

# The Montague Reporter

Year 23 – No. 10

FEBRUARY 6, 2025

\$2

editor@montaguereporter.org

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

montaguereporter.org

## MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

### Town Gets Half a Million To Make Village Chiller; Eyes More EV Stations

By JEFF SINGLETON

The Montague selectboard approved a proposal Monday by assistant town administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller to apply for a grant that could potentially increase the number of charging stations the town provides for electric and hybrid vehicles.

The charging stations, which the town subsidizes, have been a somewhat controversial issue on the board, but Nolan-Zeller also reported that the electric company Eversource has agreed to place Montague in a different rate cate-

gory, saving the town over 50% in annual payments and allowing it to charge users lower rates.

Other highlights of the meeting included an announcement of a \$499,682 state “Complete Streets” grant to fund traffic-calming measures and other improvements in Montague Center, a detailed discussion of the FY’26 town budget, which currently stands just over \$140,000 in the red, and a \$30,000 appropriation for a trailer for the highway department.

Nolan-Zeller reviewed the cost of the two EV charging facilities the see **MONTAGUE** page A7

### Pot Mold Recall Brings Lab Dispute to Surface



JULIA HANDSCHUH PHOTO

A new advisory includes brands sold, but not grown, at 253 Farmacy in Turners Falls.

By SARAH ROBERTSON

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – Some marijuana products sold at local dispensaries in recent months could be contaminated with high levels of yeast and mold, according to the state Cannabis Control Commission (CCC).

“To date, no related illnesses have been reported to the Commission,” the CCC wrote on Monday in a health advisory announcing the findings. “Consumers and Patients who experience adverse health effects after consuming the affected products should seek medical attention and notify the retailer.”

The recall affects products sold at 32 dispensaries statewide, including 253 Farmacy in Turners

Falls and Patriot Care and Smokey Leaf in Greenfield. The advisory lists the brands, strains, and batch numbers of the affected flower and pre-rolled joints, which have been pulled from shelves.

Farrah Pomeroy, a manager at 253 Farmacy’s parent company 253 Organic, told the *Montague Reporter* that the products grown and processed at the company’s Montague facility “were not in any way associated with the issue.” The retail store also sells strains from other growers.

The recalled products passed initial safety assessments, the advisory states, but follow-up testing showed the presence of mold and yeast above the CCC’s acceptable limits.

see **MOLD** page A8

### Review of School Budget Draws Squawks from Gill

By JEFF SINGLETON

**GILL-MONTAGUE** – The regional school district presented its nearly balanced budget Wednesday night to a group of town officials that included members of the Gill and Montague finance committees as well as several selectboard members, and both town administrators.

After presentations by school superintendent Brian Beck on the district’s short- and long-term goals and the upcoming budget schedule, business director Joanne Blier dug into the preliminary FY’26 budget, as well as the proposed assessments to the towns.

As we reported last week, the GMRSD has in theory eliminated a very large budget gap – which swelled to roughly \$2 million after state aid estimates were announced – by holding off on a large staffing increase proposed by principals and others, cutting two or three positions, which have not been publicly announced, and drawing on unexpected revenues, including an increase in rural school aid of nearly \$256,000 and a bump in Montague’s assessment of nearly \$75,000 after updated tax information was issued by the state.

The balanced budget also relies see **SCHOOLS** page A5

## CHECK-IN

### Gaza Solidarity Campaign Focuses Effort on Hospitals



JACKSON PHOTOS

Nearly a dozen members of River Valley for Gaza Healthcare staged a press conference outside Baystate Franklin on Wednesday.

By MIKE JACKSON

**GREENFIELD** – “There have been some big rallies, but you just don’t see the outrage or the level of people speaking out that you’d expect, given what we’ve been witnessing for the past year and a half,” Dodi Melnicoff reflected as Wednesday’s rally outside Baystate Franklin Medical Center drew to a close.

The Greenfield resident and registered nurse is a founding member of River Valley for Gaza Healthcare, a small group that has been calling publicly on area health professionals to speak out in solidarity with residents – as well as with their own professional counterparts – in the Gaza Strip.

“January, February last year there was a lot,” cofounder Jeanne Allen chimed in, “and then we hit

an election cycle, and now it’s like, ‘Oh, is that still going on?’”

Allen, a nurse and Easthampton resident, and Melnicoff explained that the focus on hospitals and healthcare workers is a response to the international campaign led by Doctors Against Genocide.

The local group grew out of an earlier effort, the Leahy Fast for Palestine, whose members have been fasting from dawn to dusk every day since December 2023 as they implore politicians to subject US military aid to Israel to the Leahy Laws, rules prohibiting aid to units credibly accused of human rights violations.

“We reached out first to Josh Levy, the then-acting US Attorney for Massachusetts, and asked him to bring L3Harris, General Dynamics and the other corporations see **EFFORT** page A6

## ERVING SELECTBOARD

### Cops, Clinician Commended For Handling of Two Crises

By KATIE NOLAN

On Monday night, Erving selectboard members read aloud commendations for Erving police officers Mitchell Waldron and Brandon Garvey, and community service officer Jessica Brooks.

In November, Garvey and Brooks responded to a report of a suicidal woman at the French King Bridge. Although Brooks was not on duty when the call came, she was at the Erving station. She decided to respond because of the seriousness of the call. While communicating with the woman, Brooks noticed a sudden change in her demeanor and realized she was having a medical emergency. The officers called for an ambulance, and the woman was transported to emergency care.

According to the memo from Erving sergeant Adam Paicos, “Their

timely response, keen observations, and ability to identify not only the individual’s mental health crisis but also her sudden medical emergency reflect the highest standards of our department.”

Brooks, a clinician with Clinical & Support Options, responds on call with the Erving department under a regional co-response program.

In December, after a traffic stop near the French King Bridge, Waldron and Garvey noticed a distraught woman and began talking with her. A friend of the woman had called the Northampton police to say she had planned to harm herself at an unknown bridge. Contacted by dispatchers, the Erving officers determined that the woman they were talking with was the one sought in Northampton. They helped her feel secure, and she was transported

see **ERVING** page A4

## WENDELL SELECTBOARD

### Tax Valuations Skyrocket 40%; Coordinator Gives Notice

By JOSH HEINEMANN

Wendell’s town coordinator Glenn Johnson-Mussad was hired this week by the Erving selectboard as a full-time town planner, a position vacated in March 2024 when Mariah Kurtz resigned. Erving started advertising for her replacement in October, and Johnson-Mussad was the only candidate recommended by the screening committee.

Johnson-Mussad’s last working day in Wendell will be February 28, and his last regularly scheduled Wendell selectboard meeting February 19.

When Johnson-Mussad took the coordinator job in Wendell three years ago, he was the fourth person within six months to be responsible for day-to-day details of town business, writing letters, creating selectboard agendas, and keeping up with correspondence with the state.

Finding a replacement was not the first item the Wendell selectboard discussed at their meeting Wednesday night, but was the most pressing. Board members agreed to modify, as needed, the posting used when Johnson-Mussad was hired, and to spread it as widely as possible as quickly as possible. The description can be refined more deliberately later.

Johnson-Mussad said the screening committee in Erving was not a public committee, so it did not have to post agendas two days ahead or comply with other open meeting laws. Wendell’s screening committee could do the same.

Selectboard member Paul Doud agreed to represent the board in that three-member group. Board members suggested other people who they thought might be willing to help, but those people should not find out about it in this article.

Members suggested increasing the hours from 28 to 32 per week and raising the pay, depending on approval by the town finance committee.

Johnson-Mussad said New Salem is considering making their coordinator full-time. He said Wendell assistant coordinator Su Hoyle might serve as an interim, depending on the office hours needed.

## Richer On Paper

Adam Hemingway, associate assessor for Regional Resource Group (RRG), Zoomed into the meeting for the town’s annual tax classification hearing.

Hemingway said the hearing could not happen, though, because the state Department of Revenue had not yet certified RRG’s findings. But he warned that the overall increase in town property values was 40% this year, as much as 60% for some properties.

The increase in property assessments can be offset by a drop in the see **WENDELL** page A5

## Certain Toothpaste Will Never Be Retubed

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# The Montague Reporter

"The Voice of the Villages"

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August 2002

## Le Pep Talk

It's been years since last week, and we're unsure where to begin.

There are reasons powerful people, even powerful people perturbed by current events in Washington, often hesitate to refer to it as a constitutional crisis, but we are a small and irrelevant enough rag to assure you that it is. Some of the apparently extralegal rein-grabbing on behalf of the executive branch might be rubber-stamped by the legislature and judiciary anyway – if the president's coalition remains firmly atop his the GOP – which means some of the opposition outrage amounts to hand-waving.

But it's all incredible to see. Just plug in and take over each department's payment and personnel-management systems? It's enough to make Charles I blush!

By Tuesday night members of Congress were demonstrating angrily in front of the Treasury, and on Wednesday the mass-assembly bug spread to state capitals. And court challenges are finally being mounted, including by a coalition of public worker unions right here in Massachusetts, hoping as of press time to turn the Department of Labor (and Bureau of Labor Statistics) into a legal Waterloo for Musk's DOGE corps.

Damage has been done. Heard lately from the National Institutes of Health? No? (Catch up here:

[www.science.org/content/blog-post/what-s-happening-inside-nih](http://www.science.org/content/blog-post/what-s-happening-inside-nih) – thanks to our Science Page editor for the tip.) If the bird flu we were talking about a few weeks earlier gets worse, how will we know?

Another scary one is the Department of Education. An email from this publication Tuesday evening to the superintendent and business manager of our local regional school district asking what would happen locally if the Department of Education goes away has gone mercifully unanswered as of press time.

There are differently-bad things going on besides Silicon Valley's great smash-and-grab of the American administrative state, ranging from targeted and cruel firings to targeted and cruel revocations of legal rights to the colossal announcement Tuesday that our president intends to ethnically cleanse the Gaza Strip in order to redevelop it for commerce.

History, on a positive note, is definitely back. And the audacity of the current project to reshape the US state only opens the door wider for future possibilities.

We know we sound like a broken record, but the majority of the world's population lives in countries that have gone through similarly disorienting transformations in living memory. Find your friends, confirm your values, and drink plenty of water. It's on.



Maureen Pollock has been Montague's town planner since 2021. In addition to advancing town initiatives, she just might be evolving into town hall's next Post-It Note Artist now that David Jensen no longer has an exhibit in the building inspector's office.

## Letters to the Editors

### Pick Up Your Power

Dear Neighbors,

It's time to remember you have power. Autocracy feeds on confusion and fear. Don't give them that. When people withdraw consent in organized and emergent ways, autocracies fail.

America's autocracy is just getting started. They are throwing as much at us as fast as they can to eviscerate our governance systems and take charge before we wake up to our power. Don't let that happen.

If you aren't feeling power, settle for action. Find people who are taking steps, each day, each week, to be in resistance, to protect what we love, to care for each other, to build alternatives. Join them. Find a next

step you can take.

Whether you've been an activist for years or a critic from the sidelines, there is a next step to take. If you've been in the fight forever and you're beyond exhausted, maybe your next step is to pause, find a circle in which to process your rage and grief, and focus on bringing others in rather than engaging from an empty cup. If you're doom-scrolling in fear and anxiety, maybe your next step is to unplug from the distraction, find folks who are in action, and do one thing in the physical world that sparks a sense of agency – the power to help.

If you voted for him and this is not what you were looking for, there is room for you in the resistance,

and in building real alternatives. We need us all.

In this age, focused attention is real power. Cultivate that. They will do everything they can to confuse, distract, and make you feel powerless. Don't give them that. As a friend shared recently, "Don't let what you can't control stop you from doing what you can control." We are more powerful than we realize. Both individually and collectively.

There is opportunity in every crisis. If we don't seize it, they will. All the tools we need are here. We just need to pick them up and use them. And do it together.

Jennifer Atlee  
Montague Center

## No Ethnic Cleansing

Instead of planning for the ethnic cleansing of and proposed land grab of war-torn Gaza, President Trump should be proposing a Marshall Plan for the wartime destruction in Gaza.

Yes, Gaza needs to be rebuilt. America bears responsibility for supplying the weapons Israel used to destroy its apartment buildings and homes, places of worship, infrastructure, schools, and 11 colleges and universities. Today 16 of the region's 36 hospitals remain partially operational, and many of its medical doctors, nurses, and staff frog-marched off to Israeli prisons where they are reported to have been beaten and tortured.

Following World War II, the Nuremberg trials were held for plotting and carrying out invasions of other countries across Europe and atrocities against their citizens. On November 21, 2024, the

International Criminal Court (ICC) voted unanimously to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Warrants were also issued for three Hamas leaders who were subsequently assassinated by Israel.

If President Trump makes good on his promise to seize Palestinian land in Gaza, bulldoze its dead beneath the rubble and what little remains of its homes, schools, and places of worship, and ethnically cleanse and depopulate the territory, he too may find himself with an International Criminal Court arrest warrant and the inability to travel too far from America's borders – except, of course, to Israel.

Genevieve Harris-Fraser  
Orange



New patterns emerge when big things break.

### Published weekly on Thursdays.

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

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Compiled by NINA ROSSI

Please be aware that the **delivery of your paper each week** depends on our 12 carriers putting their boots and shoes on paths and sidewalks, or driving their cars up to your rural delivery point. Shovel, sand, and salt helps keep the deliveries where you want them, and our carriers safe from slipping and falling – or having to lob the paper only approximately towards your door.

Due to weather events and the early sunset during winter, deliveries are sometimes delayed, and we appreciate your patience!

In turn, we appreciate that people out there are so eagerly awaiting the paper each week that we do get occasional calls from readers who haven't gotten theirs on Thursdays. We're all trying!

Do you know any **young people who collect stamps**, or are interested in starting a stamp collection? Reader Ferd Wulkan of Montague Center has a large quantity of

stamps he would be happy to pass along to one or more young stamp collectors.

Ferd writes that his stamps are not particularly valuable, but span all continents and time periods from the 19th to the 21st century, and much history and geography can be learned from them. Some are in albums; most are sorted by country.

If you know any young people who might be interested, please contact Ferd at [ferdwulkan@gmail.com](mailto:ferdwulkan@gmail.com).

The next time you encounter **sticker shock** – avocados, maple syrup, cherry tomatoes, sledgehammers, tequila, and other potential trade-war casualties – take a picture on your handy mini-portable computer and send it to us at [editor@montaguereporter.org](mailto:editor@montaguereporter.org), with “sticker shock” in the subject line! We'll publish the worst ones.

The Meals on Wheels kitchen in Erving is **seeking a part-time Kitchen Assistant**. The position is 20 hours per week and includes

benefits. The Kitchen Assistant assists with facility prep and clean-up, kitchen tasks in preparation of home delivered meals, and as a back-up driver for home delivered meals as needed. The hours are 7 to 11 a.m., Mondays through Fridays at \$15.45 per hour to start.

Submit your resume to, or obtain a job application from, Life-Path's office at 101 Munson Street, Suite 201 in Greenfield.

Cable Street, an international online journal for writers and readers of many languages, is hosting a tribute wall for **Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno**, a former editor and poetry editor of this newspaper.

“Many of you have reached out with condolences for the loss of our co-editor and mentor, Chris, who passed on October 3, 2024, but his inspiration lives on,” the journal's editors write. “We invite you to submit a piece of prose, poetry, or image. So that we may include as many contributions as possible, please limit written work to 500 words or less.”

Email prose or poetry in Times New Roman 12-point font, as a .docx or .doc attachment or via a shared link on Google Drive. Images may be sent as .png or .jpg files. Submissions must be made

by March 10 to [submissions.cablestreet@gmail.com](mailto:submissions.cablestreet@gmail.com). The tribute wall will be published in the journal's Spring 2025 issue of Cable Street ([www.cablestreet.org](http://www.cablestreet.org)).

The application is now available for **2025 Wells Trust scholarships** in agricultural, mechanical, or professional fields, for students residing in Ashfield, Bernardston, Buckland, Charlemont, Conway, Deerfield, Gill, Greenfield, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Montague, Northfield, Rowe, and Shelburne.

Applicants must have resided in those towns for a minimum of two years, and the awards are contingent upon matriculation into an academic program. The maximum award for any one year is \$5,000.

Submit an application by March 20 at [wellstrustscholarship.com](http://wellstrustscholarship.com), or pick one up at any Greenfield Savings Bank or town hall in the towns listed.

An all-day **Zine and Diorama Fest**, with open mic music hosted by Western Mass Electronics, is planned for this Saturday, February 8 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Forbes Library in Northampton.

Admission is free. Attendees are invited to browse locally-

created book art and dioramas inspired by winter, while listening to local composers “put to sound the drastic physical extremes and existential implications of the barren season. Lastly, take home a copy of the frost flower anthology of winter musings entitled *Winter Exquisite*.”

The Gill police, fire, and emergency management departments have announced a **free “Stop The Bleed” class** open to the public at 6 p.m. on Saturday, February 22 at the Gill fire station. This one-hour class will focus on teaching basic skills to stop traumatic bleeding using a variety of techniques and equipment.

The class is open to and appropriate for anyone 16 years and older, with first preference given to Gill residents. All supplies are provided, and students will be sent a certificate following the class.

Uncontrolled bleeding remains the number one cause of preventable death, and the Gill first responders want to help prepare the public to save lives. To sign up or if you have any questions, email Sgt. John Richardson at [jrichardson@gillmass.org](mailto:jrichardson@gillmass.org).

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

OP ED

# Senators Vow to Fight Coup

By SARAH BLISS

**MONTAGUE** -- Wednesday morning, approximately 75 galvanized, outraged, determined citizens from Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire, and Hampden counties braved frigid temperatures at the regional offices of Senators Warren and Markey in Springfield to voice their deep distress over the constitutional crisis and coup underway by Elon Musk and President Donald Trump.

Organized by the political action coalition Indivisible in cooperation with Left Field, the Rural Freedom Network, and Franklin County Continuing Our Political Revolution, the group held two productive meetings with Jesse Lederman, regional director for Senator Ed Markey, and Mark Antonio Williams, regional director for Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Citizen activists emphasized that we are in a constitutional crisis and demanded that Senators Markey and Warren use every tool at their disposal to halt the nomination of Russell Vought for Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director, end Musk's illegal breach of government data, reverse his firing of federal employees, and fight the assaults on our communities.

Marina Goldman and I were there from Montague, where a group of over 40 citizens from Montague's five villages came together after November's election to make sense of the radically altered political landscape. Strategizing together, we are strengthening local civic involvement, building new alliances and personal relationships with folks who don't necessarily share our own political views, defending democratic institutions, protecting vulnerable populations such as immigrants and LGBTQIA+, and building a resilient, caring, and interwoven local community.

“I'm new to political activism,” Marina explained, “as are many



A crowd gathered Wednesday morning outside the senators' Springfield offices.

here today. I'm showing up because what's happening in Washington needs to be called what it is: a coup! Musk and Trump's implementation of the Project 2025 agenda is fascist and dangerous. I can't just stand by and let it unfold.”

Side-by-side with a pediatrician, educators, young parents, millennials, elders, and artists, an activist who is the child of Holocaust survivors told the chilling story of her mother and aunt, who are now in their late 90s, and are deeply afraid of what is unfolding and feel catapulted back into 1930s Holland.

Warren and Markey's staffers Williams and Lederman expressed strong solidarity with the assembled citizens, and affirmed the passionate leadership of Senators Warren and Markey in blocking the coup that is underway.

On Monday, Senator Markey filed an amendment that would force the DOGE team from accessing critical Treasury payment systems (see [www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-markey-introduces-amendment-to-keep-doge-team-from-accessing-critical-treasury-payment-systems](http://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senator-markey-introduces-amendment-to-keep-doge-team-from-accessing-critical-treasury-payment-systems)).

Senator Warren has committed to use of a procedural tool – the use of all 30 hours of permitted debate –

prior to a vote on Vought's nomination to head the OMB, in order to expose Project 2025, Musk's Treasury takeover, and the funding freeze.

Both Senators are working hard to shift the inclinations of Republicans who are not already firmly pledged to Trump.

“We are doing all we can now,” Indivisible spokesperson Wendy Penner of Greylock Together emphasized, “and are demanding our elected officials do all they can to fight back against the takeover of our government and the federal funding freeze. This is going to be a long struggle, because the Trump regime is literally destroying our governmental institutions. With the Republican Congress unifying behind this extremism, things may get worse before they get better.”

“To turn this around, the Republican Congress needs to feel the pain, and they will, as the impacts of what's happening build. In the meantime, contact everyone you know in red and purple states to urge them to voice their stories and demands to their reps.”

Sarah Bliss is a local filmmaker and an organizing member of Montague's new community-wide coalition. She lives in Montague Center.

## Another Letter to the Editors



### Montague Must Pick

The Town of Montague is seeking input from residents on potential climate-resilience “seed” projects that could help strengthen our community against the effects of climate change. As part of the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) 2.0 Planning Process, Montague has been allocated \$50,000 to fund a 12-month resilience project that will address priorities identified by the community.

This past year, the Montague MVP 2.0 Core Team, which includes residents, local organizations, and municipal staff, surveyed and interviewed community members to understand the key factors affecting our resilience to climate-related challenges. As a result, three priorities emerged – food access, home energy efficiency, and community-based resilience initiatives – that will guide project development.

The Core Team has narrowed down potential projects to three concepts, and we need your feedback to determine which will best serve Montague's needs. The proposed projects are:

- Project A, expanding and improving community gardens in Montague;
- Project B, developing a community/commercial kitchen next to the Finders Collective in Turners Falls; and
- Project C, piloting a winter window insert program for com-

munity buildings.

We want to hear from all residents, especially those who may be more vulnerable to climate change, such as seniors, renters, people with disabilities, low-income households, and others. Your input is essential to ensure these projects reflect the diverse needs of our community.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and help us prioritize the projects that will make the most difference for Montague.

The survey is available online at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/seedprojects](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/seedprojects) or in printed form at various local locations, including the Gill-Montague Senior Center, public libraries, town hall, the Brick House Community Resource Center, and the HeartWing Center, formerly known as Montague Catholic Social Ministries.

The deadline to submit your response is 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, February 19.

We strongly encourage everyone to participate and contribute to shaping Montague's climate-resilience future. To learn more about the planning process and resilience priorities, visit our website at [montague-ma.gov/p/1554/](http://montague-ma.gov/p/1554/).

Thank you for helping to make Montague a more resilient and sustainable community!

Sincerely,

**Maureen Pollock  
Planning Director,  
Town of Montague**

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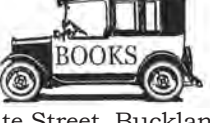
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ERVING from page A1

to receive mental health services.

"Officers Garvey and Waldron's keen observations, swift actions, and compassionate response," Paicos wrote, "directly resulted in saving a life."

#### Changing Agreements

Selectboard members and fire chief Philip Wonkka discussed a proposed revision of the 50-year-old Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid (TSFMA) agreement, which allows fire departments from 47 towns in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts to cross state lines to provide mutual aid during emergencies.

Wonkka and town administrator Bryan Smith said that some of the questions to the town's insurer, Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Agency (MIIA), had not yet been answered. In addition, town counsel had some questions about the draft agreement.

The board asked Smith to collect responses from MIIA and town counsel, and asked Wonkka to bring up the concerns at the February TSFMA board meeting and report back

at a selectboard meeting in March.

Speaking as a citizen and not as fire chief, Wonkka requested that the town allow a rehabilitation loan he received in 2002 from the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority (FCRHRA) revolving loan fund be forgiven in accordance with the current guidelines of the program, because he has lived in the residence for more than 15 years.

In 2002, the FCRHRA loans were payable in full on transfer of the property. Between 2009 to 2020, the policy was that half of the loan was forgiven after the recipient had lived in the residence for 15 years. Loans given since 2020 are to be forgiven entirely after 15 years of residence.

"This situation is more of a policy decision by the town," FCRHRA community development director Brian McHugh wrote in a memo. "If the town wanted to apply the new terms to older loans, then it could, but we could not r -write those loans, as it would be an enormous amount of administrative time. Right now, there is approximately \$1.6 mil in outstanding

loans dating back to 1984."

McHugh added, "The town may be giving up a huge resource that has helped many, many low-to-moderate income residents of Erving. As money comes back from these loans and gets reallocated to other income-eligible residents, we are able to provide an affordable means of home repairs for a vulnerable population."

Selectboard members wondered whether the program would be jeopardized if older loans are forgiven, and how much of the \$1.6 million was in forgivable, half-forgivable, or non-forgivable loans.

They asked Smith to check whether other towns have policies about forgiving FCRHRA loans, and told Wonkka they would provide an answer once they have more information.

#### Personnel Updates

In a letter dated January 14, senior center director Paula Betters wrote that she plans to retire as of July 18.

Selectboard member James Loynd recommended that the town start planning quickly to find a replacement director. Looking around

at the senior center, where the board was meeting, he said, "Paula put her heart and soul into this."

Before searching for a new director, Smith said the director job description, written in 2015, needed to be revised, as the job had changed significantly during Betters's tenure. He reported that Betters was working on revising the description.

The selectboard asked to have her comments by their February 20 meeting. Smith recommended advertising the position in March to allow hiring a replacement by June.

Principal assessor Jacquelyn Boyden is also slated to retire in 2025, and at the previous selectboard meeting, town accountant Debra Mero and town clerk Richard Newton both said they had started considering retirement.

Glenn Johnson-Mussad, currently Wendell's town coordinator, was appointed as Erving town planner on Monday night. Johnson-Mussad will start on or before March 31.

The board also appointed Adam Barnes as full-time town custodian, with a start date on or before February 24.

## AT LARGE

# Sap Waits, Feds Knock, Cha's Opens

By CHIP AINSWORTH

**NORTHFIELD** – One early spring in my youth I gathered sap on a family farm in Leyden, trudging through knee-deep snow and spilling cold sap all over myself. Inside the sugar house one day I leaned over the boiler and smelled the sweet aroma of maple sap being boiled into syrup. When I stepped back I saw that the entire front of my parka had been melted to the white insulation.

"Thought I smelt sumthin' burnin'," said the guy who was tending the boil.

Making maple syrup was an easy process for centuries – tap the tree, collect the sap, and boil – but technology and marketing have turned it into rocket science. A company called Wonderlabs that sells its online brags their product is *100% Pure Certified and Kosher and Distilled from Organic Sugar Maple Trees!*

In rural New England, a store can be judged by what a quart costs. Locals will fork over \$20 at the nearest sugarhouse, but city slickers pay more at places like LL Bean or in phony country stores where scented pine cones cost five bucks.

Think I'm kidding? At the LL Bean in Hadley, a quart of "organic" maple syrup costs \$34.95.

"What makes maple syrup organic?" I asked the sales clerk.

"It has to do with the trees," she said.

Trees that haven't been sprayed with Agent Orange, I presumed.

Now that Trump's tariffs have been called off, Americans won't be needing to slather their waffles with strawberry jam and peanut butter. Canada is by far the largest maple syrup producer, but Massachusetts accounts for about 50,000 gallons annually.

Last year, Milt and Steve Severance hosted the state's annual tree-tapping ceremony at their Northfield sugarhouse. This year's ceremonial tree will be tapped at the Deer Meadow Farm in Warren on February 28.

"Looks like the cold air is going to be around a while," Milt said Monday. "We may start tapping in a week or so, but may not get sap for two or three weeks. It's up to Mother Nature to warm up a bit."

#### FBI Visits South Deerfield

South Main Street in South Deerfield was closed on Tuesday, and one resident said the FBI was there to search the residence of Ryan Michael English – a.k.a. Riley Jane English – who was arrested in Washington on January 27.

"It's got to do with that kid who made the threats," said the town official and former cop. "They said don't tell anybody, and the road's blocked off. I go into town hall and there's a

crew of 'em in their BDUs" – battle dress uniforms – "and nobody's going to think there's something going on?"

English, who identifies as trans, turned herself in after telling Capitol police officers she had Molotov cocktails and knives in her car, and wanted to kill US secretary of defense Pete Hegseth and House speaker Mike Johnson, and also burn down the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank.

According to a police affidavit obtained by the Associated Press, English "changed his target" and decided to kill Treasury secretary Scott Bessent after reading that the billionaire South Carolinian had been confirmed by a 68-29 vote.

"My training tells me the FBI's gotta come up here and clear the house because he said he was making bombs," said the source.

#### Open for Business

The new Cha's looks like the old Cha's but with polished floors, gas pumps, and EV chargers. A longtime hub for cheap beer and cigarettes, Cha's II was originally scheduled to open in May, then July, then October.

The not-so-grand opening happened before Christmas at 5 a.m., and the first ten customers through the door got Cha's T-shirts. All ten winners were Thomas Aquinas College students.

Maybe there will be a grander opening this spring, but right now the place doesn't even sell boiled peanuts.

#### RIP Marianne

Singer, songwriter, addict, and actor Marianne Faithfull died on January 30 in London. She was 78. The daughter of a Viennese baroness and a British intelligence officer, Faithfull's first hit record was "As Tears Go By," written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards.

Faithfull was with Brian Jones the night the police raided his home in East Sussex looking for drugs and found her "in a furskin rug." The tabloids went crazy, and a star was born.

Faithfull lived with Jagger for four years, and was reportedly the inspiration for the Rolling Stones' hit song "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

In 1969 she nearly died from a barbiturate overdose, and when she came out of the coma she looked at Jagger and said, "Wild horses couldn't drag me away."

#### Carter's Convictions

Jimmy Carter's run for the White House in 1976 was nearly derailed by an interview with *Playboy* magazine where he said he had committed adultery "in my heart many times" and had "looked upon a lot of women with lust."

Carter was a devout Baptist, but no prude. "That doesn't mean that I condemn someone who leaves his wife and shacks up out of wedlock," he told *Playboy*. "Christ says, 'Don't consider yourself better because one guy screws a whole bunch of women while the other guy is loyal to his wife.'"

#### Faded Ivy

*Morning Wire* editor Georgia Howe recently interviewed Dr. Carol Swain about her latest book *The Gay Affair: Harvard, Plagiarism and the Death of Academic Integrity*. As the title implies, Swain's book criticizes Harvard's reluctance to fire the school president Claudine Gay after she was found to have plagiarized Swain's writing and research.

"For people whose kids get into the Ivy League, those are not bragging points anymore," said Swain. "Your child is probably better off going to a state university where they adhere to traditional approaches to education rather than an Ivy League school where they think they are morally superior to everyone else."

#### Random Notes

Retired local radio honcho Bob Diamond, on my January 16 column on filmmaker Ken Burns: "Fabulous, fabulous stuff on Burns. I played poker with him and his buddy who wrote for *The New Yorker* and lived in Conway" ... Greenfield native Penn Jillette to Bill Maher, on psychics' credibility: "Every single person I have experienced has been phony, and I seek it out" ... Jillette's magic show partner and Amherst College grad Raymond Joseph Teller, now legally named Teller, turns 77 on Valentine's Day. Happy whatever, Teller... When you're sick and in Florida don't go to the hospital, go to the airport. This sentiment was underscored last August at Ascension Sacred Heart Emerald Coast Hospital near Pensacola, where Dr. Thomas I. Shakhnovsky removed a liver instead of a spleen from an Alabama man who died on the operating table ... The late Natalie Cole occasionally picked up local gigs while she was enrolled at NMH, and later at UMass Amherst. Cole said her most embarrassing moment in show business happened the night she arrived at the Scotch Mist on the Mohawk Trail and saw her name wasn't on the marquee. Instead it said, "Nat King Cole's Daughter" ... Elton John's Broadway flop *Tammy Faye* closed after just 29 performances. *NY Post* theater critic Johnny Oleksinski called it "a migraine about mascara set to music."

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

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WENDELL from page A1

tax rate, though that drop will likely not be too great as Wendell is also on track to increase its spending by 20% in FY'26.

The valuation increase is based on high demand for houses, and may have been somewhat skewed by Wendell's small size. Seven houses in town were sold in the past two years, Hemingway said, and the prices paid were higher than the asking prices, a trend not unique to Wendell.

Selectboard member Gillian Budine said Conway has seen a similar across-the-board increase in valuation, and as a result looks richer to the state, and so is receiving less aid from the state.

Hemingway said the valuation change in Wendell is comparable to that in surrounding towns, and that his intention in mentioning it on Wednesday was to make residents aware of the development sooner, not later. He suggested that the board of assessors hold a public event to increase people's understanding of the increases.

Johnson-Mussad agreed to put the potential changes on the agenda for the next selectboard meeting, his final meeting, February 19.



**Montague Community Television News**

**Never Get Bored!**

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

**TURNERS FALLS** – The Young Shakespeare Players present *A Winter's Tale*, a perfect viewing for a snowy day, and now available to watch from the comfort of your couch.

If you're snowed in, consider making it a movie marathon by catching up on all local meetings, such as the newly added GMRSD budget meeting with the towns (see article, Page A1), followed by both the Gill and Montague selectboard meetings.

With all we have to offer, you'll never be bored! If there is a meeting, event, performance, or happening in the 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!

All MCTV videos are aired on Channel 9 and featured on the MCTV Vimeo page.

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**Wendell Special Town Meeting Warrant**

By JOSH HEINEMANN

The warrant approved for Wendell's special town meeting, scheduled for 7 p.m. next Wednesday, February 12, included some significant additions to the draft warrant the Reporter summarized in our reporting on the January 15 selectboard meeting.

Articles 1 through 4 would pay bills of prior years for the conservation commission, the board of health, the fire department, and WRATS, totaling \$2,419.41.

Article 5 would increase the clerk's pay by \$2,500 per year because of extra work given to her, and Article 6 would pay \$2,755 for publishing the annual report, extra money to catch up with reports whose publishing was held up.

Article 7 would authorize \$8,000 for an effort to hire a new town coordinator, and to increase that position's salary for the remainder of FY'25. The present town coordinator, Glenn Johnson-Mussad, was hired this week as Erving's full time town planner, starting March 31 (see article, Page A1).

Article 8 would authorize \$58,000 for school transportation, and Article 9 would authorize paying \$68,500 as an increase in Wendell's share of the Swift River School budget.

Article 10 would accept a Massachusetts law that allows the treasurer to enter a payment plan with someone whose taxes are past due.

Article 11, finally, would transfer \$287,678 from free cash into stabilization.

SCHOOLS from page A1

on the use of reserves, including \$500,000 from the excess and deficiency account, the school district's version of free cash. Blier warned that the district could return to a so-called Priority 3 district under the state rural aid program, and lose a significant amount of revenue, if its enrollment increases by six students by the fall.

There followed a lengthy question-and-answer period, which often focused on broad opinions about funding in education. Several attendees from Gill wondered how their town's assessment could be increasing by 12.32%. The assessment split between Montague and Gill is heavily dependent on relative student enrollment, as well as the state's calculation of each town's "minimum contribution," according to the data presented by Blier.

"It's going to be a tough sell," said Gill selectboard member Charles Garbiel, who asked if the district could provide the towns with enrollment estimates earlier in the budget process. Beck agreed to look into that.

Garbiel went on to suggest that Gill host the next budget meeting with the school district.

Beck was asked which positions the district is planning to eliminate in order to balance the budget. He said the administration hopes to avoid layoffs, but that if the time comes to eliminate positions he wants to talk with the staff first, rather than have them read about it in the press.

Gill finance committee chair Claire Chang asked if the towns had been awarded any of the "Fair Share" funds raised by the so-called millionaires' tax. Blier said the district had received no direct aid from the tax, and that most of the money

may have gone to higher education.

An analysis of Fair Share funding for education by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center indicates that Fair Share money is also funding grants for early childhood education programs and has paid for free school meals, though Gill-Montague already participates in the National School Lunch Program.

There was a good deal of complaining about the formula by which the state calculates Chapter 70 education aid – which places large numbers of school districts including Gill-Montague in a "hold harmless" category with tiny annual increases – accompanied by the sentiment that nothing could be done about it.

"There's a lever here that we cannot touch," said Montague finance committee member John Hanold, referring to the formula. "We have no influence on it... We can see in the newspaper articles that most of the state is affected by the hold-harmless, and yet there doesn't seem to be any avenue for us to work on this."

Beck said that Blier had contacted state senator Jo Comerford and state representative Natalie Blais about the aid formula, and that "they are very interested in meeting with us." He asked Montague town administrator Walter Ramsey and Gill administrator Ray Purington if they could help set a date for that meeting and invite selectboard members.

After a few more questions and opinions, the meeting ended on a relatively upbeat note. The school district will hold a formal public hearing on the budget next Tuesday and the regional school committee will vote on it on March 11, requiring a two-thirds majority for approval.

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**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Peterson School Adult Learning Courses Begin This Month At Franklin County Tech School**

**TURNERS FALLS** – Franklin County Technical School (FCTS) is offering in-person and online courses from The Peterson School starting in February.

The Peterson School is known for its excellence in technical training. The collaboration between the two schools will provide valuable opportunities for adult learners in the region to gain industry-recognized skills in high-demand fields, further strengthening Franklin County Tech's commitment to workforce development.

The Peterson School will offer the following courses, in-person from 6 to 10 p.m.:

- Basic Air Conditioning – classes begin February 25
- Oil Code License Prep – classes begin February 26
- Plumbing Tier I – classes begin February 25

• Plumbing Tiers III and IV – classes begin February 26

These classes will be taught at Franklin County Technical School, at 82 Industrial Boulevard in Turners Falls.

In addition to the classes being taught at FCTS, The Peterson School offers live online classes in the Plumbing Tiers.

For more information and to register for in-person classes at FCTS and the live online classes, go to [www.petersonschool.com](http://www.petersonschool.com).

The Peterson School has been teaching the trades since 1946 with locations in Woburn, Westwood, Worcester, Haverhill, and Turners Falls. The school provides high quality education at an affordable price with experienced instructors, convenient class scheduling, and flexible payment options to provide the best educational experience for students.

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PERSONAL INJURY, WILLS & ESTATES, WORKER'S COMP

**EFFORTS** from page A1

that were building the bombs being used in Gaza according to the Leahy Law," Allen recounts. "He did not get back to me."

Simultaneous rallies in Boston, Springfield, and Worcester, she said, also failed to win Levy's attention.

"We can't find any people in Congress who call for a total weapons embargo now, after more than a year of killing," said Nick Mottern, a member of Veterans for Peace. "Including our Congressman [Jim] McGovern – he says 'What's going on with weapons is illegal,' but he's not out here in the street calling for this to stop. He issues a statement at the close of a session. Nobody's paying any attention."

Philip Harak, co-coordinator of the Massachusetts chapter of the international Catholic peace organization Pax Christi, expressed similar frustrations.

"We're imploring our bishops to follow the Pope's clear direction of ending this," Harak said. "He says, 'This is not war, it's cruelty.' Unfortunately, the American Catholic bishops' conference has not agreed to follow with the Pope.... We've written a letter to the new Archbishop of Boston, imploring him to come out publicly to oppose this genocide. He's not yet done that."

**Covered Eyes**

Since last summer, River Valley for Gaza Healthcare has staged press conferences outside several western Massachusetts hospitals highlighting the demands issued by Doctors Against Genocide. These begin with immediate and unconditional release of detained Palestinian healthcare workers, unrestricted humanitarian access to the Gaza Strip, and the deployment of fact-finding and recovery teams, and work up to the dismantling of Israeli settlements and the decolonization of medicine.

Wednesday's event at Baystate Franklin drew 11 activists, representing 11 sometimes overlapping political organizations.

It was the healthcare group's first



Left to right: Healthcare executives called out by name; Pax Christi Massachusetts co-coordinator Philip Harak; Greenfield-based registered nurse Dodi Melnicoff.



event since the implementation of a ceasefire agreement between Hamas and the state of Israel on January 17 – and came a day after president Donald Trump's joint press conference with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at which the American leader announced plans for the US to take a "long-term ownership position" in the Gaza Strip and for its 1.8 million inhabitants to be permanently transferred elsewhere.

The activists lined up along the public sidewalk at the corner of Federal and Beacon streets, near the hospital's main entrance. Three posed with lab coats and masks bearing the faces of American Medical Association (AMA) president Jesse Ehrenfeld, Baystate Health board of trustees chair Harriet DeVerry, and Baystate CEO Peter Banko. Covering their eyes, ears, and mouth with their hands, they explained that these executives were choosing not to see, hear, or speak about evil events in Gaza.

"Their silences make them accomplices," Allen stated.

"The people running these hospitals," Mottern said, "have got a big hole in their ethical standards that they're afraid to even look at." He pointed out that James Taiclet, president and CEO of the major military contractor Lockheed Martin, sits on the board of directors of Mass General Brigham.

Members took turns reading

through a battery-powered amplifier, joined in brief chants, and held flags and signs – "Healthcare Not Warfare," "No More Weapons to Israel," "AMA Silence Is Complicity." One large banner read, "If We Were In Gaza, This Hospital Would Be Rubble."

From time to time cars and trucks passing on Federal Street honked approvingly.

**In Need of Critical Care**

"According to the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, civilians and healthcare workers are not to be targeted during armed conflict," Allen read. "On the contrary, there is a positive requirement that they be protected. Obviously, that didn't happen in Gaza.... All the hospitals and healthcare facilities have been damaged. Many totally destroyed. Medical supplies, medicine, hospital beds, even anesthesia, sanitation supplies, water, and food are all but nonexistent."

As a result, she said, it was "impossible to document" how many tens of thousands of residents displaced by the conflict have died of infectious disease, chronic conditions, and even hypothermia.

"Over 1,100 healthcare workers have been targeted and executed by the Israeli Defense Forces," Harak said. "Let us plead with healthcare administrators here, and nation-

wide, to make a public stand.... The Palestinian people are in need of critical care right now."

"My family is Lebanese, and my brother-in-law was Palestinian, so my nephews are Palestinian and Lebanese," he later told the *Reporter*. "Some of the things that I hear from our connections over there in Palestine are some of the most evil things I've really ever heard in my life... Our Jewish brothers and sisters are equally appalled, they don't want this either."

"I'm reminded today of the resilience of the Palestinian people," said Melnicoff, who said her own background includes Jewish heritage. "We've seen the long marches going up back to the North Gaza area, how destroyed and ruined it is. They're making tents on top of the rubble to live.... I'm also thankful for the Palestinian doctors and healthcare workers, who have shown us so clearly what our commitment should look like to healthcare."

The group called specifically for the release from Israeli detention of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya, the director of Kamal Adwan Hospital in North Gaza.

"He did not stay silent, even at the risk of his life," said Allen. "Several weeks ago, all the patients and staff at Kamal Adwan Hospital as well as those sheltering there were rounded up, forced from the hospital, and it was fully

destroyed.... A dozen other medical staff were shot by a drone that flew right into the hospital."

Midway through the press conference, two Baystate facilities staff members stopped by briefly and left after seeing the sidewalk was not blocked.

Melnicoff said that after a previous event at Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton, she was barred from returning to the facility. "I didn't disrupt any patient care, but we put flyers out in various places in the hospital, as well as on cars," she told the *Reporter*. "The next day a police officer came and handed me a no-trespassing summons!"

Still, Melnicoff said, Cooley Dickinson is the only hospital whose leadership has responded at all to letters from the group asking to set up a meeting to discuss the issue.

"They have a new CEO there," she said, "but they essentially said, 'Talk to the folks down in Boston.'"

Allen said several requests for a meeting with Baystate's CEO have gone unanswered. An attempt to reach a company spokesperson for comment received no answer as of press time Thursday.

"A few doctors are concerned," Melnicoff added of the overall regional response to the group's appeals. "But they haven't gotten to the point where they can negotiate coming out and not risking their jobs."

**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

# How to Avoid Chilblains This Winter

By KATE CLAYTON-JONES

**CONWAY** – Chilblains sound like something out of the Charles Dickens era, but in New England, cold floors and wood burning stoves make chilblains quite commonplace. When feet get cold but the body is warm, small itchy painful swellings called chilblains can occur on toes, and they hurt.

Chilblains are a cousin to frostbite, and can also occur on the nose, ears, and fingers, though as a foot care professional my primary concern is its manifestation on the feet.

We're in deep winter now, with weather-related health challenges. Managing the transition from cold outside air to warm indoor air, and from warm rooms to cold floors, is important for your feet. Sadly, the cozy sight of warming cold feet in front of a fire is an invitation for chilblains in those who are prone to them.

Chilblains affect about 10% of the population, primarily people who are elderly, or sedentary, or have circulation problems. When the skin becomes cold, tiny blood vessels under the skin constrict and restrict the blood supply to areas of skin. When the skin re-warms – especially if one tries to warm it too quickly – leakage of fluid from the blood vessels into the tissues can cause areas of inflammation and swelling, leading to chil-

blains. The skin often feels like it is burning, peeling skin is not uncommon, and toes can be blue or red and swollen.

Chilblains normally clear up on their own, but they can be very painful and uncomfortable, and improper treatment can lead to greater problems.

The symptoms of chilblains: The skin on the toes is swollen, and often feels like it is burning. The area may feel painful to the touch. Skin over a chilblain may blister, which may delay healing and lead to infection. Chilblains may become increasingly painful and can take on a dark-blue appearance.

Knowledge is the key to their prevention:

**Wear the right socks.** Keeping feet warm and well-insulated, with socks or slippers that do not trap sweat next to the skin, is the first and best defense. I recommend socks that keep your feet warm and wick away moisture. Socks made from non-breathable fibers like nylon or cotton cause your feet to sweat, creating the impression that they are warming the feet when just the opposite is true.

Merino wool is my preference, and alpaca works well too. Treat yourself or someone you love with the gift of good merino or alpaca socks. They can seem expensive, but they are an integral part of keeping your feet healthy and pain-free.

In addition to socks, thick-soled shoes also

insulate feet from cold surfaces and help to keep you warm. Inside the house, socks are not enough to insulate your feet from cold floors – wear slippers. The goal is to keep the feet dry, insulated, and protected.

**Moisturize.** Cold, dry feet run the risk of developing cracks, which are portals for bacterial infection. Moisturizing your feet daily, especially after bathing, will enhance circulation, and the oil will seep into the skin and prevent cracks from developing.

I recommend lightweight, natural oils like coconut and sesame, especially for older skin. Older skin is fragile like baby skin, and highly fragrant, petroleum-based skin creams may not be optimal.

**Exercise.** Gentle exercises that improve blood flow to feet warm the body and help to prevent chilblains. Try playing "Rock Paper Scissors" with your feet: curl your toes tightly like a rock, spread them wide like a piece of paper, and wiggle the toes up and down in a scissor motion. Just a few repetitions will increase circulation and help with range of motion.

**Stop smoking.** Smoking can narrow blood vessels, slow wound healing, and contribute to the formation of chilblains. It goes without saying, if you smoke, try to quit. There are smoking cessation programs in most communities, and your healthcare provider can help you find the one best for you.

Despite your best efforts, your feet may still get cold. If this happens, be sure not to warm them too quickly. Never place your cold feet in front of a warm fire, or submerge them in hot water. Though it might feel good, it is the fastest way to develop the inflamed, painful skin patches that indicate chilblains.

If you do get chilblains, do not scratch, as scratching can break the skin and lead to infections. Use witch hazel or an edible oil to soothe the itching and burning.

Rewarm the skin slowly and gently, without massaging, rubbing, or applying direct heat. Keep the affected skin dry and warm, but away from sources of heat, and keep any blisters and sores clean and covered.

If, despite your best efforts, you develop chilblains and see any broken skin or swelling, seek help from your healthcare provider as soon as possible.

*Kate Clayton-Jones RN, PhD, MBA, is a registered nurse and the founder and CEO of Footcare by Nurses, an in-home foot care company staffed by nurses dedicated to prevention and compassionate care. Footcare by Nurses currently serves western and central Massachusetts, northern Connecticut, Cape Cod, and the islands. This article was first published last winter in LifePath's monthly newsletter, The Good Life.*

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**THE SPIRIT SHOPPE**

**MONTAGUE** from page A1

town operates in Turners Falls, one in the Discovery Center parking lot on Second Street and the other next to Peskeompskut Park on Sixth Street. He said the town was subsidizing the stations to the tune of \$11,980 during the current fiscal year, most of which it has already paid to Eversource.

Last February, however, the company had agreed to classify the charging stations on the “demand” rate, which should have reduced the company’s portion of the stations’ cost by as much as 68%.

The town recently discovered that the new rate had never been applied on its bills. Eversource has admitted a “clerical error,” Nolan-Zeller reported, and has credited the overpayment to future bills. As a result, the town will not have to pay another bill until the summer.

Nolan-Zeller recommended that Montague use its remaining credits to fund a new three-year contract with Voltrek, a company that provides warranty and maintenance services for the stations. The board, without taking a formal vote, approved of him bringing a new contract to a future meeting.

Nolan Zeller also proposed that the EV budget request and the rates charged to users both be reduced in FY’26, though he did not propose specific amounts.

Next on the agenda was a proposal to apply for a grant from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to study the feasibility of adding more stations, and the “best practices” for financing them. The grant is available to low-income or disadvantaged communities with high percentages of renters and on-street parking.

Nolan-Zeller said the program “does not commit us to any installations,” and the board unanimously directed him to apply, although with a good deal of skepticism.

“We’ll just dig the hole deeper by putting more in,” said selectboard chair Rich Kuklewicz.

“I would much rather see how the town can generate its own clean energy, rather than providing electricity to cars,” said member Matt Lord. “I am ambivalent or skeptical, depending on the day.”

**Creating Calm Traffic**

Town planner Maureen Pollock announced that the state Department of Transportation has awarded the town a construction grant of \$499,682 for “traffic calming” improvements in Montague Center.

The initial design in the approved application would install raised crosswalks across Main Street at Union and Station streets, expand bike lanes along Main Street, make crossings of Center and North streets more wheelchair-friendly, move the bus shelter near the Village Store to the north, and construct a new shelter for northbound buses in front of the post office.

The town will need to appropriate funds for the final pre-construction design, estimated to cost around \$150,000, at the May annual town meeting.

The project must be completed by the end of June 2026.

During the lengthy public input process which had produced the application, some residents criticized the proposed designs as inadequate and advocated for more drastic measures such as speed

bumps. Lord said he had shared news of the grant award with residents of the village, and “they’re very excited.”

Eileen Mariani, who lives on Main Street, said she needed more time to look at the approved plan, but “so for it looks good.” She said she was particularly pleased by the inclusion of raised crosswalks in the approved design.

Pollock also requested approval to apply for a state grant to create bike trails though the Montague Plains, which would connect riders with the Canalside Rail Trail in Turners Falls and the Franklin County Bikeway and the town’s “five villages” more generally.

Town administrator Walter Ramsey pointed out that although the Plains are under the control of the state Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, the town has rights of way for a number of roads and trails on the large pine barren.

The board approved the request.

Pollock announced that her department was seeking community input for a “seed project” to develop community resilience to climate change, under the state Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness 2.0 grant program, by addressing “root causes of social vulnerability and moving from planning to implementation.”

Pollock listed three potential projects, one of which would be funded for a year under the grant: improving and expanding the community gardens in downtown Turners Falls, and locating garden sites in other villages; supporting the development of a community commercial kitchen, in a space adjacent to the Finders Collective store on the corner of Fourth and L streets; and a pilot project to install winter window inserts in homes.

Pollock said all were “great projects,” and that she wished they could all be funded, but that the town needs to choose only one after a public input process. An online survey has been posted on the town website, and paper copies will be placed at the Gill-Montague senior center, the public libraries, and the Brick House Community Resource Center.

**Everyone Loves a Budget**

Ramsey reviewed the status of the town’s FY’26 operating budget, currently under development, and options for balancing it without significantly reducing “excess capacity,” the amount below the limit allowed under state law that the town chooses to tax property owners. The current year’s budget includes an excess capacity of \$1,149,544, which has had the effect of reducing taxes and creating a cushion should expensive future projects need to be funded.

Town treasurer Eileen Seymour reported that the current plan by the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, of which Montague is a member, is to increase its HMO price by 18% and its PPO price by 20% in the next fiscal year.

Seymour, Montague’s voting representative on the trust’s governing board, said the organization’s reserves had declined significantly due to the high cost of a class of drugs used to treat Type 2 diabetes and obesity, as well as a large increase in the volume of medical claims.

The board briefly discussed the rate increases, advising Seymour to

support smaller and more frequent rate increases in the future, and clarifying that the town is not considering joining the state Group Insurance Commission, which the Gill-Montague school district has joined.

Ramsey then presented a quick but detailed review of the rest of the FY’26 budget, which must be voted on at town meeting in May. He focused on the public libraries and the Council on Aging (COA), which have each requested increases for personnel upgrades; the public works department, which includes a small increase to reflect the cost of taking over maintenance of the Avenue A planters; veterans’ services, with an increase to cover new benefits; higher trash collection costs; and a large employee benefits increase driven by the higher insurance costs.

The total expenses increased by only 3.1%, Ramsey said, but the budget would be out of balance by just over \$140,000 if the town aims to leave aside the same level of excess tax capacity as it has in the current fiscal year.

The town coordinator presented several “alternatives” for reducing this deficit, including postponing the staffing increases requested by the libraries and COA; holding off on planter maintenance; and not purchasing new employee management software. These, he said, would reduce the deficit to \$74,160.

The selectboard seemed amenable to eliminating the library staff changes, planter maintenance, and employee software from this year’s budget, but supported the increase in the COA budget. Board members were resistant to the idea of dipping into excess capacity, saying it may be needed in the future to finance infrastructure projects.

The board did not take a vote, but Ramsey said he would “look at some of these recommendations” and bring a proposal to their next meeting.

**Other Business**

The selectboard allocated \$30,000 from the public works discretionary fund to purchase a tack tank trailer for the highway department, which will pour a water-based asphalt mixture on roadways prior to repaving.

A request for proposals (RFP) to lease the Colle Building in downtown Turners Falls was authorized by the board. The RFP is required under state law as the building is owned by the town. It is currently leased to the Center for Responsive Schools, which will be allowed to reapply for a new three-year term.

A request by Community Health Center of Franklin County operations officer Jessica Strom to place signage on Montague City Road directing patients to the health center’s new location on Burnham Street was forwarded to the zoning board of appeals.

A decision about spending revenue from the national opioid settlement, meanwhile, was placed in the hands of the board of health.

The selectboard retired at the end of the meeting into two executive sessions, one to discuss litigation with FirstLight Power and the other to consider the town’s negotiating strategy with three of its employee unions.

The next scheduled selectboard meeting will be held Monday, February 10.



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

*Here’s the way it was on February 5, 2015: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.*

**Board Suspects Trojan Horse**

For over an hour Wednesday night, the Erving selectboard questioned Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust representatives about a potential donation of the Mackin family’s 50-acre Poplar Mountain property on Old Stage Road. Selectboard members were skeptical about the reasons Mount Grace might have for acquiring the property with the intention of later donating it to the town.

Mount Grace director Leigh Youngblood acknowledged that the lot “is in the path of the proposed [Kinder Morgan Northeast Energy Direct] pipeline,” but said that the timing was coincidental. Selectboard chair William

Bembury said, “A number of people in the town of Erving are looking to the board to make a statement on the pipeline.”

Member Arthur Johnson explained he did not want the town to be in the position of giving Mount Grace “leverage to fight the pipeline.”

**Who Let The Dogs Out?**

Most people in the area are familiar with the Dakin Animal Shelter. Fewer are aware that the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office (FCSO) Regional Dog Shelter & Adoption Center opened in May of 2012.

The FCSO and sheriff Christopher Donelan are in charge of jails and the dog shelter. The FCSO has contracted with 17 Franklin County towns to care for stray, abandoned and lost dogs. Last year 234 dogs were serviced by the facility.

**20 YEARS AGO**

*Here’s the way it was on February 3, 2005: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.*

**Perking Up Peske Park**

Almost half of this year’s \$800,000 Community Development Block Grant is proposed to be used for the remodeling of Peskeompskut Park. The park was created in 1965 on a vacant gully between Sixth and Seventh Streets. A fountain was installed a de-

cade later. Community groups have added other memorials over time, including Korean War Veterans, Students Against Drunk Driving, and the Downtown Neighbors Association, which planted trees in memory of four Montague women who were murdered by their partners in the late 1980s and a Tibetan refugee who died in the 1997 Crocker Building fire.

Musicians will have easy truck access to a new bandshell without tearing up the grass.

**150 YEARS AGO**

*Here’s the way it was on February 3, 1875: News from the Turners Falls Reporter’s archives.*

**Turners Falls and Vicinity**

The days stay with us a little longer, each visit.

John Shebel of Riverside is demolishing his maple sugar orchard, and selling the maples for fire wood.

The Keith Paper Company, which has been running twelve hours a day for a month or two, is now running full time.

The Springfield *Republican* reporter occasionally makes the familiar names of our business men look somewhat unfamiliar.

Donald McKay and his band of Warm Spring Indians gave the real war whoop at Colle Hall, Thursday evening last.

B.N. Farren, Esq., proprietor of the Farren Hotel block, has generously agreed to reduce the rent of the stores in the block as soon as the present leases expire.

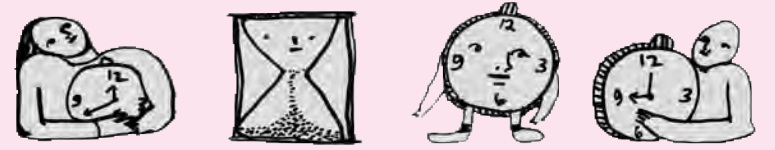
Scarcity of water for household purposes is threatening the village. It was found last week that the reservoir was almost empty, but by guarding against unnecessary waste, the water may hold

out till a thaw comes.

The oldest inhabitant thinks he doesn’t remember such another winter as this. It came in without rain, there was no January thaw, and has been colder than zero from the first. He also shakes his head, and says he pities such places as Mill River when the spring freshet comes.

Mr. A.W. Stevens, while visiting his late home in Newburyport, secured some very fine specimens of minerals from the newly opened mines. One lump of ore contains nearly fifty per cent of silver, while in another lump the percentage of lead is over seventy five. A few pieces of quartz show a fair percentage of gold.

Michael Sullivan is getting along rapidly with his contract on the fishway. He has twenty-seven men at work, and will finish about the 13th March. The fishway will be just to the south of the logway and the top will be in the middle of the island. The report some two or three weeks ago that a number of Mr. Sullivan’s men had been severely frost bitten was not true. One man did get his fingers nipped, but they say it was because he was too lazy to keep himself warm.



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**MOLD** from page A1

The advisory describes two separate sets of contaminated products likely being sold at medical and retail dispensaries, the first group since last May and the second group since September.

Two of the four affected brands, Garcia Hand Picked and Strane, are owned by the Washington, DC-based company Holistic Industries, whose Liberty Cannabis dispensaries in Easthampton, Springfield, and Somerville were also affected by the recall.

In a statement on Wednesday the company asserted that the recalls are the result of “infighting” in Massachusetts between independent cannabis testing laboratories.

According to Holistic general counsel Kyle Crossley, the CCC retested the previously approved products in response to one firm, the Framingham-based MCR Labs, “pushing for” its preferred methodology to be adopted as a statewide standard.

“Although all recalled product previously passed the CCC-mandated testing before being sold and, as the CCC notice said, there have been zero reports of any consumer health issues, we are honoring the product recall,” Crossley wrote.

Last April, Holistic reached a settlement with the CCC over mold allegedly present from 2020 to 2022 in a cannabis growing facility it owns in Monson. The commission conducted an unannounced inspection of the Monson facility in October, according to Crossley, and found “zero traces of mold.”

On January 23, however, Holistic was informed that some of

its products were removed from shelves after failing post-market testing. The follow-up tests utilized the “plate count testing” method, rather than the “qPCR” testing method used by the independent labs Holistic had contracted with. Both methodologies are accepted by the CCC.

On January 25, MCR Labs filed a lawsuit against eight competing firms, claiming they were engaging in “intentional interference with advantageous business relations” and “unjust enrichment.” MCR’s suit alleges its competitors manipulated the results of quality-control tests to minimize the presence of yeast, mold, lead, and pesticides, and additionally exaggerated the potency of products.

“[T]he Massachusetts cannabis industry is rife with a practice commonly known as ‘lab shopping,’ where cultivators determine which labs provide the most favorable results (regardless of their empirical validity) and engage those labs for compliance testing contracts and business relationships,” the suit alleges. “This race-to-the-bottom willingness to manipulate testing also results in unknowing consumers overpaying for lower-potency cannabis riddled with dangerous contaminants.”

Holistic maintains that its products were tested and compliant with the CCC’s rules, and argues that the agency’s move to “side with certain labs without making formal rule changes” could negatively impact the industry in the state.

“We are seriously concerned that the CCC, by undermining its own regulation that testing results

are valid for one year, has opened the floodgates to the filing of complaints for nefarious reasons,” Crossley wrote. “This could further destabilize the Massachusetts cannabis industry as operators face constant recalls.”

Exposure to mold in marijuana can cause serious health complications, especially for medical patients, according to the CCC. Symptoms to look out for include cough, fever, shortness of breath, and chest pain.

The CCC’s advisory explains that “[t]he affected products are subject to further investigation by the Commission and would be subject to confirmatory retesting and passing results before the products can be made available to the public.”

Other western Massachusetts dispensaries named on the list as having sold potentially contaminated products by Holistic include Enlight Cannabis in Northampton, HiBrid in Pittsfield, 6 Brick’s in Springfield, and the Great Barrington Dispensary.

A second group of products, sold under the brands Slap N Tickle and Tiger’s Eye, were reportedly sold at Indica Cannabis in Adams, Liberty Cannabis in Springfield, and the Bud Barn in Winchendon.

The CCC advises customers to destroy any products from the affected batches or return them to the dispensary for disposal. “Contact the Marijuana Establishment or Medical Marijuana Treatment Center where the products were purchased for more information,” the CCC wrote.

The advisory does not mention refunds.



**HELP SAVE THE RIVER**  
**Come to GCC on Feb. 19 at 6 pm**  
**Dining Commons, Greenfield Community College**

Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection is having a **HYBRID PUBLIC HEARING** about the relicensing of the destructive **Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage**

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**The Montague Public Libraries** seek intrepid library supporters to join *the Library Trustees.*

If you are interested in supporting and advocating for the Montague Public Libraries’ future-focused programs, materials, services, and building projects, then this may be the volunteer position for you!

The Trustees support the operations and initiatives of the libraries by attending monthly general meetings and by participating in at least one of four subcommittees, which meet periodically. The Trustees’ subcommittees include: *Strategic Planning, Personnel, Building, and Budget.*

The time commitment is typically 2 to 4 hours per month. All meetings are held virtually during the winter. You can find more information about the trustees’ work here: <https://bit.ly/MPL-trustees>

Those who wish to run for an open trustee position must pick up nomination papers from the Town Clerk at 1 Avenue A by Monday, March 31 and return completed papers by Tuesday, April 1.



MARY FEENEY PHOTO

Mary Feeny shared this photograph, taken a number of years ago at Unity Park. “I was commuting to work in New Hampshire for many years, and this photo was from my ‘commute’ series,” she writes. “A fallout of global warming / climate change: it is not as simple to look at a photo and determine the season. The lack of substantive snowfall means this photo may have been winter, may have been spring.” Metadata on the image file tells us that Mary took this on a Canon PowerShot SX260 HS, with a shutter speed of one-tenth of a second, at 4:50 p.m. on Tuesday, January 14, 2014. A winter wonderland!

**Tip of the week ...**

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MIKE JACKSON PHOTO

features@montaguereporter.org

OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER

FEBRUARY 6, 2025

Above: At the Green River Swimming Area in Greenfield, ducks wait it out, some budding below the melting ice.

## High School Sports: Taking It to the Hoop

(Our high school sports reporter is out this week, but our photographer has been hard at work!)

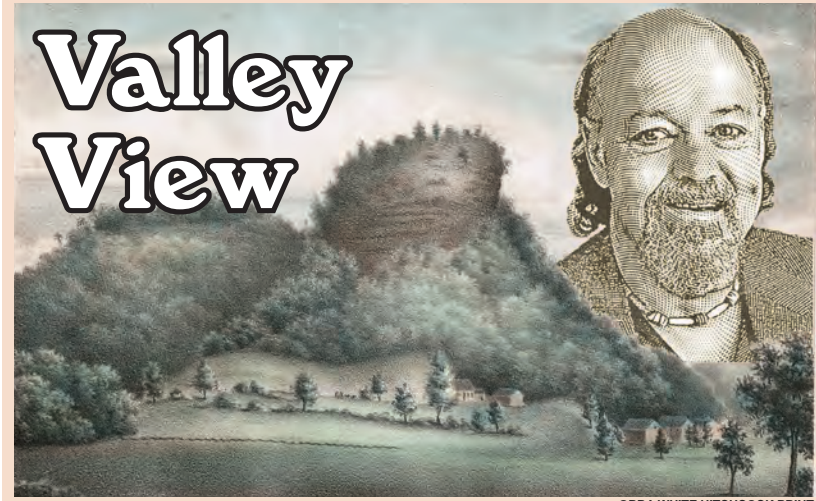
At right: Turners Falls High School's Ivy Lopez sends the ball to the hoop against Athol defender Ava Adams as the Thunder hosted the Bears in a JV game on Monday. The final score was Athol 37, Turners Falls 16.



DAVID HOULT PHOTOS

At left: Franklin Tech's Cordelia Guerin (left) drives the ball up the court with Pioneer Valley's Charley Harrington defending. The Pioneer Panthers prevailed, 39-22, in last Thursday's matchup at Messer Gymnasium in Northfield.

## Valley View



ORRA WHITE HITCHCOCK PRINT

### Their Unburned Bones Dissolved

By GARY SANDERSON

**GREENFIELD** – Venerable, retired, Connecticut Valley archaeologist Peter Thomas has chimed in on a perplexing regional Atlantic salmon puzzle that keeps on giving and won't go away.

The question is: Given that we know spring salmon-spawning runs once populated New England rivers, and that salmon was a valued food resource for indigenous and colonial inhabitants alike, why is there virtually no archaeological evidence?

Thomas, responding by email to my last column (January 23, *A Barn Long Since Left*), doesn't think it's rocket science. But first, a little refresher on previous discussion in this space.

Even though salmon evidence is rare in New England's archaeological record, we can recite a long list of regional salmon falls and rivers – including some right here in the Connecticut Valley – which strongly suggest salmon presence. Yet still, no archaeological remains, according to UMass anthropologist Catherine Carroll Carlson, who reviewed reports of 75 known fishing sites for her 1992 UMass doctoral dissertation, *The Atlantic Salmon in New England History and Prehistory: Social and Environmental Implications*.

Carlson's findings were not welcomed by altruistic fisheries biologists working furiously at the time to restore Connecticut River salmon. Instead, her conclusions were greeted by catcalls, boos, and hisses, and publicly dismissed as invalid by critics with jobs and blind crusades to protect.

Loud and clear, these critics could hear the death knell sounding on their struggling federal and state Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program, which was finally abandoned in 2013 following a failed 46-year effort.

My most recent foray into this issue wondered aloud why a certain ubiquitous Connecticut River conservation gadfly was so threatened by new research aimed at tweaking Carlson's conclusion that, because New England salmon

remains are almost non-existent in the archaeological record, so, too, were salmon.

She even went so far as to opine that New England salmon populations were intentionally overstated by colonial promoters attempting to entice restless European emigrants to a new and faraway land of unimaginable abundance. So deceptive were these promoters that they named the previously unknown American shad "white salmon" as a disingenuous drawing card. Those smaller, plebian shad, she said, were the staple of New England's annual anadromous fish runs; not Atlantic salmon – king of North Atlantic gamefish and table fare of royalty.

She was right. Shad runs did indeed dwarf accompanying salmon runs here. But when you toss in peripheral perspective from personal accounts like *The Diary of Matthew Patten of Bedford, New Hampshire, 1754-1788*, it's quite apparent that salmon were not, as Carlson claims, "insignificant," but a valuable food-resource worth targeting for the larder.

So, why are their remains so scarce in New England's archaeological record?

Thomas – with digs at Riverside/Gill and the Sokoki Fort in Vernon, Vermont to his credit – says there are two good reasons, both relating to "a lack of evidence of specific activities surviving in the ground for archaeologists to excavate and interpret."

During his two "very limited" Riverside excavations adjacent to the well-known fishing falls on the Connecticut, Thomas encountered three to four feet of black, organically-rich soils containing high levels of mercury and iodine derived from marine fish species.

"Based on the numerous stone tools we found," he wrote, "Native occupants had fished at the falls for some 9,000 years each spring."

Yet, while no one has ever challenged the fact that massive runs of shad and alewives (and lesser numbers of salmon) ran the river each year, there's a lack of identifiable remains. The reason, according to see **VALLEY VIEW** page B8



## Travel with Max

By Max Hartshorne

### New York City in 2025.... What's new?

**SOUTH DEERFIELD** – I'm back from my annual trip to the Big Apple, and as always, there are some new travel developments to share.

The biggest news is that, as of my visit in January 2025, congestion pricing was in effect. The new toll, \$9 for cars and \$25 for large trucks, has dramatically reduced the traffic in Manhattan below 60th Street. Early stats said there were 26,000 fewer cars per day in the city. An impressive 55% fewer crashes happened in Manhattan during this period than last year!

My observation after walking across Manhattan was that there were fewer cars, and it felt like fewer traffic jams were forming.

Stay tuned, because even this innovative idea which raises money for mass transit from car owners raises serious hackles with many people. The same people who fought it and compromised at \$9 instead of \$15 will soon be trying to derail the tax using some form of blackmail for federal highway dollars.

Below are some of the new happenings in NYC in 2025.

- *The expanded High Line:* The beloved High Line walking path has extended its reach with the High Line-Moynihan Connector, a new pathway that links the elevated park to the historic and beautiful

see **TRAVELS** page B3



HARTSHORNE PHOTO

Some things in the Big Apple have stayed the same...

# Pet of the Week



CARMODY COLLAGE

## 'NEO'

Neo is a sweet, energetic boy! He likes to hang out with his people and hop around the house. He is close to 100% litterbox-trained and enjoys being petted.

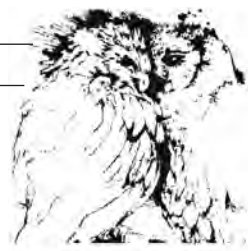
Rabbits are intelligent, complex animals who do well in families with humans who understand that they are prey animals, and do not enjoy being held or picked up. The best way to bond with them is to spend time with them outside of their pens, and shower them with plenty of fresh romaine and cilantro.

Rabbits' primary daily diet is fresh timothy hay and fresh leaves and veggies – pellets should be treated as “junk food” and given in

limited amounts. This fresh food can run \$40 to \$50 each month.

We recommend at least a 10-square-foot crate or fencing – no wire floors – and at least 24 square feet of indoor exercise space. Rabbits typically live eight to 10 years; Neo is two years and five months old.

If you're ready to adopt now and want to learn more about, meet, or adopt this pet, you can start the process by coming to the Dakin Humane Society in Springfield during our open adoption hours, Tuesdays through Saturdays from 12:30 to 3 p.m., or calling us at (413) 781-4000, or visiting [www.dakinhumane.org](http://www.dakinhumane.org).



## Sex Matters

a sex-positive health column

by STEPHANIE BAIRD

**SOUTH HADLEY** – For my February column, this Gen X-er is going on a slightly indulging departure to write a Valentine love – or should I say lust – letter to Depeche Mode (DM), in praise of the eroticism of their lyrics.

I likely first heard their music when I was 14 or 15, as I remember falling head over heels for their range of light and dark New Wave lyrics and sound addressing politics, death, religion, sex, and intimacy – specifically “Just Can't Get Enough,” “People are People,” and “Black Celebration” – and attended their *Music for the Masses* concert at Houston's Six Flags circa 1988.

Even at that concert, my second official arena concert, I felt the full erotic potential of their lyrics and performance, trancing out, pressed against the railing so fully that my bra came undone, which I didn't mind.

I studied their lyrics intensely over the decades since then, taking a bit of a break to raise my child, but delightfully rediscovering my love of them by listening to a podcast by two Gen X peers called Permanent Record, where they astutely analyze their albums. I stumbled on Permanent Record serendipitously right before DM released their latest album, *Momento Mori*, in 2023.

My love fervently renewed, picking up where it left off, and I rapturously saw them live at the Centre Bell in Montréal in November 2023. I again felt the full force of their erotic energy, but now coming from middle-aged musicians directed to middle-aged worshippers.

This concert got me thinking a lot about how we may each have one or more soundtracks – or music genres – running in the background of our lives, relevant at any given moment. For me, DM has always been strongly present as the undercurrent of my own erotic energy, from the very beginning of my own early sexual awakenings – possibly at that 1988 concert – all the way to my current existence as a fully embodied perimenopausal adult.

So let's go on a little dive into their most erotic/sexual lyrics, and learn how many of them go against stereotypical views of sex and gender.

I'll start off by mentioning that their first three albums, from 1981 to 1983, were more about having fun, and exploring teenaged and young adult notions of love, work, and capitalism. If you aren't familiar with DM or those early albums, and you generally like electronic-sounding music with catchy melodies and lyrics, they are certainly worth a listen.

Their first real breakout album, *Some Great Reward*, their fourth album, released in 1984, shows the beginnings of a deeper and more nuanced exploration into sexuality. “Master and Servant” hits us over the head with the main lyricist Martin L. Gore's burgeoning interest in BDSM, which he personally explored in depth in Berlin. He wisely proclaims that these master and servant roles “are a lot like life,” bring-

ing it back to labor relations.

David Gahan, the lush baritone frontman who exudes erotic energy just by standing there, delivers all of Gore's lyrics with confidence and intensity.

Gore's gorgeous solo ballad “Somebody” is also on this album, which sounds at casual listen like a typical love ballad, but includes a plot twist recognizing that such a gushy song usually makes him “sick,” but in this case, he will “get away with it.”

Also included is this stanza:

*She will hear me out / And won't easily be converted / To my way of thinking / In fact she'll often disagree / But at the end of it all / She will understand me,*

which nicely upends gender role expectations of a female partner simply adoringly listening.

At any rate, DM is now fully on their journey exploring erotic and relationship dynamics.

*Black Celebration* (1986) includes two very obviously erotic songs, “Stripped” and “A Question of Lust,” also addressing relationships and the importance of trust.

**David Gahan, the lush baritone frontman who exudes erotic energy just by standing there, delivers all of Gore's lyrics with confidence and intensity.**

“Stripped” is unapologetically asking the recipient to undress, but is also a commentary on how enmeshed we are with our industrial world, as well as our devices – in this case, the television:

*Let me hear you make decisions without your television / Let me hear you speaking just for me / Let me see you stripped down to the bone.*

This foreshadows the most important relationship most of us now unfortunately attend to: the one with our cell phones.

Incidentally, this album also includes my very favorite DM song, “But Not Tonight,” an existentially joyful love song for the moon, rain, and “pleasure at being so wet.”

Next, *Music for the Masses* (1987) includes one of their catchiest songs exploring BDSM dynamics: “Strangelove”:

*Will you take the pain I will give to you / Again and again and will you return it?*

Mutuality, including the reciprocity of giving and receiving pain, is constantly on their mind.

“I Want you Now” is an obvious song about wanting sex with a partner immediately, though with some modicum of awareness of the gendered way this comes off: *And I don't mean to sound like one of the boys / That's not what I'm trying to do.*

Yet they do sound like one of the boys (of the 1980s), lol. Oh well, no one is perfect.

However, this song is counterbalanced with “Behind the Wheel,”

in which Gore's lyrics (sung by the blatantly sexy Gahan) gladly give up control, perhaps both in sex and in life:

*Oh, little girl, there are times when I feel / I'd rather not be the one behind the wheel / Come, pull my strings / Watch me move, I do anything, please.*

I especially appreciate how both “Behind the Wheel” and “Strange-love” emphasize that equality within sex and relationships is essential, and that it might look like taking turns dominating and submitting. And I love the idea of Gore/Gahan giving over complete sexual control to a partner.

*Violator* (1990), one of their most well-known and listened-to albums, begins with what I believe to be their most sophisticatedly sensual song, “World in My Eyes.” The other songs show a growing maturity and introspection towards other concerns: truth, quietness, death, and religion.

“World In My Eyes” is pure melodic erotica, inviting the listener to imagine an intimate interlude of simply receiving pleasure:

*Let me take you on a trip / Around the world and back / And you won't have to move, you just sit still / Now let your mind do the walking / And let my body do the talking / Let me show you the world in my eyes...*

Interestingly, during the *Momento Mori* tour, during this song they played a very large close-up video of the eyes and face of long-time third member Andy Fletcher, who died in 2022.

Fletcher did much of the background engineering of their music, and extensively interfaced between the oft-divided Gore and Gahan. In the video his face morphed from youth to close to his death age, showcasing a more existential interpretation of the song: how an entire life, an entire world, can exist or transpire in one interaction.

Another *Violator* song, “Blue Dress,” more blatantly carries the mantle of sexual desire. *Put it on / The one that I prefer:* Gore writing and singing about a blue dress as one of his sexual accelerators.

I could go on – DM has a very large repertoire – but I think you get the point.

I invite you to think about the soundtracks of your own life thus far, and which music is most reflective or activating of your own sensuality, eroticism, sexuality, sense of intimacy, sexual accelerators, or however you want to consider yourself as a sensual being.

Let me know! I'm always interested in learning how creativity interfaces with sensuality/sexuality/eroticism/etc.

*Stephanie Baird is a certified OWL facilitator and an EMDR psychotherapist and consultant who encourages her clients towards thriving sexual health. She is the author of the book EMDR Therapy and Sexual Health: A Clinician's Guide (2023). She welcomes feedback and suggestions at [sexmatters@montaguereporter.org](mailto:sexmatters@montaguereporter.org).*

## Senior Center Activities FEBRUARY 10 THROUGH 14

### 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 2/10

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

### Tuesday 2/11

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
10 a.m. Grandparents Raising Teens  
12:30 p.m. Tech Tuesday: Drop-in Tech Help  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

### Wednesday 2/12

Foot Clinic by appointment  
4 p.m. Mat Yoga

### Thursday 2/13

1 p.m. Pitch

### Friday 2/14

AARP Tax Prep by appointment

### Tuesday 2/11

9 a.m. Stretch & Balance  
10 a.m. Line Dancing

### Wednesday 2/12

9 a.m. Interval Training  
10 a.m. Chair Aerobics  
11:30 a.m. Bingo  
12 p.m. Senior Tech Help (bring your device)

### Thursday 2/13

9 a.m. Barre Fusion  
10 a.m. Pilates Flow  
*Closing at 11 a.m. for Friends Holiday Party*

### Friday 2/14

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Quilting, Open Sew

### WENDELL

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. The next clinic is March 5. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments.

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

### LEVERETT

Chair Yoga classes are held Wednesdays at 10 a.m., hybrid, at the town hall and on Zoom. Foot care clinics are the third Tuesday of each month. Luncheons are the fourth Friday at town hall.

Please check the town newsletter or Leverett Connects listserv for more info.

### 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 2/10

9 a.m. Good for U  
10 a.m. Seated Fitness  
12 p.m. Pitch

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**TRAVELS** from page B1

Moynihan Train Hall.

This seamless connection featuring a wooden bridge with flowers underneath blends art, nature, and urban design while making it easier than ever to explore Manhattan's west side. New public art installations along the route showcase work by emerging and established artists.

• **Penn Station re-imagined:** After years of construction, Penn Station's transformation is finally complete. The newly expanded and modernized station features soaring ceilings, natural light, and improved amenities, making it a far more welcoming gateway to the city. Travelers can now enjoy a smoother commute and explore what's just after the underground tracks across Eighth Avenue at the Train Hall.

Much of Penn is still dreary with its low ceilings, but part of it has now improved. Train travelers, make sure to take the escalator up and see the glory of the Moynihan Train Hall.



It now costs \$9 to drive a car into the "congestion zone" in lower Manhattan.

• **The rise of eco-friendly tourism:** New York City is doubling down on sustainability in 2025. The Green NYC Initiative has introduced electric ferries, expanded bike lanes, and established more pedestrian-only zones in areas like Times Square and Union Square.

Hotels across the city are also embracing eco-friendly practices, with many achieving LEED certification. And all over the city, even when it's freezing, both delivery drivers and locals are riding more bikes.

• **Broadway's next generation of shows:** There's nothing in the world as exciting in theater as Broadway. The way they build sets and some of the effects are just stunning. In *The Great Gatsby*, the show we enjoyed, two cars were driving on stage – real cars!

A theater packed with 1,400 people is an exciting place to be when the lights go up on a new show. There is simply nothing like it. This year's lineup includes groundbreaking productions like *MJ*, the musical about Michael Jackson, and the latest *Harry Potter* show.

As usual, in 2025, Broadway theaters are packed to the gills. The best tip we can ever give is to go to the TKTS booth in Times Square and other locations for half-price tickets. It is still a great deal.

• **Food in the Apple:** Food halls are one of Europe's best contributions to dining. These popular halls combine 50 or more restaurants in stalls surrounding a big central hall with long shared tables.

One of the newest food halls in Manhattan is The Hugh, at 157 East 53rd Street. This upscale, sparkling-clean hall has a cool vibe, a wide selection from fish and chips to pad thai, and comfortable seating.

Little Spain in Hudson Yards and

the new Japan Village in Brooklyn offer authentic pop-up treats from around the world.

The one thing we will see less of in 2025 is the city's dreaded "sheds," those covered walkways that seem to be everywhere. Mayor Adams is trying to get them taken down, with mixed success. The problem is that it is often cheaper for the landlords to pay the fines than to finish the work.

• **The arts, and MoMA:** The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) has unveiled its highly anticipated \$450 million expansion, featuring new galleries dedicated to digital art and immersive experiences. The Bronx Museum of the Arts has also completed a \$33 million renovation, showcasing a larger collection of works by underrepresented artists.

In early 2025 the historic Frick Collection and its famous Gilded Age mansion will unveil its highly anticipated \$290 million renovation and expansion.

• **The New York City Ferry:** In warmer weather, the cheapest cruise you can take is on the Staten Island Ferry. You don't even need a ticket!

The NYC Ferry system – sorry, not free – has expanded its routes, making it easier to explore the city's waterfront neighborhoods. New stops include Red Hook, Coney Island, and City Island, offering travelers a unique perspective of the city's diverse boroughs.

The ferries are also fully electric, aligning with the city's sustainability goals.

• **Getting around by public transit:** The city's public transportation system has been upgraded with contactless payment options and real-time updates via the new NYC Transit App. Now, you just tap your phone to take a subway ride. You no longer need to buy a physical Metrocard.

• **Where to stay: not Airbnb!** We stayed in the modern and fun Yotel, with its purple exterior, on 10th Avenue. The only wrinkle I had was that when you book the hotel from any site except the Yotel site, you have to pay an additional hefty city tax upon arrival. That turned a \$425 stay into a \$500 one.

Friends in Whately have told me their own stories about how hard it is now to get an Airbnb because the law has changed in New York City requiring landlords to live in the same apartment that they're renting. Friends who used to use Airbnb when they visited their kids in Brooklyn now have to pay for a hotel instead.

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



The curtain call at *The Great Gatsby*, playing at the Broadway Theatre.

**HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG**

**Purse Left On Rack; Shamzie Gallops Miles and Miles to Wok; Sky Explosion Probably Mr. Musk's; Conditions Diminished**

**Monday, 1/27**

10:43 a.m. 911 caller reports her medication was stolen from her backpack. Officers are tied up at this time; advised caller an officer will call her when they are available. Caller informed officer that she made a mistake and does not need any services.

12:28 p.m. Walk-in reports being threatened by a neighbor after he took a picture of a vehicle owned by the neighbor because he was interested in buying it. Advised of options.

12:40 p.m. Caller reports receiving a call from someone claiming to be from Medicaid. She gave them all of her personal information when they asked. She has since spoken with Medicaid and also reported the incident to a fraud alert company. Requesting information be logged; will call if anything further is needed.

1:28 p.m. Officer flagged down at Salvation Army by an individual reporting a stolen black satchel purse. Cell phone, cards, and keys inside. Officer found the purse hanging on a rack inside the store.

4:46 p.m. Serving ordinance violation for not removing snow on Main Street. Left copy on entryway; no one home.

10:58 p.m. 911 caller states he heard and saw a verbal and physical altercation between two people on Avenue A from his apartment window. Officer out with individuals in front of Greenfield Savings Bank. Officer advised both parties of complaint and to lower their voices. Parties advised there was a fight further down the street. Officer checked area; nobody around.

**Tuesday, 1/28**

5:34 a.m. Caller states he struck a deer while in his tractor-trailer in the area of Scotty's. Caller states there is no damage to his vehicle, but he is concerned that the deer may still be in the area. Area checked; no deer present.

9:52 a.m. Multiple 911 callers reporting a two-car accident at Millers Falls Road and Chester Street. Officers requesting tow for both vehicles.

1:25 p.m. 911 caller ad-

vising of a disturbance in a building on Avenue A. Verbal argument; all parties advised of options.

2:53 p.m. Caller states that the traffic lights at Avenue A and Third Street are showing the same signals in both directions. DPW notified.

3:33 p.m. Chief requesting officers' assistance with disabled tractor-trailer truck at Avenue A and Seventh Street. Tow company on scene; no longer in the way of traffic. Officers clear.

4:27 p.m. Attempting to locate female with active warrant on Main Street. Negative contact.

4:35 p.m. Attempting to locate female with two active warrants on Union Street. Negative contact; did ask person on scene to have female come to the station when she returns.

4:57 p.m. Attempting to locate male with two active warrants on Millers Falls Road. Negative contact.

10:11 p.m. Caller from East Main Street reports upstairs neighbor's music is too loud; she cannot sleep. Quiet upon officer's arrival.

**Wednesday, 1/29**

3:14 p.m. Caller reports that her dog ran away one hour ago. Second caller referenced previous caller when reporting lost dog; states she was pet-sitting and the dog got loose on Old Sunderland Road near the Sunderland line. Big white fluffy dog; Polish Tatra (resembles a Newfoundland); blue collar; no tags. Named Shamzie but does not always come when called. Copied report over simulcast of a big white fluffy dog loose in Deerfield near Wapping Road. Information given to Shelburne Control. Greenfield dispatch received several calls about a big white fluffy dog with a blue collar on their side of the bridge on Routes 5 and 10; dog has since crossed back into Deerfield near the Wok. Deerfield PD tied up on high-priority call. Shelburne Control checked with the owner of the only other dog matching the description in that area that they are aware of; that dog is accounted for. Shelburne Control received a call from a Keets Road resident in Deerfield that there is a big white fluffy dog in his backyard. Second caller advised and is at the Wok now; will check the area of the residence. Second caller called back confirming it was the dog they were looking for and she has located him on Keets Road. Shelburne Control and GPD advised.

3:47 p.m. Party into station; a 34-year-old Montague woman was arrested on two default warrants.

8:38 p.m. Caller from L Street reporting a motor vehicle accident that

occurred on private property earlier today. Caller states someone sideswiped his vehicle and came to the door to let him know. Caller unsure if driver is a minor. Advised of options by officer; will add information to call and keep on record.

10:29 p.m. 911 hangup call mapping to Unity/Keith Street area. Callbacks went to voicemail. Officer spoke with mother, who advised son is refusing to come to the door but that he is fine; stated he was sleeping.

10:51 p.m. Two additional 911 calls received from same number; additional call subsequently received from same number; line was open for a few seconds, and a moaning sound was heard. Officers advise misdial; party had smoked a controlled substance and fallen asleep, and the phone was wedged between the mattresses and was generating the calls.

11:14 p.m. 911 caller states he just struck a deer; it is in the middle of Turners Falls Road; unsure whether it is still alive. Report taken.

**Thursday, 1/30**

12:16 a.m. Officer advises roads in Montague Center are slippery; requests DPW be contacted to see what the plan is. DPW states they don't have a plan; was hoping it wouldn't be an issue with the wind, but if it's slippery they will come out; otherwise they will be in around 3 a.m. to take care of the roads before it gets busy. Officer advises the roads are slick and they should come in now. DPW foreman advised; states they will be in shortly.

1:32 p.m. Walk-in reporting that around 3 a.m. she went outside on Sunrise Terrace after hearing a "boom" and saw an extra-terrestrial light that she believes could be from the Elon Musk project.

2:54 p.m. Neighbor reporting ongoing issue with unshoveled sidewalk on Fourth Street. Snow removal bylaw paperwork given to involved party.

6:29 p.m. Caller heard what sounded like a taser when he walked by Unity Park. Officer unable to locate anyone at park.

10:33 p.m. 911 call reporting a disturbance on Avenue A. One party transported to warming shelter in Greenfield.

**Friday, 1/31**

9:13 a.m. Multiple 911 calls reporting a two-car accident with airbag deployment at Routes 47 and 63. Transferred to Shelburne Control. Sunderland Road shut down at North Leverett and Gunn roads. Party refused medical treatment on scene; unresponsive when arrived home. Report taken.

3:06 p.m. Party into station stating his cell phone and

charger were stolen out of his locker at Turners Falls High School during the last period of school today. Report taken.

4:17 p.m. Caller states that the intersection of Marshall and High Streets is very icy; she just slid for a ways through the area. Took report from off-duty officer; Unity Street is a sheet of ice. DPW contacted; will be heading in.

4:52 p.m. 911 caller states she slid on black ice on Newton Street and two of her tires are hanging over the embankment not touching the ground. Caller states she is uninjured and was able to jump out of the car but can't get the car back on the road. Officer advises car is not over embankment, just in a snowbank. Rau's requested for winch-out.

5:07 p.m. Caller states there is a car stuck in the middle of the road on the hill on Craig Avenue; concerned another car won't be able to pass. DPW en route.

7:55 p.m. 911 caller states he slid down the hill on Wendell Road and a car was sideways in the road; he was unable to stop, and he hit the vehicle. Caller states no injuries but heavy damage to both vehicles. Report taken. No tows required.

8:10 p.m. Automatic crash notification of accident on Canal Street. Male party in car moaning. Officer advises car into tree; operator is talking. Party removed to hospital. Tow requested.

**Saturday, 2/1**

5:24 p.m. 911 caller from Unity Street states they are in the process of moving; their dog is in the truck and jumped on the door and locked the vehicle. Dog is now locked in the truck. Services rendered.

10:50 p.m. Erving PD requesting assistance with a fight involving multiple people on French King Highway. Erving PD advises cancel; was teens shooting a YouTube video.

**Sunday, 2/2**

12:08 a.m. 911 call reporting fight behind the school on Griswold Street. Male party stated he could hear multiple intoxicated people yelling behind his house. Male party was very intoxicated; taken home by his mother.

2:28 a.m. Caller from Burnett Street states someone just knocked on her door and took off. Ongoing issue. Officer states fresh footprints of three individuals in a red vehicle on Stevens Street. Officer will continue to be on lookout in area.

**Monday, 2/3**

1:12 a.m. Officer reporting that town roads are not treated and driving conditions are extremely diminished.

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# Reflections: Black Comic Book Superheroes In Movies and TV

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – I thought that since February was Black History Month, it would be a good idea to look into the history of Black comic book superheroes and how they are portrayed in some of the TV and movies I have seen. These include Storm from the X-Men, Black Lightning, Falcon, and Black Panther.

Storm is a female African-American member of a group of superhero mutants called X-Men. I have seen the character portrayed in three live-action films, alongside Patrick Stewart, by Halle Berry.

Storm has the ability to control the weather. The special effects they use in these movies makes it seem she is indeed doing that, which is incredible on screen. It's an enjoyable sight, and combined with Berry's acting abilities, it's a wonderful portrayal of the character. Another cool thing that is part of the special effects when it comes to this superpower is that her eyes turn white when she is using it.

Another movie, a prequel called *X-Men Apocalypse* (2016), features a younger version of the character played by Alexandra Shipp. By the end of the film, she has joined the X-Men. Black Lightning is an African-American superhero I have seen portrayed in a TV series of the same name on The CW. The show featured Cress Williams, who plays Black Lightning, as

well as James Remar. Besides being called Black Lightning he is also named Jefferson Pierce.

Like Storm, he can make lightning. The character debuted in DC comic books in 1977, and his later costume resembles the one in the TV series. It can be described as a black costume with stripes, and a mask over his eyes.

The special effects used in this show to show him making lightning are good and cool to watch.

Falcon is a character that flies using mechanical wings, and in the comics has some kind of ability to control birds. This character is considered the "second Black superhero" in the history of comics, after the Black Panther.

Falcon was played by Anthony Mackie in what I have seen on screen, and doesn't have the same ability with birds. He has appeared to some extent in a few Marvel movies I have seen. Once was a cameo appearance in *Ant-Man* (2015), with Paul Rudd. The others are two *Captain America* sequel movies and a couple of the *Avengers* movies.

I am not sure if Falcon will have his wings in the new *Captain America: Brave New World*, since I have heard he replaces Steve Rogers as Captain America, like he does in the comics. But he looks good in the new outfit, and for some reason the movie also features the character of Red Hulk, who I am also familiar with from the comics and who should



MARVEL STUDIOS IMAGE

Anthony Mackie, who has played Falcon in the recent Marvel movies, becomes Captain America in an upcoming movie, just as the character did in the comics.

make for a very good story.

I can't really say much about Mackie's acting ability because I haven't seen him in anything out of these films, but he does a very good job playing this character, and I expect he will continue doing so in *Brave New World*. Black Panther, finally, has been played by Chadwick Boseman in *Black Panther*, *Captain America: Civil War*, and the two *Avengers* movies. He first appeared as the Black Panther in *Captain America: Civil War*.

His costume on screen is pretty much how he looks in the comics. He also has claws come out of his hands, like in the comics. I can't picture anybody else playing the Panther.

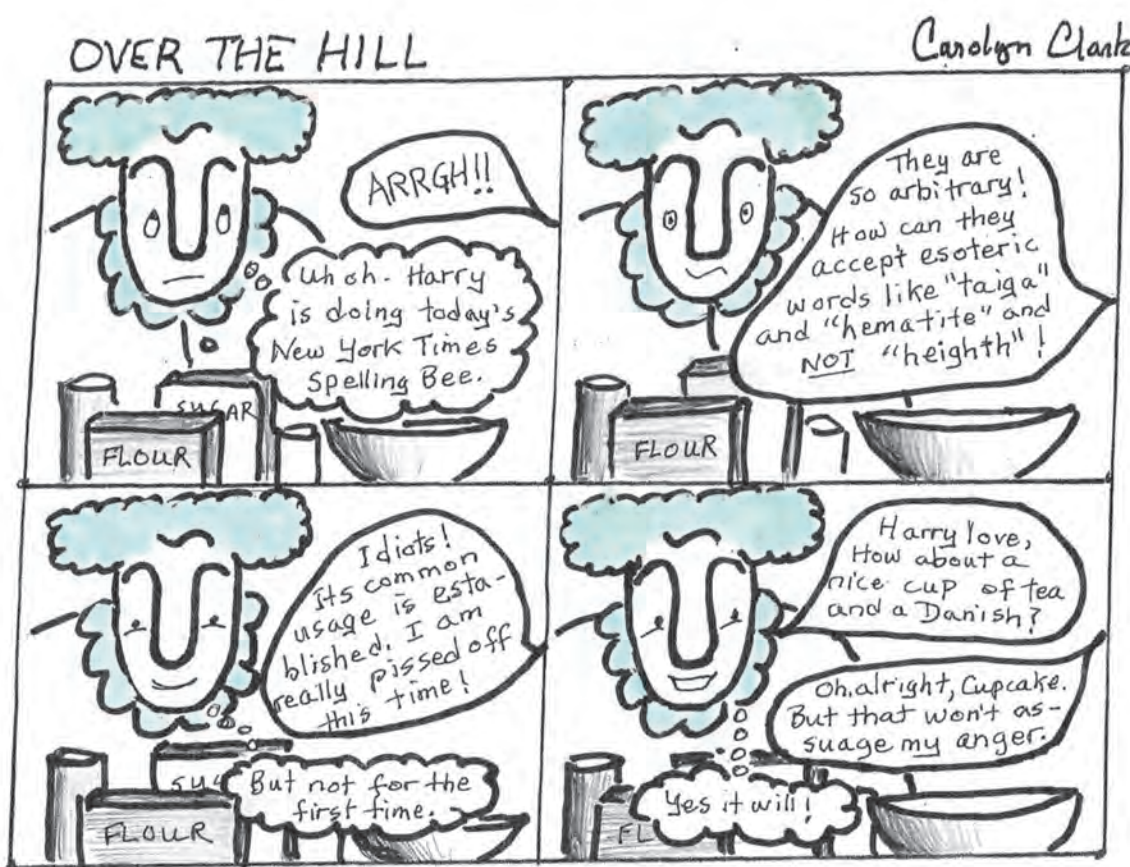
Of these characters, I like Black Panther the best, Falcon next, then Storm, and last the Black Lightning.



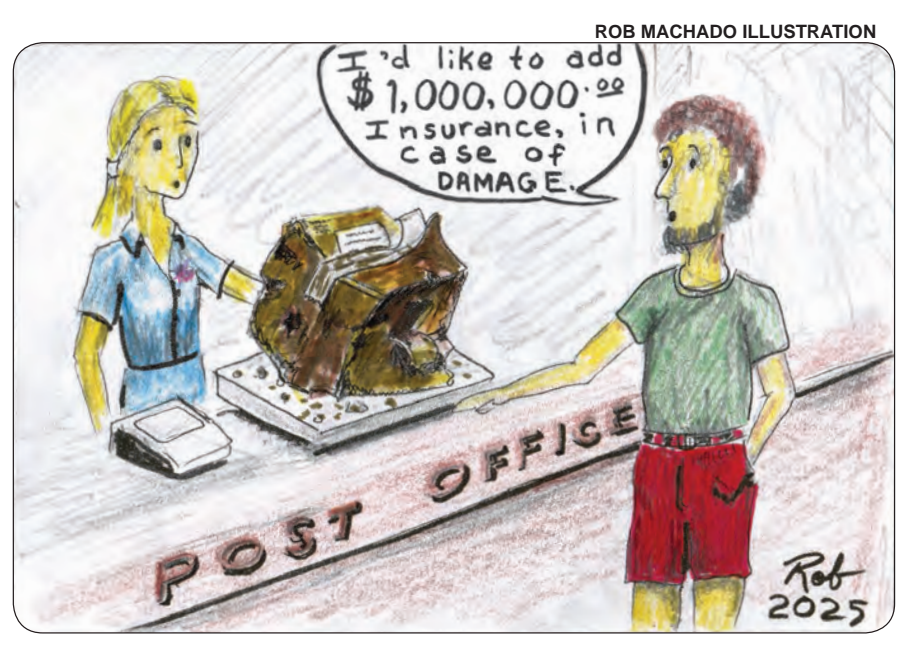
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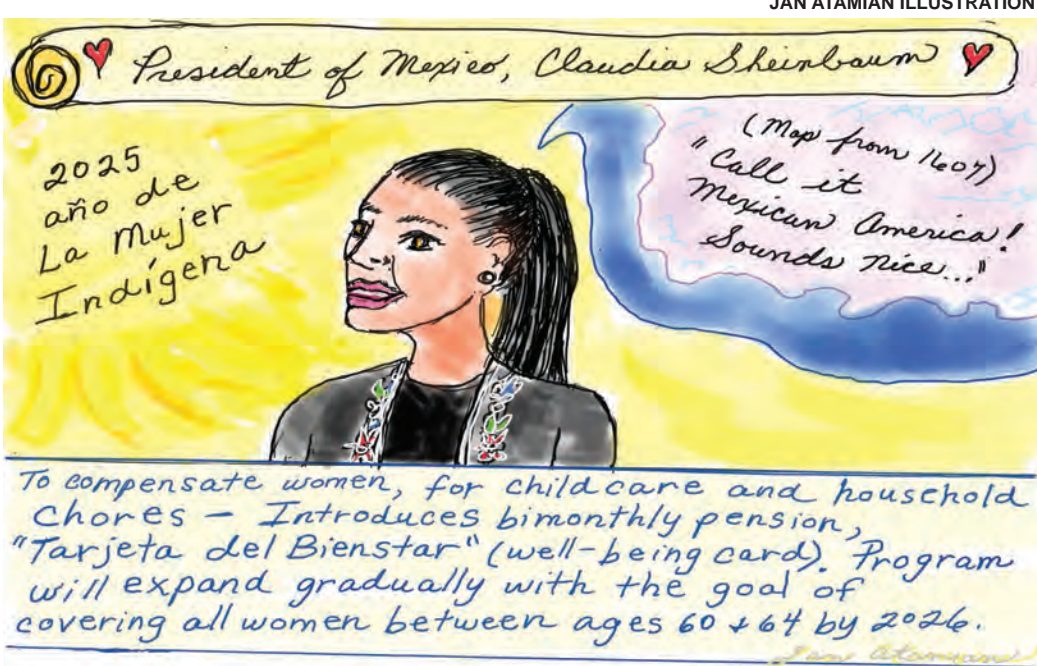
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FRONTIERS

# Decoding the Words of Whales

By SPENCER SHORKEY

**MILLERS FALLS** – Whales are known to emit clicks, rumbles, whistles, and hoots at a variety of frequencies. These sounds can be louder than a hundred decibels, and can travel for hundreds of miles, helping whales to navigate, hunt, and communicate.

*Songs Of The Humpback Whale*, published as a vinyl record by Dr. Roger Payne in 1970, is a fun listen to many sounds of humpback whales recorded at a Navy site off of Bermuda. Analysis of the whale song patterns showed many parallels to human song, including repeating elements, rhyme-like structures, and weekly playbacks of the Top 40 most popular songs on the Sunday morning whale radio stations.

I don't claim to be any sort of expert on animal vocalizations, but it is interesting to me that in this age in which computerized human language models are so well-developed that some call them "artificial intelligence" (AI), it may be possible to apply similar language modeling methods to aid in the interpretation of other animal species' vocalizations.

One can imagine a day where dialogues between humans and other species could eventually exist. Humans might say things like "Can we drive our noisy boats dangerously fast through your feeding grounds?" and whales might say "Please don't."

**Why Do Whales Vocalize?**

A few of the most well-studied species of whale are humpback whales, sperm whales, dolphins, and belugas. While humpbacks are known for long, frequency-modulating notes, dolphins, belugas, and sperm whales are known to focus on making clicking sounds at various rates. Taking into account which whales vocalize and under which behavioral contexts, some inferences can be made about the basic relevance of whale sounds.

The humpback whale songs are sung by males, with whales in the same area repeating the same songs in any given season. Interestingly, when the humpback males return to the same area in the next year, the collective songs of the area will have subtle differences, showing that whales like to add some fresh new sounds.

Interestingly, the new sounds have been shown to originate more frequently among "trend-setting" humpback populations near Australia, becoming popular among other whale populations worldwide within a few years. These humpback melodies may serve multiple purposes, from attracting mates to marking territory. However, their full informational content remains elusive.

Sperm whales tend to use rapid clicks, and employ a system described by humans as "codas," which are believed to be a key language structure and echolocation method. Each click is like a syllable, and the sequences form intricate patterns, much like words and sentences in human speech. Different sperm whale family groups have been found to produce distinct "dialects" of codas.

Interestingly, sperm whale groups are

observed to vocalize simultaneously, talking over each other – or chorusing together, depending on how you look at it.

The existence of name-like "contact calls," taught by whale mothers to their calves, has been documented in humpbacks, dolphins, belugas, and sperm whales.

Among beluga whales, contact calls were observed to increase from a minor fraction to over half of beluga vocalizations during whale separation events that occurred when low tides separated groups of belugas, as documented by the Canadian Marine Mammal Research Program. This suggests that such a form of name-calling was helpful during these stressful times.

Last year, researchers made headlines about conducting a conversation with a humpback whale, although the story was somewhat misleading given that they simply played the same two-second contact call on repeat. The responding whale communicated back with its contact call, and the cycle repeated, with the humans and the whale essentially saying "hi" to each other 36 times.

One interesting result of this experiment was that the whale respondent intentionally matched the intervals of the human-initiated contact call, meaning that if the humans waited 10 seconds to call back, the humpback also waited 10 seconds to respond. The meaning of this cadence matching is unclear, but suggests that cadence may be one important aspect of whale talk.

**Employing AI**

Understanding whale communication through human perception alone, manually categorizing and analyzing recordings, has its limits. Machine-learning algorithms can sift through thousands of hours of whale sounds, identifying subtle patterns that human ears might overlook.

One challenge in understanding how whales apply these vocalizations in conversation comes from the difficulty in identifying which calls come from which of the whales in a group. Since belugas and dolphins are relatively small and often swim closer together, it is hard to differentiate and assign the source of vocalizations to individuals among a group.

The application of high-fidelity hydrophone sensors and the use of more sensitive audio-processing software, however, is beginning to mitigate these challenges, and to enable greater understanding of conversational contexts.

One of the most powerful trial applications of applying machine learning and AI to whale data is occurring in the context of Project CETI, which has collected thousands of recordings of hundreds of sperm whale individuals in the Caribbean. Just last year, the computer algorithms employed in the data analysis showed their worth by identifying over 100 new phrase-like coda click sequences that were not readily apparent in prior analysis.

The distinct codas were identifiable with their own rubato, ornamentation, tempo, and rhythm, suggesting the presence of grammatical rules or even structured conversation.

While some researchers suggest that these codas may be the building blocks of a complex sperm whale language, other researchers push back against that human-centric view. There are other possibilities to consider, they say, such as that sperm whale codas may function more as song-like carriers of emotional, rather than intellectual, information.

The CETI study stated that "[t]he complex, multi-party nature of sperm whale vocalization, and especially the presence of vocal learning and chorusing behaviors with no obvious analog in human communication, suggests that this discourse-level structure is as important as the utterance-level structure for understanding whale communication," which is substantially different from humanity's individual-narrative-centric communication structures.

Reflecting on these fundamental differences in communication styles, Stephen Marche of *Canadian Geographic* hypothesizes: "What if it's not that an individual whale has an idea it expresses, but that there's an idea among them that the whales join themselves to?"

Despite the lack of understanding of the information content carried in the complex sequences of sperm whale codas, AI language models based on this sperm whale data were remarkably effective at predicting the next coda in a sequence.

"We were getting 99% accuracy on the ability for the computer to predict the next click," said David Gruber, founder of Project CETI. That is what language models do in a nutshell, though: predict the next word. The real challenge is in interpreting possible meanings of language, something that AI language models are not truly capable of, despite their proficiency at creating reasonable-sounding discourse.

In order to develop an AI to translate whale communication into something comparable to human language, Gruber envisions collecting billions more data points, and parameterizing data collection contexts in the language models in order to achieve translation. This next stage of data collection is ongoing, enabled by aerial and aquatic data-collection drones.

Shane Gero, the curator of the data used in the recently published Project CETI analysis, put the next step of the challenge this way: "So we've been listening to the same families of whales for the last 20 years. And one of the big challenges now is to connect that to what they're doing and who they're doing it with when they make those sounds."

Gruber compares the project to a baby learning language by knowing the contexts in which certain speech patterns appear, stating "what's the event, are they diving, and adding the context to this large scale bio-acoustic database is essential."

As for what the goal of a human-whale translating machine would be, Gruber asks: "[I]f we could understand really deeply what whales are saying, how would that bring us closer to them and how would it help protect them?"

However, he acknowledges the significance of breaking an interspecies communication barrier. "It's like this is a collective



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question for us to ask as humans soon begin to break this interspecies communication barrier. What should we say?"

**The Ethics of Communication**

As AI and acoustic analysis continue to advance, the dream of meaningful human-whale communication no longer seems far-fetched. What could we learn if we finally understood their language? What stories might whales tell about their lives, their history, and their perspective on the changing oceans?

What gains might unscrupulous actors seek to squeeze out of an AI whale-language model? Will Meta use such models to spawn fake whale profiles to create ever more weird dead internet content?

If humans succeed in understanding and even conversing with whales, what are the ethical implications? Should we communicate with them just because we can? And if we do, how should we approach it responsibly?

What happens if whales express discontent? Human activity – pollution, climate change, and noise from shipping – poses severe threats to whale populations. If we finally understand their voices, will we be prepared to hear their grievances and act accordingly? What will happen once someone inevitably broadcasts a translation of *Moby Dick* to the sperm whale masses?

Aza Raskin of the Earth Species Project, which focuses on interspecies communication more broadly, gives a concrete example of how even very rudimentary and non-translation-capable whale language models may be harmful. Given that new elements of humpback whale songs tend to spread from one population to another, with some song elements eventually becoming globally popular among humpback populations, he says, there may be certain "catchy" elements of songs that tend to spread quickly. A whale language model adept at generating such "catchy" song elements could be used to broadcast new sounds that might interfere with natural whale culture.

Aza advocates for taking on interspecies communication with great care and open-mindedness. He compares animal language models to a new scientific tool which may reveal truths and complexity beyond what we imagine, comparing it to the moment when the Hubble Telescope was first pointed into "empty space" and revealed a much deeper extent of the imperceptible complexity all around us.

Language serves as a powerful tool for empathy. It is our most effective means of grasping the experiences of other worlds and other minds. In this moment, the need for deeper empathy with nature has never been greater. My hope is that we will soon be able to initiate this sort of verbally integrated communication with sperm whales and many other species, and that it be humbling to human-centric viewpoints of intelligence.

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Make your heart go boom-boom-boom for the Valentine's Day Cookie Walk! Fresh baked cookies, crafts, and flowers. Fun for the whole family!

First Congregational  
Church of Montague  
4 North Street  
Saturday, February 8  
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

# EVENTS

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Erving Public Library,  
Erving: *Monthly meeting*,  
open to all. 1 p.m.

New Salem Public Library,  
New Salem: *Beginning  
Genealogy Workshop Series*.  
Participants encouraged  
to bring a laptop or tablet.  
Registration required at  
(978) 544-6334 or [n\\_salem@cwmar.org](mailto:n_salem@cwmar.org). 4 p.m. Free.

LAVA Center, Greenfield:  
*Beautiful Disasters*,  
storytelling open mic and  
potluck. Trouble Mandeson  
and Nisse Greenberg host  
a night of story and food  
sharing. Food, 6 p.m.;  
true stories from your  
own life, 7 p.m. Free.

Iron Horse, Northampton:  
*Mdou Moctar, Janel  
Leppin*. 7 p.m. \$.

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

Rendezvous, Turners Falls:  
*Vinyl Night with Breakdown  
Records*. 9 p.m. No cover.

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7

Canalside Rail Trail, Turners  
Falls: *Nice & Easy Walk*.  
Geared for seniors, but open  
to all. Meet at the Great Falls  
Discovery Center. 1 p.m. Free.

Turners Falls High School,  
Turners Falls: *Coaches Vs.  
Cancer*. Turners vs. Tech  
basketball, 50/50 raffle,  
games, pep band, Senior  
Night. All proceeds go  
directly to TFHS alum  
Jenna Putala and her fight  
against cancer. 4 p.m. \$.

Great Falls Discovery Center,  
Turners Falls: *Navigate Your  
Neighborhood*, drop-in  
geography workshop.  
All ages. 4 p.m. Free.

Deja Brew, Wendell:  
*Village Neighbors Meetup*.

Curious about volunteering?  
Meet your neighbors! Snacks  
available, bar open. 4 p.m. Free.

Sadie's Bikes, Turners Falls:  
*19th Gumball Machine  
Takeover*. Featured  
artists: *Richie Allium,  
Jason Kotoch*. 5 p.m. Free.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls:  
*Lights, Community, Action!*,  
four-act musical revue to  
benefit the Center for Self-  
Reliance Food Pantry. 6 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls:  
*Four Rivers Public Charter  
School presents 21st Annual  
Variety Show*. 6 p.m. \$.

Leverett Village Co-op,  
Leverett: *Ukes for  
Ukraine*. 6 p.m. Free.

Greenfield Community  
College Dining Commons,  
Greenfield: *From the Ridge to  
the River: What It Means to  
Be a Citizen of the Watershed*,  
with Mashpee Wampanoag  
artist and activist, Hartman  
Deetz, and Connecticut  
River Conservancy executive  
director Rebecca Todd.  
7 p.m. By donation.

Conway Inn, Conway:  
*Dane, ZBS.FM, Quills,  
413DJMAFIA*. 7 p.m. \$.

All Saints Church, South  
Hadley: *Le Vent du  
Nord*. 7 p.m. \$.

CitySpace, Easthampton:  
*American Amnesia,  
EmberGlow, GDI, Miracle  
Blood*. 7 p.m. \$.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Eric  
Love*. 7:30 p.m. No cover.

Bowker Auditorium, UMass  
Amherst: *Endea Owens  
And The Cookout*. \$ 8 p.m.

The Drake, Amherst: *Big  
Richard, The Shoats*. 8 p.m. \$.

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

Wendell Meetinghouse,  
Wendell: *Court Dorsey*



The much-celebrated British art-rock band Black Midi is on an indefinite hiatus, and guitarist/vocalist Geordie Greep has gone solo. Catch him this Thursday night at the Stone Church in Brattleboro.

workshop, *The Twelve  
Mysteries: A Whole Way of  
Life*. *The Twelve Mysteries*  
came out of an intensive  
period of meditation with  
Swami Ashisananda during a  
pilgrimage Dorsey made to  
northern India in the 1970s.  
He will share sonnets from his  
book *Tiger Stripes: Poems of  
Shadow and Light* and lead  
participants in the practices.  
Participants asked to bring  
lunch; hot beverages and  
snacks provided. Advance  
notice to [courtcdorsey@  
gmail.com](mailto:courtcdorsey@gmail.com) is helpful but  
not required. 9:30 a.m. to  
4 p.m. By donation.

Greenfield Public Library,  
Greenfield: *Winter Farmers  
Market*. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$.

Sawmill River Arts,  
Montague Center: Trunk  
show, Kathy Litchfield's  
*Firecrow Handwovens*.  
11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Free.

104 Fourth Street, Turners  
Falls: *Great Falls Books  
Through Bars Volunteer Day*.  
Drop in for a little bit or the  
whole time. Seeking donations  
of puzzle books, composition

books, and adult coloring  
books. 1 to 5 p.m. Free.

Leverett Crafts & Arts,  
Leverett: *Opening, Leverett  
Elementary School Art  
Exhibition*. Live music, light  
refreshments. 1 p.m. Free.

Greenfield Community  
College Dining Commons,  
Greenfield: *Full Snow Moon  
Gathering and Eastern  
Woodlands Social Dance*,  
with Wampanoag Nation  
Singers and Dancers. Bring  
rattles, enjoy refreshments.  
1 p.m. By donation.

Great Falls Discovery  
Center, Turners Falls:  
*The Secret Lives of Turners  
Falls Germans*. After the  
canal was rebuilt in 1869,  
German immigrants were  
among the first to move to  
Turners Falls, and first to  
witness the planned village's  
growing pains. Join DCR  
staff as we use photos, news  
clippings, and oral history  
to figure out how they  
built their community and  
traditions through mutual  
aid and hard work. For  
youth and adults. 2 p.m. Free.

## EXHIBITS

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Atomic Dog:  
What I did to beat the blues*, paintings  
by Ryan McGinn, through April.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners  
Falls: *A First-Class Machine Shop*,  
local history exhibit with images, text,  
maps, and artifacts, through February  
22, and *Deep Roots: A History of  
Agriculture in the Connecticut  
River*, on display in the hallway.

Montague Center Library: *Auto  
Partitas*, mixed-media triptychs  
based on automotive parts by  
Nina Rossi, through February.

Sawmill River Arts, Montague Center:  
*Small Works Show and Sale*, through  
February 24. Guest artist Jacqueline  
Strauss will show her soft sculpture  
creatures at the gallery during  
February and March.

Greenfield Library, Greenfield:  
*Clouds in Shades of Grey*, black  
and white photographs of clouds  
by Paul Jablon, through February.

Artspace Gallery, Greenfield: *Forward*, a  
community art exhibit exploring evolution,  
change, and movement, with work by  
37 local artists. Through February 28.

Looky Here, Greenfield: *Salt, fat.  
Sweet!*, work by Caroline Davis,  
through this Saturday, February 8.  
Closing reception and artist talk  
Saturday night at 7 p.m.

South Gallery, Greenfield Community  
College, Greenfield: *Zamharir (torture  
for the naked eyes)*, mixed-media  
works by Iranian artist Nima Nikakhlagh.  
Through February 25; gallery talk  
Wednesday, February 19 at 12 p.m.

Leverett Library, Leverett:  
*Botanical Photography*, by Marilyn  
London-Ewing, through February.

Leverett Crafts & Arts, Leverett:  
*Leverett Elementary School Art Exhibit*,  
works by students at the school, open  
only the first two weekends of February.  
Opening reception this Saturday,  
February 8, from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

Gallery A3, Amherst: *Depth be Depth*,  
work by Daniel Feldman, through March 1.

Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:  
*Wouldn't It Be Lovely*, group show by  
member artists, through February.

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.

## CALLS FOR ART(ISTS)

Waterway Arts in Turners Falls is looking  
for artists working in media traditionally  
seen as "craft" for a group show in May.  
Apply at [tinyurl.com/waterwayapp](http://tinyurl.com/waterwayapp).

The Art Garden in Shelburne Falls seeks  
submissions on the theme of transitions,  
uncertainty, and change for a community  
exhibit called *Turn, Turn, Turn*. Paintings,  
photos, drawings, collage, and printed  
writings will be accepted at the Garden  
on February 11, 13, and 15. Email [info@  
theartgarden.org](mailto:info@theartgarden.org) for size restrictions and  
exact times. There is no fee, and all are  
welcome to participate: young and old,  
experienced and freshly inspired ones.

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# CALENDAR



## looking forward...

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Backyard Superheroes, The Agonizers, Skeleton Crew, El Grande*, many more. 2 p.m. \$.

Academy of Music, Northampton: *Field Notes*, storytelling event to benefit Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture. 4 p.m. \$.

Mount Toby Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Building Community in a Time of Uncertainty*, community potluck dinner hosted by Leverett Together. Leverett residents are invited to hear about ongoing community-building projects including the Leverett Library, the North Leverett Sawmill, the Amherst-Leverett Alliance, the Village Co-op, and LeverettConnects. 5:30 p.m. Free.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls: *Lights, Community, Action!*, four-act musical revue to benefit the Center for Self-Reliance Food Pantry. 6 p.m. \$.

Four Phantoms Brewery, Greenfield: *Luke DeRoy*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: *Open mic* with featured performer singer-songwriter *Pete Nelson*. BYO food and beverages. Performers sign in at 6:15 p.m.; music at 6:30 p.m. By donation.

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

Looky Here, Greenfield: Closing reception for *Salt, fat. Sweet!*; artist talk with *Caroline James*. 7 p.m. Free.

Next Stage Arts, Putney: *É.T.É., Yann Falquet with Emily Troll and Eric Boodman*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Palladium, Worcester: *Atmosphere, Sage Francis, Mr. Dibbs*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

United Church of Bernardston, Bernardston: *Second Saturday Roast Beef Supper*. Call (413) 648-9306 to reserve take-out, or seatings at 5 and 6:15 p.m. \$.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Sam Amidon*. 8 p.m. \$.

Cold Spring Hollow, Brattleboro: *New Grasping Machine, Kevin Winter, Cryovacs, A Snake in the Garden, Donna Parker, Thee Baby Grinder*. 8 p.m. By donation.

De La Luz Soundstage, Holyoke: *Rio Bamba, Deejay Theory*. \$ 8 p.m.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The 413s, The Wild Brood*. 8:30 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Dr. J*. 9:30 p.m. No cover.

### SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Black Birch Vineyard, Hatfield: *Jazz Sketches Trio*. 1:30 p.m. No cover.

Greene Hall, Smith College, Northampton: *Silver Chord Bowl*, collegiate a cappella showcase. 2 p.m. \$.

Sweeney Hall, Smith College, Northampton: *The Lydian String Quartet* with pianist *Jiayan Sun*. Haydn, Debussy, Franck. 3 p.m. \$.

Vermont Jazz Center, Brattleboro: *Billy Childs Quartet*. 4 p.m. \$\$.



*Pamela Means returns to the Mount Toby Meetinghouse in Leverett next Saturday, February 15.*

Quarters, Hadley: *Rough Chop* food truck presents *Rock & Roll Trivia*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Loculus Studios, Holyoke: Screening, *The Color of Pomegranates* (1969). 6 p.m. By donation.

Space Ballroom, Hamden, CT: *Chained to the Bottom of the Ocean, Dissolve, Intercourse, Killer Kin*. 7 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: Karaoke hosted by *Buckingham Rabbit Vintage*. 9 p.m. No cover.

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10

Cold Spring Hollow, Belchertown: *Julipode, Cigs, 537H, Barbie.AI, Zac-A-Rama, Model Daughter*. 8 p.m. No cover.

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11

Erving Public Library, Erving: Workshop, *Red Cross Ready Emergency Preparedness*. 5:30 p.m. Free.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Yasmin Williams, Diana Demuth*. 7 p.m. \$.

### WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

LAVA Center, Greenfield: *Writers Read*, featuring Poet's Seat Contest 2024 youth winners *Madison McCarthy, Summit Wicks-Lim, and Henry Maxey*. 7 p.m. By donation.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *American Aquarium, William Matheny*. 7 p.m. \$.

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

### THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Brick House Community Resource Center, Turners Falls: *Workshop with Everything Computers*. For parents and caregivers to learn how to protect kids on the internet. To register or for more information, contact Stacey at *slangknecht@brickhousecommunity.org* or (413) 800-2496. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Northfield Mountain, Northfield: *Monthly Hike*. With snowshoes or micro-spikes, depending on conditions. Registration at *www.bookeo.com/northfield* is required. 1 p.m. Free.

Leverett Public Library, Leverett: Workshop, *Tea Towel Printing*. Register at *leverettlibrary@gmail.com*. 4:30 p.m. Free.

Greenfield Garden Cinemas, Greenfield: Silent auction and screening, *Ghost* (1990), benefit for Artspace Community Clay. 6:30 p.m. \$.

Northfield Mount Hermon School, Gill: *NMH Dance Company Winter Concert*. Seats must be reserved. 7 p.m. Free.

The Drake, Amherst: *Fai Laci, Skruple, Grand View Point*. 8 p.m. \$.

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Canalside Rail Trail, Turners Falls: *Nice & Easy Walk*. Geared for seniors, but open to all. Meet at the Great Falls Discovery Center. 1 p.m. Free.

Leverett Village Co-op, Leverett: *Same Old Blues*. 6 p.m. Free.

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: *Montague Square Dance*, with *Devilish Mary's House Band* and caller *Grace Clements*. Jammers welcome. Families welcome for circle dances and beginner squares, 6:30 p.m.; regular squares, 8 p.m. By donation.

Northfield Mount Hermon School, Gill: *NMH Dance Company Winter Concert*. Seats must be reserved. 7 p.m. Free.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Valentine's Day with Lady Pop*. 7 p.m. No cover.

Floodwater Brewing, Shelburne Falls: *Psychedelic Farm Girls* (formerly *She Said*). 7 p.m. No cover.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Id M Theftable, Shea Mowat, Owen Manure, Jeff Gallagher*. 8 p.m. No cover.

Shutesbury Athletic Club: *Golden Repair*. 8 p.m. No cover.

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

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Owsley's*

*Owls, Jay Faires*. 8 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Northfield Senior Center, Northfield: *Junior Firefighters Chili Cookoff*. 10:30 a.m. By donation.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Snowflakes in the Great Hall*. Make your own unique snowflake art, with simple paper or gel-printing techniques. Materials provided. Ages 6 and up. Drop in from 1 to 3 p.m. Free.

New Salem Library, New Salem: Workshop, *Shiatsu With Friends*. Have fun connecting with acu-points. No experience required. 1 p.m. Free.

Northfield Mount Hermon School, Gill: *NMH Dance Company Winter Concert*. Seats must be reserved. 2 and 6:30 p.m. Free.

Brewery at Four Star Farms, Northfield: *Helen Hummel*. 5 p.m. No cover.

Prescott Tavern, Hampshire College, Amherst: *Liberate, Split Half, Intrusive, Crucial Point, Subordinate, Buried With Your Words, Dishpit, Posthumous Obsession*. Alcohol-free, all ages. 5:30 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Arc-A-Palooza* feat. *Evelynroze, The Bromantics, John Wayneovich, Alex Casavant*. Benefit for United Arc. 6:30 p.m. \$.

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

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

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

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

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

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Twang Club Honkey Tonk Heartbreak*. 8 p.m. No cover.

The Drake, Amherst: *Oh He Dead, ViRG*. 8 p.m. \$.

### SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16

Town Hall, Northfield: *Northfield Recreation Snowman Contest*. 9 a.m. Free.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *A Bridge Too Far*. What about building new bridges in Gilded Age Turners Falls drove neighbors and whole towns against each other? Join DCR staff as they piece together questions affecting Montague's five villages in the 1800s. 2 p.m. Free.

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

New Salem Public Library, New Salem: *Winter Quabbin Walk*, two hours of light to moderate hiking with Nick and Valerie Wisniewski of the Walnut Hill Tracking & Nature Center. 2 p.m. Free.

### FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Club Casualties, The Classics, Deja Carr* (stand-up). 8:30 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: Local children's author *Astrid Sheckels*, reading *Hector Fox and the Map of Mystery*. 3 p.m. Free.

### MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

Cold Spring Hollow, Belchertown: *Fred Cracklin, Rhubarb Duo, Pearl Sugar, Throwaway*. 7 p.m. \$.

### TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

GCC Main Campus, Greenfield: Workshop, *Defeating Humanity's Greatest Fear: Public Speaking*. 4 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, MARCH 1

Northampton Center for the Arts, Northampton: *Sylvie Courvoisier*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, MARCH 8

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *SoulKeys*. In the lobby. 8 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, MARCH 15

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Folly of Three, The Fake Nudes, Creative Writing*. 9 p.m. No cover.

### FRIDAY, MARCH 21

The Drake, Amherst: *Vapors of Morphine*. 8 p.m. \$.

### SUNDAY, APRIL 13

Pioneer Valley Brewery, Turners Falls: *One Master, Midden, Compress*. 7 p.m. \$.

### FRIDAY, MAY 16

Nova Arts, Keene: *Josh Johnson, The Argus Quartet, Maria Somerville, Roger Miller*, more. 3 p.m. \$.

### SATURDAY, MAY 17

Nova Arts, Keene: *BLK JKS, Undertow Brass Band, Rong, Thirdface, Minibeast, Dakou Dakou*, more. 12 p.m. \$.

Colonial Theater, Keene: *Steven Malkmus, Mirah*. 7 p.m. \$.

### SUNDAY, MAY 18

Nova Arts, Keene: *Califone, Amirtha Kidambi's Elder Ones, Joan Shelley, Aisha Burns, Sam Moss*, more. 12 p.m. \$.

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#76: 'The Loner' a.k.a. Brian Dolzani

Interview by J. BURKETT and TROY CURRY

**TURNERS FALLS** – “The Loner” is Brian Dolzani, a contemporary musician from Connecticut who covers Neil Young songs.

(No, not Brompton Treb... the “other” Neil Young.)

He still plays solo shows but lately has been doing more of these Neil nights – and he’s good, so catch him ASAP! He has played up here at events like the Mystra Ooze fest, but plays much more often in Connecticut. All the Loner shows are up on YouTube, and both Loner and solo Dolzani dates and tour schedules can be found at [briandolzani.com](http://briandolzani.com).

Dolzani found some time this week to talk about his new live sets, and his obsession with Neil.

**MMM:** Hi Brian! How did you come up with the idea for this Neil cover act?

**BD:** I’ve included a few Neil Young songs in my live shows ever since I started playing gigs in my 20s, and I’ve always heard I sound like him. I admit it, too.

Neil’s “Tell Me Why” was a track on my first album in 1998. I met a music industry guy around that time who suggested putting a cover song on my first album to give listeners an idea of my influences. So Neil has been with me since Day One.

Fast forward 25 years, and multiple friends all at the same time said “Hey, tribute shows are very popular now, and you should do a Neil tribute.” Since my focus has always been on my own music, I hesitated slightly, considered it, and then pretty easily said “okay yes, it’s time, this could really take off – and even help my own music and shows.”

And it has. I like to be original, and I know there are other Neil tributes out there, but I know no one sounds as much like him vocally as I do. So that’s my angle on it.

**MMM:** How does it differ from doing your solo sets?

**BD:** These “Loner” shows are still me, my name is in the long official title – “Brian Dolzani as The Loner: The Music of Neil Young.” I don’t try and act like him, or dress like an old photo. However, I authentically share a similar approach and sound – after all, he has been my musical mentor all these years.

It’s absolutely similar to my own solo shows and band shows, I’m just playing 90% Neil music. I do include a couple of my own songs, too, which I’m glad people love and appreciate. Again, that’s me putting myself into it.

**MMM:** When did you get into Neil? Which album was first, and what’s your fave now?

**BD:** Out of all the classic rock

music I loved in high school, Neil stood out immediately to me. Just his alien, different, singular presence. I wanted to be that too.

I probably heard *Decade* first, which I know was a lot of people’s gateway. A couple major albums for me are *Zuma* and *On The Beach*, no surprise there. On the more acoustic side, I love *Silver & Gold* and *Prairie Wind* as well.

Having said that, *Live Rust* could be my desert island disc. That might trump everything for me. Everything is in there. That was my musical bible.

**MMM:** Have you ever covered a whole album?

**BD:** Yes, my Brian Dolzani Band played the *Harvest* album twice before I started the Loner project. We also did *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. That was a ramp-up to the full tribute idea. People loved me doing that, so I knew the buzz around the idea.

The Loner project has not played a full album yet, interestingly. We may at some point.

**MMM:** Any good stories of doing these shows, or favorite venues?

**BD:** Having supported my own music my whole career, I do hold the idea that when people “get” your own music, it’s a feeling that can’t be duplicated. However, new crowds won’t immediately appreciate it everywhere you show up and play.

But when an audience is connected with you from the first chord played, knowing it’s Neil, and their love for the music, it’s also a feeling that can’t be duplicated. And I’m loving sharing in that space. Cover music is not something I’ve wanted to focus on, but this feels different.

The project launched at our first shows at Park City Music Hall in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I’d say that’s my favorite venue so far, and we started off very well! Again, having said that, I’ve loved every Loner show I’ve played, because of the audience and vibe, no matter where I am.

**MMM:** Have you thought of covering any other musicians as a tribute act?

**BD:** Definitely not. It would feel like just playing covers, whereas Neil feels like me. I’d rather be me, and interestingly, I can be both Neil and myself in the Loner show.

**MMM:** What’s your favorite newer Neil album?

**BD:** I liked *Barn* a lot. The guys in my BD Band bought it for me on vinyl for my birthday and that was amazingly sweet. I dug the behind-the-scenes video he put out with it, too.

**MMM:** Do you like the *Trans era*? How about *CSNY* and *Buffalo Springfield*?

**BD:** I can appreciate the bravery to put out *Trans*, and envy how he can truly express thoughts and feelings the way he does. For him to simulate the distance between his kid and himself with the vocoder and “computerized” music, and to bridge that connection, is perfect. And some of those songs are just fantastic, too. I love “Transformer Man,” and first heard it on *Unplugged*.

Yes to *Buffalo Springfield*. I certainly include “Mr. Soul,” “I Am a Child,” and other “hits” from this era. I also loved *CSNY*, and their hits album *So Far* was it for me.

**MMM:** Have you been keeping up with the *Archives* box sets?

**BD:** Not physically... I’m not, or haven’t yet spent the big money on them. Mostly because they are on CD and Blu-ray – I don’t have a Blu-ray player. How many people do?

But I’m listening to some of the digital spin-offs. I like buying Neil on vinyl, but it tends to be single albums.

**MMM:** What about recordings? And future plans or tours?

**BD:** I did release a *Loner EP Vol. 1* last November, at the time of Neil’s birthday. I set myself up to release another, obviously. It’s something I’d like to offer when I feel the urge. It’s on the streaming services and my Bandcamp.

For tours, yes. I’m booking Loner shows around New England as much as I can, and would love to take it around the country.

I’m still playing my own Brian Dolzani shows, and about to release my 10th album in May. So I’m trying to do both!

**MMM:** Are your Loner shows a consistent setlist, or do they change?

**BD:** I approach the Loner shows very much as a jamband would – I would cringe to play the same exact show twice. I’m balancing playing the biggest hits while also digging deeper and including some rare gems. I love to do different segues. Even when playing the expected hits, I’m moving them around in the setlist. I love coming up with a new setlist each show.

I also don’t use a tablet for lyrics. I genuinely attempt to memorize and play from the heart. It’s a fun challenge.

The good trouble is that there are so many brilliant songs that resonate deep in my soul. I hope to get to them all!

VALLEY VIEW from page B1

Thomas, is that “no unburned bone of any animal – fish, mammal, reptile or bird – has survived in these acidic soils. Tiny fragments of heavily burned fish bone are present, but species identification is not possible, with one exception. Two small, football-shaped bones, called prootic bulla, are found in the head of each shad, of which 72 were recovered. In short, lack of identifiable salmon bones does not mean they were not caught and eaten along with other species.”

Archaeologists rely on the stone tools they recover to identify or surmise site activities. Thomas says literally thousands of stone points have been recovered over the years around Riverside, confirming that occupants were heavily engaged in hunting.

“However, with the exception of stone net sinkers,” he says, “all fishing gear consisted of bone, antler, wood or plant fibers – none of which survived in the ground. This absence has also led to a gross underestimation of the significance of Native fishing.”

In recent months, Thomas and fellow retired archaeologist Stuart Fiedel have combed through many additional riverside site reports. They have found that these reports are consistent in revealing an abundance of stone hunting tools but few fishing tools, except for the aforementioned net sinkers.

So, chalk up these recent Thomas/Fiedel findings as food for an addendum to Carlson’s dated dissertation – likely with more to come.

Stay tuned.



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