

# The Montague Reporter

## Rep Steps Down Early; Seat May Stay Empty

By JEFF SINGLETON

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – Natalie Blais, who represents Montague, Leverett, and a portion of Greenfield along with 25 other



Natalie Blais, in a 2024 file photo.

towns in the 1st Franklin District, will resign next week from the state House of Representatives to take an administrative job at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Making the announcement last Friday, Blais said that “[s]erving the 28 communities of the 1st Franklin District over the past seven years has been a great honor and a privilege.” Her last day will be next Monday, January 19. Blais’s colleague in the western Massachusetts delegation at the State House, senator Jo Comerford, wrote that “working side by side with Natalie for the residents of Franklin County and our shared communities” has been a “seven-year joy and an honor.” Blais will take the position of Associate Vice Chancellor for see **REP** page A6

### GILL SELECTBOARD

## Senator Warns Referendum Could ‘Eviscerate’ State

By KATE SAVAGE

“I’m willing to bet that this is the only time that the words ‘Welcome back to Gill, Senator,’ have been uttered,” said town administrator Ray Purington at Monday’s selectboard meeting. State senator Jo Comerford attended the meeting for the second time in her seven years in her role. While she set out a vision of greater state support for rural communities, many of the questions from attend-

ees expressed worry over the state of the federal government, and how it was affecting towns like Gill. Selectboard member Greg Snedeker asked Comerford how the state is helping towns in the wake of federal budget cuts. “This year is going to be hard,” Comerford conceded, pointing to federal funding cuts to health, housing, transportation, nutrition assistance, and renewable energy. She said her mission is to keep see **GILL** page A4

## High School Sports Week: Leads Dissolve Into Losses

By MATT ROBINSON

**TURNERS FALLS** – This week the basketball teams from Franklin Tech and Turners Falls waged several battles with the Tech boys faring the best, going 2 and 0 on the week.

The Turners boys and Franklin girls saw early leads dissolve into losses, while the Turners girls suffered some growing pains in front of a very respectful crowd. Meanwhile, the co-op swim see **SPORTS** page A8



Turners Falls’s Freilyn Abarua drives the baseline past Franklin Tech defender Nohyn Stafford as the Thunder hosted the Eagles in a crosstown contest Saturday.

### G-M SCHOOL COMMITTEE

## District Must Close Initial \$2.2 Million Budget Gap

By MIKE JACKSON

**GILL-MONTAGUE** – With business manager Joanne Blier absent Tuesday night, it fell on Tari Thomas, the interim superintendent of the Gill-Montague regional school district, to deliver grim news to the school committee about how the FY’27 budget was shaping up. “It’s going to be challenging this year,” she said of the preliminary, not-yet-balanced budget. “The estimates for state revenue – for Chapter 70 – look like the increases are only going to be about 1.8%, and our costs and needs are considerably higher.” Nikki Henderson, a math interventionist at Sheffield Elementary school, read a statement on behalf of the Gill-Montague Educators Association staff union at the beginning of the meeting. see **GMRSD** page A4

### MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

## Scrutiny of Village Road Redesign Grinds On

By JEFF SINGLETON

For the second week in a row, Monday’s Montague selectboard meeting was dominated by public input on a proposal to reduce speeding through the village of Montague Center, and for the second week in a row the proposal on the table garnered very negative reviews from most residents in attendance. The discussion, which focused on changes newly-hired engineers have made to an earlier design, was allotted 25 minutes on the agenda but took over an hour. Other highlights of the meeting included a presentation by Clean Water Facility superintendent Chelsey Little on potential ways to cut costs at the treatment plant, setting the town’s priorities for hypothetical technical assistance, and a nod of support for Montague Community Television. Board member Rich Kuklewicz was unable to attend the meeting, which was held over Zoom. The Montague Center traffic-calming discussion began with assistant town administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller introducing Paul Furgal, a civil engineer with Bowman Consulting Group, the firm hired to modify and complete the design for the project. Furgal reviewed the changes in the design, including see **MONTAGUE** page A7

## Age-Old Pond Drains As Ailing Dam Removed



Water began to surge into Osgood Brook after a work crew breached the dam that has long held Bowen’s Pond in place.

By SARAH ROBERTSON

**WENDELL** – Excavators broke through the ice on Bowen’s Pond this week to begin removing its historic dam, despite the recent cancellation of a sizable state grant funding the controversial project. The aging dam now no longer poses a risk of failure, and cooler water flowing downstream during the summer months is expected to benefit native brook trout. However, the suddenly-drained pond disrupts the existing local ecosystem, and has cost the fire department one of its three available water sources in town. The project’s fiscal sponsor is Mass Audubon, owner of the 2,500-acre Whetstone Woods see **DAM** page A6

Wildlife Sanctuary adjacent to the pond. Last September, Wendell’s state representative Aaron Saunders publicly criticized a \$462,000 grant awarded to the nonprofit by the state Division of Ecological Restoration to remove the dam and restore the uppermost reaches of Osgood Brook. Saunders argued at the time that public resources were being used to benefit the private owner, Bowen’s Pond LLC, responsible for the dam’s maintenance. “If Bowen’s Pond LLC wants to pursue dam removal on private property, that’s their initiative, and we shouldn’t have taxpayers underwriting it,” Saunders told the *Reporter* Wednesday morning. see **DAM** page A6

### LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

## Library, Council on Aging Wish For More Staff Hours

By GEORGE BRACE

Leverett’s selectboard had a full agenda on Tuesday, including a yearly check-in from state senator Jo Comerford and two departmental budget hearings, but it was the swearing-in ceremony for new fire chief Mike Visniewski that brought the crowd. “We’ve never had this many people before,” said board member Tom Hankinson. “We should vote on something.” Over 50 people, most of whom were there for the ceremony, witnessed Visniewski taking his oath and his wife Ashley pinning the chief’s badge to his uniform. “I look forward to serving the people of Leverett. Thank you,” Visniewski said to loud applause, which lasted considerably longer than his speech. He has served in Leverett’s department for the past eight years, and for 22 in Amherst, where he will remain deputy chief see **LEVERETT** page A5

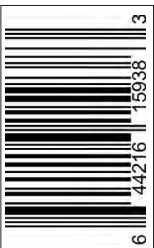
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Mike Visniewski (center) was congratulated by his colleagues on Tuesday on his promotion to fire chief.

### Para Bailer La Bamba, Se Necesita Una Poca De Gracia

Suffered Some Growing Pains.....	A1	An Unexpected Game-Changing Move.....	B1
Layers, Obfuscations, and Iterations.....	A2	An Uncontrollable Magnetic Pull.....	B3
Usually Were Cruel and Raw.....	A3	A Pretty Place, To Be Sure.....	B4
A Growing List of Leaky Roofs.....	A4	Elements Used to Create a Sense of Foreboding.....	B6
Corrosive Effects of Population Decline.....	A5	Gazing Upon the Moon in Blameless Exile.....	B7
Surviving the Abrupt Habitat Change.....	A6	Possums, Snake Farm, Made Manifest.....	B8
Warm and Away From the Gaping Crowd.....	A7	Deep Seize, Plunge Pool, All Feels.....	B9
Simply Made Their Own Space.....	A8	A Faint, Timid Call Greets the Sun.....	B10





# The Montague Reporter

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August 2002

## Oops

When it rains, it pours: After a slow start to the new year we’ve received a number of kind notes. Some, admittedly, might be in response to an editor whining about the lack of reader feedback. We also received a voicemail from one long-

time reader who *disliked* our January 1 special section and missed our usual *MoRe* offerings. We’re back to regular programming, but regret to say we can’t promise it will never happen again. Stay safe out there, friends, and do stay in touch....

OP ED

## ‘I Would Not Take That Bait’

By SARAH BLISS

MONTAGUE – On Sunday, I participated in an ICE Out! protest rally in Greenfield. We had a great turnout – anywhere from 350 to 600, depending on various estimates. Lots of cheers and honks from passing cars, and strong spirit amongst the protestors. The resistance is incontrovertibly growing!

I held a large hand-lettered sign, *JOIN US!*, and stood on the median of the city’s main intersection. A large shiny black pickup truck pulled up at a stop next to me, waiting for the light to change. An oversized speaker was propped up in its backseat, blaring loud, abrasive music with a steady bass beat out the open window. The driver, a burly middle-aged man, rolled down his window and shouted at me, “Nothing’s going to change! Nothing’s going to change!”

Thinking he was despairing of there ever being movement toward justice, I thought to encourage him and replied, “It’s already changing. We’re doing it right now!”

But instead, his voice rose to a semi-hysterical scream: “*Nothing will change!* We love our King! Long live the King! Twelve more years! You’re all a bunch of fucking idiots. Liberal idiots! You’re idiots!”

As the venom coursed through him, he became more and more vitriolic and apoplectic. He was about 10 feet from me. The light at the intersection stayed red. He wasn’t going anywhere.

Having gone through non-violent civil disobedience training, I focused on deescalation. I stayed calm. I didn’t move. I looked at him, not away. I listened to him. I thought about what his life experience may have been to have generated such rage and contempt. What obstacles had been in his way, what violence, want, hunger, disdain, job insecurity, trauma might he have endured and survived? How has capitalism impacted him?

I continued to hold my *JOIN US*

sign, facing him. I listened to him without taking his anger into me. I wondered whether there might be a cellular, unconscious level on which my demeanor, my hearing and seeing him, might make contact and, ever so subtly, open some tiny part of him to see my own humanity.

He raged on and on. The light changed, and he passed through the intersection. But a few minutes later, he was back to repeat his tirade. He’d circled around. His loops continued for perhaps eight to 10 minutes. I stayed silent, continuing to hold my sign, facing him. I held my ground. I wasn’t cowed. I wasn’t leaving. Behind me were hundreds of protestors.

Clearly, the strength of our conviction and our numbers activated his rage and possibly fear. His contempt. It was incontrovertible that we are a strong force and are only growing stronger.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the lack of deescalation – on both sides – in the Renee Nicole Good murder last Wednesday, the lack of training in deescalation for ICE agents, as well as for many activists, and how the trauma that we all carry, and which is unacknowledged and only rarely healed and released, spirals out of control when we are triggered. I was clear that I would not follow that route, take that bait.

I feel good that I fulfilled that intention. And yet, I was not facing a crowd or group of angry counter-protestors. There were no masked, uniformed men pointing rifles at me. No one was being dragged away, no babies crying for their mamas and daddies. This was one man in a pickup truck. I saw no gun. The light would change and he would move on. And behind me, I felt the strength of the hundreds who had my back.

May I keep showing up. May the practice of all my ancestors through the millennia, and of all beings who choose the path of love now, support and strengthen my own.

*Join me.*

*Sarah Bliss lives in Montague.*

**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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Letters to  the Editors

### Enjoyed 1893

The 1893 anthology that was published in the January 1 edition was a fabulous way to start 2026. What a wonderful surprise gift. Thank you! We enjoyed reading it, and are saving it to share with others.

The problems and situations of 1893 were sort of the same as they are now, with accidents, violence, inequality, sickness, new buildings, bad roads... but by 2026, we have added so many layers, obfuscations, and iterations. I am grateful for antibiotics, vaccines, snow plows, and paved roads, but am reminded that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Thank you for all that you do for our community. The *Montague Reporter* is a gem.

**Nina Arnold**  
**Turners Falls**

### Two More Birds

What a pleasure to read Ken Washburn’s feature on the Greenfield Christmas Bird Count in the January 8 issue! I’m choosing to believe that the front page, above-the-fold placement of this article speaks not to a lack of newsworthy happenings in Montague, but to the editor’s full-throated endorsement of birding as the most worthwhile of nerdy pursuits (beating out herping and trainspotting by a hair). Franklin County is frequently overlooked as a birding destination, but Montague is home to some of the best birding in our region.

On that note, a correction: the total species tally in our subarea was not 22 as reported in the article, but the slightly less measly 24. Every bird counts!

**Sam McGullam**  
**Turners Falls**

## Moral Absolutism in New England

I am writing to express our deep concern about Montague’s recent adoption of a nonbinding resolution declaring itself to be an “Apartheid Free Community.”

Whatever one’s views on the war in the Middle East or on the policies of the Israeli government, this pledge does something troubling: it takes a highly charged, international political conflict and imports it into the civic identity of a small New England town. Montague is not a foreign ministry. It is a community of neighbors with widely differing backgrounds, beliefs, and personal connections to that conflict.

By labeling one side of that conflict with a term as morally absolute and historically loaded as “apartheid,” the pledge effectively demands that residents publicly endorse a particular political narrative in order to be seen as morally acceptable. That is not inclusion. It is coercion. It divides neighbors into the righteous and the suspect, the approved and the condemned.

This kind of symbolic politics also has real local consequences. It chills speech, discourages dialogue, and makes Jewish residents in particular feel singled out, even when they hold a wide range of views about Israel and Palestine. When a town declares itself “apartheid free,” the implication is that some members of the community are associated with something shameful or illegitimate. That is not how a healthy, pluralistic town should function.

The Town of Montague has a long tradition of encouraging thoughtful debate and mutual respect. Endorsing or promoting a pledge like this moves in the opposite direction. It replaces curiosity with certainty, and conversation with condemnation.

We can oppose human rights abuses anywhere in the world without turning one of our own towns into a political litmus test. We can care deeply about Palestinians and Israelis alike without demanding that Montague take sides in a way that fractures the community.

We urge the readers of the *Montague Reporter*, and the town as a whole, to step back from this pledge and recommit to something far more important: being a place where people of different views, identities, and histories can live together without fear of being labeled or morally indicted by their own neighbors.

**Adam M. Solender**  
**Springfield**  
*Chief Philanthropy Officer,  
Director of the Jewish  
Endowment Foundation,  
Jewish Federation of Western MA*

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# Four More Letters to the Editors

## Turtle Powerdown

I’ve been thinking, (I know, uh-oh) I’ve been thinking about the river. I’m wonderin if we da people (yeah, you and me and a whole bunch of folks) each gave a little, could we come up with enough dough to buy the Northfield “Power” station, in order to shut the freaking thing down?

I’ll throw in a hundred bucks. Maybe the Ninja Turtles could add a hundred million or so, and we’d be almost half-way there! Just thinking, ya know?

Mike Joyce  
Wendell

## Early Stalwarts

I’m not much of a history buff, more a future buff, but I found it hard to put down last week’s *MoRe*. It took me two days to read it all, mostly with my magnifying device I have for just that purpose. Certainly worth the time.

My father was six years old that year, growing up in Philadelphia. Had he grown up here he would have been one of those rascals on the sleds endangering horses and pedestrians.

We tend to romanticize the “olden days” but they could be and usually were cruel and raw and no way would I have enjoyed living in Turners Falls in 1893. Yet many people living here today are descended from those early stalwarts. What a journey the town has taken bringing it through good and bad times from 1893 to today.

Thanks for all the work in putting this together. It’s one newspaper I intend to save and share with my children!

Carolyn Clark  
Turners Falls

## Read on the Cape

It kills me that you’ve been going for 20-plus years and I’m just now discovering the wonder that is the *Montague Reporter*.

Usually, I get my periodical jollies through the magazine recycle bin at the Brewster Ladies’ Library, a walk around the corner from my house here on Cape Cod. *New Yorker* magazines are my usual target. I used to subscribe, but when they used to pile up it made me feel guilty and wasteful. This way I can self-dose at my own pace.

I used to work in newspapers, here and there, and over the years developed an out-sized fondness for the greats as they become fewer and fewer in number, small, independent papers with the voice of their editor – who invariably must be local but worldly, smart not smug, witty not jokey, confident but self-effacing, and community-minded without seeming a tool of business or town hall.

Seems your paper is blessed with all that and more, and I am thrilled every time my friend in Turners Falls sends me another issue (sorry, I know, I know...) Publishing wastewater test results as a gauge of local health? Genius! Nina Rossi’s illustration? Spectacular! “Boxing Day on K Street”? Ha! Dorthee’s obituary? Wow. Not fluffy, skimpy or fudgy.

And as I always do when I see Ben Gagnon’s byline (“Local Author, Blogger Offers ‘Attic’ Rum-mage”), this morning I shut out all other distractions and settled in for what I knew would be a few minutes of high entertainment, for all he knows how to do is spin stories that make you feel better about the world, one gem at a time. He has a way with words, as the *Montague Reporter* has a way with journalism that gives hope for the future.

Thank you, and keep up the good work.

Jeff Blanchard  
Brewster

## A Treat to Be Transported

I want to express my appreciation for the Turners Falls 1893 supplement in last week’s paper.

Reading the entries, I felt like I was experiencing daily life of 130-plus years ago. What a treat to be transported to that time in this place. I got a chuckle out of the dry humor that is still a highlight for me and my family of the current *Montague Reporter*.

When my daughter and her family visit from their home near Boston, one of the first things they do after settling in is to pick up the *Reporter* and read the police blotter and head-

lines. We invariably laugh out loud.

I often take snapshots of the headlines and photos, as I did this week: “Town Orders Hole Fixed; Building Owner Suggests Hole Might Belong to Town” and “Year’s Up, Sphere’s Up” about the ball drop event and the guys involved to monitor the safety of the ball dropper. I sent those to my family members living elsewhere and friends in California.

Thank you for bringing so much joy to this family!

Rebecca Desmond  
Turners Falls

### OP ED

## Understanding Our Property Taxes – And Why Transparency Matters in Local Government

By FRANCIA WISNEWSKI

**TURNERS FALLS** – Like many residents in Montague, I have been hearing questions, concerns, and understandable frustration about rising property valuations and what they mean for our tax bills. Property taxes are not intuitive, and without clear explanations, they can feel arbitrary or out of our control. That is exactly why it matters to share information publicly, and why I believe this explanation belongs in our local paper and many more opportunities for citizen engagement.

I learned from our town assessor Adam Tocci this week that this year, Montague’s tax rate went down by 8 cents, even as property valuations rose. That may sound counterintuitive, but it reflects how our system works. When overall property values increase sharply, the tax *rate* often decreases because the total tax levy – the amount the town must collect – is spread across a larger base.

Montague is a *split tax rate* community, meaning the total levy is divided between residential and commercial properties. Every property represents a “slice of the pie.” The higher a property’s valuation, the larger its share of responsibility for funding town services.

Single-family homes in Montague saw an average valuation in-

crease of about 12% to 13%. These changes are not individualized judgments; they are driven by the housing market. The assessors’ office uses a mass appraisal system, not single-home appraisals. Sales data from comparable homes are fed into a model that estimates value across the town.

There are approximately 7,000 parcels in Montague, including about 4,000 residential properties. Assessors work year-round to keep data accurate through permit reviews, inspections when possible, and comparisons with similar homes. When assessors cannot access a property, they make the best estimate they can with the information available.

Data integrity matters; when accuracy declines, the valuation model loses reliability.

The state requires a full cyclical revaluation at least every 10 years, and interestingly, those long-term revaluations often result in values going *down* rather than up. While no one enjoys having an assessor visit their home, accurate valuations depend on updated and reliable information.

For residents who believe their valuation is incorrect, abatements are an important safeguard. Montague typically receives 30 to 40 abatement applications per year, and the deadline is now February 2.

The town has also moved away

from semi-annual billing, because residents tend to manage better with consistent billing schedules.

Market trends are also part of the story. Single-family homes in Montague are increasingly selling in the \$250,000 range, reflecting broader pressures across Western Massachusetts. Foreclosures are generally excluded from valuation comparisons because they do not represent typical market conditions.

Asking questions is not only allowed – it’s encouraged! One of the most important things I want to emphasize is that residents have many opportunities to ask questions about property taxes, valuations, and how decisions are made – and especially before town meeting.

You can call your local officials, email department heads, attend public meetings, or show up at office hours. These pathways exist because local government is meant to be accessible.

When I saw Selectwoman Marina Goldman offering office hours at our public library, I joined her. I believe deeply in the importance of residents having direct access to their elected officials. These conversations create space to ask honest questions, share concerns, and better understand how our tax dollars are used. I am grateful for her leadership and opportunity. She will be holding these office hours on an ongoing basis.

Not everyone speaks in the language of “levies,” “valuations,” or “mass appraisal models,” and that’s okay. By sharing small snippets of information like this in plain language, we can begin to translate the lingo into something that makes sense. Piece by piece, these explanations help illuminate how the system works and where residents fit within it.

Publishing this kind of information matters. Transparency is about including *you* in the budget process, and building trust. A healthy local democracy depends on elected and appointed officials being reachable, willing to explain their work, and open to dialogue. When information is shared clearly and accessible, residents are better equipped to engage, question, and participate.

We all want a government that is transparent, accountable, and responsive. Creating multiple ways for residents to ask questions and making the effort to explain complex systems in everyday language, is how we move closer to that goal.

On this topic, to reach out to the assessors you can email Adam Tocci at [AdamT@montague-ma.gov](mailto:AdamT@montague-ma.gov), or call (413) 863-3200 ext. 120, or visit our town’s website to get information about your elected officials.

*Francia Wisnewski serves on the Montague finance committee. She lives in Turners Falls.*

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Week of January 19 in Montague

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## GILL COMMUNITY INPUT SESSION

### Calling all Gillbillies!

Help identify and map Gill’s vulnerabilities and strengths during extreme weather & prioritize actions the Town can take to increase resilience. This will help the Town apply for and be eligible for grants.

**Tuesday, January 20 at the  
Gill Town Hall, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.**

**Food will be provided!**

For more information:  
**Ray Purington, Town Administrator (413) 863-9347**  
**Andrea Donlon, FRCOG – adonlon@frcog.org**

**GILL** from page A1

commitments to schools and other “big municipal ticket items,” and beyond that to focus on survival.

“We have to feed people,” she said. “We have to help keep them sheltered. We have to help them access healthcare.”

Comerford said she is working to “decouple” the state tax code from the federal one. Changes in the tax code from the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” passed last summer are estimated to cost Massachusetts hundreds of millions of dollars. The state Department of Revenue estimates that decoupling could save the state \$463 million in FY’26, and nearly a billion in the following four years.

She also said she is working to increase tax revenue by stopping companies from “profit shifting,” complex accounting moves that allow them to record profits in offshore tax havens.

Comerford warned about a ballot question that is likely to be certified for the November election which would cut state income tax by 1% across the board. “I think this is a real threat,” she said. “It will eviscerate our budget.” She predicted a \$4 to \$7 billion dollar cut to the state’s general fund if it passes.

“There’s some organizing to do,” she said, “if you agree with me that this is a bad ballot question.”

“It’s only going to make our local taxes go up,” said Snedeker. “I think people don’t seem to realize that. And that always works to the benefit of the wealthy, right?”

Several attendees also asked about how the state was protecting its residents from Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), following public acts of violence perpetrated by ICE agents against immigrants and their advocates.

Comerford answered that a Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling from 2017 prevents state and county law enforcement officials from partnering with ICE. However, she said municipalities are still allowed to partner with the agency through 287(g) agreements. The only 287(g) agreement in Massa-

chusetts is with the state Department of Corrections.

Comerford said she believed the state should outlaw these kinds of agreements. “I don’t think our police should be deputized to work for ICE,” she said.

“We are in a desperately dangerous moment,” she continued, pointing to recent US actions in Venezuela. “Are we in jeopardy as a nation? I believe we are.”

Finance committee chair and energy commission member Claire Chang voiced concern that governor Maura Healey’s proposed energy affordability legislation contains a section that would take decisions about nuclear power plants away from residents. In 1982, a ballot referendum was passed requiring the approval of voters in a state-wide election before a new nuclear facility may be built. In its current form, Healey’s bill would repeal that decision.

“This is democracy we’re talking about,” said Chang. “You can’t just repeal a referendum voted by 67% of the population. Many of the people who worked on that in 1982 are still alive, so it’s not something that you can just pretend was an old-fashioned idea.”

“My sister: I am on the record as opposing this,” answered Comerford. She said she was sending the words of her constituents to her colleague Michael Barrett, who is sponsoring the energy bill in the senate. She encouraged residents to send their concerns to Barrett and copy her office.

Selectboard chair Charles Garbiel asked Comerford about the “infamous audit question,” a ballot question passed in 2024 authorizing the state auditor to audit the legislature.

“The tricky thing about ballot questions is they never get talked about as constitutional or not until they pass,” said Comerford, citing questions over the separation of powers and conflict of interest with the auditor, which she said had “made this whole thing really hard to know what to do with.”

“We publish an audit every year,” said Comerford. “That’s not what the

**GMRSD** from page A1

Henderson described a cycle of understaffing, teacher burnout, and the loss of qualified staff “in part due to the widespread needs of our students – and in some cases intensity of need of our students – and in part because people choose to work for better wages elsewhere.”

“The cost of living is increasing, and we need fair and livable wages to stay in the district,” she said, and implored the committee not to eliminate positions as it balances the budget: “To cut more would be devastating... Please consider using money from the ‘rainy day fund’ surplus, because it’s raining.”

The union’s statement hung over the committee’s review of the preliminary budget. “When we talk about ‘rainy day funds,’” Montague member Steve Ellis commented, “we have been spending those funds, and we’ve been spending them fairly aggressively.” Gill-Montague’s excess and deficiency account (E&D), the equivalent of free cash it can roll over from year to year, was certified at \$921,258 last July, and the current school year budget pulls \$500,000 from that account.

The town of Montague has estimated its “affordable assessment” for FY’27 at \$13.05 million, or 3.0% growth. State Chapter 70 aid is expected to increase only a nominal amount, from \$8.00 million to \$8.09 million, because the “foundation” enrollment, a function of the local school-age population, is shrinking from 916 to 891. Ellis pointed out that the district’s actual enrollment was not shrinking as quickly, and that losses to school choice were “seeing a rebalancing,” from a net loss of 156 in FY’20 to an expected net loss next year of 37.

Costs are far outstripping revenues, however. From a \$28.82 million all-funds budget this year, projected FY’27 revenue stands at \$29.23 million – and expenses currently total \$31.40 million. “This initial draft incorporates every wishlist item,” Thomas said, “including all new positions, supplies, and services requested by our department heads.... Negotiable [benefit] increases alone are more than our general-fund budget increase, and there were nearly \$800,000 worth of added positions.” The largest categorical driver of costs is insurance and other benefits, accounting for a \$1.01 million increase.

Thomas said Blier calls the situation “the ESSER cliff,” the fallout from the expiration of federal pandemic-era relief funds that “bridged the gap” of low state aid.

“It’s a great reality-based start to our thinking and conversations,” Ellis said as the presentation concluded.

**Other Business**

Thomas announced that in mid-December the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) “officially accepted” a major expansion of Sheffield Elementary, to absorb Hillcrest Elementary, as eligible for state funding. A new roof for Gill Elementary School, previously

auditor wanted, in that question. She wants to know why I get the committee chair positions that I get.”

“The auditor has said publicly that she has an agenda,” she continued. “The auditor has said she doesn’t have a high opinion of the legislature – she didn’t have a good time there at all. And I’m sorry about that. It’s a hard place to work!”

Still, Comerford said, a reform of the legislature’s rules to increase transparency had been enacted as a response to the vote. Votes taken by lawmakers in committee, and testimony they receive, will now be on public record.

Comerford said this year Gill should expect passage of an environmental bond bill, a supplemental appropriation to spend the Fair Share tax revenue, and, “God willing,” the Municipal Empowering Act, which describes itself as “designed to provide local governments with greater freedom and flexibilities.”

The senator said her own priorities were to install more western Mass representation on boards and commissions, help rural areas grow by increasing infrastructure, fix state funding formulas that routinely undervalue rural areas, and make it easier for small towns to compete for state grants.

Asked if she ever sleeps, Comerford said “the job is unworkable.” She pointed to the additional challenge posed by representative Natalie Blais’s sudden retirement (*see*

approved by the MSBA as eligible, was adopted into the authority’s “accelerated repair” program.

Justin Mickiewicz, the newly hired principal at Gill Elementary, introduced himself to the school committee. Mickiewicz, who previously worked as an elementary school teacher for over 17 years in East Longmeadow, said he had enjoyed his first two days at Gill. “The climate there is amazing,” he said.

Thomas noted that the committee that hired him had “beta-test[ed] a new hiring procedure that we’re trying to undertake here in the district.”

Technology director Tina Mahaney shared her current three-year plan for maintaining the district’s IT equipment, and broke down her request for \$170,000 in funding next year to upgrade gear. She said she plans to apply for a \$140,000 federal grant to overhaul the schools’ network infrastructure, which will need a \$20,000 match. Another \$20,000 would be for “comprehensive cybersecurity services,” which she said was “very new” to the district and would include security training for staff.

Student representative Olivia Wolbach reported that she and other Turners Falls High School students had met that day with a reporter from the *Boston Globe* to discuss “how rural schools are affected by funding,” the climate at the high school, and the proposal to combine Gill and Montague into a larger six-town school district.

“I don’t know when he’s hoping on publishing the article,” Wolbach said.

School committee chair Jane Oakes said a 10-member screening committee for a new superintendent of schools had been appointed, and was being trained by Massachusetts Association of School Committees staff in advance of interviewing candidates later this month.

Wolbach, she announced, will serve as the screening committee’s chair.

“With luck, the last week of February we’ll interview the finalists in person,” Oakes said. She added that she and some others in the district had “a little bit of PTSD” from the previous superintendent search in spring 2020, when final interviews were not conducted in person due to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school committee, which normally meets every two weeks, will hold an extra working session next Tuesday, January 20 for its annual line-by-line review of the preliminary FY’27 budget, then return January 27 to vote on it.

Oakes warned that a “short meeting” may be necessary in the first week in February for the announcement of final superintendent candidates. On Thursday, February 5 the committee will meet with the selectboards and finance committees of Montague and Gill to present the preliminary budget, and then continue on with the goal of passing a final budget on March 10.

need to come from a town match.

After the regular meeting, the selectboard was joined by Jeff Suprenant and reconvened as the town’s sewer commission.

Purington reported that the Cielito Lindo food truck still had no grease interceptor on its drains, but that the owner told him he was getting quotes from plumbers for the work and would report back with a plan this week. The original deadline for the business to show “significant progress” toward meeting the new grease regulations was in November.

The commission voted to fine the company \$200 if the town does not hear about progress by Wednesday. If Cielito Lindo can install a grease interceptor within 60 days, the fine will be waived; if not, it will increase to \$500.

Those concerned about climate change affecting Gill can help decide how to use state funds to protect the town at upcoming community input sessions to prepare for the town’s Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness plan.

Next Tuesday, January 20, participants will define the top hazards in Gill, and identify the town’s vulnerabilities and strengths in the face of climate change. On Wednesday, February 11, they will choose which actions to prioritize with state funding. Both meetings will be held at 5:30 p.m. at the town hall, and food will be provided.

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**LEVERETT** from page A1

of the call force.

Selectboard chair Patricia Duffy introduced a joint budget hearing with the finance committee by stating that it has been “a really, really, hard year for everybody” and encouraging attendees to “practice decorum, make people comfortable, and go in with the assumption of good faith.”

Council on Aging (COA) chair Judi Fonsh presented an FY’27 budget of \$18,600, a 60% increase over the current budget of \$11,582. The additional funds would be used for several purposes, she said, including increasing community and events coordinator Johanna Hall’s hours from 10 to 15 per week; adding to the food budget for senior luncheons, which are currently supplemented by donations; and paying the nurses who staff the COA’s footcare clinics.

Fonsh estimated that 40% of Leverett’s residents are elderly, and said they face a variety of challenges that require support. She noted that the fire department has been receiving an increased volume of calls for assistance, and said she worries about people leaving town because they feel unsafe.

Hall began work last summer, Fonsh said, and COA members had high praise on Tuesday for her work so far. Fonsh said Hall has spoken with over 100 residents, including 34 who attended “drop-in” sessions she organized, and has aided 15 with phone calls and email.

COA member John Szczesny called Hall a “collector of wisdom” and said she has already applied learning from one case to helping others. She has fostered connections, he said, and steered people toward resources.

Member Linda Hoer said that Hall “is our senior center,” alluding to the town’s lack of a dedicated facility for seniors.

Hankinson said Hall’s hiring was intended to show a “proof of principle” that the position could provide useful help to seniors, and that he thinks she has done so “in spades.”

**Library Budget**

The selectboard and fin com also held an FY’27 budget hearing for the town library.

As requested by the board from all departments, library director Hannah Paessel – who recently received her masters degree in library science – presented two draft budgets: her desired budget of \$125,930, within the board’s “guidance” of a maximum 2.5% increase over the current year, and for comparison a “level services” budget, which came in at \$122,800, a 1% increase.

All of the increased funding in Paessel’s desired budget would go toward hiring an assistant at five hours per week, enabling the library to open on Fridays. Paessel said she has been running a test program opening on Fridays since September and has seen a 23% increase in library use, among other benefits.

Fin com member Steve Weiss commented that it is “an extremely challenging budget year” and suggested that Paessel should think about possible cuts in the event the fin com feels it is necessary to approve a lower budget.

**Lawmaker Hobnob**

Senator Comerford spoke after the two budget hearings. “Local government is the hardest thing in the world,” she said. “It makes what I do look like Cupcakeville.” She later added, however, that these are “harrowing times” generally, and that her own work addressing cuts in federal aid at the state level is also difficult.

She went on to comment on state representative Natalie Blais’s resignation, as of next Monday, to become Associate Vice Chancellor for Government Relations at UMass Amherst (*see article, Page A1*). Comerford said she and Blais have been “fused at the hip” for the past seven years, and it has been a “joy and privilege” to work together.

She added that she was in favor of a special election to fill the seat rather than wait for the November election.

Comerford said the “throughline” of her work on Beacon Hill has been pursuing “regional equity that is smart.” She listed four main areas of her activity, the first being to increase western Massachusetts representation in state bodies including boards, commissions, and the judiciary. She said she found it “shocking and abhorrent how many state bodies do not have any representation from western Mass,” and encouraged residents to pursue these positions if they are inclined.

The second area that needs more work, she said, are the algorithms that determine state funding to local towns and schools, which she said are “broken.”

Application procedures for state grants are also in need of streamlining, Comerford said. And lastly, she said that support for services in communities needs to

be addressed by the state legislature, noting that almost all local services have a state component and that the “corrosive” effects of population decline need to be taken more seriously.

Comerford said her “number one priority” was passing provisions of a pending rural school bill, and a larger bill she is working on addressing inequities in school funding.

Both the Commonwealth and nation are in a “healthcare crisis,” she said, and “the math is just not working.” She said she supports a single-payer solution, and suggested that town governments should “bring it home” for legislators with testimony about the negative impacts of rising healthcare costs.

Selectboard member Jed Proujansky asked about charter schools, saying that when a student “choices in” to Leverett Elementary the district receives about \$5,000, but when they “choice out” to a charter school it loses \$15,000.

Proujansky said that while he does not have a problem with the existence of charter schools, they shouldn’t be “used in a way that basically bankrupts towns.”

“If you’re going to send one letter,” Comerford responded, “light up our governor about a need to open up Chapter 70,” the law which calculates state aid to schools.

Comerford said state revenues are expected to rise 2.4% this year, but that 30% of the state’s budget is federally funded, and the volatility in Washington has put Massachusetts on “much shakier ground.” While the state will be impacted by the threatened federal cuts, she said, the legislature foresaw the problem and took action last January by reducing the governor’s proposed FY’26 budget by \$1 billion.

Fin com member Nancy Grossman asked if there is talk of raising money through taxes on wealthy individuals, or other means.

Comerford said various actions, including closing tax loopholes and “decoupling” from federal policies which reduce taxes on the wealthy, are being worked on.



*Visniewski, an internal candidate appointed chief after a lengthy search, wore his dress uniform to the ceremony.*

**Other Business**

Town administrator Marjorie McGinnis said the CodeRed public notification system, which was taken down by hackers in November, has been rebuilt and repopulated with the user contact information it held as of March 31, 2025.

Any users who had accounts in the system as of that date should change their passwords, she said, and she hoped to provide more information on the status of the system soon.

The selectboard appointed Hankinson as its “point person” for the pursuit of a “short-form” Community Preservation Act grant to construct a “driveable trail” from Shutesbury Road to the Gordon King Life Estate Conservation Area. The trail would provide easier access to the area, and address the potential loss of a route long used by residents via a town-owned easement through private property, which has been challenged in land court.

The board also decided it was not necessary to pursue a “long-form” CPA grant that could provide more money than is being sought for construction of the trail.

The board approved Pelham’s use of cash, rather than debt, to pay its share of a new roof at the Amherst regional middle school.

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NOTES FROM THE ERVING SELECTBOARD

# New \$1.3M Boneyard Could Open for Business By Summer 2027

By KEITH WATERS

The Erving selectboard held a joint meeting with the finance and capital planning committees on Monday. They continued their review of the FY’27 operating budget and capital requests from all the town departments.

The fire department is looking for a new fireman and had a good candidate, chief Philip Wonkka reported, but that candidate has withdrawn their application, and so back to the search.

The contract for the new fire truck was also discussed, and minor issues were raised related to the time it would allow the town to test the truck before sending payment. Town administrator Bryan Smith said he would ask the vendor to make the changes. That new truck will cost the town \$860,000.

At the beginning of a discussion of the proposed new town cemetery, fin com member Kelly Loynd remarked that she was happy to see the cemetery commission was planning to fix fallen-over grave-stones in the old cemetery. Select-board chair Jacob Smith agreed, and remarked that he didn’t know the town was responsible for that.

The officials heard an explanation as to why it makes sense to develop the new cemetery in one step, rather than in a two-part process as originally planned. The new cemetery will have traditional plots for caskets, a place for cremated remains, and a third area for green burials.

After a few final questions are addressed, the plan can be put out to bid. Cemetery commission member Holly Fitzpatrick and Bryan Smith said the project should take 12 to 15 months, so if it goes to bid this summer it could be operational by summer 2027. The cost estimate is \$1.3 million.

Highway superintendent Glenn McCrory explained that for the past three years, Erving has been renting a mower at a cost of \$11,360

for six weeks per year, the amount of time it takes to do all the mowing. He suggested purchasing a machine that could do all the mowing tasks and more.

The mower McCrory has in mind would be available to the town year round for a price of \$247,000, which could be paid under a five-year, no-interest lease-to-own arrangement at \$49,000 per year.

The other major upcoming expenses McCrory discussed are repairs and improvements to Ridge Road, projected at \$878,000, and a new plow truck projected at \$125,000. The current 2015 plow truck which it would replace has 86,000 miles on it.

Pete Sanders, Erving’s water and wastewater superintendent, was present to explain his requests. These include replacing a valve and some stairs at the POTW#1 wastewater plant, estimated at \$50,000; repairing leaking concrete tunnels at the same plant, at \$37,500; repairing the clarifiers at POTW#2, for \$400,000; improvements to utilities on Lillian’s Way, for \$702,000; and water main improvements on River Road, for \$1,540,000.

Police chief Robert Holst requested a new cruiser, to replace a 2020 model with 83,000 miles. He expects the new one to cost \$75,000. He also requested new tasers at a cost of \$6,000 per year for five years, which is what is considered their useful life.

2026 is the last year of the town’s current contract for waste removal. A new contract for 2027 and forward will need to be negotiated. The cost has been in the ballpark of \$225,000 per year.

Selectboard chair Jacob Smith has been serving as the town’s part-time IT support worker. Recusing himself from his role on the board, he presented his argument for the third meeting in a row that the town’s IT needs have grown enough to require the creation of a full-time IT position.

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As the pond's water drained from beneath the ice, the surface buckled and collapsed.

DAM from page A1

“[T]he scarce resources that we have should be put toward projects that enjoy broad community support as well as provide the ecological benefits that the supporters of dam removal projects point to.”

Over the last several months, Saunders said, he initiated conversations between Mass Audubon and the Maura Healey administration which led to the cancellation of the grant.

“Mass Audubon respectfully declined the state grant for this project and chose to fund it ourselves because we consider it a high priority and can mobilize on implementation very quickly,” Jocelyn Forbush, Mass Audubon’s chief conservation officer, said in an emailed statement. “We’ve worked closely with the dam’s owner and the project has undergone an extensive public approval process, so we’re eager to get started and bring benefits to local infrastructure and improve the ecological integrity of the area, aligning with the state’s established biodiversity goals.”

A number of local residents, including abutters, expressed opposition last year to the dam’s removal during a lengthy public hearing process before the Wendell conservation commission. The historical significance of the dam, built by some of Wendell’s earliest European settlers, and the potential for invasive species to thrive after its removal were

among their top stated concerns.

Adam Porter, a UMass Amherst biologist and a neighbor of the former pond, has warned that glossy buckthorn, which has grown in abundance on the banks of the pond, could colonize its newly exposed basin. He has also argued that native animal species, such as beaver and otters, may have difficulty surviving the abrupt habitat change in the wintertime.

The restoration plan approved by the state requires Mass Audubon to work for the next three years to restore the natural stream habitat and suppress invasive species.

Wendell and New Salem fire chief Matthew O’Donnell said the dry hydrant drawing from Bowen’s Pond, which has allowed his department to fill firefighting trucks with water, is now defunct.

“We have plans to develop another dry hydrant on McAvoy Pond,” O’Donnell said. “Unfortunately, due to the financial situation of the town, we don’t have the money to develop that.”

“It’s still a big loss that we no longer have a water supply on the northern side of Wendell,” he continued. “It’s not that the town isn’t without water protection now, but it’s not as ideal as Bowen’s Pond was, or McAvoy Pond could be.”

O’Donnell, who worked for over 20 years as a biologist studying fish before becoming a full-time fire chief, said he believes the habitat

improvements will only benefit a “marginal brook trout population.”

The conservation commission approved a variance last March to allow the dam’s removal.

“I think it’s fair to say all the commission felt mixed about the project,” con com chair Ward Smith told the *Reporter* this week. “We saw the arguments on both sides, but I think the bottom line is it came down to all the environmental organizations were on board with this project – and it was a privately owned dam, and I personally didn’t feel we had the authority to require them to repair the dam.”

Bowen’s Pond LLC, a business registered to Hubbardston resident Thomas Robinson and his family, started applying a decade ago for state permits to remove the dam. In 2020 the state Office of Dam Safety determined the structure was in “poor” condition, requiring the landowner to either repair or remove it. The family owns the 16-acre pond and about 200 acres of land surrounding it.

Town officials entertained the idea of a public purchase of the dam, but ultimately dismissed it as infeasible and burdensome. Wendell co-owns the McAvoy Pond dam with the abutting private property owners.

“Our family has preserved this property for 70 years and are working to implement permanent preservation with the very able assistance of our partners, the MA Division of Ecological Restoration and Mass Audubon,” Robinson said in an email. “The stream has been set free to take on its more natural riverine conditions and functions, improving water quality, supporting aquatic life, and restoring natural habitats.”

Whetstone Woods is Mass Audubon’s largest single parcel of land in its portfolio of over 60 conservation properties statewide. The sanctuary is not currently open to the public, in accordance with the wishes of Ina and Mason Phelps, the first property owners who donated land to create the sanctuary.

“We are deeply appreciative of the Robinson family who identified this as an environmentally conscientious best practice and then

worked tirelessly for a decade on design, permitting, and preparation,” Forbush wrote. “This kind of crucial habitat with potential for recreational outdoor use is the type we seek when evaluating land as a potential new wildlife sanctuary. We look forward to contributing to this important project and serving as a partner in the community as we have for decades.”

Saunders said that in his opinion, now that the stream restoration is underway, conversations with the nonprofit about how it can help ensure Wendell has adequate fire suppression resources should be “front and center.”

Once it is confirmed that the property will be placed under conservation protection, Saunders said, he plans to engage Mass Audubon “in earnest” over its “plans for vegetation management and public access.”

“What I’m looking for next is a property transfer, and then engaging with Mass Audubon in earnest so they understand concerns of abutters and neighbors and so folks in town can hear from Mass Audubon plans for vegetation management and public access and how this ties into a really healthy robust addition to protected land in Wendell and Franklin County,” Saunders said.

“Mass Audubon has an incredible reputation for stewardship and conservation,” Saunders said. “This was an unfortunate chapter, but this doesn’t change the fact that this

does a lot of good, and protects a lot of land in our area.”

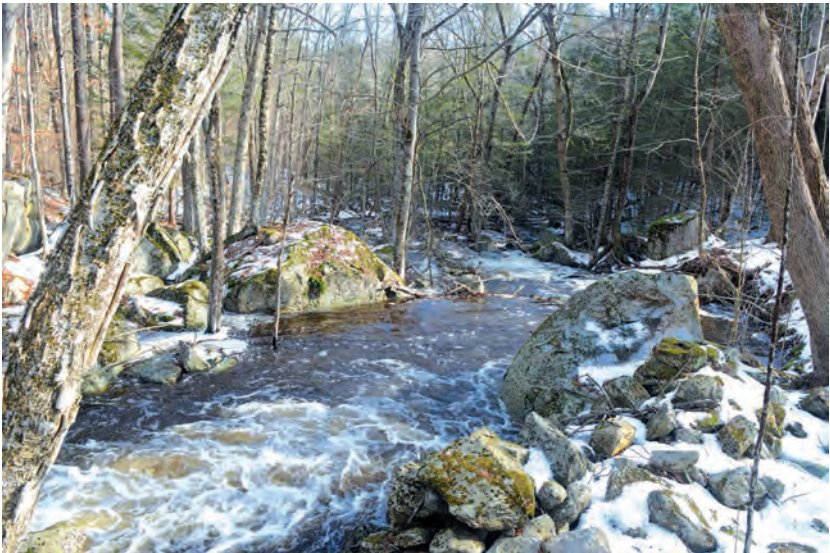
Water was pouring over the half-demolished stone and concrete wall when this reporter arrived at the pond just before noon on Tuesday. A small crew of workers dug rocks and mud from the base of the dam with an excavator and deposited the material downstream before leaving for a lunch break.

“I think they should have waited until spring,” Adam Porter said when reached for comment. “Beavers are active in the upper reaches of the pond.... With the water gone, their food caches will be inaccessible, and they will be unable to construct small temporary dams near their lodges to restore underwater access. One can only hope for a warm winter.”

Porter predicted the spread of glossy buckthorn “won’t begin to be apparent” for four to seven years, at which point the required mitigation period will have ended.

“I liked the way it was, but things change,” said Ward Smith. “That’s kind of the way life is – it’s the way the environment is. I just hope the benefits to the trout outweigh the benefits of a warm-water fishery and water source.”

“I don’t think it’s going to be wonderful, but I don’t think it’s going to be terrible,” he added. “We’re going to have buckthorn, but it probably will help to keep the stream cold.”



A tremendous volume of water rushed into Osgood Brook, swelling its banks as it passed through long-abandoned mill foundations on its way toward the Millers River.

REP from page A1

Government Relations at UMass Amherst, a role focused on developing and implementing legislative strategy for the university. According to an announcement on the UMass website, Blais will also direct the university’s Henry M. Thomas III Center in Springfield.

“Supporting public higher education at the Commonwealth’s flagship campus is more important than ever as it faces reduced federal research funding and changes to federal policies that impact immigration, student aid and more,” Blais said in her announcement.

In an interview that day with the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*, Blais said the move was a “deeply personal and difficult decision” and “the right thing for my family right now.”

This is not the first time Blais has held a job at UMass Amherst. Prior to her election to the legislature in 2018, she served as chief of staff to the school’s chancellor. She also has worked for two US Members of Congress from Massachusetts, John Olver and Jim McGovern, and as the executive director of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce.

In the state legislature Blais has served as the co-chair of the Joint Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries and has been seen as a strong advocate for improving rural school and highway aid.

Her district was reshaped significantly as a result of the 2020 census and now includes

a portion of Greenfield, which she shares with Susannah Whipps of Athol.

The decision about whether to hold a special election to replace Blais falls on Speaker of the House Ron Mariano, according to Chapter 54, Section 141 of Massachusetts General Law.

Blais would have been up for reelection this November, and a special election would only fill the seat until the end of the year. Secretary of State William Galvin, who plays a major role overseeing elections, opposes holding a special election for the seat, according to his communications director Debra O’Malley.

O’Malley explained that given the various deadlines for nomination paperwork, the earliest a special election could take place would be in May, and in election years the House generally adjourns at the end of July until the new session begins the following January.

A special election would need to be held on the same day in every town in the district, she said, so it could not simply be added to spring town elections, which vary from town to town.

O’Malley also emphasized that holding an additional special election would place a large burden on small-town clerks, who will already need to administer both the primary in September and the general election in November, during which the same seat would be open.

Montague town clerk Wendy Bogusz agreed with this assessment. “Spring special

elections do not sound realistic to me,” she told the *Reporter*, “and they would put a big burden on our office, given the large number of elections which may take place in the coming months.”

As reported last week, Montague is expected to face three additional elections this year, which have not yet been scheduled: a debt exclusion vote for a new downtown library; another debt exclusion vote for the construction of a new Franklin County Technical School building; and a vote on a proposed regional agreement to create a new six-town school district.

Avoiding a special election, however, would mean that the towns in the 1st Franklin could be without representation in the House for an entire year. O’Malley said that Blais might be able to keep some staff working, locally or at the State House, until the end of the year, but they would not have a vote.

“Yes, staff will remain for the foreseeable future,” Blais confirmed by email.

As of press time we had not received confirmation from the Speaker’s office of a decision on the matter of a special election.

“My team and I are working closely with Rep. Blais and her team during this transition,” Comerford wrote, adding: “I am deeply grateful for her leadership and her team’s dedication. I wish Rep. Blais every success as she takes on a new role at UMass Amherst.”

“There will certainly be a strain on the Franklin County delegation following Natalie’s departure,” 2nd Franklin representative Whipps said by email. “My district aide Rachel McMahon and I pride ourselves on our constituent services and that isn’t going to change. We will not turn anybody from outside of our district away if they reach out for assistance, but all of Natalie’s constituents will have a Senate office to turn to as well.”

Congressman McGovern also responded to the announcement, writing on Bluesky last Friday: “I first worked with Natalie Blais when she was a member of my team in my Northampton office. She’s an incredible legislator, a selfless public servant, & a powerful voice in the State House. Most importantly, she’s an awesome person.”

At the end of her January 9 announcement, Blais thanked the voters in the 1st Franklin District for their support.

“Western Massachusetts is an extraordinary place – rooted in the scenic beauty that surrounds us and bound by a commitment to care for one another,” she wrote. “Your passion for the issues facing our communities and our Commonwealth is unequalled. Your compassion for your neighbors is a lesson in humanity during these turbulent times. I carry with me all that I have learned from you and will forever be grateful for the opportunity to serve you.”



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MONTAGUE from page A1

modifying the connections between Main Street and Center and North streets, enhanced curbing to improve drainage, and moving a bus stop on the west side of Main Street further north.

He also noted that the Montague Center Water District was being consulted about the proposed changes.

Numerous questions from the audience followed.

Sage Winter of Turners Falls, who told Furgal she also worked for an engineering design firm, “so we’re kind of colleagues,” raised a number of what she called “targeted” technical questions, such as why the designers had not opted for “shared-use paths” – off-road trails shared by cyclists and walkers – rather than bicycle lanes.

Furgal said shared-use paths would not have fit into the project’s budget and goal, which is to reduce speeding by motor vehicles.

Winter also urged the firm to add an additional “bumpout” on the east side of Main Street near Union Street. Furgal said he would discuss the idea with town officials.

After several more comments by Winter, selectboard chair Matt Lord said he appreciated “the detailed technical review,” but urged her to communicate with Furgal and Nolan-Zeller directly. Winter responded that she had already emailed them her comments.

Ariel Elan, who lives half a mile north of the village center on Turners Falls Road, said she felt the “whole design pretty much should be scrapped,” because it was oriented toward slowing speeders coming from the south, but she believed traffic from the north to be a “much more urgent problem.”

Elan said cars coming across the railroad bridge north of her house immediately speed up and treat Turners Falls Road like an “interstate highway.”

There was some confusion during the discussion about the term “speed tables,” which Furgal used a number of times. After the meeting, Nolan-Zeller clarified that this term can apply either to speed bumps, which had been rejected earlier in the design process, or to raised crosswalks, two of which are included in the current plans. He noted that speed bumps are more commonly used in residential areas with low traffic volume.

Several residents questioned the effectiveness of having two raised crosswalks close together near the post office. “I don’t understand why we don’t put one or two speed tables either down by the Grange, or near the beginning of town,” said Leigh Rae. “If we only can have two speed tables in this plan, I do not understand why they’re 50 to 100 feet apart.”

Furgal said these crosswalks had been “previously located” during “an earlier phase that we weren’t part of.”

North Street resident Emily Monosson challenged this justification. “Do our comments really matter?” she asked, adding that she and other residents of the village had been advocating for traffic-calming measures for 30 years.

Nolan-Zeller said the initial project designs were produced in 2024, and had reflected a good deal of public input, but “we wouldn’t be here if we weren’t still looking for feedback from the community... I think we’re still absolutely

open to making adjustments.”

Union Street resident Sally Pick urged the designers to consider moving one further north, closer to the “S-curve” where Main Street leads to Turners Falls Road. This idea was seconded by a large number of attendees.

“That’s something that we want to discuss with town officials,” Furgal said.

“We wouldn’t be here if we weren’t still looking for feedback from the community... I think we’re still absolutely open to making adjustments.”

– Chris Nolan-Zeller, Montague assistant town coordinator

Lord noted that the design did not consider the potential reopening of the Center Street bridge, which has been closed since 2022 by order of the state Department of Transportation. Lord, who lives on the eastern section of the road, noted that prior to its closure, “plenty of 18-wheelers” used to drive down the street, often at dangerous speeds.

“I saw them fly by my house at 40 miles an hour,” he said. “If folks want that bridge to work again, this design may make more sense, with the very likely reappearance of large cargo trucks using that as a cut-though again.” The current plans would make Center Street curve to meet Main Street at a perpendicular angle.

No votes were taken on the design. “Paul, thank you so much for spending so much time with us this evening,” Lord said to Furgal as the discussion came to a close.

“My pleasure,” Furgal responded. “It was fun.”

The Case For Growth

Clean Water Facility superintendent Chelsey Little presented the board with examples of the savings in capital costs at the facility that could be gained by adding a new mechanic to her staff. Little first made the proposal at the board’s December 8 meeting, saying that the staff increase was not necessarily required for the coming year, but that she “didn’t want it to be the first time the board heard our need.”

At that time, Kuklewicz said he was sympathetic to the proposal, but urged the super to estimate the cost of overtime work or outside contracting that might be avoided with a second mechanic on payroll.

“[It] seems kind of crazy, but anything in wastewater and water infrastructure is super expensive.”

– Chelsey Little, Montague Clean Water Facility superintendent

At Monday’s meeting, Little showed a slide of a worn check valve at one of the sewer system’s four pump stations. She estimated that replacing all four with brand new valves would have cost a total of \$132,000, but that refurbishing them in-house had cost \$500 each.

“Which seems kind of crazy,” she said, “but anything in wastewater and water infrastructure is super

expensive.”

After giving five more examples of equipment expenses that could be avoided or reduced through in-house maintenance, Little concluded that “we want to keep doing that, and to do that we need another person.” She noted that the facility had recently been visited by representatives of the Massachusetts Rural Water Association, who were “extremely impressed by all the things we do in-house.”

“This is a really good follow-up,” Lord told her. “We should find some time to talk this spring.”

The board approved an abatement of \$684.31 in sewer bills for the property at 17 Hillside Avenue, which is currently in receivership. Little said she had confirmed with the Turners Falls Water Department that water to the house, which is used to calculate sewer bills, was shut off in 2020.

Rural Development Incorporated, an entity affiliated with the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority, plans to purchase the property and make it available as affordable housing.

The project to replace the screw pumps at the CWF is nearly completed, Little reported, and the US Department of Agriculture will soon release its loan to the town. Little said a small portion of the contingency funds remains unspent, and that the department is looking to see if it can be spent “on a couple of little things that were outside the original scope of the project.”

Other Business

Town administrator Walter Ramsey reviewed with the board the annual request from the Franklin Regional Council of Governments for the town to prioritize what “technical assistance” it would like if grants are available.

Ramsey proposed that Montague continue to prioritize studying the feasibility of a regional ambulance service, evaluating regionalization of police dispatch services, and continued funding for the “downtown coordinator” position established last year.

The board was supportive of these priorities, but Lord expressed concern that more assistance might be needed in the next phase of the project to redevelop the site of the former Farren Hospital in Montague City. Ramsey agreed that this should be a priority, but cited several other funding sources that could support that work.

The board was presented with a “letter of intent” from Montague Community Cable, Incorporated (MCCI) – better known as Montague Community Television – that it plans to continue to provide the town with local programming over the next decade. Ramsey endorsed the letter, but said the timeframe of the town’s contract with MCCI “did not line up” with its recently renewed cable license with Comcast.

Without taking a formal vote, the board endorsed entering a new agreement with MCCI, and gave Ramsey the authority to line up the beginning and ending dates.

“I love MCTV,” said board member Marina Goldman.

The next selectboard meeting is expected to be held Monday, January 26, though a “potential meeting,” in Lord’s words, was being posted for Tuesday, January 20 in case it is needed.



LOOKING BACK:  
10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here’s the way it was on January 14, 2016: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Water District Meeting  
Draws a Small Crowd

“Nobody comes to the meetings,” Montague Center water commissioner Gary Dion complained. “It’s all family-run. My wife is the Secretary. Ed’s wife is the Clerk. Nobody comes to the meetings!”

Well, Mr. Dion got his wish on Wednesday, January 6, as a crowd of nearly 20 residents came to the monthly Montague Center water district meeting. The meeting had been relocated from the cramped pump station on Main Street to

the fire station on Old Sunderland Road.

Residents were drawn to their first water meeting by the events of November, when the bacteria *E. coli* were discovered in the district’s water tank. But they asked a wide range of questions about how the district responded to the discovery of bacteria, the location of the water supply, and why the village of Montague Center has its own water district in the first place.

It was an upbeat meeting with few complaints and little finger-pointing. Questions remained, however, about the virtues of a small, independent water district, and a process for improving communication between district officials and local residents.

20 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on January 12, 2006: News from the Montague Reporter’s archive.

Adieu à Sainte Anne

A light snow drifted down on Turners Falls at eight o’clock on Sunday morning, January 8, as the bells tolled one last time at Ste. Anne’s Church. The parking lot on Sixth Street was full, and cars spilled up and down J Street and around the corner to Fifth as parishioners gathered for the last mass at the church.

Built to serve the needs of the French Canadian residents who

had moved to the village to work the mills and man the log drives, its cornerstone was laid 120 years ago. “Words cannot express the bittersweet feelings we feel today,” Father Aksamit told the congregation.

Since 1992, St. Mary’s and St. Anne’s have been “yoked” with the Sacred Heart parish in Greenfield. All three parishes were “suppressed,” to use the formal term, this weekend, and will celebrate as one parish beneath the Gothic spire of the former St. Mary’s from now on. On January 15 the church will be rededicated as Our Lady of Peace.

140 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on January 13, 1886: News from the Turners Falls Reporter’s archive.

Turners Falls and Vicinity

The snow was a Godsend to the village without water. It is better to melt snow than carry water a mile.

A child of Joseph Coburn, aged three years, was fearfully scalded a short time ago, and after a week’s intense suffering died on Sunday.

T.M. Stoughton offers \$25 reward for the conviction of the parties who broke into his storehouse of bird-tracks near the Lily Pond, recently.

Ten cents a barrel is the regulation price for water now, delivered at your door. A number of teams are busy hauling the precious fluid every day.

J.G. Eppler has had some very fine canaries this season, and expects another lot shortly. He has the reputation of dealing in the most reliable canaries ever brought into the county.

The sewer on the avenue is nearly completed to Second street. When the trotting course

on the avenue is restored to its former level, life will be worth living again.

Postmaster B.W. Mayo has made quite an improvement in the post office by taking the money order desk inside the enclosure, where it is warm and away from the gaping crowd of waiting patrons. It was a much needed improvement, which the public thoroughly appreciate.

For some reason or other the pump that supplies the village with water was stopped for a day or two, and when water was let on last night everybody found the pipes throughout their houses frozen clear to the street, the standing water in level pipes congealing almost instantly. The village is now experiencing a first-class water famine.

The kindling wood factory at Riverside, now that it has passed into the hands of business men, and has intelligent management, is getting to be a great success. Twenty young women are employed tying up bundles, and they have become quite expert, some of them earning \$1.25 a day, and most of them \$1.00.



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SPORTS from page A1

teams kept paddling along, decimating two more foes.

Girls’ Basketball

Baystate Academy 47 – TFHS 22  
Greenfield 56 – FCTS 21  
Smith Academy 40 – FCTS 31  
Narragansett 49 – TFHS 23

The Baystate Bulls defeated the upstart Turners Falls Thunder last Friday. There weren’t initially many hometown fans in attendance, but folks trickled in during the JV game, and by the time the varsity game tipped off the Turners fans outnumbered the visitors.

The Bulls’ families were good sports. It was pretty obvious that this is a rebuilding year for the Thunder, and as Baystate built a 19-point lead in the first quarter, their fans cheered quietly and clapped. The blue shirts in the audience, meanwhile, applauded every steal, rebound, fast break, and point scored by the Thunder.

Ivy Lopez was the top scorer for Turners with 10 points, followed by Jojo Hayman with 6 and Autumn DiMare and Autumn Thornton with 3 each.

On the way home I was able to catch the tail end of the Franklin Tech/Greenfield broadcast on Bear Country. The Eagles had been up by five points after one period, but were outscored 49-9 over the next three.

Only three Tech players scored in the game: Brayleigh Burgh (11), Sarah Beckwith (6), and Samantha Duncan (4).

On Monday Tech was again ahead early, outscoring Smith by six points after a quarter and holding a 21-17 lead at the half. In the third quarter, though, the Falcons finally edged ahead with a one-point lead, and in the fourth they poured it on, skating to a nine-point victory.

Abigail Dobias (9), Duncan (6), Burgh (5), Lindsey Taylor and Ariel Peters (4 each), and Madyson Lynde (3) scored for Tech.

On Wednesday night the Thunder Ladies traveled to Baldwinville, where they were upended by the Gansett Warriors. Hayman (11) led Turners in scoring followed by Bethany Whitney (5), Thornton (4), and Lopez (3).

Boys’ Basketball

PVCIS 62 – TFHS 10  
FCTS 56 – Westfield Tech 52  
FCTS 60 – TFHS 43  
Hampden Charter 78 – TFHS 66  
Smith Voc 77 – TFHS 56

Last Thursday, the Boys Thunder lost an overtime game against Pioneer Chinese Immersion down at Hampshire College. Turners erased an 11-point first-quarter deficit to tie up the game and send it into overtime.

Unfortunately, Blue was only able to muster two points in the extra play. Jackson Cogswell (22), Kainen Stevens (13), Freilyn Abarua (6), Cameron Johnson (4), Brody Girard (3), and Robert Goff (2)

scored for Turners.

Closer to home, Franklin Tech erased a three-point halftime deficit against Westfield Tech to push out the Tigers by four. Four Eagles scored in double digits – Hunter Donahue and Mason Bassett with 13 each, and Nolyn Stafford and Cole Bassett with 11 each – with Brody Hicks and Landon Benz helping out with 4 points each.

On Saturday, the two hometown teams went head-to-head in the Turners Falls gym in a snow-day make-up match.

To say this game was well attended would be an understatement. Kids and families flooded the gym, and although an additional bleacher section was in use, it was standing room only. Outside, there was absolutely no parking in the front two lots. Many people were forced to park beyond the tennis courts, and others simply made their own spaces.

At halftime, folks lining up for the traditional duck-chuck were shoulder to shoulder and three bodies deep.

Early in the first quarter, Tech couldn’t hit the basket, and Turners capitalized to build an 8-2 lead. After a timeout, the Eagles clawed their way back, and by the buzzer Turners was only up 13-12.

That’s when Tech took over, building a 10-point halftime lead and cruising to a 17-point victory. Scoring for Tech were Stafford (20), Donahue (12), Cole Bassett (11), Mason Bassett (9), Benz (4), and George Gutierrez Jr. and Hicks (2 each).

For Turners, Stevens (15) was the top scorer, followed by Cogswell (14), Abarua (7), Johnson (4), and Brayden Sloan (3).

On Monday the Thunder traveled to Chicopee, where they lost to the Hampden Charter. Down by eight points after a quarter, Turners rallied to take a 35-33 lead at the break. They couldn’t keep up that pace, though, and eventually dropping the game by 12.

Cogswell scored an amazing 31 points in the game. Stevens (15), Johnson (5), Sloan, Abarua, and Girard (3 each), and Christopher Ulloa, Goff, and Sergy Aleseyenko (2 each) also scored for Blue.

The following day Turners lost again, this time to the Smith Vikings down in Northampton. Three players – Stevens (14), Johnson (13), and Goff (10) – hit double figures in this one, followed by Aleseyenko and Girard with 6 each, and then Curtis Kretchmar (4), Abarua (2), and Ulloa (1).

Girls’ Swimming

TFHS 62 – Monson 30  
TFHS 78 – Hampden Charter 8

Last Thursday, the Turners Falls girls’ co-op swim team defeated the Monson Mustangs at the home pool, winning four individual races and sweeping the team relays.

Alice Fortin (200-yard freestyle), Maddie Phillips (100-yard butter-



DAVID HOITT PHOTO

Franklin Tech’s Nolyn Stafford (right) goes up strong to the hoop against Turners Falls’s Cameron Johnson as the Thunder hosted the Eagles in a crosstown contest last Saturday. Stafford was the game high scorer, with 20 points, in the Eagles’ 60-43 win.

fly), Addie Cardona (500-yard freestyle), and Lilian Walker-Hanning (100-yard breaststroke) all won their events while Cardona, Lilian Walker-Hanning, Phillips, and Alice Fortin took the 200-yard medley relay, Cardona, Lilian Walker-Hanning, Rosie Fortin, and Alice Fortin the 200-yard freestyle relay, and Phillips, Grace Fortin, Sibley, and Rosie Fortin the 400-yard freestyle relay.

On Tuesday, the team decimated the swimmers from Hampden Charter School.

Blue took first and second place in the 200-yard freestyle (Cardona and Phillips); the 200-yard individual medley (Lilian Walker-Hanning and Avery Houle); the 50-yard freestyle (Alice Fortin and Mia Ramos); the 100-yard freestyle (Rosie Fortin and Brenna Guilbault); and the 100-yard breaststroke (Lilian and Jade Walker-Hanning).

They took first and third, meanwhile, in the 100-yard butterfly (Tristan Bliss and Nicole Porter), and simply first in the 500-yard freestyle (Cardona) and 100-yard backstroke (Keira Feeley).

As for the relays, they finished first and second in the 400-yard freestyle (Bliss, Lilian Walker-Hanning, Rosie Fortin, and Alice Fortin; Guilbault, Phillips, Grace Fortin, and Sara Lively), and won the 200-yard medley (Houle, Lilian Walker-Hanning, Bliss, and Alice Fortin).

Boys’ Swimming

TFHS 76 – Hampden Charter 17

In the boys’ lanes against Hamp on Tuesday, Turners finished first and second in the 200-yard freestyle (William Tyler and Ryker Bray), 100-yard butterfly (Liam Bliss and Max Myers), 50-yard freestyle (Malcolm Tyler and Mario Pare-

ja), 100-yard backstroke (Nethanel Martin and Matthew Guilbault), 100-yard freestyle (Malcolm and William Tyler), and 500-yard freestyle (Bray and Makhi Doyle).

Myers and Doyle placed first and third in the 200-yard individual medley, and Bliss won the 100-yard breaststroke.

The Thunder also swept the relays. They took first and second place in the 200-yard medley (William Tyler, Tyler Galenski, Bliss, and Malcolm Tyler; Bray, Gilbert Cardona, Myers, and Pareja) and the 200-yard freestyle (Bliss, William Tyler, Malcolm Tyler, and Galenski; Pareja, Daniel Morales, Doyle, and Connor Glennon).

In the 400-yard freestyle relay, Myers, Pareja, Galenski, and Cardona finished first, while Guilbault, Glennon, Doyle, and Martin came up third.



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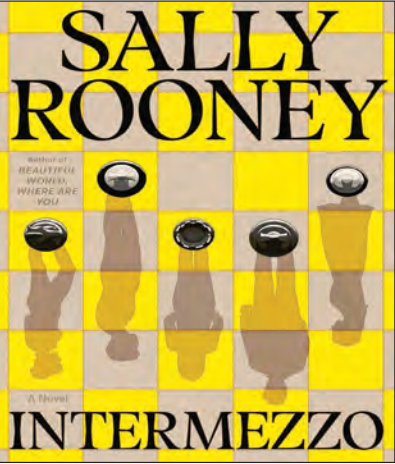


SUZETTE SNOW-COBB PHOTO

Above: Swans sun their tailfeathers in the Turners Falls power canal.

BOOK REVIEWS

Claire’s Winter Reads



By CLAIRE HOPLEY

**LEVERETT** – When winter’s icy chill reigns outside, what’s more comforting than nestling in a cozy spot with a stack of recent novels and stories to soothe, inspire, and perhaps to challenge?

Sally Rooney’s long, beautifully written novel *Intermezzo* is a good book to start with. In music an *intermezzo* is an interval between the parts of a work; in chess it’s an unexpected game-changing move that must be immediately countered.

Both meanings are in play in this novel, as brothers Peter and Ivan Koubek are struggling to move to the next phase of their lives. They’re

Sally Rooney, *Intermezzo* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024)  
Maria Reva, *Endling* (Doubleday, 2025)  
Zoë Rankin, *The Vanishing Place* (Berkeley, 2025)  
Joy Williams, *The Pelican Child* (Knopf, 2025)

grieving their father, who recently died, but both have also reached a personal hiatus.

At 32 Peter is a successful lawyer with friends and money, but he questions his career choice and actions. He had helped his little brother Ivan, 12 years his junior, when their mother abandoned the family; now they are not close, and soon become estranged.

Unlike charismatic Peter, Ivan, wearing braces and thrift-store clothing, is socially insecure and feels he’s a failure. He had been a chess prodigy, but at 22 he hasn’t improved his ranking. When he meets Margaret at a chess demonstration, they quickly fall in love. She’s 14 years older, which doesn’t bother Ivan, but it bothers her, and Peter too.

Yet Peter himself has difficult romances. He’s been in love with Sylvia since their student days, but though they adore each other, she insisted Peter look elsewhere after a horrible accident left her in perma-

nent pain. Now he also loves beautiful feckless Naomi, a part-time student and drug dealer. She’s often in financial or minor legal trouble that Peter helps her with, so she’s not the best choice of partner for a lawyer.

Peter dithers. Like Ivan, he feels he’s a failure. A chess-type intermezzo is what they need. Naomi specifically compares their relationship to a game: “Just messing with each other’s heads without getting our feelings involved.... We were both playing games. And yeah, I wanted to win and so did you.”

What makes *Intermezzo* gorgeously readable is the deft dialogue that powers the characterization. Rooney’s evocation of Dublin in the rain, and of Ireland’s indoor and outdoor space, is equally rich. Then, too, its characters focus on the quotidian issues – stuff such as age differences, childhood memories, social proprieties – that speak to readers’ lives and draw them into the problems the characters are juggling.

see **READS** page B5



WEST ALONG THE RIVER

WINTER SUNRISES AND HOT COFFEE

By DAVID BRULE

**THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE** – When the January sun finally rises up over the ridge of my valley, that’s when the words arrive and the birds begin to move.

The sun peeks between white pines on the ridge, the morning air feels pale and wan as the first feeble rays reach my winter workplace.

Today there’s no warmth shared by the pale traveler.

Whether it’s the last day of the Old Year or the First Day of the New Year, the sun seems the same as it was two weeks ago. Although, there are ways we can tell that the day has actually lengthened by a few minutes. At least so says the *Old Farmer’s Almanac*. Still being published since 1792, the *Almanac* is one of the year’s benchmarks you can count on.

Just like the building-up and taking-down of our woodpile, or the first time I light the fire in the Glenwood cookstove, or when the first snowflake drifts, the old gold yellow cover of the *Almanac* appears on the stores’ shelves as it always has.

I have a few copies from the late 1800s and early 1920s that the great-grandparents in this house consulted for stories, quips, and tips about poultry and porcine matters. Details of those old bygone years are stored somewhere

up in the north bedroom upstairs, where all the forgotten artifacts of five generations of family life in this house end up.

Sometimes, with nothing else to do, I find myself flipping through the old *Almanac* pages to see when the sun came up on February 27 in 1890, or what to do when your chickens develop scales, or when the rooster’s comb gets frost-bitten, and how to prevent that from happening. Useful stuff like that.

I often find poetry in the whimsical musings in the margins of the high tide charts and sunset tables. You can always find out which dates are Ember Days, which are Halcyon Days, when John James Audubon died (January 27, 1851), and when raccoons start mating.

The chill reaching my fingers here in the woodshed brings me back from these mental wanderings, as I hear the furnace rumble to life in the far-off dark cellar below.

It signals that the temperature in the parlor is dropping and the family will need warming up when they come downstairs for morning coffee. That means then that I’ll have to dip into the already dwindling woodpile behind me and get busy performing the required offices and duties of a cold January morning.

So I get myself inside with an armful of oak, maple, and some ash, and light the Glenwood C to

see **WEST ALONG** page B10

MONTV / MUSIK / MOUNTAIN

Interview by J. BURKETT and TROY CURRY

**TURNERS FALLS** – This week we have another interview! It’s with our friend DJ Mishmash out in the



No. LXXXVI:  
Michelle Kaplan  
a.k.a.  
DJ Mishmash

Berkshires, who is a special lady for sure, and who has a special radio show which really *is* a mish-mash of all sorts of fun stuff. Check her out on 97.7 FM when you are in the Berkshires, or find her at Mixcloud or Instagram @mishmashwber.

She is the reason we got to interview Jonathan Richman this year, and is also a music and travel writer. We recommend following her Patreon page, @Mishmashradio, as she is always finding great spots around New England. If you’re looking for an adventure close by, or a few states away, you’ll be surprised at the stuff she writes about.

**MMM:** What are your first music memories?

**MK:** My first music memories are listening to “So Far” by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young at age 4. I would ask to listen to it in the car and sing all the words to “Ohio,” “Find the Cost of Freedom,” and “Our House.”

Years later I remember sitting in the back seat, still too young to

ride up front. My dad put on “Come Together” by the Beatles and said, “Michelle, listen carefully to the words and tell me what you think this song means.”

When I was entering middle school, my dad thought I had reached the age of reason and gave me his Frank Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage* cassette box set. He told me to walk around the block and really give it a good listen. My mom played Vince Guaraldi’s *A Charlie Brown Christmas* religiously every December. Growing up I always thought we were the only people in the world who listened to and loved this album, so it felt strange to hear it anywhere else but home.

Watching *The Snowman* (1982) on VHS was one of my earliest childhood memories of music, and the moment I realized everyone I loved was going to die. The soundtrack to *The Little Mermaid* was also on heavy rotation, and music from the TV show *Arthur*.

For good measure, I will add

see **MUSIK** page B3



Frost on the holly in the author’s yard.



# Pet of the Week



CARMODY COLLAGE

## ‘CHANCE’

Meet Chance, an adult lab mix with a heart of gold. With his long legs and adorable features he’s the kind of dog that is ready for action and adventure, or a quiet cuddly evening on the couch.

Chance is good with kids and dogs, and is neutered. He would thrive with first-time dog owners due to his easy-going and fun personality. He would also be an amazing sport dog for a savvy dog owner.

Chance is fully house-trained and crate-trained and has spent time

with a professional trainer, so his manners match his good looks. This boy knows all of his obedience and is also reliable off leash. Chance has been a wonderful addition to his foster home in New Salem.

There is no adoption fee. If you are interested in adopting Chance, find “Available Community Animals” under the “Adopt” menu at [www.dakinhumane.org](http://www.dakinhumane.org). A potential adopter must submit an application, interview and meet the pet, and sign an adoption contract.



## Montague Neighbors Elects New Board Members

By LEE WICKS

**MONTAGUE CENTER** – Helen Gibson-Uguccioni, president of Montague Neighbors – formerly called Montague Villages – announced last month that three long-term Montague residents have joined the Board of Directors.

Members of the Board raise awareness of the organization, set goals, help grow membership, recruit volunteers, and ensure organizational progress and stability. Helen said she’s delighted to welcome these new members, who all have valuable skills and enthusiasm that will serve Montague Neighbors well.

**Norma Mackey-Bovat** has lived in Turners Falls for 39 years. She has an associate degree in graphic arts from Greenfield Community College. Norma has worked for New England Business Associates for 27 years as a Project SEARCH teacher and instructor, supporting people with disabilities and who are on the autism spectrum with learning employment skills in a classroom/internship setting at Cooley Dickinson Hospital. She has also supported and coached individuals in finding meaningful and competitive employment within their community.

Norma retired this summer, and wants to stay connected to the community by giving her time and resources to Montague Neighbors. She served on the Board of Directors of the United ARC of Franklin County for four years, and was a member of the Lake Pleasant Women’s group.

Her hobbies include painting with watercolors/acrylics and long bike rides throughout Montague. Norma and her husband Don spend time together on lengthy motorcycle trips all over New England and beyond, and leisurely boat rides on the Connecticut River.



Linda Emond

**Linda Emond**, who lives in Lake Pleasant, worked at Hallmark Imaging for 27 years until its closing. She volunteered for a few years at Baystate Franklin Medical Center after retiring from the Farren Care Center.

Linda says, “I’ve always enjoyed helping people, and was on the Mission Committee at Farren where I enjoyed the residents very much. I have always been involved in the organizations in Lake Pleasant, holding many offices in the Women’s Club and the Village Association.” She has been involved since the beginning of Montague Neighbors, and provides assistance whenever possible.

Linda is looking forward to joining the Board and helping Montague Neighbors grow. “I feel there is a need in our town, and we need to get the word out,” she says.

**Barbara White** has lived in Montague Center for the past 25 years. “I am so happy to call Montague ‘my home,’” she says. “I’ve laughed many times when I came into town and read the sign ‘Slow Village Ahead.’ That’s my town, and I love it!”

Barbara says she is honored to be on the Board of Montague Neigh-

bors, and looks forward to sharing her past experiences and skills in any way she can to promote the organization. She has had a few different careers in her life including as a public school teacher, a counselor to teenagers and adults, a mental health administrator, and a private school administrator and fundraiser. Many in the area know her as the co-owner of the Blue Heron Restaurant, which she and her wife Deborah Snow opened and ran for 25 years.

Explaining her interest in Montague Neighbors, Barbara writes:

“I have been retired for quite a while now, and I know and understand some of the issues we all deal with as we age. During this time, I have volunteered at the Amherst Survival Center and served on their Board of Directors, helped to organize a group called Bridge for Unity, and contributed to other local community organizations.

“My interest in Montague Villages centers around my own desire to stay in my beloved town, and in my beloved home, for as long as possible, but I also know that as we age, we need lots of support in different ways. To ‘age in place,’ most of us need help.



Barbara White

“Montague Villages is a great way to assist seniors to stay in their homes for as long as possible. We, as a group of neighbors, have many skills and more free time at this point in our lives to give to others. I am looking forward to helping to promote and grow this most worthwhile organization!”



Norma Mackey-Bovat

**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. The next clinic is January 20. Luncheons are the fourth Friday at town hall. For more information, contact (413) 548-1022 or [coa@leverett.ma.us](mailto:coa@leverett.ma.us). Check the town newsletter or the Leverett-Connects listserv for info.

**WENDELL**

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. The next clinic is February 4. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. For Senior Health Rides, contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

### Senior Center Activities

#### JANUARY 19 THROUGH 23

**ERVING**

Open Mondays through Fridays from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 1 Care Drive. Daily snacks and coffee. Fitness room and pool table open.

**Monday 1/19**  
Closed

**Tuesday 1/20**

9 a.m. Stretch & Balance  
10 a.m. Line Dancing  
11 a.m. Social Stringer

**Wednesday 1/21**

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

**Thursday 1/22**

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

**Friday 1/23**

8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Quilting and Open Sew

**GILL and MONTAGUE**

The Gill-Montague Senior Center, 62 Fifth Street, Turners Falls is open Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, please call 863-9357.

**Monday 1/19**

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
12 p.m. Pot Luck  
3 p.m. Beginner Yoga

**Tuesday 1/20**

9 a.m. Chair Yoga  
11 a.m. Money Matters  
12:30 p.m. Tech Tuesday  
3 p.m. Tai Chi

4 p.m. Spanish Class

**Wednesday 1/21**

9 a.m. Veterans’ Agent  
10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
11:45 a.m. Friends’ Meeting  
12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo  
1 p.m. Mobile Food Bank  
4 p.m. Mat Yoga

**Thursday 1/22**

1 p.m. Pitch

**Friday 1/23**

10:15 a.m. Aerobics  
11 a.m. Chair Exercise  
2 p.m. Chair Dance

### PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

## Restaurants Unite to Fight Food, Fuel Insecurity

**FRANKLIN COUNTY** – Community Action Pioneer Valley is proud to announce the return of Eat Up for Heat Up, a week-long dining event during which restaurants across Franklin and Hampshire counties will help keep our neighbors fed, warm, supported, and connected this winter. Each restaurant has selected one day to donate a portion of its proceeds to the Clare Higgins Fund for Community Resilience, which provides the flexible support Community Action needs to fill critical gaps.

The anti-poverty agency operates food pantries and administers fuel assistance programs, serving over 28,000 people navigating poverty annually from 23 sites. As federal funding becomes less reliable, the need in our community has never been greater. Hundreds of families across our region are facing difficult choices between heating their homes and putting food on the table.

The participating restaurants, by day, are:

**Sunday 1/25:** Hope & Olive, Greenfield.

**Monday 1/26:** Terrazza, Greenfield; Notch 8 Grille, the Tunnel Bar, Fitzwilly’s, and the Miss Florence Diner, Northampton; Protocol, Amherst.

**Tuesday 1/27:** Local Burger, Northampton; Johnny’s Tavern, Amherst.

**Wednesday 1/28:** The People’s Pint, Greenfield; Amherst Oyster Bar, Amherst; HighBrow, Northampton.

**Thursday 1/29:** Progression Brewing, Northampton.

**Friday 1/30:** Miss Flo’s Pizzeria and Paul & Elizabeth’s, Northampton.

**Saturday 1/31:** India House Northampton and Eastside Grill, Northampton.

More comprehensive information can be found at [www.communityaction.us/eat-up-for-heat-up/](http://www.communityaction.us/eat-up-for-heat-up/)

PLACE YOUR BUSINESS CARD HERE (12 WEEK MINIMUM). CALL 863-8666!

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Montague Community Television News

A Popular Refrain

By HANNAH BROOKMAN

TURNERS FALLS – MCTV shares the voice of the people, and this week the people were saying, “ICE Out for Good”!



You can watch our footage of the Greenfield ICE protest from January 11, and for a palette cleanser, check out the “Gumball Machine Takeover,” or our documentation from the Halloween Happening, “The Bestiary,” at the Shea Theater. The Montague and Gill select-board meetings have been updated,

and a new GMRSD school committee meeting and a Montague conservation commission meeting will be aired on Channel 9 and can be found on our Vimeo.

Our Vimeo page is easily found linked through our website, *Montaguetv.org*, by clicking the “Videos” tab. There you can find folders directing you to all of our archived Montague and Gill selectboard meetings, past and present.

If you would like to make a video, or if you know of an event that should be filmed, let us know. You can come by the station at 34 Second Street in Turners Falls to talk with Dean or Deirdre, Mondays through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can email us at *infomontaguetv@gmail.com* or even call us up at (413) 863-9200. And if you see us out there filming, say hi!



MUSIK from page B1

that the first CD I ever bought was System Of A Down’s *Toxicity* at Strawberries, and my first concert was TLC, followed a couple of years later by Cyndi Lauper.

My life was always destined to be uncategorizable, and Mishmash was born from that.

**MMM:** *How did you get started DJing?*  
**MK:** From a young age I fantasized about being a radio DJ in my bedroom talking into my hairbrush. When I moved to Great Barrington in 2012, I realized this was completely in the realm of possibility, and I applied for a show at WBCR soon after. I had always told myself if I ever got a radio show, the first song I would play on air would be “Heart of the Sunrise” by Yes. I’ll never forget how nervous I was on that first day.

I still get a thrill each show, many years later. I used to handwrite all my setlists in a notebook, rely solely on my iPod Classic 5, and communicate with listeners through my flip phone. I have made exciting connections with other radio stations, including WGXC and Wave Farm asking to simulcast my show, and doing special programming for WFMU.

I feel incredibly grateful for the people everywhere behind the scenes fighting for small but powerful community radio stations, and for everyone who listens and supports them. Doing radio is the closest thing I have to a religion. I have a spiritual experience every time I’m in the station. It is a true labor of love, and every week is the best show yet.

**MMM:** *When did you start your present show?*  
**MK:** Mishmash is an experimental, free-form radio show that has been going strong for 10-plus years. It airs live every Thursday night from 7 to 9 p.m. You can stream it live worldwide at *berkshireradio.org*, tune in locally in Great Barrington at 97.7 FM, or catch the live simulcast on WGXC in the Hudson Valley.

Every week is very different, but I tend to play a wide range of eclectic music along with interviews with special guests, live performances, weird happenings, and other shenanigans. I have always been an obsessive music listener, spending my time researching music, making mix CDs for anyone who would listen, and hosting listening parties, so it makes sense that this is where I ended up. It feels inevitable.

Sharing my musical discoveries, whether found in the deep recesses of the internet or elsewhere, is what life is all about.

**MMM:** *What genres, beyond rock, are you focusing on these days?*

**MK:** My taste keeps expanding, evolving

and becoming more refined at the same time. I know what I like, and it doesn’t have to make any sense. I play a lot of Afrobeat, Éthiopiques, Habibi Funk, Turkish psych, New Wave, punk rock, Indonesian pop, Algerian Raï, experimental weirdness –the list goes on and on. I’m not called Mishmash for nothing!

Most importantly, I have to play music I’m excited about, as if it’s something I need to get off my chest or I’ll explode, and I think that shows through. My audience is anyone adventurous and curious enough to pay attention and listen. There’s something for everyone!

**MMM:** *How did you meet Jonathan Richman?*  
*Thanks for connecting us with him!*

**MK:** I’ve seen him perform many times, but never felt the need to talk to him because I don’t like meeting my heroes. Luckily, it turns out he is just as sweet and sincere as his music. Phew!

But, there was one show at the Beverly, now known as the Unicorn Bar, in Kingston, when the whole room cleared out afterward and I felt an uncontrollable magnetic pull toward him. We had a very casual conversation about Lou Reed, and the challenges of growing up in the suburbs – we grew up just a few towns apart in the suburbs of Boston, though 40 years apart. He gave me his PO box and said to keep in touch. We’ve been penpals for seven years.

**MMM:** *What other shows/fests have you been to in 2025?*

**MK:** Some highlights this year include seeing Gyedu-Blay Ambolley at the Iron Horse; Sound Art, the second annual Experimental Music Festival at Berkshire Community Radio; Rahill at Art Omi; Nas with the Boston Pops at Tanglewood; countless amazing vinyl DJ sets at Hy’s Fried; and performances at CTSB, Race Brook Lodge, and Half Moon in Hudson.

**MMM:** *Have you set up any shows?*

**MK:** I’m really proud of organizing the Boston Typewriter Orchestra at TurnPark Art Space when I worked there as the Program Coordinator. It was so fun, unique, memorable, and perfect for all ages. Everyone was smiling the whole time. A very rewarding experience.

**MMM:** *Any other music stories, or jokes?*  
*There’s that whole genre of banjo jokes... I know how much you love them.*

**MK:** Ha ha! This is true, I’m not a fan of the banjo. No hard feelings!

I love that flyer that says, “Do you want to learn to play the banjo?” with a bunch of tabs at the bottom you can rip off that say, “No thanks.”



Smoke at Scalpers; Fear of Hackers; Face Puncher; Dead Goose; Free Food; Camo Guy; Urinal Dial; Adult Son

Monday, 1/5

9:53 a.m. Caller would like to speak to an officer about a suspicious situation involving a couple of people he knows. Caller is concerned about a larceny from over 10 years ago, but had no current or relevant information to add. Advised of civil options.  
12:55 p.m. Animal control officer investigating a dog complaint on Fourth Street. ACO advises that a very unfriendly dog is being kept in a crate near the front door inside the apartment.

7:24 p.m. 911 caller reports someone may be trying to make entry into her home in Gill; states she is not there but her mother is there watching one of her children. Conferenced with Shelburne Control. Gill unit determined situation is unfounded; advised likely the wind.

10:47 p.m. 911 caller reports that at approximately 10:15 or 10:20 p.m. he struck a cement-type pillar with his vehicle at South Prospect and Highland streets. No injuries, fluids, or airbag deployment, but vehicle will need to be towed. Caller states vehicle is out of the road but still hung up on the pillar. Caller no longer on scene; states he got a ride back to his house. Officer advises vehicle is hung up on metal post of guardrail; requests tow. Rau’s successful in getting the vehicle off the guardrail.

Tuesday, 1/6

12:35 p.m. Caller reports fire alarms going off at Scalpers Lodge, and smoke in the building. Given to Shelburne Control. MCFD looking at woodstove.

5:07 p.m. Caller states that an employee who worked for him for a year is selling stolen items online; would like to make a report. Officer spoke with caller; informed caller that he needs to cross-reference his inventory with sales in order to make sure that the things he believes were stolen are actually missing. Caller will email inventory records once he has looked through them.

Wednesday, 1/7

12:17 a.m. Greenfield PD requesting MPD’s assistance closing the road at the Canal Bridge for a motor vehicle accident on their side of the bridge. Services rendered.

2:25 p.m. Caller requesting officers to her apartment; states she is having phone issues. When asked what is going on, she stated that she and her son set up her new phone last night and she believes people are trying to hack her. Officer spoke to caller; advises nothing criminal at this time. Caller is confused about internet and cell phone, and worried about financial transactions, but nothing can be confirmed on statements. Advised caller to monitor statements and if anything does show, to reach back out again.

Thursday, 1/8

12 a.m. Caller reports lots of black ice in the area of Mormon Hollow Road and South Prospect Street. Officer states there are some spots that are slippery but not terrible; requests DPW be contacted. DPW will make that area a priority when they come in.

12:42 p.m. Caller states he was punched in the face by a male party in the hallway of an Avenue A apartment building last

week. Same male has tried to hit him multiple times since then. Caller is going to court to request a 209A order as soon as he can get a ride. Unable to make contact with caller.

1:34 p.m. Walk-in reporting an unwanted male in his apartment that won’t leave. Advised party to call when the unwanted male comes back to the apartment, and MPD will head down there to speak with that person.

2:43 p.m. Multiple callers reporting two-car accident with possible injuries at Montague City and Greenfield roads. Officer advises one female hit her head and will need transport to Baystate Franklin Medical Center. Officer requesting tow for both vehicles. Officer requesting Greenfield PD to deal with traffic backing up on their side of the bridge. GPD now re-routing traffic. Rau’s has both vehicles.  
3:39 p.m. Caller from Chestnut Street states a child is riding a mini-bike up and down the road and the father is videotaping him. She states it is against the law because he isn’t 14. Officer spoke to father and child.

4:51 p.m. 911 caller from Avenue A states she is having an issue with a neighbor’s pitbull biting and running up and down the hallways. Referred to other agency.

7:29 p.m. 911 open line from St. Stanislaus Society on K Street. Could hear multiple people talking. No obvious sounds of distress.

Friday, 1/9

12:34 p.m. Officer stopped by a citizen reporting a dead goose along Migratory Way. He is requesting DPW for removal. DPW does not service that road/area. Dispatch made contact with property maintenance person for FirstLight Power, who will locate the goose and remove it.

3:07 p.m. Party into station stating someone dropped off seven packages of food products at his home on Federal Street and he didn’t order them; would like to speak to an officer. After speaking with officer, party decided it was most likely dropped off at the wrong address. Was told he could keep the food or donate it to a food pantry.

6:34 p.m. Caller from Avenue A states that a male party all dressed in camo is acting weird and possibly has a handgun; when confronted, he tucked something into his pocket. All officers advised. Unable to locate.

9:48 p.m. 911 silent call from St. Stanislaus So-

ciety on K Street. Could hear voices and what sounds like urinating. Referred to an officer.

Saturday, 1/10

4:09 a.m. Caller reporting icy road conditions around town. DPW advised.

1:52 p.m. 911 caller from Old Greenfield Road states his mother is at the house accusing him of illegal things and tearing up the house. Both parties spoken with and calmed down. Verbal argument over some items in the house. House was not being torn apart. Parties have agreed to stay separated.

2:25 p.m. 911 caller from Morris Avenue requesting PD to deal with a female who came into the apartment to get some belongings from a recently deceased man. Situation mediated.

9:57 p.m. Caller from East Main Street would like to make an anonymous complaint about a dog that has been barking nonstop for the past 30 minutes. Advised of complaint.

Sunday, 1/11

8:16 a.m. Caller would like to speak with an officer about her adult-aged son, who lives in a home she owns. They are constantly having disagreements, and things seem to be escalating. Advised of options.

10:18 a.m. 911 caller states she needs help dealing with her adult son, who is out of control. Spoke with both parties. Caller had been advised of options previously; advised once more of her civil court options.

10:58 a.m. Open 911 call received. Male party can be heard talking loudly at mother; she can be heard yelling “Stay away from me.” Both parties advised of separation options until tempers lower and of court and civil options. Both advised they are aware of their options.

1:18 p.m. DCF requesting escort to Fifth Street to investigate a 51A report. No answer at door.

8:25 p.m. Caller inquiring if involved female was on phone with PD; states he feels he’s being lied to. Can hear woman in background yelling for him to get out of her house. Male then hung up phone. Officer spoke to both parties. Female has plan in place to get a trespass order tomorrow. No need for services at this time.

9:55 p.m. Off-duty officer advising daughter was just in a car accident due to road conditions on Old Northfield Road. Rau’s is en route. Officer requesting DPW be contacted regarding road and either treat it or barricade it off for the night. DPW notified.

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# Wilmington, by rail: Seeking Delaware’s hidden charms.

**SOUTH DEERFIELD** – What more appropriate way to visit the largest city in the second-smallest state in the US than by rail?

It was November 2020. (Remember when we had President Biden? I miss those simpler times...) Just like future president Joseph E. Biden, Jr., we took Amtrak – a short, pleasant excursion from Greenfield, Massachusetts, seven hours down to Wilmington, Delaware. It cost about \$150 round trip.

We disembarked in the city’s train station, named after the former senator, Vice President, and at the time future leader of the Free World. It’s always nice when the train lands you right in the center of the city, and this station is very centrally located between the city and the river.

It was a special moment in the history of this relatively tiny major city – just a bit larger than Portland, Maine, with a population of around 70,000. Our hotel, the comfortable Westin, turned out to be right next to the giant parking area at the Chase Center on Wilmington’s riverfront, where Joe and Kamala would be making their official acceptance speeches. We were right in the thick of it, with journalists from around the world and a mass of Secret Service and Homeland Security officials keeping everyone out.

We had planned to rent bikes from the Chase Center and ride the Jack Markell Trail for about 10 miles, which winds along the Christina River. The day was pleasant, and the only thing that stopped us was the city’s most famous resident, whose big event put the kibosh on getting to the Chase. But it’s a pretty trail, definitely worth a ride.

It turns out that Wilmington is a friendly, small-town type of place, where many people can tell tales about encounters with the altruistic Biden family.

## Boom Times

One of the first places we saw in the city was one that would have been packed during the warmer months, Constitution Yards. It’s one of those places that Millennials love, with beer gardens, axe-throwing, and food stalls, all located right on the pretty Christina River, where scullers row by.

The city has a young feel to it. We learned that many younger people were moving there for its vibrant local economy – and housing that’s not as expensive as NYC or Philly.

Though we were visiting the city,

we quickly learned that it takes just minutes to be driving along a road that feels more like a small town. As we passed rolling hills, large single-family homes with long driveways, and little town centers, we realized it doesn’t take long to get out of the metro area entirely.

We were headed to Hagley Museum and Library, the home of Wilmington’s original first family, the DuPonts.

The tour of this 235-acre estate starts with a view of the outside of the magnificent family mansion, and next door, the tiny stone structure that served as the original location of the DuPont Corporation. The grounds are magnificent, with manicured gardens and many interesting leftover remnants of the company’s original product – black powder. The first DuPonts emigrated from France in the mid-1800s to manufacture this important element of both warfare and blasting stone used to build roads and buildings. The nearby Brandywine Creek provided the water power to turn the gigantic wheels that mixed ash, saltpeter, and sulfur.

Seeing the underground tunnels that connected the diverted creek into sluices that powered turbines is fascinating. It’s a slice of our history most of us have never heard of. The Hagley Library has a room full of patent models, miniature working reproductions of real machines that were patented. The Eleutherian Mills, down by the river, were where the powder was manufactured.

Our tour concluded with a demonstration of what happens when you light it with a match... boom!

## Bucolic Wilmington

Part of the attraction of Wilmington for me was how rural it is, and a highlight of our visit was a road trip in the bright sunshine to view three covered bridges harkening back to Delaware’s colonial days.

It was on a road like this where we almost saw the President-Elect’s family home, a country lane surrounded by sweeping views of farms and fields. It’s a pretty place, to be sure.

I had always wondered about Delaware’s long history as a tax haven. Why do more than 60% of Fortune 500 companies choose to incorporate there? What is it about the state that causes 75% of all IPOs to be offered by companies based in Delaware?

It turns out to be rather hard to explain – a combination of appointed versus elected judges in the bankruptcy court. Here is how financial writer Jan Ting explains it:

“The major reason corporations choose to incorporate in Delaware is the quality of Delaware courts and judges. Delaware has a special court, the Court of Chancery, to rule on corporate law disputes without

juries. Corporate cases do not get stuck on dockets behind the multitude of non-corporate cases. Instead, Delaware corporations can expect their legal disputes to be addressed promptly and expertly by judges who specialize in corporate law.”

With that out of the way, we learned about the benefits of all of these businesses incorporating in this little state: there is no sales tax, and the average property tax is 0.56%, compared with the national average of 1.1%. That adds up! While this might be changing in the years ahead, it has kept the housing prices low, and continues to delight the residents.

## Dining and Wining

The day was sunny and bright, and we drove along the street filled with shoppers and flowers and had lunch at Buckley’s Tavern, a former taproom and ice cream store, built in 1817, with its big front porch full of Friday lunch customers. Hearty portions, tasty food.

We were in for a few treats when we discovered our dinner itinerary in the city. Our Friday evening in the compact city center began with cocktails at DE.CO, Delaware Collective, a food court with a great big bar that’s a perfect place to chat up the locals. I always love a big bar where the conversation can flow, like at Greenfield’s Hope and Olive.

Here we met Brad Owens, who, like so many others, told us he knows the Bidens personally and said they are warm, generous, and regular guests at many city restaurants. Owens is one of the owners of the vegan restaurant Green Box Kitchen, and said he was opening up a smaller outpost right there in DE.CO.

The food court is an incubator for start-up restaurants and has offerings from hoagies to sushi, and even a quiet game room. We were glad to get there for Happy Hour, a tradition long abandoned in Massachusetts. The \$4 wine tasted great!

Later that evening at Bardea, we decided to let our server make the food decisions, and he brought out a wide array of small plates, each a mystery and all delicious.

We asked the chef about his own Biden sightings. He said that Joe and Jill were regulars at Bardea, and were widely loved in the city. That extends to the Biden siblings, including daughter Ashley, a doctor like her mother.

## DuPont Legacy

The famous DuPonts also once owned a swank hotel in downtown Wilmington, a city that is as synonymous with one company as possible. Today, the Hotel DuPont is the place to stay. It is no longer owned by the company but is the home of Le Cavalier, another stand-out dining experience best described by my traveling buddy and GoNOMAD contributor, Bruce Northam:



The author visited Wilmington just as its most famous citizen was about to become President.



The Hagley Museum and Gardens.



The author, at right, found DE.CO a great place to talk with locals.



One of Wilmington’s three covered bridges.

## WEBSITES

Visit Wilmington  
[www.visitwilmingtonde.com](http://www.visitwilmingtonde.com)  
Longwood Gardens  
[www.longwoodgardens.org](http://www.longwoodgardens.org)  
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READS from page B1

While *Intermezzo* ponders the human heart, Maria Reva’s *Endling* is rooted in biological and national trauma. It’s set in Ukraine, where Yeva works from a mobile laboratory gathering endangered species of snails to protect them from extinction.

Elsewhere, 18-year-old Nastia works for an agency providing brides to groups of North American bachelors. Her mother, a feminist activist who deplores the trade in brides, has disappeared. Nastia thinks that if she takes up the activist mantle, her mother will return, so she plans to kidnap and deport a bunch of the bachelors using Yeva’s mobile laboratory as transportation. Surprisingly Yeva, whose snails are failing to thrive despite her efforts, agrees.

Nastia, her sister Sol, and Yeva set off with the kidnapped bachelors just as the Russian army invades, but then Yeva learns of a rare species of snail, so instead of heading for the border they switch course and go straight towards its home in Kherson, where they meet the invaders head on.

This plot summary does not capture the narrative complexity of *Endling*. It starts with an explanation of snails that tells you more than you ever thought possible about them. The author pops in to tell her publisher about the difficulties of completing the novel, and again when she tries to make sure her grandfather is rescued from Kherson.

Then there’s Pasha, one of the bachelors. His family had emigrated to Canada when he was small. They had wanted him to win artistic fame and fortune; instead he’d become a mechanical engineer with dreams of returning to Ukraine, marrying a simple girl, and raising a family.

This patchwork of material sometimes

seems to be slipping out of authorial control, but sleights of narrative handiwork and a wry sense of the ridiculous stitch it together. It’s a remarkable feat both as a window on contemporary Ukraine and as a contribution to the literature of war.

Like other women who have written war novels – Olivia Manning and Doris Lessing, for example – Reva focuses on civilians: that is, on the daily impact of war rather than its politics or military pursuit. Her intensely visual writing shocks like some war paintings: Picasso’s *Guernica*, for example, and Goya’s *The Third of May, 1808*.

There’s also much to shock in Zoë Rankin’s *The Vanishing Place*, set in New Zealand, where Rankin notes “There is bush so vast and so dense that it can devour you completely.” The title of her novel alludes to this “place where secrets and people can truly disappear.” She evokes it so powerfully that readers will tense every time the children who live there venture from their home.

After their mother dies they are often left alone, Effie the eldest in charge, not always sure of something to eat, and not sure when, or even if, their father will return. Effie eventually turns her back on this frightening childhood, and makes a life as a police officer in Scotland. But when she learns that a blood-stained child who looks just like her has wan-

dered from the New Zealand bush, she returns. Only then does she learn why her parents decided to live off the grid in the forest.

Rankin describes her novel as a “nature-centric thriller,” but you don’t have to be a thriller addict to love this gripping tale. The tautness of the plot, the frightening evocation of an extraordinary landscape, and the strangeness of the story will appeal to all fiction aficionados.

Joy Williams’s collection of short stories *The Pelican Child* is even more disconcerting than *The Vanishing Place*. The nine tales are peopled by strange characters, sometimes lacking in affect, often impulsive, and occasionally sinister.

In “My First Car,” a motel receptionist gives away her car to prevent her boyfriend complaining about her negligent use of turn signals. “It’s a gift. I’ll give you some eggs too,” she says happily.

In “Stuff” Henry, who’s in his sixties, tells his aged mother that his doctor has told him he will die soon. “Oh well,” she replies. Perhaps she intends to console him. Who knows?

Anger at the destruction of the Earth and its animals threads through these stories. “After the Haiku Period” features 60-something twins Camilla and Candida, whose great-grandfather had helped kill off the Plains bison, and whose grandfather and father had devastated millions of western acres extracting coal and methane.

Camilla and Candida spend their days in Tiffany necklaces, lunching with their servant on bottles of wine and lemon squares. Nonetheless they are determined to atone for their family’s actions. Told that “Atonement is a sacrifice of inestimable value,” they attack a slaughterhouse with a Glock. Their inspiration is the Welsh feeling of *hiraeth*: “A mysterious longing... Desire driven against custom, against habit, driven against mankind!”

The bewilderment these stories can provoke is explained by the author in a 2024 interview in *The Guardian*, in which she insisted “The comfy story has got to change. It needs to be more uncanny, less personal.”

Folk tales often have the uncanniness she admires. Her title story “The Pelican Child” is based on Russian tales of the clever witch Baba Yaga. In Williams’s version she has a cat, a dog, and a beautiful daughter who is a pelican. One day while she is on an aerial mission John James Audubon comes to the door offering to paint the gorgeous pelican, showing his pictures of other birds to prove his talents. He kills the pelican child and pinions her wings and head to get the dramatic picture he wants. Baba Yaga revives her. She also asks her cat and dog if they want her to use her magic to make them human. “No, the cat and dog said.”

This is definitely not the comfy ending Joy Williams deplores. These nine unsettling stories are often puzzling. Many don’t fully reveal themselves until a second or third reading. But the vivid writing and odd characters make them compelling – among the most memorable of winter reads.



MOVIE REVIEW

Marty Supreme (2025)

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

**GREENFIELD** – Since the Garden Cinemas in Greenfield have been owned by Isaac Mass, he has held unique promotional events to go with movies, along with showing very unique movies. *Marty Supreme*, which premiered on Christmas Day, is a unique movie that drew my interest. It’s loosely inspired by American table tennis player Marty Reisman.

I had some knowledge of table tennis being used in a political event before hearing of this movie. It turns out what I was thinking of happened in the ’70s with a championship in Japan. Going far with table tennis isn’t impossible.

I was drawn further into seeing this because Penn Jillette of Penn & Teller, who is from Greenfield, made a little introduction video to go with it that was on the Garden Cinemas’ website.

One other tidbit that I should mention is that Timothée Chalamet, whom I have some familiarity with from the new *Dune* movies, was specifically chosen for the starring role of Marty Mauser, the “Marty Supreme” of the title.

The film opens during the ’50s in New York, with Chalamet’s character trying to get into the British Open for table tennis. He has been working at his uncle’s shoe store,

and ends up stealing the money to get there.

There is some international interest in table tennis as a sport, and they showcase one Japanese player who is pretty good named Koto Endo. Endo, in fact, wins the Open. The US players sleep in rooms that are trash. Mauser is a good enough player to make it through the semi-finals and go up against Endo. He checks into the Ritz-Carlton Hotel due to the state of the rooms. He is an arrogant jerk to people most of the time, and we see that he is also a bit of a con artist. He takes losing the Open badly.

Marty’s luck with Ping Pong suffers some interesting strokes. People think his dream is a joke. He is forced to perform trick shows for people, including one with a walrus. He gets to travel a bit, at least, to Brussels, Munich, Sarajevo, and Cairo. His stunt at the Ritz-Carlton backfires on him.

When more bad luck comes into play, he has to reconsider an offer of an exhibition game from someone who wanted him to lose it. Ironically, he can’t get into his second Open, but he does get a second chance of taking on Endo, because this time the Open is in Tokyo, and the Japanese people want a real game. In the end, he has an epiphany about his character, which makes sense after what he goes through in the movie.

FACES...



Maggie Sadoway (right), an editorial assistant and frequent contributor at this paper, writes:

“On March 31, 2022, Montague Reporter readers were introduced to my first overseas adventure, ‘A Massachusetts Girl’s Year in Scotland.’ Nancy Dole, a constant Reporter subscriber – and advertiser – for over 20 years, did a double-take when she read my parents’ names under one of the photos; she immediately realized that the essay’s author, Maggie Sadoway, had to be the Margaret Wheeler she had known as a child in the 1940s.

“I recently stopped by the bookstore she has owned in Shelburne Falls for more than 30 years, Nancy Dole Used Books & Ephemera, where we met again after some 70 years. By way of re-introduction, I handed her a black-and-white photo of her father in my parents’ wedding party in 1939. Our dads were good buddies when they were both studying agriculture at what is now UConn; our families got together often through the mid-1950s, then lost touch.

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SCENE REPORT

# Perfect Storm: Visual Effects Whiz Offers a Play-By-Play at the Shea

By RAY DIDONATO

**TURNERS FALLS** – Over sixty people braved the deep cold of the New Year for an extra-special holiday gift at the Shea Theater Arts Center on Saturday, January 3.

The event was part the theater’s CinemaStorm series, the brainchild of Bob Krzykowski, producer and director of the locally-shot film *The Man Who Killed Hitler and Then the Bigfoot*.

Sponsored by Northeast Solar and free to the public, the night featured a showing of *Frankenstein* (2025), Guillermo del Toro’s *tour de force* re-telling of the Mary Shelley novel, with live commentary by Dennis Berardi, the innovative Toronto-based director of visual effects for the film and founder of the effects studio Mr. X.

Berardi has a long history of collaboration with del Toro, having also worked on *The Shape of Water*, *Nightmare Alley*, and *Cabinet of Curiosities* among others, and with other filmmakers on acclaimed films such as *A History of Violence*

and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, by no means an exhaustive list. He also worked on the 2004 re-boot of George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead*, a personal favorite of mine.

Krzykowski also provided commentary with Berardi, and the event was emceed by Monte Belmonte, president of the board of directors of the Shea Theater Arts Center.

The night kicked off with introductions and fun Frankenstein-related trivia before moving to the main event, which did not disappoint.

According to Berardi, *Frankenstein* contains over two hours of visual effects, and Berardi discussed digital and practical aspects of the effects, which were seamlessly integrated into the Netflix-produced film. He also discussed elements used to create a sense of foreboding – for example, skies inspired by the artwork of Bierstadt and Grimshaw – as well as the use of color-coding of character costumes to evoke visual metaphors.

Lighting and the use of silhouettes played a major role in the visual effects, and Berardi pointed out

how single source lighting was used to bring a “period” feel to the film, as well as the use of angled light, and sunlight, in certain pivotal scenes. He also described how various scenes containing wildlife, such as deer, mice, and even wolves, were designed.

Various reports have mentioned that 42 pieces of applied prosthetics were used on the Creature (Jacob Elordi), whose design was heavily influenced by the artwork of Bernie Wrightson’s illustrated edition of *Frankenstein*, and took eight to ten hours of application before shooting scenes.

Innovative uses of gray and black screens, which Berardi first experimented with in del Toro’s 2021 film *Nightmare Alley*, replaced the traditional blue or green screen, allowing for more contrast, different lighting strategies, and less color spill.

The visual effects cemented the Romantic-period essence of the Frankenstein story: nature as a source of beauty and destruction; the Creature’s own existence, suffering, and meaning; the emotionality of



Oscar Isaac, as the scientist Baron Victor Frankenstein, looks tormented and moist as a Medusa in the background acts horrified.

love, loss, regret, remorse and obsession; the human condition, imbued by both flawed Creator and Creature, and those within their orbit.

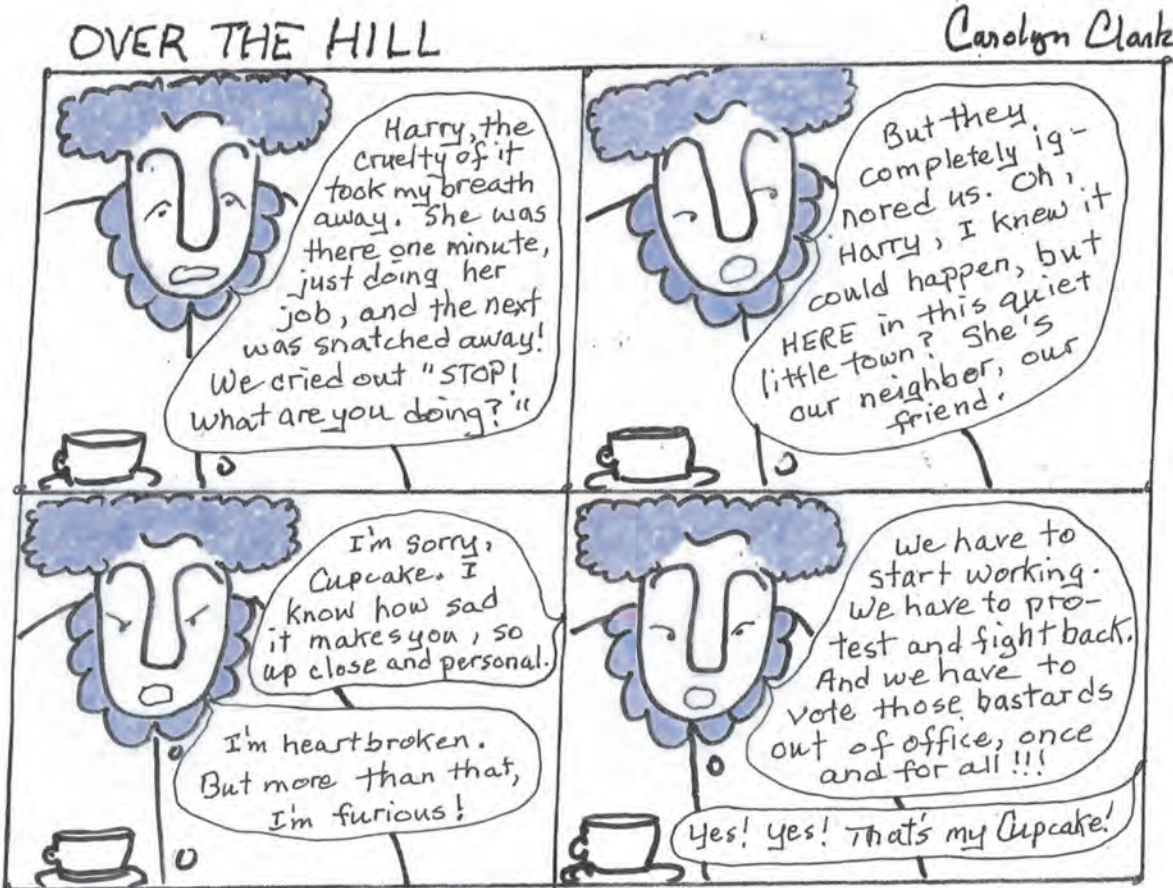
The format of the event was engaging, with audience members encouraged to shout out their questions, which Berardi would then answer as the film was rolling. The event wrapped up with a Q&A chat with Berardi and Krzykowski.

According to several reports, the film is buzzing with Oscar nomination talk and has been shortlisted by the Academy – 12 categories announced so far – for Visual Effects, Casting, Cinematography, Makeup and Hairstyling, Music

(Original Score), and Sound.

There is also significant talk of the strong acting of Elordi as the Creature, and even Best Picture murmurs, with the American Film Institute and National Board of Review both naming it as one of the best films of 2025.

Berardi and Krzykowski are currently collaborating on the upcoming film *Grendel*, where Krzykowski is writer-director of the adaptation based on a novel by John Gardner, and Berardi is a producer. According to several online sources, the Jim Henson Company will help bring to life the title monster from Beowulf.



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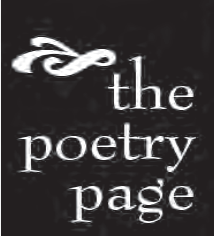
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the poetry page

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

- William Carlos Williams

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

# January’s Featured Poet: Brian Baldi

## Played a Bird

I have no brown  
power in my prairie

And this moon’s  
not for everyone

To be honest  
I cannot stand  
in favor of time

And I am  
probably the last  
person  
to write a poem  
for everyone

I don’t have  
the confidence  
to think  
my legion weaknesses  
are of recognizable use  
to anyone but

My prairie  
can sway with the rest  
of them

My prairie  
don’t stop believin’  
it goes on and on and  
on

My prairie  
is all middle and  
no sides and

Yo, I so  
easily beat  
the moon.

## No Fear of Painting

The cat  
is in the block of sun

the daughter  
walked to the corner store

my heart  
disappeared on Wednesday

and some people  
have the idea I’m negative

but no one  
knows about the douglas fir planks  
that will be delivered tomorrow  
for the raised garden beds

and the composted manure  
oh, that spongy manure!

I’ll tell you this:  
I will have no fear  
of painting, no fear  
at all.

## I’m Still Meeting People

it’s brightly endless

one a few streets over  
some new ones down  
the block

and as of yesterday,  
I have a better sense  
of the kid who runs the register  
at the hardware store

on the playground I got into it  
with a quiet father  
talking about sneakers  
and found light in his eyes

then I connected about manure  
with a neighbor  
she’s into peonies  
and fritillaria

and can you believe  
I’ve convinced two whole men  
to take cooking classes  
with me, a tiny radical  
scheme of sense and sensibility

I’m leaving the house  
soon, and something about the air  
tells me I’m likely to meet  
a lifelong friend

I want to say lifelong  
but I know things  
don’t happen that way

## Couch Zen

tonight  
I am gazing  
upon the moon  
in blameless exile


because someone  
lost the remote

## It’s Easy

money  
and muscles  
come without trouble  
if you have time  
and few other interests  
and a clean thousand years  
of easy treatment of your people  
and a comely passing satellite  
reflects some luster  
onto your toes  
through the narrows  
of two river birches  
accepting a sweet breeze

## Contributor Notes:

Brian Baldi’s poetry has been published in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Matchbook*. He recently published a chapbook, *Domestic Pepperoni* (Press Brake). He lives in Northampton.

WRITING THE LAND

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ILLUSTRATION: GEORGE HENRY DURRIE, WINTER IN THE COUNTRY (1858)

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# EVENTS

submissions:  
[events@montaguereporter.org](mailto:events@montaguereporter.org)

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

Great Falls Discovery Center,  
Turners Falls: *Nice & Easy  
Walk*. 1 p.m. Free.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls:  
*Curmudgeon Bingo*.  
7 p.m. No cover.

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 16

Great Falls Discovery Center,  
Turners Falls: *Kidleidoscope  
Story Hour: Possums*.  
Ages 3 to 6. Story, activities,  
and crafts. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Carnegie Library, Turners  
Falls: *Lofi Creativity Zone*.  
A creative hangout for tweens  
and teens. 4 p.m. Free.

Element Brewing Company,  
Millers Falls: *David Brule &  
His Irish Band*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Shea Theater, Turners  
Falls: Young Shakespeare  
Players East present  
*Julius Caesar*. 7 p.m. Free.

Tree House Brewing,  
Deerfield: *Eggy*. 7 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls:  
*Comedy Open Mic* with  
*Lana Epstein*. 8 p.m. No cover.

Deja Brew, Wendell:  
*The Breadwinners*.  
8 p.m. No cover.

Last Ditch, Greenfield:  
*Nanny, People’s Princess,  
PMS*. 8 p.m. \$.

Stone Church, Brattleboro:  
*Clap Your Hands Say Yeah*,  
piano and voice. 8 p.m. \$.

The Drake, Amherst: *Bumpin  
Uglies, Joey Harkum*. 8 p.m. \$.

Marigold Theater,  
Easthampton: *Wolfman Jack*,  
Grateful Dead tribute. 8 p.m. \$.

Hutghi’s, Westfield: *Cheap  
Kiss, \$500, babe wait*. 8 p.m. \$.

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

Leverett Library,  
Leverett: *Tree-Pruning  
Workshop*. Registration  
req’d. 12:30 p.m. Free.

Shea Theater, Turners  
Falls: Young Shakespeare  
Players East present  
*Julius Caesar*. 1 p.m. Free.

Guiding Star Grange,  
Greenfield: *Swedish Dance*.  
Intro workshop, snacks, open  
dancing. Live music on five-  
string fiddle and nyckelharpa.  
All welcome. 1:30 p.m. \$.

New England Youth Theatre,  
Brattleboro: *Play, Swamped*,  
written and directed by  
Court Dorsey. 2 p.m. \$.

Element Brewing Company,  
Millers Falls: *Bekka Dowland*.  
3 p.m. No cover.

Brewery at Four Star  
Farms, Northfield: *Eleanor  
Levine*. 4 p.m. No cover.

Shea Theater, Turners  
Falls: Young Shakespeare  
Players East present  
*Julius Caesar*. 7 p.m. Free.

Mount Toby Friends  
Meeting, Leverett:  
*Reggie Harris*. 7 p.m. \$.

Tree House Brewing,  
Deerfield: *Eggy*. 7 p.m. \$.

Nova Arts, Keene: *Bex Burch,  
Tori Young, John-Francis  
Quiñonez*. 7 p.m. \$.

Parlor Room, Northampton:  
*Lloyd Cole, Vance Gilbert,  
Melissa Ferrick*, more. Tribute  
to Jill Sobule. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Great Falls Harvest, Turners  
Falls: *Snake Farm, Jeanines,  
Folly of Three*. 8 p.m. \$.

Midnight’s, Brattleboro:  
*Galeer, Cousin Greg, Idiot  
Savant, The Y Lie*. 8 p.m. \$.

Buoyant Heart, Brattleboro:  
*Haitlin*, DJ set by *Soli G*.  
Masks req’d. 8 p.m. Free.



“bell hooks: Love Is an Action,” a fabric collage by self-taught textile artist Kasandra Pantoja, is one of 32 portraits by Pantoja on display this month at the Gallery at the Rhodes Arts Center at Northfield Mount Hermon School. A reception will be held at the gallery next Friday evening, January 23.

The Drake, Amherst:  
*Spectre Folk, Mark Robinson,  
Willie Lane*. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners  
Falls: *ZYN, Bigger Stars*.  
9:30 p.m. No cover.

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

Shea Theater, Turners  
Falls: Young Shakespeare  
Players East present  
*Julius Caesar*. 1 p.m. Free.

Erving Public Library, Erving:  
*Craft Day with the Friends*.  
For older teens and adults;  
instruction and materials  
provided. Call (413) 423-3348  
to register. 1 p.m. Free.

Great Falls Harvest, Turners  
Falls: *Cajun Danse Party*  
with *Back O’Town Cajun  
Band*. Dance instruction at  
1:30 p.m., event at 2 p.m. \$.

New England Youth Theatre,  
Brattleboro: *Play, Swamped*,  
written and directed by  
Court Dorsey. 2 p.m. \$.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell:  
Documentary screening,  
*Where Olive Trees Weep*  
(2024), about the occupied  
West Bank. Sponsored by  
Traprock and the Markham-  
Nathan Fund for Social  
Justice. Discussion to  
follow; light refreshments  
and information from the  
Apartheid-Free Communities  
campaign. 3:30 p.m. Free.

Feeding Tube Records,  
Florence: *Gastric Lavage,  
Fieldmaster*. 4 p.m.  
By donation.

Stone Church, Brattleboro:  
*Wolfman Jack*, Grateful  
Dead tribute. 6 p.m. \$.

Cold Spring Hollow,  
Belchertown: *JHK,  
Kiran Arora, Kjostad, Scald  
Hymn, Snake in the Garden,  
Dimension Viewer*. 7 p.m. \$.

Marigold, Brattleboro:  
*The Real World, Made  
Manifest, Rhubarb Duo,  
Hexrot*. 8 p.m. Free.

# EXHIBITS

**Great Falls Discovery Center,**  
**Turners Falls:** *Will Close*, paintings  
showing the beauty and complexity  
of the natural world, with text  
from experts and longtime New  
Englanders. Through January.

**Montague Center Library, Montague:**  
*Mark Mariani*, pastel paintings,  
through January.

**Sawmill River Arts, Montague Center:**  
Guest artist *Annaleah Moon  
Gregoire* presents paintings  
at the gallery through January.

**Leverett Library, Leverett:** *Meandering  
Through France*, photographs by David  
Pueschel, through February.

**Rhodes Art Center, Northfield  
Mount Hermon, Gill:** *Pieces of  
HerStory: A Fabric Collage Celebration  
of Black Women*, portraits of  
32 trailblazing women of color by  
Kasandra Pantoja, a self-taught artist.

Through January 30, with a reception  
Friday, January 23 at 6:30 p.m.

**Artspace, Greenfield:** *Making Light*,  
community art show featuring work  
by 28 local artists on the theme of  
illumination. Through February 20.

**Geissler Gallery, Stoneleigh-Burnham  
School, Greenfield:** *Earthly Possessions*,  
sculpture by Cassie Brown. Through  
March 3, with a reception this Thursday,  
January 14 at 7 p.m.

**Hope & Olive, Greenfield:**  
*Flora, Fauna, & Figures*, paintings  
by Julie Kumble, through March 15.

**Looky Here, Greenfield:** *Psychedelic  
Filly*, art by Emily Tatro, through January.

**Black Birch Vineyard, Hatfield:**  
*Quabbin Art Association*, member  
exhibit featuring a wide range of  
media, through February.

**Gallery A3, Amherst:** *Alliterations*,  
paintings by Gordon M. Green, and  
*Radical Hope*, paintings by Evelyn Pye.  
Both through January.

**Augusta Savage Gallery, UMass  
Amherst:** *Reserved Passages*,  
watercolors by former teacher  
Richard Yarde and his student Susan  
Montgomery, through February 26.

**Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:**  
*Magic of Moonlight*, member  
exhibit, through January 26.

**Split Level Gallery, Northampton:**  
*Listen to My Photographs*, photographic  
art by members of the Care Center, a GED  
program for young mothers in Holyoke.  
January 21 through February 28.

# CALL FOR ART

**Montague Center Library:** Call for art  
and poetry on the theme of “Books!”  
Make art out of a book, or inspired by a  
book. Submissions due by February 2,  
to be exhibited through March.  
A reception on February 11 will feature  
a reading of poems on the subject.  
Email [kmartineau@cwmmars.org](mailto:kmartineau@cwmmars.org)  
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CALENDAR

MONDAY, JANUARY 19

Northfield Mountain Recreation and Environmental Center: *Snowshoeing for Beginners of All Ages*. Free rentals and demonstration. Pre-registration required. 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. Free.

Four Phantoms Brewing, Greenfield: *Monday Night D&D*. "Self-contained adventures designed to be played in a single session." 6 p.m. No cover.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Fiber Group / Mending Circle*. 6:30 p.m. Free.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

MassHire, Greenfield: *Employer Spotlight on LifePath*. Job openings in behavioral health, protective services, RNs/LPNs, and more. 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Free.

Leverett Library, Leverett: *Live Insect Zoo*. All ages. 2:30 p.m. Free.

Carnegie Library, Turners Falls: Montague selectboard member *Marina Goldman* drop-in office hour. 4 to 5 p.m. Free.

Wendell Meetinghouse, Wendell: *The "M" Word*, first of a three-part monthly class on menopause and perimenopause with Rachel Lempert, RN. 4:30 p.m. By donation.

Carnegie Library, Turners Falls: *Knitting Night*. 5 p.m. Free.

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

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Gluebag, The Damage, Demented FX, Black Dog, Grem*. 8 p.m. \$.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

Dickinson Library, Northfield: *Dungeons & Dragons*. Single-night campaign for ages 16 and up, all XP welcome. Register at [northfieldrec.com](http://northfieldrec.com). 5 p.m. Free.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Wes Brown* with *Eugene Uman* and *Jill Connolly*. 8 p.m. No cover.

Quarters, Hadley: *Western Mass Electronics*, with featured artist *CMPRSSNFRTFCT*. Bring your own synth, drum machine, sampler, etc. 8 p.m. No cover.

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *The Greys, Deep Seize*. 8 p.m. \$.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Nice & Easy Walk*. 1 p.m. Free.

Millers Falls Library, Millers Falls: *Cooking Demonstration*, with Abigail of the Food Bank of Western MA. 1 p.m. Free.

Dickinson Library, Northfield: *Doctor in Homespun*. Susan Wright and Loris Epps tell the tale of a local female doctor/weaver from the 1800s. 6 p.m. Free.

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

Last Ditch, Greenfield: *Jessica Beck, Rumyn, The Survey*. 7 p.m. \$.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Anna Webber Nonet*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Kidleidoscope Story Hour: Groundhogs*. Ages 3 to 6. Story, activities, and crafts. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Quarters, Hadley: *Heated Rivalry Trivia Night*. No book knowledge req'd. 9 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

Northfield Mountain Recreation Center: *Kids Nature Art: Snowflakes and Stars*. Create mobiles from twigs, paper snowflakes, and stars. Ages 4 to 10 with adult accompaniment. Dress for the weather. Register at [www.tinyurl.com/snowflakesandstars](http://www.tinyurl.com/snowflakesandstars). 10 a.m. to noon. Free.

Greenfield Public Library, Greenfield: State senator *Jo Comerford* and state rep *Susannah Whipps* meet with their constituents over light refreshments. 10:30 a.m. to noon. Free.

Last Ditch, Greenfield: *Cabaret Calamité: A Variety Show*, feat. *Ash is a Dumb Fox, DJ Harsh Noise Boyfriend, Deanna Bach, Olivia Nied*, more. 7 p.m. \$.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Tarta Relena, Meara O'Reilly's Hockets For Two Voices*. 7 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *A Farewell 2 Kings*, Rush tribute. 8 p.m. \$.

Sulis Studio, Florence: *Raverave*, dance party with DJs, taiyaki, and other special food and drink. Benefit for the Carrier Bag Community Kitchen. 8 p.m. By donation.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Trans Inclusive Crime Syndicate* with *Cinnabun & Eris Electra, Banisch and Moonchylde, Inverted Agenda*. 9:30 p.m. \$.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

Erving Public Library, Erving: *Book Club*, M.T. Anderson, *Nicked*. Copies available at the library. Refreshments. 2 p.m. Free.

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *French/Breton Jam Session*. 2:30 p.m. Free.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Wolfman Jack*, Grateful Dead tribute. 6 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Hani Thompson*, record release, with special guests *Cloudbelly*. In the Shea's Lounge. 7 p.m. \$.

Water Street Barn, Shelburne Falls: *Little House Blues*. 7 p.m. No cover.

Visions Video, Northampton: *Zach Rowden, Early Went Blind*, screening of *Midnight Visitor*. 7 p.m. \$.

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

Four Phantoms Brewing, Greenfield: *Monday Night D&D*. "Self-contained adventures designed to be played in a single session." 6 p.m. No cover.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

Greenfield Public Library, Greenfield: *MassHire Employer Spotlight*, high-lighting opportunities with First Generation Construction. 10 a.m. to noon. Free.

Carnegie Library, Turners Falls: Montague selectboard member *Marina Goldman* drop-in office hour. 4 to 5 p.m. Free.

Millers Falls Library, Millers Falls: Movie, *The Dark Crystal* (1982). 5 p.m. Free.

Leverett Library, Leverett: *Young Entrepreneur Business Class: Marketing*. 5:30 p.m. Free.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

Last Ditch, Greenfield: *Ska Night*. 7:30 p.m. No cover.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Teen Driver, True Jackie, Don't Tell Iris, The Maladaptive*. 7 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *The Secret World of Freshwater Mussels*, presentation by malacologist Virginia Martell. 2 p.m. Free.

Tourists, North Adams: *Haley Heynderickx*. 8 p.m. Free.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Film & Gender, AFK, Bubble Scary*. 10 p.m. \$.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1

Town Hall, Gill: Documentary screening, *An Act of Conscience* (1997), about the years-long struggle that ensued after the IRS seized the home of war tax resisters in Colrain. Discussion to follow. Snow date February 8. 1 p.m. Free.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

Brick House, Turners Falls: *Montague Housing Coalition Launch Event*. "Learn more about why housing costs are rising and what we can do to change that." Presentation, community discussion, kids' corner with games and activities, free raffle. 6:30 to 8 p.m. Free.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Gracious Calamity, Monterey Mountain, Parashi*. 8 p.m. By donation.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20

The Drake, Amherst: *All Feels, Two Wrong Turns, Lost Film*. 8 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28

Stage 33, Bellows Falls: *Sunburned Hand of the Man*. 7 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

Space Ballroom, Hamden, CT: *Dan Deacon, Parlay Droner*. 8 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Leftöver Crack*. 8 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

Great Falls Harvest, Turners Falls: *Mystra Ooze Fest*. 4 p.m. \$.

Barcelona-based a cappella duo Tarta Relena "sound like soothsayers from the past" (*The Quietus*), making "music full of unnameable longing and buzzing with portent" (*Pitchfork*). Catch them in person down in Northampton next Saturday, January 24 to find out for yourself.

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**WEST ALONG** from page B1  
get that 400-pound hulk of cast iron to heat this drafty old house.

*Why do I insist on staying here of my own free will  
In a place that prides itself  
On the blunt misery of January? ...*

... the poet asks, and yet I expect to find myself here in this place from now until Doomsday.  
Fate and a dozen generations of family lines dropped me down in this place I call the Flat, where every winter morning finds me waiting

out here for something to happen!  
Even last night’s gentle snowfall was an event. Traces in the fresh snow tell us who was here while we slept. There are telltale rabbit tracks, two in front side by side, two in back one behind the other. Cotton-tails have made a comeback, lots of them, in the yard and woods. They have brought back the foxes looking for a meal. By the looks of these tracks, the local bunny escaped the clever gray fox who trotted through the yard. The tracks show the rabbit slipped through the pickets of the fence, likely just in a nick of time.

The snow even tells us of the doe who jumped the wire kennel fence meant to keep the dog in. It would have been easier for the doe if she had come in last month, since the black bear family was in the habit of flattening the fence every couple of nights in early December. By now, used to the visits, I take it in stride. All I have to do is raise the fence back up and straighten it out until the next visit.  
I catch myself imagining mother bear, *Awasoos*, just turning over in her sleep in her winter hideaway up on lofty Mineral Mountain. No

minerals and not much of a mountain, the old-timers say around here. It overlooks and towers above our little hamlet down here on the Flat. *Awasoos* will be dreaming bear dreams of springtime and fresh berries, of rolling and lolling on her back in the warming air of the new season coming in another few months.

Maybe that’s just me, though, imagining I can understand what’s going on in a sleeping bear’s mind. Mind you, I could do worse than be a swinger of branches, as Robert Frost himself has written.  
Day after day in January, the dawn light shows across the yard by 6:33, then 6:32, then 6:30, and so on.

For one brief day, I have my own Celtic Newgrange, although not really a Winter Solstice chamber. An alignment occurs when the sun rises between the two westernmost white pines on the ridgeline above my valley.

The sun’s beams then reach the top of a five-ton boulder, a glacial erratic set in neighbor Bob’s back yard. Full of armored mudballs that would thrill our local geologist, this massive rounded rock marks the sunrise on a specific given day every year: January 9.

The light reaches from the rock to throw its light on the Adirondack chair where I sit in my humble woodshed. That feels strangely spiritual, or am I imagining things again?

Within the next two days, the sun will have already moved two degrees east beyond the rock, and the celestial alignment will have passed, revealing that pilgrim’s progress into the awakening year.

A faint, timid call greets the sun from the top of the dormant cherry tree. A tufted titmouse tries out a note I haven’t heard for many moons. Could it be that the growing milder temperatures and the increasing light have already clued him in to something new happening out here?

Yesterday, a curious freezing fog crept in just after the first cup of coffee. At the same time, the skies opened up with a rain of bluejays. They swooped down to peck at the corn on the picnic table, drinking deeply from the shallow saucer of fresh water like our chickens of old: head down, deep drink, then head thrown back to let the water drain down the gullet.

The fog lends an atmosphere of a Japanese woodblock print that could have inspired Monet, as they were known to do, if only he were here with me on this cold frosty morning. Every branch, no matter how small, bears its coat of frost. Crabapple, cherry, or holly, each branch bare or not, is tinged and outlined with the finest silver.

Jays and cardinals lend royal blue and deep scarlet just to add dashes of accent to the shining winter white landscape.

*Fog or snow will drift in sleepily,  
The peace of a winter morning  
brings solace and dreams...*

*The two best things in this world  
Are hot coffee and winter sunrises.*

(Verse adapted from  
“January,” a poem by  
Baron Wormser.)



# A Journey Down Memory Lane

## Thinking Back, Looking Forward...

By JOAN MOREL

**SUNDERLAND** – Did you notice the supermoon during January’s first weekend? Silly question. How could you not? It was so very huge and bright in the clear sky on the night of the Second, after the dusting of snow during the night of the First.

A clean start for this new year. The Winter Solstice has passed, and daylight is ever so slowly increasing as spring and summer approach.

There is a bird feeder hanging over the garden during these cold times, attracting a favorite of mine – the dark-eyed junco with its slate-grey back and white belly. The flock is smallish but active and hungry, dwindling my seed supply quickly. In a month or so they will begin to migrate back north to Canada, far into the Arctic.

About that time the garden will get a quick spring cleaning, and not too long after that daffodils, tulips, hosta and coral bells will begin pushing up, while leaves and buds appear on rose, azalea, kerria, and oak leaf hydrangea bushes. Then the whole garden area will spring into action! Last year it attracted lots of attention from all sorts of interesting critters. It probably will this year, too; more pictures, more research, more learning.

Do you remember how rainy it was last year, all spring into summer? The lawn next to the garden doesn’t drain well, and little did I know that pollywogs were developing there: thousands of them hatching from eggs; of those, hundreds surviving to develop legs and lungs and begin hopping around as froglets in the grass.

Moving around without stepping on those tiny little frogs was tricky. They were no bigger than my little fingernail. They are so low in the food chain that out of a few thousand eggs spawned by the moms, only a handful survive to adulthood.

During the summer, four appeared on the brick wall

to keep me company. They seemed to be gray tree frogs, climbing and moving around on sticky-padded feet, able to change color to match the background for camouflage. Still very small, two that were a mottled gray spent most of the daytime motionless in the mortar indentations around the bricks; one was brownish-red like the brick; and one was bright green for a while, having just come off a nearby plant.

The outside light was a major attraction for bugs, quickly gobbled up by tree frogs.

I almost stepped on a weird-looking moth on the back steps one day, then saw it again a couple of days later on a plant: a really fuzzy-wuzzy white, sporting a dark stripe down its back and dark, rust-tipped wings. The Velleda Lappet Moth, a.k.a the Tolype Moth. The larvae eat leaves; the adult moth does not feed; its focus is on reproduction.

One day – and one day only, thank goodness – a cute little face popped out from under a flower pot. A vole! It stretched out to grab a bite to eat; its ears looked rounded, the body was fairly long with white under the chin and down the underbody.

Voles can damage lawns and gardens by tunneling and feeding on roots and bulbs, and can introduce fleas, ticks, mites, hantavirus, and other unwanted problems. My cat spotted it, tried digging under the flower pot, and scared it away. Yay.

A mossy-green cricket (grasshopper?) with cream-colored and dark stripes on its wings showed up in the garden, as did the usual beetles, spiders, mosquitoes, gnats, and worms. A hummingbird hovered. A skunk passed through in the night, its presence noted by all three cats who rushed to the window to get a look. Chipmunks checked out seeds, and bunnies hopped by.

Best of all, and much appreciated, a pet rock with a painting of a black cat on it showed up one day, left by students living upstairs who loved my black cat Boo.

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