceramic work by Anne Thiam. Through January

24. Email jrouрке@nmhschool.org to arrange a visit.

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.

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)Imaginings*, 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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MISTLETOE from page B1
hands it kills many more.

Another Norse hero, Baldur, survived all attacks after his mother Frigg, the goddess of love and beauty, had iron, water, animals, and plants swear not to harm him. The mischief-maker Loki was right out of shape. Knowing that mistletoe is rootless and therefore didn't count as a plant, Loki realized that it was not bound by the oath, so he made a mistletoe-wood spear and had Baldur killed with it. Demonstrating the duality of mistletoe, the gods turned this evil into good by consecrating mistletoe to love and happiness and giving Frigg the authority to make it live up to these new duties.

The Vikings took such Norse myths and customs to Britain in the 8th and 9th centuries, and when we first hear of mistletoe in English, it is often bad. In Shakespeare's time the fumes of mistletoe were supposed to make people blind. In *Titius Andronicus* he called it "baleful mistletoe."

On the other hand, during the same era mistletoe was used medicinally. A health manual of 1550 claimed "Mistletoe laid to the head draweth out corrupt humors." The "true mistletoe of the oak" was considered especially effective. In 1866 it "had...repute for helping in the diseases incidental to infir-

mity and old age."

Currently, European doctors are studying its uses in cancer treatment.

As for kissing underneath it, England has long had the custom of decorating homes with winter greens, as the poet John Gay suggested in his 1716 call to celebrate Christmas: "Now with bright Holly all your Temples strow / With Laurel green and sacred Mistletoe..."

Records of kissing under the mistletoe date back to that era, often noting that it was a country custom. If a woman were to refuse a kiss, it was believed she would not get any proposals of marriage for a year. As for the guys, when they stole a kiss they were to take a berry from the mistletoe bunch, and when all the berries were gone, there was no more kissing – not a problem with mistletoe sprigs today, as almost all of them are artificial, so their berries remain intact.

The kissing custom is another extension of the old Druid belief in the sexual power of mistletoe. The shape of the leaves and the juice of the berries have often evoked testicles and semen. Indeed, the juice contains the seeds of the plant. They are spread by birds that eat the berries and get the sticky juice on their feet and beaks. When they fly off to another tree, there's a chance that a seed will take root on a branch, eventually

growing into a ball of mistletoe that may weigh up to 20 pounds.

But mistletoe seeds are rather picky – they won't grow on every tree. They like oaks, and mistletoe from the oak was a premium crop for the Druids. It also grows on some other tall trees, and in winter the big balls can be easily spotted on the bare branches. Hard to reach, though!

Luckily, mistletoe also loves apple trees. Herefordshire and Worcestershire are England's apple-growing region, and since the 18th century there has been a thriving trade supplying mistletoe to cities. Today Romany people are often the traders. They work as migrant fruit pickers in summer, so they spot the likely bunches, and return in November to gather them and take them to markets in England and Ireland.

All the lore and mythology about mistletoe prompts reality-based questions. Apart from those apple orchards of southwestern England, where does it grow? Is it really poisonous? Is it really medicinal? And how did kissing under it get to America?

Northern European mistletoe (*Viscum album*) grows in Poland, Germany, and Scandinavia as well as Britain. A red-berried form grows in Spain and North Africa. There's a mistletoe from another branch of the family that's native to Northeastern America, but the mistletoe we mostly know and love is the British form. That's because only the British associate mistletoe with Christmas and they brought the custom, include kissing under it, to America.

It can now be hard to find the real thing because it is poisonous. Teas made from it cause nausea, vomiting, and other nasty things – including killing pets, though rarely humans.

Nonetheless, mistletoe is an ingredient of *biska*, a Croatian brandy based on fermented grape pomace. An internet entry on it suggests the recipe is a "remnant of Druid magic," describing it as "warm and elegant on the palate" with "notes of honey, chocolate-coated sour cherries, and herbs." Nor has being poisonous stopped mistletoe from being used medicinally to treat many ailments. The Food and Drug Administration does not support any such uses.

As for kissing under the mistletoe, the English custom got a huge boost in this country when Washington Irving described it in *The Sketch Book*, published in 1820. Charles Dickens, who was enormously popular in mid-19th century America, also celebrated the custom in *The Pickwick Papers*. And more recently, Harry Potter fans will remember that Harry's first kiss was beneath the mistletoe's green leaves and white berries, so the magic clearly remains.



Mistletoe, up close.



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